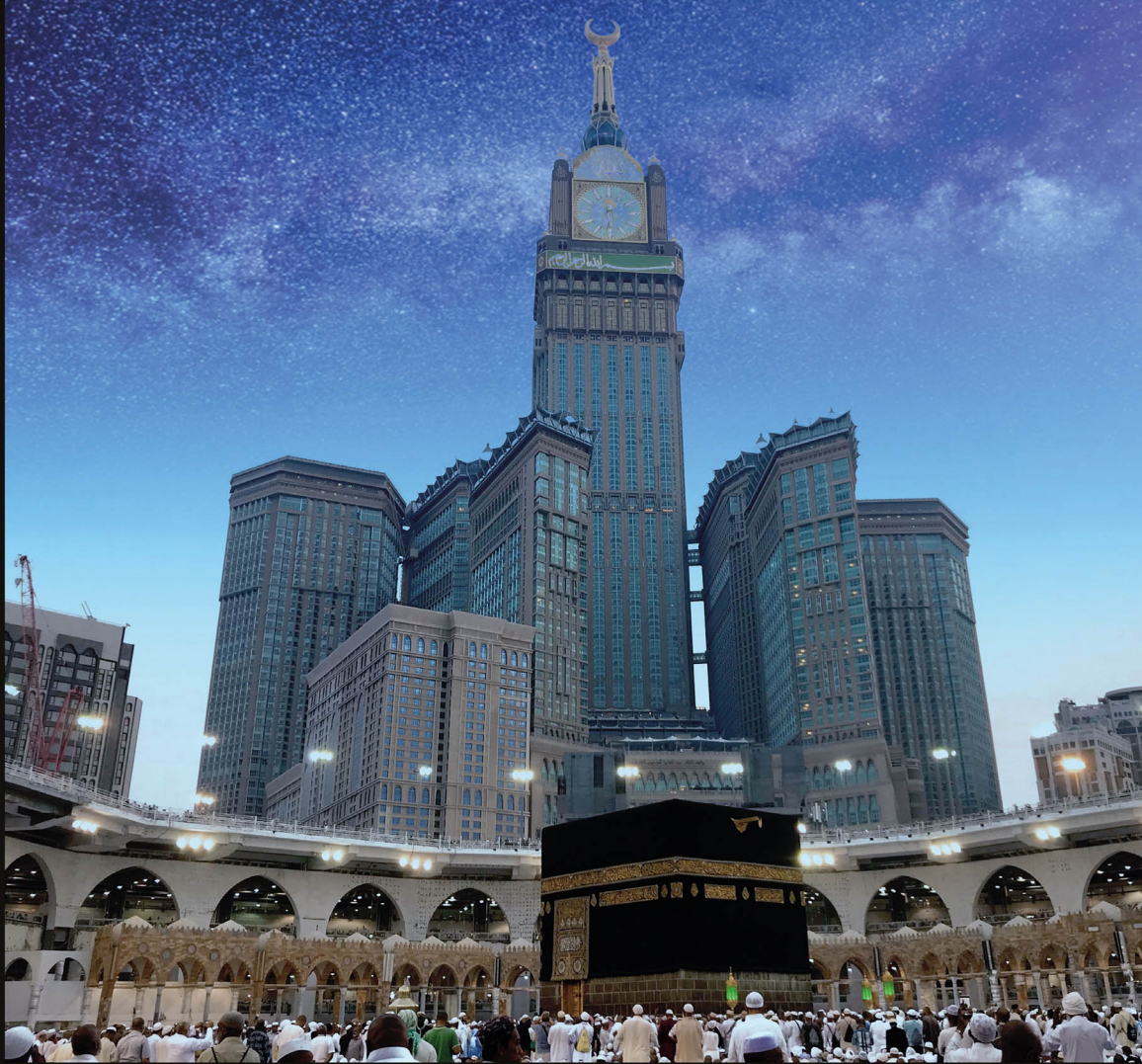




ROUTLEDGE
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The Routledge Handbook of Global Islam and Consumer Culture

Edited by Birgit Krawietz and François Gauthier

THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF GLOBAL ISLAM AND CONSUMER CULTURE

The Routledge Handbook of Global Islam and Consumer Culture is an outstanding inter- and transdisciplinary reference source to key topics, problems, and debates in this challenging research field. The study of Islam is enriched by investigating religion and, notably, Islamic normativity (*fiqh*) as a resource for product design, attitudes toward commodification, and appropriated patterns of behavior. Comprising 35 chapters (including an extended Introduction) by a team of international contributors from chairholders to advanced graduate students, the handbook is divided into seven parts:

- Guiding Frameworks of Understanding
- Historical Probes
- Urbanism and Consumption
- Body Manipulation, Vestimentary Regimes, and Gender
- Mediated Religion and Culture
- Consumer Culture, Lifestyle, and Senses of the Self through Consumption
- Markets

These sections examine vibrant debates around consumption, frugality, Islamic jurisprudence and fatwas in the world economy, capitalism, neoliberalism, trade relations, halalization, (labor) tourism and travel infrastructure, body modification, fashion, self-fashioning, lifestylezation, Islamic kitsch, urban regeneration, heritage, Islamic finance, the internet, and Quran recitation versus music. Contributions present selected case studies from countries across the world, including China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Morocco, Nigeria, Qatar, Pakistan, and Turkey.

The handbook is essential reading for students and researchers in Islamic studies, Near and Middle Eastern studies, religious studies, and cultural studies. The handbook will also be very useful for those in related fields, such as politics, area studies, sociology, anthropology, and history.

Birgit Krawietz is Professor of Islamic Studies at the Freie Universität of Berlin, Germany.

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A bone of contention and the subject of much discussion has been the question of transliteration. In the end, we did not opt for a one-size-fits-all model concerning notably Arabic transliteration, in part because of the genuinely interdisciplinary make-up of the volume. Hence, some authors use full-fledged Islamic Studies diacritics in their texts, while others employ the IJMES or another style. In the Index, we pragmatically brought these lines of representation together by listing the terms side by side and using cross-references if needed.

INTRODUCTION

For a Starter

Birgit Krawietz and François Gauthier

The most frequent reaction when mentioning this project to other people has been the remark that ‘Islam and consumer culture’ must be an ocean without a shore – and truly so. Some decades ago, the comments would have been completely different. Bringing Islam and consumption together would have appeared fairly unattractive in a scholarly sense; for the context of mid-twentieth-century diaspora settings, Muslims may have even been perceived as misers. However, there is a growing awareness and interest globally in Islam and Muslim ways of living and consuming from a variety of perspectives. This volume, edited by a researcher from Islamic Studies and a socio-anthropologist of religion, offers 35 chapters (including this Introduction) relevant to the study of the manifold intersections of Islam and consumer culture. From the starting point of this transversal theme, this handbook brings together a wide range of multi- and transdisciplinary perspectives and approaches. The handbook format has known increased popularity in recent years. Yet, in our view, it provides a remarkable opportunity to serve both as a synthesis of contemporary and sometimes cutting-edge knowledge and as a primer for future research in the social sciences and humanities. This collection strives to cross strands of research that tend to be siloed, namely Islamic Studies and the social sciences, including Cultural Studies. Whether in the distant past or the hyper-present, this handbook questions the way references to religion have acted as a resource for attitudes toward commodification and appropriated patterns of behavior. As Islam has become globalized, so does this handbook prod what is now the Muslim world. From the near and remote Middle East to Southeast Asia and Western diasporas, this handbook assembles case studies from around the globe (Green 2020). With a variegated area studies approach, it seeks to embrace philology-based, artifact-oriented, theory-driven, and other manners of analysis so that contributions get assembled here from,

Architecture, Art History, Asian Studies, Consumer Research, Cultural, Political, and Religious Anthropology, Economics, various subdisciplines of History, Islamic Studies, Middle Eastern Studies, Musicology, Near Eastern Studies, Religious Studies, Social Geography, Media Studies, Political Science, Political Sociology, and the Sociology of Religion, as well as Urban Studies.

This handbook seeks to map certain trends – not only social, but also academic – that have emerged in the last couple of decades that we believe should be put more systematically in conversation with each other. It traces and develops new sidelines and a few avenues of investigation that have yet to be more diligently explored. In many monographic accounts and edited volumes of Cultural Studies and the wider social sciences, the Global South (an anyway increasingly questioned term) in general, and Muslim-majority countries in particular, appear at best marginally, not to mention the Muslim lifeworlds that stretch across territorial and cultural geographies. As Sebastian Conrad has argued in *What is Global History?* (2016), a global approach does not need to cover the globe or an exhaustive international overview as much as it should identify and explore telling examples through the lens of national or transnational connections as a way to highlight complex processes of cross-fertilization. Accordingly, our present effort adds itself to a series of contributions that include the ‘The Global Middle East’ series at Cambridge University Press, the ‘Edinburgh Studies of the Globalised Muslim World,’ and the ‘Globaler lokaler Islam’ series initiated by the German publisher, transcript.¹

In the last decades, the expression *halal* (Arabic: *ḥalāl*, permissible) has developed a tremendous career (see Gauthier 2021a, this volume). The edited volume by Ayang Utriza Yakin and Louis-Léon Christians (2021), *Rethinking Halal: Genealogy, Current Trends, and New Interpretations* takes stock of pertinent developments. For better or worse, the buzzword ‘halal’ has come to depict what Muslims – who nowadays constitute nearly a quarter of the worldwide population – ethically negotiate and allow (or interdict) themselves as certain consumption practices amidst the almost infinite possibilities offered by our globalized consumer culture, supported by a global regime of neoliberal arrangements (Harvey 2005; Gauthier, Martikainen, and Woodhead 2013a; Gauthier 2020). Initially confined to the edible, the umbrella term *halal* has come to qualify a wide array of products and services, as well as modes of ‘Islam-compatible’ or ‘sharia-compliant’ behaviors and practices. In the wake of globalization, mediatization, and hyper-advertisement, the range of marketable items and their production chains have extensively broadened and become increasingly opaque and confusing, not only in Muslim diasporas in Europe, North America, and Australia but also in Muslim-majority countries themselves.

Indeed, consumerism has deeply penetrated most of, if not all, the countries in the world in which there is a significant Muslim presence. In a stimulating contribution about ‘the new places, forms and networks of globalised consumption’ in Cairo, Damascus, and Beirut, as the ‘three metropolises of the non-oil countries of the Middle East,’ geographer Leila Vignal (2007, p. 69) compellingly demonstrates how retail chains, supermarkets, hypermarkets, and shopping malls have invaded the region. This echoes Mona Abaza’s (2006) careful survey of the evolutions of consumption patterns and their cultural politics in Egypt,² to which we can add other works on the omnipresence of shopping malls across the Muslim world.³ Far from being insignificant or trivial, these developments are both the expression and the catalyst of profound changes in Muslim-majority societies, including in those that had been peripheral to the world economy until recently. These ‘temples of consumption’ have sweeping effects, as important as the introduction of extractive infrastructures, heavy industries, and widespread diffusion of post-Fordist industrial production. As we argue below, these developments are in continuity with the former commercial showrooms in the form of arcades and, later, department stores (e.g., Köse 2010) that had emerged in the colonial era while also introducing new social dynamics that impact and resonate with changes in the religious domain.

Islam (*islām*, submission, i.e., to the message of the one and only God (*Allah*)) emerged fourteen centuries ago in the cities of Mecca and Medina, at the crossroads of late antiquity trade routes, in what is now Saudi Arabia. The Prophet Muḥammad (ca. 570–632 CE) had been employed in his prior life as a guide for transregional caravan trade before he started revealing/reciting his divine message (*qur'ān*) over two decades in a piecemeal fashion of fragmented parts that were only at a later time put together into a whole. This new 'religion' saw itself as being the correcting and final version of God's prior, but, each time, distorted message to Jews and Christians. Within a few decades, Islam spread across the Arabian Peninsula and beyond it in different directions. In the centuries to come, it successively expanded its realm via trade relations, cultural exchange, and conquests. Nowadays, Muslim-majority states (some of them declaring Islam as their national religion) stretch in a gigantic North African and also sub-Saharan corridor from Morocco via the Levant, the Arabian Peninsula, and Iran to Pakistan. Islam even spread beyond the ocean to land in the Southeast Asian archipelagos of Malaysia and the most populous Muslim-majority country of all, Indonesia. Today, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) comprises 48 Muslim-majority countries plus nine others.

Consumption in the Web of Islamic Jurisprudence

Common wisdom about the consumption patterns of Muslims focused earlier mainly on ritual and normative specificities in the sense of dietary laws, namely hunting and slaughtering regulations and the interdiction of wine/alcohol.⁴ Besides the Islamic prohibition of pig meat,⁵ scholarly emphasis was mainly put on the general ritual slaughtering and meat consumption rules (Gräf 1959) or related development of religious identity construction (Freidenreich 2014). Apart from meat, the other case in point to traditionally characterize Islamic consumption is wine. The exact doctrinal development from scattered Quranic injunctions on grape wine (*khamr*) and their subsequent explications in the Sunna, the established tradition of the Prophet Mohammad, were not only streamlined but also turned by early Arabic-speaking scholars of Islam into a case of far-flung analogical extension to a prohibition on anything that potentially causes intoxication (*sukr*, *iskār*) or functions as a mood-modifying substance. The pertinent normative discussions are extensive and relate to different law schools and historical contexts.

The twentieth century ignited a series of profound changes in the authority structure of Islam, as the (more or less voluntary or coercive) acculturation of Western-born High Modern Ideals (Howell 2007; Scott 2020) resulted in the critique of tradition and the emergence of (political and apolitical) Muslim Modernist movements like the Muslim Brotherhood and the Indonesian Muhammadiyah organization. In the early twentieth century, 'The Lighthouse' (*al-Manār*), the famous Arabic reform journal directed by Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (1865–1935), had instituted a regular fatwa section devoted to putting *Modern Things on Trial* for their conformity with the precepts of Islam. These legal evaluations took inventory of the bounty of new modern products that inundated Muslim societies, from toilet paper to gramophones, telegraphs, photographs, railways, etc. (Halevi 2019). The impact of such media on society was major, with phenomena like 'boycott fatwas' unfolding as examples of Islamic consumer resistance(s) (Halevi 2012). Later in the century, the growing medical sector and health industry in Muslim-majority countries co-evolved with the rise of a field of Islamic bioethics. Hence, the bursting medical sector served as a kind of

icebreaker in updating the methodological tools and paths of argumentation for modern products, beyond meat. It geared them up to embrace more far-flung interests of hitherto lesser religious concerns that did not immediately serve utter physical survival and necessity. This thesis would still need to be tested, though.

The last decades, however, have witnessed a set of remarkable and unforeseeable changes in this trajectory. A process of global halalization (Gauthier 2021a) has unfolded, which has extended from food production and consumption (Armanios and Boga 2018) to an increasingly wide range of products, services, and even modes of behavior. The field of Islamic normativity has emerged as a renewed battleground for contentions on what it is to be Muslim in the face of globalization and the shaking of the prior nation-state-founded world order. Hence, the efflorescence of normative responses (sing. *fatwā*) from traditional, modern, and new authorities on the question of alcohol, for instance, with the influence of modern and digital media acting as a game-changer (Brückner 2001), becomes understandable. Krawietz (1991) has paid attention to a wider landscape of medical and otherwise body-related Arabic fatwas that address issues like blood transfusion, beard and hairstyles, circumcision, cosmetic surgery, and organ transplantation. A particularly sensitive field has been the issue of ritual and industrial animal slaughtering: Andelshauer (1996) took a closer look at modern Arabic and Turkish fatwas on slaughtering, while Bergeaud-Blackler (2017) has mapped the development of industrial processes and halal certifications.

Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) has survived the construction of nation-states and state-regulated legal systems (*qānūn*) partly modeled on Western examples in both form and content. More often than not, these black letter law constructions relegated Islamic law to an, at best, backseat position, although some of its experts were given a place in newly founded Sharia and Law faculties. Nevertheless, over the course of the long twentieth century, that is, before the advent of ‘Market Islam’ (Haenni 2005) and before halalization was officially identified by Western scholarship, Islamic jurisprudence had continued to function as an *enabler for the introduction of new products and processes* in Muslim lives. In his above-mentioned analysis of Rashīd Riḍā’s early twentieth-century normative reform evaluations, Halevi (2019) aptly speaks of ‘Laissez-Faire Fatwas’ in the sense that their spirit was largely agreeable and legitimizing. Through such instruments, *fiqh* had served as a vehicle for a critical discussion and reflection on modern life and as a reservoir for updated identity construction. It defined how, beyond the modern rejection of tradition and superstition, one could be modern *and* Muslim. Islamic law had performed such an adaptive function in the centuries before, but the twentieth century initiated a quantum leap that accelerated once more in the era of mass consumption, neoliberalism, and global capitalism. Although modern nation-building and the construction of state-bound judicial systems often excluded sharia-inspired law or reduced its scope to issues such as family law, it has been rekindled in the last decades and has reemerged in a number of forms. A striking characteristic has been its expansion beyond the limited sphere of the private to spill out into the public, embracing an *ever-growing number of collective and individual issues*. The traditional historical inclusiveness and openness to new questions that had been the DNA of Islamic jurisprudence for centuries have been thwarted with the flourishing of new-style *fiqh* evaluations. Nowadays, *fiqh*-oriented normativity has begun to draw a parallel and sometimes conflicting normative space that is both more encompassing and stricter than its twentieth-century avatar.

The development of modern media has been instrumental in this history. The efflorescence and social outreach of *fiqh* have been enabled by the publication of fatwas in

popular outlets since the late nineteenth century in newspapers, journals, and books. Modern means of communication have made it possible for fatwa collections to be assembled and published for a general audience, versus the former limitation to circles of *virtuosi* in difficult-to-access manuscripts and hard-to-read calligraphy. In this way, Islamic normativity became accessible for popular consumption, the success or unsuccess of laxer or stricter interpretations becoming an instrument of legitimation and fixation of shared norms. In addition, theological religious law writings that had been previously available only to experts have been fed into the growing pious book market over the last century (El Shamsy 2020). The initial publication of such manuscripts as books was well received in Muslim-majority countries and beyond, where Arabic has served as the Muslim *lingua franca*. Translations in vernacular languages followed. With the advent of radio, television, and later satellite and digital formats, this literature has become increasingly available, yet the format and content have tended to conform with the mediatic law of correlation between accessibility and democratization on the one side and digest on the other. At the same time, socially embedded fashions shape this field as others, with certain classical and post-classical works being resurrected and gaining unprecedented popularity (Krawietz 2018), notably the alleged father of modern Islamic fundamentalism, Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) (Jansen 1987-1988; Krawietz 2014). Recruiting premodern thinkers and ‘authentic’ sources whose works are selectively perused in order to make sense of contemporary realities has busied a wide variety of people, including radical groups. With the help of the internet and social media platforms, a landmass of products and practices have been discussed, embraced, or vilified with respect to their conformity with ‘Islam.’

Advocates and agents of halalization often refer only to the Quran and Sunna, but researchers’ analytical scope must remain sensitive to the highly flexible interpretive and methodological tools of Islamic legal thinking.⁶ The latter’s complex argumentative structures allow for creatively legitimizing or disqualifying newly invented (sing. *bid’a*) or disputed goods and practices. Three major areas or formats of Islamic jurisprudence have operated to boost the overall process of (usually just mildly critical) sanctioning: (1) substantive law or the case law of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) as a centuries-old reservoir that gets continuously updated; (2) the concept of the five basic goods and intentions of Islamic law (*maqāṣid*) in connection with the often silver-bullet of claiming public interest (*maṣlaḥa*); and (3) the dialectic procedure of normative questioning and answering (*fatwā*).

The contributions in this handbook elaborate on what could be a specific ‘Muslim’ formulation of the present imperatives of global capitalism and consumerism. They provide a series of insights that allow for a nuanced and ‘thick’ apprehension of the destinies of Islam in relation to consumption in history, as well as in today’s thoroughly marketized environment. Yet, we also believe that this collection can shed light on more general trends regarding the complex relations between religion and consumer culture. Consumerism is now a global variable, and Muslims are hard to distinguish from other populations in their daily activities. Samuli Schielke, who combines Islamic Studies expertise with that of an anthropologist of Islam, has repeatedly warned against monolithic reductions of what it means to be Muslim and has pointed to the manifold ambivalences that characterize people’s lives (Schielke 2009). Shahab Ahmed’s groundbreaking exploration *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (2015) impressively demonstrates how the richness and historical trajectories of Islamic practices and lifeworlds cannot be reduced to theological doctrines and normative evaluations. Guarding us against essentialist tendencies, Ahmed insists on the endless counter-narratives, contradictions, tensions, and more or less spiritual/aesthetic

expressions (including some beautiful Sufi wine poetry), which general analyses must also acknowledge.

A number of authors have recently taken up the term ‘Islamicate,’ first coined by the American historian Marshall G.S. Hodgson in *The Venture of Islam*, posthumously published in 1974. Hodgson used the term in his analysis of historical developments to distinguish between Islam as religion (Islam, Islamic) and Islam as culture (Islamicate), meaning the way that Islam became fused with all sorts of contingent elements and other social dimensions. Some scholars completely ignore the Islamic/Islamicate binary, and some even argue fiercely against it (e.g., Ahmed 2015). Others, like Lawrence (2021), put a lot of emphasis on distinguishing between Islam, Muslim, and Islamicate. A shared aim in this debate is to de-essentialize and variegate the notion of ‘Islam.’ Our own approach here is pragmatic and inclusive, yet we have tried to avoid the proliferation of the term ‘Islamicate’ in the assembled chapters. As the social scientific study of religion has abundantly demonstrated, the concept of religion as something scripturalist, belief-based, exclusive, and well-differentiated is a creation of the nineteenth century, as Western colonialism and imperialism spread a post-Reformation Christian understanding of religion to non-Christian lands. As Gauthier has argued (2020), the acculturation and implementation of this understanding in non-Western countries were coextensive to the construction of modern nation-states. From a Durkheimian perspective, it is counterproductive to isolate religion – and therefore Islam – from society as a whole and from other social dimensions. The distinction between Islam/Islamic and Islamicate, which can be justified within the narrow fields of Islamic or religious studies (which were founded on the strict delimitation of their object), is redundant in a wider and more interdisciplinary frame such as ours. What this handbook serves to illustrate in this respect is precisely how Islam in particular and religion in general have been constitutive for wider social and cultural forms and are best not entirely isolated.

Conspicuous consumption and the celebration of excess are not extraneous to Muslim societies and Islam-shaped cultures if we consider their long histories and the dynamics of their geographical expansion, which were always shaped by transactions with other social dimensions and cultural realms.⁷ This handbook, therefore, starts from the established fact that conspicuous consumption and Islam are not strange bedfellows. In fact, they were partners well before the advent of mass consumption. Muslim societies are not newcomers to indulgence in this world, but enjoying the latter’s pleasures and appreciating its attractions, including gracious giving, have been cast as a way of cherishing God from the very beginning. The denial of worldly pleasures and programmatic austerity in the name of Islam has been relatively marginal in the wider history of Muslim cultures and societies (Melchert 2020). Throughout history, rituals, festivals, and other socially and religiously infused settings have been sites of extraordinary consumption. This is, of course, manifest in the courts of the various Muslim dynasties and at the heart of their competition. Whether in Agra, Baghdad, Cairo, Damascus, Delhi, Edirne, Fez, Granada, Isfahan, Istanbul, Lahore, or Zanzibar, Muslim courts have repeatedly exhibited patterns of conspicuous consumption with a broad array of goods, cultural activities, and entertainment practices. Religious and ritual reasons were summoned to allow for all sorts of celebrations, as artistic depictions (paintings, engravings, illustrations, etc.) make abundantly clear. New goods emerging from intercontinental (at times, sea-born) trade became widely circulated. Coffee, whose consumption swept across the Muslim world in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to the extent that it now figures as one of its defining features, constitutes one of the most prominent examples. Another is tobacco, which became a similar staple and spread

within some of the same social spaces. These are examples of practices and goods which were granted religious approvals or at least relative leniency. They were also tainted by political valency. Indeed, coffeehouses not only became paradigmatic spaces of consumption and pleasure but were also associated with the potential for unrest (Hattox 1985).⁸

From Consumption to Consumer Culture

If the Muslim world is no stranger to practices of consumption and forms of hedonism, it is important to stress the novelty of the situation that unraveled in the last decades of the twentieth century. Economists define consumption as the acquisition of a given good or service in the space of the market, whose mechanism – naturally, spontaneously, or miraculously – sets a ‘price.’ This formal and deductive model postulates that the actors involved in this transaction are invariably undetermined, self-centered, and maximizing individuals. The latter desires A rather than B because of her preferences, about which nothing can be said.⁹ It also postulates that social, cultural, and contextual factors are ‘externalities’ that can be bracketed out in the analysis. While some social scientists have found this worthy of interest by assembling it under the banner of Rational Choice, many others, following Heilbrunn (2015, p. 13), consider that ‘anyone who has ever done the groceries at least once in their life intuitively understands the limits of this rational optimizing of utility approach.’

In *The World of Goods* (1979), Isherwood and Douglas defined the foundations of the socio-anthropology of consumption, spurring the rise of Cultural Studies. They showed how consumption is a general characteristic of human societies, from the most ‘primitive’ to ours, and that what circulates are neither objects nor utility but rather symbols, meanings, statuses, recognition, generosity, power, and cultural values. Such an understanding, which incorporates consumption practices into historical and social contexts, is much more pertinent than economists’ formal model (Gauthier and Spickard 2023). To this foundation, however, we need to add how the last decades have ushered in a new brand of consumption, or rather how the consumption of modern goods and symbols has become defining of the wider culture. In the West, the shift happened in the post-war years, and especially in the 1960s. It is then that the plentifulness and general utopianism of the times massified consumption practices and turned the latter into a veritable social ethos, which Weber defined as ‘a system of dispositions that prints a given orientation to action, that structures it in a veritable conduct of life’ (Willaime 2001, p. 97, translation FG), thus shaping relations to the self, others, community, society, the world, and religion. A *consumer culture* is, therefore, a society in which consumption practices are structuring of the whole and in which social values and the dominant representations are derived and expressed through consumption, such as choice, authenticity, individualism, freedom, and entrepreneurialism. Consumerism, meanwhile, can be interpreted as a synonym for consumer culture, yet the term also draws attention to its constitutive ideological, mythical, and utopian dimensions. In the Muslim world, as elsewhere, consumption practices, fashions, styles, and tastes emerged in sync with those of the West (especially in urban areas), yet it is only as a result of the latest wave of economic and cultural globalization that they developed into full-fledged consumerism. By the turn of the millennium, research has shown how even places like Yemen and Kyrgyzstan had adopted consumerism.¹⁰

Important from the point of view of religion is how consumerism is articulated with the dissemination and penetration of expressive individualism, that is, of a conception of life according to which every human is believed to have a unique Self and that the meaning of

life on earth is to discover and realize this Self (Taylor 2002, 2007). Consumerism is a powerful vector for the spread of what Taylor calls the ethics of authenticity since it provides a potentially infinite pool of symbols that can be used to express the individual self and be recognized through the dynamics of fashion, as well as social media. Consumerism, therefore, acts to orient religion, in general, and Islam, in particular, toward inner-worldly goals such as health, happiness, and hedonism, as well as economic and relational success. It also acts to fragment the prior social stratifications in terms of classes into a more or less horizontal array of *lifestyles*. Lifestyles are compounds of dress, eating, appearance, and other habits that express the core of self-identity and which are materialized through everyday choices and behaviors, however menial (Giddens 1991, p. 81; Slater 1997). In a consumer culture, therefore, religion tends to become *lifestyled* and caters to issues that are fundamental for the post-traditional self, such as life ethics, identity, and belonging (Gauthier 2021b). Similarly, expressive individualism signifies renewed visibility and a blurring of the boundaries between private and public, religious and secular, spurring the emergence of new forms of Islam that are market-bound rather than oriented and contained by the nation-state.

This approach goes a long way in explaining how the trends described and analyzed in this volume are coherent within the frame of our title, *Global Islam and Consumer Culture*, well beyond a simple concatenation of terms. Whether Islamic fashions, halal consumption, Muslim humor, body modification practices such as tattoos, Islamic pop or TV series, or the mushrooming of shopping malls, the bulk of the contemporary phenomena assembled here are all manifestations of the varied ways in which Islam is shaped within consumer cultures and how it simultaneously acts to acculturate consumerism within Islamic societies and lifeworlds.

Mapping the Shift

What emerges from this global picture, then, is twofold. First, consumption has always been part of the Muslim world, and the Islamic legal tradition has always had to find ways of interpreting its social practices, from the times of the Prophet to the heights of the Ottoman Empire. Second, the later decades of the twentieth century have seen a *major transformation* of Muslim societies in which consumption has become a cultural determinant to a novel and unforeseen extent. With the erosion of the sovereignty of the nation-states and the disenchantment with respect to the transformational and utopian potentials of politics, consumerism and marketization have emerged as encompassing and structuring processes, with effects across all social spheres, including Islam and Muslim practices. The shift from political Islamism to post-Islamism (Roy 2004; Bayat 2013) is a product of these transformations, but the reconfigurations are much broader. They concern all social and cultural levels, from the place and role of Islam within Muslim-majority countries' civil religions to the *meso* level of institutions and organizations, right down to the actual practices of Muslims in minority and majority settings. Across these levels and across cultural geographies, the globalization of capitalism has dissolved prior arrangements and favored the rise of new phenomena. Observers have dissected various facets of this emerging landscape and allow us to tentatively define a series of often overlapping and interconnected axes along which these phenomena are coalescing. We highlight a dozen of these axes in what follows, acknowledging the inherent limitations of such typologies, as well as the impossibility of making clear categorical distinctions:

1. An unprecedented *visibility of Muslims as Muslims*, instead of being identified (by others and by themselves) with respect to their ethnic or national background, has occurred since the turn of the 1980s (Göle 2002). In 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini put an end to his French exile by boarding a plane from Paris to Tehran to capitalize on what was the first televised revolution. In global comparison, the ‘Iranian Revolution’ was instigated by minority Shiite¹¹ forces, but it was feared that its spark would spill over to Sunni-dominated countries. While these fears did not materialize, at least not in the way anticipated, conflicts involving Muslims in the Near and Middle East and worldwide have become a permanent and often negative feature in the news. From the late 1980s onward, gender segregation and veiling excited widespread mediatic, public, and political concerns. Meanwhile, veil-wearing for women and beard-sporting for men became increasingly popular among Muslim minorities. These trends emerged before beards became trendy in some non-Muslim publics. Nevertheless, male Muslim self-fashioning has received much less public and academic attention. At the most radical end of the spectrum, even terrorists have fed the generalized ‘economy of attention’ (Franck 1998) from the 2001 blasting of the Bamiyan Buddhas (Ashworth et al. 2002) to the destruction of museum artifacts in Mosul, Iraq, or the detonation of hostages tied to the pillars of the antique city of Palmyra, both in 2015. While expressive individualism produces visibility on the personal level, consumerism and social media institute visibility into a political principle that reshapes and globalizes public space.
2. The shockwaves of the 9/11 2001 terrorist attacks rang through Muslim and non-Muslim contexts worldwide, sparking the need to present counter-narratives to the negative stereotyping of Muslims and show a *spiritual and peaceful* face of Islam. Parallel to this, Sufism has become wildly popular as a source of religious exoticism both in the wider public and in popular culture, from the incredible popularity of the Persian poet Rumi (1207–1273) and of the Whirling Dervishes on tour. The increasing production and consumption of Islamic goods and the pious appropriation of global products, practices, and modes of entertainment have combined to normalize this spiritualized brand of Islam. The neoliberal deregulation of media in most countries spurred the explosion of private and satellite television channels across the Muslim world and the production of large-scale Islamicized popular culture, a trend that has been catalyzed by the internet and social media (El Hamamsy and Soliman 2013). Similarly, commercialized Islamic pop music, which is often criticized by purist currents, whether secular musicologists (Karahasanoğlu 2016) or Wahhabi-style opponents (Ramaḍān Ibn Mūsā 2007; Otterbeck 2012), often explicitly aims to broadcast a message of togetherness in diversity and shared sentiments (e.g., Sami Yusuf; see Otterbeck 2021).
3. The *neoliberal revolution* that gained momentum in the 1980s and that became coercive through the International Monetary Fund (IMF) ‘structural adjustment programs’ profoundly affected national economies, intermeshing them within unified global markets and eroding state sovereignty on this and other spheres. As Turkey was a pioneer in the institutionalization of a Western-style nation-state and the implementation of secularist politics in the early twentieth century, it was also a model of combined neoliberalization and Islamization (Atasoy 2009). These developments, by the way, extend before and beyond the sole example of the AKP (Turkey’s Justice

and Development Party), which only continued and radicalized them. After 9/11, investors moved huge amounts of money from the US to Near and Middle Eastern countries, spurring formidable developments and the formation of *new business models* (Islamic banking, insurance, management, tourism, etc.) that combine capitalism with Islam or ‘sharia-compatibility.’

4. The vast corridor of Muslim-majority countries comprises a number of states with immense oil and gas reserves (among other natural resources). However, their incomes are not necessarily redistributed to the wider populace (e.g., Algeria, Azerbaijan, Iran, and Nigeria). A few provide their ordinary citizens with considerable *buying power*, such as the Arab Gulf region (see Hanieh 2011) and Brunei, allowing for high-level consumption and traveling patterns. Yet, what has to be noted apart from the economic importance of extractive industries is the overall emergence of a *middle class* in Muslim-majority countries (Wong 2007; Nasr 2009; Maqsood 2017) and, related to that, increasing upward social mobility via income. From high-end to middle-class customers, Muslim consumers are increasingly being taken into account by governments, investors, economic actors, and notation agencies and get represented as an immense market with unparalleled potential for growth and profits.
5. The widespread disenchantment with politics as the postcolonial era failed to realize its utopian promises, producing all sorts of frustrations and disillusionment, was captured by Asef Bayat in his famous book *Life as Politics* (2013). Politics, in other words, seeped out of the political institutions of the nation-state to percolate down to the level of social actors and coalesce in what Bayat calls ‘non-movements.’ Through these processes, everyday life has gained a political dimension that is correlated with the emphasis and meaning that individuals give to their daily activities. The so-called Arab Spring considerably amplified the drive for life as politics, but it also expressed the deeply felt longing of the citizens of Muslim-majority countries to participate in the bounties of consumerism and global flows. It is not surprising, in this context, that processes of re-enchantment operate through the efflorescence of what Haenni (2005) calls Market Islam and produce new mixes of consumerism and piety, including industry-led halalization (Bergeaud-Blackler 2017). Furthermore, the ‘scientification,’ proceduralization, and technicalization of halalization serve the more or less vested interests of multinational corporations and certain states at the same time that it incites the rise of competing normativities and the legitimation and naturalization of certain rigorist interpretations of Islamic law. The adjusting purification of everyday comportment became highlighted by the pious actors or coerced objects of ‘clean cinema’ and comparable initiatives (van Nieuwkerk 2011).
6. The construction of nation-states across Muslim-majority countries did not particularly integrate the theological and legal experts of Islam (*‘ulama’*) trained in religious schools (sing. *madrasa*) within their institutional and university structures. Some of these scholars resurfaced by contributing works of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) to the growing and astonishingly vibrant Islamic book market. The pathbreaker and epitome of *media-affined jurisconsults* was the Egypt-born Yūsuf al-Qaraḏāwī (1926–2022), who was then adopted by the state of Qatar as its leading normative voice and appointed ‘Global Mufti’ (Gräf and Skovgaard-Petersen 2009).¹² In his wake, an extremely wide variety of Islamic experts and icons rose to become *new Muslim authorities* who, in their rhetoric, performativity, and style, have effectively catered

to the different expectations and tastes (lifestyles) of their audiences. Unsurprisingly, the internet accelerated and multiplied these processes. Theatrically invested with the somewhat flexible paraphernalia of Islamic expert knowledge (shapes of beards, vestiary self-fashioning, communication styles, and official studio or do-it-yourself designs), they appear on a growing diversity of mediatic stages.

7. The Quran is not a rationalized code of law and deals with many issues in a rather fragmentary, allusive, or ambivalent manner, if at all. Nevertheless, Islam claims *comprehensiveness*, enabled by a process that gets reflected in the elaborate genre of normative hermeneutics, methods, and principles of Islamic jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*). This discipline has changed in modern times, namely because of the enormous and unprecedented level of need for Islamic evaluation. In order to respond to this demand, muftis have made use of already familiar instruments and methods, especially those allowing for legal creativity. One of the most popular tools in modern times is the multiplicity of different forms of accepted or assumed ‘interest’ (*maṣlaḥa*) that eases the stricter religious regulations for situations of only ‘necessity and need’ (*ḍarūra*) (Opwis 2005). Despite genealogical continuities, the last century has produced a considerable paradigm change, especially since the famous fatwas of Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, which pushed the door wide open, as analyzed by Halevi (2019) and others. The medical sector is one such area and an inspirational source of expansion and innovation. Since the 1990s, muftis have responded by developing a more lenient ‘jurisprudence for Muslim minorities’ (*fiqh al-aqalliyāt al-muslima*) that has been made readily available, for example, to allow buying retail via credit (Caeiro 2004). Another sub-phenomenon of the overall feature of *normative creativity* is the emergence of institutionalized collective jurisprudential growth (*ijtihād jamā’ī*) when a topic is complicated enough, involving a number of experts (including secular scientists) in one and the same legal verdict or explorative study (Makhlouf 2018).
8. The modern book and paperback market, radio, TV, cassettes, and other recent digital media have forced a profound restructuring of Islam. *Islamic knowledge*, which was enshrined in precious manuscripts for centuries, handled only by experts, and usually orally transmitted according to certain didactic standards, has become democratized and accessible for less educated masses. It is often packed into an entertainment form, available for spiritual consumption. A rising number of individuals or groups even partake as Muslim *prosumers* (to use the influential term coined by Alvin Toffler in 1980) in the reconstruction of pious landscapes. This collective transformation occurs through all sorts of paratextual strategies in relation to premodern texts of Islamic scholarship, such as with the writings of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350): editing whole books that get framed and introduced in a certain manner, translating them, advocating or editing only certain parts or merely snippets, applying them to specific, meanwhile often secularized contexts (childcare, health, psychology, sports, etc.), or combing them with specific Islamic and other ethics, ideologies, or just personal agendas (Krawietz 2018). Hence, the lifestylization of Islamic culture and the construction of Muslim identities are not only a matter of cultivating individual choices and developing subjectivities but also a vast field of redefined, reconstructed, and competing normativities in which rather ordinary Muslims can become influential Islamic brokers.

9. *Islamic duties, rituals, and pious practices* have become not only politically but also *capitalistically boosted* to a tremendous degree, namely through the dynamized field of Islamic charities (Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 2003). This phenomenon applies specifically to the Hajj, the once-in-a-lifetime pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, but also to the manifold other forms of pious travel, such as the visitation of the graves of the Shiite Imams. Modern means of transportation have made the Hajj accessible and affordable for limited middle-class time and financial resources, including for women. This religious obligation, which for the longest part of Islamic history was possible and therefore mandatory only for the privileged, has become a fashionable consumerist experience, duly publicized with a series of selfies and social media posts. During the holy month of Ramadan, Muslims have become increasingly bombarded with options on how to shape and enjoy the nights, during which the ban on food, beverages, and intercourse gets temporarily lifted, not to mention the festival that ends this sacred period. Such commodification has swept over Sufism and popular festivals like the birthday of the Prophet Mohammad (*mawlid*). Similarly, diverse practices attributed to him, bundled together as the so-called medicine of the Prophet (*ṭibb al-nabī, al-ṭibb al-nabawī*), which comprises various interventions from herbal medicine to the eviction or rather soothing of demons (*ruqya*), have become commodified in print and materialized into, for instance, a series of herbal products and health practices.¹³ At the same time and interlinked with halalization, this process has become significantly accompanied by Islamic *ethicization* (Yakin et al. 2021, p. 8). The latter evolves on all sorts of levels, starting with pious counseling and argumentation via fatwas and further evaluative formats themselves that constantly reach, if not flood, the book market and manifold media channels. The offered variety of Islamically informed positions on XYZ is enormous, as are the ethical choices that can be made by Muslims who navigate and consume the vast fatwa landscape for fitting offerings ('shopping for fatwas'). Furthermore, Islamic ethics has become a hot topic in the scholarly realm with a rising publication output globally; it gets increasingly employed as a soft power instrument (Nye 2004), for instance, through the implementation of CILE, the Research Center of Islamic Legislation and Ethics in Doha, Qatar.
10. What has been depicted and deplored by Edward Said (1978) as *Orientalism*, to evoke his pathbreaking study that still impacts the wider humanities, is in itself a lucrative source and a primer for the production of 'added value(s).' This imaginative procedure has identified or constructed all sorts of Oriental treasures. At the high end of the scale lie the opportunities awarded by the UNESCO category of Intangible Cultural Heritage, which has instigated Muslim state actors to construct an authentically *Islamic heritage*. These modes of '*self-Orientalizing*' are not restricted to Muslim-majority countries that have been subject to European colonial rule, and they are often part of economic and mediatic strategies to develop tourism and national or regional brands. Other examples range from contemporary art biennials to luxury items, as well as gastronomy, design, films, and other audio-visual productions, including Ottomanizing TV series, music genres, and operas. The conjunction of Orientalism and Islam provides significant overlaps that translate into crucibles for creativity and entrepreneurship with profitable perspectives.
11. Films and TV series across the Muslim world, often designed like Latin American telenovelas, have become highly popular around the globe and impact gender

relationships, especially in traditional Muslim settings where arranged marriages and their rationales still play a role. Situated at the meeting point between the imperatives of expressive individualism and competing definitions of Islamic normativities, these ‘*global image flows*’ (Brosius and Wenzlhuemer 2011) have introduced new behavioral options that have already modified the expectations concerning, for instance, the profile of future spouses and the nature of courtship. These have boosted the modern quest for a halalized brand of romanticism. Destinations, especially in Turkey, are internationally advertised for ostentatious marriage celebrations. As a consequence, love and marriage, which were historically conceptualized in the Islamic framework of polygyny (i.e., the male potentially having up to four wives at the same time) combined with a strong divorce prerogative for the husband, have become fragile entities in times of *liquid modernity* (Baumann 2003), producing their load of insecurity, dissatisfaction, and dismay alongside new opportunities and thrills. Although Sunnis used to often criticize Shiite Muslims for their institution of temporary marriage (*mut‘a*) (Ende 1980), muftis have emerged who voice a certain openness to so-called Sunni-style convenience or travelers’ marriage (*misyār*) (El-Wereny 2016), an umbrella term that comprises various types of ‘arrangements.’ Likewise, the concept of dating has rolled over the entire Muslim world, forcing many changes and adaptations (O’Brien 2017). Online Islamic dating apps (and websites, such as www.muzz.com) allow Muslims to reach out to the other sex by unprecedented means and on a transnational scale. While marriages can be serially consumed, hyper-mediatization and consumerism go hand in hand with the psychologization of religion and the importance of experiencing, naming, and managing emotions. Yet, all of this represents only a small sample of the ways in which *Muslims construct their subjectivities and their identities as Muslims*. A stroll through other contexts, such as sports (Krawietz 2019), would provide further illustrations.

12. Finally, the ‘eventization’ of Islam, as well as these practices of self-fashioning and lifestylezation enabled by the global and local consumer cultures, should not hide how, in the background (but at times also in the foreground), incredibly *huge security and logistical apparatuses* are mobilized in the Near and Middle East.¹⁴ In a way that is typical of the political effects of neoliberalism (Saad-Filho and Johnston 2005), complex military, infrastructural, and economic architectures combine as state and economic actors strive to position themselves in a multipolar world and negotiate new or established alliances. Dissonances have led to repeated political upheavals, authoritarian pushbacks, internationally orchestrated coups, and military interventions: the US-led ‘Desert Storm’ operation (1990–1991) following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the US and Great Britain invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Russian intervention in Syria, or the role of Turkey and China in diplomatic matters between Muslim-majority countries. At stake are the protection of resources, the persistence of often undemocratic regimes, dealing with Israel, and the defense capacities of certain countries through international (and, if necessary, military) help. After the British withdrawal from British India in 1947, Great Britain had considerably lost interest in the southern coast of the Persian Gulf. However, when at the beginning of the 1970s, small but economically powerful entities like Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates became officially established and independent, the foundations of the new powerhouse of the Arabian Peninsula were secured by City financiers with global strategies.

These axes, which we have sketched in broad strokes, can in no way be dealt with diligently in this handbook. Similarly, a large number of further authors could have figured in this introduction, and many will appear in the following chapters. While the contributions in this volume often speak to a number of these twelve axes, we have conceptualized them as we went along, and they do not translate into clear-cut sections in our table of contents. We have listed them here in order to remind ourselves and the reader that our overarching theme is far from being delimited and because we insist on sparking further reflections and research. As for the way in which we assembled this collection, we have proceeded by openly inviting proposals, besides a list of scholars and topics that appeared vital to us.¹⁵ Three major concerns have guided the preparation of this volume throughout. First, as we have noted above, we insisted on providing *historical depth* into the question of Islam and consumer culture as a way to show the continuities and particularities of the present context, as well as prove how our theme can be further developed in the study of Islam. Second, we wanted to show the complexity and creativity at work in the production of new *Islamic normativities* that emerge from the different genres, tools, and formats that run through the ages. Finally, we wanted to pay special attention to the *material* dimensions of Islamic(ate) culture¹⁶ so that the agendas, behaviors, choices, and other self-expressions of Muslim actors, consumers, and prosumers can be better deciphered and put in perspective.

This edited volume convenes a large group of household names within Islam and consumption studies, but it also includes a number of early career scholars. Indeed, we welcomed junior authors when the latter came up with fresh and convincing examples and ideas. We started out with a ‘45 to 51 chapters of 5,000 words a piece’ schema, expecting a broad range of basically lexicon-style entries with an emphasis on references to existing literature. However, it became clear as soon as the contributions started to fly in one after the other that the majority of people were unwilling to stick to the pre-designed mundane informational format. To an unexpected degree, creativity burst vigorously into the open, and most authors, instead of obediently restricting themselves to a state-of-the-art overview, pursued genuinely new avenues or energetically worked with ongoing research. At some point at the beginning of this wave, we decided to let go, but we do apologize to those few early birds whom we still cut down violently to the dictated shorter length (although a few of the shorter contributions are among the last-minute submissions). We also apologize in general because we teased all our authors with repeated suggestions for modifications, some much more than others. As is often the case in edited volumes, and even more so with a project as embarrassingly big as a handbook, circumstances and editorial decisions led to a final number of 35 chapters, including this introduction, which cover only part of the topic, yet in a way that we believe presents a good state of the art while opening some new avenues and highlighting some new phenomena and trends.

Chapter Overview

We have divided the contributions in this volume into seven broad sections or parts, the first of which is entitled **Guiding Frameworks of Understanding** (Part 1), whose aims are self-evident. We kick things off with a chapter by *Özlem Sandıkcı*, who describes how Muslims were fashioned as a distinct market in the 1990s, sparking a wave of tremendous changes in the Muslim world. She shows how Muslims were excluded from producers’ and marketers’ attention until this time because of an assumed incompatibility between Islam, consumerism, and capitalism more widely. Since then, the Muslim market has been

identified and stylized as mass categories became diffracted into niches corresponding to as many lifestyles and interpretations of Islamic normativity. Within these processes, the Southeast Asian country of Malaysia stands out as a particularly vivid example of the penetration of consumerism and the transformation of everyday life according to the grammar of the Market. *Johan Fischer* narrates the rise of a consumer culture in Malaysia based on the fieldwork he has conducted there since the mid-1990s. In this chapter, he pays specific attention to the role of the Malaysian state in the marketization process and the ways in which an Islamic consumer culture has been promoted as part of its nation-building and nation-rebranding strategies in the face of globalization. In so doing, Malaysia has been a catalyst and a broker for the construction of the global Islamic and halal market and a major player in the commodification of Islam. Next, *Lorenz Nigst* proposes a historical inquiry into the meaning of the notion of Baraka (sacred grace) and how it has changed in the context of global consumer culture. Linked to images of abundance, having Baraka signals a privileged relationship with Allah and can be summoned in practices of healing. Having penned a remarkable synthesis of the notion and its evolution in time, the author depicts how it has recently evolved from the idea of ‘being well’ to that of ‘well-being.’ These entries serve as cases in point for *François Gauthier*’s more encompassing and theoretical chapter on Market Islam and the rise of a global halal market. Drawing on French sources, he starts by introducing readers to the content of Patrick Haenni’s pioneering yet untranslated book *L’islam de marché* (Market Islam), in which the latter showed how the world of post-Islamism is being reconfigured under the authority of the Market, spurring the emergence of the contemporary phenomena that people present in this volume. The chapter then turns to synthesize the history of halal, arguing, following the works of Florence Bergeaud-Blackler, how halal is an ‘invented tradition’ that was born industrial as a novel and powerful mix of religion and economics.

Our second section proposes a series of **Historical Probes** (Part 2) that are invaluable in order to paint a deeper and more complete picture of the variegated ramifications linking Islam and consumption patterns across historical and cultural geographies. *Christian Lange* offers us a fitting start by digging up the meaning of the market (understood as the marketplace) in the Islamic tradition. While some scholars warned against the moral dangers of the market, most Muslim jurists held a generally positive attitude toward trade. The author takes us on a gendered tour of three traditional strands of references (via Anas, Abū Hurayra, and ‘Alī), which depict paradise as harboring a market in which plentiful wares are on display, people are beautiful, and various pleasures (including homoerotic ones) are on offer. Lange concludes with a reflection on shopping malls in the Arab world, shedding light on today’s Muslims’ rapport(s) with consumerism. *Isabel Toral* then takes us to the Abbasid capital of Baghdad in the ninth and later centuries, which commentators of the time considered ‘a city of superlatives’ with one million inhabitants. The chapter illustrates how the dynamics of consumption were essential to imperial power and expressions of status in a pre-market economy. Indeed, consumption was conspicuous among the aristocracy and the elite as ‘a means of power display’ and ‘self-fashioning’ in which books and poetry were as sought after as the latest iPhone is today. Cosmopolitan cities like Baghdad were attractive because they were situated at a nexus of trade routes that stretched from China to sub-Saharan Africa at a time when Europe counted for very little after the decline of the Roman Empire and the rise of the Byzantine civilization. Essential to these trade routes were caravanserais and khans, which *Robin Wimmel* introduces in his contribution. Islam was born in the Arabian desert, and it spread accordingly along the trade routes of

the times. The chapter travels through Persia, Syria, and Ottoman dominions in Southeast Europe and Asia Minor, clarifying the meaning of trade-related architectural genres that are pre-Islamic in historical genealogy but were reinvested with different meanings and importance under Islam (long before the modern advent of ‘halal hospitality’). Moving forward in time, *Roy Bar Sadeh* gifts us with a contribution that focuses on the Arabic Islamic Modernist periodical *al-Manar*, a Cairo-founded outlet that made its way to places all over the world on different continents, but in this case to India through the activities of Bombay Arab mercantile communities at the turn of the twentieth century. This case study reveals how the fomenting and dissemination of religious ideas were, at all times, linked to commercial enterprises, enacting what was already a form of globalization. Afterwards, *Arzu Öztürkmen* trades historical archives for oral histories of women collected in the town of Tirebolu, situated on the Eastern shores of the Turkish Black Sea. These testimonies, collected from ethnographic work and presented with attention to detail and nuance, are informative with respect to the various dimensions of communal life and the way that consumption patterns and saving practices were negotiated within an Islamic context. At a time when cinema, theater, and leisure practices were being imported from the West, challenging the previously limited set of goods and offerings, as well as local mores, this chapter shows how popular rituals like weddings and hammam frequentation took on new roles and social meanings.

The following section crosses the themes of **Urbanism and Consumption** (Part 3), starting with the transformations of Tangier’s waterfront. Beginning in the US, the increasingly global trend of waterfront refurbishment emerged some decades ago to employ derelict dockland and port sections as a stage for urban eventization and city competition. *Steffen Wippel* charts the various historical eras of a strip of coastline on the northern tip of Morocco, facing the Strait of Gibraltar. Tangier had developed over the centuries with its back to the sea and only very timidly and progressively developed its port infrastructures. As elsewhere, the harbor housed morally and legally illicit activities, yet economic and cultural globalization spurred ambitious development plans celebrating waterfront aesthetics at the turn of the millennium, including a shopping strip, luxury hotels and apartments, gated communities, a restaurant esplanade, a yacht harbor, an amusement park, installations catering to numerous leisure activities, and of course a business center. Within the broader array of such Dubai models (Hvidt 2009) for generating post-industrial incomes, an essential ingredient for the economy of Qatar (and for its neighbors) are masses of migrant workers, whose situation has been described by human and labor rights organizations as ‘modern slavery.’ *Laura Rowitz* explains how the *kafāla* system, an ancient Islamic contract law arrangement, is re-actualized in Gulf states to regulate labor migration. Also used in Islamic banking, *kafāla*, in this case, puts the migrant worker under the sponsorship of a native guarantor. Traditionally meant to emphasize the gratuitous nature of the sponsorship as ‘a benevolent act of generosity,’ the modern application of the *kafāla* system rather legitimates domination and enslavement through a Quranic reference. North of the Gulf states, in Lebanon’s capital Beirut, meanwhile, catastrophes seem to accumulate: from the civil war of the late twentieth century (1975–1990) to the 2020 devastating explosion that tore through the port area and surrounding neighborhoods of the multicultural metropolis. *Paula Ripplinger* resonates with Wippel’s chapter as she describes how the war-damaged historic central district became the center of inter-communal rivalries and an example of neoliberal-type privatization of public space and urbanism resulting in untamed social divisions, new shopping malls, luxury hotels, and standardized architecture. She demonstrates the dysfunctionality of the exclusivist business model of the Beirut Central District (BCD)

or Downtown in this still unpacified conflict-stricken country. We have hinted at how Indonesia and Malaysia, the former being the world's largest Muslim-majority country, have played pivotal roles in the creation and expansion of a global halal market and wide-ranging halalization. In the following chapter, *Hew Wai Weng* shows how the tourist industry, and hotels in particular, participate in the making of 'halal places' that are advertised as 'Muslim-friendly' and 'sharia-compatible.' Once again led by economic actors rather than schooled Islamic authorities, these new locales of Islam-branded cosmopolitanism institutionalize a set of 'Islam-typical' norms whose politics are far from neutral as they promote gender segregation, LGBTQ+-phobia, full-body covering fashions, a ban on alcohol, and so on. Some readers might imagine finding solace and less commodified mores in Central Asian republics like Kazakhstan. In what is the last chapter in this section that assembles contributions thematizing urbanism, *Aurélie Biard* shatters such expectations. Here, the previous capital Astana has been revamped and renamed Nur-Sultan in celebration of former president Nazarbayev's neoliberal development model and authoritarian politics (and since 2022 renamed Astana again). With the help of case studies collected in the field, the author exhibits how the middle and upper-middle classes are driven by the model of the 'Muslim winner' who attracts 'success' by infusing the major and globally operating strands of Hanafi or Salafi Islam with a fair dose of Puritan ethics. This is a textbook example of how the construction of Haenni's Market Islam involves the production and heroization of Market Muslims.

Our fourth assemblage of chapters threads together themes related to **Gender, Vestimentary Regimes, and Body Manipulation** (Part 4). As the reader will find out, gender is a transversal theme in many of the chapters in this volume. The following chapters, however, take up the issue of gender in a more frontal manner. *Carla Jones* takes us back to Indonesia to show how Muslim fashions are intrinsically bound to national economic growth strategies and the country's attempts at branding itself as a model for 'moderate Islam,' contra the Gulf model. Women's bodies are therefore at the center of competing claims about 'the universality of Muslim cosmopolitanism' and Indonesian essence all at once. While this portrait is specific to Indonesia, its main characteristics resonate across most of the Muslim world, including Turkey, where *Banu Gökarıksel* and *Anna J. Secor* draw our attention to the women who wear modest fashions and how this social practice 'contributes to the making of a self-conscious individual image' that wishes to express 'the cultivation of piety and the making of an ethical self.' Drawing from the psychoanalytical theory of Jacques Lacan, the authors 'look at how the veiled subject maps herself within the field of the gaze' and its ecology of desire and how these dynamics have changed over the last decade. *Stefan Maneval's* contribution allows us to go beyond the stereotypes associated with the Gulf countries and Saudi Arabia in particular by tracing the gendered history of spaces and modes of consumption in the trade city of Jeddah from the twentieth century to today. In the early twentieth century, shopping and trade were mostly conducted by men since women were 'ideally not seen in the streets, whereas today, the numerous shopping malls in the city are regularly frequented by women of diverse social backgrounds.' Challenging the idea that strict gender segregation affects women in particular and benefits men, the chapter argues namely that men also suffer from having their movements constrained but that both have come to enjoy the relative liberty of malls. Moving slightly away from gender issues, *Göran Larsson* overviews Muslim discussions about tattooing and other body modifications, past and present, and especially Sunni fatwas for Muslim diasporas in the West. Arguing against unnecessary modifications of Allah's Creation, Islamists like Qaraḍāwī use the example of tattoos and cosmetic surgery as a sign of Western decadence, but wide

Muslim audiences are not convinced and keep upgrading their natural bodies. The underlying argument, which consists in not modifying, and in this case, knowingly harming the body on the grounds that it is Created, also appears in the case of smoking. The practice of smoking became widespread in the seventeenth century as part of local culture and was even politicized in various protest movements across the Middle East. *Ava Nojoumi* narrates how Islamic jurisprudence has dealt with this issue previously, but how, nowadays, it is variously modifying the range of different arguments that pertain to smell and sensory modification, for instance, and more recently, integrating the results of scientific research on health.

Our fifth section delves straight into some of the more contemporary and novel phenomena linking Islam and consumer culture, which we have filed under the heading **Mediated Religion and Culture** (Part 5). We begin on a poetic note with *Rosy Beyhom's* chapter on artful Quran recitation (*tajwīd*) whose historical genealogy stems from pre-Islamic Arab oral traditions and which developed into a central spiritual device. Once again, we are happy to tie contemporary developments to their historical depths in a way that allows for a highlight of both the continuities and novelties of today's situation. This chapter allows us to note the problem of music and singing in the normative world of Islam so that the traditional emphasis is on the importance of letting the power of the artfully recited word clearly dominate any type of musicalization. *Tajwīd* is an important part of the festive rituals of Islam and a stirrer of emotions. Modern technical innovations have led to a form of commodification of *tajwīd*, namely with the rise of celebrities of the genre, a trend that has increased exponentially with the arrival of the internet and social media, and whose intricacies, paradoxes, and contradictions are discussed. We initially had high hopes of providing a fair representation of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa and had to bend before the twists of fate that led us astray with respect to this vow. Fortunately, *Musa Ibrahim's* chapter provides us with a significant contribution on the striking rise of an Islamic-African version of Hollywood in the likes of Nigeria's cinema industry, commonly known as Kannywood. All of the aspects of our wider theme seem to coalesce in this example as the result of the neoliberal deregulation and privatization of audio-visual (one of the very first measures to have been adopted as part of the IMF's infamous Structural Adjustment Programs, something that has been unduly overlooked by scholars) in Nigeria, and which prompted independent private actors to create a new genre of TV series and films influenced by Indian Bollywood productions. This bottom-up surge exploded with the help of more accessible and flexible technologies, bringing everyday concerns to the screen while filtering them in relation to African Salafism and sharia-oriented sensitivities. Kannywood productions, which have evolved into a full-fledged and profitable industry, highlight the tensions that emerge between orthodoxy and the logics of commodification. *Viktor Ullmann* follows with a chapter featuring the Jordanian Netflix teenage television drama *Jinn* (2019), which seems to rehabilitate popular Islamic demonology within a typically Western dramatology. This example demonstrates the intricacies and dynamics of Global-Market era storytelling that are best summed up with Robertson's concept of 'glocalization,' that is, how global symbolic structures become acculturated while enculturating Western filmmaking tropes. The reader's pleasure is teased yet further in *Alina Maschinski's* piece devoted to the young German Salafist 'influencer' Ibrahim al-Azzazi, who reigns on the youth platform par excellence, TikTok, and is observed by Germany's Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution. Lacking in 'scholarly credentials in the traditional sense,' the man his followers call 'Sheikh Ibrahim' distills video-snippet fatwas on everyday themes to a wanting audience, drawing ever further from Islamic jurisprudence in form and content. Finally, *Philip Geisler*

takes us to Toronto, Canada, where the Aga Khan Museum Shop participates in the recent fad over Islamic art, which has become instituted within special collections in universal museums like the Louvre or recent specialized ones like the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris and other such institutions in so many other countries, including of course in the Gulf. The chapter aims to ‘contextualize the museum shop as a conjunction of shifted consumer culture and strategies within global Islam in the early twenty-first century,’ revealing how the Aga Khan Museum incites the ‘conspicuous consumption’ and self-curating strategies of a cosmopolitan and open brand of Islam.

In the prior Nation-State regime of modernity (Gauthier 2020), institutionalized culture was a relay for nation- and state-building. It remains so today, to a certain extent, yet the importance of culture under Global-Market conditions has been opened to a matrix of new private actors and new communication logics so that its importance has grown as an arena of competing authenticity claims and identity formation. We therefore remain in the folds of culture with the next collection of contributions, which we assemble under the heading **Consumer Culture, Lifestyle, and Senses of the Self through Consumption** (Part 6). *Jonas Otterbeck* opens the section with a transversal look at the marketing and consumption of ‘Islamic consumer goods’ as expressed in London’s new Muslim Shopping Festival. Here again, the fine line between outright commodification and Islamic authenticity is thin – and shifting. Here again, competing social norms meet actor agency and empowerment strategies that co-construct the meaning of what it is to be Muslim and Muslim subjectivities. As with any other market segment, that of Islamic goods also attracts non-Muslim-yet-Muslim-compatible products and brands, from non-alcoholic beverages to luxury goods. Boosting our carbon footprint in the process, *Dietrich Jung* brings us back to Malaysia, which serves to demonstrate how consumer culture is as ‘significant [a] feature of daily life’ there as it is in the West. Yet, far from meaning the pursuit of rationalization and secularization, this consumerized environment profoundly reconfigures the rapport between modernity and religion: ‘consumption and religious practices are ambiguous but not contradicting features of individual identity constructions,’ and the study of Islam, therefore, needs to pay closer attention to the ways in which consumerism interlaces with Islamic traditions. Such is precisely what *Lina M. Liederman* does in her study of Muslim comedy and Muslim humor in Western diasporas. Born in the 1990s and catalyzed by the cultural response to the 9/11 trauma, explicitly Muslim comedy acts as an outlet for the expression and symbolic resolution of the tensions that Muslims (and non-Muslims) experience in everyday life. Crucial here is to ‘laugh with Islam’ instead of ‘about Islam’ in a way that produces integration both within non-Muslim societies *and* with community identities. Here again, these shared logics take on different forms depending on the context, whether in North America, the UK, or France. Abrahamic religions, which are profoundly patriarchal and founded – as is stereotypically said – on the idea of Creation and human dominance over nature, are challenged by the need to respond to today’s pressing environmental issues. Although relatively marginal with respect to wider trends, *Marita Furehaug* draws our attention to an eco-Islamic current that has emerged in recent years, especially but not only in Western Muslim diasporas. Here, the Islamic concept of *iktisad* (frugality) draws from Quranic verses and Islamic tradition to develop a hybrid Islamic environmental ethics that finds expressions in criticizing the arena of production and consumption practices, including Muslim fashions. The author thereby problematizes the one-dimensionality of pious fashion. Proof that consumerism is dominant in virtually every corner of the Muslim world is provided by *Tang Man*’s study of Salar Muslim women in the remote Qinghai province

of Northwest China and their massive use of the social media application WeChat. The chapter discloses how ‘the forceful trend of social media marketization in China has dramatically shaped the formation of Salar women’s subjectivities and provided them with space to explore other possibilities in life.’ Consumerism opens preferred avenues for women’s emancipation from traditional gender roles, expectations, and identities (namely with respect to marriage), as they seek to become ‘independent, beautiful, and rich’ through the micro-businesses they create on WeChat.

Our final section shifts to more explicit offerings on the global economy and its **Markets** (Part 7). One of the most striking phenomena in this respect is the creation and expansion of Islamic finance, on the topic of which *Samir Amghar* and *Ezzedine Ghlamallah*’s chapter should become a reference. The authors retrace the history of the emergence and boom of Islamic finance from the late 1950s to today, highlighting its different stages while introducing the reader to its various concepts and principles, the most important of which is the prohibition of interest (*riba*). The chapter situates Islamic finance as the joint product of the traditions of Islamic law, contemporary jurisprudence, and the determining apport of ‘secular’ and economic actors. Confirming prior analyses like those of Charles Tripp, the initial utopian objectives of creating an ethically sound alternative to capitalist finance have been significantly tempered. Islamic finance today is more an expression of the financialization and marketization of Islam than it is the realization of a true alternative to – or the Islamist takeover of – capitalism. Anthropologist *Daromir Rudnyckyj* provides a remarkably complementary perspective on Islamic finance based on his ethnographic study of Islamic finance experts in one of its global hubs, Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia. The author demonstrates how qualitative methods can provide valuable insights into macroeconomic matters and institutional logics. The chapter shows how the abstract figure of the self-interested and maximizing homo economicus is acculturated in Muslim contexts in which Islamic law and profit-seeking are translated into ‘technical problems.’ What emerges from this picture is the formidable resilience and capacity of adaptation of capitalism in its globalized form, helped by neoliberal measures such as welfare cuts and privatization. While economists consider money in purely material and utilitarian terms as a neutral, generalized converter of quantitative values, anthropologists, sociologists, and historians have drawn attention to its fundamentally symbolic and qualitative dimensions. Eric Hobsbawm, for instance, considered the role of national currencies to be ‘the most universal form of public imagery’ and an essential and powerful means for constructing shared national identities. A case in point is the focus of *Hannah Vongries* on representations figuring on Qatari banknotes. This geographically small but oil- and especially gas-rich Gulf state is known for the way that it has pushed and systematically pursued developmental policies that aim to make the most of the possibilities opened by economic and cultural globalization. The imagery appearing on Qatari banknotes since 2020 is a testimony to these ambitions and their translation into internal and external branding strategies in which representations of Qatar’s tribal past have shifted from appearing as signs of backwardness to being reservoirs of authenticity and ‘cultural capital.’ The relationship between Islamic authorities and capitalism is complex, yet it is possible here again to measure the extent of the sea change that occurred over the last decades. For most of the twentieth century, Islamist movements, whether more traditionalist or modernist, seemed to have ‘elective affinities’ with communism and socialism more than capitalism, namely because of the ways in which their interpretations of Islam put issues of social justice and social progress (coined in welfare terms)

to the fore. The triumph of capitalism over communism and the neoliberal revolution have acted to tame and reconfigure these preoccupations. As *Haouès Seniguer* illustrates in the case of Morocco, this has left Islamist forces rather speechless when it comes to critiquing capitalism and economic development. Moreover, when in a position of authority, Islamist parties (not only in Morocco, but also in Turkey, Egypt, and other places) have pursued and even accelerated neoliberal-type reforms and policies (privatization, export orientation, the pursuit of economic growth, etc.). This is yet another example that demonstrates that when Islam and the Market meet, it is the grammar of the latter that tends to reshape the expressions of the former in a way similar to how Islam was reformatted and reinterpreted within the grammar of the Nation-State in the prior era. In this sense, *Humeira Iqtidar* provides our handbook with a deserving *grand finale* as she analyses the transformations of Islamist ‘political imagination’ in Pakistan, showing how the Jamaat-e-Islami’s strategy for Islamization has shifted from being top-down – and focused on the state – to bottom-up, namely through the opportunities provided by the market.

Comments, discussions, and critiques received by the present editors over the years cast doubt on the pertinence of understanding religion by crossing it with the theme of consumer culture, capitalism, or neoliberalism. The collection of contributions in this volume, we hope, will help establish not only the relevance of this transversal theme but also its uttermost necessity for understanding Islam today. A lingering question is: how to understand this connection in light of the chapters assembled here? We suggest in closing that consumer culture and its associated concepts, whether neoliberalism, the market, or capitalism, are not to be understood as determinants in the sense of one factor from one ‘social sphere’ impacting others. Rather, we contend that societies, even modern societies, form interdependent wholes and that the different dimensions of societies, be they religion, economics, politics, morality, or art, are producers of and produced by this whole, which in turn is shaped by its relations with other societies, near and far. In this sense, and as historians like Karl Polanyi (1944), sociologists such as Mike Featherstone (1993), and socio-anthropologists like Marcel Mauss have shown, consumption imaginaries and practices are embedded in wider social logics. Hence, premodern consumption in the Muslim world was embedded in social bonds and religious norms that gave it meaning and made it, for instance, an expression of status and a function of the imaginary. What the chapters of this handbook confirm, however, is the different nature of consumption in today’s globalized world. By feeding a full-fledged *consumer culture*, consumption is not only embedded in wider society: it is an *embedding* force. It is a *structuring* part of today’s world, in places as different as Malaysia, Morocco, Nigeria, and Kazakhstan, and not only the West. This is why Islam, in all its varieties and at all levels, has become marketized to such an extent, while the market has become Islamicized in ways that exceed, by far, the perimeter of the halal market boom *stricto sensu*.

We now let the reader pack their bags and embark on a world tour, which we hope she/he/they will find enriching.

Notes

- 1 The volume edited by Pink 2009 uses that framework in the title.
- 2 Mona Abaza had committed to a chapter for this volume yet passed away before its realization. We salute her pioneering contribution to the field and extend our condolences to her colleagues, friends, and family.

- 3 Malls have been intensely researched, for example, with reference to the Arab Gulf states (Jewell 2013), Egypt (Abaza 2001), Indonesia (Schmidt 2012), and Turkey (Akçaoğlu 2009), to name but a few.
- 4 In a wider picture, the material ‘medieval’ Arabic Islamic culture of wine production is treated by Heine 1982.
- 5 For a progressive pious reflection, see Siddiqui 2012.
- 6 The process of independent legal reasoning is called *ijtihād* (literally: to exert oneself). It is a highly contested term, and its definitions are varying. However, the fact that more or less openly admitted creative interpretive moves have to be made by jurisconsults all the time leads to the constant modification and growth of the available corpus of normative evaluations. There is no need to visit here the reproach that Islamic law was at certain periods fossilized and sterile.
- 7 See, for instance, Phillips 2016. Islamic art museums or sections of Islamic art burst with examples of sorts.
- 8 Of mention are also the much earlier introduced products of paper and of Chinese porcelain.
- 9 For a presentation and critical discussion, see Slater 1997, Gauthier, Martikainen, and Woodhead 2013a, b, and Gauthier 2020.
- 10 For more on consumption and consumerism, including with respect to religion, see Gauthier 2020. For the Muslim world, see Gauthier (in press).
- 11 The majority of Muslims belong to the Sunni branch of Islam that acknowledges the first four caliphs – who succeeded the Prophet Muḥammad (Mohammad) immediately as community leaders – as legitimate and canonical. In contrast to that, the party (*shī’a*) of the fourth caliph ‘Alī, the son-in-law of the Prophet Mohammad, and his own sons was regarded as the only entitled line of authority. In their wake, Shiis, or Shiite Muslims (about 15 percent of the Muslims worldwide, although numbers are contested), exhibit different pedigree models of enhanced spiritual and political authority. According to their acceptance of a fixed number of divinely ordained spiritual Imams, majoritarian Twelver Shiites are differentiated from Sevens Shiites. Shiis are nowadays predominantly located in Iran, Iraq, and Bahrain, plus significantly (in two-digit numbers) in Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Yemen, Lebanon, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Syria.
- 12 It has to be mentioned, though, that he left Egypt for Qatar for political reasons.
- 13 Just to point here to the bloodletting practice of *ḥijāma* as an example, see El-Wakil 2011 and Schmidt Stiedenroth 2019.
- 14 For shifting security architectures from 1971 to 2003, see Üçağaç 2022.
- 15 Of this list, most translated into contributions, but we also were unable to have all the authors and themes we wanted to materialize in the end.
- 16 A noteworthy and inspiring example is the study of Kokoschka 2019 on the consumer culture in (mainly) Syria before the outbreak of the civil war.

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PART 1

Guiding Frameworks of Understanding



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1

RELIGION AND MARKET LOGIC

Fashioning Muslims as Consumers

Özlem Sandıkcı

Marketization, the expansion of market logic into non-market domains, including religion (Fairclough 1992; Slater and Tonkiss 2001), has been a defining feature of the contemporary neoliberal political economy. Market logic prioritizes monetized and profit-driven production of goods and services and fosters a cultural environment in which being a consumer emerges as the dominant mode of identity. In the last two decades, a growing body of interdisciplinary research has focused on understanding the changing relationship between religion and economy and discussed the ways marketization shapes religious identities, practices, and organizational forms (e.g., Comaroff and Comaroff 2001; Robbins 2004; Osella and Osella 2009; Rudnyckij 2009; Sandıkcı and Ger 2010; Gauthier and Martikainen 2013; Gauthier, Martikainen, and Woodhead 2013a, 2013b; Martikainen and Gauthier 2013; Lewis 2015; Jafari and Sandıkcı 2016; Gauthier 2018).

This chapter builds on this literature and explores the expansion of market logic into the Islamic social sphere and the rise of the ‘new Muslim consumer.’ Specifically, I trace the changes in the conceptualization of Muslim consumer identity in marketing and media discourses and identify three phases – exclusion, identification, and stylization – through which a view of Muslims as modern consumers in search of distinction and propriety comes to dominate the view of Muslims as non- or anti-consumers. Distinct forms of consumer subjectivity, indicative of different articulations of religion-market interaction, are valorized at each phase.

Exclusion

For centuries, Muslims have engaged in consumption and trade; yet, Muslim consumers and businesses remained almost invisible. Several factors underlie this oversight. First has been the marginalization of Muslims as low-income and uneducated people who do not qualify as consumers of branded products. While wealthy Muslims from the oil-rich states of the Gulf have been known to engage in extravagant consumption, much of the Muslim world has been considered as in the grip of poverty. The historical legacy of widespread deprivation and lack of purchasing power has seemingly placed Muslims outside the domain of the capitalist market.

The stereotypical images of Muslims as the inferior ‘Other’ of the West (Said 1978) have further fueled this exclusionary perspective. Such Orientalist representations have produced and reinforced an essentialist view of Islam as incompatible with the capitalist market ideology. For instance, in *Orientalism, Postmodernism and Globalism*, Brian Turner (1994, p. 90) argued that ‘consumerism offers or promises a range of possible lifestyles which compete with, and in many cases, contradict the uniform lifestyle demanded by Islamic fundamentalism.’ Turner interpreted the cultural, aesthetic, and stylistic pluralism fostered by postmodernism and the spread of a global system of consumption as contradictory with the fundamentalist commitment to a unified world organized around incontrovertibly true values and beliefs. Similarly, in his provocatively titled *Jihad vs. McWorld*, Benjamin Barber (1995) described the rise of Islamic fundamentalism as a reactionary response to Westernization and the spread of a global system of market capitalism and consumption. Privileging the West as the natural space of the market, these studies framed the non-West both as outside the market and as antagonistic to the ethos of consumerism.

In the twentieth century, Islam acted as an important force mobilizing people against Western colonialism and imperialism in much of the Muslim geography (Esposito 1998; Roy 2004). A critical part of the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist uprisings was the boycott of Western products and services and the rejection of lifestyles that signified the colonial/imperialist West (Ezra 2000; Jafari 2007). However, failing to acknowledge the historical complexities underlying the relationships between the West and Muslims, many analysts have incorrectly interpreted consumption resistance merely as evidence of Islam’s anti-capitalist and anti-market essence.

The view of Islam as an anti-Western force is also echoed in the writings of scholars of Islamic economics. This field developed in the postcolonial era of the 1970s as a response to the ‘assertions of superiority of Western knowledge’ (Zaman 2008, p. 17) and aimed to offer an Islamic alternative to the capitalist and communist economic systems (Khan 1995; Chapra 2000). The application of Quranic injunctions and Islamic norms is expected to prevent injustice in the distribution and acquisition of material things and motivate people to use wealth for performing obligations that would please Allah and society rather than pursuing individualistic pleasures (Zaman 2008). Given the emphasis on justice and equality, scholars of Islamic economics tend to exhibit a diffident attitude toward consumption. They characterize Western consumerism as wasteful, decadent, and immoral and advise Muslims to live modest lives and refrain from conspicuous, hedonistic, and egotistic consumption (Arif 1985; Khan 1992). As Kuran (2004, p. ix) argues, by casting Western consumer culture and the capitalist market system as Mammon and presenting Islam as an antidote against its harms and evils, Islamic economics promotes ‘the spread of antimodern, and in some respects deliberately anti-Western, currents of thought all across the Islamic world.’

Overall, this exclusionary view, driven by the assumed incompatibility or antagonism between Islam and capitalism, renders Muslims invisible and irrelevant as consumers. The image of Muslims as non- or anti-consumers fosters a subject position outside the boundaries of the Western consumption culture. A Muslim, whether due to obligation (Islamic norms), choice (anti-colonial resistance), or inability (insufficient financial resources), lacks the capacities, freedoms, and responsibilities of the imagined consumer proper.

Identification

In contrast to the prescriptions of the exclusionary perspective, studies conducted in the 1990s reported the emergence of new consumption objects and practices that explicitly drew from Islamic references (e.g., Starrett 1995; Robinson 1997). Further research in the area confirmed the increasing visibility and proliferation of products and services marketed as religiously appropriate and desirable (e.g., Schulz 2006; Fischer 2009; Hasan 2009; Jones 2010; Sandıkçı and Ger 2010; Jafari and Süerdem 2012; Maqsood 2014; Izberk-Bilgin and Nakata 2016; Sandıkçı 2017; Sandıkçı 2021). Several interrelated macro-level developments underlie the changing relationship between Islam and the market.

Since the 1980s, many developing countries have adopted neoliberal restructuring reforms (more or less forcibly), including the Muslim-majority ones (Ong 2006; Rudnycky 2009). Liberalization of markets transformed the manufacturing and finance industries, contributing to the formation of a new industrial and professional class with higher purchasing power. Additionally, the spread of transnational advertising images, the arrival of new spaces for shopping and leisure, and an unprecedented inflow of Western brands fueled the development of globally oriented consumer culture (Ger and Belk 1996; Kravets and Sandıkçı 2014). The changes in the production and consumption domains affected both secular and religious segments of the population and created new opportunities for wealth accumulation and marketplace participation (Sandıkçı and Ger 2002; Wong 2007; Gökariksel and Secor 2009; Nasr 2009).

Neoliberal transformation has also been implicated in the growth and spread of new forms of religious collectivities (Yavuz 2004; Mandaville 2010; Karataş and Sandıkçı 2013). For example, the so-called new Islamist social movements (Wiktorowicz 2004; Bayat 2005) paralleled the logic of new social movements and sought to create networks of shared meaning (Melucci 1996) through the mobilization of financial, political, and social resources. In Turkey, Islamic groups have benefited from the new ‘opportunity spaces’ created by economic liberalization (Yavuz 2004). These market-oriented venues – e.g., the media, financial institutions, and businesses – have been instrumental in propagating Islamic lifestyles and generating income for the movements by offering products and services framed as religiously appropriate.

Transnational immigration has been another factor in reconfiguring the interaction between Islam and the market. A substantial number of Muslims have migrated to Western Europe and North America since the 1950s, and increasingly so since the 1980s. The arrival of these new populations begot the provisioning of marketspaces where immigrants could interact both with each other and with members of their host society. Ethnic grocery stores, local mosques, and community schools, which served as identity hubs for socialization and nostalgia for Muslim immigrants, mushroomed. As Muslim populations have grown through the second and third generations, in addition to the arrival of newcomers, demand for halal services and goods has increased significantly, generating business opportunities for Muslim entrepreneurs.

The increasing visibility of products and services marked as Islamic in both Muslim-majority and Muslim-minority contexts has caught the attention of Western media and consultancy agencies. Since the late 2000s, several news reports on the so-called ‘Muslim consumer’ have been written. In 2007, A.T. Kearney, a Chicago-based global management

consulting firm, published one of the earliest analyses, *Addressing the Muslim Market*. This report claims that ‘at a time when many other large consumer segments are reaching a saturation point, Muslims are a new outlet from which to build a base for future growth’ (2007, p. 1). According to A.T. Kearney’s analysts, Muslims have been ‘becoming more integrated into the global economy as consumers, employees, travelers, investors, manufacturers, retailers and traders,’ thus presenting many opportunities for Western companies (ibid.). In 2009, John Walter Thompson, a New York-based marketing communications firm, shared the results of a ten-country study through a document titled *Understanding the Islamic Consumer*. In 2010, Ogilvy and Mather, another New York-based global marketing communications agency, created a special unit called Ogilvy Noor to better engage with Muslim consumers worldwide. That same year, Ogilvy Noor announced the findings of a study conducted in partnership with research agency TNS. The report, *Brands, Islam and the New Consumer*, identified ‘the New Muslim Consumer’ as a critically important development for brands hoping to build successful relationships with the Islamic world (Ogilvy and Mather 2010). Around the same time, *The Economist* (2007), *Time* (Power 2009), *The New York Times* (Gooch 2010), and the *Financial Times* (Janmohamed 2012) published feature stories on Muslim consumers. In the years that followed, several other prominent organizations joined the trend and contributed to the discussions of Islamic economy: Thomson Reuter’s *State of the Global Islamic Economy* (2015), Economist Intelligence Unit’s *The Sharia-Conscious Consumer: Driving Demand* (2012), and Dinar Standard’s *Global Muslim Lifestyle Travel Market* (2012).

Typically, these publications begin with an emphasis on the size of the Muslim population and its expected growth rate: ‘The global Muslim community stands at almost 1.8 billion people. By 2050, more than half of the world’s population will be Muslim’ (Ogilvy and Mather 2010, p. 12). However, this impressive population remains underserved and ignored by Western companies: ‘Surprisingly, save for one or two examples, most brands have been slow to directly target their products and services to this market’ (O’Neill 2010, p. 60). The analysts interpret this as a significant business oversight and assert that such a lucrative market should not be overlooked: ‘Since Muslims are the fastest growing segment in the world, any company that is not considering how to serve them is missing a significant opportunity’ (A.T. Kearney 2007, p. 18; see also Power 2009; Gooch 2010; Thomson Reuters 2015).

The identification of Muslims as consumers resembles the ‘discovery’ in the US of non-mainstream communities such as gays, Hispanics, and blacks as viable market segments (Keating and McLoughlin 2005). As studies indicate, these ‘segments’ were not preexisting entities that marketers simply appealed to but were the constructions of marketers themselves (e.g., Davila 2001; Sender 2004). An essential step in the construction process is advancing the idea of a common ‘Hispanic’ or ‘gay’ market by promoting generalized ideas about Hispanics or gays that can be readily marketed to corporations (Davila 2001). Similarly, business and media discourses advocate the idea of ‘Muslim consumers’ to distinguish them as a commercially viable segment to profit from.

However, identifying certain populations as market segments is only an initial step in the process of constructing them as consumers. As Miller and Rose (1997, p. 7) argue, making up the consumer has never been a simple matter of manipulation or ‘invention and imposition of “false needs.”’ Mobilizing people as consumers entails ‘a delicate process of identification of the “real needs” of consumers, of affiliating these needs with particular products,

and in turn of linking these with the habits of their utilization' (ibid.). For detecting and satisfying the 'real needs' of Muslim consumers, marketing analysts and consultants urge companies to acknowledge the all-encompassing nature of Islam and be willing to tailor their offerings to the prescriptions of the Islamic faith:

The Islamic market differentiates itself in the way that Muslims worldwide identify themselves; first as Muslim, then culturally, then by nationality and so on. Islam being a complete way of life doesn't leave any aspect of life untouched. Therefore the Muslims's purchasing decision process is directly influenced by their belief system. Islam embodies an ethical approach that requires individuals and corporations alike to act fairly, honestly, respectfully and responsibly.

(Islamic Market Consultancy 2016)

By identifying Muslims as a vast, untapped, and valuable segment, marketing research and consultancy agencies create and promote an image of Muslims as individuals who are eager to consume yet underserved by the market. However, in casting Muslims as consumers, they tend to treat religion as a homogenizing force that univocally and indiscriminately governs marketplace behavior (Sandıkcı 2011; Jafari and Sandıkcı 2015). There are two problems with this approach. First, it leads to an overemphasis on religion at the expense of other aspects of identity – gender, social class, age, and their interactions – and flattens out sectarian differences in how Islam is experienced and practiced in everyday life. Second, it portrays Muslim consumers as driven by unique needs and, thus, segregates them from all other consumers. The assumption of a distinctive Muslim consumer subjectivity derives from an essentialized view of Islam and inadvertently reproduces the Orientalist dichotomy. As a result, while Muslims emerge as viable and capable participants of the Western consumer culture, they remain different from the mass consumer and can only engage with the market on their own terms.

Stylization

In the contemporary world, consumption's role extends beyond an instrumental logic, and the symbolic value of goods reigns over their use value. As Baudrillard (1981) notes, in late capitalism, commodities are promoted as emblems of the desired lifestyle and mainly consumed for what they symbolize. Similarly, Featherstone (1991) links the proliferation of goods in late capitalist societies to the stylization of everyday life. This concern over style expresses itself as a preoccupation with cultivating an authentic, aesthetically choreographed, up-to-date self through choosing and using products and services imagined as proper.

Modern marketing creates an illusion of difference by encouraging people to construct and communicate an individualized identity and lifestyle through mass-manufactured objects. In the context of marketing to Muslims, the image of a homogenous group of consumers with unsatisfied needs helped establish the segment's commercial viability. However, sustainable marketing success must account for demographic, psychographic, and geographic differences. Hence, marketing professionals have increasingly focused on subgroups likelier to engage in lifestyle consumption, i.e., those with the highest economic and cultural capital. Of particular interest has been the newly emerging Muslim middle class who, analysts believe, demands 'the same sorts of life-enhancing goods and services

as middle classes everywhere' (Nasr 2009, p. 14). According to an article that appeared in *Time* (Power 2009, p. 4), affluent Muslims were hungry for Islamic versions of mainstream pleasures and eager to embrace a Western consumerist lifestyle:

During the 1980s and '90s, many Muslims in Egypt, Jordan and other Middle Eastern countries expressed their religious principles by voting Islamic. Today, a growing number are doing so by buying Islamic, connecting to their Muslim roots by what they eat, wear and play on their iPods. Rising Muslim consumerism undermines the specious argument often heard after 9/11: that Muslims hate the Western way of life, with its emphasis on choice and consumerism. The growing Muslim market is a sign of a newly confident Islamic identity – one based not on politics but on personal lifestyles.

The more Muslims are promoted as consumers who can skillfully craft a pious yet modern life, the more corporate attention has shifted onto the market for Islamic lifestyle products. For example, news about mainstream fashion companies 'seeking to profit from the rising demand for Islamic clothing' appears frequently in the media (Kern 2016, p. 1; see also *The Express Tribune* 2016; Jameson 2016). Readers learn that Dolce & Gabbana, Oscar de la Renta, Tommy Hilfiger, Uniqlo, and DKNY have released 'modest wear' ranges; H&M used a Muslim model in a hijab in one of its advertisements; Spanish fashion retailers Zara and Mango launched a special collection for Ramadan.

Examples are also abundant in the travel industry. In *Rise of the Affluent Muslim Traveler*, published in BBC News Magazine, it is maintained that urban Muslims around the world seek out destinations that meet their religious needs, such as luxurious holiday resorts that do not serve alcohol and provide halal food, prayer rooms, and separate pools and spa facilities for both women and men (Akhtar 2012). According to Dinar Standard (2012, p. 3), companies in both Muslim-majority and Muslim-minority countries incorporate such facilities into their offerings to attract Muslim tourists:

Australia's Gold Coast is attracting Muslim tourists by offering a Gold Coast Ramadan Lounge. In Thailand, spa-outlets have introduced the concept of Muslim-friendly spas in a bid to lure tourists from the Middle East. Global Health City, in Chennai, India, has gotten Halal-certified to better serve its growing medical tourists from Muslim countries. Even in Muslim-majority destinations, hotels/resorts such as De Palma Group of Hotels in Malaysia, Al-Jawhara Hotel in Dubai, Amer Group of Resorts in Egypt, Ciragan Palace Kempinski Hotel in Turkey are offering Muslim lifestyle related services by not serving alcohol, separating recreation services/timing for women, providing prayer facilities and more. Airlines and destinations are just beginning to pay attention.

A significant catalyst in shaping Islamically inspired lifestyle consumption is Muslim entrepreneurs. Consultancy reports and news stories feature pious businesspeople who design, manufacture, and market products that cater to the needs of modern Muslim consumers. Frequently cited entrepreneurial success stories include Turkey's modest fashion ventures Tekbir and Modanisa, Australia's Ahiida, the marketer of the 'modest' swimsuit *Burqini*, Singapore's halal-friendly travel agent Crescent Rating, and the British Mocktail Company,

a provider of non-alcoholic mojitos. An article published in *Management Today* declares that there is now

A bewildering array of products in the Muslim consumer market ... You can buy a burkini for the beach in Dubai, visit Islamic sex stores in Amsterdam or customize your Koran in magenta or baby pink online. There is an Islamic version of practically everything.

(Gale 2016, p. 3)

As Shelina Janmohamed, vice-president of Ogilvy Noor Islamic branding agency, explains, 'when a young Muslim consumer doesn't find a product that they are looking for on the high street, their instinct is to go and create it themselves' (Sherwood 2016, p. 2).

At a broader level, the emergence of Muslim entrepreneurs aligns with the logic of 'pious neoliberalism' or 'the discursive combination of religion and economic rationale in a manner that encourages individuals to be proactive and entrepreneurial in the interest of furthering their relationship with God' (Atia 2012, p. 2; see also Sloane 1999; Adas 2006; Osella and Osella 2009). Drawing on a globalized religious discourse and combining it with entrepreneurship, pious neoliberalism cultivates subjects driven toward material success in the present life and spiritual success in the afterlife. The emphasis on prosperity in this and the other world reframes proactive engagement with the market as a religiously appropriate endeavor, encouraging Muslim entrepreneurs to pursue economic success by expanding the choices available to affluent Muslim consumers.

However, beyond financial resources, the adoption of a stylized approach to consumption requires cultural capital. To 'turn li[fe] into a work of art' (Featherstone 1996, p. 97), one needs to possess the appropriate skills, knowledge, and abilities. Accordingly, attention turns to identifying groups of consumers likely to possess the capital necessary to appreciate lifestyle products such as Burqinis and Nojitos. Analysts propose various classificatory schemes to highlight the most pertinent sub-segments and, to render them attractive for companies, use market-friendly labels such as 'Futurists,' 'New Age Muslims,' 'Mipsterz' (Muslim hipsters), 'GUMmies' (global urban Muslim consumers), and 'Generation M.' For example, Ogilvy Noor divides the Muslim consumer market between 'Traditionalists' and 'Futurists.' While Traditionalists constitute a larger group, 'it is the Futurist group – which combines a modern outlook with a strong religious commitment – that is most interesting to brands' (O'Neill 2010, p. 63). Futurists, who are young, goal-oriented, and ambitious, 'wholeheartedly integrate brands into their own lives' (O'Neill 2010, p. 63). Similarly, Generation M, or 'Muslim millennials,' love the internet and actively use social media to identify and disseminate the latest trends and popular brands (Campaign 2016; Sherwood 2016). Marketing and branding researchers herald Generation M, GUMmies, Mipsterz, or whatever they are called, as sub-segments that see no contradiction between being faithful and living a modern life (Sherwood 2016).

Overall, marketing and media discourses promote an image of young, globally connected, digitally masterful, fashion-forward, and financially well-off Muslim consumers who embrace brands and pursue a lifestyle that seamlessly blends faith and modernity. The once marginalized groups of people turn into exciting lifestyle communities embedded in the language of consumption. As noted by several scholars, marketing does not merely

respond to needs but plays a proactive role in constituting and modifying them (e.g., Miller and Rose 1997; Knights and Sturdy 1997; Dolan 2009). Discourses of marketing research and consultancy agencies provide a viewpoint from which Muslim consumers' needs can be made knowable and comparable and provide legitimacy for products designed specifically for them. By encouraging individuals to identify with the norms and practices of being a modern Muslim consumer, marketing experts contribute to the mobilization and governance of a new Muslim consumerist subjectivity.

Conclusion

The literature on religion and economy offers disparate views on the role of the market. Some scholars highlight the damaging effects of the market and perceive consumerism as a threat to religion (e.g., Loy 1997; Haddorff 2000). Others draw attention to the symbiotic relationship and explore how the market interacts with religion to organize, mobilize, and legitimize new, situated practices and subjectivities (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001; Rudnyckyj 2009; Gauthier et al. 2013b). In line with the latter view, the goal of this chapter has been to explore the cultural processes through which religious identities, experiences, and belongings are discursively produced and configured in the market. As the analysis indicates, the emergence of the new Muslim consumer is a socio-cultural construction shaped by an ongoing history of events, forces, and practices. The relationship between Muslims and the market takes different forms in different socio-temporal contexts and involves complex mechanisms through which the desires and conduct of individuals are mobilized and governed.

As many scholars point out, media, popular culture, and the market contribute significantly to the increasing visibility of religion in everyday life (e.g., Casanova 2006; Davie 2010; Moberg and Granholm 2017). However, the proliferation of religiously coded products, services, and practices does not merely represent the expansion of market logic to the realm of religion or the infiltration of religion into the market sphere. Instead, the current relationship between religion and the market points to a new configuration in which piety and consumption are inseparable and constitutive of modern religious subjectivity. In other words, as much as the global expansion of neoliberalism is implicated in the marketization of religion, the newly emerging consumption practices create opportunities for imagining and expressing new forms of religious identities, both collectively and privately. Focusing on this symbiotic relationship between religion and the market enables uncovering the processes through which the new Muslim consumer gets discursively constructed through the imaginations and practices of marketers and popular media.

Recently, scholars have argued for the relevance of discursive approaches to the study of religion (Taira 2013; Wijssen 2013) and suggested that they can be fruitfully utilized in understanding the construction of social reality, including what is considered to be religious or not religious. This chapter has traced the development of Muslim consumer subjectivities through analyzing marketing and media discourses and illustrates the potential of discursive approaches in understanding the complex and multilayered relationship between religion and the market. The contemporary neoliberal political economy, characterized by the marketization of all domains of life, provides a fertile context to explore the (re)configuration of religious identities through the mobilization of various discursive practices. Such an approach requires the utilization of a multidisciplinary theoretical toolkit that allows for a critical engagement with concepts such as market, consumer, and subjectivity and further unpacks the symbiotic relationship between faith and profit.

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2

MALAYSIA AND THE RISE OF MUSLIM CONSUMER CULTURE

Johan Fischer

On the cover of Daromir Rudnyckij's monograph, *Beyond Debt: Islamic Experiments in Global Finance* (2019), we see the Petronas Towers in central Kuala Lumpur, owned by Malaysia's national oil and gas company, Petronas. Opened in 1999, these Towers are the world's tallest twin buildings: on the website, the design of the tower floor plates is attributed to 'simple Islamic geometric forms of two interlocking squares, creating a shape of an eight-pointed star. Architecturally, these forms represent the important Islamic principles of unity, harmony, stability and rationality' (Petrosains, 2024). *Beyond Debt* breaks new ground as the most ethnographically rich book on Islamic finance in existence. Islamic banking and finance (IBF) covers a worldwide phenomenon, and the question of *riba* (interest) is essential. Nowhere is this as prominent as in Malaysia. IBF can be defined as all activities understood to be financial or economic that seek to avoid *riba*.

Yet, it is by no means only architecture and IBF that are expressions of the ways in which Islam shapes material/consumer culture in Malaysia. Below the Petronas Towers, you find a luxurious mall, Suria KLCC, among the many shopping centers that have sprung up in Kuala Lumpur since the 1970s, in which super/hypermarkets (a combined supermarket and department store that carries a large range of products) sell an abundance of halal (literally, 'permissible' or 'lawful' in Arabic) products that, for the most part, are certified by and carry logos issued by Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, the Islamic Development Department of Malaysia (JAKIM).¹

Arguably, Malaysia is an exemplary place to explore why and how state regulation and the Islamization of knowledge over the last three or four decades have given shape to the rise of Muslim consumer culture. I have conducted research here since the mid-1990s, and this chapter builds on my previous research to answer the question: why and how did the rise of a national Muslim consumer culture come about in Malaysia? I understand material/consumer culture to be how things in the exterior environment make us what we are (Miller 2009); that is, Muslim commodities can be seen as things with a particular type of social potential (Appadurai 1999). Though my previous work has explored IBF (Fischer 2008), which can be described as halal, this chapter focuses on the rise of a national Muslim consumer culture in Malaysia that is inseparable from halal ideals and ideas. Markets in Malaysia have, to a large extent, been shaped by Islamic revivalism since the 1970s, and

JAKIM has played a key role in these processes. Most of all, using my previous work as a basis, this chapter explores how nationalized Muslim consumer culture is understood, practiced, and contested among the Malay Muslim middle class in Malaysia and beyond (Fischer 2008, 2011, 2015).²

Since independence from Britain in 1957, constitutionally, Malays have only been Malays if they are Muslims, speak the Malay language, and adhere to Malay culture/customs. The Straits Settlements (the Island of Penang, Singapore, and Malacca) safeguarded British trade in Peninsular Malaysia. The expansive colonial-capitalist economy and the modern market effectively subsumed Peninsular Malaysia (Said 1993). Thus, the visions of an Islamic economy have basically co-existed with the rationality of capitalism for over a century.

In a broader Southeast Asian perspective, Muslim markets might best be understood in the context of ‘Muslim piety as economy,’ which describes specific forms of production, trade, regulation, consumption, entrepreneurship, and science that condition and are themselves conditioned by Islamic values, logics, and politics. Focusing on Southeast Asia as a site of significant and diverse integration of Islam and the economy reveals how production, trade, regulation, and consumption are part of a networked Muslim economy with global consequences (Fischer and Jammes 2019). The expression ‘global consequences’ refers to the trend over the last three decades (or so) in which halal markets and IBF have globalized, and Muslim Southeast Asia has played a key role in these processes of globalization (Fischer 2011, 2015). For example, one prominent global aspect is tourism. Arguably, Malaysia has become a ‘halal hub’ because of Islamic tourism from the Middle East in particular (Henderson 2003) and students attending Malaysian universities, such as the several students I met during fieldwork in halal laboratories that look for unwanted ingredients in food and drinks (Fischer 2015).

Current studies on the entanglements of capitalism, Islam, and the state in Southeast Asia show how moderate Islamic ‘spiritual reform’ movements in Indonesia combine business management principles and techniques from popular life-coaching seminars with Muslim practice. Like in the case of halal, adherents of Islamic spiritual reform in Indonesia are inculcated in an educational milieu in which it is presupposed that worldly challenges could be resolved through the application of Islamic knowledge (Rudnycky 2010).

The Rise of a Nationalized Islamic Consumer Culture

Malaysia is not an Islamic state, but Islam is Malaysia’s official religion, professed by over 60 percent of the population, who, for the most part, are ethnic Malays. In principle, Islam’s official role was designated for ceremonial purposes and public occasions, while the state was to remain secular (Nagata 1994). At the time of independence, the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) played a major role in determining the constitutional position of Islam as the religion of the country, a wording believed sufficient to convey the intended notion of a secular state (Funston 2006). In a similar vein, in Indonesia, the Pancasila (five meaningful principles) constituted the country’s state philosophy, including a belief in the One and only God, and this was arguably a way of excluding atheism on the one hand and controlling Islamic extremism on the other hand.

The rise of divergent *dakwah* (literally, ‘invitation to salvation’) groups as part of the wider resurgence of Islam in Malaysia and beyond challenged the secular foundations of

the Malaysian state. *Dakwah* is an ethnic as well as a political phenomenon that has transformed Malaysia for both Muslims and non-Muslims. From the 1970s onward, Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS), the Islamic opposition party that still enjoys widespread popularity, together with *dakwah* groups, criticized the policies of the UMNO-led government for un-Islamic colonial traditions and secular practices, which separated religion from politics, as well as social and economic issues (Jomo and Cheek 1992). Similarly, in Indonesia, the organization Muhammadiyah, which was established in 1912, displayed a strong commitment to *dakwah*, and it is often considered a pillar of the 'Civil Islam' social sphere. Muhammadiyah sought to renew the commitment of Muslims to scriptural authority and core spiritual tenets. Dominated by an urban and commercial Muslim middle class, Muhammadiyah launched social, educational, and charitable programs that challenged state authority.

Ironically, Islamic revivalist critiques of 'secularism' and the 'secular state' in Malaysia have helped shape and reinforce not only a unique type of Islamic consumer culture but also a highly commercialized version of Islam in which the halal label plays a significant role. With Malaysia's rapid economic development over the past three or four decades, the meaning of Islam has become ever more contested. At the same time, Malaysia has always had an open economy, and multinational chains and brands are accustomed to Islamic business compliance regarding IBF and halal (Fischer 2015; Lever and Fischer 2018).

In order to pre-empt *dakwah* groups for the propagation of the Islamic religion and the Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS), the state began to 'nationalize' Islam in Malaysia (Fischer 2008). This nationalization has meant the increased centrality of Islam as a national and ethnic signifier in the country: Islam was equated with Malayness. The nationalization of Islam has incited a broader fascination with the proper and correct 'Islamic way of life' that, for example, entails consuming specific halal goods that are seen to have a beneficial impact on domains such as family, community, economy, and the nation. The increasing importance of halal discourses and practices is both a result of the increase in revivalism and an instrument of that resurgence; together, they lead to ever-greater involvement with Islam, which, in turn, helps to promote the movement that produced them. Thus, the nationalization of Islam subordinated the secular in Malaysia. However, the nationalization of Islam in Malaysia is an uneven and subtle process of linkages, loyalties, and dependencies between the micro-social, the state, and the nation. Islam, or more accurately, the social and moral meaning of proper Islamic practice, is contested, and there are competing attempts to incorporate it into both state institutions and a multitude of everyday practices.

An essential question in Malaysian Islamization raised by political leaders and repeated in public discourse is whether the country is essentially a secular or an Islamic state (Liow 2009). An important point here is that the state, which is often understood to be secular in nature, is itself driving the Islamization process by rejecting the logics of secularism. Thus, the state in Malaysia is subjected to Islamization by *dakwah* groups and political parties on the one hand and from within by political elites and bureaucrats on the other.

After coming to power in 1981, Malaysia's charismatic and outspoken Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad (b. 1925), set off a wave of institutionalizing and regulating halal in 1982. In this way, Mahathir actively nationalized the proliferation of halal and concentrated its bureaucratization and certification in the realm of the state, where it has since remained. With the revival of interest in Islam from the 1970s onward, the Malaysian state's Islamization efforts also included Islamic religious education and research, as explored below.

In the 1970s, the state launched its New Economic Policy (NEP) to improve the economic and social situation of Malays vis-à-vis the Chinese minority in particular. The NEP entailed benefits for Malays and other indigenous groups, such as increased ownership of production and preferential quotas in the educational system. The number and proportion of middle-class Malays engaged in the modern sector of the economy rose significantly as a result of these policies.

The state was a major ideological driving force behind the manufacturing of a Malay middle class (Kahn 1996), together with the market and capitalist relations of production (Embong 2013). The coining of the new term ‘Melayu Baru’ or ‘New Malay’ was an attempt at manufacturing an entrepreneurial vanguard of Malay middle-class modernity in its own right. The New Malay embodies an aggressive, entrepreneurial, and global ‘we can’ mentality (Teik 1995), as well as an emerging Protestantized middle-class work ethic. These new middle-class Malays are modern individuals and groups aware of practicing middle-classness through Islam, consumption, and legitimate taste (Embong 2002). The relationship between Islam, modernity, entrepreneurship, and networking in modern Malaysia is essential to the emergence of a national Muslim consumer culture (Sloane-White 2017).

The state in Malaysia strategically employs halal as a material sign to overcome critiques of excessive secularism. In fact, halal is promoted as bridging the religious and the secular, that is, an example of the compatibility of the ethnicized state, modern Islam, science, business, and proper Islamic consumption. A new phase of halal proliferation and regulation on a global scale, including in Malaysia, was triggered by a major food scandal in Indonesia in 2001. The Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI), set up by the Indonesian state in 1975, accused a Japanese company, Ajinomoto, of using pork products in the production of the flavor enhancer monosodium glutamate and demanded that the Indonesian government take appropriate action. The company conceded to replace for economic reasons, a beef derivative with the pork derivative bactosoytone in the production process. Bactosoytone was used as a medium to cultivate bacteria that produce the enzymes necessary to make monosodium glutamate. Because the products of the company had previously been certified as halal by the MUI, the scandal seemed to undermine or question the legitimacy of these religious scholars in the eyes of millions of Muslim consumers. The scandal also made it clear that even multinational companies can come into conflict with the rising number of Muslim consumers and organizations (such as MUI in Indonesia and JAKIM in Malaysia) if they overlook or disregard religiously inspired customs.

More generally, the legal system in Malaysia has been rationalized along Islamic lines; that is, the Syariah bureaucracy is based on its power as an arbiter of a legal and official form of Islam in Islamic public institutions (Peletz 2002; Maznah 2010).³ JAKIM confirmed that Ajinomoto products in Malaysia were halal after a team inspected the company’s factory. JAKIM advised Muslims to refer to the religious authority should they have any doubt over food products carrying the JAKIM halal logo. Ajinomoto Malaysia’s general manager assured Muslim consumers that its products were halal and that it did not use bactosoytone. The scandal increased the global focus on third-party halal certification and the Islamization of knowledge – and ultimately, the authority of state halal certification carried out by JAKIM. Halal and Malaysian Islam may be the most monolithic and state-regulated in the Muslim world (Bakar 2008), and this now extends beyond Malaysia to an increasingly globalized market for halal.

The growth of halal regulation in Malaysia is part of larger processes by the Malaysian state to nationalize a marketized brand of Islam. Fearing the implications of the reflowering

of Islam among middle-class Malays, the state began regulating halal, and from this, it gradually developed the vision to become the world leader in halal production, trade, and regulation. Simultaneously, Malaysia is a particular halal country where regulatory institutions and markets meet. Halal has become entangled in complex webs of political, ethnic, commercial, and national significance in modern Malaysia that together comprise a particular Muslim consumer culture. In neighboring Indonesia, an Islamic consumer culture emerged rather independently from the state, while in Malaysia, it was fostered largely with the help of the state as a project to thwart Islamic fundamentalism and divert attention away from the state toward the market (Gauthier 2020).

The Islamization of Knowledge

Existing scholarship on the Islamization of knowledge (e.g., Hoodbhoy 1991; Lotfalian 1999; Atighetchi 2007; Furlow 2009; Iqbal 2012) explores debates at the religious, scientific, legal, and political levels arguing that Islamic orthodoxy impedes scientific inquiry in the Muslim world. Both IBF and halal production and certification, especially testing products for unwanted ingredients, as in the example above, are inseparable from the religion-science nexus in Muslim Southeast Asia. Such charismatic technology inspires confidence and optimism for the improvement of quality of life and is regulated by a technological clergy, as in the case of Malaysia's JAKIM (Lim 2009). The power of Islam in Muslim Southeast Asia, more generally, is based on an inclination toward absorbing all styles of thought into one broad stream. This tradition is generally receptive to the argument that 'Islamic doctrine and scientific discovery are really not conflicting but complementary forms of belief' (Geertz 1968, p. 106) so that the 'secular' and the 'scientific' are merely practical and useful expressions of Islamic knowledge (Geertz 1968, p. 112).

How are scientific knowledge and practices Islamized in Malaysia? One example can be shown in the work of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, a Malaysian Muslim philosopher. He is an important proponent of the Islamization of knowledge/science in the context of Islamic revivalism or *dakwah* in Malaysia and globally. He argues for the Islamization of the mind, body, and soul and reacts against 'secular' Western values, knowledge, and science. From this perspective, one of the main points of divergence between religion, secular philosophy, and science is the way in which the sources and methods of knowledge are understood (al-Attas 1989, p. 3). That is, al-Attas reacts against philosophical and secular rationalism, which depends on reason alone, 'denies authority and intuition, and rejects revelation and religion as sources of true knowledge' (al-Attas 1989, p. 5). In the eyes of al-Attas, knowledge comes from God and is acquired through the channels of the senses. Arguably, science, according to Islam, is ultimately a kind of 'allegorical interpretation of the empirical things that constitute the world of nature' (al-Attas 1989, p. 31). For him, the acquisition of modern science and scientific techniques must be recast into an Islamic metaphysical framework (al-Attas 1995).

One of the Mahathir administration's most significant and controversial efforts was to make religious knowledge an examinable subject in the mainstream curriculum to ensure the Malay community adhered to Islamic teachings. Increased emphasis on Islamic studies in the curricula of secular institutions was initiated in the 1980s, around the same time halal became regulated by the state. In addition to Islamic studies curricula in tertiary education, the Islamization of knowledge also included engineering, economics, management, and political science (Liow 2009, p. 54).

The unprecedented boosting of Islamic education and research led to increased numbers of government-funded primary and secondary religious schools, and tertiary Islamic education expanded. Islamic faculties in local public universities were enlarged, and new Islamic university colleges were established to cater to the student population specializing in Islamic education. An example of this was the founding of the International Islamic University to implement the concept of integrating knowledge with morals. The state continues its Islamization efforts by laying the groundwork for Islamic educational institutions of various kinds (Aziz and Shamsul 2004), and it is in this context that Islamic science and halal in the wider Malaysian consumer culture should be seen.

In sum, the Islamization of knowledge impacts emergent technologies and techniques across Malaysia and Muslim Southeast Asia, and it is essential to an understanding of the emergence of a Muslim consumer culture. Technologies/techniques are linked to state power, markets, and forms of religious revivalism.

Muslim Piety as Economy: Taking Malaysian Islam to Market

The title of the book, *Muslim Piety as Economy: Markets, Meaning and Morality in Southeast Asia* (Fischer and Jammes 2019), highlights the argument that nowhere is the integration of Islam and the economy as significant and diverse as in Muslim Southeast Asia. Each of the contributions in the book explores different aspects of this process, and three broad areas within Muslim material/consumer culture can be identified. First, IBF is explored in the context of how practices of land, property, and shelter have been given new meanings as they are increasingly wrapped up in neoliberalism, financialization, and consumerism, with a specific focus on the role of Islamic finance (Rethel, Elias and Tilley 2019). Second, there is a focus on Islamic fashion in the chapter 'Modesty in Islamic fashion marketing communications in ASEAN' (Salam, Muhamad, and Leong 2019), which studies modesty in marketing communication by Islamic fashion brands in the Southeast Asian Muslim consumer market. In general, there is a large body of literature on Islamic dress/headscarves for women and modesty in Islam, including Malaysia, that is central to an understanding of Muslim consumer culture (Fischer 2008; Thimm 2018, 2021). Third, halal is explored as key to Muslim consumer culture regarding certification (Muhamad, Masri, and Khalid 2019), science (Azam et al. 2019), and issues of contamination and theological rulings (Tajudeen and Abdul-Rahman 2019). This point leads back to the site of Malaysian super/hypermarkets. The reason for choosing Malaysian markets as a case study here is to observe Muslim consumer culture, that is, Muslim piety as an economy with specific reference to halal *consumption, production, and regulation*.

My exploration of Muslim *consumption* or consumer culture started with the research project that became the book *Proper Islamic Consumption* (2008). This book explores everyday consumption among Malay Muslims, mainly in suburban settings where malls and super/hypermarkets are favored by middle-class groups. Kuala Lumpur is, to a large extent, expanding in the form of suburbanization, creating vast new residential areas. Thus, the fieldwork for this study took place in an affluent middle-class suburb outside Kuala Lumpur between 2001 and 2002 (Fischer 2008). This study explored a field of contradictory Islamic visions, lifestyles, and debates articulating what Islam is or ought to be that frame the everyday organization and justification of consumer behavior within Malay middle-class households. In the wake of *dakwah*, the domain of food, in particular, was increasingly subjected to Islamic understandings of halal. Thus, capitalism is adjusting to the

recent requirements of a growing number of Muslims in Malaysia, and the Islamic market is expanding. However, it is also increasingly being regulated by the state. JAKIM state halal certification and regulation work at multiple levels in Malaysia and beyond: from small shops to global chains such as McDonald's (Fischer 2015).

I suggest that the constitution of public distinctions between two Malay middle-class groups is an uneven process reflecting two types of middle-class projects: one group performs proper Islamic consumption as a localized form of purism, while another group is more orientated toward a pragmatic approach to the performance of proper Islamic consumption. This distinction between the purist and more pragmatically inclined middle-class Malays was evident from the empirical material gathered in my fieldwork. For the most dedicated among the purists, halal requirements are by no means fixed or stable but instead elastic and expansive. For these Malays, halal products must also be produced by Muslims to be acceptable. More specifically, halal products are mandatory for this group of modern Muslim consumers. In the eyes of these Malays, proper Islamic consumption is essential in every aspect of life. Conversely, pragmatic Malays either reluctantly accept the imposition of halal or simply reject it as a material and thus shallow display of belief – as Islamic materialism or excess. In summary, purist Malay middle-class projects embody the stretching of certified halal food to involve proper preferences, taste, handling, presentation, and context, whereas more pragmatically inclined or ordinary Malays reject or negotiate these notions. However, among all informants, there was a general adherence to halal principles concerning food, and this point demonstrates that Malay middle-class identities, to a large extent, are about food consumption. It was this point that made me focus on the Islamic markets in urban and suburban Malaysia – for example, the fact that most food/care products in urban and suburban super/hypermarkets are fully certified as halal by JAKIM or other Islamic certification bodies recognized by JAKIM. Before super/hypermarkets became dominant, halal was mainly about trusting the authority of the local halal butcher shop, older Malay middle-class informants in Malaysia told me. In contrast, contemporary halal consumption among my informants suggested a religious and ethnic identity that, in many ways, is impersonal and technological in nature because halal has been lifted out of not only local halal butcher shops but also the domain of traditional religious authority.

Synthesizing some conclusions from the book *Islam, Standards and Technoscience* (Fischer 2015), I now turn to *production* and then *regulation* within Muslim consumer culture in Malaysia. My ethnographic research in super/hypermarkets has shown how these increasingly comply with halal requirements, not only in terms of keeping halal and haram ('unlawful' or 'forbidden') products separate but also how more and more super/hypermarkets are designed according to halal requirements – not unlike what we saw in the case of the Petronas Towers above that were designed according to Islamic architectural ideals. An important issue that runs through these discussions is the display of halal logos in shops (and restaurants) as a technology or technique that marks properties or products as being properly certified. As part of this research, I did fieldwork in national and multinational companies that produce food (ingredients) and drinks in Malaysia, which are acutely aware that for products to be sold in super/hypermarkets, they must be labeled as halal. Many shop managers and producers are themselves Malay Muslims, so middle-class values run through both consumption and production. Moreover, it is mandatory for Muslims to oversee production in companies that are not owned or run by Muslims. As halal proliferated in the 1980s in urban Malaysia, it contributed to new forms of space-making, lifting halal out of its base in butcher shops and wet markets into standardized spaces such as super/

hypermarkets. Economic growth, the emergence of large middle-class groups, and the globalization of the food market have pluralized shopping choices. In Malaysian urban shops, there is an availability of an extensive range of local and imported foods that are almost all certified as halal by JAKIM.

Regulation in the context of the Islamization of knowledge, such as that by JAKIM, is central to the national consumer culture in Malaysia. It was of great importance to Malaysia to establish a national halal assurance system that matches the country's halal vision, incorporating the legal standards, Malaysian MS 1500 (production, preparation, handling, and storage of halal food) and MS 2200 (consumer goods for cosmetic and personal care), as an international benchmark for the state certification of halal products (Bahagian Pengurusan Halal, 2023). Malaysia is a model country in terms of complying with halal standards and has strong halal activity in food processing and the export/import trade, as reflected in its systematization and standardization of halal certification. Since I started doing research in Malaysian shops in the mid-1990s, this tendency has become more pronounced. *Tidak halal* (non-halal) products, such as pork, are, for the most part, stored in a small, secluded room away from the main shopping area in super/hypermarkets. Wine and other alcoholic drinks are similarly often stored in specific spaces. As a rule, other non-halal products should also be located in separate areas or counters. Some of these measures follow written rules and regulations, while others have been set up by shops themselves to pre-empt concerns from authorities and/or consumers.

Store managers in shops told me that, typically, JAKIM does unannounced inspections twice a year. For example, a store manager in a supermarket in central Kuala Lumpur explained that the shop had to ensure that the standard of handling the halal counter met JAKIM and City Hall requirements regarding freshness, expiration, or any damage. Hence, halal is inseparable from broader concerns about hygiene and the proper handling of products in super/hypermarkets. In all these stores, it is essential that management can present a valid halal certificate to customers. In other words, even in a majority-Muslim country like Malaysia, it is crucial to be *visibly* halal.

In the Malaysian state of Kelantan, located in the northeastern part of Peninsular Malaysia, which is often considered the Malay Muslim heartland, I could not find any non-halal products such as alcohol or pork anywhere in the huge Tesco hypermarket. At the same time, lines for customers are separated so that women who shop alone have a particular line, while other lines are designated for families. In all these shops in Malaysia, but also in countries such as Singapore (Fischer 2019b), halal logos issued by JAKIM, in particular, are ubiquitous, and they signify a transition toward impersonal, state-regulated, and standardized ways of shopping in the relationship between seller, certifier, and buyer. In this sense, it would be fair to say that Malaysia espouses itself as a *halal* nation.

Conclusion

The more halal proliferates as a religious/economic market in Malaysia, the more Islamic bureaucratic and technological modes and methods of production and traceability become important for producers, traders, and consumers. The increased focus on techniques to verify that commodities are halal constantly expands requirements to cover new types of items and practices. Halal and Islamic forms of knowledge are good examples of how national developments feed into a larger Malaysian consumer culture. Modern

forms of halal consumption, production, and regulation in Malaysia challenge and re-configure what are often considered separate secular realms of the state and politics on the one hand and the intimacy of religious life and expression on the other. A central theme is using halal as a claim for authority, articulated by the state in the interfaces between expanding markets, the secular, and the rights and demands of Muslim consumers. Rationalized Islamic authorities increasingly rely on science and scientific evidence in the regulation, innovation, and proliferation of halal. While working with scientists in Muslim universities, Islamic organizations, certifiers, and companies, I learned that religion, science, and technology are compatible in the market for a wide range of halal products. My study of the Islamic Science University of Malaysia, for example, demonstrates how science and research, including in terms of the allocation of research funding, is a major focus area for the state on the one hand, while, on the other hand, halal science institutions cooperate with companies in terms of product development, innovation, and testing (Fischer 2015). Within the framework of a nationalized Islamic consumer culture in Malaysia, scientists not only make use of haram detection technology and techniques to locate alcohol and pork but also focus on broader issues of health and hygiene, contaminants, heavy metals, cholesterol, and edible products. An increasing array of technologies and techniques are designed to verify whether a substance is ‘religious’ or not. The point here is that modern halal crosses a whole range of so-called “secular” issues and objects.

A plethora of explanations can help us understand why and how a particular form of Muslim consumer culture emerged in Malaysia and Muslim Southeast Asia more broadly. However, a handful of key reasons seem to be emerging as focal points. First, Islam is nationalized and ‘state-regulated.’ Second, Islamic revivalism has revitalized interest in halal and Muslim material culture more broadly. Third, there has been steady economic growth, which relates to the following reasons: the emergence of a Muslim middle class and the urbanization and global market integration, including shopping malls and mass consumption. Finally, there is also ethnicity; that is, there are sizable Chinese and Indian populations, and while most Chinese do not observe significant food taboos, many Indians are fastidious about food, purity, and spirituality.

The significance of religion and consumer culture is not by any means limited to Islam: the production and circulation of things and economic transactions with regard to kosher (a Hebrew term meaning ‘fit’ or ‘proper’) and Hindu vegetarianism follow similar logics to what we have seen with halal (Fischer 2016, 2019a, 2020, 2022a, 2022b). Over the last three decades or so, religious economies have entered a phase conditioned by new forms of globalized religious regulation. Hence, Muslim consumer culture in Malaysia can be seen as an example of a much broader global trend that has only recently come to the attention of scholars.

Notes

- 1 Since the early 1980s, JAKIM has been the sole halal certifier in Malaysia, but JAKIM also plays an important role globally. JAKIM works under the purview of the Prime Minister’s Office and collaborates with other relevant agencies in managing matters related to halal certification. The development of halal certification in Malaysia started with the halal food definition embedded in the Trade Description Act 1972. Halal certification and industry moved to become one of the country’s main economic development policies.

- 2 Of the Malaysian population of around 33 million in 2020, about 70 percent (figures have been rounded off) are indigenous Malays (virtually all Muslims) and tribal groups that together are labeled Bumiputera (literally, sons of the soil); 20 percent are Chinese; and 5 percent are Indians see Statista 2023.
- 3 For example, the study, *Corporate Islam: Sharia and the Modern Workplace* (Sloane-White 2017), explores the integration between Islam and the economy in Malaysia. The author argues that Syariah principles in the region's Islamic economy produce a version of Islam that is increasingly conservative, financially and fiscally powerful, and committed to social control over Muslim and non-Muslim public and private lives.

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3

BARAKA

From Being Well to Well-being

Lorenz Nigst

Baraka in a Nutshell

Although Baraka (*baraka*) is an indispensable factor in the study of Islam and Islamic culture, systematic treatments of this concept are rare. This might have to do with its pervasive and multifaceted nature so that most publications take it somewhat for granted or offer only short translations or definitions that serve their own, usually narrower, purpose. Yet, any serious exploration of Baraka, viewed through the lens of consumption or even consumer society, would first need to gather and comment on the plurality of meanings and historical contexts in which Baraka has been assumed to be involved. Hence, this chapter offers a sort of *prolegomena* in which some tentative remarks in that direction shall be made.

The notion of Baraka is very common in both pre-modern and contemporary Islamicate contexts.¹ But what 'is' Baraka? The question is difficult to answer, as Baraka is always embedded in particular historical and local socio-religious or intellectual contexts with their specificities, such as saint cults, local pilgrimages, and discourses on sainthood. It is interwoven with biblical and Quranic narratives (Peters 1989, p. 7), tied up with local collective memory (Meri 2010, pp. 99–101), worked into local social structures and hierarchies, and so forth. Owing to the plurality of historical, geographical, and socio-religious contexts in which the term occurs, there is no singular definition that would fit all of them, not to mention that people do not always agree on what Baraka consists of. Nonetheless, it seems possible to make a few general remarks. Semantically speaking, the term and the Arabic root *b-r-k* from which it is derived are firmly associated with ideas such as prosperity, growth, abundance, wealth, increase, and other related notions such as health and fertility.² This can also be gleaned from the images that regularly crop up in the context of Baraka nowadays, for example, company logos that often contain crop spikes, plants, arrows pointing upward, and other similar elements that immediately conjure up the perception of growth. The association of Baraka with growth also abounds in lexicographical explanations of the word. For example, the modern Arabic-English dictionary *Mawrid* explains Baraka as 'prosperity,' 'continual good,' and 'abundant good.' The pre-modern *Lisān al-'arab* speaks

of ‘increase and growth’ (*al-ziyāda wal-namā*) and the ‘abundance of everything good’ (*al-kathra fī kull khayr*).³ Notions such as growth and fertility also explain why not only rain but also specific crops, such as couscous, are associated with Baraka because they swell and expand (Bourdieu 1987). These associations also manifest when particular social groups associate Baraka with goods crucial for their subsistence, such as sheep, wool, and grain (Peters 1989). In a broader sense, Baraka refers to the idea that things go well and do not fail or perish; it is something that ‘descends’ upon one’s life, or a particular aspect of it, thereby turning it into a happy life and making a person succeed.⁴

Notions of plenty and so forth are indeed important in the context of Baraka. However, focusing too narrowly on them fails to grasp additional crucial elements of Baraka. The subject is complex, and there is a grain of truth in the historian Michael W. Dols’s (1992, p. 270) (d. 1989) claim that it ‘seems to defy definition by anthropologists especially.’ Such more clearly differentiated elements immediately begin to emerge when one takes a look at explanations of Baraka in scholarly publications and broader reference works that go beyond notions of abundance and growth (for a good overview, see von Dennfer, 1976). These scholarly writings offer the following definitions: ‘blessing’ (Westermarck 1968, p. 35; Chittick 1989, p. 444; Colin 2012; Fierro 2015, p. 123), ‘divine blessing’ (Peters 1989, p. 5), ‘powerful blessing’ (Katz 2018, p. 180), ‘blessing that is bestowed by Sufi holy men and women (often after death)’ (Cook 2007, p. x, glossary), ‘divine grace’ (Pinto 2010, p. 294), ‘grace flowing from God’ (Tottoli 2021, p. 110), ‘spiritual blessings’ (Rollier 2019, p. 65), ‘mystical blessings’ (Bigelow 2021, p. 86), ‘divine or Muhammadian spiritual influx; blessing; protection’ (Geoffroy 2010, p. 207), and ‘beneficent force of divine origin, which causes superabundance in the physical sphere, prosperity and happiness in the psychic order’ (Takim 2006, p. 45). Takim adds, ‘Sufis conceive of the barakah as a divine gift that is granted to certain people due to their experience of the *numinous*’ (Takim 2006, p. 46). Others mention that ‘*barakah* is technically the blessing of God; it is goodwill and healing virtue emanating from him’ and that, as Caldarola (1982, p. 133) continues, in ‘popular thought it becomes concentrated in certain places and individuals.’ They define it as ‘divine power’ (Janowski 2020, p. 109), a ‘supernatural power’ (York 2019, p. 127), a ‘beneficial power which lifts the person from the human place up towards the supernatural’ (Nieuwenhuijze 1985, p. 105), a ‘wider ranging concept indicating emanation of grace, or blessing’ (ibid.), a ‘spiritual power’ (Trimingham 1971, p. 26), or ‘that spiritual power which produces a special blessing’ (Ouaknine-Yekutieli 2015, p. 112), or they highlight, ‘*Baraka* is the sacred knowledge, or ‘invisible spiritual force or blessing,’ believed to be necessary to prepare the initiate for spiritual transformation, which culminates in the passing away (*fanā*) and subsistence of the self through God, enabling the Sufi to live a spiritually infused life’ (Caruso 2013, p. 40), or they call it a ‘saintly power’ (Powers 2002, p. 259), an ‘intercession ability’ (Woldeselassie 2017, p. 429), or the ‘power to cure’ (Crapanzano 1973, p. 4). The explanation in the *Collins English Dictionary* provides a good example from a more general reference work: ‘a spiritual power believed to be possessed by certain persons, objects, tombs, etc.’ (2024). Another general reference definition is found in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, which refers to Baraka as the ‘contagious superpower (or holiness) of the saints’ (2023).

These definitions or explanations palpably gravitate toward the two notions of ‘blessing’⁵ and ‘power,’ rough synonyms of the two concepts of ‘grace’ and ‘force,’ respectively. Thus, some convey the idea that God bestows Baraka on *particular* individuals or groups (‘blessing’); others reflect that people ascribe *efficacy* to Baraka in terms of, for example, curing illness (‘power’). This mirrors different research foci: Baraka as a ‘power’ is more

likely to be perceived by researchers who study socio-religious contexts in which people seek Baraka to sort out their problems (such as by visiting shrines or in saint cults). Baraka as something bestowed is more likely to be tackled by researchers who focus on how it is thought to have become associated with particular individuals, places, objects, or times, although one notices oscillating usages. Furthermore, Baraka is always somewhere *concrete*. This concreteness is particularly obvious in lexicographical explanations of the Arabic verb *bāraka/yubāriku* and its passive participle *mubāarak*. Thus, the aforementioned *Lisān al-‘arab* explains the phrase *bāraka llāh al-shay* ‘as ‘God has put Baraka in it’ and the passive participle *mubāarak* as ‘where abundant good comes from’ (*mā ya’tī min qibalihī al-khayr al-kathīr*) (Ibn Manzūr n.d., s.r. *b-r-k*). In this context, al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī’s (d. 1108/1109) work, *al-Mufradāt fī gharīb al-qur’ān*,⁶ is also worth highlighting because it contains the following, striking observation that arguably speaks to the proliferation of the notion Baraka in the everyday life of people in Islamic societies:

Since ‘blessing’⁷ emanates from a place that cannot be perceived and in a manner that cannot be counted or confined, it is said of everything where one witnesses an increase which is not tangible that it is *mubāarak* and ‘there is Baraka in it.’

(*al-Iṣfahānī 1997, s.r. b-r-k*)

In the following, it is argued that as an object of belief, Baraka is indeed something that some have and others seek. However, it also develops as a force of change that is understood to have been set in motion by God through the prophets and messengers and that others are called upon to carry on. In terms of concrete socio-religious realities, this is important. On the one hand, Baraka is sought as a remedy or a source of support where nothing else can be done and, more generally, as something that one hopes will produce positive effects and be efficacious. On the other hand, Baraka is thought to result from the effort of being actively loyal to the prophetic missions. The former is intimately linked to the notion that there are concrete holders of Baraka who are close to God and who represent some sort of borderland or realm where a different world reaches into this world (see below on the notion of miracles).⁸ Baraka can be acquired through physical – ritual – contact with such borderlands, and this form of Baraka acquisition brings healing, fertility, and so on. The latter is intimately related to the conviction that some have been chosen by God to implement religion and community, which often entails that they radically defy the status quo (see Stibitz 1898). Baraka results from following their example, one’s love for them or being loyal to that mission. In both settings, Baraka leans toward extraordinary, non-conforming, and sometimes even defiant individuals. Needless to say, the two can overlap. It is those who really *make a difference* whom people want to ‘see and touch.’ But it is also *they* who create a wind of change and inspire action. Similarly, in narratives, it is often precisely subversion that makes things flourish, brings fertility, etc.

Having Baraka

Generally, Baraka is associated with individuals believed to have been set above others and to have a privileged relationship with God. Hence, a certain overlap between Baraka and other notions, such as *ni‘ma* or *mawhiba*, can be discerned.⁹ It is plausible that a special relationship with God cannot become socially productive and an object of belief without manifesting itself, which already strongly suggests that Baraka has a tendency not to be on

the side of what is utterly ‘normal’ because the act of being ‘normal’ is invisible within the realm of the ‘normal.’ Not only is the non-conformist behavior by holders of Baraka of symbolic value (Nigst 2013, pp. 293–295) because the respective individual must stand out from the majority, but furthermore, they are almost always associated with miracles and paranormal events.¹⁰ In order to believe in those individuals, non-conformant behavior and miracles become necessary and require narratives that recount and employ them.

Most notably in an Islamic context, there are the *prophets* and *messengers*. These figures are of great relevance in the context of Baraka in two regards. First, they have been chosen and elected¹¹ by God to establish the religion and the community God loves. The Quranic narratives recount the stories of earlier prophets such as Abraham, Hūd, Moses, Noah, or Šāliḥ. Their missions often constitute a rupture with the status quo for the sake of God’s religion and have a certain steadfast provocativeness about them (such as building a ship in the desert like Noah; cf. Fartacek and Nigst 2016). It is important to see that not only is the *force of change* that is developed here a mode of Baraka, but also that this mode of Baraka is thought to continue through loyalty to it. Such loyalty is epitomized by obedience to and love of God’s commands and Law (‘loving what God loves’), following the prophet, and following the example of those who hold fast to his project (see the strong emphasis on *iqtidā*’ in an Islamic context). All of this locates Baraka in forms of *doing*.

Furthermore, this mode of Baraka is linked to the idea of a *community elected* by God.¹² The notion of unilaterally imposed covenants between God and humankind that are tied to obligations should be mentioned in this context. This idea already appears in the Hebrew Bible, where Israel is a ‘holy community chosen by God to be his special people,’ an election that imposes duties on this community, such as keeping God’s laws, and that ‘signifies God’s blessing of them.’ The Quranic narratives around the children of Israel thereby ‘convey the idea that Israel has betrayed God’s love and lost the status of God’s chosen community, which implies that the believers who follow the qur’ānic prophet replace the Children of Israel as God’s renewed chosen community’ (see Rubin 2022). The chosen community is perceived as a saved community (see lexemes like *najāt*). Metaphorically, adhering to God’s commands is occasionally equated with being inside Noah’s ark (*safīnat al-najāt*),¹³ being inside a protected place through one’s belief, and participating in and upholding what is loved by God. Insofar as this is about loyalty to a force of change, what is at stake here is acting *this way* rather than *that way* (see the term *dīnī*). This makes plausible why notions of deviance and rupture tend to have much weight where legalistic religion and the idea of a chosen community interlock – and more generally, wherever the societal status quo is shattered for the sake of what is perceived to be a better society. Importantly, the perception of being chosen (for individuals and groups alike) frequently involves an altered stance toward misfortune and suffering, which often is reinterpreted as a token of divine favor.

Second, Baraka is associated with prophetic figures *as such* in the sense of liminal figures, where another, unseen world reaches into this world (see their association with fertility, miracles, etc.).¹⁴ In an Islamic context, this is especially true for the Prophet Muḥammad and one may assume that the relevant theological ideas developed substantially over time. But the same holds true for the divine message (e.g., the verses in the Quran), which is understood as coming from beyond the border of the other world, from the realm of the hidden (*al-ghayb*) (see the expectation that they, and most forcefully certain verses, can heal, protect, or vanquish enemies). Given the importance of prophetic figures, it also makes sense that places central to Islam, like Mecca, are thought to be set above and are associated with a body of narratives that elevate and singularize them¹⁵ and that specific categories of people are often

thought to share in this Baraka of Muḥammad, such as the *ahl al-bayt* in a Shī'ī context or other individuals with a genealogical link to the prophet.

These two dimensions (obeying God's commands and loyalty to the prophetic mission; being a liminal figure that crosses the boundary of the unseen/*al-ghayb*) are also well reflected by the diverse paradigms of *Islamic sainthood* (see, e.g., Denny 1990) – a general constellation that produces the largest number of individuals who are holders of Baraka. The subject of Islamic sainthood is complex, but it clusters around the two poles of active piety (often with a strong ascetic element) on the one hand and more passive forms of sainthood on the other (see, e.g., the paradigm of *majdhūb* sainthood where someone has 'been drawn towards God,' which often involves a strong element of non-conformist behavior) (Nigst 2013). The more passive paradigms of sainthood are occasionally perceived to be more exclusive and special, as they are a form of election and themselves beyond the reach of human efforts (i.e., they materialize as a 'pure gift'), but active piety is crucial insofar as it epitomizes loyalty to the prophetic project and the mode of Baraka as a force of change, or perhaps rupture, referred to above. Significantly, regardless of whether their sainthood is more active or passive, almost *all* saints are associated with *karāmāt* (sg. *karāma*), 'miracles.' From a conceptual point, this is important insofar as the semantics of the Arabic word *karāma* point toward 'honor' and 'honoring.' In a sense, *karāma* is a token of honor received by the saints; it is something they have been given by God as a gift. It is not given to just anybody. Rather, it confirms the saints' closeness to God, their elevated status, and hence their position as non-normal and extraordinary individuals who form a borderland between this world and the world of *al-ghayb*.

In a broader sense, Baraka is associated with those loyal to Muḥammad's project, fought and stood up for it, suffered for its sake, and whose active belief brought a new community into being. For example, many of his Companions have their shrines (see, e.g., Bilāl b. Rabāḥ in Damascus). To a certain extent, everyone who advances the prophetic project, including scholars, can become associated with Baraka in the sense that they offer models to emulate. It is plausible that loyalty to and investment in the prophetic project can thereby take different forms in accordance with the social context or historical situation, which also explains why there is a strong link between Baraka and collective memory (Meri 2010, pp. 99–101). All sorts of prophet-like figures who claim access to the unseen (*al-ghayb*) at specific historical moments can themselves gather followers around them who perceive that they are the chosen community.

Seeking Baraka

People typically come into contact with Baraka when and insofar as they seek it (see the verb *tabarraka*). Often, they pursue it as a *remedy*, given that Baraka irrevocably operates against a backdrop of *contingency* and *uncertainty*, in a paradoxical sense, thereby stabilizing them. It is a common human experience that things are not *necessarily* there. This impression can be felt especially acutely when things come to a perhaps sudden or unwanted end, fail to materialize altogether, or when life even takes a turn toward the 'night side' (Sontag 1978, p. 3). But even if people achieve what they want or hope for, they cannot tell *ahead of time* that they will. People are also confronted with the fact that things are not available or favorable for *them*, whereas others appear to be more 'blessed.' Often, what people wish for the most seems to be distributed unequally or unfairly.¹⁶ In a sense, seeking Baraka *is* doing something where nothing can be done. Small gestures like taking one's little child to a shrine

epitomize the need for things to go well and the uncertainty that they will. Intimately connected with the hope to regain, maintain, or increase positive and desired things and to have good luck, it makes sense that people seek Baraka from individuals in whom God's favor has already become palpable. Not least, particular figures are sources of hope insofar as the religious narratives often recount how they were saved from similar (or even worse) adverse situations (such as the sickness of Ayyūb/Job), or the stories tell how these figures became known for providing what someone desperately needed (e.g., saving someone's life, like Ilyās/Elijah) (Fartacek and Nigst 2019). This also explains why Baraka can become associated with particular *texts*. Perhaps most famously, the narratives around al-Būṣīrī's (d. ca. 1294) poem in praise of Muḥammad, the *Qaṣīdat al-burda* ('Mantle Ode'), recount how al-Būṣīrī found healing from hemiplegia by reciting his poem over and over again and seeking intercession through it. As the key narrative linked to the poem has it, in his sleep, al-Būṣīrī saw the Prophet Muḥammad wiping the author's face 'with his blessed hand' (*bi-yadihī al-mubāraka*) and casting a cloak over him (hence the name of the *qaṣīda*), after which he was healed. This instance of successful healing, known only through the narratives, has turned the text of the poem itself into a source of hope and blessing (Pinckney-Stetkevych 2006).

Whether it is the prophets or the much more numerous saints, the notion of a privileged relationship with God interlocks with the (sometimes contested) idea that such figures can intercede with God for help more efficiently due to their being closer to God (see the complex subject of intercession, *shafā'a*). Generally, it is no coincidence that there is an overlap between Baraka and prayers of supplication (*du'ā'*), which often ask for the positive things associated with Baraka (such as an increase in intellect, knowledge, wealth, or offspring),¹⁷ while at the same time any inventory of why people pray would correspond to an impressive list of situations of negatively experienced contingency, such as conflict, disease, and poverty. Contingency does not always mean unwanted experiences, however, as not only negative and unwanted things happen to people, but also positive and wanted ones. Contingency, therefore, can occasionally also be perceived as a gift (see Dalferth and Stoller 2020, pp. 17–18). In important ways, the notion of Baraka corresponds to a particular form of looking at positively experienced contingency. In this context, it is worth mentioning once more that particularly close relationships with God are often discussed in terms of a 'pure gift.' While that pure gift is understood to be independent of any human effort, other people in turn might actively seek the Baraka of individuals thus privileged and close to God in the hope that it will affect something in themselves¹⁸ and that it will transfer some of those bestowed gifts to them – often with the idea that Baraka is 'contagious' and therefore transferable through physical contact¹⁹ with objects that had come in contact with the holder of Baraka or, in the case of living Baraka-holders, through physical contact with bodily fluids, such as their saliva.²⁰ Even today, Baraka remains important as a 'medicine' and remedy in the face of negative contingency.²¹

In many cases, looking for the Baraka held by particular figures means seeking it in specific *places*. This is true for the shrines of saints whose tombs are perceived to be the places *par excellence* to acquire Baraka. But especially regarding prophetic figures, framed through singularizing narratives that establish a connection between these figures and a particular local environment, their Baraka regularly spreads to where they walked, sat, took refuge, suffered, etc., and thereby becomes accessible in all these concrete locations. This has already been described in pre-modern writings. For example, in his work on monasteries, al-Shābushtī (d. 988 CE) alludes to narratives about the monastery Dayr Fīq in the area of the Sea of Galilee that refer to a particular rock on which Jesus (who is regarded as one of the Islamic prophets before Muḥammad) used to sit. As al-Shābushtī writes, people used to break little pieces from

that rock to obtain possession of the Baraka with which it is charged.²² For a contemporary example, the Druze Ayyūb/Job shrine in Nīḥā in the Lebanese Chouf district is claimed to be where this prophet lived through his time of suffering. But some narratives locate Baraka not only in specific places but also in certain *texts*. As already indicated above, this is particularly well illustrated by the entire complex of al-Būṣīrī's *Qaṣīdat al-burda*, the special status of which cannot be understood without the accompanying narrative of how al-Būṣīrī was healed. Once Baraka has become narratively associated with a particular place or being, physical contact is a constant element in seeking it; that is, it is understood to be acquirable through touching, drinking, rubbing, or running one's hands over what has been charged with Baraka. This physical contact component is well attested in the pre-modern Islamic tradition. Relevant examples are found in most canonical Islamic sources, such as al-Bukhārī's (d. 870 CE) *Ṣaḥīḥ*. For example, in one *ḥadīth*, Muḥammad calls on Bilāl and Abū Mūsā to drink water with which he, Muḥammad, had first washed his face and hands and from which he had taken a mouthful and then spit it back into the drinking bowl (see, e.g., Bukhārī 2022, no 4328). Other reports mention that Muḥammad gives his shaved hair to the people.²³ Reports about people trying to drink the water that someone holding Baraka had used for their ablution, or even the water used to wash their corpse, can also be found. Considering that places and things are understood to become charged with Baraka because they have been in physical contact with a holder of Baraka, the term 'contagiousness' has occasionally been used to convey this idea (see, e.g., Encyclopaedia Britannica 2023). This 'contagiousness' is also a pervasive element of contemporary religious practice. It is epitomized by such practices as leaving behind pieces of cloth in places where Baraka is found so that they can become charged and picking them up again after a while, thus making Baraka transportable.²⁴

In distinction from seeking Baraka from a person or place in the sense of a remedy in concrete situations of negatively experienced contingency, there are extraordinarily thorough attempts in Islam not only to proactively *embrace contingency*²⁵ but also to *transform it into meaningful forms of doing*. In the case of seeking Baraka as a remedy, one seeks to escape from disease and uncertainty (or hopes that some desired outcome materializes through someone's Baraka). In the latter case, it becomes crucial that the prophetic mission is seen as informing people about the appropriate mode of religious action. More specifically, if contingency is conceptualized as a relation of force between God and humankind (as when human beings are designated 'slaves' or 'poor'), Islamic religious thinking has seen efforts to *transform the relation of force into a relation of love*. This can also be understood in a legalistic sense. For example, the famous Damascene religious scholar Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) emphasized that 'slave' ('*abd*') can denote not only someone who is passively 'enslaved' (*mu'abbad*) but also someone who is actively 'serving' ('*ābid*') (see, e.g., Ibn Taymiyya 2005, pp. 1, 157). What counts is to embrace the fact of being 'enslaved' – the inability to change what happens to oneself – and to turn to persistent active worship and love. In a sense, the pious idea is to embrace contingency increasingly and, more fully, to love God and the prophet, be loyal to the religion, and fulfill what is commanded by the Law (i.e., the realm of *dīnī*). As suggested above, at root, the prophetic mission is a force for change that is understood to be a mode of Baraka. By implication, not only do more extensive forms of loyalty to this mission create legalistically informed religious virtuosi but more generally, it is understood that Baraka will result from holding fast to the religion established by the prophet (see phrases such as *ḥusūl al-baraka*). Thus, while turning to God for help in times of need remains crucial, and while the prayer of particularly pious individuals may be considered as particularly efficacious, there is also this other notion

of Baraka that insists on ‘doing as God wanted’ and understands it to result from persistent loyalty to God’s religion. Needless to say, in Islamic societies, different groups have had rather different theological and practical understandings of what constitutes loyalty to Muḥammad’s prophetic project and to what God loves.

Historically and up to the present day, there has occasionally been tension between seeking Baraka through physical contact and believing that Baraka emerges because people act in particular ways that induce Baraka. In his work *Mi ‘yār*, the Moroccan religious scholar al-Wansharīṣī (d. 1508) offers a passage with various opinions about people picking up earth from the graves of saints, etc. One of them quotes a saying attributed to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 728). When the latter saw people pushing toward a bier with the corpse of a pious man in order to touch it, seeking Baraka, he reportedly stated: ‘You are jostling around his bier, but you are not jostling around his works’ – meaning that people would benefit more from doing as he did (al-Wansharīṣī 1981, vol. 1, p. 330). Some people want to disentangle Baraka from its association with particular places and instead tie it to what they perceive as sincere forms of loyalty to the prophetic project. However, even in the chosen community, people still fall ill, and negatively experienced contingency cannot go away.

Baraka as Part of Everyday Life

There are countless ways in which the notion of Baraka has traditionally been integrated into everyday life. Baraka is often sought as a remedy, if not medicine, in situations that are critical or characterized by high levels of uncertainty (see also the link to supplicatory prayers and the broader complex of making vows). Diseases stand out in that regard, but ‘spiritual’ medicine also addresses various psychological afflictions. Baraka is a key component of certain elements of religious culture, such as amulets, whose purpose is to ward off potential harm and to protect against the Evil Eye (Krawietz 2002). The latter concept is about social envy and begrudging others for their successes, wealth, looks, children, and so forth. In a sense, the Evil Eye is the dark side to the bright side associated with Baraka and is epitomized by the desire for goods, outcomes, and so forth. Not only specific plants mentioned in the religious sources, but also inanimate materials and artifacts, are known to be carriers of Baraka, such as representations of the Hand of Fatima (which is called *khamṣa*), and therefore play a role as marketable goods. An in-depth study would also need to take contemporary material culture, visual representations, and literary allusions into account to demonstrate how Baraka is explicitly and implicitly evoked, insinuating the accessibility of what cannot be bought. Baraka plays a vital role within the increasingly commercialized and mediatized sector of ‘spiritual’ healing as a form of alternative, religious medicine. Hence, the already broad array of preventive and post-damage means and items of religious medicine has become a fast-growing market under the conditions of industrial mass consumption and mediatization. For example, specific ingredients such as black cumin (*al-ḥabba al-sawdā’*) mentioned in the canonical ḥadīth collections (e.g., Bukhārī 2002, no. 5687-5688) are marketed via online shops that make this connection explicit (e.g., Filled With Barakah n.d.). However, pertinent product design (Kokoschka 2019) and clever advertising campaigns have yet to be systematically explored.

Places and people presumably holding Baraka have long since been surrounded by booming economic entities. Many people used to visit shrines frequently, and many still do so. Pre-modern forms of sacred travel by visiting graves and other presumably Baraka-charged places created early routes of ‘tourism,’ apart from pilgrimages to Mecca and Medina.

Notably, but not exclusively, Sufi orders where people flock around a living or dead saint or his descendants can be regarded as economic units. This type of (institutional) culture is not extinct nowadays. Certain persons derive economic and reputational advantages from their assumed closeness to the divine. Social structures built upon Baraka thereby can be somewhat exploitative, not least in contexts in which Baraka is deemed inheritable. But even without such an institutional embedding or charismatic leadership in Weber's sense, the influence of certain individuals may be boosted by associating them with Baraka. Several modern entrepreneurs creatively pick up on the widespread tradition of flocking around 'spiritually' gifted people. More generally, the 'contagiousness' of Baraka is a tremendous driver of all sorts of mobilities and forms of exchange. And trying to rub shoulders with the obviously blessed and well-to-do was and is often accompanied by acquiring their insignia.

Conclusion and Outlook

A review of the relevant literature shows that Baraka, apart from specific places or times that are believed to have been blessed by God, is understood to be a sort of privilege that God bestows upon certain individuals, such as the prophets and saints. These individuals function as points of access, with Baraka mostly being sought through physical contact with people, places, and objects. Moreover, as some of these individuals (i.e., the prophets and messengers) are believed to have been entrusted with the mission of establishing or rectifying God's religion, Baraka is often also understood to ensue from loyalty to their religious missions. Hence, Baraka could, at times, resurface in the form of promises of a new chosen community. However, in many cases, loyalty to the prophetic project does not need to involve any virtuoso forms of behavior, much less any challenge to the status quo or attempt at fundamental societal change. In such contexts, Baraka is often declared to result from relatively vague recommendations, such as 'being pious,' and is centered on one's own or one's family's economic success, health, and so forth, thereby reflecting the interests of social classes that do not wish to see their wealth questioned, but rather justified.²⁶ Indeed, Baraka, through its overall association with wealth and well-being, seems to privilege those who succeed within existing socio-economic structures, in a sense justifying and legitimating their success. This matters insofar as seeing Baraka at work behind what is objectively socio-economic inequality can effectively prevent understanding the latter as the result of political decision-making, social privilege, unequal conditions, social injustice, and so forth. In fact, reinterpreting socio-economic inequality in terms of incalculable divine favors effectively renders doing well contingent in the same sense as, for instance, disease.

Notes

- 1 It is imperative to underline that the notion of Baraka is mostly *shared* by the different confessional groups, at least where it is *not* understood to result from orthopraxy.
- 2 This is well attested in pre-modern dream books. For example, in Ibn Shāhīn's *Ishārāt*, terms that co-occur with Baraka are *māl*, *sa'a*, *nī'ma*, *khuṣūba*, *rakhā*, *ghinā*, *bushrā*, *fawz*, *shifā*, *faraj*, *rāḥa*, *ribḥ*, *surūr*, *khayr*, and *sa'āda*.
- 3 The *Lisān al-'arab* is one of the most comprehensive pre-modern Arabic lexicographical works. It was authored by Ibn Manẓūr (d. 1233 CE) and attempts to bring together major earlier lexicographical works, most importantly al-Azharī's (d. 980 CE) *Tahdhīb al-lughā* and Ibn Sidah's (d. 1066 CE) *al-Muḥkam wal-muḥīṭ al-a'ẓam*.
- 4 See, for example, Imām al-Masjid n.d.: *yajib [...] an yaḥull 'alā kull shay' ladayhi al-baraka min 'inda llāh*.

- 5 The frequent translation ‘blessing’ for *baraka* goes back to the biblical text (see, e.g., the Arabic translation of the Pentateuch (see, e.g., Genesis 1.22: *bāarakahā llāhu qā’ilan*)).
- 6 See his explanations of Q (19:31) and Q (23:29). This work should be mentioned here because the respective explanations are re-used heavily online in contemporary explanations of Baraka.
- 7 Literally *al-khayr al-ilāhī* (‘the good of divine origin’).
- 8 Knight 2020, p. 73, writes of Muḥammad’s body as a ‘site of divine activity.’ See also Stewart 2002.
- 9 A much less common lexeme that may be mentioned in this context is *ḥanān* (see, e.g., Ibn al-Athīr 1970, 1:452).
- 10 The phrase often used in an Islamic context to refer to miracles (*khbāriq lil-’āda*, lit. ‘breaking with the normal course of events’) highlights their atypical character well.
- 11 See lexemes such as *ikhtiyār*, *iṣṭifā’*, *intikhāb*, *tafḍīl*, and *ikhtisās*.
- 12 Occasionally, in ‘Islamist’ contexts, the notion arises that owing to Muḥammad’s *baraka*, this community/Islam survives despite being the constant target of enemies; see Ibn Mahfūz n.d.
- 13 At least from a certain Sunni perspective. From a different perspective, the *ahl al-bayt* and loyalty to them are often likened to the *safinat al-najāt*.
- 14 For Hūd, see, for example, al-Kisā’ī 2008, p. 77. Another good example is Salomo’s ability to converse with animals.
- 15 See, for example, Katz 2004. For the usage of *tafḍīl* with regard to Mecca, see, for example, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya 1998, 1, p. 52.
- 16 This is especially well reflected by two German terms used in the context of contingency: *Widerfahrnischarakter* and *Unverfügbarkeit*. It is about things ‘happening to’ oneself, things over which one ‘has no control.’
- 17 For a clear example, see the Druze manuscript BnF Arabe 1209, 48r: *Allāhumma innī as’aluka yā rabbī ziyāda fī l-’aql wal-’ilm wal-ḥilm wa-as’aluka yā rabbī ziyāda fī l-māl wal-ahl wal-awlād*.
- 18 Significantly, prayers occasionally refer to such forms of gifts and not solely to negative contingency; see, for example, supplications such as *Allāhumma, ftaḥ ‘alaynā futūḥ al-’arīfina bika*.
- 19 Such as running one’s hand over, rubbing, kissing.
- 20 For an example, see Nigst 2013, pp. 295–296. For the importance of the body in this context, see also several of the contributions in Mayeur-Jaouen and Heyberger 2006. For different bodily fluids containing Baraka in the context of Muḥammad, see also Knight 2020, pp. 73–91.
- 21 Not least, this is grounded in traditions that explain what the *baraka* of particular figures like the *abdāl* consists in and that often highlight their function with regard to negatively experienced contingency, which characteristically encompasses situations such as droughts or war; see, for example, the section *barakat al-awliyā’ wal-ṣāliḥīn* in Al-Haqqani n.d.
- 22 See al-Shābushtī 1986, p. 204: *kull man dakhala al-mawḍi’ kasara qiṭ’a min dhālika al-ḥajar tabarrukan bihī*.
- 23 See, for example, Muslim 2006, no. 1305. For the outstanding importance of the body of the prophet in the context of Baraka, see also the many examples in Knight 2020.
- 24 Similar to taking home water from Lourdes.
- 25 See also the historical Islamic discourses on *tawakkul*.
- 26 See, for example, TV preachers such as ‘Amr Khaled; Khālid 2021. See also Kurtulus Korkman 2015.

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4

FROM MARKET ISLAM TO THE HALAL BOOM

François Gauthier

The transformations that have affected the rituals, practices, norms, and legal exegeses of Islam across the Muslim world over the last century or so are remarkable. For most of the twentieth century, i.e., during the colonial period through independence and early postcolonial times, Muslim-majority countries embarked on the path to modernization. Embracing, acculturating, or contesting the Western Enlightenment-born ‘modern cultural programme’ (Eisenstadt 2002), political, intellectual, cultural, and even religious elites proceeded on a path of wide-ranging reforms meant to pull the Muslim world out of its allegedly superstition-filled traditions and all-around backwardness. The main step in this utopian endeavor was to build a modern nation-state and to reform religion according to the model provided by Western post-Reformation Christianity (Gauthier 2020). Islam was to be de-traditionalized, rationalized, differentiated, institutionalized, and made to serve nation- and state-building processes. Popular and mystical practices were dismissed or outright repressed (e.g., Turkey closing Sufi lodges and banning Sufi orders in 1925), traditional authorities were challenged, and Islam was mainly tossed aside as a principle on which to establish the Rule of Law and state sovereignty. A variety of nationally constituted (but increasingly internationally operating), institutionalized, hierarchical, and vertical Muslim modernist movements emerged that aimed to offer an alternative to the privatization and secularization of Islam, giving birth to political Islam, whose fundamental intent was to invest in the governing and regulating center of society, the state, in order to produce Islamized yet rational and modern societies. Besides these more mainstream movements, apolitical Islamic movements (like Quietist Salafis or Sufis) cultivated their rigorist yet spiritualized ethics somewhat in the margins. All over the Muslim world, new religious authorities arose beside the more traditional ones (Gauthier 2018, 2020). One of their main occupations turned out to be the religious approval (or not) of the flood of new products, practices, attitudes, and affective dispositions that reached them through media and that kept on pouring into their everyday lives.

The paradoxes of colonialism, combined with the labor needs of Western countries during the decades following World War Two, pushed Muslim populations to emigrate, mostly men at first and then their families. The creation of Muslim minorities that ensued was a

historical novelty, one from which many of the changes to come would be brewing. Meanwhile, Muslim-majority countries negotiated their allegiances to communism or capitalism during the Cold War, many of them hanging on the relative autonomy offered by the Non-Aligned Movement founded in 1955 in Bandung. A Muslim world very different from what it had been before started to take shape. By the turn of the 1980s, the post-war economic miracle in the West was definitely over, the Welfare State model was in crisis, the Keynesian arrangements were fatally wounded, Fordist-Taylorist capitalism had been caught up by its contradictions, and communism's emancipatory appeal was wavering in the face of the hardships of reality. A substitute ideology came to the rescue, the same that had been dismissed a few decades earlier because of its failings. The self-regulating magic of free markets was to replace the state as the optimal social regulator and a new source of utopianism in the form of the promise of new or renewed economic growth. Within a decade, neoliberalism, the all-encompassing free market doctrine, became enshrined within supra-national institutions that ensured its ideological, political, and practical hegemony (Harvey 2005; Gauthier 2020). A 'New Spirit of Capitalism' (Boltanski and Chiapello 1999) was born, and the latest and most radical wave of economic and cultural globalization was launched (Robertson 1992). The 1989–1991 collapse of the Soviet-led communist bloc sealed capitalist hegemony. Consumerism, the ideological fabric and ethos of a consumer culture that had already saturated the West (as well as many other places and social classes in the world), spread to 'the Rest.' By the turn of the millennium, the world had been united under the sign of the Market.¹

It is remarkable that scholars of religion have not been as attentive as they should have to the correlation between the neoliberal and consumerist revolutions and the radical pivot in the direction of religious change. The 1980s were indeed when the structural landscape of Islamic movements and practices began to change, and when many of the trends whose description and analysis fill this volume started to emerge, including the new practices of veil-wearing, the rise of Muslim fashions, the extraordinary explosion of a global halal market, online fatwas, the emergence of commercialized Muslim humor, Muslim cinema, Muslim video games, Muslim dating apps, Islamic finance, insurance, and management, and Islamic self-help. In a nutshell, Islam started to spill out of its nation-state-regulated box and became constitutively visible. This was also when political Islamism ceded to what scholars call 'post-Islamism' (Roy 2004; Bayat 2013), and apolitical, spiritualized Islamist currents began spreading transnationally and further into the mainstream (including Quietist Salafis, Tablighis, and followers of the *Da'wat-e Islami*, cf. Gugler 2010, 2011). The advent of the internet and social media has only accelerated and radicalized these trends.

How are we to understand these changes and the dynamics of this new globalized landscape? This chapter provides a starter for wider audiences to think about these questions by bringing into the discussion some important contributions that have been published in French and deserve wider dissemination. It starts with Patrick Haenni's concept of *Market Islam* (2005), which is perhaps one of the most comprehensive analyses of the trends that continue to unravel today. The chapter then focuses on the rise of a global halal market and the generalized '*halalization*' of Islam, relating works by Florence Bergeaud-Blackler.² In the third part, I address some normative issues, which have recently erupted in the French public regarding the latest work of Bergeaud-Blackler and argue for the need to pay attention to the articulation of Islamic normativity and actor agency.

The Rise of Market Islam

The expression ‘Market Islam’ has shown up independently in the writings of a few authors over the last two decades. In his work on Indonesia, anthropologist Daromir Rudnyckij (2009, 2010) uses the concept to capture how Islam has been reconfigured to serve as a legitimation for neoliberal policies and the production of neoliberal subjectivities in Indonesia. His study shows how Islam is used as a prime resource in management training courses for state-owned steel plant workers to encourage their adaptation to the uncertainties of the global economy. Studying Turkey, Joshua Hendrick has written how the Gülen movement (GM), which was instrumental in the rise to power of Erdogan’s AKP before their falling out, is an example of what he calls a ‘post-political, market Islam’ (2013, p. 24). By this, he means that the GM is a major private actor in the Islamization of global capitalism and the production of religious goods and services (ideas, messages, media, books, videos, music, and fashions) destined for the new market for Islamic goods. This constitutive involvement in economic activities provides the means for the dissemination of the GM’s ideas, its growth, and its reproduction. This constitution, as well as the content of the GM’s doctrine, acts to *marketize Islam* while *Islamizing the market*. By presenting itself as a product for mass consumption, the GM expresses ‘the degree to which free markets have the power to reframe traditional mores in their image’ (Hendrick 2013, p. 241).

The first use of the expression dates back to 2005, however, as the title of Swiss sociologist Patrick Haenni’s (b. 1968) book *L’islam de marché*, yet to be translated into English.³ Everybody refers to him, but hardly anyone bothers to expand on his contribution, namely because of the language barrier. While most analysts at the time were focused on political issues and debates about Islam and secularism, Haenni noticed a tidal change in the popular culture and everyday practices of Muslims in Muslim-majority countries, whether in the Middle East, the Maghreb, or South-East Asia. With great acuity, Haenni described the dynamics that would coalesce in the Arab Spring uprisings some years later (see also Bayat and Herrera 2010; Bayat 2013). Haenni understands the global Islamic revival as part of an exit movement from the prior Nation-State-based symbolic structure and as the symptom of a wider and profound reconfiguration process by which Islam is being reshaped and driven by the ‘social imaginary’ (Taylor 2003) and mechanisms of the Market. For Haenni, the rise of Market Islam means a major reconfiguration of Muslim religiosities along with life ethics, personal identities, lifestyles, expressivity, and visibility in the public sphere. Haenni chose to name this emerging constellation ‘Market Islam’ ‘because of its affinities with the institutions of the field of economics that serve as its support’ and because it is suggestive of ‘the new entrepreneurial culture to which [contemporary Islam] borrows the categories of its discourse’ (2005, p. 9).⁴ In other words, the shift from political to Market Islam refers to how economic globalization imprints a completely novel economic orientation to Islam and reframes the latter within the grammar of ‘glocalized’⁵ consumer cultures.

Haenni’s analysis distinguishes between four concurrent trends. The first of these is the rise of an essentially inner-worldly, individualistic type of religiosity that breaks with the collectivist projects of political Islam. The tropes of self-realization and well-being as life objectives are central to this transformation, which Haenni argues results from the penetration of self-help and New Age-derived therapeutic techniques and language, coaching and management discourse and techniques, hedonism, and a positive attitude toward consumerism. This trend promotes the idea that an Islamic state does not depend on the specific nature of its institutions as much as on the lives and morality of its individual constituents

(2005, p. 20).⁶ Islam becomes shaped according to the *ethics of authenticity and expressivity* (Taylor 1991) carried by consumerism. As a result, representations of Allah become less austere, and values such as individual happiness, enjoyment, relaxation, entrepreneurship, pro-activeness, optimism, hard work, and leisure are re-interpreted as acceptable and even desirable features of what makes a good Muslim and a good Muslim life. Similarly, moral improvement, capitalist management, and self-development literature are appropriated and acculturated within an Islamic framework. Haenni gives the example of how Stephen Covey's bestseller *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* has been the model for Islamic self-help and self-management books with titles like *The Secrets of Efficient Management from the Life of the Prophet* (2005, p. 22; see also Kenney 2015). In general, such Muslim writings often follow Anglo-American role models. Similarly, the rise of Islamic fashions contributes to reshaping Islam in forms that are 'estranged from the identity program of political Islamism' (Haenni 2005, p. 31) while contributing to the 'sacralization of the individual' (p. 37).

Second, Haenni insists on the importance of the popular disenchantment regarding state-oriented Islamist projects and state utopianism as a whole. As a consequence, utopianism has shifted from the State to the Market and here-and-now concerns: 'It is no longer a question of convincing the masses about an ultimate and intangible truth but adjusting religious offers to the real or supposed expectations of a target group' (2005, p. 39). Haenni notes how the religious mainstream has become more conservative as a result of its marketization and how everyday symbols and practices have become invested with religious meaning. Recast to serve expressive identities and an everyday ethic, Islam spills out of its differentiated and privatized sphere to color elements of daily life that were hitherto devoid of religious signification, hence the invention of a potentially infinite market for Islamized products, from Mecca Cola to vacation packages, finance, insurance, etc. Thus marketized, the 'truth' and authenticity of Islam are no longer guaranteed by theological accuracy and traditional authorities but by experience and 'social efficacy' (Haenni 2005, p. 43).

Third, the shift from a State imaginary to a Market one has theological implications, such as the emergence and massive dissemination of a new Islamic prosperity theology designed to support the constitution of a new 'Muslim pride' that is no longer activated by political projects but economic performance (2005, p. 56). Rebelling against the traditionally fatalist view of Islam ('Insha Allah'), which Max Weber (Turner 1975; Seniguer, this volume) saw as a major hindrance to the adoption of the capitalist ethos,⁷ a surprising number of Muslim voices have proceeded to disseminate what looks like a Puritan re-interpretation of Islamic sources. Economic success is granted a religious legitimation, while 'the poor and the needy,' which were the focus of prior Islamic economic thought, are recast as counterexamples of what constitutes the 'good Muslim.' The good Muslim, then, is no longer the disinterested devout but the capitalist 'winner' (Tammâm and Haenni 2004; Biard, this volume). 'Was the Prophet not a successful businessman?' has become an often-heard justification. Disengaged from collective action, Market Islam also turns its back on issues of equality, thereby providing legitimation for the explosion of inequalities produced by neoliberal policies (although other currents brand Islamic solidarity for certain political purposes or use Islamic NGO-ification as a tool for self-fashioning). Breaking with the socialist affinities of many Islamist-modernist movements, the poor are represented as being such out of personal responsibility rather than systemic or social causes. In accordance with the neoliberal creed, the poor simply fail to work hard enough and seize the opportunities that present themselves and that could summon God's grace (Nigst, this volume) in the form of material success.

Fourth and finally, Haenni diagnoses the end of the welfare ideal in Muslim-majority countries and the end of political Islamism, replaced by a positive attitude to market economics. More than any other author, he showed how the shift from Islamism to post-Islamism was embedded in a symbolic transfer from the State to the Market. Also, against the diagnoses of optimist liberals (e.g., Nasr 2009), Haenni argued that the triumph of economic liberalism entails a conservative rather than a progressive inclination in matters of politics and morality, much like what happened in the US with the rise of Evangelical Christians and their support of radical liberal economic policies coupled with an ultra-conservative political and moral agenda. Haenni points to the role of ultra-conservative Evangelicals in the rise of the Tea Party in the US (and later Trumpism) to show how economic liberalism by no means bridges support for political and cultural liberalism. In Muslim countries, the allures of consumerism and digital media *do not automatically* translate into demands for democracy, like what happened in the 2011 Arab Spring, 2019 in Algeria, and the 2023 revolutionary movement in Iran. As Asef Bayat (2013) observes, Western commentators have perhaps downplayed the ways in which these protests were also a means of claiming a right to access the culture of choice that is consumerism. Coming back to Haenni, he concludes that the acceptance of an essentially economic version of modernity signals the death of welfare and socialist ideals in the face of expressive individualism and moral and religious conservatism. It also signals the ousting of the Enlightenment and secularist ideals that were embedded in the idea of the modern nation-state and moral individualism. In other words, the shift from political to Market Islam signals how the American economic conception of modernity has won against the ideals of the French Enlightenment (2005, pp. 87–107).⁸

Haenni's analysis was avant-gardist. It put together many elements that appeared marginal from the secularism-preoccupied perspective of the social scientific mainstream yet which, once put together, appear massive. As Haenni (2005, p. 52) wrote, 'These trends are anything but anecdotal.' The years that followed proved him right. As we see here, Haenni's conceptualization of Market Islam is much broader than that of Rudnycky and Hendrick, which it encompasses. Market Islam, according to Haenni, refers to the bulk of the transformations that have affected Islam over the last decades, including the contemporary phenomena that appear in the present volume. In the remainder of this chapter, I build on Haenni's analysis and examine in more detail the explosion of 'halal.'

Halal: From Profane to Sacred?

One of the most remarkable and significant products of the marketization of Islam has been the creation of an Islamized market.⁹ To address this issue, I mainly but not exclusively rely on the works of another French scholar, Florence Bergeaud-Blackler (b. 1964), who began researching halal in the mid-1990s, when the phenomenon was marginal. Today, the halal market is a ubiquitous presence in our lives and seems to have always existed. It is widely perceived among the population, including among Muslims, as having roots in tradition and time immemorial, as a kind of Muslim equivalent of Jewish kosher. Economic research institutes are bidding up the value of this exponentially growing global market: 1,300 billion? More? In a recent book, also untranslated in English, Bergeaud-Blackler (2017) synthesizes the results of her research and establishes herself as 'the' specialist on the subject. In her work, Bergeaud-Blackler has traced the recent emergence of the halal market as it exists today, in contrast to the previous meaning of the term 'halal' in Islam, in particular in

opposition to the term ‘haram.’ Her fieldwork has consisted, apart from interviews with a multiplicity of actors at all levels of the production chain, of participant observation within the para-governmental labeling and standardization bodies. Her main thesis is relayed in the subtitle of her book: the market for halal products is an ‘invented tradition,’ in the sense of Hobsbawm. For the famous British historian, an invented tradition ‘consists of a set of practices which aim to promote certain norms and values and which find their legitimacy in a postulated continuity with a largely imagined and more or less consciously reconstructed past’ (Hobsbawm 1984, pp. 1–2). As Bergeaud-Blackler demonstrates, the emergence of the contemporary halal market is not the result of the commodification of products that were traditionally halal. There was not, as in kosher foods, something like halal products with their production standards, which were then integrated within standardized industrial processes, marketed, and integrated within the global flows of neoliberal capitalism. Rather, ‘halal products were born as commodities’ (Bergeaud-Blackler 2017, p. 21). Incidentally, the presence of multinational food corporations in the ‘global halal market’ is not the result of an industrial appropriation of a trade that previously followed artisanal or traditional exchange networks: ‘the halal market was born industrial’ (p. 14).

The halal phenomenon emerges at the confluence of two spheres that were once clearly differentiated: the religious and the economic. It is hard to overstate how this is a novelty in a social scientific discipline that continues to understand religion from the perspective of well-differentiated and institutionalized social spheres and heavily favors crossing religion with politics. It is not surprising, then, if the competing interpretations of halal understand it as the product of the subordination of one sphere by another. For Gilles Kepel (2012), for instance, the halal explosion is the result of the hijacking, by Islamist forces, of a secular sphere. On the other end of the spectrum, Faegheh Shirazi (2016) laments how greedy capitalist forces act to sully the purity of halal. In both cases, the analysis rests on the idea of a pure sphere (the secular for Kepel, Islam for Shirazi) being colonized and denatured by the other. Both perspectives are highly normative since they define what ‘the secular’ and religion should be. In contrast, Bergeaud-Blackler’s research opens a new perspective when she writes that ‘the halal market is inseparably a religious and capitalist phenomenon’ (Bergeaud-Blackler 2017, p. 14). It is a hybrid by which the reconfiguration of Islam in the consumer cultures of global capitalism takes on marketized forms.

Traditionally, only Allah can designate something illicit (haram), and Muslim scholars were wary about ‘declaring illicit what God had intended to be licit.’ (Bergeaud-Blackler 2012, p. 65, 2017, p. 10; Bergeaud-Blackler, Fischer, and Lever 2016, p. 5; Yakin, Christians, and Dupret 2021a) the traditional meaning of *ḥalāl* in Islamic jurisprudence means lawful or permitted: ‘In the Quran, halal [...] refers to things (such as food) and sometimes institutions (such as marriage) that have been allowed by God in relation to the things he has forbidden (haram)’ (Bergeaud-Blackler 2017, p. 1). Muslims have made use of a loose division between halal and haram in reference to this simple opposition. Centuries of Islamic juridical debates sought to clarify these terms and developed additional categories in order to refrain from abusive designations of actions as being haram. Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) came to distinguish and formulate evaluations in relation to five categories of actions (six for the Hanafi school present in Turkey and elsewhere), known as *al-aḥkām al-khamsa*: (1) obligatory (*wājib*); (2) recommended (*mandūb*); (3) indifferent (*mubāḥ* or *jā’iz*); (4) reprehensible (*makrūh*); and (5) forbidden (*ḥarām*). *Ḥalāl* covers more than one of these normative/ethical categories; in Islamic jurisprudence, it is a generic term that comprises four categories: the mandatory that is of course allowed/

licit, the recommended (doing such a deed will be rewarded in the Hereafter, but its avoidance will not be punished), the indifferent, and the reprehensible (avoiding such a deed will be rewarded, but committing it has no detrimental consequences for one's accounting on the Last Day). It should, therefore, not be argued that this all-too-vague category of halal is devoid of ethical orientations, but only those distinguishing categories (in contrast to the broad designation halal) allowed for nuanced judgments and defused quarrels of interpretation between different schools. They reflected the complexity of juristic opinions (fatwas), provided differentiated ethics, and sought to avoid simple binaries (Armanios and Ergene 2018, p. 33). An important issue at the base of all this is the question of whether things not addressed in the holy sources should be conceptualized as generally allowed (*al-asl fi al-ashya' al-ibaha*) as long as not proven otherwise through a process of normative evaluation or whether everything should be preemptively declared as forbidden, awaiting its specific licensing. In its historical development, Islamic jurisprudence rather followed the former 'libertarian' model in most social fields, but 'postmodern' halalization has turned things upside down.

The outcome is that nowadays, the principle has been inverted, and everything is taken as non-halal until *proven* otherwise. A *no-trust principle* is assumed, and nothing can be accepted until certified as halal by a 'relevant body' (Yakin et al. 2021a, p. 1). The Quranic prohibitions list the consumption of dead animals, blood, pork flesh, and any meat that has been sacrificed in the name of any other god than Allah (Sura 5, verse 3). The same sura (verse 5) stipulates that 'The food of the People of the Book is lawful for you as your food is lawful for them.' Until very recently, the opinion of Muslim religious authorities was that the consumption of meat slaughtered by the 'People of the Book,' i.e., Christians and Jews, was lawful by principle and that people who deviated from this well-accepted rule were being overly scrupulous, or even that they were going against the word of the Quran. The unambiguous character of the Quranic prescription meant this theme avoided becoming an object of debate and polemic among Islamic scholars for centuries.¹⁰ Within the late twentieth century, though, pressure from below started to be felt. Imams were surprised that they increasingly had to respond to Muslims' halal and haram questions. By the mid-1990s, in France, the authorities of the Grand Mosques of Paris, Lyon, and Evry, who formerly dismissed concerns over halal food as based on superstition, were asked by the French government to define standards for halal meat.

The halal market has since become big business on a global scale, and the perimeter of halal has extended far beyond the meat market to incorporate food as a whole, as well as products and services as varied as cosmetics, organized elderly care, mass tourism, fashion, 'clean' cinema, insurance, and financial products. Above all, the term halal has gone from being a qualifier (an adjective) to becoming a noun (Fall et al. 2014) or, rather, half a noun, i.e., a normative category that defines the properly Islamic by putting a tag on a growing number of products and services.¹¹ Integrated within the sphere of capitalist production and consumption, the category of halal has been instrumental in bringing religion into the folds of everyday life.

Halal Before Halal

In Muslim-majority countries, including those with significant minorities like Malaysia, meat – especially, but also food more generally – was halal by principle, and this went without saying (and therefore labeling as such). Furthermore, the halal qualification

derived as much from tradition and culture as from religion. The massive emigration of Muslims to Western countries, coupled with the development of cultural and economic exchanges between the countries of origin and the host countries, are among the factors behind the development of an explicitly halal market. In France, the homes of Muslim immigrant workers, the majority of whom were North African, reserved their consumption of meat slaughtered ‘according to the Islamic rite’ (by slitting the throat, invoking the name of Allah) for religious festivals, above all the Eid. Such slaughter activities were carried out on farms by a family member or a member of the community. In 1980, a decree banning all slaughter outside slaughterhouses targeted the mass ritual slaughter that took place on Eid. The reasons for the ban were said to be primarily financial and unrelated to issues of regulating religion in the public arena: the slaughters represented a loss of income for the state and the industry. From that time onward, Muslims started to buy their feast-bound meat from Jewish butchers, with whom Muslims share a common ban on pork meat.

According to Bergeaud-Blackler (2017), two factors contributed to the development of halal meat consumption on a regular rather than occasional basis; factors that economists would say are relative to offer and demand. First, the Islamization of the slaughter chain for meat destined for export to Muslim countries in the wake of the Iranian Revolution. This made it possible to redirect part of the meat production to the domestic market for the Muslim minority, hence the proliferation of halal meat sales outlets, particularly in small grocery stores and corner shops owned by Muslims. I deal with this factor (‘offer’) in the following. However, this phenomenon remained marginal until it was met by a second factor. This factor is more sociological and linked to the naturalization and perennialization of Muslim immigration in the host countries (‘demand’). Due to family reunification policies, in France as elsewhere, an influx of women, children, and relatives perennialized Muslim immigration. The women, who were almost exclusively in charge of the kitchen, imported their own dietary criteria, particularly when it came to meat. They believed that quality meat that had been drained of its blood (according to traditional practice) was paler in color. This belief was and remains unfounded, as the relative paleness of ‘halal’ meat is essentially due to the fact that ‘non-halal’ meat, intended for Western consumption, comes from more mature animals, whose flesh is aged to give it more flavor and tenderness (Bergeaud-Blackler 2017, pp. 44–49). These attitudes toward meat brought into play notions such as wholesomeness and freshness – in a word: purity. Anthropology has shown the importance of this highly moral notion, which relates to its opposite, the unhealthy and repulsive, in a word: the impure (Douglas 1967).

With the presence of children came a concern for cultural and religious transmission. At the very end of the 1980s and especially the beginning of the 1990s, Muslim minorities were targeted by foreign-funded proselytizing religious movements with conservative, even fundamentalist tendencies, such as the Tablighi Jamaat and the initially Egyptian and Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. This is reported to have had effects on the normalization of certain practices (like the respect of the Ramadan fast) and religious morality, socially constructing the figure of the ‘good Muslim.’ At that time, however, there was still no real distinction between the slaughter that took place routinely in France (and elsewhere) and slaughter ‘in accordance with the Muslim rite.’ Meanwhile, the halal meat market remained discreet in France and elsewhere until the mid-1990s. It tended to be frowned upon by non-Muslims and was essentially limited to ‘lower quality animals’ (Bergeaud-Blackler 2017, p. 49). It is only later that other criteria were invoked to define what is halal and what is

not; criteria such as the ‘cruelty’ of the killing methods (with or without stunning, by blade or perforation of the animal’s skull, etc.) and the treatment of the carcasses being invoked.

From the Islamic Revolution to the Industrial Normalization of Halal

The Iranian Revolution and its aftermath were at the start of a chain of events that ended up encouraging legislation. One of Ayatollah Khomeini’s first wishes was to promote national economic autonomy, particularly in the food sector. However, the development of livestock farming and the restructuring of the Iranian agricultural industry soon reached their limits. Faced with an international embargo, the Islamic Republic had to open its borders to feed its population. The compromise negotiated with the – especially Western – countries exporting meat to Iran involved accepting the presence of religious delegations in slaughterhouses. According to Bergeaud-Blackler:

Rather than reducing the space of the licit to the national productive space at the risk of generating economic pressure on the population and destabilizing the new regime, Iran extended the Islamic normative space to [non-Muslim] places of production, without renouncing its religious principles nor the market specialization of neoliberal globalization.

(2017, p. 39)

Other Sunni Muslim countries, from the Gulf States to Egypt, followed suit by demanding the ‘Islamic supervision’ of slaughterhouses (p. 41). Indeed, the last thing these countries wanted was to appear less Muslim than their Shiite rivals. Some, like Malaysia, adopted a genuine program of national economic development that involved the promotion of a distinctly *Islamic* capitalist economy, with the aim of making Kuala Lumpur the nerve center of an eventual globalized halal market. In Western countries, local Islamic associations scrambled to obtain the right to inspect slaughterhouses in return for payment.

But above all, the halal inspection business became an instrument for conquering Islamic authority and representativeness [...] Halal inspection thus became both an economic and a normative issue in a religious field that was in the process of integration and institutionalization.

(Bergeaud-Blackler 2017, p. 41)

The above highlights the issues involved in controlling the development and application of the halal standard once its dynamic has been launched. From then on, standardization was the product of economic rather than political logic. In this respect, the supranational economic regulation organizations promoting market-based globalization have played and continue to play a leading role, imposing their logic on states. Formerly invested with the regulative power over religion and guarantors of the separation of secular and religious norms, states have devolved the status of ‘partners’ and ‘stakeholders’ among others in various standardization committees, where ‘transparent’ and ‘horizontal’ neoliberal governance reigns.

In 1997, the Malaysian government, whose ambitions were recalled above, submitted a proposal to the Codex Alimentarius, which is the international organization responsible for harmonizing the food standards of the member countries of the World Trade

Organization (WTO). This proposal aimed to incorporate trade directives governing the labeling of so-called Islamic products. Interestingly, this new standard put forward a principle of purity¹² that ‘not all legal schools of Islam recognize’ and introduced a religious reference that is ‘intractable in international trade law’ (Bergeaud-Blackler 2017, p. 88) by defining halal food as what is authorized by ‘Islamic law’ (art. 2.1, quoted p. 88). For the first time in modern history, a religious criterium was introduced into trade law. Apparently, the inherent essentialism (Muslims are all the same) and reductionism (of the manifold currents and traditions of Islam into a single judicial code) involved in the institutionalization of such a tautological definition (Islamic food is what is recognized as such by Islamic law) did not appear on the radar of WTO’s experts. In addition, the legalism inherent to this kind of standardization has had the effect of drawing a clear and absolute line between what is halal and what is not (even potentially). As a result, the religious norm that became institutionalized in international law goes far beyond the traditional restrictions on what is haram and introduces an exclusive evaluation scale that is contrary to the traditions of Islamic law. As Bergeaud-Blackler writes, ‘Everything that is illicit contaminates [...]. It follows that products containing even the slightest derivatives of pork, alcohol or non-ritual meat, prepared or transported in contaminated areas,’ become haram, hence a radical extension of the perimeter of haram, which, symmetrically, allows an indefinite extension of the domain of halal. As Bergeaud-Blackler sums it up, ‘if everything can be haramized, everything can be halalized’ (p. 89). This is how, following a WTO measure, the apparently indefinite extension of the field of halal was enabled, extending the delimitations of the halal market well beyond the edible. All of this also goes against prevailing normative trends in the history of Islamic law that cannot be characterized by a zero-tolerance mindset (see introduction to this volume).

This new radicalism for economic purposes in the understanding of what can be halal, in turn, has mainly benefited large-scale industries already equipped to meet the bureaucratic requirements of certification processes, to the detriment of small businesses, craftsmen, and traditional networks based on trust and personal ties. It also brought the state back in as the most likely player to provide the necessary infrastructure. This first international standard, forged on the Malaysian model and crafted with the help of the Swiss food giant Nestlé, constitutes what Bergeaud-Blackler calls the ‘inclusive halal’ model. The decade following the adoption of this standard by the WTO saw an explosion in the global halal market, coupled with the invention of a suitable Islamic finance system, whose center of gravity was in South-East Asia. These developments attracted the covetousness of other economic players and other Muslim-majority countries, anxious to share in the global windfall and concerned about not losing control of their domestic markets. As a result, the contours of a counter-model emerged around 2010, which Bergeaud-Blackler calls the ‘*ummic*’ model, which is more restrictive but, above all, removed from the empire of *Western* multinationals. The *ummic* variant is not only halal ‘for Muslims’ but ‘by Muslims,’ which involves additional (invented) procedures.¹³ The big new players include Gulf countries like the United Arab Emirates (with the two locomotive emirates of Abu Dhabi and Dubai being the famous ones) and Saudi Arabia, as well as Turkey, the latter attempting to position itself as the purveyor of a European Union-specific standard. The logic deployed here is typical of neoliberal, consumerist capitalism (organic food is paradoxically another example): a bid for the definition of standards and procedures, whereby rigorism coincides with a surplus of authenticity on the one hand and the creation of new market niches on the other.

This interpretation is corroborated by the way that halal industrial standards were first defined in the US. The story starts with the publication of Muslim Brotherhood and al-Jazeera preacher Yusuf al-Qaradawi's (1926–2022) bestseller, *al-Halal wal-Haram fil Islam* (The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam), which had been published for the first time in 1959 but was re-edited many times and translated into several languages.¹⁴ Judging merely from the title, Qaradawi seems to have reduced the aforementioned categories of individual actions to the lawful/unlawful binary, with little room for nuances. This is not true, however, since Qaradawi remained within the tradition of modern Islamic jurisprudence in the wake of scholars like Muhammad Rashid Rida (1865–1935).¹⁵ Yet, it is on this readily accessible source, or rather its catchy title, that two non-theologically trained Pakistani-Americans, businessman and founder of the Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America (IFANCA) Muhammad Munir Chaudry and food industrialist Mian N. Riaz, based themselves in order to define the norms of halal food production for the food industry. These norms were published in a 1992 article that became the main reference for industrial halal production up to today.¹⁶ As the first attempt 'to align industrial processes with religious law' (Bergeaud-Blackler 2012, pp. 63–64, 2017, p. 92), its influence has been incalculable. Inspired by the works of Joe Regenstein, who sought to normalize the industrialization of Kashrut, the definition of halal production became attributable to Muslims who were trained in agronomy, veterinarian medicine, and other technical fields rather than Islamic law. Yet, while the industrialization of Kashrut consisted of the translation of existing norms and modes of production, Chaudry and Riaz literally had to invent a consensual halal tradition. In order to do so, they relied on the most accessible fatwas available: those issued by fundamentalist currents that are a significant rupture with traditional Islamic jurisprudence but forthcoming enough to modern blessings, considerably adjusting that resource to their needs and usually highlighting the paramount importance of Quranic verses and sayings of the Prophet Mohammad, his Companions, and their followers. By accessible, I mean both readily available and easily understood. In this respect, the works of modern Islamic fundamentalists benefit from a double advantage: the intricacies of traditional Islamic jurisprudence are not only difficult to find for the profane (not to mention the fact that they are less often translated in vernacular languages), but their content is also incomprehensible for those who are not trained in one of Islam's recognized schools of thought. Qaradawi, therefore, provided an apparently universal, uniform, and easy-to-grasp interpretative model that appeared to be grounded in the most authentic Islamic tradition while undercutting the dizzying complexities of the different Islamic schools of thought (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafii, Hanbali...). Furthermore, a third advantage has to be mentioned: Qaradawi's (and others' in his wake) normative evaluations (fatwas and full-fledged treatises) are quite forthcoming regarding all sorts of goods and practices, compared to the Wahhabism emanating from Saudi Arabia and distributed on a global scale, hence his claim to provide a middle ground (*wasatiyya*) (cf. Shaham 2018). Fundamentalist texts like those of Qaradawi have the tendency to neatly delineate the holy sources in their narratives so that they appear as easy-to-manage building blocks. The birth of a halal market is therefore bound to the emergence of the fundamentalist doctrines of Muslim modernist Islamism and the dismissal or transformation of traditional religious authorities. The integration of Muslim norms into industrial production chains has, therefore, to a considerable degree, acted to legitimize, massify, and institutionalize fundamentalist Islamist doctrines.¹⁷

Apart from Malaysia, where the development of halal markets was part of the government's economic and political policy (Fischer 2009, 2011, this volume; Rudnyckyj 2018, this volume), the halal market has developed mainly outside the control of governments, especially in the West. Economic players, in tune with a changing religious landscape, have been the driving force, even if some level of regulation must be ensured by the states. It is also through supranational economic regulatory bodies, such as the WTO's regulatory commissions and the European Union's European Committee for Standardization (Bergeaud-Blackler and Kokoszka 2017), that the halal market has become institutionalized. While Bergeaud-Blackler's work concentrates on developments in the food sector, the primary focus of the halal market, the perimeter of halal is rapidly expanding and now encompasses an impressive range of non-food products and services, with key sectors including education, tourism, health, wellness, leisure, arts, sports, technology, internet, fashion, home design, and finance (Bergeaud-Blackler 2017, p. 104, 2015). Since the turn of the millennium, Islamic economic forums like the Halal Food Exhibition (Paris, 2004) and the World Halal Forum (Kuala Lumpur 2006; London 2013; Istanbul 2023) have proliferated (Bergeaud-Blackler 2017, p. 183), attracting the interest and attention of the highest political authorities and economic actors, plus (trans)local visitors on the ground.

This expansion of halal is taking place at a time when specialists have observed a change in strategy on the part of several Islamist movements over the last twenty years. These movements are now aiming to overcome the aporias of political Islam, whose project was to Islamize society from 'above' through the State, by promoting re-Islamization from 'below,' i.e., through mores, consumption, morality, and the creation of a global Muslim market (Bergeaud-Blackler 2017, p. 84; see Iqtidar, this volume). What is unfolding before our eyes is a profound reconfiguration of 'Islam' that revolves around the substantiation of halal, i.e., as a growing entity of concrete halal products. As halal increasingly defines Muslim practices and identities, Islam becomes *halalized* (Gauthier 2021). The plurality of Islam and the depth of its legal and cultural traditions are being replaced by a halal 'for all' – all those who make up the global community of Muslims, the 'universal umma' (Roy 2004). However, even the so-called inclusive model tends to dismiss the more liberal interpretations of Islam, while Muslims are essentialized and defined primarily as consumers: 'The size of the halal market corresponds to a chimerical consumerist umma, in which the world's Muslims would only eat, dress, and entertain themselves by consuming halal-certified products and services' (Bergeaud-Blackler 2017, p. 96). Bergeaud-Blackler writes, 'Since halal criteria are defined by the actors themselves and not by an independent entity, the standard is caught up in a technical-ritual on-upmanship: the increase in control points ends up signifying greater religious conformity' (p. 167). The 'keystone of the halal market,' the 'Islamic controller' (p. 157), emerges as a new religious authority, often outside the major hermeneutic schools and with a rigorist tendency, in a space that is intended to be purely commercial, blurring the boundaries between the differentiated social spheres produced by the Nation-State-ordered modernity. This function can also take the shape of censorship institutions, as is the case with the moral monitoring of film production (Ibrahim, this volume), which are declared *hisba* boards, thereby rhetorically mimicking a genealogy reaching back to the premodern market officer, the *muhtasib*.

The meeting of economic and religious players in the making, standardization, and expansion of the halal market shows how neoliberal globalization challenges, according to

Bergeaud-Blackler, the formerly marked differentiations between the secular and religious spheres:

The history of the halal market begins with the creation of a halal convention around which industry, religion, and the state work together. For such a thing to happen, halal slaughter had to be reduced to a code [the halal/haram binary]—something which Islamic exegetes had avoided doing for fourteen centuries—, merchants in secularized countries had to agree to lose control over part of the slaughter chain to religious authorities, and finally all this had to be enshrined in secular legislation.

(2017, p. 23)

However, in a historical perspective, Muslim butchers used to rely on an elaborate code of Islamic regulations and ethics that gets retrieved in modern times by fatwas studying modern slaughtering conditions (Andelshauer 1996).

Halal and the Lifestylization of Islam

There is a missing link in Bergeaud-Blackler's account that is essential to add to the analysis in order to understand how the halal offer met the halal demand; in other words, how the first and second aforementioned factors coalesced into the halal explosion. Muslim diasporas in Western countries did not start buying halal products simply because Islamists were parachuted into their communities. Similarly, Bergeaud-Blackler fails to provide an explanation for how explicit halal consumption became established in Muslim-majority countries. What is missing in this account are the manifold influences of consumer culture on Muslim lifeworlds and practices and how halal consumption became a formidable vehicle for the lifestylization of Islam as a consequence.

The expansion of halal within and without the edible has been catalyzed by the fact that Muslims themselves have appropriated the idea of halal and have provided a constantly increasing demand for 'Islam-certified' goods and services. This is where the consumerized religiosity fashioned by the ethics of authenticity, which turns consumption into a tool for constructing expressive identities, meets with the market logics of the neoliberal age: products are devised to fit market segments and find a corresponding demand. In so doing, however, these offers also create the demand in an economically virtuous circle. Incidentally, products and services targeting Muslims will have a good chance of being successful if they cater to the need for authentic and expressive identity and life ethics. As a consequence, the first category of halal branded foods are not traditional or ethnic dishes but Western foods like burgers, pizzas, and, of course, kebabs. For second-generation immigrant-born Muslims, the significance of halal consumption is the same as for the first chosen-veil-wearing women of the late 1980s: it is about marking a rupture with the parents' generation in order to affirm a Muslim *and* modern – Westernized or anti-Western – identity (Amghar 2014; Rodier 2014). The parents' Islam often lacked scholarly references, so the fundamentalist or Salafi plug-and-play displays of elements from the holy sources have unfolded a considerable, seemingly empowering appeal for their children.

Because of this conjunction, halal consumption rapidly spread to all Muslim-majority countries where consumerism and market ideologies were well-implanted. Research is still inchoative on this topic, yet the logics behind halal consumption in Muslim-majority countries appear similar to those in Western diasporas. Muslims in Muslim-majority

countries are made to choose who they are and construct their own identities, guided by the ethics of authenticity and expressivity intrinsic to consumerism. As the structural conditions that supported the dissemination of secularism erode, Islam is refashioned on the *born-again* model and lifestyled. Increasingly, Muslims become Muslims through fashion and consumption patterns. They seek to be Muslim *and* modern. This explains why halal certification in Muslim-majority countries often targets imported products and restaurant chains like Coca-Cola and McDonald's as a way to acculturate them by Islamizing them, all the while modernizing Islam (Fischer 2009, 2011, and this volume; Yakin, Christians, and Dupret 2021a). The consumption of Islam-compatible meats and foods, therefore, no longer 'goes without saying,' even in Muslim-majority countries. Coupled with the need for expressive consumption, *being* Muslim increasingly becomes *consuming* Muslim. This includes a spectrum of possibilities, from the more rigorist options to Islamic vegetarianism, which all correspond to different lifestyles and authenticity claims.

Halal norms define an ever-increasing array of products and services. As halal becomes a part of everyday life, the term penetrates vernacular languages and popular expressions. In just over a decade, halal has even come to designate appropriate Muslim *behavior*. To quote Samir Amghar (2014, p. 29), halal has become 'a veritable "Islamic way of life."' Halal, in other words, enacts the *lifestylization of Islam*. This has been made possible because Muslims are 'seeking a norm, normative benchmarks that can guide them on the road to faith' (p. 31) in a rapidly changing world amidst the increasingly uncontrollable flows of cultural and economic globalization. Halal precisely offers that: a *brand* that captures a set of norms and the guarantee of Islamic authenticity. The halal referent has spread to engulf authenticated ways of being Muslim in all spheres of life. This corresponds to what Yakin, Christians, and Dupret (2021b, p. 2) call the second stage of the 'positivization of Islamic law' around halal, following the strictly legal, technical, and managerial stages described above.

Republicanism vs Liberalism: The Politics of Halal

Halal now defines the contours and substance of religion while fitting it in a consumerist frame in such a way that being a 'good Muslim' today basically means consuming and behaving halal. As such, the explosion of the global halal market and the indefinite extension of the perimeter of halal are hallmark examples of the profound reconfiguration of Islam through the marketizing processes described by Haenni in the first part of this chapter. In this section, I wish to address some issues that characterize work on halal and that call upon the wider question of the articulation between normativity and agency. I summon two examples, one that is more typical of English-language scholarship and another that is more specific to France.

Scholarly work on halal has boomed almost as exponentially as the global halal market itself, especially in the English language. One thing that is striking when considering the bulk of this scholarship, however, is the absence of reference to the history of the creation of the halal market and the 'invented' nature of its tradition. Few works question or even note the reduction of traditional legal categories to the halal/haram binary and how these processes are linked to the dynamics of consumer culture and neoliberal globalization. Most of these works are content on describing the processes of implementation of halal standards in various parts of the world, as well as the ethical discussions and confrontations incurred (e.g., is it more ethical to stun or not to stun).¹⁸ In so doing, they

take the very existence of halal for granted, thereby contributing to its legitimation and naturalization. Not that halal regulations should be delegitimized. Rather, they should be analyzed with respect to how their present shape relates to different historical jurisprudential contexts. They should also be related to the consumption practices they are hinged upon and their wider embeddedness in the dynamics of global capitalism, as well as how they participate in reshaping Islam rather than simply mirroring it. Otherwise, the ever-expanding list of criteria and procedures involved in the halalization process becomes hard to detach from the novel and singular conjunction of neoliberal capitalism and fundamentalist interpretations. Incidentally, the way that industrial processes have acted to enculturate and naturalize fundamentalist reductionism within Islamic law calls for more analyses and discussions than they have to date. At a time when essentialisms are routinely sought after and critiqued across the social sciences, this essentialization of Islam and Islamic law should be given more attention than it does in the literature. What the bulk of these works fails to see is how halal standardization fuels certain strands of Islamic normativity. Halal standards are far from being neutral; they are coercive and exert a form of censorship in manifold ways and with manifold effects, from the level of practices right up to the geopolitical sphere.

Does this mean, then, that we should follow Bergeaud-Blackler in her latest developments? If the issue raised above is more typical of liberal environments, the polemic at the center of which Bergeaud-Blackler has found herself is typical of republican France.¹⁹ In her latest book, Bergeaud-Blackler (2023) takes a resolutely normative step by warning about what she calls Islamism's (more specifically, the Muslim Brotherhood's) project to undermine European democracies and secularism. I do not wish to open a discussion on this book (this would lead us astray from the topic of this chapter), which has re-enflamed the French psychodrama made of crossed accusations of Islamophobia versus '*Islamogauchisme*' (the legitimation of Islamic fundamentalism by well-meaning leftists).²⁰ However, many, including myself, have noted how Bergeaud-Blackler has been increasingly influenced in the last years by political scientist Gilles Kepel. We find a trace of this in the conclusion of her solo book on halal (2017). For Kepel (2012), the growth of halal introduces a frontier between French Muslims and the majority, which he interprets as a sign of communitarianism (a negatively connoted term in France; see Gauthier 2017) and contrary to the exigencies of the Republic:

Attachment to dietary prohibitions is a measure of integration. Respect for these prohibitions reflects a weak desire for integration and a retreat into the identity of the religious community, while their weakening would indicate a desire for assimilation on the part of the individual. However, according to this grid, the almost total respect for the ban on pork, the huge enthusiasm for halal food and the high level of observance of the Ramadan fast all point to the conclusion that the vast majority of individuals are not on the road to integration. Most social researchers have however given up trying to understand this phenomenon and have turned to other indicators.

(Kepel 2012, p. 47)

In the same vein, Bergeaud-Blackler (2017, p. 249) argues in her conclusion that the normative power and substance of the new halal norm means that the 'food barrier becomes a diasporic barrier.' As a consequence, she concludes that the religious affiliations

embodied in practices such as observance of the Ramadan fast and halal consumption signify de facto resistance to the demands of the social contract and the duty for Muslims to integrate. My concern here is that in her overstressing of Islamic normativity, Bergeaud-Blackler tosses aside the agency of Muslim halal eaters. As an expression of consumerism and the lifestylization of Islam, Muslims, whether in France or in Muslim-majority countries, are totally enculturated into a brand of global consumerism that is Western-originated. Eating halal and dressing ‘modestly’ by no means signifies resisting integration but, instead, agreeing to the imperatives of consumer culture by choosing a lifestyle whose value of authenticity is derived from visible references to Islam.²¹ To say it bluntly, the fact that fundamentalist-born categories have been institutionalized thanks to the dynamics of neoliberal capitalism does not turn every halal eater into a radical Islamist and a potential jihadist.

Similarly, this inflection in her analysis reveals some of the further limitations in her work. Clearly, Bergeaud-Blackler lacks an understanding of the functional advantages and utter flexibility of *fiqh* in finding creative solutions to adapt to all sorts of contexts. She fails to see how Islamic jurisprudence, including in the more radical currents, has acted in a way so as to accommodate the new material and non-material realities of modernity across the whole twentieth century, as was recalled in the introduction to this volume. Her apparent ignorance of the actual production of Islamists like Qaradawi and the way that it is inscribed in the legal tradition of Islam (cf. Shaham 2018) leads her to overstress the rupture and reductionism at work in the ongoing halalization processes and the extent to which Islam has been Islamized by fundamentalist currents. In the end, it is especially regrettable that Bergeaud-Blackler has parted with what is most interesting in her work, namely how she draws attention to the dual nature, economic *and* religious, of the reconfigurations within Islam. Rather than joining in with Haenni, she falls back onto a Kepel-style narrative in which Islamists are seen as having hijacked the market and turned halal into a formidably effective propaganda machine that feeds what the latter calls an ‘atmosphere of Jihadism’ (Kepel 2021).²²

An analysis that is attentive to both normativity and agency involved in the halal phenomenon warns against the vagaries of both these extremes, whether it is in the form of liberal naturalization or republican hysteria. Indeed, a middle way is not only possible but desirable. Muslims are not only sovereign individuals; halal standardization is not neutral. Conversely, the triumph of fundamentalist reductionisms through their seamless integration into industrial processes, thanks namely to multinational corporations, does not amount to the triumph of Islamic fundamentalism.²³

Conclusion

Haenni has apparently distanced himself from academia. Bergeaud-Blackler’s alarmist inflection, which has made her a favorite reference within right-wing and extreme-right-wing circles, sheds light on some of the shortcomings of her work on halal and explains the mocking tone one sometimes finds in it. Nonetheless, the wider research field would be well advised to engage more diligently with their findings. This includes Euro-American languages like English and German but also publications from Muslim-majority countries in Arabic, Hausa, Persian, Swahili, Turkish, Urdu, Uzbek, etc. Certainly, the fields of marketing, management, and consumer research should take note of developments outside of their comfort zone and disciplinary borders. In different yet complimentary

ways, both of the above-discussed authors draw attention to the importance of recent transformations and how they enact a profound change of course with respect to Nation-State-bound, long twentieth-century developments. They also shed light on how the very meaning of what it is to be modern and Muslim has shifted, opening new possibilities in which market dynamics, cultural practices, and a new lifestyle brand of religion combine and thrive.

Notes

- 1 By putting a capital letter on ‘Market,’ I mean to draw attention to how it acts as an ideal and idea as much as a social institution, as a horizontal and spontaneous mechanism for the production of social optimum on every level. The same goes for the State and the Nation when that is the case, cf. *infra*. See Gauthier 2020.
- 2 I am aware of the perils of such a sweeping argument as the one made in this chapter, and the frowns it may cause specialists of Islamic studies. There is a need for general syntheses, however, and I am willing to face the risks involved. The course I am charting in this chapter is knowingly as subjective as it is suggestive, but I feel it does manage to put some material together in a way that links many of the contributions in this Handbook. I am indebted to Birgit Krawietz for her attentive reading, comments, doubts, and critiques of prior drafts of this chapter, whose shortcomings are my sole responsibility.
- 3 This short book (108 pages) is the condensed version of Haenni’s PhD thesis in sociology, which he completed under the guidance of Olivier Roy, to which he is close. Haenni has since stepped away from academia and pursued his career as a journalist, incessantly travelling across the Muslim world. Among his other notable publications, see Haenni 2009, 2011.
- 4 All quotes from Haenni 2005, as well as other French sources, are my translations.
- 5 The term glocalization was introduced by Robertson 1992 to denote how globalization simultaneously involves the localization of global trends and the globalization of localisms, in a two-way process of acculturation and enculturation.
- 6 This shows a change in the conception of society as something greater than the sum of its parts (Republicanism) to one in which society is the sum individuals (Liberalism). See Gauthier 2017.
- 7 Weber’s view was more nuanced than this; see Seniguer (this volume).
- 8 This is the meaning behind the book’s subtitle: *L’autre révolution conservatrice* (The other conservative revolution). This trend is, according to Haenni 2011, one of the reasons behind the success of Salafism.
- 9 The following section is drawn and adapted from sections of an article published in French (Gauthier 2019).
- 10 This is all the more remarkable since a large number of Quranic verses are obscure and have generated multiple and competing interpretations and innumerable polemics. See Reynolds 2019.
- 11 In Arabic, the distinction between adjectives and nouns is not as marked as in European languages.
- 12 Apart from political reasons, the Hindu influence in Malaysia is held responsible for this emphasis on purity.
- 13 *Umma* denotes the overall community of Muslim believers.
- 14 From the mid-1990s, Qaradawi had a sustained presence on the internet. Although his influence was immense, his website was still far from reaching the popularity ratings of Market Islam TV preacher mega-star Amr Khaled (Gräf 2007).
- 15 Like the Salafi Rashid Rida, Qaradawi ‘places himself between [the conservatives of] the Neo-Ahl al-Hadith and Muslim Western-oriented intellectuals’ (Shaham 2018, p. 84).
- 16 The article in question was published by Chaudry in 1992 and expanded into a book a decade later (Riaz and Chaudry 2004).
- 17 Some authors like Armanios and Ergene 2018 pudically choose the term ‘pietistic’ rather than ‘fundamentalist.’ In my opinion, fundamentalist is a better term because it is broader, including both peaceful pietistic movements and potentially violent ones. Since the same theological sources can be summoned by both variants, I see no reason to hide violent expressions of radicalism.

- 18 This is massively the case not only in marketing and management journals and books (e.g., Hall and Prayag 2022), but also in social scientific research (e.g., contributions on halal in *Sociology of Islam*; Yakin, Christians, and Dupret 2021a).
- 19 For basics on the structural opposition between market-bound liberalism and state-bound republicanism in modern polity, see Gauthier 2017, 2020.
- 20 This is an avatar of the wider hysteria between the alleged cultural war opposing *wokes* and conservatives.
- 21 Rather than metal music, Catholicism, veganism, or Neo-Paganism.
- 22 I have only come to understand this misconception of Islamic law by Bergeaud-Blackler as I was writing this piece, and thanks to Birgit Krawietz. This helps explain why Bergeaud-Blackler is so critical of Haenni's work in personal conversation, which she sees as diluting Islam in the market. Bergeaud-Blackler thereby replays the Kepel vs. Olivier Roy battle that occupied the French media for some time, associating with the former and placating Haenni on his former supervisor.
- 23 Such a balanced and complex analysis is exactly what authors like Reina Lewis (2015) and Carla Jones (2016, this volume) propose in the case of Muslim fashions.

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PART 2

Historical Probes



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5

THE DAY OF SURPLUS

On the Market in Paradise

Christian Lange

Introduction

In his autobiography, the prominent Jordanian Salafist ‘Umar Sulaymān al-Ashqar (1940–2012) recounts that around the middle of the 1960s, he followed lessons with the famously conservative Saudi scholar, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Ibn Bāz (1910–1999). Lecturing in the Prophet’s Mosque in Medina, Ibn Bāz warned his students against the ‘forbidden things’ (*munkarāt*) on display in some of the city’s markets, in particular certain ‘mannequins (*ṣuwar*) of adorned women, inflated to take on the shape of a large and ripe woman’ (al-Ashqar 2010, p. 70). As al-Ashqar recalls, Ibn Bāz not only condemned such practices in the classroom; one day, he went into the markets to reprimand the merchants for their lewd behavior (ibid.). In the wake of Ibn Bāz’s intervention, violent clashes erupted between the Medina residents and pious local activists, followers of Ibn Bāz who felt the need to take the Islamic duty of ‘commanding right and forbidding wrong’ into their hands, instead of contenting themselves with verbal censure (as Ibn Bāz had done) and referring to the police. In retaliation, the Saudi authorities deported some of Ibn Bāz’s students from Saudi Arabia, including al-Ashqar (al-Ashqar 2010, p. 71; see also Cook 2000, pp. 180–191; Lacroix 2011, p. 90).

That markets are places of sin, haunted by the devil and his minions, is an old motif in the pious literature of Islam. For example, the Prophet’s cousin ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib is said to have preached to the people in Kufa that ‘on Fridays, the devils enter the markets with their banners, in order to distract people from the congregational prayer’ (Abū Dāwūd 1935, vol. 1, p. 343). In his *Revivification of the Religious Sciences* (*Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*), in a chapter on the etiquette of trade, al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) relates how one of the pious Muslim forefathers, the Companion ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ, once said: ‘Do not be the first to enter the market-place [in the morning], nor the last to leave it [in the evening], because the devil resides there and hatches offspring’ (n.d., vol. 2, p. 132).

However, Muslims who declared markets dangerous and warned other Muslims against spending time in them fought an uphill battle, as Muslim jurists entertained a generally positive attitude toward trade. In the Hadith, the vast body of narratives traced to the

Prophet and his Companions, Muslims are not only allowed to visit markets, but the pleasures to be had in them are extolled.

A striking illustration of the high regard for markets and the titillating prospect of consumption therein is found in a series of narratives attributed to the Prophet about the ‘market in paradise’ (*sūq al-janna*), an imaginary space of immediate and total gratification. This otherworldly market is mentioned in Muslim eschatological literature in the context of the so-called ‘Day of Surplus’ (*yawm al-mazīd*, see Qur’ān 50:35), that is, the day of the week – usually held to be a Friday – on which God appears to the denizens of paradise in a public audience. Then, after gently addressing the blessed, treating them to a heavenly concert (in which the houris and the prophet-king David act as entertainers), and granting them the beatific vision, God sends them to shop.

It bears mentioning that not all Islamic narratives about the Day of Surplus include the shopping excursion of the blessed. For instance, two famous medieval authors of parenetic-eschatological works written in Arabic, Abū al-Layth al-Samarqandī (d. 373/983) and al-Ghazālī, do not mention the market in paradise at all (al-Samarqandī 1427/2006, p. 40; al-Ghazālī n.d., vol. 5, pp. 176–177). However, there is an evident, unbroken tradition throughout Islamic history of transmitting, elaborating, and commenting upon stories about the paradisiacal market. This tradition centers on three Hadiths traced back to the Prophet through the Companions Anas b. Mālik, Abū Hurayra, and ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, respectively. In this chapter, I discuss these traditions, examining how widespread they were, what versions of them circulated, and what reactions they elicited. I conclude with a reflection on modern shopping malls in the Arab world and on what the market in paradise contributes to our understanding of Ibn Bāz’s and al-Ashqar’s run-in with the Saudi authorities, as well as of contemporary Muslim consumerism at large.

The Anas Tradition

The Anas tradition is the most ‘orthodox’ of the three traditions mentioned above. It appears in Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj’s (d. 261/875) highly regarded *Book of Sound Traditions* (*al-Ṣaḥīḥ*). In addition, it is found in a significant number of other ‘canonical’ collections, such as Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal’s (d. 241/855) *Musnad* and al-Tirmidhī’s (d. 279/892) *Sound Collection* (*al-Jāmi‘ al-ṣaḥīḥ*) (see Wensinck et al. 1992, vol. 3, p. 34b.14), as well as in medieval and late-medieval works such as Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣfahānī’s (d. 430/1038) *What Paradise Is Like* (*Ṣifat al-janna*), Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Nawawī’s (d. 676/1277) *Gardens of the Righteous* (*Riyāḍ al-ṣāliḥīn*), and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī’s (d. 911/1505) *Shining Full Moons of Eschatology* (*al-Budūr al-sāfira fi ‘ulūm al-ākhirā*). Here, I quote the Anas tradition from *Urging Souls Forward to the Lands of Happiness* (*Ḥādī al-arwāḥ ilā bilād al-afrāḥ*) by the Damascene scholar Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350). This work conveniently collects many (though not all) Hadiths about the market in paradise:

Anas b. Mālik related from the Prophet: There is a market (*sūq*) in paradise. People go there every Friday. Then the northern wind blows, caressing their faces and moving their dresses, and their beauty (*ḥusn*) and comeliness (*jamāl*) are enhanced. They return to their families, having become more beautiful and comely, and so their families say to them: ‘By God! After [having departed from] us, you have become more beautiful and more comely!’ And they [likewise] say to them: ‘By God! After we [departed from you], you have become more beautiful and more comely!’

(1432/2011, p. 376)

The first thing to note regarding this Hadith, besides its wide circulation and ‘orthodox’ status, is that the word *sūq* is equivocal. It is related to the verb *sāqa* (to drive on, to herd); hence, *sūq* can signify not only a ‘market,’ as in the most common meaning, but also, simply, a ‘place of concourse.’ It is understood in this way by the most prominent commentator on Muslim’s *Book of Sound Traditions*, the aforementioned al-Nawawī, who explains that ‘what is meant by *sūq* is a meeting place (*majmaʿ*), in which they come together like people on earth come together in a market’ (1407/1987, vol. 9, p. 172).

The most important motif of this Hadith is the transformation of the inhabitants of paradise into beautiful people, a miracle that occurs because of a gentle wind blowing from the north. Several related Hadiths add further details. They state, for example, that in the *sūq*, there is a dune of musk (*kuthbān min al-misk*), ‘whiter than snow,’ on which the men take a seat, chatting leisurely, and that when they return to their wives, they not only look better than before but are also perfumed and dressed more colorfully (Ibn Ḥabīb 1427/2006, p. 56; Ibn Abī al-Dunayā 1427/2006, p. 259; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya 1432/2011, p. 379). However, the short, above-quoted core of the Hadith is the most-frequently cited version.

When it comes to traditions about the market of paradise, compilers known for their asceticism (*zuhd*), for example, Ibn al-Kharrāṭ of Seville (d. 581/1185), only relate the Anas tradition to the exclusion of similar narratives, such as the Abū Hurayra tradition and the ‘Alī tradition (Ibn al-Kharrāṭ 1410/1990, p. 327).

The Abū Hurayra Tradition

The second tradition, the one transmitted on the authority of Abū Hurayra, is longer than the Anas tradition. It is embedded in a frame story in which another early Muslim, the traditionist and judge Saʿīd b. al-Musayyab, asks Abū Hurayra whether there really is a market in paradise. Abū Hurayra replies that this is indeed so, quoting the Prophet to the effect that the inhabitants of paradise are invited to enter it on account of their good actions on earth; that they take a seat on high chairs studded with precious stones or on a dune of musk and camphor; that God reveals Himself to them and that the inhabitants of paradise see Him ‘without wavering’; that God speaks gently to each one of them; and that perfume rains down on them from a cloud. The Prophet continues:

Then our Lord, Mighty and Exalted, says: “Rise to receive the bounties that I have prepared for you, and take whatever you desire!” [...] Then they come to a market that is surrounded by rows of angels. In it are things the likes of which no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind [lit. heart] has conceived. What we desire is carried (*yuhmalu mā ishtahaynā*). There is no buying or selling in it. In that market, the people of paradise meet each other. The inhabitants of the Lofty Mansions approach to meet those who are below them, while nobody among them is [considered] lowly (*wa-mā fihim danīy*). They [the inhabitants of the Lofty Mansions] are pleased to see their clothes and appearance. Before they reach the end of their conversation, they assimilate from them what is better than they (*yatamaththalu ʿalaybi aḥsana minhu*). In this way, nobody in it [the market] has to be sad. [...] Then we will return to our lodgings and meet our wives. They will say: “Welcome, beloved ones! You have arrived! You are more beautiful and more sweet-smelling than when you left us.” We shall say: “God the Almighty kept us company today. We deserved to be transformed the way we were.”

(Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya 1432/2011, pp. 377–378)

In Islamic religious literature, this Hadith is sometimes simply referred to as ‘the Hadith of the market in paradise’ (*ḥadīth sūq al-janna*). Al-Tirmidhī, one of the ‘canonical’ transmitters of this tradition (see Wensinck et al. 1992, vol. 3, p. 34b.11), calls it ‘rare’ (*gharīb*), a term used to characterize Hadiths that scholars considered to be neither ‘weak’ (*ḍa‘īf*) nor ‘sound’ (*ṣaḥīḥ*). Such Hadiths were deemed acceptable particularly in parenetic and eschatological contexts (see Lange 2016a, pp. 82–83). Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya also cautiously accepts the reliability of the narrative (1432/2011, p. 378). Moreover, Muslim theologians often adduced the Hadith in the context of discussions about whether the beatific vision (*ru‘ya*) of God in paradise is a physical or spiritual event. What is more interesting for the present discussion, however, is the way the narrative describes the market in paradise.

To begin, note that the Hadith refuses to specify precisely what kind of luxuries the market in paradise has in store: it speaks of things that ‘no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has conceived.’ This is a statement derived from the New Testament (1 Corinthians 2:9) that Muslim eschatologists repeat a lot (Lange 2016a, pp. 2–3, *passim*), but that, at the same time, is undermined from within Muslim eschatological literature by a plethora of afterlife narratives full of sumptuous, often highly concrete and sensual images and descriptions (al-Azmeh 1995). Thus, in a Shi‘i compilation, we read that the inhabitants of paradise ‘pass by the markets of paradise, in which [...] there are garments, silk brocade, gold brocade, silk cloth, *raḥraf* and *‘abqarī* cloth, pearls, rubies, and suspended crowns’ (al-Baḥrānī 1430/2009, vol. 3, p. 182). And according to an anonymous medieval Sunni compilation, the angels in paradise tell the happy shoppers that ‘on earth, you used to walk through your markets, and a piece of cloth would please you, or something else, but it would only be available for you at a price; by contrast, in this market here, your Lord, Mighty and Exalted, has made everything available, so whosoever desires a thing, let him take possession of it, without [paying] a price!’—an invitation promptly followed, as the blessed stroll through the market, ‘gazing at pillows, rugs, colorful cushions, and garments, and whatever they see and like, the angels carry behind them’ (Anon. 1418/1998, p. 90).

Crucially, according to the Abū Hurayra tradition, there is ‘no buying or selling’ in the market in paradise. When the market-goers in paradise ‘buy’ things, as the Egyptian commentator ‘Abd al-Ra‘ūf al-Munāwī (d. 1031/1621) explains, they pay with a figurative currency, that is, with the good actions they performed on earth (1415/1994, vol. 10, p. 312). The idea that people in paradise engage in actual trade was, it appears, one step too far, even for those who did not object to the prospect of otherworldly shopping. Nobody in paradise, after all, has to work. Besides, as noted above, the greedy self-interest of merchants and the nervous buzz of markets on earth were something the pious abhorred. The traditionist ‘Aṭā’ b. Yassār (d. 103/721) once confronted a man selling his wares in the Medina mosque by reprimanding him: ‘You should sell your wares in the market of this world; this here is the market of the next world!’ (Mālik n.d., vol. 1, p. 174). Little did ‘Aṭā’ know what the markets of the next world would look like according to the imagination of later Muslim eschatologists. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, pitching the merits of the heavenly against the pitfalls of the earthly market, puts the sentiment in verse:

The ‘market of getting to know each other’ is what it’s called. There is no noise in it, nor deceit, nor false promises.

The ‘merchants’ in it take no pleasure in ‘trade deals,’
nor in ‘selling’ things, bargaining with the Merciful One [...]

Woe to those who prefer over it the market in which
the banner of the devil has been set up!
If you knew the true worth of that market [in paradise] you
would not trust the market of volatile and ephemeral business [on earth].
(1428/2007, p. 1025)

However, others saw things a little differently. If the inhabitants of paradise were allowed to sell things to each other, they would trade in fine cloth and perfume, the Prophet was related to have said (al-Suyūṭī 1416/1996, p. 583), as if to assuage the disappointment of those who were promised paradise but were also passionate about trade. For the medieval merchants of the Islamic world, it must have been difficult to see much virtue in markets devoid of economic activity. As the theologian and popular preacher in Baghdad Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201) recounts in his *Stories of Witty People (Akhhbār al-adhkiyā)*, a group of merchants was once asked about how business was in their market? They ironically replied, 'It's like the market of paradise: nothing is bought in it and nothing is sold' (1424/2003, p. 206). 'Our market is the market of paradise' (*sūqunā sūq al-janna*) even became a proverbial expression used to allude to a state of economic depression (al-Maydānī n.d., vol. 1, p. 356).

A final element of the Abū Hurayra tradition that deserves attention is its egalitarian gist. The Islamic paradise is stratified and divided into different degrees of exultation (see Lange 2016a, p. 157). However, on the paradisiacal market, such distinctions are erased, at least temporarily, on Friday. In markets on earth, as gathered from the Abū Hurayra tradition, the kind of clothing one wore was an important social marker, and the poorly dressed were looked down upon by the rich. What a relief, then, to be able to overcome such divisions in the afterlife, where 'nobody is considered lowly,' and where the inhabitants of the expensive mansions in the more exclusive residential areas of the eternal garden might even compliment the less affluent on their looks. And not only that: the average paradise dwellers even take on some of the superior qualities of their posh neighbors in a mysterious process of assimilation (*tamaththul*). This motif takes center stage in the 'Alī tradition.

The 'Alī Tradition

The motif of the miraculous transformation of the market-goers in paradise, already present in both the Anas tradition and the Abū Hurayra tradition, is fully articulated in the third and final of the three 'canonical' Hadiths about the market in paradise, the 'Alī tradition. To quote again from Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's *Urging Souls forward to the Lands of Happiness*:

'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib related from the Prophet: There is a market in paradise in which nothing is sold or bought except images (*ṣuwar*) of men and women. If a man desires (*ishtahā*) such an image, he enters into it (*dakhala fihā*).

(1423/2011, pp. 378–379)

Next to al-Tirmidhī, from whom Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya quotes the tradition, a score of other (non-canonical) Hadith collectors relate this, including Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, Hannād al-Sarī (d. 243/857), al-Bayhaqī (d. 459/1066), and other, later ones. As Ibn Qayyim

al-Jawziyya notes, the Hadith is declared 'rare' (*gharīb*) by al-Tirmidhī. Others, such as Ibn al-Jawzī, Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), and al-Suyūfī, are more critical, plainly classifying it as 'forged' (*mawḍūʿ*), on account of the supposed unreliability of one link in the tradition's *isnād*, a traditionist by the name of 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ishāq (Abū Nu'aym 1415/1995, pp. 255–257 [editor's footnote]). This 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ishāq, an early second/eighth-century scholar from Medina, who during his lifetime was accused of being a *qadarī* (a defender of the doctrine of free will) and who ended his life in Basra, did indeed enjoy a checkered reputation as a transmitter (al-Mizzī 1413/1992, vol. 16, pp. 519–525). However, the Hadith is also transmitted with an *isnād* that does *not* include 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ishāq, albeit in a slightly different version, one in which the verb 'to desire' (*ishtahā*) is replaced by the more chaste 'to like' (*aḥabba*) (Abū Nu'aym 1415/1995, p. 258; al-Suyūfī 1416/1996, p. 582–583; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya 1423/2011, p. 379).

Whatever the deficiencies of the *isnād* or the lexical irregularities of the Hadith, there can be no doubt about its popularity over the centuries of Islamic history and across the Muslim world. This fact is demonstrated not only by the number of works that include reference to it but also by the exegetical efforts of Muslim scholars to make sense of it. The first interpretive issue relates to the question of what the word *ṣūra* (pl. *ṣuwar*) means. Are we to understand that in the market in paradise, there are pictorial representations of men and women, or is *ṣūra* something else? In a variant of the Hadith, transmitted by Ibn al-Jawzī and others, it is stated that the market-goers in paradise are presented with actual sheets of writing material with images of men and women on them, 'and on the margin of every image is written: *Those who wish (tamannā) to look like me, God will make them beautiful according to my image (ṣūra)*' (Ibn al-Jawzī 1419/1998, p. 131; Ibn Ḥabīb 1427/2006, p. 57; al-Baḥrānī 1430/2009, vol. 3, p. 182). However, the Indian scholar from Uttar Pradesh, Muḥammad 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Mubārakfurī (d. 1935), in his commentary on al-Tirmidhī's *Sound Collection*, states that the *ṣuwar* in question are 'effigies' (*tamāthīl*) (al-Mubārakfurī n.d., vol. 7, p. 223), perhaps approaching the question from the perspective of a society famous for its abundance of sacred statues. Writing in Egypt, al-Munāwī simply affirms that 'the word *ṣūra* here means form and shape (*al-shakl wal-bay'a*),' but he leaves it unclear in what material substrate, if any, the *ṣūra* is seen (al-Munāwī 1415/1994, vol. 10, p. 312).

According to the 'Alī tradition, the market-goers in paradise can choose between 'images of women or men,' the latter being a reference, so it seems, to male servants (*ghilmān*, see Qur'ān 52:24) and immortal youths (see Qur'ān 56:17, 76:19), perhaps even to homoerotic pleasures in the Muslim paradise (see Lange 2016, pp. 151–152). What this addition does *not* indicate is that the female inhabitants of paradise get to enjoy images-on-sale of males. Although none of the traditions explicitly states that women are barred from retail in the eternal garden, they all agree that the market-goers, after their shopping spree, return home to meet their 'wives.' Unlike in certain shopping malls in contemporary Gulf countries (Baldauf 2008), there are no sections specifically designated for female customers in the market in paradise. Muslim eschatologists often debated whether only men were allowed the beatific vision in paradise or also women, but strolling around the eternal market, it seems, is an exclusively male prerogative. As Franz Rosenthal once remarked, 'nearly all the fantasies about paradise [in Hadith-based eschatology] are meant for men' (1987, p. 254).

A final interpretive challenge of the Hadith is the question of what 'entering the image' means. Some understood the expression literally: to enter the images in the market in paradise is to enter into a new space as if passing through a magical doorway. According

to this view, the shoppers in the eternal market, to use the words of Walter Benjamin, become like children who ‘enter into the pages of picture books like clouds, saturated with the brilliant colours of the world of images’ (1991, p. 609). This act of entering the ‘world of images,’ as Ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 638/1240) makes clear in a comment on the market in paradise, is not merely a disembodied flight of infantile fancy. Rather, it happens sensorily (*hissan*) and corporeally (*jisman*), ‘by virtue of a divine faculty (*qudra ilāhiyya*) that God creates in whomsoever He wishes’ (vol. 2, p. 323; see also vol. 5, p. 490). According to an extended version of the ‘Alī tradition transmitted by Abū Nu‘aym al-Isfahānī, when the market-goers enter the image they have chosen, ‘they meet the houris, singing in a way that no creature has ever witnessed before: “We are the eternal ones, imperishable! We are the happy ones, unperturbed! We are the content ones, never displeased! Blessed are those that belong to us, and we belong to them!”’ (Abū Nu‘aym 1415/1995, pp. 254–255; see also al-Suyūfī 1416/1996, p. 582; al-Baḥrānī 1430/2009, vol. 3, p. 185). This elaboration of the ‘Alī tradition connects it to the well-known motif of the courtesans of the Muslim paradise, the aforementioned houris, female attendants in the eternal garden, there to ensure the immediate gratification of the sexual and other desires of the garden’s male inhabitants. What characterizes the houris in the Hadith about the market in paradise, as well as other paradise narratives, is their immaculateness and total availability: there are large quantities of them, growing on trees, from which they are plucked like ripe fruit; they rain down from a cloud whenever the desire of the inhabitants of paradise is aroused, and they are recursively virginal (see Lange 2016a, pp. 142–143).

Most versions of the ‘Alī tradition, however, understand the act of entering the images in a less explicitly sexual way, stressing instead that those beholding the images are themselves aesthetically enhanced. As mentioned above, this aligns with the Anas and Abū Hurayra traditions. In the former, a gentle northern wind increases the market-goers’ physical beauty, while in the latter, by rubbing shoulders with the inhabitants of the Lofty Mansions, the visitors of the paradisiacal market miraculously assimilate, by a process of osmosis, some of the features of their more exalted neighbors. The transformation they undergo in the ‘Alī tradition, however, is of a different kind: it requires an act of penetration, and it happens because of the shoppers’ own deliberate choice.

What kind of transformation is this? Al-Munāwī argues that the market-goers do not change in their essence (*dhāt*), that is, their bodies, but merely in their attributes (*ṣifāt*), that is, their outer appearance, such as their clothing (1415/1994, vol. 10, p. 312). It is undoubtedly possible to understand the ‘Alī tradition in this way, but some extended versions suggest that many thought not of make-up but actual shape-shifting. In one version of the narrative, a man returning to meet his wife and explaining to her his enhanced status says:

In it [the market in paradise], God has made beautiful images available for us, and we were transformed into those that we chose for ourselves, so I chose the image in which I now appear to you—what do you think?

(*Ibn Ḥabīb 1427/2006, p. 56*)

The wife’s reaction, needless to say, is enthusiastic. ‘All those who like a certain image,’ we read in another narrative elaboration of the ‘Alī tradition, ‘simply look at it, and the image then stays with them, features, adornments, beauty and all, until, by the power of God, it fades’ (Anon. 1418/1998, p. 90). Even more fantastically, as the happy shoppers continue to look around, they discover wings on display in the market, the angels encouraging them

to put them on. ‘And so they put them on, and their wings carry them through the air to travel wherever they want’ (ibid.). In the market in paradise, the blessed are not merely provided material luxuries; they acquire the power to take on new, doctored bodies and thus optimize their selves.

Conclusion

The small but remarkable group of narratives about the market in paradise showcases some of the core features of the traditional, Hadith-based Muslim view of paradise. Joys of a more spiritual kind – music and the beatific vision in particular – and bodily pleasures are seamlessly intermeshed; consumption is limitless and unending; self-sufficiency and creative agency are spectacularly amplified; and gratification is always immediate and all-encompassing. But, of course, not all Muslim eschatological thought conforms to this pattern. In Islamic religious history, thinkers inspired by Neoplatonic ideas – whether philosophers or mystics – preferred to define paradise in terms of a spiritual resurrection and a disembodied afterlife, and pious authors with a penchant for asceticism, though not completely rejecting the idea of a paradise of the senses, felt uncomfortable with the blatant materialism of traditional eschatology and tried to sideline it in their writings (see Lange 2016a). As explored in this chapter, this split in attitudes also runs through the texts about the market in paradise. While some Hadith compilers and commentators seem to welcome and celebrate the prospect of otherworldly shopping, sober-minded authors either only pay lip service to the market in paradise or choose to ignore it altogether.

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, the influential Saudi scholar Ibn Bāz was vociferously opposed to the effigies (*ṣuwar*) of women that were on display on the Medina market around the middle of the 1960s. Unfortunately, what he thought about the market in paradise cannot be known for sure, although it seems safe to say that the idea did not particularly impress him. In a lecture on *The Gardens of the Righteous* of al-Nawawī, available as an audio file on the internet (as well as on YouTube and Twitter), he briefly discusses the Anas tradition, confirming that the beauty (*ḥusn*) and the sweet smell (*ītib*) of the inhabitants of paradise increase (Ibn Bāz n.d.). But he does not dwell on the market motif, nor does he refer to the Abū Hurayra tradition or the ‘Alī tradition.

The images of houris available on the market in paradise and the *ṣuwar* in the Medina market, ‘inflated to take on the shape of a large and ripe woman,’ bear an uncanny resemblance, echoing each other with their siren song: ‘We are the content ones, never displeased! Blessed are those that belong to us, and we belong to them!’ Both, I argue, betoken a consumerist utopia. This is a utopia vigorously promoted by governments and corporations in the Gulf region and the wider Middle East today. In the mid-1960s, Ibn Bāz could not have foreseen the building boom on the Arabian Peninsula starting in the 1970s, nor could he have predicted the proliferation of shopping malls in the region, with their dazzling promises of boundless consumption (see Azaza 2006, pp. 31–38). In the early twenty-first century, shopping malls in Dubai promoted themselves using concepts related to traditional Muslim eschatology, deploying the three key themes of unmeasurable size (malls as big as fifty football fields), magical realism (skiing in the desert), and total availability of goods and services (Kanna 2005, p. 67).

In his celebrated 1984 novel *Cities of Salt*, Abdelrahman Munif decried the twentieth-century transformation of Arabian oases into cities ‘of glass, iron and stone’ for leading to the loss of a pristine past and thus sparking a profound alienation. The consumption-driven

ethos of places like Dubai, Qatar, or Riyadh, however, is more convincingly analyzed in terms of a ‘culturally absorbed’ and fully validated form of ‘utopian thinking’ (Kanna 2005, p. 60). As Anette Baldauf aptly puts it, ‘Dubai’s shopping spaces satisfy... the shopper’s desire to escape... to an imaginary elsewhere’ (2008, p. 227). In Ahmed Kanna’s words, ‘the giant complexes of Dubai suggest a [...] definition of the human subject [...] that ideally finds holistic fulfilment in the act of consumption’ (2005, p. 71). In the shopping malls of the Gulf region, just like in the market in paradise, those happy enough to be allowed entry are encouraged to shop themselves into being.

Those intending to disrupt this late-capitalist, consumerist utopia run the danger of being ostracized. Ibn Bāz’s critique of the mannequins on the Medina market and ‘Umar Sulaymān al-Ashqar’s deportation from Saudi Arabia presaged things to come. Today, militant Islamists like the East African al-Shabaab deliberately target ‘Western’ shopping malls, thereby squarely placing themselves outside of the social status quo. By contrast, religiously inspired writers who seek to remain contributors to the societies they live in are forced to articulate anti-consumerist sentiments with a level of restraint, regardless of whether their aim is to criticize this-worldly or otherworldly consumerism. An example is Māhir Aḥmad al-Ṣūfī, a scholar based in the United Arab Emirates who produced a 10-volume *Encyclopedia of the Afterworld (Mawsū‘at al-ākhirā)*, a compilation of Hadiths arranged in chapters, each of which contains a brief introduction. In the chapter on the ‘markets of paradise,’ al-Ṣūfī relates the Anas and Abū Hurayra traditions, but a large part of the latter (the part about what happens in the market) is missing, with al-Ṣūfī conveniently noting that ‘the Hadith here continues with the words and the meaning [found in al-Tirmidhī]’ (1429/2008, vol. 10, p. 216). Al-Ṣūfī further chooses to omit the ‘Alī tradition altogether, even though the work of al-Tirmidhī, in which the ‘Alī tradition is recorded, is duly listed by al-Ṣūfī as one of the sources of his *Encyclopedia*. Also, in the introduction to the chapter, al-Ṣūfī states that the ‘markets’ in paradise are simply ‘places’ (*amākin*) where the inhabitants of paradise meet each other to reminisce about their lives on earth and to praise God (1429/2008, vol. 10, p. 215).

After his ban from Saudi Arabia, al-Ashqar spent the remainder of his life in Kuwait and Jordan, teaching Islamic law and publishing widely on a variety of topics to promote his brand of middle-of-the-road Salafism (Wagemakers 2020). Among his publications is an extensive compilation of eschatological Hadiths (Lange 2016b), in which he relates the Anas tradition, again to the exclusion not only of the ‘Alī tradition, but also of the Abū Hurayra tradition. Al-Ashqar’s dislike of interpretation is tangible throughout his writings, and one might therefore expect him simply to accept the common meaning of the word *sūq* as ‘market,’ just like most classical authors but also most modern ones do (e.g., al-Albānī 2000, vol. 3, p. 269). However, al-Ashqar quotes al-Nawawī to the effect that the word *sūq* merely refers to a gathering of people, not an actual marketplace (1991, vol. 3, p. 241). The blessed in paradise, as al-Ashqar is keen to underline, enjoy each other’s and God’s company, but they do not care about what is on sale in the market. Whatever one may think of the kind of piety promoted by al-Ashqar, there is something quixotic and oddly passé about this stance. Al-Ashqar’s voice is that of the prophet crying out, not in the desert, but in the shopping mall.

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6

THE ABBASID CAPITAL BAGHDAD AS A BOOM TOWN, TRADE HUB, AND STAGE OF CONSUMPTION

Isabel Toral

At the end of the ninth century CE, the historian and geographer al-Ya‘qūbī (d. ca. 896) began his *Book on the Countries* (*Kitāb al-Buldān*) with the following words:

I have begun with Iraq because it is the center of the world, the navel of the earth; and I report about Baghdad because it is the center of Iraq and the greatest city, one which has no peer in the east or the west of the earth in size, importance, prosperity, abundance of waters, and salubrious climate, and because it is inhabited by all varieties of mankind and urban and rural folk who have immigrated to it from all countries near and far. People from the remotest parts of the world have preferred it to their homelands; people from every country have residential quarters there and places for trade and for business. What can be found together in no other city in the world comes together there. The two great rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates, flow along its borders, so that goods and provisions come to it by land and by water with such ease that every object of trade which can be exported from the east or the west, whether from Islamic or non-Islamic lands, makes its way there. So many goods are imported to it from India, Sind, China, Tibet, the country of the Turks, Daylam, the country of the Khazars, Ethiopia, and other countries that there may be more of a commodity there than in the country from which it was exported. Indeed, so much can be found and obtained there that it is as if earth’s bounties had been conveyed there, the world’s riches amassed there, and the blessings of the universe perfected there.¹

As this passage shows, Abbasid (the caliphal dynasty that reigned from 750 to 1258) Baghdad was perceived as a city of superlatives in the late ninth century. The stupendous abundance of its resources and riches, its amazing spatial centrality (which connected the city to a global network of commercial routes), its relatively moderate climate,² and the brilliancy and multiethnicity of its inhabitants were recurring themes in the descriptions of the city. Yet, even considering that many of these reports are colored by nostalgic back-projections and the distorting topoi of an Abbasid ‘Golden Age,’³ everything indicates that Baghdad in its heyday was indeed a vibrant cosmopolis of around 50 sq km that probably housed more than one million inhabitants,⁴ thus making one of the greatest conurbations worldwide of

its time. All these people ate, drank, consumed, produced, commercialized, and demanded commodities. Baghdad was, in sum, a thriving node of long-, middle-, and short-distance trade, an enormous marketplace, and a consumption hub. Furthermore, it was the seat of the dynasty of the Abbasids that reigned over far-reaching dominions, including parts of North Africa, Egypt, the complete Fertile Crescent, Arabia, Iran, modern Uzbekistan, and Pakistan, and the ruler himself was identified by Muslims as the caliph, God's viceregent on earth.

Building the Capital

Such accounts point to an enormous amassment of power, material, and human resources in the capital, which required a well-functioning infrastructure and a productive agrarian hinterland. It also shows that at the beginning (eighth to tenth centuries), the Abbasid state machinery functioned effectively so that the surplus of the massive tax revenues of the Empire⁵ actually reached its center and got redistributed by the state through the payment of wages, stipends, and the acquisition of all kinds of goods. As Hugh Kennedy has shown in various studies, the bureaucracy of the Abbasid state worked amazingly well at that time.⁶

One indirect indicator of the importance of state administration in Baghdad can be found in the many texts that emphasize the rise of an elite consciousness and arrogance in the social class of the *kuttāb* (secretaries) of Persian background, who in many ways continued the local bureaucratic tradition inherited from the Sasanian Empire. They contributed significantly to the configuration of *adab*⁷ as an education ideal and habitus of the new civilized (Baghdadian) man, a model for any cultivated and fashionable person in the Islamic world of the time.⁸ An *adīb* (a man who professed *adab*) was also admired for his elegant attire and luxurious *savoir-vivre*. For example, when the famous singer Ziryāb (ninth century) from Baghdad arrived in provincial Muslim Andalusia, he became a much-celebrated *arbiter elegantiae* and major trendsetter. He introduced Andalusia to new musical instruments, sophisticated dishes, and lavish textiles, like precious silk types and brocade.⁹ Attracted by these fabulous opportunities and this fashionable lifestyle, talented men from the provinces, as well as new Muslims of diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds, came to pursue a career as a bureaucrat in Baghdad. A man like Sahl b. Hārūn (d. 830) is typical in this regard. A Basran of Persian origin, he served successfully under various ministers of Persian ethnicity, who protected people of their background and brought them to Baghdad. He became a secretary of Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd's vizier Yaḥyā b. Khālīd al-Barmakī (from a family of Bukhārā in Central Asia, former Buddhists, executed in 803). He survived the fall of his patrons and served under the vizier of Caliph al-Amīn (r. 809–813).¹⁰ Under Caliph al-Ma'mūn (r. 813–833), he became director of the *Bayt al-ḥikma* (House of Wisdom), the renowned royal library that stored Arabic and Persian books.¹¹ Besides his administrative duties, he became a famous writer and master of elegant Arabic.

Another good indicator of the general prosperity of the city is that the sources continuously mention building activities. They frequently refer to luxurious palaces and gardens commissioned by members of the dynasty.¹² Almost all caliphs built their own palatial centers when they seized power and constructed residences for the princes and other members of the dynasty. Al-Manṣūr built Madīnat al-Salām and the palace al-Khuld; al-Mahdī completed 'Askar al-Mahdī in eastern Baghdad; al-Rashīd initiated the palatial city of al-Mubārak; al-Musta'īn had a share in building the wall around Baghdad; al-Mu'taḍid

started building the Dār al-Khilāfa (a compound of various palaces and luxurious residences) in eastern Baghdad, and al-Muktafi completed the Dār al-Khilāfa.¹³

The caliphal elite tried to imitate the court in all aspects, investing in projects that attempted to compete with the rulers' premises and were usually constructed close to the caliphs' palaces. First and foremost, powerful viziers and commanders in chief (*amirs*), such as Hārūn's vizier Yaḥyā al-Barmakī (d. 806), the eunuch and commander Mu'nis al-Muzaffar (d. 933), and the Seljuq vizier Niẓām al-Mulk (d. 1092), owned palaces as places of conspicuous consumption in eastern Baghdad, sometimes even at the riverbank, and further initiated building projects of their own. The presence of these wealthy classes further stimulated the urban economy: new markets developed, for instance, for exotic or luxury goods, such as ceramics, spices, textiles, and rugs, which were brought to Baghdad through long-distance trade by land, sea, and river. Luxury slaves (especially females expensively trained as singers and dancers, who were sold for high prices),¹⁴ as well as domestiques and eunuchs for the harems, were also in high demand and brought from areas as far as North Africa, Central Asia, and the Caucasus (since the enslavement of Muslims was not permitted, slaves had to be obtained from distant regions beyond the borders of the caliphate).¹⁵ Importing these goods and slaves from far-off lands required high investment and sophisticated credit systems. Thus, a regular banking sector emerged.¹⁶ In addition, the sources mention the construction of public buildings (e.g., mosques and markets), new neighborhoods, and significant state investment in infrastructure (canals, walls, harbors, etc.). Caliph al-Manṣūr especially is said to have initiated large infrastructural projects, such as new streets, bridges over the Tigris and various canals,¹⁷ the construction of market stands, and a cemetery.

According to these accounts, construction sites must have dominated the city landscape. These activities required the acquisition of vast amounts of building material (sun-dried and baked mud bricks, wood, iron, etc.) and attracted a massive labor force (artisans, engineers, construction entrepreneurs, etc.) from the wider area and, in consequence, led to a rapid increase in the population (who also needed housing, foodstuffs, water supply, etc.), and thus led to a growth of the public demand for commodities. Al-Ya'qūbī, for instance, talks about the construction of al-Manṣūr's palatial city:

Then he [the caliph] directed that engineers and experts in construction, surveying, and the division of plots be assembled, until he had laid out his city, known as the City of Abū Ja'far. He assembled architects, workmen, carpenters, blacksmiths, and excavators, and when enough of them had gathered, he assigned them wages and provisions. He wrote to every country to send whoever was there who understood anything about construction, and 100,000 skilled workers and craftsmen of various kinds came. A number of authorities have reported that Abū Ja'far al-Manṣūr did not commence construction until he had 100,000 skilled workers and laborers.¹⁸

Since these employees were paid in cash, their hiring facilitated the monetization of the economy and gave a further stimulus to local production. As a result, Baghdad became a veritable 'booming city' and a global economic hub that attracted fortune-seekers from all over the place. For instance, the fast growth of the neighborhoods in the south of the Madīnat al-Salām was first due to the settling of the many people employed in constructing the Round palatial city (the palatial city built by caliph al-Manṣūr 762 in a round shape), and these areas soon became densely populated and crowded with small markets, water system

of their own, mosques, etc. Although the ‘small people’ of Baghdad do not frequently appear in our historiographical sources, which almost exclusively focus on the elite, they formed the vast majority of the population. As it is today in luxury areas with elaborate service economies, boys selling water, cooks, bakers, barbers, grocers, butchers, tailors, shoemakers, coppersmiths, tanners, paper mill workers, harbor workers, and members of many more professions had settled in Baghdad and made up a great portion of the non-elite segment of its society. One of the few insights into the everyday life of the average Baghdadian is the biography of the Hadith scholar Ibn Ḥanbal¹⁹ who spent his life among artisans and small shopkeepers. This is not to forget those workers employed in the official *ṭirāz* workshops, i.e., in places where expensive textiles were produced for the caliphal court, and the many copyists and calligraphers producing luxurious manuscripts for the court.²⁰ The rapid growth of Baghdad also led to the emergence of a Medieval urban underworld of burglars, beggars, and prostitutes, as is partly reflected in literary sources.²¹

The passage mentioned above by al-Ya‘qūbī highlights another aspect: political agency in urban development. The imperial city of Baghdad, founded in 762, was not spontaneously grown but the result of a deliberate choice taken by the Abbasid authorities, who intended to transform this city into a symbol of their newly acquired power that expressed the divine providence of the dynasty and the beginning of a new age. Before this, the location had some smaller settlements and a market but no city. Although one should not take the reports that say Caliph al-Manṣūr personally chose the site at face value, as it was more likely a decision of the representatives of the dynasty, they promoted the dissemination of foundation legends to underpin this idea.²² The Abbasid dynasty remained tied to the city’s up and downs until 1258 when the Mongols conquered Baghdad and ousted the Abbasids. The location must have been well thought out, and the founders must have been considering economic factors since the new city was not only perfectly connected – near to the northern canal system between Tigris and Euphrates in Central Mesopotamia, where both rivers come the closest – but also near to a fertile agricultural zone in the North East (the Diyāla plains), which could nurture the rapidly growing city population.²³ In one account of the foundation, al-Manṣūr is said to have remarked that

Here is the Tigris with nothing between us and China, so everything which comes by sea can reach us by the river, as can the provisions from the Jazīra, Armenia and the surrounding areas. And there is the Euphrates on which everything from Syria, Raqqa and the surrounding areas may come.²⁴

For this reason, the city was part of both river systems and the network of the trade routes leading to them. Commodities from the Mediterranean area and Byzantium could reach it via Syria and the Euphrates, Armenian and Iranian goods via the northern Tigris, and Indian goods via the Tigris and Basra. The trade with China tended to take the sea route (from Canton to Baghdad via Basra), particularly for silk and ceramics; the Chinese imported food, wine, fragrances, aromatics, drugs, and female dancers. Communities of Arab and Iranian merchants in Chinese port cities like Guangzhou/Canton attest to the regularity of these mutual relations.²⁵

It is difficult to evaluate how much of the economic growth was the direct result of a deliberate political strategy or the indirect side-effect of caliphal building activities and investments, the attraction of well-paid administrative personnel, and the general amassment of tax revenues. The case of Umayyad Basra evidences how systematic policies from the

state (special tax exemptions) could be undertaken to attract investment in infrastructure.²⁶ However, many of the policies of the caliphs failed – first of all, al-Mansur’s Round City itself, which was soon abandoned, primarily because of security concerns, but also because it was not viable as a city (problems in the water supply). Another continuous source of problems was the strong presence of the military (Iranian soldiers, Turkish freemen, and slaves in the service of the caliph) and urban militias, which did not match well with the population and provoked many conflicts. This was the main reason the capital was temporarily relocated to Samarra in 836, but the strategy was unsuccessful, and the caliphs returned to Baghdad in 892. Despite these tensions, the maintenance of vast numbers of highly armed military men (many paid in cash) in the city would also have been an important economic factor.²⁷

Manuscript Culture and the Surge of a Book Market

Booming Baghdad had become a ‘place to go’ for ambitious and talented people of all kinds. This also included those who were connected with the production of cultural and intellectual goods, or ‘cultural agents,’ such as poets, prose litterateurs, scholars in all branches of the Islamic sciences (e.g., Quran, the prophetic tradition [*hadith*], Sunni and Shii jurisprudence, Quranic exegesis, theology), natural scientists, physicians, philosophers, historians, translators, and many other intellectual professions. The intellectual activities underwent processes of increasing systematization, institutionalization, and professionalization from the ninth century onward, which affected and improved the social status of the cultural agents involved.

Since most of them were also producers of texts, it comes as no surprise that they are remarkably present in our sources. They moved to Baghdad to seek patronage by the elite – the traditional path to a career – or to make a living on the many opportunities the new city offered them. Patronage was a key factor of intellectual history in the early centuries of Islam since rulers and ministers surrounded themselves with experts in various fields of knowledge to enjoy their services and gain prestige by sponsoring and interacting with them. But there were other ways of making a living in boom-town Baghdad.²⁸ One possibility was to work as a tutor to the children of the powerful, which gave them the opportunity to shape the minds of the elite and promote their own intellectual production.

For instance, the talented al-Jāhīz (d. 868) was a brilliant intellectual of humble origin who followed the path of political patronage. He climbed up the social ladder, caught the attention of courtly elites through his talent, and then made his career thanks to their protection. He was from Basra and was influenced by its intellectual milieu. In 815, he wrote an epistle on the imamate, with which he won the compliments of al-Ma’mūn, who invited him to Baghdad. Al-Jāhīz moved to the metropolis, where he earned his living as a scribe, teacher, chancellery assistant, and tutor, but he never abandoned his native Baṣra. He was patronized by diverse secretaries and served under several caliphs.

But this was not the only other career path for talented cultural agents. One of the most intriguing phenomena of the time was the emergence of one of the first book markets in history, which led to new occupations for intellectuals and the growth of a middle class of literate people seeking education.²⁹ One could now support oneself as a copyist, author, bookseller (*warrāq*), librarian, editor, publisher, or a combination of any of them. The self-supporting author and book entrepreneur were early phenomena and instrumental factors of Arabic book culture. Furthermore, mass production of books began to serve a

growing lay readership that demanded new genres, themes, and text types (e.g., anthologies, *ikhtiyārāt*) to be circulated, discussed, and quoted by literati. From the late ninth century onward, the production of books exploded, and the panorama of people engaged in philological activities increasingly diversified. This fostered the development of standards for manuscript production, reader-friendly layout, and controlled reproduction – things more commonly associated with the advent of book printing.

Moreover, it functioned as a market since the production responded to the demand of readers who were willing to pay for copies of these texts. Books (*kitāb*, pl. *kutub*) were handwritten codices that contained one text or a coherent collection of texts; increasingly, books tended to be connected to a certain title and author whose name authorized the text. Books came in a variety of compositional arrangements: pre-existing texts might be compiled into a book (*taṣnīf*) with a more or less thematic arrangement, or a book might be composed from scratch (*ta'liḥ*). Books that entered Arabic-Islamic culture through translation brought their own ordering systems with them.

The introduction of rag paper in the late eighth century set the necessary conditions for this development since it had cheapened the material base of book production.³⁰ Until then, it had been based on parchment bound in codices (expensively produced using animal skins) or papyrus rolls (only made in Egypt). Furthermore, paper was safer for recording documents because the ink seeped into its fibers and could not be erased. The increasing manufacture of cotton textiles in Baghdad – the cultivation and manufacturing of cotton, a crop of Indian origin, had expanded massively in this period³¹ – provided the raw material, the many canals, and the necessary water supply for the paper mills. However, without the numerous cultural agents in Baghdad who were producers and consumers willing to spend their money on intellectual production, this technical innovation would not have had the enormous impact it had. The relatively high literacy level in the Baghdadi population was another key factor, as well as the fact that the literate people wrote and read the same language: the normalized and prestigious 'Arabiyya, a language of religion, Empire, and poetry. The fact that the shared scholarly discourse and book culture was conducted in this formal Arabic meant acquisition and demonstration of competence in this language was a condition of entrée into the society of the educated elite in their time. Books were necessary to learn and practice 'Arabiyya, and the knowledge of 'Arabiyya led to an increased demand for books in this language.

One early focus of Arabic philological activities was the text of the Quran. Its codification, transmission, and interpretation were the focus of several disciplines that came to be known as the 'Quranic sciences' (*'ulūm al-qur'ān*). In addition, the study of grammar, lexicography, rhetoric, poetics, history, theology, and the classification and authentication of prophetic traditions were also broadly connected with religious concerns and the theme of many books (the disciplinary boundaries were blurred and their methodologies intertwined).

As a result, we have found a record of around 100 bookshops in Baghdad at the end of the ninth century, numerous paper mills at the shores of the canals, and a readership eager to consume the latest productions; and the related mass production of works to satisfy this demand. The independence from political patronage opened the space for a new type of cultural agent and a greater diversity of positions. For instance, the litterateur and historian Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr (d. 893) was one of those 'new men' who took advantage of the opportunities offered by the mentioned 'book revolution.'³² Born in Baghdad in 819 or 820 to a family of Persian origin, he started out as a teacher and eventually took up residence in the

Booksellers' Market in eastern Baghdad, where he became a very active copyist, compiler, and author. His wide circle of acquaintances helped him to obtain much of the information that went into his books, many of them anthologies. As the new cultural hub and central book market, Baghdad became the place where anthologists and philologists would meet colleagues, poets, and scholars to collect and trade material. Al-Jumāhī (d. 845), for instance, was the first Arabic philologist to classify poets chronologically in his anthology *Ṭabaqāt al-shu'arā'* (The Classes of the Poets) and was of Baṣran origin – he had received his education there. However, he traveled regularly to Baghdad, where he had contact with the most important scholars of his time. Another example can be found in the biography of arguably the greatest historian and polymath of the Abbasid period, the Iranian Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī (d. 923). After several decades of traveling and collecting knowledge, from 870 onward, he settled in eastern Baghdad, in the al-Shammāsiyya neighborhood, authoring many books and receiving scholars from the whole Islamic world so that he became a central intellectual figure in Baghdad for many years.

These intellectuals were also eager collectors of books. Muḥammad b. 'Umar al-Wāqidi (d. 822), born in Medina, was famous as an expert in early Islamic history, Hadith, and the emergent Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). After spending several years traveling, he finally moved to Baghdad in 796, where he was appointed as a judge and enjoyed the patronage of Hārūn al-Rashīd, the Barmakids, and later al-Ma'mūn. He is said to have left six hundred bookcases, each weighing as much as two men, and that he had two slave boys writing down his words day and night.³³ These numbers are almost certainly exaggerated but indicate the massive amount of written material already circulating in the early ninth century in Baghdad. In the late tenth century, this number exploded. Abū al-Faraj Muḥammad al-Warrāq al-Baghdādī, known as Ibn al-Nadīm (d.995), a bookseller like his father, authored the well-known *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, an 'Index' of Arabic books written in Arabic either by Arabs or by non-Arabs circulating at his time, which references approximately 10,000 books and 2,000 authors.

Conclusions

Similar stories like the one above about the boom in books and scholarly self-fashioning could be told about culinary culture, design and architecture, precious textiles and costumes, or varieties of entertainment. The caliph and the courtiers consumed conspicuously as a means of power display – as would those of the sultan courts in Cairo, Delhi, Granada, Isfahan, and many others who came after the boom in Baghdad – and this practice inspired the elites in their households and circles of clients and boon-companions. But on the contrary, the accumulation of wealth in the imperial capital enabled the growth of a middle class beyond the courtly elites who had the means to spend their money on luxury items and cultural goods.

Many religious scholars and pious men were critical of these developments and vituperated the greed and avarice of the inhabitants of Baghdad. They propagated an ideal of Muslim ascetic simplicity and usually maintained an attitude of distance toward the court and politics. However, this was more a matter of self-fashioning than of real detachment. Many of these same scholars enjoyed their patronage by the caliphs and owed their social position to caliphal protection and funding. Furthermore, they soon participated actively in the book market by producing books on religious disciplines. Ultimately, the power of the caliph and the source of his wealth also depended on the Islamic legitimation provided

by these scholars, who produced discourses on the caliphate as an Islamic institution and defended the position of Islam as the religion of the Empire.

Hence, the argument made in this chapter is that when it comes to exchanges between consumer culture and Islam, the heydays of vibrant court life should not only be examined but closely so, as they reveal precious insight into the historical background for many contemporary concerns.

Notes

- 1 Ya'qūbī (2018, pp. 66–67).
- 2 This appreciation might be surprising, but in comparison with other cities in Iraq, the historical climate in Baghdad, located in the northern part of the Babylonian canal system and near the Iranian plateau, was indeed relatively moderate. Actually, we know of several occasions in which the Tigris even froze. However, disastrous inundations were much more frequent. Cf. Toral and Scheiner (2022, pp. 20–21).
- 3 Cooperson (1996); Toral (2022b).
- 4 These numbers, of course, are estimative, due to the lack of reliable sources. The calculations range from 280.000 to 1,5 million inhabitants in the tenth century, and the surface ranges from 47 sq to 70sq. Cf. Bulliet (2022, p. 316).
- 5 For the situation of Baghdad as imperial capital and the network of trade routes, cf. Bulliet (2022, pp. 316–320); Kennedy (2011, pp. 181, 189–197).
- 6 Kennedy (2001, pp. 59–95).
- 7 The multifaceted term *adab* referred not only to an ideal of 'refinement, good manners, morals, decorum, decency, humaneness' but also to 'a broad knowledge in variegated disciplines,' as well as a literary genre that can best be translated with 'belles-lettres'. Cf. Bonebakker (2008).
- 8 Van Berkel (2022).
- 9 Reynolds (2008).
- 10 According to some sources, he was even present during the dramatic events of the Barmakids' execution. See Hamori (1994); Sourdel (1959, pp. 151–182).
- 11 For the *Bayt al-hikma*, see the critical assessment in Gutas (1998, pp. 53–60).
- 12 For these construction activities, cf. Scheiner (2022); O'Kane (2022).
- 13 Palatial complex on the eastern shore of the Tigris, where the caliphs had their residence from the late ninth to the thirteenth century. It eventually came to hold 23 palaces. Cf. Toral and Scheiner (2022, pp. 9–10).
- 14 According to Ibn al-Jawzi (2013 ch. 9, section 13). In the ninth century, a trained singer was worth up to 30,000 dinars and an untrained slave only twenty.
- 15 Eunuchs likewise had to be non-Muslims at the moment of castration. Bray (2004).
- 16 Walsmley (2000, p. 318).
- 17 Ahola and Osti, who reconstructed the topography of Baghdad in the early tenth century, remind us that not only did this network of canals increase, but also that some of the canals reverted to agricultural land over the centuries (Ahola and Osti 2023, p. 221; maps 1–3).
- 18 Ya'qūbī (2018, p. 71).
- 19 Ibn al-Jawzi (2013, passim).
- 20 O'Kane (2022).
- 21 Bosworth (1976).
- 22 Toral (2022a).
- 23 Adams (1965); Bulliet (2022).
- 24 Al-Ṭabarī and McAuliffe (1995, p. 238).
- 25 Schottenhammer (2022).
- 26 Verkinderen (2019).
- 27 Toral and Scheiner (2022, pp. 28–30).
- 28 The Islamic system of higher education, the *madrasa* institution, did not emerge until the eleventh century, so formalized teaching positions were not offered.

- 29 Gruendler, (2020) Toorawa (2005).
- 30 Whereas in China, paper was produced using wood bulb, Arabic paper was produced using recycled textiles, or rags. Bloom (2001).
- 31 Cotton cultivation spread from India to Iran and Iraq in this period. At the end of the ninth century and beginning of the tenth century, there were already cotton plantations in Upper Mesopotamia, Syria, and Palestine. Cf. Ashtor and İnalçık (2012).
- 32 Toorawa (2005).
- 33 Leder (2012).

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7

CARAVANSERAIS AND KHANS AS COMMERCIAL ARCHITECTURE

Accommodating Long-Distance Travelers in West Asia

Robin Wimmel

Preface

This chapter focuses on travel, trade, and commerce and provides an overview of buildings that formed architectural genres almost omnipresent in the trade networks of the Islamic world up to the early twentieth century. More precisely, it discusses buildings commonly termed ‘caravanserai,’ which served merchants for accommodation and business. Two genres differ by function and architectural appearance: those en route between cities and those in an urban setting. The terms ‘caravanserai’ and ‘khan’ or ‘han’ have been used synonymously in various languages (with indeterminable derivations) through the centuries. Both can likewise designate either an inn offering only accommodation at some halting place or an inner-city structure combining spaces for lodging with facilities for commerce and industry. To distinguish the two genres, it is increasingly common to use ‘caravanserai’ for the roadside inns and ‘khan’ for the buildings in cities. Caravanserais and khans are related to long-distance relationships, so this chapter considers some trade or caravan routes. The topic is vast, and many aspects can be treated here only in the most condensed way or even not at all.

Obscure Origins and Terminology

Muslim builders of lodgings for people on the move did not start from scratch regarding either concept or architecture. Facilities from the Old Iranian Achaemenid and the Roman Empire are commonly regarded as the caravanserais’ forerunners; however, the scarcity of built evidence that reached the modern age makes it hard to sketch anything like an architectural genealogy. This is also true of inns from the Byzantine era, which doubtlessly existed in parts of the Mediterranean that came under Islamic rule in the latter’s earliest phase.¹ In late antiquity, a facility termed ‘pandocheion’ served as an inn, though this name conveys nothing about its function, location, or shape. It could be any kind of hostel where

the guest had to pay, and it was found both in towns and on roadsides. The *pandocheion* was adopted in the western sphere of the early Muslim realm; simultaneously, the Greek word was probably transformed into the Arabic ‘*funduq*.’ There was also a functional shift, and *funduq* became more precisely the designation for inner-city hostels with a focus on lodging merchants combined with trade-connected fiscal control.² The Latin *fundicum* and Italian *fondaco* derive from *funduq*, which designated the inns of Christians in Muslim trading places; later, *fondaco* meant merchants’ inns in Christian commercial centers like Venice.³ At the same time, *funduq* also came into use to designate roadside inns.⁴ From the tenth century on, the term *han* or *khan* was apparently introduced (in written sources) to name inns in general, which implies that it was used synonymously with ‘*funduq*’ for roadside and urban inns alike.⁵ In the following centuries, *khan* prevailed, and *funduq* as a term for ‘inn’ fell into oblivion, except as a designation for urban khans in the Maghreb. The term ‘caravanserai,’ which came into use in the early Ottoman Empire, added to the terminological confusion. In one foundation deed, the same building could be titled both *han* and *kervansaray*.

In summary, time and location alone do not pin a specific term on a specific building.⁶ The difference between the two genres, caravanserai and urban khan, is evident in buildings that still exist or have been documented sufficiently to provide a conception of their architectural appearance. However, in early Muslim building activity, a structure’s function was frequently obscured by the equivocality in its design.⁷ As a rule of thumb, the most important intangible distinction is that caravanserais were charitable foundations (free of charge), whereas khans charged for accommodation, thereby generating revenues for foundations. Caravanserais are commonly described as constructed in chains, located at more or less regular intervals along one route. Yet, there were considerable gaps, and important routes like those in the desert connecting Iraq and Syria had no caravanserais at all.⁸

Caravanserais

One of the earliest known caravanserais is the so-called khan at the Umayyad palace complex of Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi in the Syrian desert, dated by inscription to 109 AH (727 CE). An excavation of its foundations provided a layout of an almost-square courtyard structure of circa 55 meters on each side. The courtyard was closed on three sides by oblong halls; on the fourth side, smaller spaces flanked the single gate. An open gallery clearly surrounded the courtyard. One of the two annexes on the side with the gate had a *mihrab*, indicating its use as a prayer room.⁹ The main halls supposedly served the shared accommodation of humans and animals, which was the main point of all caravanserais. Serving as beasts of burden were various breeds of camels, horses, mules, and donkeys. The size and composition of caravans depended on many factors; for example, approximately 500 animals might have been the average, but on the more important routes, 1,000–2,000 (or more) formed merchant caravans. These figures make it clear that it was impossible to quarter even medium-sized caravans inside a single caravanserai.¹⁰

In the following centuries, at least up to the thirteenth century, examples of caravanserai-like structures are hard to find, except in Iran and Central Asia.¹¹ From then on, various branches of the building genre caravanserai appeared, though in uneven chronological and spatial density patterns. The appearance of significant variations of architectural features can be (roughly) attributed to different dynastic-territorial contexts. In Iran, ingenious

large-scale constructions were commissioned well into the nineteenth century, albeit at the behest of the respective powers of the time.

Iran

The concept of the caravanserai may have originated in what is today's Iran, along with neighboring Mesopotamia in the west and Khorasan in the east. These regions were transit lands on the Silk Roads, which may have been one of several reasons for establishing a system of stations situated ideally at intervals of one day's travel. Achaemenid establishments from the fifth century BCE have been cited as an archetype of structures for safety and shelter along the roads.¹² However, architectural evidence from pre-Islamic times attributable to caravanserais is scarce.¹³

One of the few known buildings that could have served as a caravanserai before Islamic founders entered the scene is Dayr-e Gachin, a huge structure on the ancient route from Ray to Qom in north-central Iran.¹⁴ The layout is similar to many later Iranian caravanserais: a square, walled enclosure with corner towers; a two-storied portal; a four-*iwan* scheme in the courtyard; 'Persian' arches spanning raised platforms in niches around the courtyard, behind each of which was a small space for accommodation; stable galleries with additional niches for accommodation between the outer wall and inner spaces; and in the corners, special units like an oratory and apartments for high-ranking travelers with their own miniature courtyards. However, this well-preserved building made of brick displays a succession of construction phases carried out over more than 1,500 years. The oldest part is the wall with towers dating to the Sasanian era in the third century CE. The four *iwans* (vaulted halls with an open front) and installations in the stable galleries are attributed to renovations by the Great Seljuks in the twelfth century; the smaller cells around the courtyard show Safavid features; and the bath in one corner section is the latest construction from Qajar times (nineteenth century). Most Iranian caravanserais use this courtyard type, which can also have a circular or octagonal layout. But two other important kinds of caravanserais exist whose architecture is strongly related to extreme climatic conditions. The mountain caravanserai is completely covered by a system of multiple domes, and in the hot and humid coastal Gulf region, pavilion-like structures with wall-less spaces open for ventilation prevail.¹⁵ The Iranian courtyard type had a strong influence on caravanserai architecture in Mughal India and Central Iraq.¹⁶ In India, the history and architectural heritage of the Great Trunk Road have drawn special scholarly attention.¹⁷ In Iraq, among other places, caravanserais for Shii pilgrimage to Kerbala and Najaf were built as late as the nineteenth century; however, traces of the once numerous stations today are scarce.¹⁸

The greatest number of caravanserais still in existence and affiliated with a dynastic context was probably built in Safavid Iran. To the present day, popular tradition attributes most caravanserais in Iran to Shah Abbas I (r. 1588–1629), who is said to have built 990, a number assessed as plausible by scholars.¹⁹ Safavid caravanserais furnished a dense network of roads that crisscrossed Iran and probably the main roads in the Safavid part of Afghanistan. Recent research analyzing satellite imagery has identified previously undocumented caravanserais on the direct route between Herat and Kabul, on the northern route Herat-Balkh-Kabul, and on the southern route Herat-Kandahar-Kabul. Of the 149 caravanserais that have been located, 81 show a standardized monumental plan assignable to the seventeenth century. These caravanserais have mostly been distinguished as affiliated

with Safavid foundations, but Mughal structures are also assumed, and cooperation between the two empires in supporting travel through Afghanistan is regarded as conceivable. One main conclusion from this evidence is that the imperial infrastructure testifies to substantial overland trade in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.²⁰ The special significance caravanserai construction had for the Safavids (and the Qajars) is mirrored by the existence of a state department assigned to this task.²¹ Besides the usual functions for trade in general, in addition to inner-Iranian Shii pilgrimage, caravanserais were designed to play a key role in the trade of Iranian silk, which Shah Abbas intended to control by circumventing the routes through Ottoman territories. He established a new center of silk production in New Julfa near his capital Isfahan, from whence he further developed roads to the Gulf (furnished with the coastal type of caravanserai) that featured the ports of the British East India Company. In the seventeenth century, Armenians came to dominate the production and export of Iranian silk after the Shah forced them to move from Julfa (on the Aras River in the northwest of the empire) to Isfahan.²² However, the Shah's project was not entirely successful, and Tabriz remained the prime source of Iranian silk brought by caravan to Ottoman trade centers such as Aleppo, Bursa, and Izmir (Smyrna) for further export to Europe.²³ This will be discussed further below.

Ayyubid and Mamluk Syria

In the Mediterranean region, a limited corpus of forms for caravanserais came into being in the twelfth to fifteenth centuries.²⁴ These structures, built entirely of stone, lined the main roads of Greater Syria, certainly to serve Muslim pilgrims but primarily to improve conditions for caravan trade. The oldest still-existing caravanserai is Khan al-Arus in the north of Damascus, identified by inscription as a *funduq* commissioned by Sultan Saladin, the first Ayyubid ruler, in the year 577 AH (1181–1182 CE).²⁵ In its dimensions and general layout, the building greatly resembles the aforementioned Umayyad caravanserai. However, there are no smaller rooms, only continuing spaces around the courtyard, interrupted by the gateway and, on the opposite side, by an *iwan*. A tower-like structure above the gate contains a single room with a slit on the floor for throwing or pouring something down on unwanted intruders.²⁶ Like all other Ayyubid and Mamluk caravanserais, no gallery resembling the Umayyad structure exists in the courtyard. In fact, galleries reemerged in Syria only in the sixteenth century at Ottoman caravanserais as arcades. In its relatively modest dimensions and design without distinct representative features like decoration, Khan al-Arus is typical of caravanserai architecture in this time and region.

Seljuk Anatolia

The caravanserais built in Anatolia under the Seljuks of Rum present a broad spectrum of designs and great architectural refinement. Sultans or highly positioned court members commissioned more than 250 in the short period from circa 1200 to 1275. More than 100 caravanserais still exist as ruins or (frequently) restorations.²⁷ They were built mainly along routes connecting Konya, the capital of the Sultanate of Rum, to the Black Sea ports Sinop and Samsun and the Mediterranean ports Antalya and Alanya. Other routes had an 'international' connection to Byzantine lands in the west and the main urban centers of Aleppo, Baghdad, and Tabriz in the east.²⁸ The Rum Seljuks maintained trade relations not only with neighboring states but also with the Italian maritime republics. Therefore, the

caravanserais presumably served primarily as inns for commercial caravans; seemingly, another important function was to provide the sultan and his retinue with appropriate shelter when traveling.²⁹ They varied considerably in dimensions and degrees of decoration. For instance, the famous ‘Sultan Hans’ are monumental structures with lavish stone decorations on the portals and other components. Especially elaborate *muqarnas* elements (‘stalactites’), a highly emblematic ornament of architecture from the Islamic world, vault the gates. The Seljuks used primarily two layouts. The simpler form is just a rectangular hall divided by massive piers into three or more naves. The more complex design has a hall and an annexed courtyard surrounded by closed and open vaults arranged side by side. One feature found especially in the Sultan Hans is that the central nave can be crowned by a dome on a drum, supported by pendentives or squinches. Besides this simplified typology, many buildings show an individual plan. What they all have in common is that they are built of stone and are sometimes partly brick, but timber is never used. This first caravan-serai architecture in Anatolia combined patterns mainly developed in Islamic lands farther east with local, notably Armenian, building traditions.

Ottoman Empire

Ottoman architecture as a whole is firmly situated within the arts of the Islamic world.³⁰ A somewhat stereotypical image of the ‘typical’ Ottoman mosque has been established, but a ‘typical’ Ottoman caravanserai can hardly be defined.³¹ In general, their often innovative architecture combines elements of imperial art, perfected in the sixteenth century by Mimar Sinan, head of the Royal Corps of Architects in Istanbul, with respective local traditions.³² Ottoman master builders created a genuinely original design for caravanserais, not affiliated with either Rum Seljuk’s or neighboring Iran’s architecture. Thus, and through their adherence to formal guidance provided by the empire’s central architectural office, all these caravanserais are identifiable as representative of the Ottoman state, notwithstanding their architectural heterogeneity. The caravanserai as a building genre was introduced to Europe by the Ottomans in the fourteenth century.³³ In the wake of their eastward expansion, the Ottomans constructed caravanserais throughout Anatolia and Greater Syria, but not in their Egyptian or Iraqi territories. Four main types can be identified: (1) an oblong hall with an entrance on the short side; (2) the same, but with an entrance on the long side; (3) the latter with an attached arcaded courtyard; and (4) a composition of two of the first type attached as wings to a central hall with a common entrance. Usually, the buildings possess some convenient guest rooms used exclusively by humans in addition to the main hall where the common travelers lodged side by side with their animals. Some exceptional cases are the Ottoman courtyard caravanserais, built only south of the Taurus Mountains in Syrian lands.³⁴ Besides considerable refinement of the room program, these caravanserais are the only ones in the whole genre featuring arcades in the proper sense around the courtyard. Literary and surviving physical evidence indicates that caravanserais had differing densities and levels of architectural effort. Most substantial building activity occurred in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; after circa 1700, the construction of caravanserais as large-scale foundations on long-distance roads became a rare exception.³⁵

Trade, pilgrimage, and administration – the usual reasons for traveling – made use of what can be described for simplicity’s sake as two three-branched road networks.³⁶ Starting from Istanbul, one opened up Anatolia, and the other, Rumelia (the Ottoman domains

on the Balkan Peninsula). The Anatolian Left Branch went to Tabriz in the Iranian lands; in the opposite direction, a link extended to Bursa, an important destination for silk from Iran. The Middle Branch took its course from Tokat, a major crossroad on the Left Branch, via Sivas, Diyarbakır, and Mosul to Baghdad. The Right Branch was the empire's main artery leading from Istanbul to Damascus via Konya, Adana, and Aleppo (alternatively via Antakya); many stretches followed the tracks of a Roman road. This route was of special significance as the main highway for pilgrims going to Damascus to join the big hajj caravan setting out for the Hejaz every year.³⁷ The Anatolian branches were linked to other major caravan routes such as Aleppo-Mosul via Urfa and Mardin, the desert routes Aleppo-Baghdad/Basra, and Aleppo-Tabriz/Isfahan via Urfa, Diyarbakır, and Bitlis. In the Rumelian system, the Left Branch went on a common track with the Middle Branch to Sili-vri on the Marmara Sea and from there through Thrace and the Macedonian mountains to Durrës on the Adriatic Sea. The Middle Branch followed mainly the course of the ancient Via Militaris ('Constantinople *Heerstrasse*') via Sofia to Belgrade. Up to Edirne, this Middle Branch was highly significant for the Ottoman court, which maintained close ties to the old capital even after Constantinople had become the sultan's official abode. The Right Branch ran parallel to the coast of the Black Sea until it split north of the Danube toward destinations in Poland and Crimea. The course of all these routes could vary, for instance, for security reasons or seasonal conditions. Multiple secondary routes certainly existed, which could have intermittently been highly frequented, depending on shifts in the destinations of caravan trade.

Judging by the distribution pattern, the Anatolian Right Branch and the Rumelian Middle Branch received the most attention from Ottoman caravanserai founders. These were sometimes the sultans themselves but were mostly holders of high offices like grand viziers and Ağas of the Harem, who ordered huge caravanserai complexes to be built. For the Anatolian part, with its Syrian extension, these facilities were primarily intended to serve Muslim pilgrims. To some degree, this was most likely the case in Rumelia as well, but this road had military significance and frequently served the European embassies to the Sublime Porte.³⁸ On other routes, only small structures were built – even on the Anatolian Left Branch, the most important one for trade – and some had no caravanserais at all.³⁹ That is not to say that large-scale caravanserais did not exist off the main roads. Indeed, some most impressive ones were placed alone on secondary routes.

Khans

The urban khan as an institution can be traced back to antiquity, but much obscurity persists concerning its architectural expression before the fourteenth century.⁴⁰ From this period, samples exist in Fes el-Bali, Granada, and Bursa. All have the same basic layout of a rectangular courtyard with rooms of the same moderate size behind an arcade or colonnade shared by all sides, which is repeated in one or more upper stories. The striking general similarity of urban khans, even from various periods and located far from each other, instantly becomes apparent by comparing their floor plans.⁴¹ This scheme supposedly came into being long before the first known samples. As an architectural tradition, it had been maintained until around 1900 when the last khans were built – not only in big trade centers but in many less famous ones as well.

Two monuments commissioned by one of the most notorious figures from Ottoman history, Kara Mustafa Pasha, can well illustrate the building genre of urban khans.

Kara Mustafa Pasha's Khan at Merzifon, Anatolia

Kara Mustafa Pasha made for himself a brilliant career under the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed IV, who appointed him as Grand Vizier in 1676.⁴² Already in 1670, in the rank of Third Vizier, he started a whole settlement at İncesu, located in Central Anatolia 30 km south of Kayseri.⁴³ It comprised a huge caravanserai and facilities for trade and commerce, religion, and education. With additional structures for manufacturing, civic infrastructure, and residential buildings, the complex also had the function of reestablishing security in a region depopulated by revolts and banditry.⁴⁴ However, İncesu marks the end of the era of great Ottoman caravanserais commissioned by the empire's elites. The shelters built along the roads in later centuries were, for the most part, relatively modest structures. Nonetheless, countless khans in towns throughout the empire were built up to the final years of Ottoman rule. Though İncesu seems to be the sole caravanserai among Kara Mustafa's vast foundations, he ordered khans to be built in many places from Izmir to Jeddah.⁴⁵

Kara Mustafa Pasha commissioned the Taşhan ('Stone' Khan) as, again, part of an extensive building complex but, this time, constructed in an existing town center. Replacing a decayed predecessor, it must have been erected in 1672–1673.⁴⁶ Like many other khans in Turkey, the Taşhan had been restored to become a 'Butik Otel' some years earlier. This urban khan and the surrounding buildings originally constituted the main commercial district, the bazaar. Kara Mustafa's foundation also comprises a mosque, numerous shops, and a *bedesten* (an Ottoman type of market hall, another building genre that was an integral component of many Ottoman cities). The *bedesten* served retail trade, the storage of precious commodities, and the deposit of documents of a certain value, but it provided no lodging.⁴⁷ In Merzifon, it exists in the most typical form of a *bedesten* as a 'fireproof' square hall made entirely of stone roofed by nine cupolas of the same size. Gates to be locked at night are on each side; the doorways interrupt a belt of shops girding the building.⁴⁸ The Taşhan is located vis-à-vis the *bedesten*. The layout is a quadrangle, but topographic factors probably caused its irregular shape. The building encircles a courtyard and has two and, in some parts, three stories. Godfrey Goodwin provides a description and estimation:

The han is reached from the north-east gate of the mosque courtyard down a flight of stairs which leads directly into the bazaar. The arched gateway of the han opens into a rectangular court which is flanked by the ground-floor rooms with open arched galleries above, off which are the cells for travellers. (...) The Taş Han is a good example of an architect striving towards change and also of excellent masonry.⁴⁹

The khan's first-ever use of three stories in Ottoman *han* architecture has special importance.⁵⁰ Also worth mentioning are the numerous shops under tall semicircular arches on all four sides, integrated into the layout but not attached as in the *bedesten*. The gate is just one more arch, accentuated by a bay on corbels projecting above. The construction materials are ashlar and brick; the roof consists of various vaults covered with tiles and cupolas with a lead layer.⁵¹ Besides the shops on the outside, the stable, and cells for lodging travelers on the upper floors, rooms for other commercial purposes certainly existed, mainly on the ground floor. The room program of a khan typically includes spaces for storing or manufacturing goods. This kind of building is often also a place for wholesale trade within a bazaar's economic fabric. However, the original functions here cannot be clearly determined because some parts have been changed.⁵²

Business in the khan may have had to do with cotton, an important factor in the city's economy. Cotton was cultivated and manufactured in western and southern Anatolia, northern Syria, and Cyprus, and it was further processed in northern Anatolia.⁵³ Evliya Çelebi reports in the mid-seventeenth century on Merzifon's textile industry, which was famous for its dyed products.⁵⁴ He mentions the many dyers and the beautiful colors they use, especially blue and pink. Merchants brought vast quantities of pink cloth to Crimea every year, where it was swapped for slaves.⁵⁵ Textiles traded in Merzifon comprised Crimean folk cloaks and garments (maybe also for export), pink thread, cotton mattresses, colorful cotton cushions, printed muslins, delicate chintz quilts, women's outdoor overgarments, and veils.⁵⁶ The Taşhan might well have been involved in wholesale trade in cotton products. The Taşhan could also have been a place for trade in dyes, which often came from lands outside the Ottoman sphere but were needed in the local industry.⁵⁷ Although located in a provincial town of moderate size, it was without a doubt integrated into a trading system and road network not only serving local demands but also operating on an interregional or even international level.⁵⁸ Merzifon's merchants traveled by caravan to the port cities of Samsun and Sinop on the Black Sea and even further by ship to the Crimean Khanate. However, the main link with other commercial sub-centers and the major hubs of long-distance trade was the position on the Anatolian Left Branch.

İncesu was located (one stage from Kayseri) on a critical secondary route linking the Anatolian Left Branch with the Right Branch. It is conceivable that the caravanserai served as a stopover for northbound cotton caravans from the south, maybe even on their way to Merzifon. The Right Branch was met at Ulukışla, another huge halting place complex with a large caravanserai built in 1615–1616. From here southward, the Taurus Mountains were crossed via the Cilician Gates, which were one of the most important defiles since antiquity. A few stages after Adana, the Mediterranean was reached. Here, at Alexandrette (İskenderun), the Europeans established the port of Aleppo in the sixteenth century.⁵⁹ From the nearby halting place complex in Payas with its arcaded courtyard caravanserai, designed by the famous architect Sinan and erected in 1573, it took about four days to reach Aleppo.⁶⁰

Kara Mustafa Pasha's Khan at Aleppo

Aleppo, already economically important for a very long time, became a superregional commercial center in Islamic times under Mamluk sovereignty. However, evidence of the presence of the urban khan in Aleppo (or elsewhere in Syria) exists only from the end of the Mamluk period, just before the Ottoman conquest in 1516.⁶¹ When the Ottomans extended their control over the former Mamluk Empire with territories in Egypt and Syria, Aleppo experienced a decisive impetus for commerce, thriving in the context of belonging to a world power. Under Ottoman rule, Aleppo's capacity for long-distance trade quickly doubled.⁶² Between 1522 and 1556, approximately 25 khans were constructed in the central district;⁶³ 53 is the number given of the 'caravanserais' built there in the later sixteenth century.⁶⁴ In fact, the city's shape was Ottomanized by an architectural design developed by Mimar Sinan and his office.⁶⁵

Against this backdrop, the construction of Kara Mustafa's Khan al-Wazir around 1680 seems to be a rather late date.⁶⁶ It is located on the immediate periphery of the bazaar at the western foot of the citadel's mesa. The khan was systematically surveyed in 1912 by the architect Karl Müller, the author of the first monograph on caravanserais, published in

1920. Müller collected extensive material, especially on roadside inns not only in Iraq, but also in the Jazira and elsewhere from 1909 to 1914.⁶⁷ He drew a plan of the ground floor of the Chan al-Wesir, took photos, and gave this description:

Similar⁶⁸ in the layout but considerably more monumental is the Chan al Wesir in Aleppo, standing free with three sides and being attached to a neighbor lot on the fourth. On three sides, the plan is quite regular with rectangular rooms, while on the fourth side, the rooms squeeze obliquely. Chan al Wesir does not contain any of the usual shops open to the street; also the portal, which surpasses the building somewhat in height, does not project from the frontage. From the gate, where deep niches are located, two stairways lead to the upper floor. Around the courtyard, designed in an irregular quadrangle, two rows of rooms lie back-to-back on the northwest and south side, of which frequently two or even three backrooms are united with the double-sized front room to a group. [...] On the upper floor, arcades with Persian ogee arches flank the courtyard on three sides. The arches rest in the western half on light columns, whereas they are supported by massive pillars in the eastern half.⁶⁹

When Müller called the khan ‘monumental,’ he not only meant its size but also had the overall architectural appearance in mind, especially the portal structure. The part of the facade with the gate is emphasized by increased height and various means of elaborate decoration. Besides the striking effect of the stripped masonry made of black and light stone, so-called *ablaq*, many delicately carved elements embellish the portal and adjoining facade. This kind of representative design is repeated with even more effort in the courtyard, which is quite unusual.⁷⁰ Originally, the khan was intended as a residence for traders from Iran (and maybe Baghdad). In fact, the government granted it a monopoly for housing merchants from the Safavid Empire.⁷¹ These merchants probably engaged in the trade of silk produced in northwestern Iran for export to Europe via Aleppo, a business that had been a domain of Armenians since the fifteenth century. Chiefly for fiscal and political reasons, they shifted the outlet partly to Izmir during the seventeenth century.⁷² Nevertheless, after a crisis caused by Shah Abbas’ policies of silk trade, Aleppo resumed its former role as the primary market for Iranian silk sold to European companies after the death of the Safavid ruler in 1629.⁷³ But this silk trade finally declined in eighteenth-century Aleppo – with consequences for the Khan al-Wazir. The number of merchants from Iran staying there had apparently become too low to keep its operation profitable.⁷⁴ No information seems to be available on the business or other purpose the khan later served. The fact is that the Khan al-Wazir remained more or less well-maintained and largely in its original shape until its users were forced to abandon it in the Syrian Civil War, which left the monument ravaged but not destroyed.⁷⁵ Most probably, the khan adapted successfully to trade functions that were not dependent on Europe-related business.

Concluding Remarks on Usage Patterns

This chapter sought to specify the meaning and shape of two trade-related architectural genres that may not have been invented in the Islamic world but were cultivated to new dimensions there. The chapter made a clear distinction between caravanseraï and khan, although, initially, both terms were used interchangeably. Their basic common feature, whether as a roadside inn or inner-city structure, was their function to accommodate the

traveler, but the khan had the additional function of hosting the buying and selling of merchandise. This difference became manifest in the architecture, which evolved largely independently. The khan was a much more crucial prerequisite for long-distance trade than the caravanserai, as merchant caravans did not depend on the presence of caravanserais.⁷⁶ The unequal significance obviously increased from the eighteenth century onward, when new caravanserais were rarely built, but the construction of khans continued. In the nineteenth century, a boom can even be observed in many cities engaged in the still-vibrant caravan trade. This overland trade laid the foundations for a finely spun network of relations going well beyond an exchange of commodities. Though it took place in lands under Islamic sovereignty, its protagonists came from diverse ethnicities and faiths, acting in a division of labor. Persevering for centuries despite perpetually shifting conditions, of which the new sea routes were a particular challenge, this inner-Asian trading system stretched from the Indian subcontinent to Europe's eastern border regions. Indeed, transit trade with Europe also used caravans, but the volume was inferior to that found in the final destinations in western Asia.

Generalizations can hardly be made, but to a certain degree, Ottoman Aleppo can represent the preponderance of this inner-Asian trade. Aleppo's economic significance in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was based on trade at the regional level, with more remote parts of the Ottoman Empire, Iran, and India. Serving not only customers like the court and the upper class in Istanbul, but also notables and the military in the provinces, the volume of trade exceeded the Iranian-European silk trade.⁷⁷ Strong Ottoman domestic trade – the cause, not the result of European presence in the city – continued through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to the beginning of the twentieth century.⁷⁸ It thrived through caravans coming to Aleppo from east and west on certain main tracks. From there, it spread on various routes to Anatolia, Iraq, southern Syria, and beyond to non-Ottoman lands.⁷⁹ Thus, as a distribution hub, Aleppo had far-reaching leverage over a network of commercial sub-centers whose economies also prospered from this caravan trade. Aleppo's influence was not restricted to the trade in commodities transported to other cities but also affected local infrastructure like mercantile practice and its architectural expression.⁸⁰

Examinations of sub-centers in Aleppo's vast hinterland show numerous still-existing khans, and even greater numbers are noted in secondary sources. In Gaziantep, 31 khans were counted in the late nineteenth century; 18 still exist. Five were built in the eighteenth, eight in the nineteenth, and three at the beginning of the twentieth century; some of the younger ones are very large. Armenians, in the past almost omnipresent as caravan traders, emerged in the nineteenth century as owners of khans, which traditionally had been revenue-generating components of Muslim foundations.⁸¹ In Urfa, the number of khans grew from seven in 1867 to 11 in 1891 and 32 in 1894; 11 still exist.⁸² A similar development took place in Tokat, where 15 khans were reported in 1827, 20 in 1883, and 26 in 1887;⁸³ six still exist.⁸⁴ For Mosul, the number of '23 hans ou hôtelleries' is given in 1891.⁸⁵ Karl Müller provided rare documentation of a khan in Mosul. Chan Hadschi Kasim Aga, also termed 'Chan al Pascha,' built in the early nineteenth century, was owned by a (probably Christian) dragoman and was 'typical for Mosul.'⁸⁶ These khans, whose list could be continued, certainly resulted from caravan trade in an inner-Asian context partly related to Aleppo. Despite their quantity and size, their often elaborate architecture bears testimony to vital commerce activities on a high level. A more comprehensive future study bringing together insights from recent research on individual buildings with a broader analysis of the whole genre of urban khan could test this assertion.

Notes

- 1 Hillenbrand 1994, pp. 334–336.
- 2 Constable 2003, pp. 6–7, 41, 58–64.
- 3 Constable 2003, pp. 109–110.
- 4 This is evident in the inscription of Khan al-Arus addressing the building as ‘funduq’ and giving the date 577 AH/1181–182, see p. 111.
- 5 Constable 2003, pp. 58–64. Constable states a basic functional difference between *funduq* and *khan*; however, even the cited sources evoke the impression that the contemporaries used the terms interchangeably, cf. Constable 2003, pp. 59–60. See also Scharabi 1985, p. 27.
- 6 On the complexity of terms, see Hillenbrand 1994, pp. 331–334.
- 7 Cf. Hillenbrand 1994, p. 334; Constable 2003, p. 55.
- 8 On the desert caravans, see Grant 1937, pp. 131–148; p. 136 describes the camp with tents.
- 9 Constable 2003, pp. 56–57, plan Figure 6; Hillenbrand 1994, p. 334.
- 10 On caravan travel, see Hillenbrand 1994, pp. 374–376.
- 11 Because of the limited scope, I do not refer to early Islamic buildings called ‘ribat.’ The meaning strongly depends on the context; frequently *ribat* with religious connotation is connected to fortified buildings in the borderlands of expanding Islam in Central Asia; see Chabbi and Rabbat 2012. For their intricate role in the history of caravanserai architecture, see Hillenbrand 1994, pp. 338–346.
- 12 For example Müller 1920, p. 5; Sims 1978, p. 98.
- 13 Cf. Hillenbrand 1994, pp. 334–336.
- 14 Shokoohy 1983, pp. 445–461.
- 15 Kleiss 1981, pp. 111–127. On Iranian caravanserais, see also Kleiss 1996, 1997, 1998, 2000a, 2000b, 2001 and Siroux 1949, 1971.
- 16 For an overview of Mughal caravanserais and a case study, see Campbell 2011.
- 17 Parihar 2008.
- 18 Sarre and Herzfeld 1920, p. 201. Some were documented by Karl Müller; I will come back to Müller below.
- 19 Kleiss and Kiani 1995, p. 775.
- 20 Franklin and Boak 2019. By this, the authors intend to further disprove the ‘Steensgaard thesis,’ maintaining that a mere peddling trade existed on the overland routes between Asia and the Near East, which was supplanted by the Dutch and English East India companies. This much-disputed thesis was established in Steensgaard 1974.
- 21 Kiani and Kleiss 1990.
- 22 Zarinebaf-Shahr 1991, pp. 151–152.
- 23 Zarinebaf-Shahr states that caravan trade between Tabriz and the Ottoman Empire did not significantly decrease before 1740, *ibid.*, pp. 156–158. In the seventeenth century, Armenians dominated this trade, previously controlled by Iranians, on the route Tabriz-Aleppo, *ibid.* p. 151.
- 24 Sauvaget 1939, 1940; Tavernari 2011.
- 25 Sauvaget 1939 pp. 50–52; Tavernari 2011, p. 165 and catalogue pp. 28–31.
- 26 Sauvaget calls the device *mâchicoulis*, and his restitution drawing adds crenulations to the flat roofs, Sauvaget 1939, p. 51.
- 27 Erdmann 1961 documents 100 buildings. Yavuz 1997, p. 80, gives the figures of about 200 known and 100 extant caravanserais. The carefully created website turkishhan.org states that approximately 170 are still standing.
- 28 Yavuz 1997, p. 80.
- 29 Yavuz 1997, p. 81.
- 30 Goodwin 1971, still in print, is the pioneering and most comprehensive work on the broad spectrum of genres of Ottoman architecture from the beginning well into the nineteenth century.
- 31 For an analysis and catalogue of existing buildings, see Wimmel 2016.
- 32 Necipoğlu 2005, esp. chapters 4, 5.
- 33 Probably with the Evrenos Bey Han near Alexandroupolis in Greece; see Wimmel 2019, p. 160, with further references.
- 34 On Ottoman caravanserais in Syria, see Wimmel 2021.

- 35 For example two courtyard caravanserais commissioned by the governor of Damascus in the mid-eighteenth century; see Wimmel 2021, pp. 224–226, Figures 12–15.
- 36 For an overview with further references, see Wimmel 2019, pp. 155–157, Figure 1. For more detail, see Wimmel 2016, pp. 39–58, 484–492, map 2.
- 37 Sauvaget 1937; Wimmel 2021, pp. 212–213.
- 38 On travel accounts from these missions, see Wimmel 2019, pp. 161–169, 192–193 and *passim*.
- 39 For example the route Izmir-Tokat, Wimmel 2016, p. 88.
- 40 See above ‘Terminology.’
- 41 See Scharabi 1985, pp. 67–73, compilation Figures 6 and 7 commented pp. 70–71, 205–220, and entries in catalogue. Though basically functioning as khans, Iranian *sarays* and the Cairene *wakala* show certain discrete features. The courtyards of *sarays* have facades typically ordered by niches and an *iwān* instead of arcades, *ibid.*, p. 219. In the *wakala*, ground floor and first floor are for trade and accommodation of merchants, added above are maisonnettes with tenements for locals (called *raba*), *ibid.*, pp. 217–218.
- 42 Heywood 2012. After his failed siege of Vienna 1683, he was strangled by order of the sultan, but the true reason certainly had much to do with conspiracy.
- 43 For an architectural analysis and historic context, see Denктаş 1997 and Wimmel 2016, pp. 397–426.
- 44 The so-called Celalî revolts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries with irregular militaries as the main actors; for the role of the complexes, see Denктаş 1997, p. 202. On Kara Mustafa and the Ottoman foundation system, see most recently Pantik 2021.
- 45 Pantik 2021, p. 42, lists ten cities.
- 46 Pantik 2021, pp. 122–23, with details on the title deed for the exchange of property dated 1671.
- 47 Scharabi 1979, p. 26, 61–64; Kreiser.
- 48 For details, see Çerkez 2005, pp. 157–165.
- 49 Goodwin 1971, p. 362 (abridged text).
- 50 Pantik 2021, p. 123.
- 51 For a very detailed description, see Çerkez 2005, pp. 123–156.
- 52 Çerkez 2005, p. 127.
- 53 Inalcik 1973, p. 130.
- 54 Evliya (born in 1611, died after 1683) traveled throughout the Ottoman Empire on semi-official mission and composed an extensive travelogue. In addition to descriptions of daily life, he conveyed much data on economics and history, but should be treated with some caution. For a biography and commentary on his famous *Book of Travels (Seyahatname)* with further references, see Kreiser 2005.
- 55 Inalcik 1973, pp. 129, 131.
- 56 Çerkez 2005, p. 438, note 650.
- 57 Evliya uses a term that could hint at the Iranian or simply foreign origin of the dyes used in Merzifon, *ibid.*
- 58 For nearby Tokat and northern Anatolia in this context, see Faroqhi 2009, pp. 5, 14, 22–23.
- 59 Masters 1999, p. 29.
- 60 Despite being located in an area that has been most violently struck by the earthquake in February 2023, the caravanserai was not damaged. It now shelters people from Payas who have lost their homes. With many photos, see Yeni Şafak 2023.
- 61 Gaube and Wirth 1984, p. 146.
- 62 *Ibid.*, p. 118.
- 63 *Ibid.*, p. 146.
- 64 Masters 1999, p. 26 (after André Raymond).
- 65 For an in-depth study, see Watenpaugh 2004.
- 66 No exact date of the uninscribed khan is known; Watenpaugh (2004, p. 197), gives the span 1678–1682. A deed dated 1682 lists Khan al-Wazir and other buildings of the Pasha in Aleppo, see Kasmó 2023, p. 164, note 3; see here also for the building’s history up to the present with details on works of the 1950s and a report of a textile manufacturer who had his business there for decades.
- 67 Müller participated in the archeological campaigns of Max von Oppenheim.
- 68 To a khan in Mosul, see p. 117.

- 69 From the German original, Müller 1920, p. 44.
- 70 For a detailed analysis of facade and decoration, see Watenpaugh 2004, p. 196–201.
- 71 Masters 1999, p. 40; Watenpaugh 2004, p. 190.
- 72 Masters 1999, pp. 26–27.
- 73 Masters 1999, p. 33.
- 74 Kara Mustafa's daughter, as administrator of her father's *waqf*, appealed in vain to the court to enforce the monopoly in 1736, Masters 1999, p. 40. For figures on the revenues, see Pantik 2021, p. 342.
- 75 See the Damage Report from 2020 in Kasmó 2023; p. 168, and the Memory Statement of a former textile manufacturer who had his business there for decades, *ibid.*, p. 169. Various textile businesses in the khan in the 1960s/1970s are listed in Gaube and Wirth 1984, p. 366. On my visit in 1998, only parts of the khan were in use, but it was in good repair. The earthquake in February 2023 caused damage to the portal; luckily with support by the Museum for Islamic Art Berlin restoration is in progress.
- 76 Cf. note 8 for the absence of any shelter on the important desert routes between Iraq and Syria.
- 77 Masters 1999, p. 49, 35, pp. 65–66; Gaube and Wirth 1984, p. 238.
- 78 Gaube and Wirth 1984, pp. 241–242, 262.
- 79 *Ibid.*, pp. 10–11; see also map Figure 66 on Aleppo's commercial connections and sphere of influence in the nineteenth century.
- 80 *Ibid.*, pp. 16–17.
- 81 Darıcı 2018, pp. 25–26, 43–44, 48–52. The earthquake caused at least moderate damage to some hans in Gaziantep.
- 82 Özme 2006, pp. 100–101, 105–107. The city's most important han, sixteenth-century Gümrük Hanı, remained undamaged.
- 83 Şahin and Şimşek 2018, p. 305.
- 84 Kaplan 2007, p. 16 (tab.).
- 85 Cuinet 1891, p. 825. However, Cuinet laments a decline from a flourishing industry still present in the late eighteenth century to the production of cheap consumer goods, partly due to the shift in trade routes caused by the Suez Canal, *ibid.*, p. 824.
- 86 Müller 1920, pp. 43–44, Figures 42, 43, pl. V. Müller compared Khan al-Wazir in Aleppo to Chan al Pascha; see above p. 116.

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8

CIRCULATION OF IDEAS AND CAPITAL

The Arabic Islamic Modernist Periodical al-Manar (1898–1935) and the Bombay Mercantile Communities

Roy Bar Sadeh

Introduction

In 2009, Ya'qub bin Yusuf Al Ibrahim, a Kuwaiti historian and public intellectual residing in London, wrote a review of a biography of Rashid Rida (1865–1935), the Ottoman-Syrian-born Muslim scholar and founder of the transregional Islamic modernist journal of *al-Manar* (the Lighthouse; 1898–1935). The author of the biography was the late Jamal al-Banna (1920–2013), the younger brother of Hasan al-Banna (1906–1949), the founder of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (*al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn*; est. 1928). Al Ibrahim accused al-Banna of limiting the history of *al-Manar* to the Egyptian context and appropriating the journal to the historical narrative of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. Al-Banna, Al Ibrahim argued, attributed *al-Manar*'s related activities exclusively to Rida and his Cairo-based associates. Al Ibrahim blamed al-Banna for ignoring the role played by Gulf mercantile entrepreneurs in the funding of *al-Manar*'s activities. As an example, Al Ibrahim mentioned Shaykh Qasim (Jassim) Ibn Muhammad Al Ibrahim (1869–1956), a Kuwaiti-born pearl merchant who was based in Bombay in the early twentieth century. In other words, Al Ibrahim's diatribe against al-Banna was centered on what he perceived as the latter's confinement of *al-Manar*'s history to the Egypt-based genealogy of the Muslim Brotherhood.¹

On the one hand, Al Ibrahim's criticism of al-Banna brought into view the importance of capital and logistics to the development of Islamic modernist projects, showing that Gulf-based states and entrepreneurs have been, much before the discovery of oil or its making into a central source of income, major philanthropic sources for transregional Islamic enterprises.² The logistic aspects of such intellectual and political projects are often ignored by intellectual historians, who tend to focus on the producer of the ideology and its recipients while overlooking how ideas travel, circulate, and are experienced in practice. Leor Halevi demonstrated how important such issues have been for Muslim intellectuals since the late nineteenth century. As Halevi has shown, *al-Manar*'s editor, Rida, was fully invested in a variety of 'material questions,' striving to accommodate his own intellectual movement to the conditions of global capitalism and free trade by encouraging

Muslims to consume and experience various modern objects and commercial inventions.³ Thus, Al Ibrahim's attempt to recover the overlooked role of such transregional mercantile families is an important intervention in showing how Islamic scholarly milieus, such as those of *al-Manar*, were deeply tied to transregional Gulf commercial enterprises.

On the other hand, like al-Banna and his focus on the Egyptian context, Al Ibrahim's critique was limited to the context of the modern Gulf nation-states. Such a focus on the nation-state exemplifies methodological nationalism – i.e., presupposing the nation-state as the only analytical framework of a given society.⁴ Inscribing the history of *al-Manar* within the geographies of the modern Gulf nation-states, Kuwait in particular, Al Ibrahim reduced the importance of the South Asian trajectory of *al-Manar* for the journal's history, solely highlighting the 'Gulf and Egyptian' aspects of the story. Such a position was also espoused by most historians of modern Kuwait. Suliman al-Atiqi, for example, has also brought into view the important role played by Kuwaiti merchants in *al-Manar* and the impact of Rida and his journal on Kuwaiti national identity. However, Atiqi's work focused, for the most part, on the development of Kuwaiti national identity, only briefly referring to the South Asian activities of mercantile families.⁵

However, the Kuwaiti scholar, Hissa 'Awadhi al-Harbi, has recently highlighted in a thorough study that South Asia was central to the development of the economic, social, and cultural landscapes of the Kuwaiti state from the late nineteenth century to the 1960s.⁶ The importance of South Asia to the Gulf during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries cannot be separated from the expansion of British imperial policies across both regions. Kuwait, Bahrain, and other political entities in the Gulf were informally governed by and tied to the British colonial government in India since the early nineteenth century. In fact, these political entities had a similar status to that of the Indian Princely States – nominally sovereign powers governed by local rulers with a subsidiary relationship with Britain. These entities constituted key nodes in the upkeep of British rule over the routes to and from its 'crown in the jewel.'⁷

Yet, this South Asian-Gulf connectivity was more than a story about British imperial government (governance is a concept linked to neoliberalism, as of the 1990s). It was also a story about the making and unmaking of transregional connections and solidarities amidst the rising tide of various forms of colonial segregation and nationalist exclusion. Demonstrative of this moment was the enterprise of *al-Manar*. Though published in Arabic in Cairo, the journal's history was deeply entangled with the South Asian context.⁸ Thus, this chapter contends that it was the socio-political and socio-economic atmosphere of British India that brought together South Asia-based Arab mercantile families (mainly from the Gulf) and *al-Manar*'s milieu – i.e., contributors to the journal and Rida's disciples.

Offering a transregional outlook on the history of a few of these Bombay-based mercantile families and their links with *al-Manar*, my main concern in this chapter is thus to understand how the journal's intellectual milieu and Bombay's Gulf-originated mercantile families became connected from the late nineteenth century to the 1930s. What were the possibilities and limitations of such an interface? And what does this relationship reveal to us about Islamic modernism and its history during the period in question?

I argue that these links were forged as a result of the particular conditions of *al-Manar*'s milieu and what conditions these mercantile families faced amidst the connected and polarized environment of economic constraints and possibilities brought by British colonial governance across the Indian Ocean. On the one hand, Rida and his associates considered

such mercantile families – whose fortune was tied to the British colonial state in the Gulf and Indian subcontinent – as a source of material support for *al-Manar*. Not only was the fortune of these families – deeply entangled with British colonial policies – not condemned by Rida and his associates, but they also considered such economic enterprises an embodiment of the economic practices of *al-salaf al-salih* (the pious forebears, a term commonly referring not only to the first three generations of Muslims, but, in some instances, also to notable Muslims of later periods). Indeed, such mercantile families fit with what Leor Halevi termed Rida's 'laissez faire Salafism.' This term, as Halevi noted, reflected the attempt of Rida's call for Muslims to return to the core message of Islamic law by 'minimizing, in the name of the Salaf, religious and legal barriers toward individual prosperity and communal welfare.'⁹ Such 'minimization,' as Rida believed, 'would empower modern Muslims to overcome hardship and rise to affluence,' an economic ethos that emerged amidst the dominance of the British 'Empire of Free Trade.'¹⁰

On the other hand, however, not only the economy sustained this relationship; rather, this relationship emerged from the polarizing environment of what Isabel Hofmeyr has called 'imperial cosmopolitanism,' a moment in which ethnic categories, such as 'Arab' and 'Indian,' came to be politicized, remaking pre-colonial connectives throughout the Indian Ocean.¹¹ During the period in question, *al-Manar's* milieu in the subcontinent faced suspicion from some Indian Muslim scholars. These scholars rejected its Arabic-centric message, preferring instead the utilization of Urdu over Arabic as a Muslim *lingua franca* and dismissed *al-Manar's* claims for pedagogical authority over the teaching of Arabic. It was in this context that *al-Manar's* milieu forged a scholarly network with members of Bombay's Arab mercantile community to transcend such constraints. Yet, these conflated connections also had limitations of their own as they took place amidst the rise of various forms of ethno-territorial nationalism, putting into question both *al-Manar's* vision for Islamic unity and the claims for religious legitimacy its milieu promoted.

I shall begin this chapter by providing some background information on the logistic context in which *al-Manar* came to be connected with the Indian subcontinent. I will then move on to the main part of this chapter: an analysis of the encounter between *al-Manar's* milieu and the Bombay-based mercantile communities from the Gulf.

***al-Manar* and the Indian Subcontinent**

Founded by Muhammad Rashid Rida in Cairo in 1898 and printed in Arabic, *al-Manar* was first circulated as a weekly periodical and later became a monthly journal, remaining as such until Rida's death in 1935. In its first years of activity, *al-Manar* had a limited subscription of around 300–400 people and a distribution of 1,500 copies per month. In a few years, however, the journal increased its subscription to approximately three thousand.¹² Yet, these numbers do not reflect the complete circulation of the journal. During this period, people read as part of social activities, for example, reading aloud and exchanging journal volumes, suggesting that the journal's sphere of circulation was actually much larger.¹³ Moreover, *al-Manar's* extensive circulation also inspired the creation of similar journals reproducing and elaborating *al-Manar's* themes in the Ottoman and Russian Empires, North Africa, and Southeast Asia.¹⁴ Striving to become a transregional media platform, the journal published articles dealing with a variety of topics pertinent to its readers around the world (e.g., politics, religion, and modern sciences). The journal

also issued fatwas (normative Islamic evaluations of all sorts of issues) to inquiries sent from various regions, contributing to the emergence of a transregional Muslim public sphere.

Throughout its years of activity, *al-Manar* promoted its view of Islamic unity (*al-jami' a al-islamiyya*) based on educational reform that combines Islamic and modern sciences. The journal's model of the ideal Muslim was identified with Arab history and the Arabic language, considering both as proof of a glorious past: the time of the Prophet Mohamad and the four Rightly Guided Caliphs (*al-khulafa' al-rashidun*). Thus, although he persistently called for Islamic unity, Rida himself wrote in 1917, 'My Islam is connected by history to my Arab ethnicity.'¹⁵ Yet, this definition of an Arab identity was a malleable one. All Muslims were invited to join this intellectual enterprise by mastering Arabic. The acquisition of the Arabic language by non-native speakers meant not only a linguistic transformation and strengthening of transregional Islamic bonds; rather, the propagation of the Arabic language by *al-Manar's* milieu in the subcontinent was an attempt to produce a new form of unified Muslim identity predicated on the ideal of the *salaf*, which Rida made into a central historical model for his diverse schemes of Islamic reform.¹⁶

A major target audience of this message was located in India, home at the time to the world's largest number of Muslims. Connected with Egypt, *al-Manar's* headquarters, by the scientific innovations of telegraph, steam, and print, the Indian subcontinent had a variety of Islamic institutions, journals, and philanthropic organizations with which Rida and his associates sought to forge contacts, promoting through these links the journal's message. Yet, the periodical's promotion of Arabic and glorification of Arab history in India intersected with what Nile Green defines as the 'Urdusphere,'¹⁷ i.e., the region dominated by the Urdu language, which served as a *lingua franca* connecting 'Muslim intellectuals as far apart as Kabul and Madras, not to mention readers in such maritime Urdu outposts as Durban, Istanbul, and Cairo.'¹⁸ Unlike the late nineteenth-century multilingual Ottoman project of Islamic unity,¹⁹ *al-Manar* offered Indian Muslims a linguistic vision based on Arabic. Thus, while the study of Arabic and its history were indeed appreciated by various South Asian Muslim intellectuals, in the Indian subcontinent, Arabic never gained similar official status to that of Urdu²⁰ or even Persian.²¹

Bombay's Arab Mercantile Communities within *al-Manar's* Milieu

Seeking to circulate its message across the Indian subcontinent, *al-Manar's* milieu utilized various platforms. A major platform through which they circulated the journal's message was the Bombay Arabic-speaking mercantile community. This community, many of whose members came from the Gulf, primarily comprised merchant families residing in the city's Colaba district, a commercial hub hosting merchants of diverse languages and religions. These families were politically and economically linked to the ruling families of Bahrain, Kuwait, and other parts of the Gulf, such as the Emirate of Dubai, and became an integral part of *al-Manar's* milieu in the Indian subcontinent. These mercantile families were strongly affected by Bombay's imperial importance and its contested religious environment at the beginning of the twentieth century,²² which facilitated their business and trade ventures.²³ As we shall see through the case study of *al-Manar*, members of these families made the city into a center for publications in Arabic, circulating various new ideas, such as Islamic modernist thought, back to the Gulf.

These families' mercantile and philanthropic activities took place in a historical context dominated by 'imperial cosmopolitanism.' According to Isabel Hofmeyr, who coined this term, colonial boundaries and technologies formed new political imaginaries while simultaneously polarizing people according to ethnicity and class.²⁴ This situation was similar to that of the Hadramawt immigrants in colonial Java and other communities around the Indian Ocean during the late nineteenth century. These mercantile communities, as Eng-seng Ho explained, found themselves in newly race-defined societies where both subjects and rulers 'began to think of politics in national terms and to think of religion in ethnic ones.'²⁵

As British colonial officials in Bombay witnessed, *al-Manar* was widely read among these mercantile families. Moreover, this community's members published articles and provided financial support for *al-Manar*, finding in the journal's message a sense of belonging to communities of Arab-Muslim readers in Egypt and the Ottoman Empire.²⁶ Moreover, as a result of their entanglement with the colonial and capitalist order, they found in *al-Manar* a source of legitimization for their commercial activism. As Leor Halevi has noted, Rida invoked the model of *salaf* in order to legitimize such enterprises, demonstrating that 'Salafism emerged as an ideological tool for the reform of Islam in a world where capital was so deeply appreciated that the Salaf themselves had to be resurrected from their graves to work in capitalistic terms.'²⁷ But who were these merchants? And what was so distinctive in their relationship with *al-Manar*?

A demonstrative example can be found among the Bahrain-based pearl merchant al-Hajj Muqbil al-Dhakhir (d. 1923), who belonged to a family from Unaizah in today's Saudi Arabia. Al-Dhakhir was the agent of the French Cartier Jewelry Company (est. 1847) and the second person in the history of Bahrain to own a private car. At the beginning of the 1890s, he was placed in charge of circulating (*wakil*) *al-Manar* and other Egypt-based journals, such as Cairo's scientific journal, *al-Muqtataf* (1876–1952),²⁸ by Bahrain's ruling Al Khalifa family for which he served as a close advisor.²⁹ Al-Dhakhir financed the publications of classical works of Islamic thought, particularly those of Hanbali jurists such as Ibn Taymiyyah (1263–1328), Ibn Qudamah (1147–1223), and al-Bahuti (1592–1641).³⁰ In addition, he also funded the publication of contemporary books, such as writings by the Indian Muslim scholar Siddiq Hasan Khan (1832–1890), who was affiliated with the Bhopal-based movement, Ahl-i Hadith, and the activities of a society that aimed to counter the activities of Christian missionaries in Muslim lands.³¹ As part of his endeavors, al-Dhakhir also financially supported *al-Manar*'s circulation and publication across the Gulf.³² For such reasons, Islamic modernists in Syria and Iraq, such as Jamal al-Din al-Qasimi (1866–1914) and Mahmud Shukri al-Alusi (1857–1924),³³ highly valued al-Dhakhir's philanthropic activism and *al-Manar* had even published an obituary in his honor after his death in 1923.³⁴

Finding in *al-Manar* a source of legitimization for his family business enterprise, in 1902, al-Dhakhir asked Rida to issue a *fatwa* on the question of whether paper notes were a valid currency in accordance with Islamic law. This theme involved a wide range of questions on debated matters, most notably usury and the value of a currency. In his response to this inquiry, Rida helped to expand the integration of al-Dhakhir's pearl business into the colonial market by accepting the idea that paper banknotes were equivalent to silver/gold coins or any other recognizable, exchangeable, and safeguarded currency used in the British Indian market.³⁵

These connections are further demonstrated by the financial assistance al-Dhakhir's son, 'Abd al-Rahman, provided to one of Rida's emissaries in the subcontinent, Sayyid 'Abd al-Haqq Haqqi al-A'zami al-Baghdadi al-Azhari (1873–1924). The Ottoman Iraqi-born al-Azhari was the Arabic teacher at Aligarh's Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College (M.A.O. College; est. 1875). He began his Indian career as an Arabic book trader in Bombay.³⁶ As *al-Manar* mentioned in its March 1913 issue, al-Azhari received financial assistance from al-Dhakhir, who was his student at the M.A.O. College, to publish his Arabic speech for the Muslim New Year, as well as its Urdu translation.³⁷ The Arabic and Urdu publications of the speech included a critique of the current state of the Muslim *umma* and a call for Islamic revival based on the study of the Quran. In addition, the Urdu translation of the speech reflected *al-Manar*'s milieu understanding that the strict reliance on Arabic would prevent the circulation of the journal's message across the Indian subcontinent.³⁸ While the study of Arabic was ideal, conveying the periodical's message of reform was of no lesser importance for its milieu.

'Abd al-Rahman al-Dhakhir also funded the publication of al-Azhari's 1913 treatise, *al-'Arab wal-'arabiyya bi-hima salah al-umma al-islamiyya wa-jam' al-umam al-bashariyya* (*The Arabs and Arabic: With Them There Will Be Wellness of the Islamic Nation and all Human Nations*). This work glorified the role of Arabs in Islamic history and suggested a path toward Muslim unity via the promotion of the Arabic language.³⁹ Published by *al-Manar*'s Cairo-based printing press, al-Dhakhir funded its production, enhancing his family's philanthropic reputation among Islamic modernist scholarly networks in Egypt. The fact that the book was published in *al-Manar*'s Cairo-based printing press rather than in one of Aligarh – a major center of Urdu literary organization⁴⁰ – also hints that some members of the M.A.O. College may not have been very interested in such ideas. Such lack of interest may have resulted from the college's managing board policies at the time, in particular, its members' efforts to persuade the British government to upgrade the college's official status to that of a university.⁴¹

Al-Dhakhir's support was not the only example of *al-Manar* receiving financial assistance from Gulf-based merchants living in, or connected financially to, the subcontinent's trading hubs. The connections between the intellectual circles of *al-Manar* and Al Ibrahim mentioned previously are another case in point. Many members of this family were operating in Bombay, Kuwait, and southern Iraq. They first gained prominence for their involvement in the booming late-nineteenth-century pearl and palm date trade, utilizing Bombay's links to various markets, particularly those of Paris and London.⁴² Like the members of the al-Dhakhir family, Al Ibrahim's family members worked closely with the European imperial powers or European capitalist entrepreneurs as part of their trading activities in various kinds of commodities, dates, and pearls in particular.

One of the most generous donations to Rida's Cairo-based shortly lived school for Islamic modernists, Madrasat al-Da'wa wal-Irshad (the School for Propaganda and Guidance; first named Jama'at al-Da'wa wal-Irshad; 1911–1914), came in 1911 from the well-off Shaykh Qasim (Jassim) Ibn Muhammad Al Ibrahim from Bombay. Similar to other members of his family, he was involved in various forms of trade. Al Ibrahim later donated a single sum of 2,000 English pounds to the school, as well as an additional 1,000 pounds for his yearly membership fee.⁴³ As a token of appreciation for Al Ibrahim's support, Rida nominated him as a member of the board of the School for Propaganda and Guidance and also published a long letter thanking Al Ibrahim in *al-Manar*'s March 1911

issue. The letter depicted how, when Al Ibrahim came to Cairo in 1911, members of the managing board of this educational project visited him to express their gratitude for his financial support.⁴⁴

Demonstrative of Al Ibrahim's connections with *al-Manar's* milieu, the former was also the first to welcome Rida upon his arrival to Bombay in 1912. He hosted Rida in his luxurious Cuffe Parade house, the 'Jassim House,' which was built by the notable Gujarati Parsi architect Jamshetji Mistri, and took care of his travel arrangements. The impact of Al Ibrahim's encounter with the ideas of *al-Manar* is further demonstrated by the establishment of the Mubarakiya in 1912. Founded by a group of affluent Kuwaiti merchants, among them members of the Al Ibrahim, this school was named after Kuwait's British-backed ruler, Mubarak al-Sabah (1837–1915). This institution, which was established as a reaction to the American missionary school in Kuwait City, had a similar curriculum to that of Rida's Madrasat al-Da'wa wal-Irshad. As a sign of support for this institution, Rida visited the Mubarakiya in 1912 on his way back from Cairo to the Indian subcontinent.⁴⁵

It is important to note, however, that Qasim Al Ibrahim did not only support educational and journalistic enterprises that were solely identified with *al-Manar*. For example, he did not follow Rida's hostile position toward the Ottoman Empire on the eve of World War I. Whereas Rida blamed the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) government in Istanbul for marginalizing the Arabic-speaking subjects in the Ottoman-Arab provinces, Al Ibrahim contributed funds to various Ottoman state-building projects and organizations. These projects were diverse. They included donations for the construction of the Hijaz railway, activities of the Red Crescent in the Ottoman front in Tripoli, strengthening of Ottoman military naval forces, and establishing a shipping company to carry pilgrims to Mecca and back.⁴⁶ Therefore, it seems that Al Ibrahim's contributions to Rida and *al-Manar's* enterprise of Islamic reform constituted only a small part of much larger and more diverse philanthropic activities.

Yet, Qasim Al Ibrahim was not the only member of the family who contributed to *al-Manar's* milieu. Demonstrative of this history is the Moroccan-born scholar Taqi al-Din al-Hilali (1893–1987). A protégé of Rida, al-Hilali stayed in India during the years 1923–1924 and 1930–1933, serving as a teacher of the Arabic language and literature in various institutions in northern India. Seeking to promote classical Arabic as a transregional Muslim *lingua franca*, al-Hilali, in contrast to al-Azhari, never learned Urdu and avoided using any language apart from Arabic in his classes.

During his 1923–1924 stay in India, al-Hilali worked in a Delhi-based madrasa, Ahli Hadith (est. circa the mid-nineteenth century), whose proponents were affiliated with Hanbali scholarly networks in Najd (today's Saudi Arabia). Disappointed with what he conceived as the poor Arabic level among the madrasa's students, al-Hilali saw his mission as elevating the level of Arabic in India while simultaneously promoting his own theological and jurisprudential views. However, as al-Hilali's Indian experiences demonstrate, circulating Arabic in the subcontinent and gaining authority for its teaching were challenges. For example, in one of the lessons, al-Hilali read verses from the work of the well-known Abbasid poet al-Mutanabbi (915–965), complaining to his students that the version of *diwan al-Mutanabbi* they were utilizing contained 'many mistakes.'⁴⁷ The students argued that they recited this section of al-Mutanabbi's work many times with 'Abd al-Rahman al-Nukramani, the school's lecturer of literary studies. In rejection of al-Hilali's claims, al-Nukramani warned the students that if they continued to study under al-Hilali's guidance,

he would refuse to grant them a certificate of studies.⁴⁸ He justified his hostile point of view toward al-Hilali with the following reasoning:

You should know that the Arabs in these times are all ignorant people who no longer possess any knowledge of Islamic sciences. Only in the times of the Prophet Mohammad, God's blessing and peace be upon him, and the righteous Salaf, did they possess such knowledge. But today, you see them coming every year from Mecca and Medina and begging people [for donations]. Have you seen in our times even one of them who is affiliated with the people of knowledge (*ahl al-'ilm*)? In addition to that, this Arab (referring to al-Hilali) living in India is an anonymous youngster whom nobody knows, and his certificate of studies would not bring you any benefit.⁴⁹

Despite being a native Arabic speaker, al-Hilali was seen by al-Nukramani and some of his students as an outsider interfering with their work. To al-Nukramani, Arabs may have been the first people to accept the message of the Prophet Mohammad, and Arabic may be the sacred language of Islam, but it did not grant the inhabitants of the Middle East or North Africa a monopoly over religious or linguistic interpretations. In other words, al-Nukramani utilized the same rationale, propagated by *al-Manar's* milieu, which argued that Arab identity was an acquired skill, to assert that Islam's golden era now lived among non-Arabs, including Indian Muslims, who constitute living proof of the accomplishments of the *Salaf*.

However, while al-Hilali's message and methodologies have invoked harsh responses from Indian Muslim scholars, his Arabic-centric message was well received by Mustafa Al Ibrahim (born in 1904; date of death unknown). The latter was the son of Yusuf Al Ibrahim, who was Qasim Al Ibrahim's brother and himself one of the wealthiest pearl traders in Bombay. Mustafa financially assisted the movement of scholars affiliated with *al-Manar's* milieu during the 1920s to 1930s. He came to know al-Hilali during the latter's visit to Bombay in 1924. Supportive of al-Hilali's message, Al Ibrahim persuaded al-Hilali, in 1924, to relocate to his family estate in a small town on the Iraqi Shatt al-'Arab and become a teacher of Islamic etiquette to students from the town's Sunni minority in a madrasa he had established. Al-Hilali agreed and was offered a high salary by Al Ibrahim. He remained in Iraq for three years, until 1927.⁵⁰ In another instance, Al Ibrahim insisted on offering additional financial support to al-Hilali by paying the dowry to the family of a woman from Basra whom the latter wanted to marry.⁵¹

Al Ibrahim's friendship with al-Hilali during the latter's second stay in India, from 1932 to 1935, is highlighted by the financial support provided to al-Hilali by Al Ibrahim, in the sum of 1,200 Indian Rupees during those years.⁵² This financial assistance was crucial for the survival of al-Hilali in the Indian subcontinent during a dispute he had with one of the professors of the prestigious Islamic seminary, Dar al-'Ulum of the Nadwat al-'Ulama in Lucknow (est. 1894). Al-Hilali, who taught Arabic at this institution, objected to bilingual instruction in Arabic lessons, in particular, those using Urdu, arguing that they would cause his students to lose precious study time and thus fail to master Arabic. This view led to a dispute between al-Hilali and one of the institution's lecturers, Shaykh al-Shirwani. The latter criticized al-Hilali's pedagogy at a Nadwat assembly, describing him as an 'Arab lecturer who does not know Urdu' and questioning al-Hilali's ability to clarify 'issues of religious sciences to his students without explaining [to] them these

issues in their [native Urdu] language.⁵³ This disagreement underlines the opposition among various members of the Nadwat to *al-Manar's* monolingual vision propagated by al-Hilali, leading to al-Hilali's temporary suspension from the institution. Until he had regained his position at the Nadwat after several months, it was Al Ibrahim who funded al-Hilali.⁵⁴

Al-Hilali viewed the philanthropy of Al Ibrahim as an example of an 'Arab noble deed' (*makrama 'arabiyya*), attributing it to what he perceived as the generosity of the Arab Bedouins.⁵⁵ His emphasis on the 'Arab qualities' of Al Ibrahim is important here, for it appeared in the context of the dispute with his Indian rivals from the Nadwat regarding Arabic instruction. Al-Hilali described Al Ibrahim's philanthropic deeds as a characteristic through which perfect Islam was embodied, while the former's rivals from the Nadwat were depicted as people who contradicted the spirit of Islam, creating a *mihna* (tribulation) since they refused to make Arabic the exclusive language of instruction and study.

Yet, there is another issue pertinent to understanding the importance of Bombay's mercantile families to *al-Manar's* Islamic modernist project: logistical challenges and support. When Rida visited India in 1912, members of Bombay's Arab mercantile community provided him with translating services from Urdu to Arabic and took care of his travel, food, and accommodation arrangements. Utilizing their transregional links with major Gulf hubs such as Kuwait and Basra, these families also took care of Rida's travels in the Gulf region on his way back from India to Egypt.⁵⁶

Another example can be derived from the memoirs of al-Hilali. In 1924, when he looked to sail from Bombay to Iraq, the British government, which was, at that time, at odds with the Turkish government regarding the disputed Mosul Province, only granted travel permits to foreign subjects who were known to its officials and directly served British interests. Since al-Hilali was a French colonial subject, he did not fit such British interests and was unable to receive a travel permit for Iraq.⁵⁷ Thus, al-Hilali's friendship with Mustafa Al Ibrahim proved to be of great assistance, given that the latter was a well-known trader who was connected to British rule and often traveled between Basra and Bombay. Al Ibrahim hid al-Hilali on a steamship heading to Basra, where passengers' documents were not checked very carefully, lying to the British officers on board regarding al-Hilali's real identity.⁵⁸ Upon their arrival to Basra, they received permission from the British to sail via smaller vessels to Al Ibrahim's family estate in Iraq.

Such examples demonstrate that since Britain and other colonial powers could prevent people from traveling freely, members of *al-Manar's* milieu had to look for ways to bypass restrictions. Therefore, they often affiliated themselves with middlemen, such as members of the Al Ibrahim family, who maintained good relations with the British rulers and could facilitate their movement within the restrictive conditions of *Pax Britannica*. These connections, as previously noted, produced a new scholarly network on the Indian trajectory of *al-Manar*, which offered financial and logistical support to its members while simultaneously providing intellectual and religious approval to an Arab mercantile community in an environment of colonial exclusion.

However, during the 1920s and 1930s, amidst the international emergence of nation-state affiliation, those affiliated with this network of belonging also found themselves facing the crystallization of categories such as 'local' and 'foreign.' Some of them, like Mustafa Al Ibrahim, in fact, benefited from these new conditions. Al Ibrahim, similar to other members of his family who remained in Kuwait and played a role in its politics, became involved in

the post-World War I Hashemite state in Iraq. As part of this involvement, he served in the late 1930s as the Iraqi Consul General in New York. In 1939, during his stint, he received the city's Honor Medal from its mayor, Fiorello H. La Guardia Laguradia (1882–1947), for establishing the Iraqi pavilion in the New York 1939 World's Fair.⁵⁹ Reflecting Al Ibrahim's connection to the global dates trade (for which the US was a central market), the Iraqi pavilion also included a live demonstration about the process of preserving and drawing dates.⁶⁰

As for al-Hilali, however, the division of the post-Ottoman Middle East into separate nation-states proved much less beneficial. When Al Ibrahim hired al-Hilali as a teacher of Islamic etiquette in his hometown in the Iraqi Shatt al-'Arab, not all Hanafi religious clerics were happy with his Salafi teachings. Al-Hilali, for example, preached that the muezzin should leave a time gap between the call to prayer (*adhan*) and the prayer itself in order to give sufficient time for worshippers to arrive at the mosque and prepare for prayer. The muezzin of the town's mosque, on the contrary, started prayer immediately after its call.⁶¹ He was also upset about al-Hilali's 'intervention,' describing him as 'the alien Shaykh of Morocco,' blaming him for importing Saudi-Wahhabi rituals to the mosque and asking him 'to be polite.'⁶² These statements by the muezzin led al-Hilali to attempt to justify his Arab origin.

I am not an alien, since I am an Arab in the land of the Arabs. And even if my ancestors have immigrated to the *Maghrib*, my right to live in my land is still firm. Then the muezzin told me: 'go to the people of Morocco and guide them [instead of guiding us].'⁶³

In this interaction, al-Hilali was denigrated as a foreigner by the local muezzin, who perceived belonging as based on the territorial delineations of the imagined nation-state. Although Iraq was ruled by King Faisal (1885–1933) at the time, whose regime supported pan-Arab solidarity that included Morocco, the muezzin chose to define al-Hilali by his territorial belonging to the Moroccan state. Moreover, his accusation that al-Hilali imported Wahhabi religious practices from Saudi Arabia to Iraq was another telling indication of the limitations of *al-Manar's* milieu. While members of *al-Manar's* milieu believed that the promotion of Arabic and lauding the role of Arabs in Islamic history would create close links with Arab merchants in Bombay and enable their support, the reality was rather different. They found it increasingly difficult to sustain and expand that network in the post-Ottoman Middle East, where they were perceived by at least some of the region's inhabitants as foreigners.

Conclusion

As shown in this chapter, *al-Manar's* ideas were deeply entangled with commerce and the flows of capital that members of these transregional mercantile families circulated. Yet, as I have argued, the message of *al-Manar* drew attention and support among members of the Arab mercantile community in Bombay as it legitimized their ways of gaining capital and provided them with a sense of belonging in the simultaneously connected and segregated environment of 'imperial cosmopolitanism.' While *al-Manar's* Arabic-centric message did

not gain much extension beyond particular Islamic institutions and journalistic networks in the Indian subcontinent, the identification of Islam with Arabic and Arab-Muslim history did create a new scholarly network between the Cairo-based circles of the journal and some of these Gulf-originated mercantile families. *Al-Manar's* intellectuals drew upon these families' financial capital and connections with British colonial authorities in order to circulate the journal and fund its activities in the subcontinent and beyond. Meanwhile, these families used such contacts to religiously legitimize their own enterprises in a growing anti-colonial environment. However, these connections remained authentic only within the boundaries of the subcontinent while becoming weaker in the Gulf itself amidst the rise of various forms of ethnic and territorial nationalism. This tenuousness, which was historically contingent, simultaneously exemplified the limitations of both transnational networks of belonging and the rising Arab nation-states. Thus, by recovering and analyzing the Indian encounter and flows of sorts between Bombay-based Gulf mercantile families and *al-Manar*, we can gain new insights about the production of modern nation-states and the changing means through which ideas travel.

Notes

- 1 See Al Ibrahim 2009. For al-Banna's book, see Rida 2006.
- 2 There are, however, several exceptions. See Devji 2013, pp. 60–62; El Shamsy 2020; and Tuna 2015, pp. 125–145.
- 3 See Halevi 2019. For an insightful review of Halevi's work, see Green 2020.
- 4 Goswami 2004, pp. 4–6.
- 5 See Al-Atiqi 2015.
- 6 See 'Awadhi al-Harbi 2017. In addition to al-Harbi's work, a recent article by Ikrame Ezzahoui has examined the visit of Rida to the Indian subcontinent, Kuwait, and Oman in 1912, considering it as an example of the multifaceted scholarly, commercial, and political ties between South Asia and the Arabian Peninsula. See Ezzahoui 2023.
- 7 Onley 2007.
- 8 See Bar Sadeh 2023; idem. 2018; idem. 2019.
- 9 Halevi 2019, p. 127.
- 10 Ibid., p. 9.
- 11 Hofmeyr 2013, p. 8.
- 12 Yasushi 2006, p. 10; Ryad 2009, p. 43.
- 13 Fahmy 2011, pp. 33–36.
- 14 Yasushi 2006, p. 10.
- 15 Rashid Rida 1917, p. 34.
- 16 Halevi 2019, pp. 96–130.
- 17 See Green 2011b.
- 18 Ibid., p. 485.
- 19 Özcan 1997, p. 23.
- 20 This does not mean that South Asian Muslim educational institutions and organizations did not promote the teaching of Arabic. One such example was Lucknow's Nadwat al-'Ulama,' which was first established in 1894 as a religious assembly, opening its Islamic seminary named Dar al-'Ulum in 1908. This institution maintained intensive connections to *al-Manar* throughout the journal's years of activity. See Hartung 2006, pp. 135–157; Zaman 2012, p. 9; idem. 1998. Moreover, the fact that Arabic did not gain prominence in the Indian subcontinent does not mean that Arabic cultural movements did not impact the thought and practice of proponents of Urdu in the subcontinent during nineteenth and twentieth centuries. See Bar Sadeh 2023.
- 21 Persian was a major intellectual and administrative language in the subcontinent until the British East India Company replaced it with English (through the English Education Act) in 1835.

- 22 In his study on Bombay's intellectual productions in Urdu and Persian from 1840 to 1915, Nile Green stressed the city's economic and religious contesting atmosphere and its connectivity with various regions of the subcontinent, Iran, and South Africa. See Green 2011a.
- 23 A demonstrative example is the Dubai-born merchants who resided in early twentieth-century Bombay. See Yanai 2014, p. 79.
- 24 Hofmeyr 2013, p. 8.
- 25 Ho 2006, p. 173.
- 26 This information is quoted from Kurzmann 2009, p. 9.
- 27 Halevi 2019, p. 99.
- 28 Some scholars have sought to make this family's history known to broader publics. See, for example, al-Shibili 2011.
- 29 Fuccaro 2009, p. 93.
- 30 El Shamsy 2020, pp. 180–181.
- 31 *Al-Manar* reported on the activities of and opposition to Protestant missionaries in Bahrain and other parts of the Gulf. See al-Nasih 1913.
- 32 Rashid Rida 1902.
- 33 I would like to thank Ahmed El Shamsy for referring me to the Arabic correspondence between al-Alusi and al-Qasimi. These correspondences reveal the significant role played by al-Dhakhir in the publication and circulation of classical Hanbali works, as well as contemporary Salafi ones. See al-'Ajami 2001.
- 34 Al-Mani' 1923.
- 35 Halevi 2019, pp. 107–113.
- 36 See Ahmad 1994, pp. 4-7; Basri 1999, p. 418.
- 37 Al-Haqqi al-A'zami al-Baghdadi al-Azhari 1913b.
- 38 In 1903, for example, when al-Azhari worked as an imam in one of Bombay's mosques, Rida approved him in a *fatwa* to publish an Urdu summary of his Friday sermons (*khutab*), while giving the sermon itself in Arabic.
- 39 This information appears in the title page of the book, where al-Azhari thanked 'Abd al-Rahman al-Dhakhir, mentioning that he is the son of al-Hajj Muqbil al-Dhakhir. See al-Haqi al-A'zami al-Baghdadi al-Azhari 1913b.
- 40 For example, *Anjuman-i Taraqqi-i Urdu*, which sought to promote the study of Urdu across British India was deeply connected to the M.A.O. College's intellectual circles. See Rahbar 2003.
- 41 For further information on the relationship between *al-Manar*'s milieu and those of the M.A.O. College, see Bar Sadeh 2019.
- 42 Al-Atiqi 2015, p. 82.
- 43 Rashid Rida 1911, p. 193. Rida's school promoted education in Islamic and natural sciences, in addition to the training of Islamic preachers to counteract Christian missionaries.
- 44 *Ibid.*, pp. 191–200.
- 45 Yanai 2014, p. 37.
- 46 This information draws on materials found on the Al Ibrahim's website, a repository of private family documents and informative articles on the family and its history. See http://www.al-ibrahim.org/bin_ibrahim_india/ (accessed September 10, 2021). See also a recent publication on Qasim Al Ibrahim, which was published by his family: Al Ibrahim n.d. I thank Alexandre Caeiro for sharing this source with me.
- 47 Al-Hilali n.d., p. 133.
- 48 *Ibid.*
- 49 *Ibid.*, p. 134.
- 50 *Ibid.*, p. 147.
- 51 *Ibid.*, pp. 184–185.
- 52 This support was a result of al-Hilali's suspension from the Nadwat, which reduced his salary after he refused to utilize Urdu when teaching Arabic. *Ibid.*, p. 184.
- 53 *Ibid.*
- 54 It is important to note that the Nadwat's official chronicles in Urdu do not recall this story, claiming instead that al-Hilali had to leave his position for six months because of financial difficulties the school had faced. See Tabriz Khan n.d., pp. 215–216.

- 55 Al-Hilali n.d., pp. 184–185.
 56 See Rashid Rida 1913; al-Haqqi al-A‘zami al-Baghdadi al-Azhari 1912, pp. 8–10, 36–38.
 57 Al-Hilali, n.d., p. 144.
 58 Ibid., pp. 144–145.
 59 See New York Times 1939 and Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library. The name that appears in the latter reference – ‘Ibrahim Mustafa al-Sheikh (Consul)’ – is incorrect. In the document itself, he is called ‘Sheik Mustapha al Ibrahim,’ which is closer to the way I have transliterated his name.
 60 Al Ibrahim n.d., p. 13. Interestingly, while the book stresses the connection of Al Ibrahim to Kuwait, it does not mention Mustafa Al Ibrahim’s position as the Consul of Iraq in New York. Instead, the book mainly stressed his economic ties with New York City.
 61 Al-Hilali n.d., p. 148.
 62 Ibid., pp. 148–149.
 63 Ibid., p. 149.

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9

GOODS AND GAIETY IN A TURKISH BLACK SEA TOWN

Oral History of Women in Tirebolu

Arzu Öztürkmen

This chapter explores the everyday life practices among women in Tirebolu, a small town in the Eastern Black Sea region of Turkey, during the early Republican times (1920s–1950s), focusing on their perception of consumption, savings, and leisure. By following an oral history approach, I aim to delineate unrepresented aspects of local history while also situating Tirebolu within a broader regional – and even global – framework. Tirebolu is a town whose material culture and demographic structure have radically changed since the 1900s through the effects of war, harsh climate, nation-building processes, and the forces of modernization. Compared to the nearby cities of Trabzon, Batumi, or Samsun, it had a small economy that consisted of fishing, copper mining, and hazelnut farming, which allowed for a prosperous and lively social life from the fifteenth through the nineteenth centuries (Sümer 1992).

My interest in the town's social history comes from personal and academic reasons. As my mother's native town, Tirebolu has been a place where I have had a strong sense of belonging since my childhood. My sisters and I spent most of our summers in the town, enjoying our freedom and listening to stories about a 'glamorous past.' These stories talked about a time when women wore European-style hats and dresses, painted landscapes on canvases or on the walls of their houses, played piano or violin, and waltzed at the garden parties organized in the 1930s at the Republican Park of the town. Narratives, place names, and relics also revealed the presence of former Greek and Armenian communities, a memory almost totally silenced today.

After completing my doctoral studies in folklore, I became more interested in Tirebolu from an academic lens. This was the 1990s: a period where nationalism and postcolonial studies offered scholars new perspectives to explore and deconstruct the national historiographies we had grown up with. The 1990s were also a decade where interest in oral history and research on gender studies increased, leading me to inquire about the local history of Tirebolu with a more scholarly approach. This is how I began collecting life stories from women in Tirebolu from 1994 onward and published a series of articles on the memory and historical ethnography of the town, with a focus on the power dynamics between ethnic groups and among women.

My general framework has hitherto followed two lines of inquiry. The first has been to understand the untold parts of local history as situated within a general framework of national historiography. I have focused more on how Tirebolu's Muslim Turkish-speaking community endured the *'muhacirlik'*¹ and the Independence War eras than on the clashes with non-Muslim communities. This research has illustrated how Tirebolu reconstructed itself as a 'Muslim Turkish community' during the Republican period, producing new discourses of modernity at different historical conjunctures.² My second line of inquiry has a more folkloric interest in the performance of everyday life. Recording women's narratives has provided detailed descriptions of daily routines, habits, and practices of the late Ottoman and early Republican era, revealing power networks, along with social, economic, and cultural aspects of a past communal life. The notions of 'goods' and 'gaiety' among women of Tirebolu that I pursue in this chapter are taken from the pool of narratives that I have collected over the years.

Historical Ethnography of a Small Town: The Case of Tirebolu

How was the everyday life of a Muslim (and non-Muslim) woman in Tirebolu shaped at the turn of the twentieth century? What would she 'consume' and 'save' in what could be considered a 'middle-income' household? Given the diversity of localities in the Ottoman – and post-Ottoman – world, studying consumption in a small town like Tirebolu may look partial or even trivial. The study of trade and consumption in the Ottoman world is a field that has been thoroughly explored (Quataert 2000; Baram and Carroll 2002; Ceylan 2016). However, research has hitherto focused particularly on well-documented elite communities and urban settings (Artan 2000; Frierson 2000; Exertzoglou 2003; Živković et al. 2017; Akçetin and Faroqhi 2017). There have also been local case studies regarding traded items like ceramics, tobacco, wine, flowers, or clothes in places including Istanbul, Antep, Palestine, or Belgrade (Baram 1996; Quataert 1997; Carroll 1999; Jirousek 2000; Halenko 2004; Kılıç 2015, p. 303; Karababa 2016; Živković 2021). This important corpus of work has primarily used data from written sources like newspapers, advertisements, or police and court reports. With only some exceptions (Carroll 2002), these scholars have provided a general understanding of commerce and goods traded in urban spaces among the elite of the Ottoman world. But, using oral history and, to some extent, historical archeology, local history research allows scholars to document underrepresented communities (Allen and Montell 1981; Samuel 1982; Smith 1984; Öztürkmen 2003). This kind of research offers a deeper understanding of national or regional social history. Tirebolu's local history, for example, encapsulates the experience of a local community during the transition from a collapsing empire to a nation-state, during which old traditions and new perceptions began to be negotiated in a modest but lively economy. Like the other Black Sea settlements of Trabzon, Giresun, or Ordu, Tirebolu's Ottoman past has also been explored through written evidence (Yüksel 2008, 2013). Nevertheless, taking women's life story narratives into account allows researchers to historically imagine everyday life practices and track how local trade was conducted.

This chapter provides a historical spotlight on the everyday life experience of a community, particularly concerning their consumption and saving patterns, as well as the value they assign to objects or their spending modes for leisure and entertainment. With the recent global turn in historical writing, a new approach now invites us to better understand modernization processes in micro-spaces that are also connected to the modernizing world

(Amin 1989; Hopkins 2006; Sachsenmaier 2006; Conrad 2016; Darian-Smith and McCarty 2017). Historian Carol Gluck rightfully reminds us that modernization processes are a common but perhaps different experience in various parts of the world; they are a condition that is not ‘optional in history’ and that ‘has not ended yet.’ She proposes that in writing history, we should replace ‘the rest of the world’ with simply ‘the world’ (Gluck 2011). This understanding has informed my approach to Tirebolu, illustrating how the everyday life experience in micro-spaces is connected to the modernizing world. In fact, the Tirebolu of the late nineteenth century was a rather small but well-established town with its own local elite, schools, churches, and mosques alongside its lively marketplace. Like its neighboring towns (and despite its rocky shores), it was a main stop of the Black Sea marine transportation route and had commercial ties with Trabzon and Batumi in the east and Istanbul in the west. Through Şebinkarahisar, it also gave way to the Anatolian towns of the Silk Road like Erzurum and Diyarbakır (Karaman 2008; Erüz and Erbaş 2020).

By combining the information from my previous written research, women’s oral history narratives, and the material culture approach, this chapter contextualizes the local consumption experience of a small town like Tirebolu within a broader context. It begins by describing the historical dynamics in which Tirebolu was situated at the end of the nineteenth century, a period in which local cultural ways were being transformed into divided religious identities.³ Tirebolu may be seen from a contemporary perspective as a ‘Muslim community.’ However, it was not perceived as such at the turn of the twentieth century, when local cultural modes of consumption were commonly practiced among cohabitating Muslim and non-Muslim communities, like in many other late Ottoman and early Turkish towns over the same period.

The corpus of oral history interviews referred to in this chapter relates to the early Republican era (with a strong memory of ethnic clashes during the First World War and the Independence War). Collected between 1994 and 2004, these narratives reflect what is remembered about the daily life of a generation of women born during the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries, and therefore grew up and built their adult lives during the early Republican era. Over the course of this decade of research, I collected 30 in-depth interviews. Since these women come from a small community, most asked to remain anonymous. Two women I interviewed in 1994 and one I interviewed in 2004 could not recall their exact birth dates but informed me that they were over 100 years old. The rest were born in the 1930s and 1940s. In that regard, their narratives may be perhaps the last historical-ethnographical accounts of a daily life and economy where the waves of modernization did not yet much affect the traditional patterns.⁴

This chapter examines how these Muslim women of Tirebolu regulated their ways of consumption and saving in this small Black Sea town. As the gatekeepers of everyday life, they reveal the values assigned to places and objects through various modes of saving and recycling, controlling the goods and expenses of the kitchen, and finding sources for entertainment and leisure in their small economy. Their narratives offer a valuable case study of a community during the transition from the late Ottoman period to modern Turkey at a historical juncture that redefined local, regional, and global identities.

Situating Tirebolu Within the History of the Black Sea Trade

Studies on the Black Sea region have long focused on the relationship between its challenging climate, topography, and its economy (Bijiskyan 1969; Bryer and Winfield 1985; Ascherson 1996; King 2004). From a historical perspective, its regional trade has been

examined from Antiquities to Medieval times, highlighting connections to the Mediterranean and Asian regions (Karpov 1993, 2011; Doonan 2006, p. 47; Greaves 2007; Ciociltan 2012; Villari 2016). Recently, there has been a rising interest in the Ottoman trade within Black Sea port cities (Kasaba et al. 1986; Özveren 1996, 1997; Ardeleanu 2014; Lyratzopoulos and Zarotiadis 2014; Chatziioannou and Delis 2020). Meanwhile, a growing area of research looks at the Black Sea trade's global connections in diverse case studies.⁵ While the scholarship on Ottoman port cities has focused chiefly on the main ports, like Samsun, Trabzon, or Batumi, recent scholarship has also underscored the importance of smaller towns with pier markets. Since mountains were historically an obstacle to land transportation, many small settlements depended on sea transportation. In his study on nineteenth-century Ottoman trade in the Black Sea, researcher Yunus Emre Aydın reminds us that many Black Sea towns developed around castle harbors, some smaller than others, like the Tirebolu port (Aydın 2016). Each had a pier marketplace that connected them to sea transportation and, in turn, to the larger Black Sea trade, which remained under Ottoman control until the end of the eighteenth century. These ports were also important for the Ottoman expeditions to Iran and the Caucasus. Nevertheless, following the Küçük Kaynarca Treaty of 1774, the right to free sail and trade in the Black Sea was granted to Russians. In 1862, another treaty concerning the Black Sea trade was signed between the Russian and Ottoman Empires, which allowed Russian merchants to buy industrial and agricultural products from anywhere in the Ottoman lands, along with taxation benefits. France and England followed along with other European states, such as Spain, the Netherlands, and Sweden, and engaged in commercial activities in the Black Sea. When commercial mobility increased at the regional ports, small towns like Tirebolu improved their status as regional port locations (Aydın 2016).

Looking from the perspective of global history, the increasing importance of port towns shows how Tirebolu was, in fact, linked to the Mediterranean in the west and to Russia and the Silk Road in the east. In that regard, the town's social life shared similarities with bigger cities of the Black Sea, like Trabzon and Giresun. Hence, local residents were connected to larger economic networks. Moreover, given the multi-ethnic structure of the empires, they were also associated with different religious hegemonic organizations. In his seminal book, *Global Entanglements of a Man Who Never Traveled*, Dominic Sachsenmaier explores, for instance, the story of a Chinese man in the seventeenth century who converted to Christianity and was able to lead a remarkably globally connected life without ever leaving his home province (Sachsenmaier 2018). Looking at the consumption patterns of Tirebolu from this global history perspective invites us to examine more closely how transnational regions were constructed and interacted with during the late nineteenth century. As Sebastian Conrad reminds us, a global history approach aims to explore different local cases through the lens of connectivities and cross-fertilization (Conrad 2016).

Writing micro-histories in a global context requires a closer look at topography, landscape, and transportation challenges. This latter issue is closely related to the range of goods that the people in the provinces could reach and consume in their local everyday life. In his important book, *La Turquie d'Asie*, Vital Cuinet long ago described the challenging conditions of the Black Sea mountains. He specifically mentioned the land road between Giresun and Karahisar-Sharqi (today's Şebinkarahisar) and depicted it as 'the only important road of Giresun' (Cuinet 1892, p. 70). Cuinet described how the road narrows from seven meters to three, allowing only one vehicle to pass over its deep cliffs. This is why trade and travel in the Black Sea relied mainly on naval transport. Based on documents from Ottoman state archives, the work of Oktay Karaman (2008) displays the changing realm of the Ottoman

Black Sea during the nineteenth century, when a wide range of international companies operated. These included Russian, Austrian, and French boats, which in 1869 regularly traveled from Odessa to Batumi, with stops in Samsun, Ünye, Ordu, Giresun, Trabzon, and Rize. Tirebolu's port was also an important stop for these ships, with its opening to landlocked towns in Anatolia. The *Avusturya Şirketi Vapurları* (Austrian Company Boats), which used to leave Istanbul every Friday, would stop at the Tirebolu port. Karaman also reports that Tirebolites asked for regular roads to be built in their town. Their request was rejected because of the construction of the land road between Giresun and Karahisar-Sharqi. The latter was opened in 1883 to control the mining trade from Gümüşhane and its surroundings (Karaman 2008).

The important position of Tirebolu's port is underscored in several works on the Black Sea trade (Aydın 2015; Erüz and Erbaş 2020). Historically, the port was used to transport gold, silver, copper, lead, and timber. These materials were transported to Tirebolu on donkeys, mules, camels, and oxen and then shipped to Istanbul and Europe (Bostan 1992, pp. 24–26; Köse 2002). In addition to commercial activities, shipbuilding was carried out in the Tirebolu port. Yunus Emre Aydın's research examines the particularities of the Tirebolu port during the nineteenth century and provides a comprehensive review of primary and secondary sources (Aydın 2015). Aydın emphasizes that Tirebolu's economic life improved greatly in the nineteenth century. Based on Ottoman state archives, the works of Faruk Sümer and Ayhan Yüksel inform us about the content of products circulated in and out of Tirebolu (Sümer 1992; Yüksel 2008, 2012). With the rise of sea transportation among Russian, British, French, and Austrian companies, local products began to be exported. Besides the traditional trade of copper and silver, the main exports were hazelnuts, walnuts, fish oil, wax, beans, rice, timber, sheep, and goatskin. Tirebolites also had access to imported products like sugar, grain, flour, coffee, salt, leather, and tobacco. This transaction covered companies from European countries like England, France, Greece, and Romania, along with Egypt and Russia (Aydın 2015).⁶ Faruk Sümer states that, in the late nineteenth century, more than 100 sailboats were anchored at Tirebolu's port. Hence, the town had a lively economy with a vibrant commercial life during this time (Sümer 1992).

Religious Profiles of Consumers in Tirebolu

Tirebolu of the late nineteenth century, although a predominantly Muslim society, was also home to Pontic Greek and Armenian communities. Historian Faruk Sümer estimates that the population consisted of roughly 60 percent Turks, 35 percent Greeks, and 5 percent Armenians (Sümer 1992). The structure of Ottoman society has long been studied from political, economic, and social-historical perspectives. A more particular focus on ethnic and religious dimensions emerged in the 1980s, parallel to the rise of studies on nationalism (Braude and Lewis 1982; Majer 1997; Keyder 2018). Ethnic and religious plurality was studied from different angles. A more romantic approach has underscored the themes of mutual tolerance and peaceful living together (Adıbelli 2010; Avşin-Güneş 2015). In recent years, however, several studies have criticized the notion of 'Ottoman multicultural harmony' (Barkey 2008; Kieser 2010; Hayden 2016; Göktürk 2020; Chovanec and Heilo 2021). Usama Makdisi, for instance, calls attention to the difference between toleration and coexistence (Baer et al. 2009, p. 927). Karen Barkey, on the contrary, argues that the Ottoman state valued differences and negotiated communal diversity with flexible strategies (Barkey 2008). What matters for this discussion is whether being a Muslim or a Christian

affected what and how one consumed in Tirebolu during the nineteenth century. In his analysis of 'religioscapes' in the Ottoman empire, Robert Hayden argues that religious identity encompassed all other social categories like gender and class within it so that

[...] a woman would rarely be seen as only that, but would of necessity be regarded by others, and regard herself, as a Muslim woman, or a Christian one, or a Jewish one [...] Similarly, peasants were not just a single category of tax-paying common people; they were also grouped as Muslims or [...] as various specified others, who were subject to taxes not imposed on Muslims [...] Minority communities sometimes had greater autonomy in the countryside than in cities, but their autonomy was tenuous.

(Hayden 2016, pp. 60–61)

Hayden's argument may hold true for many Tirebolites' stances vis-à-vis their social and political identity. However, in the private domain of material life, and despite all the religious distinctions, they must have had access to similar goods and services. For the nineteenth-century residents of Tirebolu, the ethnic and religious origins of their neighbors were natural components of local knowledge. They would know whether their neighbors were of Circassian, Çepni, Georgian, Greek, or Armenian origin, but they probably assigned more importance to differences of gender, class, and local identities, which determined their social and material cultural boundaries. The memoir of Sano Themia Halo (1909–2014), who grew up in a Pontic village at the turn of the twentieth century, reveals the common material life among different ethnic and religious communities in terms of their consumption of food or clothing (Halo 2001). Although there were obvious religious differences, they still shared similarities in their ritual practices. Weddings were mostly endogamous, yet the daily routine of local practices like the *hamam* day or the repertoire of gift exchanges would be the same. The spring festivities of *hidirellez* were often celebrated on different days and displayed religious particularities, yet the consumption of food and picnic habits were pretty much the same. Therefore, although this chapter focuses on the women of the Muslim community of Tirebolu, one can easily imagine that the consumption patterns of an Armenian or Greek Tirebolite woman were not so different from those of her Muslim neighbors.

The Value of Objects: Modes of Saving and Recycling

In his analysis of the nineteenth-century Black Sea region, Oktay Özel calls our attention to the notably powerful Muslim families who were big landholders and part of the emerging bourgeoisie. He writes:

Most available arable lands, pastures and forests from the coasts, along the valleys and up onto the high plateaus, where native Muslims and non-Muslims regularly spent the summer, were owned by these Muslim landlords. They also held significant administrative posts, and exerted enormous influence over the judicial administration.

(Özel 2010, p. 484)

This pattern could also be observed in Tirebolu, where several notable families owned large hazelnut gardens and lived in households within the town, conducting a daily life

similar to the *konak* tradition of urban Ottoman settlements.⁷ Some of these houses formerly belonged to Greek families, including the Mavridi family. Yorgo Mavridi's home is now demolished, but some of the narratives I collected depicted the house having its own particular heating system and a beautiful garden with a sea view. Oral history archives at the Centre for Asia Minor Studies in Athens also offer narratives from the first generation of non-Muslim Tirebolites. They show that both Greek and Turkish communities had similar class issues vis-à-vis their landlords (*ağas*). In 2002, I interviewed some second-generation Tirebolites in Kalithea, whose families had left Tirebolu during the ethnic clashes in the 1910s, fleeing by boat first to Russia and then taking refuge in Greece.⁸ The parents of the two Armenian women from Tirebolu, whom I was able to interview in Istanbul and in Vancouver, narrated how their surviving parents had left Tirebolu to settle in the Kurtuluş neighborhood of Istanbul during the early 1920s, selling all their properties in their native town.⁹ Most of the women from Tirebolu that I talked to belonged to the middle-class community of the town, while a few came from notable Muslim families who had their own multi-floor houses where they lived as extended families.

Given the hilly topography of the town, space was a precious asset, and many small-income Tirebolites had to contend themselves with a kitchen-living room and a bedroom. Order and cleanliness were required in such small spaces, where each piece of furniture and object had its place. Where a carpet should lay and which pan or cup should be used were carefully regulated. Situated between the sea and with limited land transportation, well-off Tirebolite women of the early Republican era had often inherited luxurious furniture, like large color-glass lamps (*karpuz lamba*), copperware objects, or textiles and jewelry sold in Trabzon, Batumi, and Istanbul. H.M. was, for instance, remembered as the 'lady with a lilac-colored chador' (*eflatun çarşafı hanım*). Childhood narratives reveal how porcelain cups meant to serve Turkish coffee (some imported from Russia) would be prudently protected; touching them was a privilege, and harming them led to punishment. Access to textiles was possible, but buying quality fabric was expensive and confined only to special occasions. Until there was wider access to Sümerbank clothes, the state enterprise for textiles, one was limited to the selected material of two local shops. As N.M. stated: 'Those who could afford would go to Trabzon or ask their husband to bring fabric from Istanbul.' S.İ., the wife of a well-off merchant, recalled her pre-wedding visits to Trabzon to buy gold, fabric, and new dresses. She stated that some women also ordered their dresses directly from tailors in Istanbul. Well-to-do husbands who frequently traveled to Istanbul would return with silk clothes or newly designed dresses and chic hats. At times, they would go to Istanbul as a family and stay in hotels like the Sipahi Palas or the Bristol Hotel. S.İ. stated how the chic style of certain women in Tirebolu, seen in their 'hats' and 'furs' and 'beaded dresses,' distinguished them from neighboring towns like Espiye and Görele, who still followed a more traditional style conforming to Muslim ways. Indeed, some women in Tirebolu also referred to such dress codes.¹⁰

For lower-income families, however, dressing up was a domain where women carefully repaired timeworn clothes by taking apart a jacket or a pant to sew it again with the other side (*ters-yüz etme*). Children would usually wear their older siblings' clothes and then deliver them to their young sisters or brothers in a few years. Clothes that completed their lifetimes as dresses would be resurrected as a patchwork rug (*kilim*) or a bed cover. Knitting and embroidery (*dantel örme*) were skills taught at a very early age. When knitting cardigans or sweaters was relatively easier, more skillful women used five different needles

to make socks. Most women were trained at a very early age to embroider tablecloths, bed covers, and curtains. Mothers would prefer to do the housework themselves and teach their daughters how to knit. This was also a training in how to use time or how to beat the boredom of an indoor life. 'Do your embroidery,' as M.N. remembers, was the constant motto of mothers in Tirebolu. Embroidery was indeed a multi-faceted work. To begin with, it was a way of keeping girls busy (instead of being idle) with handwork. It was also a process of compiling items for a girl's dowry. Covers for all kinds of furniture, like beds, tables, tripods, or armchairs, were being prepared for future weddings. Dowries also included knitted items for when children would be born. These were kept within wooden chests, themselves valuable items, and used for home decoration. Each piece of furniture was treated like an artifact to be used as long as possible. In fact, consumption and saving were practices that complemented one another.

The scarcity of objects and furniture made it necessary to transfer them from the town to the village house during the harvest time. Families owning fields and hazelnut gardens had to gather the crop in August. And to do so, the entire family would temporarily settle in the village house. As A.Ç. said:

In those times, we had to pack everything and move to the village. We even brought some heavy furniture with us. Now, they manage their village business from Tirebolu. There are plenty of vehicles operating in-between. Back then, we had no road, and once we were gone, we had to stay there till the end of the harvest.

The value of household tools, objects, and accessories created, at times, conflicts about how to share them. As a young bride, you had to be content with a single room. Respect and tolerance were needed to continue an orderly and peaceful life in the tiny space of the household. The inner domains were carefully distributed and decorated, and every object had its place. A.Ç. narrated a story that revealed the scope of the conflicts that could arise from minor changes. The story relates to a harvest time in the mid-1930s when most of the furniture had already been carried to the village house. Too old to go to the village, her mother-in-law remained in Tirebolu, and A.Ç. stayed to care for her. One day, A.Ç.'s husband told her to prepare to host an important guest for dinner. As most of the furniture was in the village house, she thought to decorate the living room with a rug, putting her mother-in-law's thick bed cover on the floor:

I told her, 'We'll have guests tonight. Let me take your bed cover and use it on the floor, and I'll bring it back to you as soon as they leave.' She replied, 'How dare you let men dropping alcohol on my blanket!' Then, I think, I didn't say anything else. I just went there, took the rug and put it on the floor, tidied up the guest room. And then, I went upstairs to get something. When I came back, I saw that she had taken it away. So, without asking to her, I once more took the cover from where she had put it, and as I was putting it on the floor, she rushed in from the other room, and took hold of a corner of the cover. Now, she holds one corner, and I hold the other saying, 'Leave it, don't take it.' She pulls and I pull. Look at the sign of our ignorance and immaturity (*cehaletin alametini bak*). She pulls and I pull. I say, 'Leave it, leave it where it is,' and she tells me 'You're gonna pour alcohol on it?' So, she is more Muslim than we are! As she was pulling it and I was pulling it, she pulled more and I found myself on the floor!

This physical fight over a bed cover also reminds us of the multiple functions that a particular house accessory could encompass depending on its context. A thick bed cover could function as a rug if this was a meeting among women. But it also calls attention to the perception of *rakı* among women. Although Islam forbade alcohol, *rakı* has been a traditional drink since Ottoman times. It is usually consumed during long dinners as the accompaniment of special appetizers (*meze*) and deep conversation (*sobbet*). Oral history reveals that the men of Tirebolu, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, drank *rakı* in their domestic space, except during Ramadan, and considered these dinners an important part of their male sociability. One should also note here the symbolic values assigned to various modes of saving and consumption. How to recycle a fabric in an aesthetic way displayed one's efficiency and artistic creativity.¹¹ The abilities of a bride or bride-to-be were staged as a performance in everyday life. Because the sections of the house were very small, decorating was also seen as a way of distinguishing oneself. Needlework and other handcrafts were one way of creating such distinctions. Learning a needle motif unknown to others could create prestige among peers, and the outcome of such artistic creativity was usually displayed in the bride's own room or the kitchen.

On the Consumption and Saving of Food: Kitchen Habits and Hospitality Patterns

At the turn of the twentieth century, Tirebolu consumed the food it produced. Many families had their own vegetable garden (*bostan*), big or small, where they grew all kinds of greens, dark cabbage, green beans, corn, and eggplants. Fruits included figs, cherries, apples, pears, and berries. Fish was widely consumed, whereas social status determined the priority of who would get the best fresh fish. In his old age, K.A. still remembered a story he had heard from his father. Returning from fishing, the father met the town's landlord (*ağa*), who confiscated the big fish from his hand with no explanation: 'I had just caught it and was bringing it home with joy,' he had told. Oral history narratives in the Asia Minor Center in Athens also confirm similar bitter stories of social hierarchy for the Greek community of Tirebolu. Nevertheless, fish was abundant and consumed in various ways, as fried, steamed, or preserved in salt as a *meze* to be consumed with *rakı*. Meat, however, was more expensive, and one was at the mercy of the butcher to get the best parts. Some families had their own manual meat grinder. Raising chickens for eggs and later as meat was typical. It was also a widespread practice to send a big tray of food to the neighborhood bakery to be cooked in the 'wood fire.'

Families spent their summers in the mountains or villages, where they could prepare food storage for the winter. Corn, fish, or yogurt could be preserved as dried, and fruits and vegetables were preserved as pickles and marmalades. Butter was kept salted and, like all other food, preserved in jars that needed to be properly kept to last the whole winter. The maintenance of cellars was another domain where women could stage their skills of managing saving and consumption. Although corn flour was commonly used, Tirebolu's climate did not allow wheat production for local consumption. Until the nineteenth century, however, the town had some rice fields (*andals*), which met the local demand. These fields were eventually dried during the early Republican era because of the threat of malaria. As Tirebolite cuisine continued to include *börek*, *burma*, and *pilav* along with some other meals including rice, like *sarma*, *dolma*, or *dible*, one can understand that rice and wheat were imported from outside of Tirebolu. Producing local flour and sugar was one of

the main strategies of the Republic, establishing several plants across Anatolia (Karayaman 2012; Evsile 2018). These items made their way to Tirebolu's grocery stores (*bakkals*) to be sold for everyday consumption.¹² Drying layers of phyllo dough (*yufka*) on a wood fire was a common summer ritual among neighbors, practiced as a collective labor (*imece*). These would later pile up in each household on top of the wardrobes and be covered by a large sheet. Many women remembered this image and told stories about their temptation to reach out to them and grab a bite, despite the risk of falling down from the chair.

Another important childhood memory relates to the fountains: many women I have interviewed remembered their endless trips, as little girls, to the main fountains to bring water for their fathers or uncles. This common practice would be dreadful in darkness, particularly when they needed to pass near the cemeteries. In fact, water consumption had its particularities in Tirebolu, which has been known for its freshwater springs and several historical fountains in its different quarters. S.S. remembered how visiting different springs and tasting their water was a summer pastime in the mountains (*yayla*):

Despite all the hard work, and the fact I was surrounded by the elderly, we had great fun. We used to go every day to another spring, and have a picnic there. Each spring had its own taste, and was a main stop in the landscape surrounding their mountain houses. We visited each of them almost like a shrine every year.

However, within the town itself, water was an important issue in men's everyday lives. As experts in Tirebolu's fountains, they knew which one of them was the tastiest or best to wash their hair. Tirebolite men were also famous for their expertise in cooking. They all loved to eat rich food when they could. To begin with, they were the procurers of the house. Women did not do the food shopping; the marketplace was the men's domain. They selected the 'best' meat and the 'freshest' eggs. Some husbands had rules on how to cut the lemon or how long a coffee pot should remain on the fire. Such details brought an extra load to the food management algorithm and the imperative not to waste the remains of the food while cooking.

Consumption for Entertainment in the *Hamam*, Cinema, Theater, and Park

As an old town in the Eastern Black Sea region, Tirebolu had a lively social life. Oral history revealed that cohabiting Muslim and non-Muslim communities acknowledged one another's rituals and religious holidays. When I interviewed S.E. in 1994, she was almost 100 years old, but she remembered receiving eggs from her neighbors during Easter, which she recalled as '*Kızıl Yumurta Cemiyeti*' (Red Egg Gathering). Weddings had commonalities between the different religions, like the bath (*hamam*) day, the dowry items, or food practices, but there were also social habits that differed. For example, Ne.K. recalled how the public visibility differed among Turkish, Greek, and Armenian brides. She narrated how Greek and Armenian women would come 'their faces open, like our brides today, they would pass at the groom's arm, and our people would go out to watch them.' During the Republican era, wedding practices were secularized, and civil ceremonies were mostly held in government offices. Wedding entertainment, however, continued to include traditional consumption patterns and, hence, shared religious practices.

Everyday life entertainment during the Republican era also included segregated gatherings with festive food consumption. Like in most other Anatolian towns, the public bath,

the *hamam*, had a central place in the social life of Tirebolu's women. If not weekly, perhaps once every two weeks, women had a long bathing session for which preparations would be made in advance. Undoubtedly, the *hamam* also displayed the social and class hierarchy among women, mainly depending on their husband's or father's reputation. Notable women had their own 'informally' reserved spots.¹³ Today, M.N. regrets that she complied with these unspoken rules without challenging them: 'We paid the same money, and they paid the same money. What was it all about? We were ignorant too; this was the time of the wealthy, and we respected them.' Some notable families had the tradition of reserving the whole *hamam*, especially for special occasions such as weddings or returning to the city from the villages and mountains. Consumption of food was at the center of the *hamam* rituals. Nu.K. still remembered the taste of the pickles and fruits she prepared and shared at the *hamam* parties. Music and dance were also made part of the ritual. Usually, large cauldrons would be turned upside down to serve as drums to accompany the singing, along with women who played musical instruments.

Week-long wedding ceremonies would also include a *hamam* party on Tuesday if the hosting family was well off. Weddings were organized in such a way that it would allow families to adapt parts of it depending on their economic power. Sunday was the day to get the bride ready for the upcoming wedding; the waxing of legs and eyebrows was performed almost as an initiation ceremony. Monday was scheduled for the banquet for her close friends. Tuesday was the *hamam* day held by the bride's family. On Wednesday, the groom's family would come to the bride's house to offer the wedding jewelry. And on Thursday, the groom picked up the bride from her house for a banquet at his house. The following day would be the 'honey day,' as N.K. named it, followed by the week-long 'see-the-bride' visits (*gelin bakma*), at which the bride would continue wearing her wedding dress while accepting greetings.

Paying for entertainment would happen mostly in the fields of theater, cinema, and holidays. During religious holidays, Tirebolu had, like many other towns, its own 'festival area' (*bayram yeri*) with carousels, acrobats, and other performers. Among these, carousels had a special place in most women's memory of their 'fiancé.' It was customary for young men to wait for their fiancées at the carousel and pay their fares. Later, the carousel fare was replaced by that of an 'automobile tour' in the town. Theater and cinema were among other public places where women had legitimate access to entertainment. Tirebolu had a theater building, which Ne.K. and N. M. recalled as being 'even more beautiful than the ones in Istanbul!' The theater had private boxes for families to watch touring companies' performances. It also had a music hall upstairs where live (*caz*) performances were held throughout the thirties.¹⁴ Going to the cinema alone or with children was an ordinary practice for married women in the 1930s. Especially on Sundays, the movie theaters (one converted from a church, the other newly built) would organize special sessions for women and children. According to N.K., during the forties, the fashion was to eat *pide* at home on Sundays and then go to see a movie. Yet some other women, coming from more conservative families, expressed that they experienced the cinema only in secret, using the money they saved and hid from their husbands.

Another public entertainment place was the Republican Park. The Park was designed in such a way that people could both sit and have a drink around the pool and use the dancing platform for garden parties. The first generation of Tirebolu's 'open women' danced with their husbands in this newly created public space. Ş.K. remembered her parents' regular visits to the Park and her mother's chic dresses. However, even if those European-style

clothes and performances touched upon certain religious or traditional sensitivities, they were mostly tolerated within the framework of the Republican reforms adopted by the local elite and state bureaucrats in Tirebolu.

House visits were also among the most practiced leisure activity, where *sobbet* (long talk) would be accompanied by some treats, like *börek*, *revani*, or nuts and dried fruits. Keeping such small food ready for guests was customary. If their family approved, some young girls organized social gatherings at their homes. For instance, N.K. still remembers a year-long series of house parties at which she would cook, dance, and sing with her girlfriends.

Land Ways, Migration, and the Construction Turn in Tirebolu (the 1950s–2022)

Since the 1950s, Tirebolu has undergone substantial changes in its demography and material culture. The Turkification of the demography during the early Republican era impacted the first generation of a new elite, who mostly settled in other cities, visiting their families only during holidays. My mother and her peers belonged to this group of professionals in medicine, law, or education, whereas many women I interviewed were not sent to school and had been married in traditional ways. Following the hardships of the economic depression of the 1930s and the impact of the Second World War, Tirebolu was one of the towns that welcomed full-heartedly the Democratic Party in 1950. The transition to ‘democracy’ affected the relationship between the notable families and the peasants from the surrounding villages. As K.A. commented: ‘This was after the Democratic Party that many of us learned our “shoe numbers.” And it was also after the Democratic Party that the son of an *ağa* could not beat us anymore as he wished. Things changed dramatically!’¹⁵

Things began to change materially as well. A new road was constructed linking Trabzon to Ordu, thus making the hinterland of Tirebolu prosperous in its own right. Small settlements like Espiye, Bulancak, or Görele rapidly developed to reach the urban and modern standards of Tirebolu. One of the most remarkable changes was how the hazelnut harvest was practiced. Many notable families started to leave the town in the 1950s for their children’s education or better jobs, and most left their hazelnut gardens in the hands of ‘*yarıcis*,’ peasants who collected the crop to return half of it to the owner. In time, peasants began to save enough money to buy parts of these hazelnut gardens from their owners. In one old shoemaker’s words:

Money changed hands in the 1960s and 1970s. The townspeople sold their lands and houses, and they gradually left the town. Who was the buyer? The peasant! We are accustomed to eat well, to dress up. They, on the contrary, do not spend their money on such things. They save!

The 1960s were also the decade of the first wave of Turkish migration to Europe as guest workers. Some peasants who migrated from Tirebolu to Germany, Holland, and the US in the late 1960s came back with savings in the 1970s. They invested in buying lands, building modern houses, and opening new businesses in furniture, textile, whiteware, or intercity bus lines. While old notables visited their town only during the summer, Tirebolu’s demography considerably changed with the incoming new settlers from the surrounding villages. The changing demography of the town from urban- to rural-origin residents brought discontent among the established townspeople regarding the newcomers. The term ‘*içinden*’

referred to the old families from ‘within’ Tirebolu, whereas ‘*köylü*,’ the peasant, referred to those coming from the outside villages, making the term ‘*Kimlerdensin?*’ (To which family do you belong?) a common question. To a Tirebolite lady from a notable family, all was a matter of ‘manners’: ‘I come during the summers, and it hurts me to see people who spit on the road, or dust off a table cloth from a balcony.’

Although I remember the Tirebolu of the 1960s and early 1970s as a joyful summer resort with beaches, boat rides, and open-air cinemas, when I began my research in the early 1990s, it had turned out to be a neglected town with demolished houses and half-finished new settlements. In contrast to neighboring towns like Giresun and Trabzon, whose administrative status was acknowledged as a ‘city,’ it was seen as a ‘fallen town,’ especially when compared to the Tirebolu of the late Ottoman and early Republican eras. Many women I interviewed expressed a sense of nostalgia for the Tirebolu of their childhood in terms of its natural beauties with its seaside, mountains (*yayla*), rivers, and springs. However, they displayed different attitudes toward the changes that came with the rise of the Islamist movement in the 1990s and its growth in the 2000s. Many rural entrepreneurs joined during these years, and new business networks developed around certain religious orders. While global hazelnut export continued, new business opportunities also emerged in the service and manufacturing sectors, thanks to other religious clusters in Istanbul, Europe, Eurasia, and even China. The rising profile of the conservative small businessmen who soon became ‘promising grooms’ for arranged marriages in the town and such arrangements also afforded job opportunities for siblings and other family members.

Another significant change has been in the material culture of Tirebolu, a sensitive issue for Tirebolite women. When the Black Sea Coastal Highway construction began, Tirebolu was the only town where the coastal layout was protected via two tunnels, thanks to the activism of the town’s women’s association. Nevertheless, the construction business that overtook the Turkish economy did irreversibly change the view of Tirebolu in the late 2000s: with the new regulations, high-rise apartments began to be constructed along the seashore, changing the panorama of the town. Although many people complained, the houses were sold quickly. The rising housing problems were, in fact, a concern I repeatedly encountered during my research. An older father from a notable family who saw me taking pictures of his old house confronted me:

You like the old things, don’t you? You would like this house to be preserved. But what will I do for my five children who want houses from me? I do not need this old house. I need a six-floor house, to make my five children happy, so that I can live happy on the sixth floor at my very old age.

While there is a consensus on living a prosperous modern everyday life, the profile of Tirebolu’s women has been divided between ‘secular’ and ‘pro-government/religious.’ In the last two decades, the way the local government and local businesses operate projects has been very much in accordance with government policies. An old Tirebolite expresses the profile of new pro-government Tirebolites as ‘chic Muslims’ (*süslümans*) who desire a good life, with a reference to their consumerist attitudes. A group of ‘*Hocanıms*,’ women Quran teachers, open their own schools in their houses, while others work in the women’s branches of the Tirebolu-AKP. There are also descendants of old notables who continue to live in the town

and have mixed feelings about the town's material and demographic changes. To conclude with the words of a former landlord's daughter who worked as a schoolteacher:

We know one another; we know who we are. I miss my old Tirebolu, but I also like my terrace overlooking the sea in this clean new building. I like the fact that I can reach the airport in an hour, and have access to the diversity of goods and services that we lacked in our childhood.

Her words portray the dilemma of small localities in Turkey, where local politics, sense of belonging, nostalgia, and comfort are in a continual negotiation.

Conclusion

Today's Tirebolu has greatly changed in terms of its urban structure. The seaside road, constructed in the early 1950s, shifted the local market from Yeniköy, the former center of the town, to the seaside called Barabut. In the 1990s, an artificial harbor was constructed, followed by the filling of the old bay of Barabut, to gain more land for the town's new demands, including modern shops for all kinds of national goods and services, along with a station for minibus and bus transportation. New high-rise housing projects with a sea view emerged in the 2010s, expanding the town toward its peripheries. The municipality has little interest in preserving old buildings, leaving them to rot in their own filth. The modes of consumption and their local boundaries have also changed dramatically since the early twentieth century. Nevertheless, exploring the historical ethnography of a small town like Tirebolu makes us contemplate the regional trade patterns that continued even during the turmoil of the interwar era. Like all other Anatolian towns, Tirebolu's everyday life during that time displays how demographic changes from the cohabitation of diverse ethnic and religious communities shifted toward a new Turkish-Muslim community, which carried traces of former legacies, including the cautious and thrifty economic behavior, before shifting toward an abundant free market at the turn of the twenty-first century. Local consumption in Tirebolu was bound to topography and transportation in the past, shaping social and economic life accordingly. Today, with the pace of change in the landscape, architecture, goods, and entertainment, the relics of the past are hard to chase in these small towns. Oral history and ethnography help us link the gaps between different phases of modernization processes, as eating the traditional *pide* at 11 am on Sundays prevails as a silent but meaningful consumption.

Notes

- 1 The '*muhacirlik*' era refers to the temporary migration of Muslims fleeing from Russian occupation of Trabzon. The Russian army came up to, but could not cross the Harşit River at the borderland of Tirebolu.
- 2 The early Republican period can be said the first of these historical conjunctures, while the demography of the town was 'Turkified.' Others included the internal migration after the 1950s, and the rise of Islamist movement in the 1990s.
- 3 I tried to refer to the clash of ethnic groups in a former article. See Öztürkmen 2006.
- 4 One should remember that following the transition to multi-party system, the internal migration during 1950–1980 changed the class profile of the population, with the settlement of local elite to bigger cities and the moving of rural population downtown. Later in the 1990s, with the rise

- of Islamist movement, new commercial networks and possibilities changed the town's material culture and social life in a radical way from early Republican era.
- 5 See the project 'The Black Sea and its port-cities, 1774–1914. Development, convergence and linkages with the global economy,' Harlaftis et al. 2012–2015.
 - 6 Some British documents dated 1883 list the products traded at Tirebolu port, with a value of £19,500, including £11,000 worth of agricultural products, £2,150 worth of animal products, £500 worth of industrial products, £2,000 worth of mineral products, and other products worth £3,850 Şaşmaz 2014, p. 697.
 - 7 *Konak* refers to large mansions in Ottoman material culture, housing an upper-class extended family, with their servants. See Andı 1996; Gündüz 1997, p. 677; Dayanç and Alan 2008.
 - 8 Many Pontic Greeks settled in Russia for trade and also to omit new taxation regulations. In 1915, they were also affected by the Armenians' forced exile and the terror of local Muslim militia led by Topal Osman.
 - 9 In some cases, suffering from Wealth tax obligation in 1942, the 6–7 September pogrom in Istanbul, and the Cyprus events in 1963 and 1974, many non-Muslims continued to leave their homeland behind and migrated to Europe or the Americas.
 - 10 The dress code became even more important when the costume reform imposed by law caused a choice to be made between 'national modernity' and 'traditional conservatism.' The veil had to be removed, but how to replace it in the public space was an important identity decision for most women. Wearing a 'shawl' instead of a 'scarf' was a conservative choice. Many men in Tirebolu who were loyal to Kemal Atatürk and his reforms encouraged their wives 'opening up,' meaning taking off their scarves. But not all women could adapt to this rapid change. A.Ç. recalled her husband telling her, 'You'll wear your scarf when you approach the house, if these are my parents who embarrass you.' A.Ç. would not comply saying 'I was not used to it.'
 - 11 Even today, Tirebolu women brag about themselves, and how they turned a blue jean to a Bermuda short, or a long sleeve dress into a sleeveless night blouse.
 - 12 N.M. remembered how bread was distributed with a pass in Tirebolu. Although Turkey stayed out of the war during the World War II, its economy greatly suffered because of supplementary military consumption, which affected wheat and flour production as well. See also Dokuyan 2013.
 - 13 M.N. still remembered the *hamam* sessions with the loud announcement of the *tellak*, the *hamam* keeper: 'Is Rabia Hanım here, has Azize Hanım come, has Muteber Hanım come? Put the fire on, put the fire on!'
 - 14 'Caz' (Jazz) mostly referred to Western type of popular music. For the local elite and the state employees in Tirebolu, *caz* was primarily seen as an access to modern ways of life. The tradition of watching Western type of band continued until the 1990s in the Republic Park. For a historical review of jazz in Turkey, see Uyar and Karahasanoğlu 2016.
 - 15 Here, 'shoe numbers' referred to the supply of black rubber shoes (*kara lastik*) during the 1950s, replacing peasants' rough leather footwear *çarık*.

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PART 3

Urbanism and Consumption



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10

(NEO-)LIBERAL TRANSFORMATIONS OF TANGIER'S WATERFRONT

From Trade and Transport to Leisure and Pleasure

Steffen Wippel

Tangier is located at the northern tip of Morocco and is the main urban center on the Tangier Peninsula. Its major seafront faces the Strait of Gibraltar in the north. An approximately five-kilometer-long semi-circular sandy bay dominates the central parts of Tangier. To the east and west, the landscape is characterized by an alternation of mountainous, cliffy coasts, and small beaches. Nearly 20 kilometers of beaches follow the Atlantic coast between Cap Spartel and the city of Asilah. Along the Mediterranean, the 40-kilometer-long Tamouda Bay extends between the Spanish presidio of Ceuta and Tétouan, the second city on the peninsula.

Despite its age-old maritime trade vocation, the Moroccan coastal city of Tangier had long turned its back to the sea. The beginning of explicit waterfront development in the early twentieth century finally put the city in increasingly closer contact with its coastline. After independence in 1956, the central authorities hesitantly aspired for Tangier's further seaside development, but the city experienced a lasting period of decay. A new phase of waterfront transformation did not start until the mid-2000s. With its clear focus on the seaside front, urban renewal in Tangier joins the experience of a plethora of seaside and riverside cities in the region and worldwide.

Conceptual Considerations

The *evolution of port cities* is often described as a sequence of historical phases of port-city interaction, which have followed broader economic transformations, developments in transport and trade patterns, and technological changes (Hoyle 1989, 2000; with a focus on Rotterdam, Hein and van de Laar 2020). Mostly, they have resulted in the increasing functional and spatial separation of ports and cities. Intra-urban harbors were integral parts of cities' economies and societies until the early twentieth century but were always ambivalently perceived places. On the one hand, they were severely reputed for undesired

practices, such as prostitution and crime, or as gateways for migration and diseases, which called for regulation and control; on the other hand, these sites have been regarded as sources of modernity, openness, and cosmopolitanism and have benefited maritime metropolises that wanted to assert a liberal self-image (Daus 2000, pp. 75–78; Kokot et al. 2008). With the development of larger and technologically more advanced ships, modern deep-water seaports were established outside inner cities. Since the late 1960s, following the introduction of container shipping, port activities spread even farther away from urban centers to more peripheral sites, and former port areas deteriorated into wastelands. Finally, recent revitalization programs for the areas surrounding the old ports have transformed them into premium business and residential waterfronts.

Accordingly, the conventional definition of *waterfront development* refers to the contemporary reconversion of former port and industrial sites along the coast or riverside of existing port cities. Its onset has been dated to the 1960s, when it started on the North American East Coast, with Baltimore and Boston as outstanding examples. From there, it has increasingly spread around the world (cf. also Comby 2020). In Europe, prominent cases can be found from Oslo in the north to Barcelona in the south, whose waterfront was revitalized for the 1992 Olympic Games. A new interest in waterfront development also arose in cities of the ‘Global South’, mostly in emerging economies but also in economically less-developed countries. On the Arabian Peninsula, Dubai and other Gulf cities are prominent examples, reflecting their ambitions for worldwide recognition; to some extent, they have become urban models themselves (Wippel et al. 2014). Yet, in these cases, waterfront development primarily concerns the newly built waterfronts of rapidly expanding cities, not the conversion of existing historical urban sites, i.e., deserted former docklands.

Therefore, in contrast to the classic definition, I plead for a broader understanding of waterfront development as the reshaping of the entire (sea-, lake-, or river-oriented) waterside of an urban agglomeration. This also necessitates a historical perspective. Coastal and riparian cities, for instance, started to build not only new port facilities in the industrial liberal age, but also promenades for the entertainment and recreation of the local population (cf. also Daus 2000). Besides big cities and metropolises, smaller localities around the Baltic Sea and the UK likewise developed their seaside promenades and resort architecture from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century, when modern mass tourism commenced. In the nineteenth century, climatically better-favored sea resorts along the Mediterranean, starting with the French and Italian ‘rivieras’, also came into vogue. These places offered certain liberties and temporary escapes from thoroughly structured everyday life.

Since the 1980s, more and more cities underwent a *neoliberalization* of their mode of governance, with important effects on their cityscape (e.g., Brenner and Theodore 2002; Heeg and Rosol 2007). In the former liberal age, when laissez-faire ideology dominated, the ‘night watchman state’ was limited to guaranteeing legal certainty and public security and, beyond that, to a minimum of intervention in economic and urban development. In contrast, a central characteristic of the neoliberal agenda is the radicalization of the market principle, which then comes to pervade many aspects of social life, pushes state institutions themselves to act like market participants, and is implemented with massive state support. Urban management is increasingly oriented toward the ideal of the ‘entrepreneurial city’ (Hall and Hubbard 1998). Private firms have entered broad public-private coalitions and are actively engaged in fields such as urban planning and security (e.g., Swyngedouw et al. 2002; Heeg 2019). Under conditions of accelerating economic globalization, transnational investors, developers, and builders profoundly intervene in the urban fabric.

Cities are, first of all, considered engines of economic growth, and they increasingly feel pushed to enter fierce regional and global competition in their quest for capital, tourism, and transport. Hence, urban policies, in the first instance, mutate into locational strategies to increase attractiveness and attention and to integrate global trade and investment flows. State-created hard locational advantages include infrastructural provisions like the establishment of special economic zones, techno-parks, and new transport schemes. But, notably, with soft advantages, public authorities attempt to attract an affluent, high-income, and revenue-generating national and international clientele, including highly skilled workers, aspiring residents, and free-spending tourists. A global consumption-oriented 'creative class' (Florida 2005) is considered an essential promoter of economic progress and has, in turn, gained significant influence on urban development strategies. Widely recognized flagship mega-projects serve as a major means in the attention economy and address expectations of luxury, experience, and amusement (Swyngedouw et al. 2002). Luxury residences, shopping malls, restaurants and bars, and facilities for leisure and pleasure – like entertainment parks, marinas, integrated tourism complexes, and cultural attractions – are considered central elements catering to highly individualized lifestyles. The transformation of degraded urban waterfronts into high-end office, residential, and leisure complexes with self-selling sea views is part of this. They constitute important showcases for the image of a city and have attained central positions in globally oriented urban marketing and branding (Swyngedouw et al. 2002; Comby 2020).

The pervasive diffusion of the neoliberal city is nowadays found all over the world, particularly in the less-developed Global South (Heeg 2019). However, neoliberalism is neither static, universal, nor monolithic, but rather a process that has captured more and more parts of the world and shows differentiated specifications varying with historical, political, and socio-economic circumstances (Peck and Tickell 2002). Moreover, cities are rarely entirely neoliberalized but, instead, display growing islands and additional layers of neoliberal imprints adding to previous ones.

However, neoliberal development is simultaneously characterized by increasing socio-spatial *fragmentation and heterogenization* (Heeg and Rosol 2007). A fragmented urban landscape resulting from growing physical separation and social opposition among different parts of the city is on the rise. Large urban development projects, in particular, are poorly integrated into the urban fabric. In line with that, modern comprehensive and rational planning has been replaced by patchy master plans for individual project sites and vague, marketing-oriented urban 'visions' (Swyngedouw et al. 2002; for Arab Gulf cities, Wippel et al. 2014). Physically separated (and often socio-economically inaccessible) free zones, port installations, gated communities, tourism resorts, shopping malls, entertainment centers, and leisure parks form enclaves of 'territorial exclusion' (Stren 2001, p. 202) that allow access only under certain conditions. Likewise, recent programs for waterfront rehabilitation show processes of social exclusion and gentrification affecting poorer segments of the population that live close to the former ports or subside from port activities (Kokot et al. 2008).

Yet, except for Gulf cities, waterfront developments in the Arab world and their productive and consumptive functions remain widely underexplored. Hence, against these precursory conceptual considerations of broader evolutions, this chapter investigates the transformations of the Tangier waterfront from a historical perspective, notably from early endeavors around the turn of the twentieth century to the recent large urban and peri-urban development projects, and it points to the simultaneities and shifts between fields of trade and transport, on the one hand, and leisure and pleasure, on the other.

Historical Waterfront Development in Tangier

Tangier was an old trade center linking trans-Saharan and trans-Mediterranean commercial networks. However, the old town (*medina*), majestically overlooking the Straits from above the cliffs, turned its back to the sea; the only access from the seaside was the *Port Gate* (*Bāb al-Marsā*). The first mole was built under British rule after 1663 (e.g., Routh 1912, esp. pp. 343–364). The king, who held the city in personal possession, wanted to make Tangier one of the most important trade ports in the world. But two decades later, when Tangier fell back to the Alawite dynasty, the retreating occupiers destroyed the port facilities.

From the late eighteenth century on, Tangier developed into Morocco's diplomatic capital and increasingly came under international administration. Ships still had to anchor at a distance from the shore, and goods and passengers were transloaded on small boats. Only since the late nineteenth century did the harbor resume development.¹ Tangier became the first trade port of the Sultanate and was the only port with departures for pilgrimage to Mecca. Since 1875, a series of small wooden and cemented jetties were built, and in 1905, the resident German businessman Renschhausen received the concession for an early port construction. However, with the creation of the French and Spanish protectorates in Morocco, the protecting powers concentrated their efforts on ports in their respective zones, such as Casablanca and Ceuta. With the establishment of the international statute of Tangier in 1923, new efforts to expand the port were made again until the early 1930s. At that time, the port was built and managed by an international port society with important stakes in the statutory powers and its capital. After the Second World War, when maritime traffic boomed once more, another extension of the harbor made Tangier one of the most frequented ports in the Mediterranean.

Under international administration, an extremely liberal approach characterized Tangier's urban development (esp. Nieto and El Idrissi 2009). The consular representatives intervened little in urban development, and hesitant attempts for regular urban planning were not very successful. Instead, notably private, often foreign interests were largely given a free hand and pushed the city's expansion. Due to its specific history, Tangier's city center is not marked by the same strict dualistic structure as other Moroccan towns, and the new extramural town developed rather uncoordinatedly without the rigid geometric pattern found in the French-occupied part of Morocco (in particular, Dalton et al. 1993). Initially, established families, traders, and entrepreneurs invested in real estate development. Global flight capital supported the construction boom after the Second World War. Then, real estate companies, in particular, contributed to a more systematic development.

In parallel, the city had expanded along the bay to the southeast. The first buildings on the seashore started to appear in the late 1890s. The short seaside stretch became known as the *Boulevard de Front de Mer*. The first hotel opened with a large panoramic terrace allowing guests to watch the horse races, which took place along the bay and were an esteemed entertainment of the urban society. Soon, a theater and cinema, and later the French *Kursaal*, with a ballroom, a cinema, casino, and cabaret, attracted a large public. For a long time, the quarters behind these facilities were inhabited by a poor population and had poor sanitary conditions. But in the 1920s, the boulevard started to transform rapidly. After a Spanish donation of 100 palm trees, it was renamed *Avenida de España*. In the following decade, it was extended along the bay, but the railway line that had connected Tangier with its Moroccan hinterland since the mid-1920s was also extended along the beach to the port.

The boulevard had now become the place for carnival and flower parades, fairs, *corridas*, and other festivities and amusements. The double-rowed palm alley along the sea was a favorite place for the local *paseo* of all classes, promenades 'to see and be seen'.

Cosmopolitan by tradition, the population of Tangier had grown rapidly since the second half of the nineteenth century and become even more diversified.² The city's liberality attracted European and American writers, artists, misfits, and dropouts. Prostitution and homosexuality were widespread, well-known phenomena, and the city was inundated by hashish grown in the nearby Rif Mountains. Wealthy people, smugglers, criminals, gamblers and speculators, spies, refugees, and resistance fighters from abroad populated Tangier and gave it the allure of a mysterious place and a louche 'sin city'. An important attraction and source of income was gambling, which was commonly tolerated even if officially forbidden. Together with the Andalusian coast, sunny and climatically temperate Tangier appeared on the touristic map from the 1880s on as a Mediterranean winter resort, first for an aristocratic clientele.³ Soon, ferryboats from Gibraltar and Algeciras brought an increasing number of tourists to the city, even if until the 1900s, its environs remained inhospitable, with repeated kidnapping of Westerners. But only in the 1930s did responsible actors in Tangier start to conceive of tourism as an economically relevant sector and to plan the construction of associated installations to be financed by the municipality.

In the 1890s, the first *balnearios*, simple wooden bathing huts for women, were set up on the beach. Over time, more of them opened, and, together with Rio and Miami, Tangier was considered to have one of the finest beaches in the world. Bathing in the sea became popular but was mostly practiced by Westerners. Moroccans came to the beach for economic and spiritual reasons. It was a place not only for fishermen, smugglers, refugees, and street children, but also for waste disposal. The *Avenida* experienced its apogee from the mid-1940s, the end of the interim Spanish occupation, until 1960, when the international regime was dissolved. Renowned hotels, restaurants, cafés, offices, and an attraction park existed along it.⁴ More and more, the old *balnearios* had been replaced by modern structures with swimming pools, bars, and restaurants. The waterfront area was also popular with many artists and hedonists, who were attracted by the glamorous and dubious reputation of Tangier (that also allowed them to experience a bit of 'exotic' Africa) at that time; they, in turn, contributed to the city's fame.

After its reintegration into Morocco, Tangier suffered for decades from the central authorities' intentional neglect. The reasons for this were resentments, especially on the part of the then-Crown Prince and later King Hassan II, against the north of Morocco, long reputed as a rebellious region, but also the more conservative parts of the Moroccan population's disapproval of the lax moral standards in the city. However, in 1961, the first nationwide free zone was established in the harbor area, specializing in outsourced mass production in the textile sector, and the port was extended further. With growing labor migration to European countries, passenger traffic at the port of Tangier developed rapidly and made the city the main gateway between Morocco and Europe. The port and free zone complex constituted an extraterritorial enclave at the foot of the city with strictly controlled access for authorized workers and transit passengers only. Along the bay, the city extended further. A few more hotels were built along the western part of the bay, and the residential building grew denser.

Yet, major projects to expand tourism largely failed (Berriane 1992). In the 1970s, Agadir, later followed by Marrakech, replaced Tangier as the most important Moroccan

tourist destination. Despite the renewed attractiveness of the city, including its beaches, for the *beat generation* and as a stopover on the *Hippie Trail*, the beach area had already started to slowly decline; hotels closed, pollution increased, and its public ‘Moroccanized’, exhibiting more and more conservative bathing habits and costumes. As a result, Tangier forfeited much of its international character, and the harbor area, in particular, was reputed as a place for cheap bars, flophouses, drug trafficking, contraband, and prostitution (cf. also Peraldi 2007).

Contemporary Waterfront Development in Tangier

Major developments have largely transformed the peninsula’s waterfront again since the mid-2000s. When Mohammed VI acceded to power in 1999, he showed an assertive interest in developing Tangier. Since then, it has been a focus of national strategies. This encompasses endeavors to make the agglomeration the second economic pole in the country, to turn it into an important transport and logistics hub, and to give it a central place in national tourism development. Huge infrastructure projects and far-reaching urban transformation are in the works.⁵ Besides numerous individual projects, this includes two main programs focusing on the waterfront.

As the first and most ambitious project, the construction of the integrated ‘Tanger Méditerranée’ port, logistics, and industrial platform aimed at opening the city to international capital and integrating it into far-reaching connections. Under the auspices of the newly established *Tangier Mediterranean Special Agency* (TMSA), a new mega-port opened in late 2007 (cf. also Barthel and Planel 2010). It is located more than 40 kilometers away from the old harbor, to the east of the agglomeration, directly in the Strait of Gibraltar (Figure 10.2). The port is designed mainly for container transshipment, and by 2019, after the opening of two other container terminals, it advanced to place 35th worldwide in annual throughput. It is now the first-ranked port on the African continent, the fourth in the Mediterranean, and the second in the Arab world. The ports of Tangier are by far the most important entrances for travelers and international road transport from Europe to Morocco. Additionally, the container port has sparked multiple regional and transregional interconnections. The place has capitalized on its strategic location, where the world’s main east-west shipping route passes from the Mediterranean Sea to the Atlantic Ocean. Many feeder lines connect Tangier to ports in adjacent Mediterranean and sub-Saharan regions, contributing to Tangier’s new role as a ‘gateway to Africa’ (Wippel 2021; for Tangier’s variegated African links, Mareš and Wippel 2020). As a new landmark, the *TangerMed Business Centre* was designed by ‘starchitect’ Jean Nouvel. The city and the new port area gained direct motorway and railway access. Away from the coastline, the TangerMed complex also comprises several free and industrial zones scattered across the peninsula.

With the opening of TangerMed, all commodities and most passenger traffic were transferred to the new port. In the old port, only short-distance fast ferry traffic to Spain has remained. A new fishing harbor with triple capacity has been built next to the existing port ground. Also, the industrial plants from the port’s free zone had to move to the *Tanger Free Zone* south of the city. This left ample space for the complete rebuilding of the inner-city waterfront (Figure 10.1). Already in 1999, the central station near the harbor had closed down, and the fenced railway tracks, which separated the promenade from the beach, spoiled the sea view, and caused many accidents, were dismantled. Instead, a new main

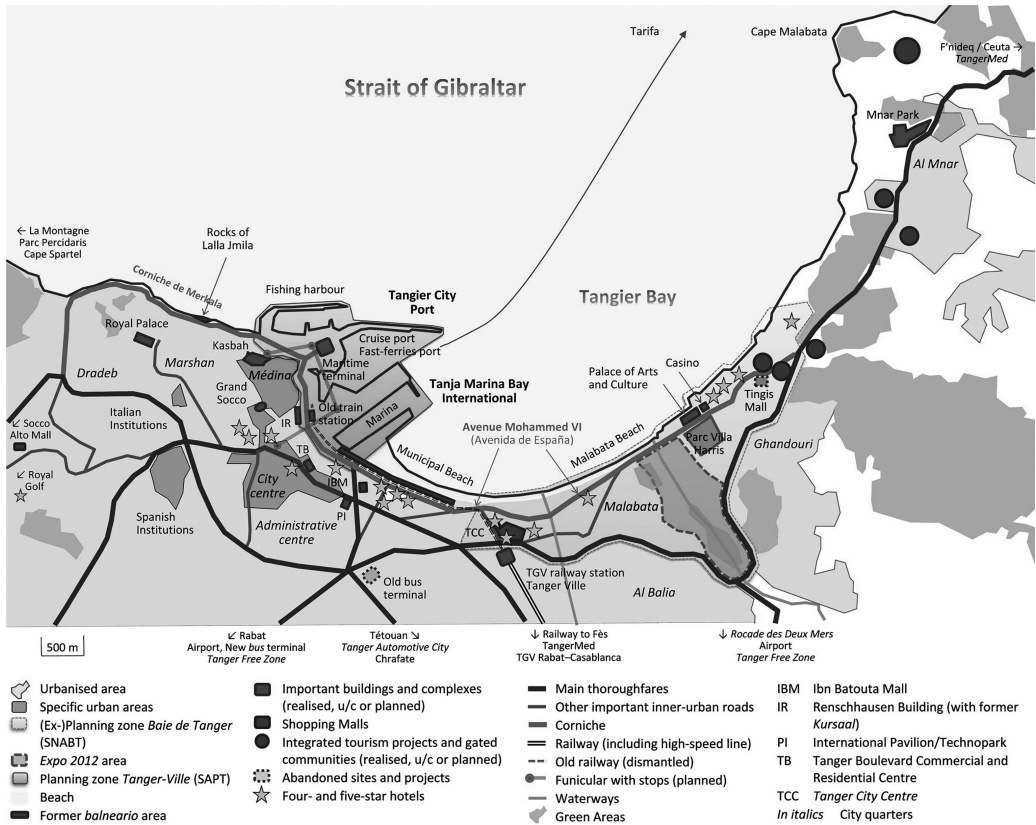


Figure 10.1 Tangier's contemporary waterfront. Concept and cartography: Steffen Wippel 2020.

station opened at the southern tip of the bay in 2003. Parallel to that, in 2005, the numerous bars along the corniche, now renamed *Avenue Mohammed VI*, had to remove their stories protruding above the sea to provide an open view of the sea. As merchandise and passenger traffic increasingly congested the corniche, a western access to the old port area, the *Corniche de Merkala*, opened in 2009.

Since 2010, the *Société d'Aménagement du Port de Tanger* (SAPT) has been developing the 54-hectare 'Tanger Ville' scheme. The main project aims at converting the former inner-city harbor and free zone into a waterfront for leisure and consumerism (cf. also Benabad 2012). It includes expanding the cruise terminal to multiply the arrival of passengers by more than seven and building a vast marina and manifold tourism facilities to attract international visitors. High-standard residential and office buildings, several four- and five-star hotels, cafés and restaurants, a 'culture and event pole' with a museum, a multiplex cinema, a convention hall, and a 'commercial pole' with 43,000 square meters of shopping floor space have been envisaged as well, primarily designed for a well-off clientele. The first phase of *Tanja Marina Bay*, with a new yacht harbor and its restaurant esplanade, opened in 2018.

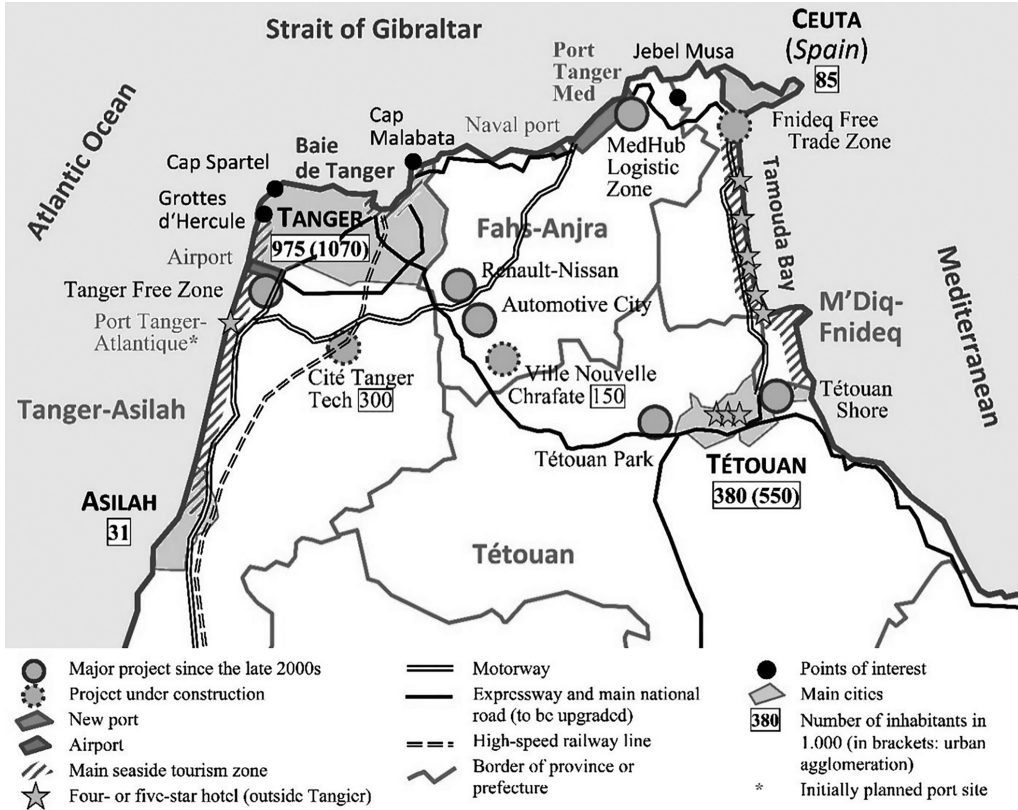


Figure 10.2 Development projects along the Tangier Peninsula.
 Concept and cartography: Steffen Wippel 2020.

Further transformations happened along the beach that extends the *Tanger Ville* project to the southeast. In 2016, the remaining bars had to leave, and their buildings were destroyed. New bars have reopened recently, tucked away in the promenade’s new basement beside the huge underground parking garage. Above, the widened, concreted, and purged walkway now allows for leisure activities such as horse and bobby car riding, skateboarding, and basketball. Also, the double palm row was rooted out, and the boulevard developed into a broad thoroughfare that is difficult to cross. The corniche has been decorated with a supposedly Islamic geometric design (benches, fences, light stelae, gazebos), which some passers-by called ‘Dubai style.’

Between the central railway station and the sea, construction has become denser, too. Here, at the southernmost end of Tangier Bay, a new center for transport, business, and up-scale consumption has developed (Kanai and Kutz 2013). In 2015, the *Tangier City Centre* complex opened, encompassing the city’s first mega-mall of 30,000 square meters, a multiplex cinema, luxury hotels and apartments, and an international business center. Toward the coastline, this joins with apartment blocks, already built before, mainly for holiday purposes (for the most part for Moroccan expatriates who can afford it). The station itself was

again under reconstruction, and a postmodern steel-and-glass superstructure was inaugurated in 2018 to serve the new high-speed rail line to Casablanca. Further to the east of the bay, the continuation of the aseptic corniche in the same style has been completed, too. For about two decades, this area, up to Cap Malabata, has experienced the construction of several cafés and restaurants, four- and five-star hotels, and gated communities. The projects that have been built or are under construction include an amusement park, a restored old landmark villa with gardens opened for the public, and a still unfinished cultural complex.

Seashores outside the city itself also experienced considerable reconfigurations (Figure 10.2). Along the Atlantic coast, holiday villages have popped up (mostly for national tourism). The Hercules Cave, a famous tourist attraction, has been refurbished and was reopened in 2016. In contrast, along Tamouda Bay, mass sun and beach tourism development had already started in the mid-1960s and intensified since the 1980s (Berriane 1992, 2011; Daus 2000, p. 311; Le Tellier 2006, pp. 167–178; Arcila Garrido et al. 2016). While both areas cater mainly to national guests, well-known international investors have begun to establish more tourism infrastructure there, including extended luxury resorts oriented toward a global public.

In general, tourism in the Tangier region has been increasing considerably again in recent years, including foreign visitors (and Moroccans residing abroad and one-day tourists from Spain) – but it is still far from the officially declared ambitious goals. Paralleling the general tendency in Morocco, Tangier has even experienced a fall in cruise ship passengers in the last decade.⁶ To increase occupancy rates over the year, responsible actors also aspire to attract the more lucrative MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions) tourism.

The Not-so-Glitzy Sides of Waterfront Development

While current development along the Tangier waterfront has brought impressive construction activities with economic success and sometimes shows glitzy aspects, it has also created major physical, social, and cultural problems and fractures. In the past, the former inner-city port and free zone area constituted an extraterritorial enclave with strictly controlled access for authorized workers and transit passengers only. But despite declared intentions to open the sea to the broad public, in fact, today's walled and fenced residential, industrial, and infrastructural zones, along with controlled access, have contributed to the ever-growing physical fragmentation of urban and peri-urban space and the exclusion of large parts of the local population from coastal areas in and around Tangier. These new 'islands' are often much more connected to other parts of the world than to their immediate urban or national hinterland.

The new thoroughfares, gated communities, and tourism zones increasingly block access, especially to previously popular beaches (e.g., at the new port site and at the foot of the *medina* hill); the walled TangerMed area alone occupies about eight kilometers of coastline. During its construction, the local population protested against forced expropriation, under-value compensation, and detrimental ecological consequences (e.g., Barthel and Planel 2010; Planel 2011). Negative effects on the fragile ecosystem have also been reported from the strongly urbanizing and touristifying east coast (Berriane 2011). In the course of the nationwide 'Villes sans bidonvilles' program, launched in 2004 by the central government to reduce precarious housing conditions, barracks in the eastern part of the bay were destroyed in its first year, and its inhabitants displaced to other settlements, suggesting the

liberation of highly valuable and visible central ground for the newly inaugurated tourism zone (Le Tellier 2006, esp. pp. 486–491). Moreover, existing workplaces along the waterfront close to workers' places of residence, such as in the old port and free zone, have been lost or transferred to the inland (industries) and coastal (port) periphery of the agglomeration.

Interventions in the local fabric mainly come from outside the city, on either broader national or international scales. This includes central state development strategies for both the national and local levels and the strong presence and intervention of foreign (notably Spanish and Gulf) investors, contractors, developers, and donors in the different projects. The two main programs relating to the waterfront, *Tanger Méditerranée* and *Tanger Ville*, have been promoted as high-ranking 'royal' prestige projects, experienced ad hoc planning, and were not well integrated into belatedly updated comprehensive urban development schemes. Typical for Morocco is the 'agencification' of urban project execution under the control of several central state authorities and with far-reaching planning, implementation, and surveillance rights on extensive project areas to the detriment of local interests, needs, and competencies (Barthel and Planel 2010; Amarouche and Bogaert 2019). Major examples are the SAPT for the old port area and the TMSA for the TangerMed port and its wider hinterland. Parts of these projects (like port terminals, marina residences) are then ceded to international private firms for development and management.

Finally, we should not disregard that the former port area and promenade have not only been relieved of dirt- and noise-producing and view-spoiling activities but have also been cleansed of unwanted, dubious, and unregulated establishments, practices, and human elements; the old city port was long associated with irregular migration, (female and male) prostitution, crime, and drug smuggling. Indeed, access to and views of the sea have been facilitated along the beach promenade, but beach life – such as 'half-naked' bathing – has more and more shed the libertinage of past times (already Daus 2000, p. 310). Instead, a purified corniche has been created that provides for more innocent pleasures after the demolition of permissive drinking and dancing halls and their banishment underground or to the beachfront's periphery. By contrast, neoliberal development priorities are demonstrated by the anecdote that authorities defied Islamist objections against the establishment of a casino on the eastern shore of Tangier Bay with an economic rationale that pointed to well-funded visitors, jobs, and tax revenues (Iraqi 2007; Kanai and Kutz 2013, p. 89).

Notes

- 1 In the following, a long list of sources helped to track Tangier's historic urban (port and waterfront) development, including Michaux-Bellaire 1921; Bonjean 1967; Ceballos López 2009; Tafersiti Zarouila 2012; Mas Garriga 2019.
- 2 For its unique history, Pack (2015, p. 58) even concedes to Tangier a more original cosmopolitanism than to other touristic enclaves along the Mediterranean like the Côte d'Azur that, according to him, has only an invented international character.
- 3 For tourism and beach life, cf. particularly Daus 2000, pp. 292–304; Pack 2015.
- 4 In the late 1930s, even a dedicated monthly journal 'Tanger-Riviera' was published.
- 5 For recent developments in and around Tangier, cf. Ducruet et al. 2011; Tafersiti Zarouila 2012; Haller et al. 2016; Wippel 2019. Since 2013, several field stays allowed me to collect further information.
- 6 All developments described here refer to the pre-COVID-19 situation.

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11

LABOR MIGRATION CONTROL AND ASYMMETRICAL DEPENDENCY IN THE ARAB GULF

In-Country Sponsorship (*kafāla*) in Qatar

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Arab Gulf societies are frequently associated with extreme wealth, ultra-modern forms of consumerism, and urban architecture. Yet, consumption in gigantic malls and strolling through green parks in the midst of hot deserts is not for the masses: large proportions of the migrant population residing in the Gulf states not only cannot afford this lifestyle but are also deliberately excluded from certain areas in modern Gulf cities. So-called bachelor bans, for example, bar single men from entering malls and parks on certain days of the week and from living in privileged residential neighborhoods in some countries (Gardner 2010a).

Social and spatial segregation are related to the *kafāla*² system, under which all foreign laborers are required to have an in-country sponsor who is responsible for them, their visa, and their legal status. Anthropological and Islamic studies (Longva 1997; Gardner 2010b, 2018; Damir-Geilsdorf and Pelican 2016, 2018) have affirmed the highly asymmetrical power relations found under the *kafāla* and identified its underlying mechanisms. The resulting legal status of migrant workers has been defined by human and labor rights organizations as ‘modern slavery’ (Free the Slaves 2022; Minderoo Foundation 2022). In the past 10–15 years, international workers’ and human rights organizations have called on Gulf governments to abolish or reform their respective *kafāla* legislation, prevent illegal practices, and monitor the process of reform. While legislators in Gulf states (the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) including Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates) initiated reforms of the *kafāla* between 2008 and 2015, these reforms continue to meet several obstacles throughout the region (Khan and Harroff-Tavel 2011). Cases of abuse on Qatar’s FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) construction sites represent the most recent and prominent example.

Known to Islamic law from the eighth century onward, the *kafāla* has been and continues to be a standard contractual guarantee. It is only since the 1960s that the *kafāla* has been used as a tool for labor migration control in the Gulf. Yet a closer look at its legal past

opens avenues for understanding its controversial status in the present. In classical Islamic contract law, the term *kafāla* denotes a surety bond or bail that ensures, for example, another person's appearance in court (*kafāla bil-nafs*) or the fulfillment of a principal debtor's obligation (*kafāla bil-māl*) (Linant de Bellefonds 2012). As such, the *kafāla* continues to be important in civil transactions and Islamic banking throughout Muslim-majority countries.

Legally speaking, the *kafāla* thus holds the guarantor responsible if the original contract party s/he stands in ('takes *kafāla*') for fails to fulfill his or her obligation and leaves the guarantor legally rather unprotected (Foster 2001, p. 137).³ Today, Gulf nationals sponsoring labor migrants also consider themselves legally unprotected. In both its classical version and its modern guise, the legal instrument of the *kafāla* seems to suggest relationships with unequal legal protection and forms of dependency. Moreover, historical research suggests that the practices of slavery and migration regulation in the region prior to the *kafāla* system have persevered (Hopper 2013; Zdanowski 2014), and this emphasizes colonial continuities (AlShehabi 2019).

However, the existence of unfree labor today cannot be explained solely by reference to historical continuity or legal disposition. I argue that the *kafāla* system's consistency is facilitated by a certain local discourse among citizen-sponsors about labor migrants. While the relevance of this narrative has already been demonstrated for Lebanon (Abdulrahim 2010), it remains an unexplored area of research for Gulf societies. In this chapter, using the example of domestic worker law in Qatar, I show that the *kafāla* system's persistence cannot be understood without considering the context-related mechanisms of that discourse. Drawing attention to the relationship between law-making and prevalent societal discourse, this chapter contributes to the discussion on why fundamental changes to the *kafāla* system are so difficult to realize.

The first part of the chapter addresses the historical origins of the *kafāla*. The second part delineates the continuity of unfree labor in the Gulf and introduces the *kafāla* as a tool for labor migration control. The final section is devoted to the Qatari discourse on migrant domestic labor accompanying the ongoing legislative reform of labor under the *kafāla*. Examples from Qatari newspapers will shed light on the public discourse among Gulf nationals and the legal discourse among members of the Shura council – the legislative authority in Qatar, apart from the Emir – respectively.

Historical Origins of the *kafāla*: A Contractual Guarantee in Islamic Law

Known to Islamic law from the eighth century onward, the *kafāla* derives from pre-Islamic practice (Foster 2001, p. 139; Rahman 2008, p. 344). Foster notices that the Quran and Hadith 'play a confirmatory role, rather than forming a true source of law,' but '[t]he question which is left unanswered here is just how much was developed in pre-Islamic Arabia, how much by Islamic processes, such as *ijmā'* [scholarly consensus] and *qiyās* [analogical reasoning], and how much from borrowing from other systems' (2001, pp. 139–140.).

In the Quran, the root *k-f-l* appears ten times. In the Meccan chapters *Sūrat Tāhā* (20, verse 40) and *Sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ* (28, verse 12), it is noteworthy that the verb *yakfulu* is used to describe a person who rears or nurses a child of whom they are not legal parents. In the Medinan *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* (chapter 3), verses 37 and 44 use *kaffala* and *yakfulu*, respectively, when narrating that Zachariah became baby Mary's guardian. Eventually, *Sūrat al-Naḥl* (chapter 16) and *Sūrat Ṣād* (chapter 38), both Meccan, provide derivatives of *k-f-l* understood to mean 'surety' and 'to entrust something to someone.' Verse 91 of *Sūrat al-Naḥl*

calls on believers not to break their oaths since they have made God their surety/guarantor (*wa-qad ja 'altum llāha 'alaykum kafīlan*). In *Sūrat Šād*, verse 23 reports how someone is asked to entrust his sole sheep to a person with 99 sheep (*fa-qāla akfilnīhā*).⁴

In the Sunna, *k-f-l* appears in a report about the Prophet's refusing to hold the funeral prayer for a deceased person who died in debt. Abū Qatāda, present in that situation, then proposes to take responsibility for his debt: *Anā atakaffalu bihi* (however, other transmissions of the same incident similarly state that he said '*alayya qaḏā 'uhū* or '*alayya daynuhu*').⁵ In other Hadiths, many of them weak,⁶ the word *kiflun* (and its dual, *kiflān/kiflayn*) is used in the sense of someone's 'share' or 'portion' of a responsibility, a burden, or a reward (similar to 4:85).⁷ Therefore, uses of *k-f-l* in the scriptural texts of Islam indicate three meanings: someone taking responsibility for a child in various forms; a share of something; and to entrust something to a guarantor (cf. the classical Arabic dictionary *Lisān al-'arab*: Ibn Manzūr 1968: 11/588–590, *k.f.l.*). Note, though, that both the Quran and Hadith contain other terms related to giving guarantees, as in *za'im* (12:72) or *qabīl* (17:92).

In the context of the standard contractual guarantee that the *kafāla* has become in legal practice, two characteristics deserve particular attention (Rahman 2008). First, as the *kafāla* adds a third party to an otherwise bilateral contractual relationship, it usually results in two contracts rather than one: a contract between the principal debtor and their creditor and a second one between the creditor and the guarantor. This emerging triangular relationship led to the jurists' recurring discussions of the relationship between the original contract and guarantee and the extent to which the guarantor was to be held responsible when a contractual obligation was not fulfilled. Second, jurists had always emphasized its gratuitous nature, understanding the *kafāla* as a benevolent act of generosity on the part of the *kafīl*, assuming he or she provided the *kafāla* by courtesy and free of charge. The 'classical' jurists agreed that the contract required no consideration: the person who takes the obligation enters into the relation unilaterally with no rewards, the only condition being that *s/he* is capable enough (*ahliyya al-tabarru'*) to fulfill the obligation (Rahman 2008, p. 345).⁸

Although Muslim scholars continuously state that the notion of *kafāla* was pre-Islamic and was modified under sharia, to my knowledge, there is no evidence of which exact changes were introduced under the Islamic legal regime or why. In her pioneering study on Kuwait, Anh Nğa Longva (1997) argues that the gratuitous nature of the *kafāla* goes back to Bedouin customs of hospitality. When Rahman (2008, pp. 344–345) argues that early Muslim jurists interpreted the *kafāla* – similar to a gift *inter vivos*⁹ – on the basis of *ta'āwun*, namely, as a means to mutually assist those in need and thus being a good deed and subservience to God, it seems to be unclear whether or not the gratuitous nature is an invention of Islamic law. Indeed, in light of the debate around the quite divergent forms of exchange in pre-modern times, the *kafāla*'s hospitality or gift character is an interesting aspect to look at. As theorized by, and since the work of, sociologist and anthropologist Marcel Mauss, '[p]rior to modernity, the form of exchange in human societies was the gift, a complex of altruistic and self-interested behavior that was obligated and obligating as much as it was free and voluntary' (Gauthier 2020, p. 65). With Polanyi, we can presume those forms of exchange have, in the past, been 'embedded in the wider social order, e.g., within the structuring impetus of statuses and obligations proper to traditional societies' (ibid.). For contemporary times then, we can similarly hypothesize that the *kafāla* must be conceptualized with respect to the specificities of global capitalism and liberalism's cultural ethos of consumerism.

The *Kafāla* as a Regime of Unfree Labor Migration and its Precursors

Today, labor migration is an important demographic factor in the Gulf states (Khalaf et al. 2015; Babar 2020). In Qatar, for instance, migrants make up more than 90 percent of the workforce, which is indeed one of the highest proportions in the world. Workers often originate from Southeast Asia, East Africa, and – to a far lesser extent – Arab countries (Khalaf et al. 2015, p. 33). Employees from Western countries are subject to *kafāla* legislations too and are typically referred to as – usually much better paid – ‘expatriates’ (as opposed to migrant workers).¹⁰ In the largest sectors dependent upon migrants – construction and domestic labor – workers are predominantly non-Muslim. This raises the question of whether modern labor migration resembles Islamic slavery in history. Under the latter, Muslims from territories under Muslim rule (designated as *dār al-islām*) were entitled to enslave non-Muslims. The groups they enslaved lived in those territories external to the *dār al-islām*, within the *dār al-ḥarb*. Conversely, in the *dār al-islām*, the enslavement of Muslim and *dhimmī*¹¹ subjects was forbidden (Schneider 2007, p. 377; Fynn-Paul 2009, p. 18). Indeed, the legal abolition of slavery in the Gulf countries took a long time compared to the rest of the region (e.g., 1952 in Qatar and 1962 in Saudi Arabia), notwithstanding attempts by British authorities to suppress the slave trade dating back to the nineteenth century. In many of their colonies, British authorities had replaced slavery with the system of Indentured Servitude, under which nominally free wage laborers from one part of the British Empire were contracted in another part. Patterns of this regime of involuntary labor migration proved persistent even after its abolition in the British Empire in 1917. For example, the seasonal work of pearl divers in the Gulf (ca. 1870–1920/1930) was deemed by Matthew Hopper (2013) to be somewhere between debt bondage and slavery. In the late 1920s, British authorities in Bahrain established a sponsorship system for the first time, under which captains were legally responsible for their divers. With the discovery of oil, British and US oil companies perpetuated this pattern, opening recruitment offices around the world. The colonial sponsorship system was not yet referred to as *kafāla* (AlShehabi 2019) but was a “‘cheap” means of controlling foreigners and having local citizens take responsibility for them’ (Jureidini and Hassan 2020). Moreover, it was characterized by the cooperative selection of workers by oil companies and colonial bureaucracies. This ‘public-private partnership’¹² and the temporary character as a defining feature of labor migration (Thiollet 2016, p. 8) were later established in state law when the *kafāla* was introduced as a labor migration regime (ibid., p. 14).

Thus, historical continuities with and structural analogies between labor migration regimes of the past seem to suggest parallels between historical slavery and dependency under the *kafāla* system in the present. However, in Qatar, the legal institution of slavery was officially abolished (1952) before the *kafāla* system was introduced. Above all, contemporary labor recruitment preferences result from global labor market dynamics rather than from past enslavement practices. While Gulf countries preferably recruited Arab migrants, from the 1980s onward, Asian countries provided the bulk of cheap labor. Labor militancy in the Gulf had been on the rise in the 1950s and 1960s and stirred worries that the shared language of migrant and native workers would further instill the spread of republican and Arab socialist political ideas. Gulf monarchs’ strategic considerations resulted in a so-called Asianization of the migrant workforce (cf. Hanieh 2011, p. 60; Babar 2020), and since then, its demographic composition in the Gulf has predominantly been affected by the competition between sending states reliant on remittances (Babar 2020). Besides having

turned into a labor migration regime, the *kafāla* witnessed a second interesting twist in modern nation-states' civil legislations: in some North African countries, starting from the late 1950s, the *kafāla* became an institution under which tutelage for children¹³ is organized (Bargach 2002; Cilardo 2011, pp. 236–251). Neither of the two modern variants of the *kafāla* is known to pre-modern Islamic law.¹⁴ Instead, both are adaptations of a rather modern origin (Cilardo 2011, p. 236; Jureidini and Hassan 2020, p. 95). Moreover, both seem to indicate the *kafāla*'s eligibility for the establishment of contractual relationships of asymmetrical dependency, as defined by the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies. In such relationships, one actor controls the actions and the access to resources of another actor, the latter losing autonomy because of the strong asymmetry between the two; such situations are usually supported by an institutional background that ensures that the dependent actors normally cannot change their situation (Winnebeck et al. 2021, p. 8).

This asymmetry describes migrant workers' situation in many Gulf states, as well as in Jordan and Lebanon, where the *kafāla* binds each migrant to a specific employer who acts as his or her sponsor. The system prohibits or makes it more difficult for employees to change employers or to simply leave the country if difficulties occur in the workplace or with employers. Migrant labor regulated under the *kafāla* is only temporary employment, contracts usually being limited to between two and four years. In practice, many employees work in the country for a very long time based on follow-up contracts. However, this system does not allow workers to obtain permanent residence permits, a factor also reflected in the terminology: migrants in lower-skilled jobs are referred to as 'guest worker' (Arabic: *wāfīd*). Under the *kafāla*, every migrant worker needs a so-called sponsor (Arabic: *kafīl*, lit. 'the one who provides the guarantee') to legally enter the country and to take up work there, and this must be a domestic company or a citizen of a Gulf state. Among other things, the sponsor guarantees to the state that their employees will leave the country after the end of the contract, and s/he has control over several matters that affect migrant workers' labor market mobility, including their residence permit, termination of employment, any change of employer (a no objection certificate from the *kafīl* is required), and – in some countries – their departure (the sponsor has to sign an exit permit because the departing worker will otherwise be treated as 'absconding' by the authorities). While some of these provisions have been subject to reforms in many Gulf states, because of a lack of implementation and control, they cannot yet be considered abolished.

In short, the *kafāla* is a regulation of labor migration that provides citizens – in their role as employers – with a very high degree of control over their migrant employees who are left 'susceptible to abuse' (Parreñas 2021, p. 23). As a principle, the *kafāla* system transfers competencies – and thus powers – of state authorities to its citizens, resulting in the privatization and normalization of authority, and thus, in part, of violence (Gardner 2010b).

Domestic Labor and Obstacles to the Abolition of the *Kafāla* System in Qatar

While other Gulf states had begun to implement reforms of the *kafāla* during the late 2000s (Khan and Harroff-Tavel 2011), Qatar refused to do so for several years. But in 2010, the emirate was chosen to host the FIFA World Cup 2022, and the process of reform started. Along with it came increasing international media attention and – after the reformed legislation took effect in 2015 – the monitoring of its implementation by the International Labor Organization (ILO). Observers largely agree that Qatar's efforts at reform

lack discernible results in practice, while most Qataris (88 percent in a survey of more than 2,300 nationals) are hostile to the reform (Diop et al. 2018). The terminology referring to the Islamic law concept of the *kafāla* was replaced by terms such as ‘guest worker’ (Arabic: *wāfīd*, before: *makfūl labu*, i.e., the one subjected to *kafāla*) and ‘recruiter’ (*mustaqdim*, before: *kafīl*), but the controversial elements of the system remained, and the reform lacked mechanisms for implementation and control (al-Ghanim 2015).

In 2018, the Qatari law on domestic work¹⁵ was promulgated. As in most states, domestic workers employed by many Qatari families did not enjoy legal worker protection, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Among the measures introduced by the new law are a maximum of ten working hours per day, one day off per week (at least 24 hours consecutively), and the annual granting of three weeks’ holiday and a bonus. Due to loopholes in the law and its provisions often being weaker than the labor law, it fails to conform to the ILO’s Domestic Workers Convention of 2012 (Human Rights Watch (HRW) 2018). It also lacks control mechanisms (Amnesty International 2020), and, most importantly, it continues to enshrine the practice of *kafāla*, the *kafāla* system representing one of the domestic workers law’s functional constituents.

In what follows, I share three observations concerning this law. I argue that the discourse in the legal and public spheres accompanying the drafting of the law, in particular, tells us much about the societal embeddedness of *kafāla* legislation. The promulgation of this law illustrates how attitudes among Gulf citizens translate into the legal conceptualization of migrant (domestic) labor.

First, in Shura council¹⁶ discussions on the bill, domestic workers’ rights were counterbalanced against the financial well-being of Qatari families. For example, when discussing the introduction of paid annual leave of three weeks and a bonus after each year of employment, then Shura council members Nāṣir b. Rāshid al-Ka‘bī and Rāshid al-Mi‘ḍadī argued for the cancellation of one of these entitlements to unburden Qatari families who could not afford the expense (Al-Watan 2017; Migrant Rights 2017). Al-Mi‘ḍadī and his colleague Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Sulayṭī argued that the nature of domestic work differed entirely from other work in state and private sectors, as did the financial status of families from that of companies and businesses. Al-Sulayṭī stated that domestic workers’ rights (including wages) increased annually (Al-Watan 2017). In these discussions, domestic workers’ employers are exclusively represented as families at risk of being overburdened, and workers’ rights are understood in relation to those of Qatari families. Moreover, Shura council members inverted the imbalance of power between sponsors and workers. Public discourse has followed similar patterns: in an inquiry by the daily newspaper *Al-Sharq*, a respondent stated that in case of conflicts, the new law punished only the *kafīl*, while servants escaped punishment by absconding and finding support from their countries’ embassies. Qatari *kafīls* were represented as ‘the losers of this law’ (HRW 2015), as also claimed by recruitment agencies (al-Ulwānī 2018).

Second, the new law and its coverage in Qatari newspapers¹⁷ reflect racialized and gendered resentments about migrant domestic labor. Wage levels in the domestic sector are geared to workers’ nationalities, which corresponds to many employers’ ideas about domestic workers’ skills and competence. Article 11 requires domestic workers to abide by several precepts, among them ‘to respect the country’s laws, social customs and traditions and its religious and moral values.’ Conversely, however, the law does not require employers to respect their employee’s religion and culture. In the public discourse, migrant workers’ cultures are represented as a threat to the intimate family sphere in which they work.

Newspaper articles portray Qatari children and the family in general as in need of protection from maids when they express that ‘children will be protected from the culture of guest workers in domestic service, especially Asians’ (‘Abd al-‘Azīm 2013) or ‘[m]aids divide men and their wives with sorcery and witchcraft,’ ‘[e]scaped maids behind 90% of thefts,’ or ‘[d]evice to identify maids disguised in Qatari women clothing’ (Amnesty International (AI) 2014, p. 15).¹⁸ This conception of migrant domestic workers expands into another precept of Article 11, requiring them ‘to treat well the employer and the family staying with him and not harm them [*‘adamu l-‘isā’ati ilayhim*], particularly children and the elderly.’¹⁹

Third, domestic labor faces resentment from legislators and sponsors regarding its very nature as household and care work performed in the private sphere. Human and labor rights organizations found that excessive labor and lack of or insufficient rest periods were among the most complained-about factors among domestic workers in Qatar (Amnesty International 2014). Thus, the (non-)regulation of rest periods in the new law (Article 12) not only deviates from Qatari labor law (HRW 2018) but also points to specific problems faced by live-in domestic workers. While the law guarantees workers a weekly day off, it does not specify the frequency and length of breaks or that employees should be allowed to leave the household during rest periods. Responding to an inquiry by HRW, the Ministry of Labor explained that ‘the nature of domestic work is entirely different from factory work or other types of employment, whereby it is naturally interspersed with many periods of rest’ (HRW 2018). Against the attested importance of rest periods in domestic and care work, the ministry is unwilling to put domestic labor on par with other activities or to legislate specific labor protection requirements.

In a survey undertaken by *Al-Sharq*, many Qataris disapproved of their employees leaving the house independently on their day off, assuming that this ‘will cause chaos [*fawḍā*’]’ (*Al-Sharq* 2017) or that maids leaving the house unescorted did not ‘suit Qatari traditions and customs’ and caused ‘problems for themselves or the families they belong to.’ Some respondents explained that as sponsors, they were responsible ‘if a calamity happened to her,’ expressing the view that domestic workers were ‘an integral part of the house. There are no provisions and rules for their work in the house, as there are no fixed working hours per weekday. The relation between them and the employer is not an exploitative one, but a private one’ (ibid.). Portraying labor relations as family-like relations, the discourse among Qatari citizens is a typical representation of the ‘moral economy of paid domestic work.’ In highly personal labor relations, economic and contractual features of employer-employee relationships are replaced by notions of morality and/or family (Näre 2013; Parreñas 2021, p. 16). This ‘moral economy’ serves to legitimize low wages and deregulated working hours as it perceives the expansion of rights primarily as a burden for families, the imposition of which should be prevented.

Contextualized by the discourse in Qatari media, it becomes clear that the law contains both racist and status-related stigmas about domestic workers and a differentiation between domestic work and other employment relationships in which the latter becomes deregulated. These ideas exist among the authorities and among Qataris, and they correspond to the general phenomenon of the devaluation of work usually associated with women, which in many cases is categorized by the state as distinct from surplus value production and privatized within the domestic sphere (Mahdavi 2013; Kanna 2020). Various resentments against migrant workers circulate among Qatari citizens, in media outlets, and among members of the Shura council. In this respect, irrespective of the international discourse on human and labor rights in ‘host’ countries, there is also a legitimizing discourse

regarding the regime established under the *kafāla*. While the topics of citizenship and mobility are not always addressed explicitly in the legal discourse, such communication revolves around an assumed right of citizens to dispose of inexpensive migrant labor. Qatari discourse on domestic workers shows that Qataris not only legitimize the interaction with ‘their’ migrant domestic workers by racist and classist references, but it also disregards or inverts the existing power relationship between them and their employees, as well as ignoring the issue of violence. Constitutive of both this violence and what has been called ‘the spatialization of class’²⁰ (Hanieh 2011, pp. 60, 64–65) is the *kafāla*’s permanent threat of deportation.

The domestic workers’ law demonstrates that to understand how labor is conceived of under the legal framework of the *kafāla*, different dimensions of inequality, such as nationality, gender, and their context-specific relatedness to class, must be considered.²¹ This conceptualization of *domestic* labor exceeds the standard devaluation of domestic work. In the Gulf context, this work is carried out by foreign women, and the discourse exhibits an inherently culturalist-racist component. *Kafāla* expectations, what is usually seen as an Islamic understanding of gender roles, and particular (neo)customary restrictions for females, create a complex entanglement of social relations that feed into the migrant labor legislation.

Conclusion

Since the 1960s, the *kafāla* in the Arab Gulf region has served as a regime of unfree migrant labor. Originally a contractual guarantee in traditional Islamic law, as in its modern application too, this legal institution exhibits a certain disposition toward relationships of asymmetrical dependency. However, I argue that neither this characteristic nor historical continuity alone can explain the persistence of unfree labor in the Gulf. As demonstrated by AlShehabi, the historical continuity of unfree labor relations – and particularly the sponsorship system in the Gulf – precedes the definition of foreign labor regulations as *kafāla*. The persistence of extremely asymmetrical labor relations is closely linked to the region’s modern economic history, characterized as it is by a mono-structural reliance on trade networks and single resources such as pearls or oil and gas. Thus, it comes as no surprise that despite having signed ILO conventions on workers’ rights, trade union freedoms, and human trafficking, most Gulf states have never ratified them. The modern twist on *kafāla*, from being understood as a sort of gift to denoting a sponsorship system for labor control, has to do with the changing circumstances in the region, both cultural – including legal – and economic. Given the modern economic experience, the region has witnessed a specific brand of capitalism that, from the vantage point of colonial capital forces, suggested the implementation of a sponsorship system. Today, the discourse on reforming the *kafāla* shows characteristics of a developmental and individual rights discourse, as is typical for cultural and political liberalism (Gauthier 2020, p. 67). Under the modern *kafāla* in Qatar, obligations are shifted to migrant workers as far as the responsibilities arising from the *kafāla* sponsors’ share are concerned. Is *kafāla* yet another example of global capitalism and cultural liberalism blending into the reorganization of traditional concepts? If so, it prompts us to consider the extent to which, in ‘modern’ law, a more functional ethos of interpersonal relationships and exchange is at work and to what extent analogies can be drawn with the asymmetry debated by Muslim jurists in the ‘classical’ period.

While it is easy to argue for the importance of discourse in general, a specific feature of the *kafāla* makes a good case for this point. As Parreñas notes, ‘[u]nder the *kafāla*, employers are the primary assessors and administrators of the law. In other words, the ‘employer’s word is virtually law in their households’ (2021, p. 4). The relationship between law and societal discourse becomes a more pertinent question once those affected by the law are ‘made the legal responsibility of their employers’ (ibid., p. 23). In the case of migrant labor regulation in the Gulf, discussions among those making the law are, at the same time, discussions among members of the small group of beneficiaries from the legal status quo. Thus, it becomes evident that the relationship between actualities shaped by law and the dominant discourse is dialectical. Further examination of such dynamics is needed to understand how legal change works under these conditions. Moreover, considering the tribal authoritarian political systems predominant in the Arabian Peninsula, and its demographic situation, both law-making processes and what is understood as public discourse require a specific evaluation. Mednicoff and Springer thus speak of the ‘strong symbolic rather than practical content’ of legal regulations (Mednicoff and Springer 2014, p. 105), and anthropologist Andrew Gardner adds that in the region, law and its shift toward the improvement of individual rights have the function of indexing modernity, concluding that ‘labor law indexes a vague but discernible rendition of a cosmopolitan modernity’ (Gardner 2018, pp. 130, 139).

The Arab Gulf states’ appeal to a ‘cosmopolitan modernity’ is related to the global flows not only of workers but also of capital from the West. Although migrant workers’ presence in the region has generated particular forms of consumerism in Gulf cities, the volume traded for it does not impress financial investment, as most of the workers’ wages translate into remittances to the financially dependent sending states. To attract investments of noteworthy magnitude, Gulf governments see themselves under constraint to push reforms for the improvement of individual rights, including those of migrant workers. For the time being, however, the latter find themselves forced to rely on their own everyday negotiations of harsh working conditions.

Notes

- 1 I thank Birgit Krawietz, François Gauthier, Janis Ewen, Christoph Ramm, Omar Anchassi, and, most of all, Serena Tolino for their feedback on drafts of this chapter and for triggering stimulating thoughts in me.
- 2 The research this article is based on has been conducted within the framework of the SNF project *Trajectories of Slavery in Islamicate Societies. Three Concepts from Islamic Legal Sources* (Grant no. 208124).
- 3 For differences between the legal schools, see Linant de Bellefonds 2012.
- 4 Among the verses not mentioned above are the Meccan 21:85 (*Sūrat al-Anbiyā’*) and 38:38 (*Sūrat Ṣād*), both speaking – among other biblical figures – of a figure called *Dhū l-kifl*. In the Medinan 4:85 (*Sūrat al-Nisā’*) and 57:28 (*Sūrat al-Hadīd*), *kiflun* resp. *kiflayn* denotes the share a believer receives in the consequences when s/he intercedes in an evil cause.
- 5 For example, *Sunan al-Nasā’ ī*, Kitāb al-kafāla. Bāb al-kafāla bil-dīn; *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, Kitāb al-ṣadaqāt, Bāb al-kafāla.
- 6 In the science of Hadith, the attribution ‘weak’ (Arabic: *ḍa’if*) is used to classify Hadiths, which do not qualify as ‘authentic’ (Arabic: *ṣaḥīḥ*) or ‘good’ (Arabic: *ḥasan*) due to either a discontinuity in the chain of transmission or a criticism against one of its narrators.
- 7 Other weak Hadiths include *kiflu shayṭān*, which is translated as ‘the seat of the devil,’ with reference to wearing a hair knot during prayer, or *al-kifl* as the name of a sinner.

- 8 For Ḥanbalis, Mālikis, and Shāfi'is, a mere offer on the part of the guarantor renders it valid and enforceable (Rahman 2008, p. 346). Ḥanafī law insists on a formal agreement between the surety and the creditor (Linant de Bellefonds 2012).
- 9 The legal term 'gift *inter vivos*' (Latin: a gift between living parties) refers to property that was transferred during the grantor's lifetime.
- 10 For further thoughts on the implications of this linguistic differentiation, see Vora 2012, pp. 790–791.
- 11 Historically, under Muslim rule, non-Muslim subjects of Abrahamic belief held the *dhimmī* status. In return for the payment of a tax, these communities (*ahl al-dhimma*) enjoyed legal protection of the empire they lived in.
- 12 Public-private partnerships are part of the spectrum of privatization strategies and have become typical neoliberal configurations.
- 13 As such, it creates a contractual relationship between a 'donor' (the one who offers the *kafāla*) and a minor of whose financial protection or moral or physical guardianship the donor takes care. In this relationship, the children 'can only be recipients and are [legalistically, L.R.] denied all agency' (Bargach 2002, p. 30). Notwithstanding the different relationships established through the *kafāla* as tutelage for children and as a labor migration regime, both qualify as asymmetrical dependencies.
- 14 Most studies on the *kafāla* as a 'classical' guarantee have until now considered only normative legal sources (Santillana 1938; Foster 2001), with a few promising exceptions (e.g., Hooper 1936). Different conclusions have been drawn about the relationship between legal theory and practical application, depending on the corpora consulted. While study of the Cairo Geniza documents convinced Udovitch (1970, p. 290) that there was a close relationship between the commercial law of the Ḥanafī legal school in relation to *kafāla* and actual practice, Tyan (1946), after consulting notarial documents, attested to a 'significant difference' between them (cf. Foster 2006, p. 10). This question remains entirely open for the modern period, which is witnessing fundamental legal expansions.
- 15 Law no. 15 of 2017 on service workers in the home, issued August 22, 2017. *Qānūn raqam 15 li-sanat 2017 bi-sha'n al-mustakhdamīn fī l-manāzil* 2017.
- 16 The Qatari Shura Council (*majlis al-shūrā*) is a consultation system established in 1972. Together with the cabinet, it forms the legislative body of the country. The council consists of 45 members, 30 of whom are elected, the remainder being appointed by the Emir. Among other things, they approve, accept, or reject draft bills. As the Emir's endorsement is required, the council has an advisory function rather than exerting actual legislative power.
- 17 The state figures prominently in the Qatari media sector, due to legal regulations and the fact that members of the ruling family privately own many traditional Qatari media outlets. Daily newspapers and other 'traditional' media are usually classified as 'loyalist press' (William Rugh) as journalists practice self-censorship when approaching certain topics such as the ruling family or Islam. Furthermore, these media outlets are dependent on funding and advertisers. As part of Qatar's international media strategy, prominent international media outlets such as Al Jazeera and beIN Sports are important tools of Qatari public diplomacy and Qatari soft power in the world. See Al-Jaber 2020, pp. 301–312.
- 18 The AI report refers to articles from four major Qatari newspapers of 2012/2013.
- 19 The verbal noun *isā'a* is typically used in the context of abuse and delineates wrong or maltreatment or even the causing of injury.
- 20 As Adam Hanieh explains, '[c]lass was constituted through its spatialization – an acute reliance on the temporary migrant labor flows came to overlay an extremely narrow definition of citizenship' under which a minority of the population enjoyed the benefits accruing from oil revenues to different degrees while migrant labor lacked all citizenship rights (Hanieh 2011, p. 60).
- 21 Such an intersectional analysis cannot be carried out in the framework of this chapter. For the gender dimension, see Mahdavi 2013.

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12

CAPITAL, CRISIS, AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Central Business District of Beirut in Times of Neoliberalism

Paula Ripplinger

In 2020 (on the 4th of August at 18:08 local time), more than four tons of ammonium nitrate exploded in a warehouse in the port of Beirut, quite close to the city center. The consequences were devastating: more than 200 people lost their lives, 7,000 were injured, 300,000 became homeless all of a sudden, the blast also shattered windows in a radius of 20 kilometers, numerous buildings and critical city infrastructure were destroyed, and the entire port area was shaken to its foundations.

Catastrophes and urban devastation have been familiar to the capital of Lebanon and the country as a whole: the civil war that took place among Muslim and Christian forces, then among different warring Muslim groups that involved a number of foreign forces haunted Lebanon from 1975 to 1990. The stigmas are still visually present in many parts of the city where numerous buildings have been empty for decades, are riddled with bullet holes, and are gloomily ruinous in their appearance. However, the central part (henceforth labeled as BCD, Beirut Central District), also called ‘Downtown,’ has been reconstructed to offer a very different view: modern, architecturally sophisticated skyscrapers, artificial-looking luxury shopping streets offering high-end brands, expensive restaurants, and chic apartment blocks with almost no windows lit at night. The rushed redevelopment after the civil war turned the traditional *souk* into an open-air mall hosting mostly international chains. This chapter investigates how this artificial-looking historic area in the Lebanese capital has become a symbol of the contentions between religious fractions, the system of Lebanese sectarianism, questions of identity and memory, and neoliberal investment. What kind of governance structures have been applied here, and can we say that they have failed? The explosion of 2020 and its problematic handling have revealed with exceptional brutality a societal dysfunctionality of sorts, and yet, this latest devastation begs the question of whether 30 years after the end of the civil war, the protagonists involved have really been pacified. The Lebanese civil war left destruction and a fragmented society in its wake. ‘Solidere,’ a private real estate company founded and directed by the Sunni Muslim Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri (assassinated in 2005), was commissioned to rebuild Beirut as the government was unable to do so, especially in the city’s heavily damaged center. In the

process of drawing up plans to rebuild, Solidere managed to acquire ownership of most of the houses and land located in the center. This triggered fierce debates and the formation of a strong opposition; various groups of stakeholders with very different levels of power confronting each other. The ambivalence and tensions of promoting reconstruction and giving hope to the public, on the one hand, and condemning expropriation, privatization, and the suspension of public rights on the other, have characterized the conflict between the different parties until today.

Beirut Central District: Urban Infrastructure and Scenery

Pre-war Beirut could long adorn itself with the label of being ‘the Paris of the Middle East.’ Since Phoenician and Roman times, Beirut has been a melting pot of cultures and religions that evolved into a modern cosmopolitan liberal haven with manifold socio-economic opportunities. Already a significant city-state in Phoenician times, it was not until the nineteenth century that Beirut regained its status in the region via colonial trade, operating as a self-sufficient seaport. As European merchants began to settle there, the city’s population grew enormously in the second half of the nineteenth century, competing with the traditional power center, Damascus, and flourishing especially under Ottoman rule, thus producing a mixed mercantile society (El-Chami 2013). During the French Mandate from 1920 to 1943, new central streets and buildings were built according to the Haussmann model.¹ The typical nineteenth-century ‘central house,’ which had been built during the Ottoman Mandate, was then replaced by modern administrative functions, along with French-inspired streets, which once again transformed the cityscape, adapting it to the European trend of ‘beautifying the city.’ Situated on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean, Beirut was rather close to Europe, making it a hub between the Western industrialized countries and the neighboring Arab states (Winckler 2011).

Between 1830 and 1840, Beirut was modernized as a port city under Egyptian rule. Its municipality became the institutional site of a modern city open to Mediterranean trade under Ottoman rule. The discourses during this Ottoman period created an urban identity marked by elitism and conservatism, laying the foundations for the social inequalities in Lebanon still manifest in today's Lebanon. Sectarian conflicts were also incompatible with the emergence of the nation-state in Lebanon after the Ottoman Mandate (1517–1860). They were a primary factor leading to the outbreak of the civil war (1975–1991): Christian Maronites and Shiite Muslims who fled to the capital, mostly from the south, due to the decline in the agricultural sector and the increasing impoverishment of the Lebanese countryside, found themselves marginalized and underrepresented, and they challenged the new urban order to the dismay of the elite (Hanssen 2005, p. 269).

The BCD in question emerged from the historic center and heart of the city, located on the north side of the coast and accessible via major roads from all directions. The old *souk*, shopping streets, luxury hotels, banks, and the Lebanese Stock Exchange were located here. This part of town used to attract numerous businesspeople, visitors, residents, and tourists and turned the center into the city’s most popular meeting point. In addition to its economic and financial importance, the Downtown area was also a cultural center, with cafés, theaters, and cinemas that served as places of intellectual and intercultural exchange (Schmid 2002, p. 74).

In the early twentieth century and following a colonial role model, specific religious quarters within the city were established and demarcated, with Christians concentrated in

the east of the city and Muslims in the west, while the center, at this junction, became ‘a microcosm of Lebanon’s diverse society’ (Mango 2004, p. 22) and functioned as a place of exchange between the different communities and retained its diverse character, symbolizing the successful coexistence of different religious groups. That it was given a particularly dominant role is emphasized by Mango (2004, p. 24) with the five functional purposes he attributes to the pre-war BCD: (1) many government buildings such as the Grand Serail, the Ministry of Finance, and the Parliament were located there; (2) it had upscale retail and advertising shops; (3) more than 3 percent of its buildings were occupied by offices; (4) it had tourism and cultural purposes; and (5) not to be forgotten, there were a large number of people who actually lived within the proto-BCD, making it the center of their activities. The center’s exceptional prosperity and proximity to the West gave rise to its place as the nimbus of the city.

Looking beyond the myth of Lebanon as the ‘Switzerland of the East,’² the presence of the French and British in the region must be considered because they created an active network of socio-economic alliances between the Christian and Sunni upper classes and Europe. The money flowing back from the Lebanese in exile also had a huge impact on the country’s thriving banking sector. The 1950s, in particular, were a decade of stable development and prosperity. In the 1960s and 1970s, Lebanon benefited from rapid economic growth, transforming Beirut into an attractive metropolis in the region. Its liberal nightlife attracted tourists, and the city developed into a banking and trade center. The ‘Switzerland of the East’ image nevertheless conceals the already-existing strong sectarian and socio-economic tensions in the seemingly peaceful pluralistic society (Glasze 2003, p. 73).

After 16 years of civil war atrocities, there was hardly anything left of the BCD’s thriving cosmopolitan atmosphere. Instead, the city’s once vibrant center was crisscrossed by inner-city boundaries. The center was more devastated and abandoned than almost any other district in Beirut. The city’s two most famous hotels, the St Georges (opened in 1934) and the Holiday Inn (built in 1971 and opened in 1974), both on the outskirts of the center, were occupied by opposing factions and used as battlefields during the war. The demarcation line (‘Green Line’), along which most of the destruction took place, ran right through the center, dividing Beirut and cutting it along sectarian lines into a Christian East and Muslim West. The economic activity that had once defined the urban center came to a standstill, and banks and offices were relocated. Almost all the former inhabitants left, only a few squatters remained, and military barricades lined the streets (cf. Makdisi 1997, p. 662). There was no Downtown anymore, no city center, so people retreated to their own districts. The city of Beirut was now defined by internal borders, and a new understanding of the division of the city center emerged between the various, meanwhile homogenized, sectarian neighborhoods under militia control (Schmid 1998).

Religion and the BCD

The strongly demarcating ‘Green Line’ turned the center into a highly politicized space, particularly marked by power struggles between sectarian groups. The ‘Taif Agreement’ of 1989, which was reached under the influence of Syria and Saudi Arabia, among others, provided a framework for a segmented distribution of public offices after the civil war. This, in turn, affected the balance of power between the three main sectarian groups: Maronite, Sunni, and Shii. The stated aim of the agreement was to ensure the participation of all sections of the population and greater decentralization. Despite the promised reforms, little changed after

the civil war because no one wanted to give up their power base. However, the proportional representation system was changed in favor of the Muslim population, weakening the Christians' position (50:50 parity in parliament).

In Beirut's prosperous times, a strong merchant class had emerged in the city center which interacted socially because they shared similar interests economically, and sectarian affiliation did not much affect their relationships. The center was, therefore, the place where negotiations took place, where people, be they Muslim, Christian, Maronite, Orthodox, etc., gathered, communicated, and traded. The heterogeneous social setting of pre-war interaction in the central district was later disrupted by Solidere's redevelopment, which proved incapable of taming sectarian tensions.

After independence in 1943, the leading communities agreed on a compromise, a national pact of power-sharing between the religious communities – mainly Maronite and Sunni leaders. Unfortunately, this form of government, known as 'concordance democracy,' was characterized by strong imbalances and inter-sectarian violence, which not only left tensions unresolved but even enhanced them, ultimately culminating in the start of the civil war in 1975. The conflict between the predominantly Muslim supporters of the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) and the predominantly Maronite Christians in Beirut was exacerbated by an influx of refugees from southern Lebanon due to a decline in the agricultural sector and the Israeli occupation (from 1982 to 2000). These internal population movements, which determined the settlement of the urban periphery of Beirut in the long term, were accompanied by regional transformation processes during the Arab-Israeli Wars (1948, 1967) and the conflicts with the Baathist regime in Syria. These processes doubled Beirut's population to 940,000 in the 1970s (Shwayri 2008, p. 78).

The political landscape altered significantly after the civil war. As an outcome of the Taif Agreement, the political power shifted from a Maronite dominance to a precisely defined system and distribution of the three most important state functions, according to a schema in which the president must invariably be a Maronite, the prime minister a Sunni, and the speaker of parliament a Shii. With the emergence of the Shiite party or militia, Hezbollah (officially founded in 1985), a new actor entered the scene that would determine domestic politics in the coming years. Furthermore, due to its proximity with Iran, the emergence of Hezbollah has drawn Lebanon into another regional conflict.

While at the end of the civil war, the main conflict had been between Muslim/Palestinian and Christian militias, from 2005 onward, the conflict expanded to include another component, namely the emerging fault lines between Sunni and Shiite Muslims. The 2005 assassination of the Sunni Prime Minister Hariri was followed by large demonstrations by different groups (e.g., pro-Syrian government Hezbollah, pro-Sunni-Christian government), which challenged the balance of power over public spaces in the central district and politicized it. Martyrs' Square in the center of the BCD became a political stage where huge demonstrations were held, alternating between two opposing alliances which define themselves along political and denominational lines. The 'March 8 Alliance' is Shiite, close to the Hezbollah, has strong ties with Iran, and supports the Syrian regime. The 'March 14 Alliance,' on the contrary, is Sunni, close to Saudi Arabia, and supports the civil war in Syria. The Sunni versus Shii friction has thereby transcended the former sectoral fault line.

Solidere's central district project was initiated by the rich Sunni entrepreneur Rafiq Hariri who had made a fortune in Saudi Arabia. Even though it was officially promoted as neutral, it in fact embodied a Sunni articulation of power with the potential of transforming it into a sectarian battleground (Bollens 2019, p. 186). Moreover, the Lebanese feared that

the Saudis were exerting too much influence through Hariri and that this would also lead to US dominance in Lebanon. The inner-Lebanese power conflicts have, therefore, always been integrated into a hegemonic conflict in which various regional and international actors are involved. The prospect of sectarian polarization likewise threatened the reconstruction efforts that immediately followed the end of the civil war at the beginning of the 1990s. To avoid a sectarian confrontation (because the reconstruction could be seen as a Sunni project), the divided Muslim and Christian populations had to be integrated economically, politically, and socially into the planning of the central district. However, in particular, Shiite and Maronite politicians, as well as the clergy, felt inadequately represented in the reconstruction plans, even though Hariri actively sought out religious representatives, included them in Solidere's supervisory boards, and initiated compensation payments in order to appease them and ensure somehow cross-community integration (Schmid 2002, pp. 137–138).

However, prior to the civil war, the center had been a space for all Lebanese, regardless of their religious orientation. As it had not been structured by sectarian affiliation before the outbreak of war, it was 'naturally destined to be its battle zone' (Makidsi 1997, p. 666). Hence, the post-war cabinet described the center as the 'heart of the capital,' and its reconstruction was regarded as the first symbolic start to the 'reconstruction of the whole country' (Khalaf 1993, p. 79).

Reconstruction Plans and Solidere

Discussions of possible reconstruction plans were already underway in the inter-war years during periods of calm. An analysis of such efforts during the civil war, especially in the 1970s, is crucial for understanding later processes. This period saw the emergence of institutions that would play a decisive role in the reconstruction measures of the 1990s or are still active today. Furthermore, the primary conflict actors and issues of contention that significantly intensified or expanded decades later can be identified, such as the religious communities. International support, which was already requested at the time, is also relevant. From a contemporary perspective, the plans reveal the interests and distribution of power at the time, as well as dangerous legal mistakes and inconsistencies.

However, it was not until 1991 that the Dar Al-Handasah planning office was commissioned to carry out reconstruction studies for the city center. This first plan, commissioned by the Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR; Irani and AbuKhalil 2004), aimed to redevelop the central district by demolishing the shattered historic buildings – a de facto destruction of the authentic urban heritage – and to replace them with modern buildings and redesigned infrastructure. However, the government could not afford this reconstruction, so it turned to private investments. Construction magnate Rafiq Hariri and his foundation were involved in this planning. Following harsh criticism and the final abandonment of the initial plan in 1994, almost all the responsibilities for the new reconstruction were transferred to the newly established private shareholding company, Solidere, an acronym for *Société Libanaise pour le Développement et la Reconstruction du Centre-Ville de Beyrouth*. It was established in 1994 with the sole purpose of taking responsibility for financing and rebuilding the center under the leadership of the Sunni Muslim Rafiq Hariri.

There are three main functions that Hariri has been entrusted with since 1992 as the head of government: controlling the sectarian groups that had retreated into their own districts in recent years, restoring state authority, and rebuilding infrastructure. Hariri, who had already made his influence felt in the 1980s, now became a serious player on the

political scene coupled with his profile as an increasingly successful millionaire entrepreneur. He used this position skillfully, and some state offices and important positions relevant to the reconstruction process were filled by his supporters. Hariri wanted to entrust the reconstruction of the destroyed BCD to the private sector. In order to achieve financial stability, private international and regional investors were to be involved in the planning process. The plans drawn up by Dar Al-Handasah shortly after the end of the civil war were to be implemented by the newly established entity of Solidere.

Rebuilding and developing a new city center in Beirut is what Solidere sees as its sole mission (until today). The company claims to combine the entrepreneurial independence and astuteness of a private company with a global vision and a sense of public service. The company's role is clearly defined as owning, developing, and managing land and property (Solidere Website 'About BCC' 2023, Section 'The City Center'):

restoring life to this vital part of the country, an important political and symbolic dimension. Delivering benefits of comprehensive planning, Beirut's downtown has re-emerged as a prime, active district, with its historic core, business-cum-institutional center, residential quarter, and social arena. Central to the project was the laying of a complete infrastructure and utility network, together with the constitution or reconstitution of the public domain. New and renovated facilities accommodate a variety of activities.

Solidere is a joint-stock company consisting of property owners and investors who hold shares in the city center. The company's capital is made up of a large number of properties that were expropriated after the war and converted into shares, making it appealing to international investors and a wealthy global elite. The retail shops in the newly built mall in the central district are geared toward high-income customers. This profit-driven orientation has turned the BCD into an isolated island within the city, and this new business model contradicts the character of the old *souk* (Bollens 2019). Fawaz diagnoses a neoliberal urban policy signature in the founding of Solidere; the role of the public planner changed toward entrepreneurship to create a financially strong and competitive Beirut to re-establish itself in the financial and service sectors (Fawaz 2009, pp. 840–842). Private corporate investment and land-use changes, as in the case of the BCD, served only the rich elites, according to Fawaz. Schipper (2018) identifies the core components of neoliberalization³ for the housing sector: the commodification, privatization, and financialization of public housing, the deregulation and global networking of real estate and financial markets, the competitive orientation of local politics, and the marketization of welfare state social systems. Therefore, regarding the situation in Beirut, one might ask to what extent the forces of the opposition have succeeded in bringing about a post-neoliberal shift through their social movements. What did they accomplish? Have the social protests, including the opposition back then, as well as the strong protest movement of more recent times, succeeded in offering any post-neoliberal alternatives (Schipper 2018)? The founding of the private joint-stock company radically changed the power structure within the circle of stakeholders, above all for Rafiq Hariri himself. Whether this particular neoliberal reconstruction plan was and is the only possible option for redeveloping the city center still dominates the debates of the opposing stakeholders and the public. What can be said for certain today is that the project failed to seriously involve the affected population in the decision-making process and very much added to the sectarian polarization of society. Neoliberal policies, if only because of their

genesis, have never been able to deal with the ongoing religious conflicts in the city, as seen in Lebanon in the 1990s.

Public opposition to the reconstruction plans grew quickly, and some protest groups came together to discuss and draw up alternative plans. Sawalha (2010) divides these groups into two parties: one made up of intellectuals, historians, architects, and social scientists, and the second of dispossessed people, residents, and tenants. They expressed their oppositional stance by forming neighborhood collectives and assemblies and by evoking memories of the spatial situation before the war (pp. 23–25). Former tenants, owners, and squatters, most of them refugees, demanded that their interests be considered. The group of architects, intellectuals, and urban planners criticized the plans on a professional level (Schmid 2006, p. 373). One of the first things the experts criticized was the drastic redesign and the associated extensive demolition of many buildings in the BCD. Makdisi (1997) quotes Jan Tabet as saying that the plans did not take into account an appropriate functional integration of the surrounding neighborhoods into the new BCD, thus creating an ‘island of modernity.’ Despite the restoration of some houses to their original shape, some opponents countered that this would deprive the buildings of their historical-social context. Solidere presented itself as the guardian and protector of the city’s past, forming a committee of urban planners, historians, and archeologists to decide which buildings should be classified as ‘historically valuable.’ However, the houses and squares, once full of life and inter-religious and inter-ethnic encounters, became empty shells – restored to their original state but losing their social embeddedness and connectivities (Sawalha 2010, pp. 36–38). Such a broad public expression of opinion and criticism was unprecedented in the country’s history and was, according to Beyhum (1992, p. 50), ‘the first public debate since the beginning of the war.’ Schmid (1998) summarizes the key elements of the opposition’s criticism: namely the de facto monopoly of Solidere and the profit orientation of the plans; the situation of the so-called ‘old owners’ was also one of the main critiques. At the end of the war, it was estimated that there were more than 100,000 claimants who were appeased and compensated with shares in Solidere. Until the 1996 elections, there were still some opposition members in parliament who criticized the reconstruction plans and were able to prevent or veto possible projects. Yet, after the elections, the privatization process underway in the country took its course, and the parliament was largely composed of wealth-seeking businessmen (see Makdisi 1997, p. 695). As often happens with neoliberalization, the ‘optimal harmonization of conflicting interests’ through market processes has, instead, resulted in the accumulation of wealth among the very high-income classes (Harvey 2005).

Despite the loud voices of opposition, there was a relatively high level of support for the plans, potentially due to the devastation, loss, and despair that dominated the atmosphere in the city directly after the civil war. The population was full of hope for a new beginning after the war, returning economic growth, tourism, and general social progress – a revival of the old image of the ‘Switzerland of the Middle East’ was the widespread aspiration. The city center, with its destruction and scars, was associated with painful memories of the civil war, and radical change was initially accepted. It remains to analyze why the opposition was not forceful enough. One reason may be that it was too fragmented and had too many different interests. In addition, the population seemed to have too little confidence in the opposition’s alternative financing plans (Schmid 2006, p. 376).

Of particular importance is the marginalized group of Shiite civil war refugees who had settled in the city center and occupied parts of the remaining buildings – whereas Christian

refugees settled in the east part of the city center. Their interest in the BCD reconstruction process was to find alternative housing or to be compensated by Solidere, and they also enjoyed strong protection from the two Shiite parties: Hezbollah and Amal. The organizational structures of the expropriators reveal that in addition to the preservation of historic buildings and landed property, there were also power conflicts between the religious denominations. A number of expropriation committees were formed by people who also feared for their property in the city center, including influential Christian upper-class families who had a strong interest in maintaining the old patronage system, which had been shaken by the emergence of private individuals such as the Sunni Hariri, who tried to seek his support among the middle and lower classes (Schmid 2002, pp. 125–26). The Shiite refugee placement in the center led to the politicization of the conflict over the reconstruction process. Hariri appeased the warring parties with the above-mentioned (very) high compensation payments, which led to heavy economic losses for the company but ultimately prevented a violent escalation. The Shiite parties also benefited from the conflict by presenting themselves as the opposition via media appeal, demonstrating in public, and presenting themselves as the protectors of the refugees. After the end of the civil war, the Maronite Christians feared for their domestic political influence, which had been considerably reduced by the Taif Accord. Both the Shiite and Maronite clergy were firmly opposed to the reconstruction project. The danger of sectarianism and the threat to the whole reconstruction project were real, and Hariri had to compete for Christian and Muslim votes – including by putting Shiite and Christian representatives on the board of Solidere (Schmid 2002, pp. 137–138).

Heritage and Memory

The reconstruction of the BCD framed worthy cultural heritage in different types: Late Ottoman (1900–1916) and French Mandate (1920–1934) historic buildings symbolizing the Golden Era, plus significant archeological sites from the Phoenician, Roman, and Hellenistic periods. In the course of the extensive demolition work carried out by Solidere, which resulted in the damaging and destruction of large areas and of several buildings along the *souk* complex and Martyrs' Square, some such historical sites were rediscovered and preserved. In contrast to the heritage from the French Mandate period, most of the Ottoman and earlier Hellenistic, Roman-Byzantine, and Medieval structures and buildings could not be saved from destruction. Not least because, after harsh criticism from opposition groups, the master plan initiated significantly less demolition than originally planned, and it branded the BCD to the outside world as a place with a long cultural history of economic continuity. However, it failed to respect, reconstruct, and remember the BCD as a historical place of interaction between many different groups and people. The old *souks*, symbolizing the city's once historic and cosmopolitan character as an, in fact, age-old place of trade, were virtually razed to the ground in 1994, paving the way for a complete reorientation through the business model in the BCD (Bollens 2019).

The real estate company acted both as a developer for the concrete reconstruction plans and as a custodian of national identity and memory and, thus, of national cultural heritage (Saliba 2013, pp. 17–21). The ambivalences within this profile are enormous. As part of Solidere's recovery efforts, the aspect of conservation has emerged within the BCD at an interface between market-related and institutional concerns that accounts for contemporary interests and needs. The preservation of cultural heritage and the economic revival after the war stand in contrast to each other as two counter poles.

Once designated as a conservation area, Beirut's early modern heritage was recognized and assimilated as national heritage, specifically as playing a major role in the central struggle to rebuild the BCD. According to Saliba (2013, p. 22), 'Colonial modernity was used as a historical asset for real estate promotion in Beirut's central and peripheral districts' through employing this henceforth identified heritage as a fashionable façade for high-end shops and boutiques. Makdisi (1997) addresses the criticism of the plans for the old *souk* in the BCD in his article on reconstructing history in central Beirut. Solidere itself states in several information brochures that the clearance and demolition of the old *souk* area also paved the way for a comprehensive reconstruction of the entire BCD. This concerned an area of some 60,000 square meters on which new luxury shops, offices, supermarkets, cinemas, and much more were to be built in the style of a posh shopping mall or high-end outlet center. It remains an open question to what extent this temple of consumption is supposed to recall the historical *souk* with its bustling life and connectivities and how that has affected the historical consciousness of the population (Makdisi 1997). In the claimed conceptual continuity of the *souk* in relation to the newly constructed mall, a misalignment arises between perceptions of heritage, trauma, memory, or nostalgia as articulated by the public and the sanitized new structure addressed only to affluent customers. Makdisi (1997, p. 686) quite aptly remarks:

Hence the souk area will be called a souk because it will (supposedly) look like a souk. But what does a souk look like? In particular, what did Beirut's old souk look like? Assuming the souk is 'rebuilt,' it will only be a matter of time before the generation of Lebanese that remembered the old souk, the old Beirut, will be gone.

The space in which the new mall or luxury outlet center is located has been deprived of its history and stripped of historical memory and variegated identity. Yet, according to Makdisi (1997, pp. 24–25), the main concern is about a past that has been erased and a superficial reconstruction that has little in common with the real-life memory of the historical processes of exchange in that area.

Governance Structures

In times of neoliberal opening, urban development processes around the globe have often been tuned toward profit maximization, competitiveness, and market dynamics. Thus, it is no wonder that Beirut, in general, and the BCD, in particular, were impacted by this trend. Reconstruction of historical areas as a large-scale urban development project is a catalyst for economic growth. Generally valid goals can be identified for such processes in large cities, even if the location of Beirut must be considered more closely here with its special features, including the inducement of foreign direct investment (and its dependence in return), the legitimization of forms of government or ruling systems, the fueling of the job market, and the enrichment of elites. The dual functions of pertinent cities consist in their suitability as globally oriented marketing instruments, while, at the same time, they are supposed to serve as national identity, as memory, and as a symbol of modernization (Al-Hamarneh 2019).

Neoliberal practices have become intertwined with the governance of the city as cooperative forms of negotiation between different actors from the economy, politics, and civil

society.⁴ Harvey (1985)⁵ speaks of so-called ‘class alliances,’ which are driven by different interests and distributions of power and thus make decisions for or determine the development of space and its use. He refers to Henri Lefèbre’s ‘right to the city’ (1968) and points out that cities are places where social movements emerge, where conflicts are played out, and where (invisible) rules for the use of space are made.

Such settings give rise to the class alliances just mentioned. In the case of Beirut, worthy of mention are the negotiation processes between investors, banks, construction companies, landowners, and an active civil society. Local authorities often pave the way for urban development projects. Economic conditions are created to incentivize real estate actors. Therefore, urban development policies and decision-making processes are characterized by patronage. A kind of hierarchy of co-determination is created in which experts, such as certain architects, planners, and engineers, become the second most influential group. In contrast to that, an active civil society has little chance to participate in that game (Al-Hamarneh 2019, p. 15).

In exchange for corporate shares, the former tenants and shop owners were expropriated and could no longer fulfill their roles in strengthening the identity of the BCD. Moreover, in a multi-confessional country like Lebanon,⁶ religious rights, as the wider Muslim community stated, were not considered in their eyes; this applies especially to the Shiite population and certain strands of Sunni Islam with a ‘wrong’ political orientation. Undoubtedly, the Solidere plan was not inclusive, but it had a massive impact on how people viewed their government. Beyhum (1992) even compares the plans to ‘a system of class segregation.’ The city center has been stripped of its context, and its former inhabitants are no longer welcome – the violent eviction of the squatters symbolizes the isolation of the BCD from the city (Mango 2004, p. 71f).

To this day, large-scale projects such as residences are being realized in the BCD area or have been in the process of being built for many years, but there are no longer buyers. The years 2006 to 2010 were marked by an extreme construction boom, and the demand from Lebanese expatriates and interested parties from the Gulf region especially (e.g., clients from the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)) for chic properties in the BCD increased exponentially, which led to a number of complexes being razed. This development has caused an extreme oversupply in the housing market, which additionally saw unprofessional actors emerging who did not match the actual purchase power and the needs of the market. Clients withdrew their investments in the wake of these developments, an incipient oil crisis shook the Gulf region, and foreign acquisitions increasingly declined. The local population cannot afford to live there, and the result is basically a ghost town. The purchasing power of the few wealthy expats is not enough to cover the many vacant buildings, taxes, and, therefore, income for developers (Preston 2018).

As for the label of (still) being a *souk*, the streets of the city center already exhibit the paraphernalia of consumer culture, according to European and US role models. The ability to pay and spend money characterizes this part of the city despite the fact that rebuilding and reviving the city center was previously seen as necessary for the city to regain its former pre-war strength and international access.

In its long history, the city of Beirut had been a leading center for culture, education, commerce, and entertainment, but with the onset and progression of the civil war, its previous vitality came to a halt while the capitalizing world moved on.

Conclusion

The reconstruction of the Beirut Central District (BCD), or ‘Downtown,’ brought together seemingly irreconcilable concerns. With the establishment of Solidere in 1994, a real estate public-private partnership company, the Lebanese government was able to build what it considered most desirable for post-war Beirut: the complete reconstruction of a center that would implant a new, competitive Beirut, a new Lebanon. It was designed to harken back to the pre-civil war era. This drawn-out violent conflict shook the country from 1975 to 1990, destroyed or damaged much of the urban fabric, and turned the different religious groups into blocks of hostile partisans allied with different foreign powers. However, the reconstruction process was dominated by privatization and the self-interest of private investors, and it unbalanced governance structures.

The economic structure changed with the advent of Solidere, and the property was marketed through land stock values. The whole conflict has been further aggravated by the total change in processes of trade and relationships between buyers and merchants. There was no longer an appreciation of traditional trade habits within a functioning *souk*; rather, the old *souk* area was transformed by basically adopting an archetype of American/European malls that cater to modern retail desires (El-Chami 2012). Successful reconstruction can only take place with the participation of the affected population itself. In this case, the interests of the locals were structurally disregarded. The *souk* of Beirut close to the corniche, once a symbol of interaction between different ethnicities, income classes, and religious groups, was destroyed, and with it, a public space accessible to all the city’s inhabitants.

The urban governance structures and development processes in the Beirut Central District have been geared toward profit maximization, competitiveness, and market dynamics. Large-scale urban development projects, such as the reconstruction of Beirut, served as a catalyst for economic growth and were able to generate foreign direct investment, create jobs, and enrich elites – accompanied by power struggles and the vested interests of different actors. The different social and religious groups could not be pacified; worse still, the sectarian divide appears to be even deeper since the different denominations have retreated even further into their own neighborhoods, despite any aspiration for a shared redevelopment. Even though strong opposition has emerged in the course of the dispute with Solidere, this is a bitter development for a country known since Phoenician times for its openness and socio-economic exchange.

The explosion in 2020 has unmasked with frightening clarity the social, political, and neo-liberal identity crisis that the nation has been dealing with for years. Besides people taking to the streets again to demand a change of government that no longer ignores the interests and needs of the population, the event shows that the structures of governance, with their fixation on sectarian divides, have failed. The BCD remains an abandoned place, inaccessible to most of the city’s residents, and the now largely deserted open-air mall symbolizes the crisis in full effect. The former microcosm of diversity and heterogeneity, where all sorts of negotiation processes took place, has given way to a dysfunctional island of commercial consumerism.

Notes

- 1 George-Eugène Haussmann (1809–1891) was a French civil servant and urban planner known for his extensive redesign of Paris in the mid-nineteenth century. As prefect of the Seine department, Haussmann was commissioned by Napoleon III to modernize and beautify the capital. His plan

- included demolishing narrow medieval neighborhoods, creating wide boulevards, creating parks and squares, and improving the city's infrastructure. This ambitious urban renewal project, which became known as 'Haussmannization,' had a profound impact on the appearance of Paris and shaped modern urban planning worldwide, e.g., in Beirut.
- 2 The term 'Switzerland of the Middle East' is often used to describe Lebanon in the 1950s and 60s, referring to the major banks based there at the time, to Beirut in general as an important financial center in the region, and to the flow of capital due to strong tourism (as well as the presence of the Lebanese Mountains).
 - 3 On the manifold shapes of neoliberalism, see Harvey (2005).
 - 4 See more Simons (2003).
 - 5 See more Harvey (1985).
 - 6 There is no reliable data on the composition of the population of Lebanon, but there are 18 recognized religious communities, the composition of which is roughly as follows: Sunni and Shii, each about 30 percent; Maronite Christians, about 20 percent; Greek Orthodox, about 10 percent; Greek Catholic, Protestant, and Armenian Christians, about 5 percent; and Druze, also about 5 percent. In the 1950s, the percentage of Christians was about 54 percent and that of Muslims about 44 percent. See Wimmen (2016) and Lebanese Information Center Lebanon (2013).

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13

THE MAKING OF MODERN HALAL SPACE

Sharia-Compliant Hotels in Urban Malaysia and Indonesia

Hew Wai Weng

Introduction

We offer you a new era of hospitality – the sharia-compliant way, suitable for all walks of life, especially Muslims, with facilities from comfortable rooms, halal restaurants, up-to-date meeting and banquet facilities to the provision of *surau* (prayer room) facilities with a full-time imam who leads the performance of daily prayers.

(Malaysiakini 2013)¹

After years of creating innovations in its business, Sofyan Hotel brought up its true originality in 1992, namely the Halal Hospitality Concept... Therefore, the company has developed a new concept instilling the substance of halal values in the Hospitality Industry so that it can be accepted by all.

(Sofyan Corp 2023)

Over the last decade, across cities in Malaysia and Indonesia, there have been increasing numbers of sharia-compliant or Muslim-friendly hotels claiming to offer halal hospitality and Islamic services. For example, located near Kuala Lumpur, the Ampang De Palma Hotel promotes itself as the first-ever sharia-compliant hotel in Malaysia (Syed Marzuki, Hall, and Ballantine 2022). Similarly, in Jakarta, the Sofyan Hotel Cut Meutia rebrands itself as the leading hotel in implementing halal hospitality. Other hotels include the Tenera Hotel in Bangi, the Mardhiyyah Hotel in Shah Alam, the Adya Hotel in Langkawi, the Noor Hotel in Bandung, and the Madani Syariah² Hotel in Yogyakarta. To a different extent, they highlight the role of Islam in their brandings and operations. The influences of Islam on these hotels are various, but, in general, are expressed by services (e.g., only serving halal food, no alcohol), facilities (e.g., prayer rooms, calls for prayers, gender-separated swimming pool), features (e.g., the display of religious texts, ‘Islamic’ decorations), activities

(e.g., Islamic classes, religious ceremonies), and regulations (e.g., veiling for female staff, the prohibition of non-married couples to stay in the hotels).

Together with other Islamically marked services, such as Muslimah beauty salons, halal restaurants, sharia-compliant airlines, and Muslim-friendly tourist destinations, these hotels are part of the attempt by some Muslims to articulate the idea of ‘halal hospitality’ and to make leisure activities ‘Islamic.’ In contemporary Muslim-majority urban societies, these places are sites where politics, consumer culture, and urban lifestyles converge and where Islamic values, leisure activities, and hospitality services are negotiated. What makes such places Islamic? How are Islam and hospitality services mutually constituting and shaping each other? What do these places tell us about urban piety and consumer culture among middle-class Muslims? By examining two case studies, the De Palma Hotel near Kuala Lumpur and the Sofyan Hotel in Jakarta, this article explores how and under what conditions different actors articulate Islamic hospitality through place-making, aesthetic arrangements, and moral regulations.

Making Halal Places

In recent years, religious terms such as ‘Islamic,’ ‘halal’ (permissible, according to Islam), ‘sharia’ (put simply, it means following Islamic laws), and ‘Muslim-friendly’ have been deployed to describe various places such as restaurants, hospitals, gated communities, fashion boutiques, and urban development projects in Malaysia and Indonesia (Hew 2019). In addition, there are also some attempts to ban, if not regulate, alcohol-selling, gambling activities, LGBTQ+-themed events, and nightclubs in cities to make urban life ‘Islamic.’ Generally speaking, pious urban middle-class Muslims are the main actors in these place-making processes and key advocates of moral policing. Many are highly educated, work as professionals or businesspeople, have good incomes, and are active in various Islamic organizations. Instead of rejecting urban developments, they make sense of them in increasingly Islamic terms. Indeed, as Casanova (2013) argues, instead of leading to secularization, contemporary urbanization processes are accompanied by religious innovation, together with the competitive appropriation of religious resources in group differentiation and congregational associations. Such intertwining configurations of religiosity and urbanity might lead to a ‘making of urban religion,’ or a ‘production of religious urbanity,’ or both (Metro-Zones 2011). These place-making processes entail practices of inclusion and exclusion. On the one hand, one might argue such places are sites for practicing lifestyle choices and ethical consumption; on the other hand, they might directly or indirectly contribute to social conservatism and religious segregation.

Islam is increasingly associated not only with mosques and religious schools but also with supposedly ‘religiously neutral’ places such as housing complexes, hotels, beauty salons, restaurants, and malls. By inserting religious values in supposedly religion-neutral spheres, these Islamically marked urban places challenge the simple dichotomy between the public and private domain, and between the sacred and secular space. How can we make sense of this ‘Islamic turn’ of urban place-making processes? How can we understand the intersection between urban renewal and religious revival processes? Using case studies of Muslim gated communities in peri-urban Jakarta, I propose the concept of ‘religious gentrification’ to understand how pious developers and middle-class Muslims appropriate Islamic idioms to serve various urban place-making processes, to pursue pious middle-class lifestyles, and to justify spatial segregation based on religiosity and class. For many of them,

Islam is not merely a marketing label, as they also articulate Islam as a framework for the moral order of society through the appropriation of urban places (Hew 2019).

Another scholar working on Indonesia, Abidin Kusno, uses the term ‘Islamist urbanism’ (2020) to examine the relationship between Islamism and the built environment – suggesting that Islamists have both shaped and been shaped by the built environment of which they are a part. In Malaysia, the issue of ‘proper Islamic consumption’ for consumers, the marketplace, and the state evokes a whole range of contradictory Islamic visions, lifestyles, and debates articulating what Islam is or ought to be (Fischer 2008, this volume). In Turkey, Bülent Batuman (2018) has suggested that Islamism has integrated the neoliberal logic of entrepreneurialism successfully into the making of Muslim subjectivities. In some ways, the urban place-making of some middle-class Muslims brings together the implementation of neoliberal governance and the Islamization of everyday life. Such places cater to the growing population of domestic and international middle-class pious Muslim travelers, and, at the same time, certain ‘checklist items’ are being enacted to become the social norm of the ideal modern Muslim consumers. In other words, the making of such halal places is not merely a branding exercise and marketing strategy, but it also entails processes of the normalization (Foucault 1977) of Islamic ideas in leisure places – an effort to exert social control and enforce religious power in a tactful way and without direct coercion, which is also embedded in market logics.

Articulating Islamic Hospitality

Recently, some Muslim entrepreneurs have been actively promoting the idea of ‘Islamic hospitality’ (Stephenson 2014) by introducing Islamically marked hospitality services. This modern articulation of halal hospitality (Hall and Prayag 2022) makes little reference to the cultural histories and traditions of Islamic hospitality (Constable 2009). Instead, it focuses on enacting checklist items, guidelines, or standards to make modern travel and industry ‘Islamic.’ In the past, sharia has been understood in Malaysia and Indonesia as mainly referring to the implementation of Islamic laws and the political contestation for a more secular or Islamic state. However, recently, some Muslims have articulated sharia as a form of business trademark and a way of urban lifestyle. Besides ‘sharia-compliant,’ they also use terms such as ‘Islamic,’ ‘halal,’ and ‘Muslim-friendly’ to describe such Islamically marked places – often used interchangeably. Yet, these terms might imply different connotations. For example, ‘sharia-compliant’ indicates a more rigid approach, denoting that the usage of a place must meet rigid interpretations of Islamic teaching (e.g., all staff in the hotel must wear Islamic attire), whereas ‘Muslim-friendly’ indicates a less strict condition, meaning a place has facilities that meet the basic demands of Muslim travelers (e.g., providing the option of halal food).

Marsden and Retsikas (2013, p. 3) have suggested the concept of ‘articulation’ to analyze how Islam is produced, reproduced, and transformed in particular social and historical contexts. As ‘all expressions of the religious are mutually constituted in relation to the quandaries and concerns of everyday social existence,’ they suggest ‘Islam’s invocation and diffusion are best explored through the ways in which ideas, practices, discourses and debates that are thought of by their participants as being Islamic are inter-involved with such areas of contemporary social existence’ (Marsden and Retsikas 2013, p. 4). While some promoters of sharia-compliant hotels argue that they adjust their hospitality services based on religious texts, in reality, the making of an ‘Islamic’ hotel is less a process of how

Muslims implement religious ideas from Islamic texts in their hospitality services and more about how they make hotel services and facilities become and/or appear 'Islamic.' Hence, different actors have different opinions and ways to make the hotel fulfill Islamic requirements as they understand them. It is also a process by which businesspeople and religious scholars negotiate their interests. In addition, university departments, state agencies, and travel companies have played their roles in promoting and regulating Islamic hospitality, some even drafting standards and guidelines to define and rate it. This chapter examines how state agencies, business actors, hotel managers, and religious scholars articulate Islamic hospitality through three interrelated dimensions: spatial (Knott 2005), material (Meyer 2009), and social.

Many promoters of Islamic hospitality claim that there is a substantial global Muslim travel market, and therefore, it is crucial to provide Islamic facilities and services to Muslim tourists. However, while a growing number of pious middle-class Muslims deliberately demand Islamically marked services, many ordinary Muslim tourists might not. For example, many Muslim tourists prefer to have the option of halal food and praying facilities but do not necessarily look for hotels that ban alcohol consumption, broadcast calls for prayers, and feature 'Islamic' designs. To a certain extent, deliberate efforts to make hotels 'Islamic' do not reflect the aspirations of most ordinary Muslim travelers. Instead, such attempts impose some interpretations of Islamic teaching onto hotel services. By doing so, the hotel management enacts checklist items to become the social norm of the ideal Muslim. Indeed, while such hotel operators claim it is important to provide Islamic services for attracting Muslim tourists from overseas, especially the Middle East, in reality, many guests are actually domestic tourists and event organizers, especially those who are Islamist-minded or pious middle-class Muslims.

In Indonesia, there is a mushrooming of sharia hotels in major cities catering to pious domestic travelers, such as the Cantik Syari Hotel in Jakarta, the Adilla Syariah Hotel in Yogyakarta, and the Ruby Hotel Syariah in Bandung. Many of these hotels have said they do not accept unmarried couples as guests. In Malaysia, some of these hotels are located in urban neighborhoods popular among pious middle-class Muslims, such as Shah Alam and Bangi. In Shah Alam, the Mardhiyyah Hotel, formerly known as the Grand Bluewave Hotel, claims to be a five-star, sharia-compliant, international hotel and a winner of the Platinum Category Muslim-Friendly Accommodation Recognition (MFAR) from the Malaysian Tourism, Arts, and Culture ministry's Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC) (Selangor.travel 2023). In Bangi, the Hotel Tenera positions itself as a 'Muslim-friendly hotel' – it has three swimming pools, one exclusively for female guests. Other sharia-compliant hotels in Malaysia include the Tamu Hotel in Kuala Lumpur, the Adya Hotel in Langkawi, and the Paya Bunga Hotel in Kuala Terengganu. Some hotels even claim to be Muslim-only, such as the Blue Lagoon Condominium Port Dickson. Despite the growing trend, it is essential to note that most hotels in both countries are still conventional – many provide halal food and praying facilities, yet few claim to be 'sharia-compliant.'

In 2014, the Indonesian Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy and the Malaysian ITC organized a joint seminar on 'Muslim-friendly Hospitality Services' in Kuala Lumpur. The speakers at the symposium included the Chairman of Sofyan Hospitality (later renamed the Sofyan Corporation), Royanto Sofyan, and the Group General Manager of De Palma Hotel, Mohd Ilyas Zainal Abidin, who shared their views in a panel called 'Sharia-guided business: hotel management in Islam.' How did such a trend of 'sharia-compliant' or 'Muslim-friendly' hotels evolve? Who are the players and promoters of such hotels?

What makes such hotels Islamic? By exploring the De Palma Hotel in Kuala Lumpur and the Sofyan Hotel in Jakarta, both trendsetters of halal hotels in their countries, I examine how and under what conditions Islamist-minded businessmen and religious scholars, with the assistance of government agencies and tourist service providers, implement and instill their religious values into the making of urban places. Based on my interviews and observations at the hotels, I describe how they develop and popularize the trend of making hotels Islamic in the next section.

De Palma Hotel in Kuala Lumpur

At De Palma, you will bring home an enlightening memory of Muslim hospitality, Malaysian style. That's the De Palma experience. Be it our rooms and facilities or quality services, you can expect star treatment from our attentive staff, all in Syariah-prescribed comfort. Your daily reminders to prayers are within earshot, with a surau (small prayer room) just a lift ride away for the Solah Jumaah and even Friday congregation. Even your business requirements are conducted and blessed by our in-house imams in true Islamic fashion. In short, your stay here will be like you have never left home, no matter how far you are from it. Enjoy a halal menu that caters to international, regional and local tastes. Check-in at the unique Islamic suites where luxurious settings are in perfect harmony with devotional living.

(Asiaroom 2015)

De Palma Hotel in Kuala Lumpur is part of the group owned by the Selangor State Development Council (PKNS). As seen in the description of the De Palma Hotel on a booking website, terms such as 'Islamic,' 'sharia,' and 'halal' have been used intentionally to promote the hotel's facilities and services. Other marketing materials also make use of these qualifications. For example, at a busy junction of Jalan Ampang, a billboard claims the hotel is a 'leading sharia-compliant hotel' and features photos of their guests performing prayers. On a brochure, the hotel promotes itself as 'your preferred Islamic hotel,' offering guests sharia-compliant hospitality, with services such as an Islamic floor, Islamic meeting packages, and halal restaurants.

My first visit to the hotel was in 2013 to attend an Islamic fashion show co-organised by the hotel and the Malaysian Chinese Muslim Association (MACMA). The organizers explained why they chose the De Palma Hotel for the event, 'it is to show that Islam and fashion, Islam and leisure, can go side by side. We can be trendy in an Islamic way. We can enjoy hotel services in a halal way' (fieldnote, 2 February 2013). On a Friday afternoon in 2014, I revisited the hotel. Hundreds of Muslims gathered inside and around the Surau Nurul Hikmah, a small mosque on the third floor, to listen to the Friday sermon and to perform congregational prayer. The swimming pool next to the mosque was closed during prayer. According to general manager Mohd Ilyas, the hotel is the first and only one in Malaysia that hosts a mosque that can conduct Friday prayer, with in-house imams to lead prayers. In addition, at every prayer time, the azan call can be heard all over the hotel, so it has the atmosphere of 'being in a mosque' (Malim Ghazali 2011, p. 62).

The most important feature of the hotel is the Islamic floor: the rooms on the sixth floor are for Muslim guests only. As a non-Muslim, I requested an *ustaz* (religious teacher) to show me the floor. Once I left the lift, zam-zam water ('holy water' from Mecca) and dates

were served on a welcoming table. Quranic recitation could be heard along the floor corridor. I entered one of the rooms, where there were complimentary prayer mats, prayer caps, and beads on the bed. A few information sheets were also available – including an ‘Ask Ustaz’ form, a form to request a wake-up call for morning prayer, an information sheet on prayer times, and selected *hadith* texts. On the side table, there were a Quran and signs displaying the prayer texts for before sleeping and after waking up. There were paintings with Islamic motifs, geometric designs, or calligraphy on the walls. The prayer direction (*qiblah*) was clearly marked in the room, and the *azan* (call for prayers) could be heard from the corridor. There was a facility for *wudu* (the small ritual ablution demanded before obligatory daily prayers) in the bathroom.

The De Palma Hotel was once a conventional hotel. When Mohd Ilyas took over the managerial role in 2008, he transformed the hotel into an Islamic one. According to Mohd Ilyas, many people associate some hotels in Kuala Lumpur with ‘immoral’ activities such as sex before marriage and prostitution. He said, ‘We would like to change this perception. We want to insert moral values into our hotel services’ (interview, Mohd Ilyas, 7 February 2014). His attempt to ‘Islamize’ the hotel is motivated by both religious and economic interests. Ilyas does not shy away from admitting that Islam is a marketing brand, ‘there are many budget hotels in Kuala Lumpur today. If we cannot offer a lower price, our hotel must have surplus value to compete with them.’ ‘Being Islamic’ is the surplus value for De Palma Hotel. ‘Sharia-compliant’ is also a branding exercise for Muslim-owned hotels to compete with other hotels perceived as dominated by non-Muslims. The chairperson of the De Palma Hotels, MD Nasir, states that with the establishment of sharia hotels, ‘there exists plenty of opportunities, especially for Muslim entrepreneurs to enter the hotel sector, and in doing so, extend their network in a field that is still being dominated by non-Muslims’ (Malim Ghozali 2011, p. 103). In a similar tone, Mohd Ilyas said his mission is not only to ‘reinvent Muslim travellers’ demands, but to create new job opportunities and options for those qualified in Islamic studies’ (Malim Ghozali 2011, p. 15).

As there is a niche for the Muslim market, both domestic (growing number of pious urban Muslim middle-class travelers) and international (increasing numbers of tourists from the Middle East to Malaysia after the 9/11 incident), Ilyas believed his hotel could cater to such segments of Muslim consumers. According to him, as of 2014, about 60–70 percent of hotel guests are local travelers, while another 30–40 percent are international tourists, mainly from the Middle East. Having said that, he refuted the idea that his hotel promotes segregation and exclusivism. Ilyas emphasized that non-Muslims are allowed and welcome to stay at the hotel if they accept its concept. According to him, non-Muslims comprise about 20–30 percent of guests in the hotel. Ilyas claims it is part of *dakwah* (Islamic preaching), ‘by providing Islamic service to our non-Muslim guests, we would like them to feel and to understand the true values of Islamic teachings.’ Ilyas also quickly pointed out that economic interest does not contradict religious convictions. He claims,

By running an Islamic hotel, I am earning profit for this life and gaining *pahala* [a reward from Allah for good deeds] for the afterlife. We hope our hotel staff and guests can pursue an ‘Islamic lifestyle.’ Our guests can improve their religious knowledge by attending religious classes, consulting our *ustazs*, and reading Quran. Many hotels in Kuala Lumpur do not employ female Muslims who wear headscarves. In our hotel, female Muslims can observe Islamic principles while working.

(interview, Mohd Ilyas, 7 February 2014)

Instead of enforcing strict regulations on the guests, Ilyas said he preferred to create an Islamic feeling or ambience at the hotel, which could make the guests aware of their religious duty and keep themselves away from immoral activities. For instance, while the hotel management does not enforce separation of gender for the usage of its swimming pool, Ilyas told me that

Most guests do not wear a bikini when they swim. Instead, many female swimmers wear Islamic swimsuits. Men and women also do not mix freely in the pool. They know this is an Islamic hotel, and they know how to act properly.

In addition, while the hotel receptionists do not strictly check the marriage status of visiting couples, Ilyas claimed, 'for those who want to have sex before marriage, they will not come to our hotel, because they will feel guilty for doing so in an Islamic hotel' (interview, Mohd Ilyas, 7 February 2014).

In other words, Ilyas thinks his hotel's socio-spatial order and religious touch can be translated into a proper bodily experience and pious social practice. In this case, an Islamic atmosphere might lead to Islamic practices among the staff and guests. How does the hotel management create an Islamic atmosphere? Based on my observations, the hotel seems to employ several techniques. Once I entered the hotel, a monitor displayed the daily prayer times and the hotel events. Zam-zam water and dates were served at the reception desk. There was a small box titled 'Ask Ustaz,' where the guests could write down their questions with contact details on a piece of paper and put it inside the box. When received, the hotel *ustaz* arranges an appointment with the guests or replies to their questions by email. On the hotel lifts, there were displays of selected *hadith*. There were also signs to remind guests to offer additional prayers before and after having a meal, using the toilet, and sleeping. Only halal foods (including international, Middle Eastern, and local cuisine) were served. The hotel café did not serve alcoholic drinks but provided non-alcoholic mixed beverages (fieldnote, 7 February 2014). It also continuously conducts religious seminars and programs to facilitate 'the Islamic way of life' (Malim Ghozali 2011, p. 33). The hotel has also introduced an 'Islamic meeting package,' with the motto 'your business the Islamic way' to attract religious departments and Islamic-based companies to hold events there.

Mohd Khafiz, a former staff member at a state religious department, was one of the six *ustaz* hired by the hotel management to make the hotel services, facilities, and activities 'Islamic.' Compared to the hotel manager Mohd Ilyas, he has a more rigid idea of promoting an Islamic hotel. To monitor the hotel's adherence to Islamic principles, the management set up a sharia advisory panel comprising hotel managers, Islamic scholars, and leaders from Islamic institutions. According to Khafiz, the hotel plans to undergo a refurbishment, and his suggestion was to have more Islamic floors. He stressed that Islam should not be just a brand but also the essence of the De Palma. Thus, the hotel should host more religious events, such as Ramadan celebrations, Islamic preaching, and Quranic classes. According to him, the hotel management should implement the idea of Islamic work ethic, in which 'the staff in the hotel are working as worshipping (*bekerja sambil beribadah*) because we are not serving the guests, but also serving God' (interview, Mohd Khafiz, 13 February 2014). According to him, all Muslim staff must attend religious motivation courses, observe prayers, and wear Islamic dress. However, the label of 'sharia-compliant' is not without controversy because, with such a label, some Muslim guests might have a higher expectation. For example, a Muslim guest complained about a middle-aged female kitchen staff member

not dressing properly – because she wore a short-sleeve shirt despite covering up her hair. However, in 2021, the hotel was renamed the Grand Barakah Hotel and geared down as a Muslim-friendly hotel.

Sofyan Hotel in Jakarta, Indonesia

‘For your convenience, we would like to inform you that our hotel is a halal hotel that is managed within the principle of Islam. Due to this matter, we don’t accept those who are not spouses to stay in the same room. Also, bringing alcoholic drinks into the hotel premises is strictly prohibited’ – that regulation is clearly displayed at the reception of the Sofyan Hotel Cut Meutia in Jakarta (Fieldnote, 19 August 2022). At the swimming pool, one of the rules and regulations listed on a signboard is ‘female companions are required to wear reasonable and unattractive clothing.’ The only newspaper available in the lobby is *Republika*, an Islamist-inclined newspaper in Indonesia. When I made a reservation at this hotel in early April 2014, the booking confirmation email stated that ‘the hotel is a syariah (Muslim) hotel, couples who check-in together must be married. Non-halal items containing alcohol, pork and lard are not permitted in the hotel.’ The hotel website also claims that its halal and sharia-compliant hospitality facilities and services are certified by the Indonesian Council of Religious Scholars (MUI, Majelis Ulama Indonesia) (Sofyanhotel 2023).

Sofyan Hotel is opposite Masjid Cut Meutia, a mosque in Central Jakarta. It is one of the hotels in the Sofyan Group, and it claims to be the first sharia-compliant hotel in Indonesia. The exterior and interior designs of the hotel do not differ much from other conventional hotels. However, the hotel services and facilities are adjusted to meet certain Islamic standards. When I was there in 2014, inside the hotel rooms, the azan could be heard from the corridor. Next to the bed, there were a Quran, a sheet displaying prayer times, and a few religious-themed books. Besides English and Indonesian TV programs, a few Arabic-language channels, such as Saudi Sunnah and Aljazeera Arab, were also accessible. The direction for prayers (*qiblah*) was clearly marked on the wall ceiling. A herbal bar inside the hotel served halal mixed herbal drinks instead of alcoholic beverages. Not far from the bar was a small prayer room. On its lower floor were an Islamic travel agency and a reflexology massage room (fieldnote, 1 April 2014).

As I observed, all female staff wore Islamic attire with a headscarf. The sales executive of the hotel, Fatona, told me, ‘It is compulsory for me to cover up, not as a hotel staff, but as a pious female Muslim. In the past, I worked in another hotel where the management did not allow wearing a headscarf. I am happy to work at the Sofyan Hotel, as I can observe my religious duty while working’ (interview, Fatona, 1 April 2014). Another male staff member at the reception desk told me that a marriage certificate or identity card would be checked if necessary. However, he indicated that the hotel staff has ways to identify the potential unmarried couples without asking for an identity card – ‘if a couple comes to us with no luggage, most likely they want to use our rooms for an affair. It is un-Islamic to reject them directly. It is also un-Islamic to allow such immoral activities in our hotel. We will therefore tell them that our hotel rooms are fully booked’ (fieldnote, 1 April 2014). In some ways, the hotel management enforces moral policing on its guests.

In recent years, the hotel has been hosting many events to promote an Islamic lifestyle. On 15 September 2018, it staged an event themed Halal Talk 2.0, ‘Eat Healthy, Live Halal,’ with a sharing session by a few halal promoters and a halal bento workshop (Instagram, Sofyanhotel, 14 September 2018). In conjunction with that event, there was also a

kids' video competition with the theme 'Wearing according to sharia with your own style' (*Berpakaian Syari Versi Kamu*). On 17 and 18 May 2019, the Indonesian Ministry of Tourism hosted a workshop, 'Certificate in Halal Tourism: Learning and Accreditation,' in the hotel. At the same time, a group called the Hijabers (female Muslims wearing trendy headscarves) Community also had a gathering in the hotel, and one of the participants told me, 'We want to get together and have fun, but in an Islamic way. This hotel is a perfect choice for us' (Fieldnote, 17 September 2019).

Sofyan Hotel was once a conventional hotel. Riyanto Sofyan, the current chairman of Sofyan, took over his father's managerial leadership in 1990. Beginning in 1992, he decided to gradually turn the hotel into an Islamic one. His personal life experience drove him to transform his hotel:

I was rich. I have a big house and a few luxury cars. Yet, at that time, I was not happy. Something was lacking in my life. So I joined religious classes to seek the meaning of life... I realized religion is important for us to have a balanced life. With the advice of a few religious teachers, I transformed my conventional hotel business into a model that upholds morality and spirituality, following the Quranic teachings.

(interview, Riyanto Sofyan, 7 April 2014.)

Some steps Riyanto Sofyan took to transform his hotels were prohibiting pork-related food products and alcoholic drinks, closing the nightclub with live bands and lady entertainers, implementing an Islamic reception policy, and establishing a sharia supervisory board to monitor the development of the hotel. In addition, the hotel started running religious study sessions for its staff. Riyanto emphasized that after the transformation, there has been no decrease in hotel room sales as they are targeting a new market – the emerging middle class of pious Muslims in Indonesia. Given that the hotel is frequently visited by the members and supporters of the Islamist party in Indonesia, Prosperous Justice Party (PKS, Partai Keadilan Sejahtera), it has been sometimes called a 'PKS hotel.' However, Riyanto emphasized that his hotel opens its doors to all guests, regardless of religion. He insisted,

Islamic hospitality is for both Muslims and non-Muslims who seek a moral and healthy lifestyle. It is not a sign of exclusivity. It is similar to vegetarian restaurants, offering customers a healthy choice. It is also a form of dakwah, to preach the beauty of Islam to our non-Muslim guests.

Nevertheless, Riyanto did not deny that he is a sympathizer of the Islamist party, and the party members share a similar conviction to 'Islamize Indonesian society in a modern way.' Indeed, at that time, a few of the hotel's sharia supervisory board members were PKS members. The Islamist party's direct or indirect involvement in making urban places Islamic is not limited to hotels but also Islamic integrated schools (Hasan 2012) and Muslim-only gated communities (Hew 2018a).

Having received an MBA (Master's in Business Administration), Riyanto told me he prefers not to publicly declare his hotel an Islamic or sharia one but to incorporate Islamic values in his hospitality facilities and services. His business motto, 'where hospitality is a virtue,' reflects this preference. Instead of adopting Islamic architecture or decorations, he said his business focuses on providing exemplary services that uphold Islamic principles. However, in its advertisements, the Sofyan Hotel often claims to be Indonesia's first halal or

sharia hotel. Such contradictory statements reflect Riyanto's attempt to make the hotel Islamic; at the same time, he tries to rebuke some critics that the hotel promotes a type of exclusion or segregation. As we can see from the corporate profile, Sofyan Hospitality describes Islam as an 'ethical value' and a 'lifestyle choice:'

Each step taken by Sofyan Hospitality must be made with full responsibility to preserve its commitment guided by 'noble orientation.' This commitment, in turn, will enhance long-term profitability, product sustainability, and intergenerational equity. Therefore, the corporation strives to comply with the Islamic Principles of Sharia as the basis of its operation to operate and develop hospitality services and products that are 'halal,' and provide optimal benefits to guests, society and the environment... Best value for money, attractive, a preferred lifestyle for all.

(SofyanHospitality 2015)

Instead of formulating hospitality services derived from Islamic texts or Muslim traditions, Sofyan Corporation makes modern hospitality services and facilities 'halal' by adding Islamic standards. Going beyond hotel services, Sofyan Corporation also promotes itself as a consulting service to 'develop a halal compliance system in the tourism industry, such as for hotels, restaurants, tour and travel providers, spas, malls and shopping centers, theme parks, recreation venues, and other related industries' (SofyanConsulting 2023). Furthermore, the Sofyan Corporation has expanded its businesses into education and property. For example, in 2014, it established Madina Islamic School, an Islamic Integrated National-Plus School in Tebet, South Jakarta.

Standardization for Halal Hotels

Both the De Palma Hotel and the Sofyan Hotel claim to be industry pioneers. They have led the path, contributing to the growing number of hotels adopting similar concepts. They have set the standard, which some universities and state agencies refer to in formulating the guidelines for halal tourism. The chairman of Sofyan Corporation, Riyanto Sofyan, received the Halal Hotel Pioneers Award at the *Halal in Travel Global Summit 2022* held in Singapore (SofyanCorp 2022). This award, included in the Special Recognition Awards category, is a form of appreciation given by CrescentRating to the halal hotel pioneers. Riyanto received the award for his efforts and contributions in encouraging the development of the halal industry in Indonesia.

Indeed, Sofyan Corporation, with its Sofyan Halal Hospitality Standard (SHHS), has been providing the solution for a halal or sharia-compliance management system. It offers advisory services, supervision, and training to hospitality facilities and service providers to comply with the standard. Working with the MUI, Sofyan Corporation has also developed a comprehensive and sophisticated guideline for sharia-compliant hotels for the Indonesian Ministry of Tourism. The guideline outlines in detail the compulsory criteria (such as serving halal food, no consumption of alcohol, providing prayer facilities, and no pornographic entertainment) and non-compulsory criteria (such as broadcasting religious TV programs, the display of Islamic motifs, the bed and toilet are not facing the praying direction, the prohibition of smoking) to be fulfilled by a sharia-compliant hotel. Based on the fulfillment of these criteria, a hotel can be awarded either a 1-hilal (1-star; literally half-moon or

crescent) or 2-hilal (2-star) sharia-compliance rating. In addition, Sofyan Corporation also offers consultancy services to hoteliers in Japan and South Korea.

In Malaysia, the De Palma Hotel aims to ‘become a mentor in the rebranding of other hotels and a leader in the propagation of Islamic idealism in the hospitality industry’ (Malim Ghozali 2011, p. 95). In 2016, the hotel was awarded the ‘Islamic Quality Standard for Hotel’ by Universal Crescent Standard Center (UCSC). Based on the model of the De Palma Hotel, academic teams from IIUM (International Islamic University Malaysia) and UiTM (the MARA Technological University) have been developing a comprehensive guideline for sharia-compliant hotels in Malaysia (Zakiah Samori and Fadhilah Abd Rahman 2013; Nur’ Hidayah Che Ahmat et al. 2015). In addition, the IIUM offers a certificate course in sharia-compliance hospitality, targeting those with a passion for working in hotels. According to the introduction course sharia-compliance hospitality concerns hotels, resorts, restaurants, and airlines that ‘do not serve alcoholic beverages, offer food with halal certificates, and provide wellness facilities for women, prayer facilities and a generally Muslim-friendly environment’ (IIUM Academy 2022). Some subjects included in the program are ‘Modern Islamization of Hospitality Industry,’ ‘Managerial Requirements for Muslim-friendly Hotel,’ ‘Staff Requirements for Islamic Hospitality Services,’ ‘Physical Requirements for Muslim-friendly Hotels,’ and ‘Room Criteria for Muslim-friendly Hotels.’

In 2020, the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture Malaysia (MOTAC), through the Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC), launched the official logo for the Muslim-Friendly Accommodation Recognition (MFAR). The recognition is an extension of MOTAC’s star rating system and is the first Islamic tourism-related recognition in the world that a government agency issues. According to the general director of the ITC, ‘such recognition provides assurance and confidence to Muslim travelers that the hotel they have selected meets their basic faith-based requirements’ (Camilia Rezali 2021). The MFAR has three categories – silver, gold, and platinum. Premises that fall under the platinum category meet most of the sharia-compliant requirements, such as offering information on locations of mosques and Muslim-friendly tourist attractions, serving halal food and beverages, displaying the *qiblah* direction, and providing a bidet, prayer mat, and Quran in the rooms. In addition, the hotels under the platinum category should also allocate certain hours for female-only use of the gymnasium and swimming pool (Teh Athira Yusof 2022).

In addition to MFAR, the JAKIM (Department of Islamic Development Malaysia) also accredits halal certification to hotels in Malaysia. JAKIM’s halal certification mainly covers kitchen and restaurant services. It does not include other aspects of the hotel services, regulations, and facilities. There is a website on which Muslim consumers can check the list of hotels in Malaysia that have JAKIM’s halal certification (Halal Malaysia 2023). However, JAKIM’s strict requirement for halal certification has caused many controversies in Malaysia (Hew 2017). For example, in 2022, a hotel in the capital, Kuala Lumpur, designated a ‘non-halal lift’ to carry non-halal goods and perishable items. The hotel said that this is part of the requirement set by the authorities to ensure they receive their halal certification for the hotel’s back-of-house operations, such as the service lift (Sheila Sri Priya 2022). JAKIM clarified that no clause in its guidelines stipulates that hotels or premises must display the ‘non-halal lift’ sign. However, it also stated that they could establish any appropriate mechanism in accordance with the procedures set to maintain the integrity of Malaysia’s halal certification (MalayMail 2022). Therefore, some hotels with halal and non-halal restaurants put up the ‘non-halal lift’ sign to comply with JAKIM’s guideline (Salama 2013).

In addition to government agencies, there are initiatives by private companies to audit and rate Muslim-friendly hospitality services. One of them is the Singapore-based CrescentRating. CrescentRating is a consultancy that audits hospitality brands on halal standards, helps to market destinations, and publishes research reports on halal travel. Based on sets of selection criteria, the CrescentRating system rates the overall halal-friendliness of hotels on a scale of one to seven – with one being the lowest rating and seven being the highest (CrescentRating 2023). Both MFAR's categories of Muslim-friendliness and CrescentRating's rankings of halal-friendliness reflect a growing trend of standardization in modern Islamic hospitality services.

Modern Halal Places: Between Ethical Choice and Moral Policing

In our hotels, unmarried couples are not allowed to stay in the same room... We are different from other conventional hotels. We want to protect our children from mixing freely... We also do not serve alcohol. It is okay for European tourists to refuse to stay here (because of the no alcohol policy). I believe our local Muslims will support Hotel Zamburger.

(ML Studios 2022)

Since 2017, the founder of the Zamburger Hotel, Norizam Tukiman, has successfully acquired and managed more than 74 hotels and resorts in Malaysia and Indonesia. Claiming to be the largest chain of Muslim-friendly hotels in Malaysia, the Zamburger Hotel also positions itself as sharia-compliant, aiming to apply Islamic principles in its services, given that most Malaysians are Muslims (UZ Hotel 2023). In Indonesia, a similar trend of labeling hotels 'halal,' 'sharia-compliant,' and 'Muslim-friendly' persists. Such hotel branding is not only to meet the request of pious middle-class travelers but also to 'reinvent Muslim travellers' demands' (Malim Ghozali 2011, p. 15). In other words, while certain segments of Muslim consumers are expecting Muslim-friendly services, many conservative Muslim entrepreneurs are setting a higher standard of what constitutes, to their understanding, 'Islamic' or 'halal' services – and, by doing so, they are creating yet another new niche market and, at the same time, expanding conservative Islamic values. Such an intersection of conservative religious values and neoliberal economic attitudes can be captured with the notion of 'middle-class moralities,' which reduces Islamic ethics of social justice into a checklist for individual piety.

From Islamic schools to sharia-compliant hospitals, from halal restaurants to Muslim-friendly hotels, modern halal spaces entail aspirations of simultaneously being 'Islamic' and being 'modern' among urban middle-class Muslims. The promoters of these Islamically marked places articulate Islam as a 'marketing brand,' a 'surplus value,' an 'ethical principle,' or a 'spiritual essence' in their place-making processes. As Thomas Blom Hansen points out, religion has been articulated as a moral force that can be mobilized as a bulwark against urban life's imputed immorality and modernity's excesses. By promoting 'ethical values,' religious observance is commoditized and turned into consumer choice, style preference, and lifestyle markers (Hansen 2014, p. 378). However, some people might also use religion to exercise certain forms of social control and moral policing by enacting guidelines to discipline how Muslims should perform in certain places. For example, using the case

study of Islamic corporations in Malaysia, Patricia Sloane-White (2017) argues that sharia principles in the Islamic economy produce a version of Islam that is increasingly conservative, financially and fiscally powerful, and committed to social control over Muslim and non-Muslim public and private lives. Therefore, these urban halal places are sites where various ideas and practices of Islamism and moral norms are promoted, enforced, negotiated, and even contested (Hew 2018b).

Notes

- 1 The hotel has been renamed the Grand Barakah Hotel in 2021.
- 2 *Syariah* is the Malay-Indonesian way of writing 'sharia.'

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14

TO BE A MUSLIM ‘WINNER’ IN KAZAKHSTAN

Lifestylization of Islam in Hyperconsumerized Astana

*Aurélie Biard*¹

Socio-Economic Background

The integration of Muslim Eurasia (Mostafa 2003), including post-Soviet Kazakhstan, into a globalized economy and culture with the fall of the USSR has given rise to a transnational Islam adapted to the rationale of the globalized capitalist market economy. This transnational Islam forges individuals who are well-adjusted or at least willing to conform to the norms of today’s economic reality. In the wake of the latest wave of globalization, this reality is characterized by post-Keynesian neoliberal deregulation, a ‘new brand of financialised and consumption-based capitalism [that] has reshuffled the cards in such a way that economics now seem to determine to a large extent other social spheres’ (Gauthier 2018, p. 382). Rooted in neo-evangelism’s prosperity gospel (Michel and García-Ruiz 2012), this transnational Islam promises the new urban middle classes of a rentier state such as Kazakhstan – oil still accounts for 30 percent of the annual wealth and two-thirds of exports² – wealth, upward social mobility, and social respectability. Consequently, this transnational Islam is conservative and market-oriented.

This chapter’s goal is to explore the trajectories of new Muslim entrepreneurs among the urban middle class involved in the private sector through the study of their lifestylization of Islam and its publicization in the urban space of Kazakhstan’s million-inhabitant capital, Astana, where the fruits of oil-fed prosperity are clearly visible. A provincial administrative center built at great expense on former swamps (in 1997), Astana – located a thousand kilometers from the former capital city, Almaty – was marketed by former President Nursultan Nazarbayev as the ‘city of the future’ (*gorod budushchego*) or ‘city of dream’ (*gorod-mechta*) (Laszczkowski 2018, p. 3). The capital city as a visual display of urban modernity operates through the aesthetics and spatial imaginaries that have come to characterize the urban landscapes of a number of Asian capitals over the past few decades, whether in post-Soviet Central Asia (Ashgabat, etc.), East Asia, or the Arabian Peninsula (Abu Dhabi and Doha, for instance). The human geographer Natalie Koch depicts this as ‘spectacular urbanism,’ explaining that those ‘high-rise cities [...] bustling with life and brimming with gleaming skyscrapers and ultramodern infrastructure...have become iconic

of [...Asia's] state-led modernization agendas and increasing integration with the world economy' (2018, p. 1).

As the seat of the Kazakhstani government since 1998, Astana³ was presented by the autocratic government as a 'symbol of the rise of the state' and 'a symbol of the liberated nation's hope and assuredness as to its flourishing future and the future of its descendants' (Nazarbayev 2006, p. 357; quoted in Laszczkowski 2018, p. 10). The 'spectacularity' of the capital city is therefore supposed to represent the perceived success of Nazarbayev's model of development, which was predicated on stability and prosperity via authoritarianism and economic neoliberalization (Harvey 2005). This emerging capital relies on the logic of 'intense concentration of the state's resources in the hands of a small elite' (Koch 2018, p. 140). This elite (formed mainly by members of Nazarbayev's family⁴) has used spectacular urban development as a 'political technology' (Koch 2018, p. 12) to 'craft a particular image of the state and themselves as modern and beneficent' (p. 17). Indeed, as pointed out by Koch, when Nazarbayev argued in 2010 that 'the modern Astana in Kazakhstan in miniature,' he was relying on synecdoche to legitimate the spectacular urban expansion of the capital city. In the context of urban development, this 'mental trick of synecdoche' results in a 'geopolitical claim' (p. 33), which suggests that 'the capital city of a country is representative of the entire country, that the modernity expressed there is found everywhere, and that the government's largesse is indicative of its beneficence across its lands and towards all its residents' (p. 28).

Economic entrepreneurs and pious Muslims display distinctive practices in this state-sponsored and flourishing showcase capital. In this spectacular capital city, they aspire to embody representations of Muslim 'winners' who attract 'success' (defined mainly as the acquisition of material goods and wealth) thanks to Islam. This is a conservative and even rigorist type of Islam rather than the folkloric and secularized interpretation inherited from the Soviet period. These economic entrepreneurs are from the new urban middle classes, which are growing rapidly. These 'winners' have been the only ones to benefit from three decades of neoliberal policies (Caré and Châton 2016) from the authoritarian state oligarchy of Nursultan Nazarbayev or his hand-picked successor, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. These neoliberal policies induced a 'rollback' of the state (i.e., the withdrawal of the state from direct delivery of services) that has been shown to redistribute wealth according to the logics of clientelism. However, since 2016, amidst growing economic stagnation, increased popular discontent, and political mobilization, the government has been forced to utilize a part of its sovereign wealth fund to both support the economy and increase social spending. The global pandemic has also exacerbated the plight of millions of ordinary Kazakhstanis, whose livelihood depends on the trickling down of wealth from large private and quasi-governmental companies and state officials.

The failure of public policies has therefore contributed to reinforcing socio-economic gaps between regions and the rural/urban divide, accentuating the polarization of Kazakhstani society between the losers (those 'left by the wayside' by the economic 'shock therapy' carried out in the 1990s) and the winners of the neoliberal transformations, including the Muslim entrepreneurs under study. It is worth remembering that the 'losers' of the neoliberal reforms do not have institutional means to represent or relay their sectoral interests and social demands to the authorities, which is a likely factor underlying the spontaneous protests of January 2022.⁵

Religious Setting and Market Islam in Kazakhstan

This chapter argues that behind the project of the 'winners' described above to gain bourgeois respectability in the capital city lies, in reality, a project of a 'conservative revolution' (Haenni 2005; Gauthier, this volume). In a context of economic grievances, stark inequality, widespread corruption and volatile oil prices, massive capital flight, and continuing dependence on the Russian market (worsened by the war in Ukraine), the economic 'success' that these devout Muslim business-people under study claim supposedly derives from both divine predetermination (predestination or God's plan for each individual as they define it) and individual responsibility. They consider people to have been predestined (or not) to be Muslim 'winners,' i.e., to be successful/wealthy thanks to Islam. Their market-oriented Islam is not the prelude to the establishment of a sharia-based Islamic state in the sense of capital punishment and the like, but one of the vectors of the privatization of the state, even of the liquidation of the welfare state (Haenni 2005, p. 11).

Leaving aside any social contestation concerning Kazakhstan's stark inequalities, what is at stake for these Muslim 'winners' is the establishment, *via* their adoption and advocacy of supposedly 'authentic' Islamic lifestyles (in terms of behavior, clothing, and discourse), of an alternative social order. This is achieved by the progressive Islamization of social norms and the normalization of Islam-inspired values such as 'modesty,' discretion, and gender segregation in Astana's public space, especially in the 'Left Bank' area. This new quarter featuring monumental, futuristic, and stylistically extravagant administrative, residential, and commercial buildings is where the political effects of public aesthetics in Astana are most visible: it materializes the regime's vision of development and the urban ideal it embodies (Laszczkowski 2011c, 2016, 2018). It is precisely in this expansive and spectacular quarter that the Muslim winners under study have established their private businesses and deploy Islamic capitalist and business ethics that go hand in hand with the 'bourgeois' Islam they strive for, copycatting patterns inspired by globalized Arab Gulf style entrepreneurs. Indeed, the neoliberalization of the Kazakh economy, especially in the 1990s' shock therapy marked by privatization and the confiscation of wealth by oligarchs, has created what Hakan Yavuz in the case of Turkey, calls new 'opportunity spaces' for actors that use the marketplace to transmit a societal-centered rather than state-centered understanding of Islamization or, more precisely, re-orthodoxization (2003). The new Kazakhstani entrepreneurs that are giving capitalism a religious gloss seek to Islamize from below through mores sustained by Islamic consumption and Islamic lifestyles.

The joint spread of neoliberalism and consumerism in Muslim Eurasia following the collapse and dismantling of the Soviet welfare state and the forces of globalization 'changes the environment in which religious institutions evolve and imposes new ways of managing human and economic resources' (Gauthier 2017). This challenges territory-bound, inherited religious authorities and their institutionalized privileges, such as Hanafi Islam, the majority law school in Central Asia (Muminov 1999). In post-Soviet Kazakhstan, transnational religious movements like Salafism⁶ have emerged, increasing pluralism, now understood in terms of 'competition.' Salafism in Kazakhstan is primarily a quietist version that corresponds to what Quintan Wiktorowicz calls the 'purists'⁷ (2006). As such, it simultaneously promotes loyalty to the government and, in this case, a form of Islamic prosperity gospel for which economic success is a divine dividend. This quietist version can be understood as a striking example of an entrepreneurial and radically transnational type of Islamic movement that

shuns the basic precepts of prior types of political Islamism, such as the quietist Salafi's disregard for the nation-state. Quietist Salafis, at least among the new urban middle classes, far from positioning themselves as a political opposition upholding 'original' Islam against an 'impious' regime, view the secular Kazakhstani government as legitimate. The majority of Salafis in Kazakhstan embody this Sunni quietism, which maintains that rulers must be obeyed, however irreligious they may be.

Yet, official and public discourses make no distinction between the trends within global Salafism. Thus, Salafism – as the perceived enemy form of Islam – arouses mistrust from post-Soviet political elites, who are concerned about its potential politicization in a way that might undermine state structures. Local Kazakhstani Salafis are variously depicted by government and state-controlled media as 'Wahhabis,' 'terrorists,' and 'fundamentalists' striving to establish an Islamist theocracy in secular Kazakhstan. The Kazakhstani government's efforts to counter 'extremism' have led to significant securitization within the country. Local and global jihadist and terrorist events – such as the series of terrorist attacks in Atyrau (2011), Aktobe (2012), and Almaty (2016) – have contributed to amplifying criticism of Salafism. The state's instrumentalization of Islam, in Kazakhstan as in the other Central Asian republics, has led to the promotion of state-advocated 'good' Islam (Hanafism) – considered a 'traditional' faith adapted to the history of the Kazakhstani nation, and therefore supposedly moderate to the point of serving as a support to a reified ethno-confessional identity or 'Kazakhness' (Laruelle 2014) – and the corresponding disqualification of 'bad' Islam such as Salafism, which, like other 'non-traditional' faiths, is represented as a foreign export alien to Kazakh tradition.

It is worth remembering that the Hanafi law school, which originated in Iraq in the middle of the eighth century and was firmly established in Bukhara and Samarkand, had enjoyed, in the whole of the Ottoman Empire, the constant favor of the dynasty and exclusive official recognition. Leaving space for forms of analogical reasoning (*qiyās*) and being open to pre-Islamic and regional practices, the Hanafi school has been confronted with hostility from other law schools, notably the Hanbali school and its contemporary offshoots. Although for some time mainly confined to the Arabian Peninsula, the Hanbali school extended northward and later became very influential throughout the Muslim world from the end of the eighteenth century through various echoes of the Wahhabi movement (which is the doctrinal basis of what is today called Salafism). The Hanbali school denies the use of individual judgment and prohibits any sort of *bid'a* (problematic innovation): the *sunna* of the Prophet – the compilation of his words, actions, and attitudes – not individual judgment must be used to interpret the Quran. The sum of these Hadith (accounts or 'sayings') forms the tradition of the Prophet – the *sunna* or path he traced for future generations. The antagonism between the Hanafi and the Hanbali law schools in terms of the practices of Islam as well as ways of thinking has oriented the history of Islam in Central Asia throughout the modern and contemporary period (Dudoignon 2001, p. 25). Yet beyond this antagonism between the two law schools, the current mutations of quietist Salafism (originally from the Hanbali law school) and conservative Hanafism in post-Soviet Kazakhstan, like elsewhere, offer not so much contrasting outlooks but, rather, similar trajectories.

Historically, Hanafism has been known for its flexibility; i.e., it gave full scope to personal opinion (*ra'y*) in the interpretation of the sacred text. Alternatively, Salafism has characterized itself by its emphasis on religious purity and, therefore, on the fight against all religious deviations (theological debates being central for the Salafis, the real question is for

Muslims to know what one’s theology is, or what the Salafis call ‘*aqīda*). The efficiency of mechanisms aiming to export (mainly from Saudi Arabia) this conservative interpretation of Islam has been such that it tends to produce – in a post-Soviet republic such as Kazakhstan, where Hanafism historically predominates – what might be qualified as a ‘salafization’ of the Islamic norm (redefined according to what Salafis find authentic). Therefore, nowadays, Hanafism and Salafism mainly differ in the kind of globalized networks they try to link up with: either Arab Gulf puritanism (historically emerging from the Hanbali school of law) for Salafism or Turkic world networks (historically related to the Hanafi school of law) for Hanafism.

The neoliberal and consumerist reworkings of Islam by both Hanafis and Salafis in this post-Soviet society penetrate an increasing spectrum of social classes. This chapter focuses solely on the winners of the neoliberal transformations (especially among practicing Muslims in the urban middle classes) and the specific relationships they have toward post-Cold War consumer capitalism. This is in a context where the authoritarian post-Soviet state has adopted market-oriented, neoliberal modes of governance and management characterized by anti-redistributive policy choices and a security shift. The focus, based on empirical fieldwork data, is not so much on the formation *per se* of a new social class, of a pious bourgeoisie of the same nature as in Turkey or Indonesia (Yankaya 2015; Jones 2016, 2018). Rather, it is on the social trajectories of these new Kazakhstani Muslim capitalists as well as on the Foucauldian mechanisms (self-constraint, discipline, etc.) they put forward. These individuals participate in a more Bourdieusian search for (personal) distinction as the result of a work of the self on the self, and personal achievement linked to (hyper) individualistic logics of upward social mobility (mainly characterized by the accumulation of new capital or by the consolidation of their initial volume of capital). They adhere to a Market Islam (i.e., Market Muslims) that is morphing into a ‘bourgeois’ brand of Islam among Astana’s middle classes and are as concerned with puritanical moral standards as they are indifferent to the perpetuation of an oligarchic and authoritarian political order. These pious businesspeople display a strict Victorian-type morality and profess a ‘bourgeois’ faith with political loyalism and respect for the status quo and for social hierarchies (i.e., the notion that money has been earned honestly and economic success should therefore be respected and valued). At the same time, they advocate largely globalized social practices (study abroad, travel, consumer culture, access to advanced technology, etc.) that are reserved for an elite out of touch with the social realities of the rest of the country.

Nevertheless, I argue that this search for distinction as superiority and difference is also a contestation (at least implicitly) of the social order in Kazakhstan. The universe of meanings of these ‘conservative protesters,’ according to Stéphane Dudoignon’s expression (2018), is indeed different from, even opposed to, the dominant values attributed to Kazakhstani society that they tend to perceive as ‘pagan,’ anti-religious, and amoral, since either too Westernized and/or too Russified. Their lifestylization of Islam in Astana’s public space – especially through a specific type of Islamized consumption – comprises a well-defined set of ethics, i.e., of guidelines as to how to live, based on the adherence to Islamic ethical norms (*akhlāq*), manners, and behavior (*ādāb*). It presents itself as an alternative Islamic identity in opposition to supposedly amoral Westernized lifestyles. The alternative Islamic ethical system they promote – the Prosperity Theology of Market Islam – implies an anti-Western puritanism: they consider the Western values propagated by globalization (particularly the defense of LGBTQ rights) to be decadent and corrupting

influences on individuals and society. The cultural battle is, in their eyes, all the more crucial because a hipster culture is developing among the young generation (51 percent of the inhabitants were born after independence in 1991). This is particularly the case in Astana, as in Almaty, with its trendy bars, organic restaurants, alternative cultural places, and ‘glocalized’ practices (a word made up of globalization and localization, i.e., adapted to the culture to which they are addressed). The small minority of the Kazakhstani generation who are the bearers of this hipster culture is composed of young people who are often highly educated, speak foreign languages, and travel to Europe and Asia. These individuals defend multicultural and progressive values, which are largely disconnected from local social realities. Thus, they are perceived negatively by the rest of the population, sometimes represented as ‘foreign agents’ or morally depraved people. On social networks or at university, particularly in Astana, tensions around gender or sexuality rage between supporters of conservative values and those defending progressive and multicultural values. The debates are all the livelier because the Russian media, widely distributed in the region, use the subject as a tool, regularly stirring up the fantasy of a deprived and decadent *Gayvropa* (a ‘gayized’ Europe) (Laruelle 2016, 2018, 2019).

The ethics and morality these Market Muslims put forward in promoting this Islamic puritanism with anti-Western accents merge here. This leads to a denaturalization of the social order and even to processes of rapid de-objectification of state institutions, that is to say, questioning their capacity to produce ways of understanding that are naturalized by social actors and allow an implicit agreement on the legitimacy and naturalness of the social order. In this case, the de-objectification mainly concerns the state institutions whose secularism is inherited from the Soviet Union.

Context: State-of-the-Art Concepts and Methods

The reworkings of Islam, as the case of Kazakhstan illustrates, imply a move away from the secularization and rational choice paradigms in the study of religion. They are better captured by François Gauthier’s (2017, 2020) theoretical framework, according to which current mutations of Islam (like other religions) take on the specific shapes and social location that they do as a consequence of their inscription in what he calls the ‘Global-Market regime.’ This regime has unfolded in the last decade as a result of the latest phase of globalization, which has seen economics gain in importance worldwide, rearranging and reconstituting the institutionalizations inherited from the former, Nation-State regime. For Gauthier, religion in the Global-Market regime is best understood against the backdrop of the joint rise of neoliberalism as a dominant ideology, set of policies, and practices on the one hand, and consumerism as a consumption-oriented, desirable, social, and cultural ethos on the other. Historically, these trends emerge differently depending on whether one starts from Western welfare states or Soviet-led communist states. Yet, both cases provide variations on a common theme, corresponding to a profound reshaping of religion and the emergence of new Market-shaped religious phenomena. It is important to note that the ‘Market’ here is understood as relating to economics, as well as the idea of a spontaneous and immanent type of social regulation.

The reshaping of Islam according to the new grammar of the Market regime is best illustrated in post-Soviet Kazakhstan by the entrepreneurial and business-minded ‘Market Islam’ propounded by the Muslim entrepreneurs who are trying to be socially recognized in Astana’s public space as the inspiring ‘winners’ of three decades of neoliberalization of the Kazakh economy. The notion of ‘Market Islam’ was first coined by Patrick Haenni (2005;

see Gauthier, this volume), based on his study of the moralist preacher ‘Amr Khalid’ in Egypt. Haenni’s notion embraces a broad spectrum of trends within Islam that are all characterized by the blending of neoliberal values (individual productivity and performance, competitiveness, personal success, etc.) and Islamic practices, turning ‘Market Muslims’ away from collective social and political projects. The trends of Market Islam has been widely observed in other Muslim societies – including the United Arab Emirates, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, and Turkey – by scholars such as Dilek Yankaya (2013), Gudrun Krämer (2013), Vali Nasr (2009, 2010), Gwenaël Njoto-Feillard (2004, 2012), Carla Jones (2016, 2018), and Patricia Sloane-White (2017). The discussion of Market Muslims in Muslim Eurasia, meanwhile, has centered on rural economic entrepreneurs’ development of an ethic of economic success since before perestroika (Dudoignon and Noack 2014). For the contemporary period, scholars like Gül Berna Özcan (2015, 2017), Manja Stephan-Emmrich (2017a, 2017b, 2018) and in collaboration with Abdullah Mirzoev (2016, 2018) and Philipp Schröder (2016), Aisalkyn Botoeva (2017, 2018), and Alima Bissenova (2014, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019) explore emerging Islamic businesses and lifestyles to show how local actors – be they entrepreneurs, religious authorities, migrants, or state officials – come to articulate different orientations of Islam in the Global-Market regime.

Individual Islamic Success Stories in the ‘City of Dream’

The two case studies presented here are based on extensive fieldwork conducted in 2017 among Kazakhstani Market Muslims in Astana using the anthropological method of total immersion. The first case presents the story of Azamat, a pious Kazakhstani businessman from the Hanafi rite (while being ultra-conservative) who owns a prosperous cement company in Astana. The second case study features Ilyas,⁸ a quietist Salafi businessman. Ilyas’s main inspiration and discursive reference is Madkhali Salafism, named after the Saudi Sheikh Rabī’ al-Madkhali.⁹ This loyalist form of Salafism goes one step further than quietist Salafism, making loyalty to the ruler not merely a principle but a religious duty (Lacroix 2018). Therefore, it differs from most branches of quietist Salafism, as George Joffé puts it, in ‘its unwavering commitment to the principle of ‘Wali al-Amr’ – the unquestioned and unquestionable authority of a ruling power, however repressive it might be, provided it does not engage in acts of religious infidelity or heresy’ (2018, p. 739). A former oil engineer, Ilyas is now the manager of three Astana-based companies: an innovation fund, a drilling company, and an ecological water treatment plant.

The aim of these case studies is not to represent the quietist Salafi or ultra-conservative Hanafi ‘community’ as generalized wholes, whether in Astana or in Kazakhstan more broadly. Instead, it seeks to provide a snapshot of the specific – and significant – ways in which economic entrepreneurs like Ilyas and Azamat, in using their strategic position and influence to share their understanding of Islam with their local communities in Astana, are reshaping the religious landscape and forms of communal identity in a Kazakhstani society that is increasingly contending with politicized religious divisions and competing visions of religious authority. This is the capital city, the ‘city of the future’ as dubbed in official public discourse, an unceasingly dynamic space, both material and imaginary, that allows these economic-*cum*-religious entrepreneurs to define and defend different horizons of the possible that encapsulate a certain allegedly authentic Islamic culture in line with modernization and economic rationalization, as well as urban futures materialized in spatial form.

Comparing the Hanafi and Madkhali-Salafi Approaches to How to Become a Muslim Winner

Kazakhstan is the flagship example of the development of a Market Islam that is morphing into a 'bourgeois' Islam among the urban middle classes of countries with rent economies in Muslim Eurasia. High growth rates throughout the 2000s allowed for the emergence of new middle classes across the country that have adopted consumerist lifestyles, including in the capital (Bissenova 2014, 2017), which, since 1998, has attracted hundreds of thousands of migrants from different regions of the country. This intersected with the globalization of Islam to produce a 'bourgeois' variant of religious practice. According to Alima Bissenova, one of the goals of the transfer of Kazakhstan's capital from Almaty to Astana was 'a consolidation of a "national" (as opposed to Soviet, or Russified) urban middle class' (2017, p. 652). This was a result of the desire to begin 'a new chapter in a city that would be conceived, planned, and built by the new Kazakhstani administration and which would entrench the Kazakh language¹⁰ and middle classes in the urban space' (p. 652). Astana looks like a city of opportunity from the point of view of a migrant trying to find success in the city, regardless of their regional or even rural origin. If in Almaty, 'classes do not mix and mingle,' they do so 'at the new super-modern places like in Astana supermalls' (p. 664).

Successful and prosperous entrepreneurs such as Ilyas and Azamat are precisely former internal migrants who 'made it' in the capital city, especially in the Left Bank area. However, far from starting out as the 'losers' of economic neoliberalization – they were not poor, nor do they hail from underprivileged groups – both Ilyas and Azamat came to Astana with a minimum starting social capital (Dorronsoro and Grojean 2004).

Azamat and his wife are originally from the southern city of Taraz. Azamat's father was a veterinarian (related to agriculture), and his mother worked in food sales; his father-in-law was a wealthy man. It is precisely with the latter's support that Azamat, a construction engineer by training who served in the military in Ukraine during the Soviet era, tried to create his first businesses. The process of embourgeoisement among the new urban middle classes is embodied by Azamat, who has since become a successful Kazakhstani businessman who owns a prosperous cement company that has a quasi-monopoly on government contracts for construction in Astana (his company participated in the construction of the opera house, railway station, hotels, the Triumphal Arch, the Millennium Park, the Kazmedia building, etc.). Azamat is a devout Sunni Hanafi Muslim, a rite corresponding to the state-advocated 'good' Islam. 'Starting from scratch,' as Azamat likes to explain, he created his cement company in 2002 in Almaty. He was awarded the best entrepreneur of the year prize by Imangali Tasmagambetov, the former Minister of Defense of Kazakhstan from 2014 to 2016, mayor (Kazakh: *akim*) of Astana from 2008 to 2014, *akim* of Almaty from 2004 to 2008, and Prime Minister of Kazakhstan from 2002 to 2003. The example of Azamat shows how the state remains paradoxically central for these neoliberal Muslim Puritans, if only to capture the state's resources. Indeed, these economic actors are linked to the state's oligopoly through clientelist and/or lobbying networks. Against that backdrop, an entrepreneur like Azamat complies with the state's vision of development to secure government contracts for construction.

As for Ilyas, his father, a former engineer and member of the communist party during the Soviet era, was the mayor of a city in northern Kazakhstan. Both Ilyas and Azamat's respective social trajectories, which they reconstruct as 'success stories' in the framework of their orthodox practice of Islam, respond to individualistic logics of social ascension (these

entrepreneurs do not have common interests). Their trajectories also tend to show the complex and diversified nature of their social capital, with a double play on autochthony and the international. Thus, the trajectory of Ilyas as a globalized entrepreneur shows a passage through educational institutions abroad. He studied in the United States as an undergraduate student, which gave him a command of Western languages and cultural codes. Today, he is connected to non-Western resources, namely Saudi private business networks (composed of economic and/or religious Saudi private donors and investors) with whom he mainly communicates in English or via translators. These networks are sources of potential commercial financing not only for Ilyas – in particular, he hopes to obtain Saudi financing for a project connected to his 'innovation fund' – but also in the field of charities. In 2011, Ilyas captured a Saudi tender/contract for building a hospital specialized in treating children with tuberculosis (almost 7 million dollars in funding). The hospital in question was built and inaugurated in the presence of the then-Saudi Deputy Finance Minister and the mayor (*akim*) of the city:

We won the tender honestly. We offered the lowest price. It was at the Saudi Arabian embassy. The *akim* wanted another company to win the tender. He annoyed us. He sent letters of denunciation to the Saudis, who replied that if he continued, they would freeze the investments. I have the best possible protection, which is from the investors. There was no bribe; I earned it honestly. It's a miracle (*karāma*) because the company the mayor defended was bigger than mine.

This transnational social capital tends to enable business 'success,' especially for those who, like Ilyas, are not part of the clientelist economic and political networks linked to the state oligarchy. For a businessman such as Ilyas, promoting an Islamic business ethic allows him to both indirectly criticize the regime for its high level of corruption and guarantee his own social legitimacy by showing another way of doing business, one that is 'cleaner' and more participatory, thanks to the funding of Islamic charitable activities for the local community. Through the international (Western and then Saudi) resources made available to him, Ilyas managed to establish and consolidate his dominant position within society and his social group. However, the legal uncertainty that prevails in religious matters and the prevalent insecurity in terms of property rights (such as the incessant racketeering by the administrative authorities, the capture of profitable business by the circles in power, etc.) hamper the development of reproduction strategies (economic investments, etc.). In other words, the absence of stabilized rules of the game hinders economic progress. As Ilyas points out, he can prosper as a businessman so long as his business is not being threatened by the security services, the KNB (Kazakh National Security Committee), which sometimes seizes business assets under the guise of countering 'religious extremism.' Ilyas is trying to consolidate his business, which he does not consider prosperous enough to be worried and/or 'harassed' (notably through tax levies). He is monitored by the KNB, but an agent within the KNB warns and protects him, indicating the permeability between security bodies and the Salafi milieu. This legal uncertainty does not allow for the implementation of more sustainable strategies of social differentiation, with the ultimate goal being the formation of a pious bourgeoisie based on Salafi tenets.

In the futuristic cityscape of the Left Bank area, these entrepreneurs' upward mobility and 'success' as Muslim 'winners' are supposedly derived both from divine predetermination and individual responsibility, highlighting the tension between human freedom and God's omnipotence concerning one's destiny (and therefore, one's economic success). The

Islamic tradition tends to assert the overwhelming force of God's predetermination at the expense of the individual's free will. In this perspective, are entrepreneurs like Azamat and Ilyas, devout practicing Muslims, considered to have been predestined to be Muslim 'winners'? Bagsat, a young *ustaz* (professor in Islamic theology; Arabic: *ustādh*) in Azamat's free *medresse* (school of Islamic learning; Arabic: *madrassa*) trained in Fethullah Gülen Turkish schools¹¹ in Kazakhstan and then in Turkey, provides an answer to this question. His answer highlights the necessity for the 'chosen' ones, i.e., those whose destiny was predestined to be that of a rich man, to do the deeds of righteousness:

The success, the wealth that man accumulates in this world, the honor, does God give man all of these things, or does man make them happen himself? (...) God has written destiny for each of us in the womb. (...) God has given Azamat wealth to use for beggars, orphanages, the retreat house, mosques, *medresse*, for the poor, and he does not become poor himself. On the contrary, his money multiplies.

According to the traditional understanding, every human act is repaid by God in the Hereafter with either a reward or a punishment. According to Bagsat,

Every man chosen to be rich is tested by God: will he help the poor, or will he use his money to drink alcohol, wine, open a liquor factory, open a nightclub, casinos; or will he do charity, have a clean, honest business?

In this view, God's reward for Azamat and Ilyas's righteous deeds is to proportionally allow them to acquire more wealth. Bagsat explains, 'Life being a boomerang, [if] an already rich person passes all these tests (*sadaqa*, *zeket*, etc.), he will do a better business.' Bagsat adds, in what appears to be a Weberian rationalization of religious practice, that

What you have given will be returned to you. If man gives 1, God gives 10. If he gives 10, God gives 100, and if he gives 100, God gives 1000. God says that our *niyyet* (intention) multiplies to 700. The *sawap* (reward, Arabic: *thawāb*) increases from one to 700, according to our *niyyet*, when you give *sadaqa*.

A successful entrepreneur such as Ilyas states in the same vein that 'Allah helps you as long as you help Allah.'

Indeed, for both Azamat and Ilyas, the divine reward for their orthodox practice of Islam is their business being blessed, as they say, by divine grace or *baraka* (Nigst, this volume). But then again, economic success and becoming a Muslim 'winner' by accumulating economic capital are a test in itself for the believer, hence the emphasis on individual responsibility and personal ethics. Ilyas, for instance, proclaims that any businessman can benefit from *baraka* by respecting sharia, Islamic law (Arabic: *sharī'a*). If setbacks in business occur, this divine reprimand must be treated as a test: 'Why? What sins have I committed? I deserve my punishment; I must find a solution by becoming a better Muslim.' Once blessed by *baraka* in business, a 'good' Salafi must consider wealth as a test as well:

The Saudi ulama [clerics] say, 'When we meet a Muslim brother who is poor, we say: 'Be patient; it is a test.' Later, when this brother has been granted *baraka*, a job, or has become rich, it is also a test. You must not forget sharia.

This emphasis on personal responsibility in becoming a Muslim ‘winner’ involves working on oneself, implying Foucauldian mechanisms such as self-constraint and discipline. Both Azamat and Ilyas insist on the discipline inherent in their practice of Islam. This includes bodily discipline, hygiene, patience, emotional control, and the lack of sleep necessary in order to devote oneself to God – for instance, reciting after the first prayer instead of going back to sleep, as Ilyas recommends. It is also found in creating and sustaining, through hard work, a ‘proper’ business while resisting corrupt practices. This discipline can be applied to the whole family as a daily routine, including young children. For example, Azamat’s children get up at 5 in the morning to devote an hour of their time to memorizing the Quran before morning prayers and school. The cultivation of Islamic discipline is similarly connected to the development of civic virtue and urbanity.

Devotees such as Ilyas and Azamat of this would-be ‘bourgeois’ Islam expect religious facts to align with their expectations and interests. Becoming successful and prosperous is a goal in itself for these winners of neoliberal transformations. They contend that, through hard work and self-fulfillment, success on Earth and in the afterlife go hand in hand. According to Edmund Leites, this is ‘the true message of historical Puritans’ (quoted in Roy 2008, p. 124). Personal enrichment is perceived as positive – as a divine foreshadowing of the repayment for exemplary conduct based on the principles of Islam – so long as money is ‘properly acquired’ and purified by paying tax (*zakāt* corresponds to one-fortieth of an individual’s income, while *ushr* entails giving up to 10 percent of profits to the needy). With the notion of salvation through work, these new entrepreneurs from the urban middle classes have invented an Islamized version of the Puritan ethic, adherents of which likewise saw the wealthy as ‘God’s favorites.’ This Islamic Calvinist ethic combines strict piety with intense entrepreneurship and heavenly salvation with the here-and-now: for the believer, to whom prosperity is promised, the reward is immediate and visible.

The attractiveness of this idea – especially to young entrepreneurs looking for personal enrichment and social capital – serves the aims of both quietist Salafism and ultra-conservative Hanafism and helps them to spread. As Ilyas points out in the case of quietist Salafism, ‘when you are rich, you are more listened to. I have experienced that. I was poor.’ Islamic actors like Ilyas and Azamat engage with marketization, transforming Islam into a lifestyle that they advertise in Astana’s public space to attract, in particular, young people toward the adoption of an orthodox practice of Islam.

‘Saving’ Fellow Consumer-Citizens and Reforming Society through Islamic Lifestyle in Astana

In the eyes of these Muslim ‘winners,’ the quickly transforming city of Astana enables them to achieve and display a sharia-compliant lifestyle. This transformation primarily consists of urban cultural codes, which are increasingly loaded with references to Islam that are materialized in the cityscape, such as trendy halal cafés (Bissenova 2018), Islamic fashion shops in shopping malls like the one in the shape of a transparent tent designed by Norman Foster. The publicization of such a lifestyle (whether from the Hanafi law school or from quietist Salafism) in this urban space is supposed to inspire Astana’s consumer-citizens to follow their example while constructing distinctly Islamic urban imaginaries. First and foremost, a conservative Islamic lifestyle is characterized by a disciplined style of consumption, which these actors contrast with the reckless consumption (e.g., the consumption of alcohol) associated with Kazakhs or Russians who

have gotten rich quickly – ‘in the eyes of many, undeservingly’ (Bissenova 2019, p. 273) – and who are ostentatious about their acquired wealth. In search of personal distinction, the Madkhali-Salafi Ilyas castigates the ‘sins’ committed by the Kazakhstanis who, in his eyes,

Consider themselves as Muslims, but their practice is not correct. (...) They stopped following the Law, the rules. They commit sins like usury (*ribā*), drinking alcohol, etc. Because of these sins, Allah is taking from us the higher goals; our goals are now to get rich, fast, and a lot, and to fall into materialism and greed. They became lazy; they are showing off. They spoil.

In contrast, Hanafi Azamat and his family make sure their lifestyle is as ‘halal’ as possible; they are striving to ‘enjoy consumption with propriety – and avoid excess’ (Bissenova 2019, p. 274). Their leisure time and holidays are sharia-compliant: they vacation in Turkey, Malaysia, and the Emirates, especially Abu Dhabi and Dubai. Dubai happens to be the favorite destination of Azamat’s wife and is where she wanted to settle with her whole family to live in a ‘pure’ Islamic environment, but Azamat refused, since as he puts it, ‘my principle is: it is better to be rich at home than elsewhere.’ The family dines exclusively in the new trendy-but-discreet halal cafés in Astana’s glittering downtown. They eat, in particular, at the successful Café Rafe chain, which is owned by a family close to Nazarbayev and has long been part of the establishment (Bissenova 2018). As for the education of Azamat’s children, they are educated in Fethullah Gülen Turkish schools. Meanwhile, his eldest daughters were part of the Bolashak presidential program thanks to which they studied biotechnology in Malaysia and England. All members of the household take care to consume halal on a daily basis. Halal consumption (Gauthier, Fischer, this volume) has conquered Central Asia in recent years, to the point of becoming, in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, a cultural fashion for the urban middle and upper classes. This halal consumption is particularly visible during Ramadan because of the commercialization of ritual consumption. Azamat, by his own admission, resists this trend as concerns his own production:

One day, the head of the Halal Committee in Astana came to me and offered to make my production halal. In fact, I said to myself, how is this halal? There is halal water. Halal cement? People will laugh. I understand about the food, but you don’t have to go that far. I refused; I don’t need it.

This disciplined Islamic consumerist lifestyle is coupled with a desire to protect oneself from foreign (Western) imperialist influences, such as American movies or *haram* (forbidden) consumerist goods. Both at work and at home, a prosperous businessman like Azamat adheres closely to conservative Islamic mores, implementing separation between the men and women who work in his company and maintaining a type of gender segregation that is close to *pardah* (female seclusion) at home (male and female family members are, for instance, separated into two different rooms during meals and other gatherings). His daughters studied abroad, but since they got married, they have been stay-at-home mothers. Azamat’s wife, a dentist before her internal conversion to Islam, no longer works because she cannot treat male patients.

In order to comply with such a puritanical Islamic lifestyle, how and to what extent is it 'proper' to exhibit, as a Muslim 'winner,' one's 'success,' i.e., to show off God's inner-worldly rewards for an orthodox practice of Islam and/or signs of election in public space? This question is particularly relevant for Salafi businessmen who have no choice but to keep a low profile and, therefore, avoid displaying an expressionist lifestyle through visible public signs (dress code, long beards, etc.) if they want to escape state repression. On the contrary, for a devout Hanafi Muslim, it is necessary, according to Bagsat, to show off one's success but without ostentation in the public space.

One should not boast. But there is a word from God that says that what Allah gives, He wants to see it used. For example, if you are given wealth, and you hide it in the house, if you walk around with torn trousers, taking public transport, the bus, you offend God. Allah says: 'I have given you wealth; why don't you use it?' What God gives as wealth, He wants to see it used. That the rich person rides in a 4X4, that he has a luxurious house, that he puts on fancy clothes, these are normal things. But what is abnormal is to boast. 'I have it, and you don't.' Which is not right. 'I'm on top; I have extra things,' while using them, consuming them is normal. That's how it should be.

For Azamat, however, one can solely flaunt one's success when giving charity in order to encourage other pious businessmen to do the same; otherwise, discretion in the public space is recommended:

You try to be equal to everyone else. When you enter the mosque, everybody is equal, because in the grave we will all be equal. (...) When you give *zeket*, you must give gently and quickly. You have to do it without offending the person opposite. There are people who are in need but who answer: 'I am not a beggar. Why are you giving me something?' They get offended. 'Today is *juma* (Friday prayer); I give you in the name of Allah,' that's what I say.

In order to display their respective Islamic conservative lifestyles and attract followers, particularly among the younger generation, Azamat and Ilyas opt for differentiated repertoires of action. These repertoires are a co-production between the state and individual actors concerning the spreading of their faith. As a conservative Hanafi, Azamat is still part of what is officially considered a 'traditional' faith in Kazakhstan. Therefore, he can display his religiosity and charitable activities more freely than a quietist Salafi such as Ilyas, who is not allowed to preach or to engage in *da'wa* ('invitation' or 'call' to Islam) openly in the public space. Reflecting the regime's concerns about religious mobilization, the Administrative Code of Kazakhstan prohibits the 'unregistered spreading of the creed of religious groups.' This means that religious discussions that take place outside a registered religious building, including invitations to religious services and discussions – especially those of 'non-traditional' religious groups –, are considered 'illegal missionary activity' and punishable as 'incitement of religious discord.'

In this context, halal business – i.e., business done in a halal way (no payment of bribes, refusal of *ribā* (interest), no collaboration with banks, etc.) – has become a vehicle for a group of economic-cum-religious entrepreneurs like Ilyas to engage in

Salafi preaching without running afoul of legal restrictions. Quietist Salafis such as Ilyas are integrated into society, but due to their religiosity – external signs like sporting long beards and ritual practices such as the five daily prayers – they can only work in the private sector. Today, Ilyas tries to keep a low profile. He has, for instance, shortened his beard, stopped dyeing it with henna, and adopted the less conspicuous Hanafi way of praying – i.e., not saying ‘amen’ loudly after reading the *Fatiha* and between *rakat* (prostration), not holding his hands close to his chest (they should be on the level of the waist), and not having one’s feet too far apart from each other – when he prays at the Khazret Sultan mosque, the main mosque of Astana. For Ilyas, it is necessary to ‘be a crafty fox,’ to be a hidden Salafi, since this *modus vivendi* with the regime allows him to spread the Salafi path – but only discreetly. Ilyas adds,

As a Salafi, you can be a partisan inside; it is hidden. You can get as close as possible to your enemies and still be a Salafi. You can work in the White House, in the Kremlin. This is the power of *aqida* (creed): you can even be close to Putin and, still, you are a Salafi.

According to Ilyas,

Muslims who are in political opposition are suffering a lot and are not getting any results. If you are not in opposition, as a Salafi, you can survive in any society, especially in a democratic system: democracy is an instrument to better do *da’wa*; it is easier to do so since the system is freer.

There is, according to Ilyas, an obligation to engage in *da’wa* in Kazakhstan, despite the political regime’s authoritarianism. It is a question of salvation:

We, Salafis, want to do *da’wa* for Kazakhs in order to save them. It is dangerous now, it is forbidden by the law, but we do it anyway. As an entrepreneur, I want to lead by example, that of a rightly-guided Muslim, and show Islam as a way of life. I have the intention (*niyya*) of working for Allah through my business. It is a question of honor for me; it is a kind of *da’wa*.

Ilyas emphasizes the discreet nature of his *da’wa* activities among his commercial partners. According to Ilyas, it is through halal business practices that the preaching of *Tawhīd* (divine oneness), especially the *Tawhīd al-Rubūbiyya*¹² (divine oneness in lordship), is made possible. For Ilyas, respecting and applying *Tawhīd al-Rubūbiyya* is one of the conditions for business success, especially for those who are not part of the clientelist economic and political networks linked to the state oligarchy. What does the practice of *Tawhīd* in business look like? For Ilyas, it is about setting goals, getting things done (*‘amal*), and not expecting favors from people with high-ranking positions, but only from God:

The more obedient you are, the more you will obtain rewards from Allah in business. In business, do not tie yourself to ‘creatures’ or expect things from them – it is a small *shirk* (polytheism), and the divine punishment will be immediate.

As Ilyas describes it, the practice of *Tawhīd* corresponds to ‘business coaching’ as promoted, for example, by Donald Trump when he was a ‘successful’ businessman: ‘Do not

show you are dependent; otherwise you will be humiliated. As Donald Trump says, 'When a commercial offer is made to you, show that you are ignoring it.' You must expect results only from Allah.' He believes that his business success – which he attributes to Islam – makes his *da'wa* appealing and helps to attract young entrepreneurs to Salafism since they, in turn, want to become or at least appear like Muslim 'winners.'

As for Azamat, he opted to evangelize his employees within his company. He provided a Turkish *ustaz* who, for two years, taught the company's male employees the Quran and Arabic, while Azamat's wife instructed female employees. Azamat also built prayer rooms in both its offices and factories. His company encourages its employees to observe the month of Ramadan by paying them a bonus of 20,000 tenge (about 50 euros in 2017). Such measures have led to a re-Islamization of most of his employees, which, according to Azamat, creates a climate of trust between him and his office and factory workers:

Today, in the office, there are 15 people, more than 10 people pray five times a day. If a person wants to, they can lie. For example, in the factory, I have one person who checks each one, and I trust him. Sometimes he makes a mistake in counting the cement bags. But I don't go and watch him closely; I tell him, 'it's up to you; you can steal if you want. God sees everything.' That's the best control.

The focus is on the personal development of his employees, who have been re-Islamized by him, and not on a quest for profit and performance (which would result in the exploitation of his employees, as he puts it). This is, according to him, the opposite of Western and particularly American management methods:

It's much more humane this way, my employees are calm, they don't raise their voices, they respect each other. They are treated with dignity. In France, for example, there is a growing problem of depression among employees because American methods are imposed by employers; this is what is called lean management: making profits, increasing the pace, there is nothing human anymore. Here, at least, Islam allows us to calm things down and to have something more human and serene.

Furthermore, Azamat has a private *zeket* fund for helping orphans, the disabled, and the needy through which he distributes his wealth. He established a *medresse* in Astana: a four-story building where the *ustaz* (religious instructors) paid by Azamat live on the top floor with their families and run free courses for children, adults, and pensioners and where, as Azamat points out, 'we do not separate people according to whether they are entrepreneurs or poor. Everyone is equal.' Through these charitable deeds, Azamat seeks to lead by example through an inspiring Islamic conservative lifestyle, as well as increase his social prestige and gain bourgeois respectability. The philanthropy successful entrepreneurs like Azamat put forward illustrates, among other things, how the state is passing on the responsibility to so-called 'civil society,' whether Islamic or not, in providing basic social goods and services to the local population. However, these actors cannot compensate for the withdrawal of the state at the local level or in the under-administrated regions.

The aim of loyalist Salafi entrepreneurs like Ilyas as well as ultra-conservative Hanafi ones such as Azamat is, behind their quest for distinction as difference and superiority, to reform the mores of Kazakhstanis, whose faith has 'deviated' from that of the 'pious

predecessors' by purifying social values. Loyalist Salafism – discreetly implemented at the local level through business activities in order to avoid repression – and conservative Hanafism are presented as suitable for modern urban life and even as a means for the modernization of individuals and societies. For quietist/loyalist Salafis and conservative Hanafis alike, the only effective strategy is the 'return to Islam' for every Muslim. This means, more precisely, for Salafis in particular, a 'return' to 'Sunni authenticity,' i.e., devoid of *shirk* (polytheism) and *bid'a* (problematic innovation). These orthodox Muslims, whether Salafi or Hanafi, want to make the Prophet's tradition (the *sunna*), the norm for individual behavior. A loyalist Salafi like Ilyas is therefore pushing for integration into Kazakhstani society in order 'to change the current ideology for the benefit of the true *sunna*.' His priority is 'to do *da'wa* in order to save your family, friends, neighbors, business partners from hellfire,' which requires a person-by-person re-Islamization from below, as espoused by the Salafi interpretation of Islam's tenets.

For these pious economic winners, economic prosperity allows Islamic consumerism and Islamic orthodoxy to go hand in hand. For Ilyas, specifically, it is only by respecting Salafi orthodoxy that economic development and success can be achieved by the individual at the *micro* level and society at the *meso* level. For Ilyas, it is, above all, the local population's 'ignorance' regarding Islam and the Salafi interpretation of its tenets that is holding back Kazakhstan's economic development:

The *Jābiliyya*¹³ (age of ignorance) is the source of all our problems. I love my country; I am a patriot but not in the secular sense of the term. I am not tied to Kazakhstan but to the *sunna*. (...) If Muslims have miserable and poor lives, it is because they are committing a lot of sins. Christians and the others are already punished by *kufr* (disbelief); God does not even notice their sins.

Statements such as these, which emphasize individual responsibility, effectively serve as a justification for the growing inequalities at the heart of Kazakhstani society. For loyalist Salafis as well as conservative Hanafis, social policy is external to Islam; there should be no state-led 'Islamic social justice' to replace the clientelist distribution of wealth. What is at stake here is identity reconstruction, not social contestation.

For Ilyas, the future is in the hands of those Kazakhstani youth who are becoming pious. 'We need them to do jihad in education, sciences, in business, in personal development,' he says. These devout young people are not wasting their energy 'in drinking and nightclubs.' Theirs is a strong faith (*iman*) and enthusiasm that, Ilyas believes, holds considerable promise for the future of Kazakhstan. Azamat shares the same observation and hopes for the re-Islamization of Kazakhstani youth.

What is good in Kazakh society, in the mosques, 80 percent of the people are young, both men and women. (...) These young people are our future. There will be more and more mosques, more and more young people, and the future, in ten, fifteen years, will be theirs. They will do better than now; it will be even more enlightened.

These practicing Muslim capitalists whether conservative Hanafis or quietist Salafis, share an activist streak and a search for 'authenticity' that, together, allow them to oppose Western and Soviet models. Whenever Islam is presented as an alternative to Western globalization, a recurring theme is the denunciation of impiety (*kufr*) at the heart of society and the

national culture. They reject the secular tradition in this post-Soviet republic, which, they claim, leads to neo-paganism. Muslim capitalists in the post-Soviet space are at odds with 'paganism' – as they call it – and are constantly ambiguous when using the term. Sometimes, 'paganism' is seen as a loss of religion and a lack of knowledge about Islam (due to the scientific atheism prevalent during the Soviet period), while at other times 'paganism' is perceived to have been caused by the importation of destructive Western culture. The association of 'paganism' with deleterious Western influence garners the most support because it externalizes deviances and threats to society, swiftly transforming them into a Western import. To be 'virtuous' Muslims, 'pious bourgeois' capitalist Muslims must fiercely defend themselves against the decadent values of 'Western Babylon' and Russian deficiencies. They argue that the import of Western and Russian 'values' represents a path to degeneracy in their own societies. This is visible, for instance, in alcoholism, as concerns Russian influence. Worse still is the sinfulness and sexual deviancy of the alleged 'distortion and perversion of natural gender order' supposedly responsible for the decline of the European civilization (in other words, LGBTQ tolerance) – a trope shared with Russian nationalist discourses.

Concluding Remarks on the Neoliberal Politicization of Islam and New Urban Islamic Imaginaries

The display and publicization of a sharia-compliant lifestyle (coupled with Puritan Islamic ethics and/or neo-puritanical conservatism) are supposed to inspire Astana's consumer-citizens to follow their example. And through this, these economic-*cum*-religious entrepreneurs advocate for the Islamization of lifestyles in general and mores in particular (as opposed to their Westernization). This happens in the context of a search for social recognition by the Muslim 'winners' of neoliberal transformations in the wake of Kazakhstan's independence since the fall of the USSR. In so doing, they promote an exclusivist and elitist puritanism with anti-Western accents in a fast-changing society. This is particularly acute in Astana, where youth are increasingly confused and polarized between Western liberal values and moral conservatism. When Kazakhstani youth praise the neoliberal economy, personal success based on capital accumulation, and consumerist lifestyles, this praise tends to be increasingly coupled with Puritan moral values. This group of younger Kazakhstanis tends to see Islam as a new code promoting individual morality and a more normative public space.

Loyalist Salafi Ilyas and ultra-conservative Hanafi Azamat, as proponents of ethical systems with a Victorian-type morality, advocate the adoption of supposedly 'authentic' Islamic lifestyles as a guarantee and proof of individual virtue. This Islamic 'authenticity' corresponds in their eyes to an Islam returned to its origins, before its supposed 'corruption' by external influences. In their view, every Muslim should imitate the 'pious predecessors,' understood as Mohammad's Companions (the *sahāba*) in Medina's idealized first community (622–661). But the Islamic 'authenticity' they strive for is, in reality, adapted to consumerist modernity, especially in a city like Astana. Indeed, in advocating for this supposed Islamic 'authenticity' through specific practices, these Islamic actors fully partake in the Global-Market regime, by which religion is lifestyled. As François Gauthier defines it, a lifestyle is a holistic construct 'that combines different dimensions, including aesthetics, politics and religion, within a visible affirmation of identity' (2021, p. 496). It provides 'signposts on how to live and pragmatic/practical solutions for overcoming or conquering obstacles' (2021, p. 496). In this respect, being involved in quietist Salafism

or conservative Hanafism is a personal lifestyle choice that the individual can quit at any time, in line with consumerism's ethics of expressivity. The consumer-oriented religiosity fashioned by the ethics of ultra-conservative Hanafi or loyalist Salafi 'authenticity' turns 'proper' Islamic consumption (halal goods, sharia-compliant leisure time, etc.) into a tool for constructing expressive identities and therefore intersects with the market logics of the neoliberal age.

The lifestylization of Islam, like any religion, is about personal identities; the emphasis is not so much on grand political projects as it is on individual remodeling. The latter implies an imperative to better oneself and to consider obstacles on one's path as opportunities to grow or progress while remaining strictly self-reliant. This is reminiscent of Samuel Smiles's 'self-help' in Victorian England, where the values of hard work, courage, and willpower were held high, based on the well-tryed maxim, 'Heaven helps those who help themselves' (Smiles 1859). This is exemplified by Ilyas. The public expression and visibility of these refashioned identities through the lens of religion in the Global-Market era tend to blur the public/private divide (hence the alleged deprivatization as pointed out by Casanova (1994) at the level of individual religiosities). In the end, 'the lifestylization of religion aids the de-differentiation of religion, and is largely inassimilable within the secularization paradigm' (Gauthier 2021, p. 496).

Through their publicization of a sharia-compliant lifestyle via differentiated privileged repertoires of action, Astana's Muslim winners are seeking societal reform and the construction of new social identities while creating distinctly Islamic urban imaginaries. Despite a strong political loyalism, successful Kazakhstani Salafi or Hanafi entrepreneurs are ambitious in their own way. They are aiming for a transformative societal impact and are forging a new, distinctive vision: that of a pious Muslim society and state. From this perspective, they are driving the diffusion of an alternative social order in Astana and, more broadly, in Kazakhstan, aimed in particular at middle-class youth who are turning to Islam. At the local level, in Astana's Left Bank area, these successful entrepreneurs with globalized practices are trying to (re)create Muslim identities and forge a society based on a Saudi, Emirati, or Turkish model, depending on that which they find inspiring. In this case, the Emirati trajectory holds the most fascination for Kazakhstani and Central Asian youth more generally because it combines globalization, technological modernity, and moral rigorism. Malaysia also attracts young people, who perceive it as a successful marriage between authoritarianism, economic prosperity, and Islamic identity.

The new entrepreneurs, with their sharia-compliant consumerist lifestyles, are quite comfortable with an authoritarian oligarchic political regime and leave aside any social contestation regarding the growing social inequalities in Kazakhstan. These Muslim winners, products of three decades of neoliberal policies, are against state intervention in the economy and generous welfare and make no demand for social justice based on the reallocation of the state's resources. The Puritan Market Islam they promote implies a neoliberal politicization of Islam as it accompanies state privatization and the dismantling of the social net rather than the instauration of a sharia-based Islamic state (Haenni 2005). Far from the collective projects of 'old Europe' (based on government interventionism in a Jacobin style), the objective of the devotees of this neoliberal Puritan Islam is the constitution of virtuous civil societies that interact with states in a way similar to faith-based initiatives by US Republicans that consist of delegating all or most of the prerogative concerning public services to private religious institutions.

Notes

- 1 This original chapter was translated from French by Camille Liederman and François Gauthier.
- 2 Kazakhstan exports 73 percent of its oil production (1,245,106 barrels per day in 2016). Kazakhstan had proved crude oil reserves of 30 billion barrels as of January 2018. This is the second largest endowment in Eurasia after Russia, and the twelfth largest in the world, just behind the United States. Kazakhstan has the largest proven oil reserves in the Caspian Sea region. Kazakhstan is rapidly expanding production at its three large refineries; it has completed upgrades of the Pavlodar plant, Atyrau, and Shymkent refineries.
- 3 Astana was renamed, from 2019 to 2022, Nur-Sultan in honor of Kazakhstan's former president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, the 'Leader of the Nation' ('*Elbasy*'), who unexpectedly resigned at the age of 78 years on 19 March 2019, during a televised address to the nation, after 29 years of autocratic rule. Not only does his handpicked successor, President Tokayev, a diplomat by training, maintain Nazarbayev's authoritarian line, but Nazarbayev continued to rule the country before the events of January 2022 (see endnote n°4). Nazarbayev continued to control the country through the institutions he headed: the security council, the presidential party Nur Otan, and the specially created 'office of the first president.' However, in September 2022, Nur-Sultan was changed back to Astana. President Tokayev has agreed to do so after a number of controversies and unrest resulting in Nazarbayev's resignation from the National Security Council of Kazakhstan.
- 4 This elite group was certainly predatory, but it formed a ruling class during Nazarbayev's long reign.
- 5 These protests began in the remote western oil-rich region of the country, following a sharp rise in gas and fuel prices, before spreading rapidly to the main cities and turning violent in the former capital of Almaty. However, the protests were concomitant with an attempted internal coup d'état due to elite power struggles that ended in Nursultan Nazarbayev's second exit from power (President Tokayev not only dismissed Nazarbayev from his formal position as chairman of the National Security Council but also attempted to remove Nazarbayev's political allies in the security apparatus and replaced them with his own). The violence seen in Almaty was a product of the coup and not the original protests.
- 6 Salafism is a contentious label, as, e.g., Laurent Bonnefoy explains (2013, p. 1); contemporary Salafism has remained ill-defined. It can nevertheless be depicted as an attempt to reform Sunni Islam, building, in particular, on the teachings of Taqi al-Din Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328), Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792), and Muhammad al-Shawkani (1759–1834). These Arabian religious scholars sought to purge Islam of a number of problematic innovations (e.g., *bid'a*) and to return to the practice of the pious ancestors (*al-salaf al-salih*), i.e., the first three generations of Muslims. Admittedly, Salafis share a similar approach to religious jurisprudence, but they often hold different interpretations of contemporary politics and conditions. As Quintan Wiktorowicz depicts, there are 'three major factions in the community: the purists, the politicians, and the jihadis' (2006, p. 208). The 'purists' belong to the quietist Salafi movement, which calls for loyalty to the Muslim ruler in order to preserve the community from strife and disorder (*fitna*) and has favored strong links between the movement and a number of governments, especially that of Saudi Arabia. The Islamic University of Medina has long been considered as the most prominent teaching institute of this branch of Salafism.
- 7 The 'purists' are 'primarily concerned with maintaining the purity of Islam as outlined in the Quran, Sunna, and consensus of the Companions. They believe that the primary emphasis of the movement should be promoting the Salafi creed and combating deviant practices, just as the Prophet fought polytheism, human desire, and human reason. Until the religion is purified, any political action will likely lead to corruption and injustice because society does not yet understand the tenets of faith. The proper method for implementing the creed is therefore propagation (*da'wa*), purification (*tazkiya*), and religious education or cultivation (*tarbiya*)' (Wiktorowicz 2006, p. 217).
- 8 The names of this quietist Salafi entrepreneur as well as the conservative Hanafi entrepreneur have been changed.
- 9 Rabi' al-Madkhali, who was affiliated with the Islamic University of Medina in Saudi Arabia until the mid-2000s, has emerged as the most influential and yet uncompromising figure of quietist Salafism. While not being at the core of the Saudi state's religious apparatus, he has emerged to gain followers around the world (including Muslim Eurasia and Europe). The internet has rapidly

become a prominent tool for broadcasting this religious doctrine beyond the borders of Saudi Arabia.

- 10 The Kazakh language is a member of the Turkic language family within the Altaic language group, belonging to the northwestern, or Kipchak, branch. The language was typically written using the Arabic script until the twentieth century. After the Russian Revolution of 1917, Kazakh was written in Latin script but was switched to Cyrillic script about two decades later. In 2017, Kazakhstan began transitioning back to writing Kazakh in the Latin script but rendered in a reformed system of spelling.
- 11 The Gülen movement started out in the late 1960s in Turkey as an Islamic-based and officially non-political project. The modernist Islamic thinker Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, the founder of the Nurcu sect, influenced Fethullah Gülen. The Gülen movement promotes inter-faith dialogue and common values, with its leader adhering to Sufism, seemingly being nostalgic about the heyday of the Ottoman Empire. In Central Asia, the movement has created high schools and universities to educate the future regional elite. In Kazakhstan, the Turkish-Kazakh schools were co-founded by Gülen's Hizmet movement and his followers and have been functioning in Kazakhstan since the early 1990s. Before former allies Gülen and Erdogan publicly fell out in 2010, the schools were considered a key instrument in expanding Turkey's clout overseas. Gülen, who is living in self-imposed exile in the United States, is accused by Ankara of ordering the 15 July 2016 attempted coup against Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan by a group of the cleric's followers within Turkey's military. Gülen has repeatedly denied the accusation. Amid the campaign by Turkey against the Fethullah Gülen, Kazakh schools across Kazakhstan were being renamed in 2016 'Bilim' (Education) Innovation [Innovative] schools.
- 12 This is typical Salafi parlance, and this insistence on the *Tawḥīd al-Rubūbiyya* can be traced back to the preaching of Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb, the eighteenth-century Arabian reformer. He and his followers perceived their fellow Muslims, either throughout the world or in the Arabian Peninsula, as living in a *jāhiliyya* (see fn 13) because of their adoption of practices and beliefs lacking scriptural support. His theology was essentially an exclusive vision of divine unity: if God is unique (*Tawḥīd al-Rubūbiyya*), God alone must benefit from the worship of believers (*Tawḥīd al-Ulūhiyya*). Therefore, manifestations of popular piety, such as visiting tombs to ask for the intercession of a saint or advancing ungodliness at the expense of faith, are reminiscent of the Shiite pilgrimages to the mausoleums of the Imams from the family of Mohammad and for this reason must be combatted with the greatest severity.
- 13 The Arabic word *jāhiliyya* is used by Muslims to refer to the historical period in west-central Arabia covering the centuries immediately prior to the mission of Mohammad, a period characterized by ignorance of the divine truth. To the original audience of the Quran, however, as William E. Shepard explains it (2003), it almost certainly referred primarily to the moral condition of those individuals and their society, which led them to oppose the mission of the prophet of Islam. In recent centuries, the idea of a contemporary *jāhiliyya* has regained currency in some circles. In the twentieth century especially, reformers such as Muḥammad 'Abduh and Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā have compared the conservatism, injustice, superstition, and secular tendencies found in their society with comparable aspects of the pre-Islamic *jāhiliyya* criticized by the Quran. The idea of *jāhiliyya* as a contemporary reality has been more forcefully asserted by the twentieth-century revivalists, Abū l-'Alā' Mawḍūdī in India and Pakistan and Sayyid Quṭb in Egypt. For the latter, a *jāhili* society is any society that does not follow God in all areas of its life. Such societies serve human beings instead of God and thus are inevitably unjust, inhumane, and backward. Only an Islamic society can be truly 'civilized.' Although relatively few Muslims would take things this far, the idea of *jāhiliyya* as a contemporary moral and social reality seems to be quite widespread today. In this current usage, the term refers not so much to the distinctive failings of the old pagan Arabs as to those of modern societies, such as materialism and secular ideologies. The notion of *jāhiliyya* has thus been effectively updated.

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PART 4

Body Manipulation, Vestimentary Regimes, and Gender



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15

INSPIRATION AS WORSHIP

Creativity, Circulation, and Divinity in the Indonesian Modest Fashion Scene

Carla Jones

The Fall 2021 presentation of Jakarta Muslim Fashion Week took place in a breezy outdoor venue, featuring the collections of modest fashion designers over four days in mid-November. The open-air, pandemic-friendly context featured a floating runway over the competition swimming pool in the wealthy enclave of Senayan and presented an array of styles and colors ranging from muted earth tones to incandescently vivid, from patterned to monochromatic. Yet to a casual observer, none of the collections instantly signaled recognizably Indonesian semiotics. Indeed, that unplaceable, yet hardly generic, aesthetic could arguably be the exact quality Indonesian modest fashion designers consider exceptional. To be a modest fashion designer is to integrate creativity with divinity in ways that may mean creating and celebrating beauty beyond national borders. In this chapter, I map the overlapping contours that shape the current modest fashion scene in Indonesia, where designers, religious authorities, and economists each view Indonesia's potential for translating leadership in the global fashion industry into transnational religious leadership. Sometimes, those visions overlap, and sometimes, they do not.

Scholars of the visible rise of public forms of Islamic piety movements in Indonesia in the past two decades have noted its transnational character. For pious Indonesian women, both celebrities and not, performing beauty across national borders is entirely consistent with religious aspiration. Indeed, aesthetic inspiration from non-Indonesian and potentially non-Muslim sources is not only appropriate but also *halal*. For them, finding beauty elsewhere illustrates the divinely created capacity in humans to be creative. In this sense, designing modest fashion is an ethical act in the way that the anthropologist Kenneth George has described it: a self-fashioning through submission to the divine, which can bring about both virtue and pleasure (George 2010, p. 87).

Moreover, as these designers imply, modest fashion is a form of ethical comportment that requires a wearer to be conscious of her surroundings and appearance in a way that may ultimately feel liberating, even as or perhaps because the style also conforms to technical criteria for modesty (cf. Lewis 2015). Significantly, those styles and techniques can emerge from an infinite array of sources, including but not limited to Gulf aesthetics. For

them, influences from South Korea, Japan, and the US are as aesthetically available and valuable as anything more geographically proximate or religiously affiliated.

By modest fashion, I refer to the rise of religiously coded dress among Indonesian middle-class subjects beginning in the early 1990s. In that era, the styles were distinctive for their novelty, even foreignness (cf. Brenner 1996), along with two other features, their simplicity and their exclusively feminine associations. What was then simply deemed *busana Muslim*, literally ‘Muslim clothing,’ was notable for newly associating feminine piety with appearance even in a Muslim-majority population. In the intervening decades, the phrase ‘modest wear,’ loaned from English, has now entered the Indonesian lexicon along with a proliferation of modest fashion shows and a highly diverse aesthetic menu comprising broad criteria for head cover, long sleeves, and a variety of interpretations for covering the torso and pelvis for both men and women. Considering the contextual history of archipelagic Indonesia, the fact that Indonesian modest fashion designers enjoy playing with multiple sources of inspiration while respecting, if not perfecting, those sources is unsurprising.

Perhaps equally unsurprising, Arab inspiration (recognizable as influence rooted in claims to ethnically Arab communities in the Persian Gulf) has been prominent as direct clerical influence and indirect aesthetic prestige over the past decade, in which Gulf oil influence has been central to soft power diplomatic efforts. ‘*Arabisasi*’ has been evident in formal educational, philanthropic, and clerical exchanges between Indonesia and Saudi Arabia as part of the kingdom’s global strategy to export its influence through religious authority and oil wealth. Soft power, in this sense, integrates aesthetic, commercial, and intellectual fields into foreign policy to mitigate competing political threats via cultural influence. This approach is not limited to Saudi Arabia. For some Muslim-majority countries, a new strategic terrain dubbed ‘moderate Islam’ has become a field in which to claim a future global role in the face of armed extremist movements such as the Islamic State. Egypt, Turkey, Jordan, Morocco, and Indonesia each benefit from appraising Saudi Arabia’s soft power initiatives as cultural and religious threats and framing themselves as legitimate and historically authentic models of tolerance or sophistication, as Peter Mandaville and Shadi Hamid argue (2018). Taking soft power strategies such as these seriously can highlight apparently peripheral social fields, such as fashion or beauty, in transnational debates about global influence. Placing these fields closer to the center of our analytical frames, in tandem with their intermittent appearance in foreign policy, allows us to see the complex ways they animate elite anxieties about national autonomy and personal aspirations to cosmopolitanism.

In what follows, I argue that women’s appearance has become a vital tool in Indonesia’s national diplomatic and economic strategies for becoming a global leader in religious moderation. Fusing an aesthetic form that was once an expression of political resistance into a central component of Indonesia’s global influence reveals a noteworthy shift in fortunes for wearers and designers of modest styles. Yet, as I will show, being able to access and benefit from state support requires also being willing to limit the source of style influences to those that are legibly Indonesian. For some designers, this is constraining. For them, articulating their aesthetic expression of worship through modesty is most satisfying when it includes unexpected sources from communities not associated with Islam or religion. In short, their artistic processes of inspiration often borrow from international travel and references, and in the sense of divine inspiration. These can resonate and amplify in ways unrecognized by religious or state officials but valued by designers and their audiences.

Arab Centers/Arab Styles

Arab presence in Southeast Asia has long been contested. Arab, *qua* religious, style has been one of many translocal influences in the region. While Muslims around the world honor the fact that the Quran was revealed in Arabic and the Prophet Mohammad was an Arab man, in Indonesia, these facts have contributed to complex cultural transformations that reveal how politically and semiotically dense Arab connections have become. Historical analyses of Islamization in Southeast Asia have asked whether the arrival of Arab merchants in the thirteenth century was a process of ‘conversion or adhesion’ (Reid 1988, p. 140), noting that simple recitation of the *syahadat* (*shahada*) was not a definitive indication of conversion. Instead, adopting a previously foreign style of dress and diet was more reliable signs of a religious revolution. Engseng Ho describes the imperial and mystical landscape of the Indian Ocean as one in which translocal exchange of influences in food, dress, and affiliation facilitated otherwise distant relationships, marking descendants of Hadhrami travelers with genealogical links to the Prophet (*sayyid*) as simultaneously cosmopolitan *and* minorities (2006, p. 305). These affiliations were later used by Dutch colonists in the Indies as categories of racial control, marking residents of Arab descent against *pribumi* and other ‘foreign orientals’ (*vreemde oosterlingen*) whose residence may have predated European rule but whose classification as foreign foreclosed full membership in native life (Mandal 2018, p. 74). Thus segregated, Arabness framed Arab cultural life as a ‘fanatic’ foil against which to pose local Muslims as apparently more moderate.

By the early twentieth century, the intersection of Arabness and Islamic critique informed its own ‘*umma* below the winds,’ a reference combining the Chinese conception of Southeast Asia as a region below the South China Sea seasonal monsoons and the sense of a transregional Muslim community (Laffan 2003), facilitating a religious foundation for resistance to colonial rule. These connotations have remained relevant in the recent period of religious purification over the past two decades. What began as student interest in the 1980s in discovering religious interpretation abroad as a way of critiquing authoritarian rule at home has now become a complex, sensory, and commercial landscape of global and local sources in a post-authoritarian era. In this landscape, Arab connections and style have been central features of the religious reformist and democratic *reformasi* movements. Although for many young activists, travel to the Middle East, facility with the Arabic language, and religious expertise have signified substantial cultural capital, these have also fueled recent resentments. As Sumit Mandal argues, the rediscovery of Arabness has been central to national aspirations among some Southeast Asian Muslims to be considered essentially moderate (2011). This narrative relies on a perception of the Muslim world as singularly centered in the Arab sphere, thereby assigning extremist and masculinist valences to an Arab essence and allowing peripheral Muslims to claim a more moderate stance by virtue of their ethnic and geographic distance (Lücking and Eliyanah 2017).

Using the concept of *figures* helps tease out how to think of the foreign. As Joshua Barker, Erik Harms, and Johan Lindquist argue (2014), a ‘figure’ is both a unique individual and a familiar symbol, emblematic of an era or a moment. Building on James Siegel’s (1998) idea of new types of sociality, types may precede and exceed any individual and therefore correspond less to any particular person. Yet, they circulate and resonate in powerful ways because they may also uncannily correspond to particular individuals. Preachers, kings, descendants of the Prophet, as well religious social media stars,

might be construed as ‘figures’ in this sense. Each channel translates power external to the self or the region into personal power. Returning to the complex figure of the *sayyid* is illustrative here and, to a lesser extent, the *kyai*, or local preacher, which Clifford Geertz described as a cross-cultural ‘broker’ (1960). For example, a *sayyid* with a large following (*habib*, literally ‘beloved’) is beloved in part because of their capacity to draw an audience and in part because of their figuration as a diffracted yet living presence of the Prophet in the Indonesian present. Hadhrami descendants whose lives and families have been situated in the archipelago for generations may have ‘become Indonesian’ and occupy a range of high-profile and respected positions, yet this is arguably because of their status as still alluringly and partially foreign (Alatas 2011).

Style as Power

Contemporary Muslim entrepreneurs, preachers, and social media celebrities in Indonesia, known as *selebgrams* (a portmanteau of *selebriti* and Instagram), are figures in this sense. They traffic in a newly precarious but profitable arena of mediated piety, which reanimates some of these origins in the power of the foreign and the capacity of exceptional individuals to concentrate and distribute that power. Each of these genres plays on the understanding of inspiration as a religious and productive concept that invites an analysis of the prevalence of figures with active, attractive relationships to difference. Many are converts, minorities, mixed children of Indonesians and non-Indonesians, or people known for frequently traveling abroad. They relay embodied experiences of the world outside of Indonesia to Indonesians. These are a more publicly visible and wealthier version of the religious celebrities described by Fenella Cannell (1999), which include beauty pageant queens, spirit mediums, and performers in the Christian passion play held among Bicolanos in the Philippines. As people with an unusual ability to attract a galaxy of powerful others, *bakla* (cross-dressed beauty queens) intimately access alterity through its trappings by wrapping a male body in glamorous femininity and almost, but not perfectly, emulating American beauty standards. For these figures, embracing alterity is to fleetingly dance with the protective power of the other, sometimes at the personal risk of losing the self, but its efficacy only holds if that power remains undomesticated.

Considering these examples together accentuates the salience of appearance. Like the radiant beauty of the pageant queen, appearances do not simply reflect or signify some more profound or accurate translation process but are the very medium of accessing an external power that might protect and enhance the self. Once again, this has historical origins. As John Pemberton has argued (1994), *cara* (the social realm that consists of fashion, manners, or style) became a technique through which royal families in colonial Java could face the foreign domination of Dutch rule by positioning Dutch clothing, accessories, and etiquette equally alongside their broader repertoire of available tools such as *batik* and other sacred heirlooms. This technique created a paradoxical effect of simultaneously elevating and reducing Dutch style by making it both more spiritually potent in a Javanese sense and more nonsensical to Dutch colonial officials (1994, p. 67).

Although historically and socially varied, these examples emphasize that Indonesian attention to the foreign seeks a balance between domestication and admiration. In the highly capitalized, digitized, transnational yet effectively intimate context of contemporary social media, skilled practitioners craft new alloys of national and transnational references to create new forms of community with thrilling new codes of belonging that also emphasize

appearances. Male and female preachers can selectively access the aesthetic celebrity universe of the *selebgram*. Celebrity preachers who can deftly deploy a mix of global and personal semiotic references can enhance their status, endear themselves to followers, and potentially convert that visibility into income (Millie 2017; Slama 2017). For example, celebrity preacher Abdullah Gymnastiar mixed Sufi references to love and beauty with declarations of affection for his wife and quotations from American self-help figures (Hoesterey 2015) until his followers abandoned him in the wake of his second marriage in 2006. Similarly, Felix Siau uses Arabic phrases, textual references to the Quran and *hadith*, slang Indonesian, and evocative images to craft a reputation as a ‘casual but dogmatic’ preacher using visual persuasion in the service of Islamist proselytizing (Hew 2018, p. 61).

Many of these figures emphasize their conversion status as evidence of their journeys and, therefore, their unique capacity as conduits for others’ transformative *hijrahs* (religious journeys). By citing the 622 CE migration in which Mohammad and his followers fled Mecca for Medina, these celebrities narrate otherwise personal or idiosyncratic life changes in a genealogy of recognizably epic movements out of sinful pasts and into more vigilant, pious futures. Siau, in particular, stands out as a Chinese-Indonesian convert, yet even preachers who were raised Muslim, such as Gymnastiar, Arifin Ilham, Jefri al-Bukhari, and Yusuf Mansur, have presented their biographies as conversion narratives. Repeatedly retelling their conversions has at least two effects: it highlights the transformative potential of Islam (even in the absence of traditional religious training) and emphasizes outsider status by holding the past in permanent relief with the present (Howell 2008; Burhani 2020). Rather than erasing a sinful past, *hijrah* stories underscore that past, reanimating conversion as a positive life change, even while recalling the life that preceded it. Reminding disciples and fans of a celebrity preacher’s pre-conversion life may seem counterintuitive, but it is arguably essential to their appeal. It maintains their insider status as outsiders.

Female *selebgrams*, typically fashion designers or influencers, mix images and affect to summon and cultivate audiences that share features common to those of religious discipleship. Feminine public figures in this genre may not be religious experts per se but pious lifestyle stars, modeling enthusiasm for piety and beauty in equal measure. As influencers, their employment and reputations are intimately enmeshed: their compensation is algorithmically informed by their capacity to affect their followers. What they sell, however, is both material and immaterial. This combination, what Annisa R. Beta describes as a unique form of *dakwah* or religious outreach, emphasizes a sense of intimacy and a general sense of ‘feeling’ close to their followers (2020). Some of the world’s best-known Muslimah influencers are Indonesian, even though their global audiences consider them more Muslimah than Indonesian. These women rely heavily on the ability to post photographic content that conveys a vision of them as both pious and cosmopolitan (cf. Abidin 2016), not only partly because of the nature of a platform such as Instagram but also partly because of their intersection with the appearance-focused orientation of the fashion and beauty industries.

Consider Dian Pelangi, whose Instagram account boasts over 5 million followers. Dian selectively shares glimpses into her life via her social media channels, promoting her clothing and headscarf lines, her sponsoring brands, her family, and her global travels. If that intimacy converts access to private aspects of an influencer’s life into public affection, it is equally in conversation with a parallel cosmopolitanism. For instance, in July 2020, Dian shared previously unseen photos and video of the moment she and her husband watched her home pregnancy test turn positive in a hotel room at the Ritz Carlton in ‘Jerusalem, Palestine’ in December 2019. Images such as these share the joy she and her husband felt long

before their news was public while situating her in a circuit of travel that many Indonesians may imagine as part of their religious universe, even if they cannot personally visit (Lücking 2019). Indeed, her decade-plus as a celebrity began as a teenager, posting outfits of the day to her blog. These were composed of global brands such as Zara or H&M in combination with an accent piece of her design and set in a variety of locations such as her home, her school, and, importantly, her travels to Australia, Egypt, and around Indonesia. Although she is a globally recognized celebrity, her primary motivation in producing images set in global capitals has been for her Indonesian audience (Pelangi 2014, personal communication, 06/03). In tandem with these glamorous settings, her accompanying texts and styles telegraph humility and sincerity, qualities highly valued in a crowded and commodified visual economy, creating economic value.

Imagining an Indonesian Center

Situating fashion and celebrity in these broader questions of foreign and national sources of power invites us to consider the role of a range of institutions in Indonesia that are invested in the possibility of making Indonesia a new center on the world stage. Imagining an Indonesian center involves precisely that – imagination – harnessed to initiatives designed to achieve these dreams. Among the most prominent in the past decade have been formal and informal strategies by the Ministry of Religion, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Indonesia's largest Islamic organizations, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, to situate Indonesia as a global leader in 'moderate Islam.' NU especially took up this challenge by actively promoting 'Islam Nusantara,' a concept that emerged in the months leading up to the organization's annual congress in 2015, which was organized around the theme of the unique correspondence between broad Muslim values of inclusivity and specifically Indonesian qualities that preceded and now enhance Islam's presence in the region (Sahal and Aziz 2015). Framed in the language of soft power, NU representatives have asserted that Indonesia is the legitimate inheritor of a uniquely tolerant, friendly, and diverse orientation to theology and community because of its archipelagic, connective, and 'in-between' geographic and cultural roots. Islam Nusantara's focus on resilience, gentility, and compassion has been strategic in domestic efforts to quell radicalization in Indonesia and has been publicized by Indonesian foreign diplomatic efforts in the US and Egypt (Hoesterey 2018).

Although apparently peripheral to this agenda, a closer analysis suggests that women's bodies and appearance have been a deliberate but marginalized feature of this mission. Presenting Indonesia as the world's largest Muslim-majority country, yet one where modestly attired women remain *anggun* (elegant), illustrates how women's appearances are summoned to serve as evidence of Indonesia's religious moderation through manners and beauty, the religious principle of *adab*. Strikingly, this globally shared religious value translates, in the context of contemporary celebrity visibility in Indonesia, not into the application of Arab styles or even calligraphic representations in fashionable dress but instead into a careful blend of both nationally recognized local textiles (read as 'Indonesian') with foreign styles that may have no connection whatsoever to Arab aesthetics. In this sense, feminine beauty garbed in Indonesian textiles and taste implies an antidote to other genres of pious femininity, particularly Gulf-style *abayas*, that are presumably less friendly and less moderate. This approach combines two key state goals, often expressed through competing ministries, around global Islamic leadership: foreign diplomacy and economic development. Positioning Indonesia as the '*kiblat*,' or center of the modest fashion industry,

hoped to re-orient the higher value design roles associated with Western fashion centers via apparent reference to a uniquely Islamic geography (Tempo 2016; Republika 2019). It also underscored how appearances are alternately saturated with intense moral valences or dismissed, as the context demands.

The creation of a new government bureau in Indonesia in 2015, the Badan Ekonomi Kreatif (BEKRAF), represents the most formal expression of new development strategies around soft skills in Indonesia. This initiative celebrates the national cultivation of creativity that requires rendering non-technical into technical to facilitate the insertion of otherwise messy cultural and economic forms into global assemblages. Now a subsection of the Ministry of Tourism, it situated the post-development hyperbole of ‘creative classes’ (Florida 2002) and the ‘4th industrial revolution’ (Schwab 2017) in the particular context of religiously spectacular Indonesia. At the center of this new initiative is fashion, representing 56 percent of the creative economy and now seen as a potential driver of national development, alongside more muscular industries like oil or mining.

Modest fashion has been particularly high profile in these campaigns in an attempt to lead the fastest growing sector (US\$300 billion) of the global garment industry (Usher 2018). Women’s labor in the mass garment and textile industries is thus harnessed to the feminized and often female-staffed world of fashion design. The rhetoric of Indonesia as the *kiblat* (*qibla*) of the modest fashion world predates the formation of BEKRAF but has now been integrated into its broader fashion agenda, emphasizing diversity and beauty as uniquely Indonesian. Further, fashion shows have become features of the foreign diplomatic and cultural budgets for Indonesian embassies. Consular offices in Los Angeles and Houston, in the US, and embassies in Amman, Moscow, New York City, Paris, and Seoul have regularly hosted fashion shows featuring modest fashion designers over the past decade.

Although Indonesian diplomatic and economic initiatives dovetail with their optimism about the potential for fashion to achieve multiple national goals, they face well-known barriers to entry for non-Western creatives in the global fashion system. Like many countries with large export-oriented garment industries, Indonesia has struggled to achieve credibility as a source of fashion design and remains associated with low-waged fast fashion production. The system may celebrate creativity and even elevate eccentric individuals as unique specimens of genius, yet nonetheless reproduces a map of centers and peripheries (Leshkovich and Jones 2003). Designers in global capitals are recognized as autonomous authors of artistic expression inspired by global travels, while the peripheries outside of those capitals are undifferentiated raw cultural materials feeding a system that Minh-Ha Pham argues rests on ‘racial plagiarism’ (2017). For designers and influencers in Indonesia, this landscape has created opportunities and barriers, some of which can produce national boundaries that prevent the sort of transnational influence these initiatives aim to transcend. While asked to perform indigeneity abroad, they may find that it is less effective in attracting Indonesian consumers, who want to see global aesthetics available at home. Being either unable or unwilling to suit those rules may limit their access to state funding.

Let us return to examples of how individual designers and influencers have navigated this demand for presenting versions of Indonesian beauty abroad and access to the foreign at home. As Dian Pelangi’s global reputation has grown, her travels have become a mix of personal and sponsored by Wardah Cosmetics and the Indonesian government. Wardah, an Indonesian skincare company branded as halal (although almost all personal care products in Indonesia are halal given the Muslim-majority market) and ‘for Indonesian women,’ invests heavily in key ‘brand ambassadors,’ of which Dian is one of the most prominent.

These ambassadors are Indonesian actresses, designers, singers, or other celebrities whom Wardah sends abroad for extensive photoshoots to produce content for the brand's advertising and for the celebrities' social media channels. Borrowing from the language of foreign diplomacy, these ambassadors fuse their own faces with the face of the company in the service of promoting a genre of modest beauty that is friendly, global, beautiful, and, importantly, Indonesian.

A brief reading of the styles these ambassadors display in foreign settings reveals how cosmopolitanism and inspiration intersect in ways that selectively borrow from the broader fashion industry's rhetoric of aesthetic inspiration, divine inspiration, and her customers' aspirations for both upward mobility and increased piety (cf. Fealy 2008, p. 29). When presenting collections outside of Indonesia, Dian has opted for looks that emphasize local textile traditions such as *batik* and *songket*, in effect celebrating the officially ecumenical aesthetic narrative of diversity and tolerance. Yet, fashion shows for consulates and embassies are primarily marketed to and attended by the Indonesian diasporic community, offering them a reflection of Indonesia, yet rarely expanding the audience beyond the national borders. In addition, shows that are hosted in formal show calendars typically emphasize Indonesia as a site of ethnic diversity and handmade clothing (PRNewswire 2019).

These trips have provided inspiration for Dian's domestic collections in Indonesia. For example, her October 2018 collection was inspired by her September 2018 visit to New York as a BEKRAF- and Wardah-sponsored designer to New York Fashion Week. Although the textiles she showed in Jakarta were created through wax-resist dyeing and, therefore, technically batik, the overall style was inspired by the Drake song 'Nice for What,' which she felt had been the sonic backdrop to her weeklong visit to New York City. Her use of black baseball caps and logoed sashes combined to evoke an edgy street style rather than Indonesian tradition. Similarly, other collections presented at the Wardah October 2018 Jakarta Fashion Week were formally oriented around direct, foreign, urban inspiration. Barli Asmara's collection was oriented around the Parisian style, Ria Miranda's was from Seoul, and Restu Anggraini's was from Tokyo. All designers situated their inspirational orbit outside of Indonesia.

Similar examples include modest fashion designers Anandia Putri of IKYK (an abbreviation for 'I Know You Know,' a bit of dialogue from the US TV show 'Friends') (@ikyk2011) and Rani Hatta (@ranihattaofficial), both of whom have openly embraced urban styles from Japan and Korea, countries with limited historical relationships with Islam. Both designers claim that the monochromatic, athletic, and pyramidal forms of the Korean *hanbok* and Japanese *kimono* are inherently more modest than either the sheer and form-fitting Indonesian *kebaya* or the trendy versions of modest wear prominent in Indonesia. Both argue that what might seem like either androgynous or even masculine styles are, in fact, more feminist than Indonesian styles. Both use black and neutral tones in their collections yet distinguish their color choices from associations with black abayas. Both set many of their fashion shoots in Korea and Japan with local models and have devoted, non-Muslim customer bases there (Jones 2018). Yet, neither have received as much funding or recognition from the Indonesian state, in part because their looks are insufficiently recognizable as Indonesian. Their use of imported textiles and apparently foreign shapes make them less valuable ambassadors for a uniquely Indonesian version of Islamic modesty. In short, what they are exporting is not as easily recognizable in the narrative of Islam Nusantara because they appear to be importing foreignness rather than exporting Indonesian aesthetic moderation.

These examples reveal some inconsistencies in national, especially state-led initiatives to straightforwardly harness women's appearances to serve diplomatic or economic goals. While they may seem inclusive, collections that intentionally situate Indonesia as a global fashion center by referencing other fashion centers may not achieve the goal of positioning the Indonesian style as recognizably distinct. Yet, I would argue that each of these modest fashion designers is making a different and important claim on visibility and beauty. By linking their creative processes to global capitals, to non-Indonesian sites, and by positioning Jakarta as another node in a network of fashionable cities, they are making a claim about the universality of Muslim cosmopolitanism. They are claiming that their own aesthetic processes of creativity and modesty, beauty and worship, are legitimately situated in a global map of fashion circuits in which the 'peripheries' are not simply low-value sites for labor or authentic traditions but are also legitimate consumers of inspiration and of sources from beyond their borders. In this sense, they are making radical claims to inclusivity by saying that their personal forms of creative expression are not provincial but universal and that Allah supports that work. In short, they know their work to be halal.

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16

CIRCUITS OF CONSUMPTION, DESIRE, AND PIETY

Seeing and Being Seen in Veiling Fashion

Banu Gökarıksel and Anna J. Secor

Introduction

Anne Hollander, in her work of art history, *Seeing Through Clothes* (1975), argues that the primary function of a garment is ‘to contribute to the making of a self-conscious individual image, an image linked to all other imaginative and idealized visualizations of the human body’ (p. xiv). If clothes are the image of the self, then what kind of ideal self is mapped through veiling? Veiling has inspired much political, social, and psychoanalytic critique, but the perspectives of women who veil are rarely the impetus for these theories. Our work is based on focus groups and interviews in Istanbul and Konya with over eighty veiled (*tesettürlü*) women who wore headscarves paired with outfits that, to varying degrees, attempted to conform to an idea of women’s modesty in Islam. Like most veiled women in Turkey, they did not cover their faces, and they did not wear enveloping outer garments (such as the *abaya* or, in Turkish, the *çarşaf*). Rather, they often wore overcoats (*pardesü*) or tunics over long skirts or pants. In the context of the rise of fashionable veiling in Turkey, we argue that veiling does not simply mean blocking the gaze but is instead a matter of mobilizing a particular visual regime, one that enacts its own aesthetics and ethics within the context of consumer culture. Veiled women are not invisible; they are visible in a particular manner, and they are active participants in producing that visibility. We argue that for veiled women, the clothed body is the site of a project to map an ideal of harmony that has both aesthetic and ethical registers negotiated within the limitations and opportunities of consumer culture. This ideal of a unified, harmonious appearance (which, we suggest, exists somewhere between the psychoanalytic ego ideal and an Islamic ideal of the self) is ruptured by materialist and corporeal desire, what women call *nefis*. Veiling fashion, we argue, both incites *nefis*/desire and works as a means of governing it.

Our work¹ departs from previous psychoanalytically inflected scholarship on the veil. Much of this work has begun from a premise similar to the one articulated by Ellie Ragland: ‘The woman under the veil is extracted from the spectrum of the gaze’ (2008, p. 13). As an object within orientalist fantasies, the veil appears as a fetish object, a barrier to the (male) recognition of loss (castration), and a disavowal of sexual difference (Alloula 1986; Copjec 1989; Yeğenoğlu 1998). Within accounts that focus on the veiled subject herself,

veiling is usually understood as a system of control that removes women from the field of the gaze, limiting their visibility in the public arena and protecting them from shame (Copjec 2006). From this perspective, the veil has been interpreted either as preventing women from experiencing themselves as subjects or as an interruption of the masculine fetishization of women's bodies (Krips 2008). Such arguments seem to give veiling exceptional status: as though it is not clothing but an absolute barrier to women's visibility and presence, as though veiling is the only clothing that covers the body, and as though that which must be seen in order for seeing to really take place is the body, rather than the clothes.

Yet, veiled women are still visible, and they are still able to see. Malek Alloula (1986) makes this point with regard to the French colonial photographer; the veiled women whom he photographs can still see him, even when he cannot see what he wants to see of them. As Emma Tarlo (2010) writes, veiling is part of being visibly Muslim; it marks active participation within the domain of public visibility. Women do not become invisible when veiling; they are simply visible in a particular way. And as Reina Lewis puts it, 'The question of what a Muslim looks like, or what looks Muslim, brings to the fore many issues of collective and individual identity that underpin the very project of formulating a commercial version of Muslim lifestyle culture' (Lewis 2015, p. 113), a vision promoted by a growing set of cultural intermediaries, entrepreneurs, and 'aesthetic authorities' (Bucar 2017, p. 11).

One of the reasons why psychoanalytic treatments of the veiled subject have fallen short is that they have tended to treat the veil as a symbolic object rather than as part of women's lived subjectivities. In contrast, our approach is to consider how the veil becomes part of women's self-formation, both with regard to the cultivation of piety and the making of an ethical self (Saktanber 2002; Mahmood 2005) and in relation to questions of consumption and fashion (Moors 2007; Moors and Tarlo 2013). At the same time, by focusing on the aesthetics and desires of fashion in relation to veiling, we reverse the assumption of psychoanalytic scholarship that has suggested that the veil produces a kind of invisibility. Instead of casting the veil as something that blocks the gaze or removes women from the scopical field, our work looks at how the veiled subject maps herself within the field of the gaze. When Lacan (1998) refers to the field of the gaze, he directs our attention to how visibility depends not just on one's own eye but on a preexisting gaze. Within this field of the gaze, the subject plays with her own image, mapping herself (clothed and idealized) within the picture according to the coordinates of her own desire. We aim to show how veiling, as it takes place within a wider consumer culture, works as part of this play between the image, the gaze, and desire.

Our focus is on fashionably veiled women in Turkey, where veiling has been at the center of fiery political debates between secularist and Islamist nationalists for decades. These debates became increasingly polarized in the 1990s and early 2000s when new styles of veiling and a veiling fashion industry emerged in urban centers, while dress codes limited the access of women wearing headscarves to certain public or state spaces, including universities. Our study was conducted from 2004 to 2009, following the election of the Islamically oriented socially conservative AKP (*Adalet and Kalkınma Partisi*: Justice and Development Party). During this time, the AKP was in power, but restrictions on the headscarf remained intact for the most part. These restrictions were not lifted until the early 2010s. With the AKP amassing more power over the last two decades, enfranchising a conservative Muslim middle class, and shifting its policies toward more conservatism, today, the headscarf is more accepted and even expected across Turkey. The veiling fashion industry has become more established as well.

Our study captures a period during which there was political tension around veiling fashion. This research included interviews and focus groups with multiple actors, such as consumers, designers, sales assistants, store managers, and CEOs of veiling fashion companies. We also observed a fashion show and analyzed catalogs and advertisements of veiling fashion companies. For the purposes of this chapter, we focus on six focus groups with consumers (five of which were in Istanbul and one in Konya) and one focus group with sales assistants (who also dressed in veiling fashion styles) in Istanbul that took place in the summer of 2009. Each group was composed of eight women (all veiled), organized by age group and socioeconomic status, and lasted about two hours. During the focus groups, there were a moderator, a notetaker, and both authors in the room; of this group, all of us identified as women, and none of us were veiled. The fact that the research team did not veil likely affected the conversations, perhaps making participants feel as though they were ‘representing’ their own practices to outsiders. However, one of the strengths of the focus group method is the richness of the dialogue that ensues between participants. The difference between the researchers and groups remains present, but what happens in the focus group is not simply an exchange of questions and answers between the researcher and researched (Morgan 1988; Wilkinson 1999; Smithson 2000; Onwuegbuzie et al. 2009). With the strengths of the focus group method in mind, we asked a series of open-ended questions about clothing styles, consumption practices, and faith that aimed to generate rich conversation between participants. Our analysis in this article focuses on how these women discussed their desires, participation in consumer culture, and experiences of seeing and being seen in veiling fashion.

Veiling Fashion

Veiling fashion has emerged within a broader market of Islamically inflected goods, an ‘Islamic consumptionscape’ (Sandıkçı and Ger 2001) that includes a range of products: from halal food to Muslim women’s novels and magazines to headscarves in the trendiest colors and patterns of the season (White 1999; Gökarıksel and McLarney 2010; Lewis 2007, 2015). In this context, research on the rise of fashionable styles of veiling has sought to understand what it means for women to wear veiling fashion and how they negotiate conflicting ideals of piety, beauty, modesty, femininity, and national identity in a variety of contexts (Craciun 2017). Fashionably veiled women constantly navigate the multiple social and cultural significations of their clothing, which has been variably associated with politics, aesthetics, fashion, and class status. Wearers of the styles invest considerable time, energy, and money in their clothing, headscarves, and accessories (Gökarıksel and Secor 2010a, 2010b). At the same time, the fashion industry and self-identified Muslim women’s lifestyle magazines devise strategies to turn Islamic virtue into economic value and vice versa (Jones 2010; Lewis 2010). Thus, this scholarship provides insights into the role of veiling fashion in the commodification of Muslim identities, as well as the making of pious Muslim femininities. Yet, we find the question of how veiling fashion inserts women into a scopic regime – that is, a way of seeing and being seen – has not been explored. And yet, this question of the gaze is central both to fashion and to Islamic modesty – a convergence that makes veiling fashion especially important for understanding Islam and consumer culture.

Fashionable veiling immediately upends the idea of the veil as a blank barrier, a ‘death shroud’ (Ragland 2008, p. 11), or a ‘uniform’ that disappoints the photographer with its ‘deficiency of expression’ (Alloula 1986, p. 11; see also Krips 2008). In contrast, fashion

promises compulsive innovation and self-expression; rather than dead desire, fashion represents the constant renewal of desire in the field of consumption (Baudrillard 1981; Wilson 1985). Fashion is inherently linked to the visual; like art, it is part of a ‘perpetually idealizing vision’ that ‘appeals to the imagination through the eye’ (Hollander 1975, p. xvi). Taking shape through an interplay of visual references, fashion is constituted within the exchange of looking and desiring that defines the field of the gaze.

Veiling fashion is always designed to be looked at; it is outerwear worn to traverse public spaces. Like fashion more broadly, fashionable veiling is defined by cycles of changing cuts, colors, and fabrics, ‘visual rhythms of delight, indifference, and distaste’ (Hollander 1999, p. 112). Women in our focus groups spoke knowledgeably about that season’s fashionable arrangement for buttons, zippers, hemlines, pleats, and sleeves. The fashion cycle is swift and encompasses all elements of the dress; in the words of one sales assistant,

For example, the headscarf I’m wearing is a 2009 model, as anyone who follows the fashion would know. If I wear this headscarf next year, there will be people who would say, ‘She’s wearing last year’s fashion.’ There are people who would comment on someone wearing last year’s overcoat.

Both the alacrity of change and the sense of obligatory renewal were evident in women’s complaints about high prices being followed by end-of-season sales; as one woman put it, ‘Why should I wear last season’s styles?’

Veiling in Turkey began to be recognized as fashion over the past forty years. This is not to say that headscarves and modest dress had not been subject to fashion previously, but it is to mark the emergence, since the 1990s, of a distinctive look consisting of ever-shifting styles of scarves and coat or tunic combinations (Kılıçbay and Binark 2002; Saktanber 2002). Designer labels, fashion shows, and Paris-inspired styles have all contributed to a vibrant domestic industry catering to an increasingly visible Islamic bourgeoisie. In the past decades, veiling fashions have come to be displayed on catwalks, in store windows, in the pages of magazines, on television shows, and, most of all, on the streets of the city. Yet, veiling fashion is far from a perfect concoction of piety and style. Not only do women themselves struggle to reconcile the demands of modesty with the imperatives of fashion, but they also find themselves subjected to a particular kind of political, moral, and aesthetic scrutiny. Rather than blocking women from view, veiling fashion has, in fact, been a highly visible dimension of the changing place of religion in Turkish society.

Veiling, Looking, and Desiring

JALE: When they [men] see a well-dressed woman who takes care of herself, they look. I mean the eye sees what it sees. Sometimes even I turn around and look when I see someone beautiful.

SALIHA: But I think it’s us who provoke them [men], we’re provoking them.

ESRA: I agree. It’s definitely all women’s doing.

SALIHA: Yes, absolutely. They dress in a way that makes even me look. Imagine a beautiful woman, for instance, a really beautiful woman and she has exhibited all of her beauty. I find myself staring after her.

MODERATOR: So are there veiled women at whom you find yourself staring as well?

JALE: Of course, the headscarf, the overcoat, the matching colors, the shoes, the purse.

If looking is the hook for desire (Lacan 1998; see also al-Ghazali 1995), then the scopic regime of fashionable veiling should be understood in terms of a particular dispensation of looking and desiring that is formed in relation to patriarchy and capitalism. On the one hand, this looking-desiring dispensation is similar to that of fashion in general: the objects that compose the fashionably veiled image (the latest scarves, the new cut of a jacket, the trendiest fabrics and colors) circulate across bodies, billboards, television, shop windows, and so on. This circulation constructs feminine beauty and masculine desire, sells commodities, and sometimes also perpetuates patriarchal norms, as in the above dialogue when a woman is blamed for the attention she receives. *Jale*, a 30-year-old woman who wore a combination of a blue headscarf and a blue double-chested coat, points to how the objects that go into veiling fashion ensembles capture her eye and provoke her desire for the image on display. In this process of looking and desiring, the mystique of the commodity and the allure of the fashionable image are enhanced. For women spectators, this allure, as *Diana Fuss* (1994, p. 224) writes in her discussion of fashion photography, involves ‘neither immediate identification nor unmediated desire but rather a complicated and unstable exchange between already mediated forms.’ The scopic regime of fashionable veiling, like fashion in general, hinges on women as spectators using consumption to mediate between their identification with the fashionable image and their desire for the image.

How this complex relationship (triangulating commodities, subjectivities, and the image) plays out in the arena of veiling fashion is perhaps best illustrated with another dialogue from our focus group with young (late twenties to late thirties) lower-middle-class women in Istanbul:

AYŞE: The other day, for example, I saw this scarf in a commercial and I absolutely loved it. I said, ‘Oh, I must definitely go and get it.’ It was an *Armine* [a well-known Turkish brand name] scarf. It looked so amazing on the model that I thought it would look similar on me as well. I went ahead and bought it, I loved it.

MODERATOR: What else affects you?

ÖZGE: For me generally, it’s like, I went searching for a scarf but I couldn’t find the scarf that I wanted. I was trying to find something to go with my outfit. Finally I gave up and I started walking home. Suddenly I saw this lady walk past me. That’s it! She was wearing the scarf I needed for my outfit! I had gone around and visited ten stores to find it with no avail, and I was returning home all upset when I saw exactly what I wanted on her.

AYŞE: Oh my God, the same thing happened to me.

ÖZGE: So I ran to her and I was like, ‘Where did you get it?’ ‘If you want,’ I said, ‘I’ll give you a brand new scarf in exchange for yours.’ And that’s what I ended up doing!

AYŞE: The same thing happened to me with a friend of my sister’s. I was like, ‘That scarf would go so well with my overcoat.’ I had looked for it in a couple of stores but wasn’t able to find it. Then I saw this photograph of my sister and her friend, and I told my sister to ask her friend where she got her scarf. It

was a friend of hers from the university. She found out for me, I went to the same store and bought the exact same scarf.

MODERATOR: So you see things on each other, on the streets, and on commercials.

AYŞE: And sometimes what they do is they tuck the brand name underneath, instead of displaying it at the back, which I hate. The other day, I saw a scarf on someone, I looked from behind and couldn't see the brand name. If I could've seen it, I'd go and get it.

MODERATOR: Ah, you look for the brand.

AYŞE: Yes, for example, you tie the scarf so that the brand name is visible, whether it's Aker or Vakko or whatever. My God, I tried so hard to be able to tell hers, from the back but no, she had tucked it in. I couldn't walk up and ask either, I was too shy. Usually it's there, though, you can see it. That also has an effect on the way to tie your scarf.

In each of the anecdotes that Ayşe and Özge (both of them housewives in their late twenties) share in the conversation above, the veiled woman who is seen – in a commercial, on the street, in a photograph – incites a desire and an identification. The model looks amazing in that scarf; if Ayşe wears the scarf, she will look like the model. The woman on the street projects the image that Özge was endlessly seeking to achieve; what was impossible – ten stores, a wasted afternoon – is perfected on the head of this other woman, whom Özge then accosts and actually de-scarfs! And the image that Ayşe has in her head of the perfect scarf to go with her overcoat is reflected in the photograph of another woman, a university student, a friend of her younger sister. Finally, there is a demand for visibility – the brand name must be displayed, for this is the law of fashion and its circulation. In all of these ways, it is clear that, like fashion in general, the images and commodities of veiling fashion circulate through the interplay between looking and desiring.

On the other hand, veiling fashion is not fashion in general; the dispensation of looking and desiring in veiling fashion is shaped by a particular ethical practice, that of Islamic modesty. To be clear, veiling is not unique in its association with modesty. On the contrary, clothes have long been understood to operate within the contradictory imperatives of modesty and exhibition (Flugel 1930). Yet, the question of how modesty is articulated and its relationship to the gaze is especially pronounced when veiling is indexed to Islam. Importantly, the question of how and to what degree a woman should cover according to Islam is not one with a single, agreed-upon answer, although naturally, there are those who believe that their own interpretation is indisputably correct. For the most part, women in our focus groups recognize the contingency of these interpretations, pointing out that not only do readings of the Quran differ, but what counts as modest in one era is risqué in another.

Among the women we talked to, the fundamental purpose of veiling was consistently expressed as 'not to attract attention.' Given this emphasis on not attracting the eye, it is easy to understand why veiling has been widely interpreted as an intervention in the power that women possess to command the male gaze, as something intended to interrupt the heterosexual male's scopophilia (Mernissi 1987). Yet while this formulation emphasizes the male looker, veiling as fashion works upon *women's* spectatorial subjectivity (Fuss 1994). Further, while it appears that veiling and fashion could not be more opposed to each other when it comes to the question of the gaze, they are lived within a common realm, a single visual field within which wearers of these styles operate both as spectators and as part of the

spectacle. We find that the practices of veiling fashion take place within the tense interplay between the scopophilia of fashion and the modesty of veiling.

That looking and desiring between women can lead to anxiety is demonstrated in the following story. In a focus group with older women in Istanbul, Arzu, a 43-year-old housewife who wore a small, polka-dot headscarf to the focus group, confessed, 'There was a covered lady [at the bus stop], but she had dressed so beautifully even I was tempted to look at her.' She went on to describe how the woman was harassed by men waiting at the bus stop, one of whom said, 'We see the open [non-veiled] ones anyway, but we are curious about these closed boxes.' Arzu expressed her dismay and addressed the object of this attention in her absence, 'You're beautiful and you're dressed so well! You have all this makeup on that even as a woman you attract my attention. How could a man not look at you? I was mad at her for being so.' In an uncomfortable way, Arzu identified with the male gaze and felt (as they did) the pull to look at this woman with her beautiful clothes and makeup. While Arzu is mad at the well-dressed woman for being the proximate cause of this awkward tangle, she is also using this story to make a point about the ambivalence of veiling fashion and the line that should not be crossed, lest the 'closed boxes' become the most alluring ones of all.

Instead of removing women from the field of the gaze, veiling as fashion inserts them into the scopic field in a particular way. Veiling does not work simply to arrest the play of looks and desires; instead, as fashion, it instigates a frenetic circulation. Yet, the practices of veiling fashion are not reducible to the practices of fashion in general because veiling is part of an ethical project of the self with an Islamic moral telos. Thus, what is at stake in veiling fashion is an image of the self that is not only fashionable but also pious. This is why we say that veiling inserts women into the scopic field in a particular way; the gaze that illuminates the veiled subject is not only social but also theological. In the following section, we turn to the question of what ideal self the veiled body seeks to mirror.

The Ideal of Harmony and the Aesthetics of Veiling

Veiling fashion (as that improved skin, that identity mapped on the surface of the body) calls forth an exacting aesthetic regime. On the one hand, women talk about how the styles of veiling are more exciting, attractive, and even joyous than the styles that non-veiled women wear. At the same time, women feel that veiling makes greater demands on them than non-covered dress would. Many women talk about their own transition to veiling in terms of taking better care with their appearance, comparing how little thought they put into their dress when they were non-covered to the amount of attention to detail that veiling fashion requires. To pull off the look, women find themselves both putting time and thought into assembling their outfits each day and (in the words of one of our respondents) 'constantly shopping.' In many of our discussions, women explained that sneakers look gauche with an overcoat; clothes that are comfortable and casual are hard to integrate with the more ladylike images of the fashionable veiled woman that circulate on billboards and in advertisements. Women described their own attention to detail, the importance of matching handbags and shoes, of varied textures and harmonious arrangements of color designed to complement their complexions, the shapes of their faces, and the dimensions of their bodies. In a discussion in the Konya group about pinning the scarf, one respondent explained that her pins are placed to minimize the look of what she calls her 'chubby cheeks.' And in another focus group in Istanbul, when discussing the appropriate length for

an overcoat, women's feelings about whether or not they could wear certain styles reflected both their ideas about appropriate modesty and their sense of the aesthetic implications – for example, that a short overcoat might look better on a taller person. Even the question of loose- or tight-fitting clothes was approached both in terms of modesty and in terms of women's individual aesthetic preferences for how much fabric they felt their frames could pleasingly carry. Çağla, a young woman who not only wears veiling fashion but also works as a sales assistant in an Istanbul boutique, situates questions of beauty, care, and attention to detail within an Islamic register:

[In Islam] the woman is always a jewel (*ziynet*); ... A woman is all care, from tip to toe; there's care for everything, even the toenail of a woman. In that sense, the woman is always beautiful, she is creation (*fitrat*); she is the ornament (*süs*). In this sense, Islam wants the woman to be plain and good looking.

How to navigate this demand – to be both modest and beautiful – is a central problematic of practices of veiling fashion.

The aesthetic ideal of veiling fashion is that of harmony – harmony between elements of the dress, harmony between appearance and conduct, and harmony between appearance and belief. Incongruities of dress, such as miniskirts, bright red lipstick, or colorful nail polish worn with headscarves, were generally considered aesthetic outrages, a critique that included an ethical dimension. Indeed, whether a particular style is a sin against God or against aesthetics is often a blurry area. For example, women criticized the popular practice of padding the scarf in the 2000s to change the shape of one's head. One criticism was from an Islamic perspective, concerning the possible sin of pretending to have a lot of hair piled underneath, while a second criticism focused on the aesthetics of the elongated, alien shape created. Both of these critiques, one ethical and the other aesthetic, were presented and accepted by the group as equally compelling reasons for not following this latest fad.

The ideal of harmony often concerned which parts of the body could be uncovered, while others could not. In a focus group with upper-middle-class younger women in Istanbul, Esin (who described herself as *süslü kapalı*, 'fancy-covered') explained that while she always covers her head, in the summer, she might wear short sleeves. Other women in the group censured her, asserting that one must not wear even quarter-length sleeves with a covered head or show one's legs when draping one's shoulders. Once you cover your head, women explained, you have to follow certain rules of modest dress. Looking at a fashion photo of a woman wearing a headscarf and a skirt with a high slit, a member of our teenaged focus group in Istanbul stated simply: 'She should either take off the scarf or cover her legs.' Unharmonious clothes visibly map the inconsistencies of the subject and its disintegration.

The ideal image – unified and harmonized, ethically and aesthetically – is just that, an ideal. It is not something that women talk about having achieved; it is, instead, the pursued object of veiling fashion. This elusive image of the self resonates with the psychoanalytic concept of the ego ideal that, in the words of psychoanalyst Peter Blos, initiates a 'sustained striving for perfection' that 'can never be fulfilled' but 'that furnishes a sense of well-being'; the ego ideal, he writes, is 'a ceaseless journey without arrival' (1974, p. 47). But also, perhaps more relevantly for those involved, the unified and harmonious ideal image resonates with an Islamic project of the self, in which following in the footsteps of the Prophet means shaping oneself for worship and habits of piety. While the women we talked to were not

necessarily participants in a Sufi order (these are outlawed but functioning in Turkey; see Silverstein 2008), Sufi-inflected ideas of the self are part of the fabric of lived Islam in Turkey. Insofar as this seamlessness (between inner and outer) and harmony (between the elements of appearance, conduct, and desire) are not achieved but are rather part of a project of the self, women explain the central struggle of this project with recourse to a key Sufi concept: *nafs*, or in Turkish, *nefis*.

The Rupture of *Nefis*

In the discourse of veiling fashion, *nefis* is the agency that ruptures the unity of the clothed body and of the Islamically identified self. While not explicitly referencing Sufism, our participants often refer to *nefis* in the Sufi vein to identify the power of bodily and material desires over them. In Sufism, *nefis* initiates a constant conflict within the self; it is the source of inconsistency and the force that causes the disintegration of the self. While *ruh* (spirit) pulls one toward God and unity, *nefis*, ‘the lower self,’ distracts one from the path of God, pulling one toward material and egoist desires (Renard 2009, pp. 79–80). Accordingly, *nefis* can and must be governed; this is the path of the faithful and defines the Islamic project of the ethical self (al-Ghazali 1995).

Our participants frequently use the common colloquial phrase in Turkish *nefsine hakim olmak* (governing *nefis*) to describe their efforts to discipline an overpowering *nefis*. For example, Burçak, a 20-year-old college student in Konya, clearly defines the relationship between *nefis* and religiosity in response to our question to the group about whether they see themselves as devout: ‘The person who can control her *nefis* is a religious person. We can control part of our *nefis*, but unfortunately we cannot control it all. God willing (*inşallah*), we will come to that stage [of complete control].’ Burçak does not claim to be completely devout because she sees herself (and, as hinted by her use of the pronoun ‘we,’ other women in the group and likely all women who wear veiling fashion) as not possessing the ability to entirely reign over *nefis*. According to her, the more a person can rule over *nefis*, the more religious she is. Veiling is a technique employed in the governance of *nefis*; it is a practice that ideally orients a woman toward God; serves as a constant reminder of the greater *jihad*; enables her to work toward harmonizing her appearance, conduct, and piety; and thus helps the cultivation of Islamic virtue (Gökarıksel and Secor 2012; see also Mahmood 2005).

But when veiling is inserted into fashion, it participates in the play of looking and desiring material objects and images of fashion. As the central Sufi thinker al-Ghazali (1995) notes, the eye is where desire begins. Fashionable veiling draws the eye, which provokes *nefis* and makes its subjugation difficult. Burçak admits that she can only partially govern *nefis* and presents her style-conscious black-and-white ensemble as the embodiment of the part of *nefis* that she cannot yet control. For her, as for many other participants, *nefis* is the agency that disrupts the ideal of the Islamic self. The pesky presence of material desires that fashion seems to invigorate makes it impossible to suture the ideal image. At the same time, Burçak still positions herself (and her dress) on the path toward more complete control of *nefis* and, thus, of piety.

Burçak thus expresses a conundrum: veiling orients women toward Islamic modesty and piety, yet the material objects and images of fashionable veiling constantly incite *nefis*, pulling them away from God. The following dialogue among Istanbul sales assistants provides a window into the way that *nefis* was deployed in relation to this tension between fashion and piety:

ÇAĞLA: As we are all Muslims here, we're all covered. We can't let our *nefis* guide us. If that happens, we'll lose our faith, God forbid. As my colleague mentioned, I like purple and I wear it, but that doesn't mean this is Islam or that this is right for Islam. No way. I wear purple because I like it, because it pleases me. But it's different when you face God. (*Allah katında farklıdır.*) ... There is veiling because we have Islam. In other religions there are other clothes. Nuns, for example, wear certain garments, lay people, others, don't wear those. We wear these not because it's a requirement of our religion but because we're human and weak, we are dressed like this [in veiling fashion] right now. However, we cannot put our *nefis* forward and say, 'This is right.' So yes, we're doing this, but whether it is right or not will be Allah's call.

FATMA: We try to discipline our *nefis*.

ÇAĞLA: Islam draws a certain line, and people must obey that. And in colors, one follows custom. In present-day Turkey, there is no restriction of color because people wear such colorful, showy things. Of course it's wrong. [It doesn't mean it's right] just because that's the way it is in Turkey. ... It all comes down to *nefis*. All of us sisters here cover ourselves because we're Muslim; that's what we are saying. But wearing colorful headscarves. ... For example, the Koranic verse tells us, 'Wear your headscarf wide over your shoulders.' Though I want to, my *nefis* tells me to make a cute bow.

GÜL: What we mean by *nefis* is the reflection of our style and colors.

For Çağla, veiling is unquestionably for Islam, and there are certain undisputable rules about modesty. Veiling puts her on the path of the faithful and enables her to identify with other veiled women as Muslim sisters. Çağla seeks a universal understanding of modesty in the Quran. However, she is quick to point out that knowing what Islamic modesty requires does not necessarily mean complying with this requirement. Çağla knows her headscarf should drape loosely over her shoulders, but her *nefis* makes her wear it in the latest fashion, in 'a cute bow.'

While veiling fashion companies market the ever-changing colors and cuts of their products as seamless confections of Islam and fashion, Çağla rejects the idea that fashion and piety can be so easily melded. Despite her understanding of Islamic modesty, she bluntly states that her own purple clothes cannot be justified according to Islam. Rather than arguing that, as long as her hair and body are covered, wearing purple does not violate the principle of modesty (a strategy producers use in defense of their coral reds and neon pinks), Çağla says that she simply likes the color and wears it, knowing that her veiling may not be fully Islamically appropriate. The prevalence of an increasing diversity of styles and colors in veiling fashion in Turkey, she argues, does not mean that they are Islamically acceptable as modest clothing. On the contrary, as Gül puts it, the lively fashions are evidence of untamed *nefis*.

Nefis is the imp of fashion. As a psychic agency that pulls women away from their pious ideals, *nefis* is called upon to explain the rupture between the lived image and the ideal. Veiling orients women toward their ideal of harmony and situates them on the path toward achieving greater control over *nefis*. As a technology of the self, veiling ideally produces certain kinds of behaviors and desires. At the same time, *nefis* continually opens up a gap between the projected image of piety and the self. When veiling becomes fashion, the relationship between veiling and *nefis* is further complicated. Veiling fashion inserts women

in an economy of gaze and material objects, which stimulates *nefis*. In the words of Jale, 'It's fashion, there's always something new. When one sees, one wants. It's *nefis*. *Nefis* overcomes, and you buy it.' Veiling fashion both participates in the governing of *nefis* and incites it; this tension animates the project of the Islamic self. Wearers of veiling fashion must navigate this conflict between the styles of veiling fashion as desirable commodities and veiling as a discipline of the soul. The women in our research inhabit this tension; it pervades their everyday practices, through which they map themselves within the field of the gaze.

Conclusion

Our analysis does not aim to impose a psychoanalytic interpretation of the veil as a symbol of this or that but instead to understand the role of veiling (and specifically a particular regime of fashionable veiling embedded in consumer culture in Turkey) in women's own formations of themselves as ethical, pious, and desiring subjects. Our argument is that rather than being removed from the visual field, women who wear veiling fashion enter into the field of the gaze and are, therefore, subjects and objects of looking and desiring. Within the context of this visibility, veiling fashion becomes part of the production of an ideal image understood in terms of harmony and unity. The ego is thus projected onto the surface of the body and idealized in clothes, the 'improved skin' (Bergler 1953, p. xxiii) that is essential to identity. The disruption of this ideal is, for the women in our research, attributed to the agency of *nefis*, the pesky imp of material and corporeal desire whose government is central to an ethical project of the self in which desires and ideals are in harmony. Rather than removing veiled women from the play of the gaze, veiling fashion is the mark of women's participation in circuits of consumption and the desire that fashion stokes through looking and being seen. At the same time, it is the ongoing work of piety that is played out in the governing of *nefis* through the harmonization of veiling fashion. The surface of the body – adorned with the commodities of veiling fashion – is thus not insignificant; it is the site upon which women project their ideal selves, aesthetically and ethically. The path to unity within the self and with God is mapped on the surface of the body, and it is on and through the veiled body that the ongoing struggle for the unity of desire, faith, and image takes place.

Beyond the moment of this research (the first decade of AKP rule), veiling, as a site of faith and everyday embodied practice in Turkey, continues to be articulated in new ways. After two decades of AKP rule, veiling has become more acceptable and even encouraged in public life. The veiling fashion industry has expanded and become more established during this time and has made forays into mainstream fashion. Following a coup attempt in 2016 and the AKP's alliance with an ultranationalist party, the AKP has amassed more power and intensified its socially and politically conservative agenda with a focus on women's bodies. This has created new resonances and conjunctures. Evren Savci, in her book *Queer in Translation: Sexual Politics under Neoliberal Islam*, demonstrates how struggles of Islamic dress articulate with embattled LGBT+ rights to highlight 'the failures of neoliberal incorporation of difference' under AKP rule (Savci 2021, p. 30). At the same time, in the wake of the consolidation of AKP power, questions of public Islam articulate not primarily within a framework of human rights but, significantly, with the practices and discourses of authoritarian populism. For example, Ebru Öztürk, Ayşe Serdar, and Katarina Giritli Nygren argue that radical right-wing populism mobilizes debates over women's Islamic

dress ‘to construct populist subject categories’ of the people, elites, and outsiders in different ways in France, Sweden, and Turkey (2022, p. 538). They conclude that ‘gender and sexuality imbued with religious and secular norms provide prolific grounds for assigning people to specific populist subject categories and serve as constitutive battlegrounds for hegemony’ (p. 551).

Yet as we have argued here and elsewhere, what is at stake in women’s Islamic dress is not only or primarily ascribed political meanings but also questions of faith and interpretations of Islamic practice. Veiling as outerwear makes women visible in public in particular ways. The symbolism that attaches to this visibility should not be mistaken for the core meaning or purpose of Islamic head covering for the women who wear it (Gökariksel and Secor 2012, 2020). However important it is to understand head covering within evolving socio-historical contexts, for the women who choose to wear it, ‘the veil’ is not a symbol (of politics, identity, or a particular set of gendered power relations) but an active part of a religious practice. Women’s veiling practices are not static or fixed but continually shifting, both in response to the spatially and historically changing ‘regimes of veiling’ that they navigate and to their own evolving relation to their faith and Islamic knowledge (Secor 2002). Veiling is *at once* an embodied spatial practice embedded within complex regimes of power *and also* a question of faith and interpretation, of harmonizing desire, piety, and image, as these, too, are constantly being (re)constituted in ways that are both intimate and broadly significant.

Note

- 1 This chapter is a shortened, updated, and significantly edited version of Gökariksel and Secor (2014).

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GENDERED SPACES OF CONSUMPTION IN SAUDI ARABIA

Sociability and Segregation in the City of Jeddah in the Twentieth and Early Twenty-First Centuries

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In Jeddah, as much as elsewhere in Saudi Arabia, spaces of commerce and consumption have for a long time been shaped by social practices of segregating unrelated men and women. This chapter traces the history of such spaces – from the *sūq* of around 1900 to the shopping centers of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries – from a gendered perspective. Trade started to be an important pillar of Jeddah’s economy long before this period, and it has left its imprint on the city.¹ In fact, ever since the rise of Islam, Jeddah has been known as the ‘harbor of Mecca,’ accommodating vast numbers of pilgrims on their way to the holy cities of Islam, Mecca and Medina, every year.² In addition, the port of Jeddah has served as an entrepôt for the Red Sea trade route connecting the Indian sub-continent with the Mediterranean via Egypt. In the past, significant parts of the city were dedicated to commercial activities, with the largest mansions belonging to the families of wealthy merchants.³ Over the course of the twentieth century, with the onset of the large-scale oil production in Saudi Arabia after the Second World War, Jeddah developed into the country’s second-largest city, with approximately four million inhabitants in the early twenty-first century. Saudi Arabia’s most important international seaport and largest airport are located there, as are some of its biggest shopping malls.

The city of Jeddah serves as a case in point in this chapter. While practices of gender segregation varied slightly between different cities in the past (cf. al-Nafea’ 2005 for Riyadh), the overall trajectory outlined in the following pages can be considered more or less similar across all major cities in the country, as brief examinations of other Saudi cities, especially the country’s capital city of Riyadh, will show. This is due to the fact that the principle of separating unrelated men and women can be regarded as deeply rooted in the culture of most parts of the region that constitutes today the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Moreover, under Saudi rule, strict gendered rules of conduct were enforced in public throughout the country with the help of the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice,⁴

the so-called religious police, albeit less rigorously in Jeddah than in the more conservative capital. Within this general context of social control and public policing, shopping malls opened in cities across Saudi Arabia in the particularly conservative cultural climate of the 1980s and 1990s (cf. Le Renard 2015, pp. 318–319). As this chapter will argue, they took consumerism to the next level and allowed for the emergence of new forms of sociability and encounter.⁵

Gender and gender segregation in Saudi Arabia and the Middle East at large are a widely discussed and researched topic.⁶ However, the existing literature on gender in Saudi Arabia usually focuses exclusively on women, so the knowledge of gender segregation presented in it must itself be considered as heavily gendered, if not biased, in some cases.⁷ Given the overwhelming attention paid to women's roles and rights in Muslim societies in the Gulf region and the Middle East, it is unsurprising that gender segregation has long been understood, rather one-sidedly, as a limitation of women's freedom of movement. In the 1980s and 1990s, feminist scholars of the Middle East highlighted that even if women's activities in public, as well as their public visibility, are severely restricted, they constitute their own women-only publics and are not powerless (Joseph 1983; Abu-Lughod 1986, 1990; Altorki 1986; Chatty and Rabo 1997; Stolleis 2004). Yet, the research following this line of thought was centered on the position of women alone – it rarely reflected upon men-only sociality or the patterns of relationships between men and women, let alone the effects gender segregation has for men. This feminist strand of research can be regarded as an attempt to counterbalance a long history of gender-blind literature produced mainly by male scholars, who investigated spaces and institutions in the Middle East, past and present, without considering the role of women, thus rendering them silent and absent from all aspects of public life.

In Western public discourse, gender segregation in Muslim societies is still predominantly framed as a way of restricting women's mobility and freedom – hence as an expression of male domination over women. However, academic research on the topic has become more nuanced, especially since Saba Mahmood challenged widespread assumptions on gender relations in Muslim contexts in her groundbreaking book, *Politics of Piety* (2005). Recent scholarship on gender in Saudi Arabia, informed by Mahmood (e.g., Le Renard 2011, 2014; al-Rasheed 2013; van Geel 2016, 2018), has emphasized that non-liberal rules and practices, such as gender segregation and veiling, are not necessarily perceived as coercions by the women who observe them, but, instead, constitute, at least for some women, an essential part of the cultivation of a pious self. Using anthropological methods such as participant observation and interviews, Amélie Le Renard (2011, 2014, 2015) has offered valuable insights into Saudi women's social practices, highlighting the social significance of shopping centers and 'women-only' or 'families-only' spaces of consumption and sociability. Authors such as Le Renard and Madawi al-Rasheed have also shed light on the diverse opinions that Saudi women have on these norms and practices, as well as on ways of contesting and transforming the official gender policy of the Saudi state. However, they do not address how gender segregation and other gender-related practices in Saudi Arabia affect the lives of men. Even al-Rasheed's *A Most Masculine State* (2013) is a book about women in Saudi Arabia, although the title would suggest the opposite.

This chapter aims to contribute to the much-debated topic of gender segregation in Saudi Arabia by offering a more balanced perspective through the lens of consumption. It is informed by the expanding field of Middle Eastern masculinity studies (e.g., Ghoussoub

and Sinclair-Webb 2000; Jacob 2010; Amar 2011; Inhorn 2012; De Soudy 2013; Menoret 2014; Merabet 2014), but it does not solely focus on men; instead, it suggests that gender segregation can be better understood if its implications for both men and women are considered. The findings presented in this chapter are based on my book, *New Islamic Urbanism* (Maneval 2019a), which uses a variety of visual, oral, and written sources. The first section, dealing with the first half of the twentieth century, presents an analysis of historical photographs and autobiographies. A brief second section, summarizing the developments that occurred from the 1960s through the 1990s, draws on secondary literature, as this period is relatively well-researched. Finally, the third section, dedicated to the first two decades of the twenty-first century, is informed by my fieldwork (five months in total) conducted in Jeddah between 2008 and 2012, updated and expanded in March 2019 and May 2022.

Gendered Spaces of Commerce and Sociability in Jeddah, ca. 1900–1950

From the late nineteenth until the mid-twentieth century, the most important market street in Jeddah, known today as *Sūq al-ʿAlawī*, led pilgrims from the harbor in the west to the Mecca Gate in the east. The regular stream of pilgrims made this street the most lucrative location for shop owners, especially where it intersected the city’s north-south axis, *Sūq al-Nadā* (Krause 1991, p. 52). Historical photographs of the commercial area show crowds of people passing by the shops in the early twentieth century: customers, salespeople, porters, and workers wearing a large variety of garments and headgear, attesting to the different origins and social statuses of the visitors of the market. What is striking is that one can only see men in these pictures, save a small number of women sitting on the ground in an open square close to the harbor. These may have been pilgrims waiting for their journey to continue or some of the few women selling agricultural produce or homemade food out of economic necessity.⁸

Women are indeed almost absent in historical photographs of the streets and markets of Jeddah in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There are rare exceptions: Raphaël Savignac, a Dominican friar who traveled with the French military expedition to the Arabian Peninsula during the First World War, took a snapshot of two fully veiled women in the street as they passed by the photographer. The shaky image stands in sharp contrast to Savignac’s other photographs, suggesting that the picture was taken hastily, without a tripod, as he was undoubtedly aware that taking pictures of women was socially unacceptable. A few similar point-and-shoot images of women were taken by Charles Winckelsen, another Frenchman, who visited Jeddah in 1918. Some more can be found in the photo collection of famous Dutch orientalist Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857–1936), which spans the period from the mid-1880s to the 1930s. The only women who smile into the camera without hesitation or distress are visibly from poor socio-economic backgrounds. In one picture, there is a young barefoot woman dressed in rags, carrying a baby and a basket; in another, a young woman with a baby on her back sits next to some fishing boats at the port, her dress revealing shoulders, arms, and upper part of her back. Their substandard clothes and dark complexions suggest that they were probably enslaved (or formerly enslaved), as most of the enslaved people in Jeddah, especially female domestic servants, came from sub-Saharan Africa (Toledano 1998, pp. 6–7, 2007, p. 79; Ṭarābulṣī 2008, p. 261).

In sum, the photographic evidence from the early twentieth century indicates that women, except those in the lowest social strata, avoided being photographed and seen in public. A saying from the region of the Hijāz confirms this impression, stating, ‘A woman leaves her house twice: she leaves her father’s house when she is married, and leaves her husband’s house when she is buried.’ The author who cites this saying, Hisham Jomah, limits its scope, adding: ‘Women went out to visit relatives and parents but not for any sort of participation in public functions or entertainment’ (Jomah 1992, p. 231). Ideally speaking, in early twentieth-century Jeddah, a woman’s place was inside the house, which is also where women met and socialized (Altorki 1986, p. 55).

The street and the market were occupied by men and perceived as inappropriate for women. Social control ensured that women avoided the market, as shopkeepers or men sitting in the streets could have recognized them (Sijeeni 1995, p. 149). If their families could afford a servant, women would have him buy what they needed. Shopkeepers would also come to affluent households upon request to allow women to choose from a selection of goods, as reported in the memoirs of Marianne Alireza (2002, pp. 66–67), an American woman married to a wealthy Saudi man, who lived in Jeddah from 1945 to 1957. However, as mentioned by Jomah, women often left their homes in order to visit neighbors, friends, and relatives, to attend weddings and other festivities, or to go to the cemetery to pay their respects to the deceased (cf. Didier 1857, p. 133; al-Shahrani 1992, p. 55). But whereas men spent much of their time lingering in the streets, women were only supposed to traverse public spaces if unavoidable and as quickly as possible. They were not to participate in the activities occurring there, like shopping.

Adherence to this rule was not so much a matter of religiosity as it was of social standing. The visibility of the two poor women with their children photographed by Winckelsen indicated the low status of these women. Women at the other end of the social scale, such as the veiled ladies in Savignac’s snapshot, avoided being seen. Being photographed, even fully veiled, represented being seen, and this was intolerable to them. A distinction made by the anthropologist Michael Gilsenan (2008) between ‘being visible,’ in the literal, physical sense, and ‘being seen,’ as the result of a socially determined activity, helps to understand women’s position in public. Women were ‘in the literal sense of the word visible. But they [were] not “seen”’ (p. 172). The social practice of women avoiding being seen required men to actively avoid seeing women. For example, in his memoirs, ‘Abbās al-Faḍlī recounts how men in Jeddah looked in another direction when a woman passed by so as not to disturb her (2010, p. 13).

The male sphere of commerce and trade continued inside the house, and so did the rule that women should not be exposed to the gaze of unrelated men. The head of the family often had his office on the ground floor, where he received customers and entertained guests. The upper floors of the houses were usually reserved for women and families. Since a fixed spatial division between a male public sphere outside and a female domain inside did not exist and contact between unrelated men and women had to be avoided not just in the streets but also inside the home, men entering residential buildings had to be cautious not to see or disturb the women present inside. Most men – particularly those perceived as strangers, e.g., customers or pilgrims on their way to Mecca who were accommodated in people’s homes (cf. Rathjens and Wissmann 1947, pp. 80–81; Anṣārī 1972, p. 183) – were not supposed to enter the upper floors at all. Friends and relatives who were not *maḥram*, i.e., not suitable for marriage due to a close degree of kinship, had to make themselves conspicuous while climbing up or down stairs in order to warn women of their presence and

avoid any contact (Jomah 1992, p. 199; al-Fadlī 2010, pp. 13–14). When women visited each other inside their homes, which happened regularly in the context of mutual, formal gatherings known as *wu'ūd* (Altorki 1986, p. 32), men had to leave the floors occupied by the women. Men socialized on the ground floor or outside the home, either directly in front of it, in front of a mosque, or at one of the cafés, so they would not disturb the women's gatherings.

The rules of gender segregation in the first half of the twentieth century thus entailed that trade, commerce, and shopping were considered male activities, and women avoided the spaces dedicated to these activities, namely, the *sūq* and the ground floor offices of merchant houses. Women were not forbidden to enter or traverse these spaces, but as being seen by non-*mahram* men was regarded as shameful, women did not spend more time than absolutely necessary in the streets and usually did not leave the house to go shopping. Once a year, during the al-Qays carnival in the ḥajj season, when many men were absent (either temporarily working in Mecca or performing the pilgrimage themselves), the roles of men and women changed. For the four nights of the carnival, women dressed as men and paraded through the city, playing drums, performing dances, and singing songs mocking men. The men remaining in the city during the carnival had to be careful not to get into the parading women's way if they didn't want to risk getting a beating (Freitag 2014).

The reversal of gendered rules of conduct and movement during the carnival of al-Qays further illustrates that no stable topography of permanently male or female places existed in Jeddah at this time. However, the rule that contact between unrelated men and women should be avoided inside the homes and in the streets had to be respected at all times, requiring both men and women to be attentive to it.

Societal Change from the 1960s through the 1990s

In the second half of the twentieth century, due in part to the large numbers of foreign experts and workers that moved to Saudi Arabia to help set up infrastructure for the oil industry and other branches of the economy and in part to an increasing number of Saudis who started traveling, studying, and living in the US and Europe for long periods, social norms and rules of conduct started to change. The 1960s and 1970s saw women becoming more visible in public and gaining more autonomy than in previous decades. Although it was not yet accepted for women to have employment that required leaving the house, a rising proportion of women went to school, and it was not uncommon for daughters of privileged families to earn university degrees abroad (Doumato 2000, pp. 2–4). It became normal for many Saudi women to go shopping in the *sūq* and, a bit later, in the various shopping centers, which started to open in the city. Some of these women were accompanied by their husbands or fathers, while others went shopping without the company of men. More and more women ceased to cover their faces in public. Instead of asking for permission, they would simply inform their husbands if they went out (Altorki 1986, p. 56).

This trajectory of societal change shifted in the conservative cultural climate of the 1980s and 1990s (Ochsenwald 1981; Dekmejian 1994; Teitelbaum 2000). Inspired by extensive religious instruction at school and religious TV broadcasts promoting Wahhabi teachings,⁹ as well as by the anti-liberal teachings of the Ṣaḥwa movement (*ṣaḥwa* = 'awakening,' or religious revival; see Fandy 1999; Lacroix 2011), men and women intermingled less, even in the context of private festivities (al-Rasheed 2013, pp. 109–110). From the 1980s onward, banks, large mosques, ministries, and other government organizations introduced

female-only branches, and universities opened separate male and female campuses. Most upmarket shopping malls opening in Saudi Arabia at that time, i.e., until Muhammad bin Salman lifted gender segregation in shopping centers in 2017, were gender-divided, and so were upscale cafés, larger restaurants, beach resorts, etc. Normally, a shopping mall's ground floor was reserved for men, while the more opulent upper floors, including the food courts and amusement centers, if available, were for women and families only. Young women began wearing black gloves and stockings as a conservative political statement and expression of piety. Women with uncovered faces risked harassment by the religious police, reprimand by other women, or becoming the subject of slander (Doumato 1999, p. 577, 2000, pp. 20–21). Although the number of women graduating from universities and colleges rose considerably until the end of the 1990s, the employment rate of Saudi women remained low at around 5–6 percent.¹⁰ Better job opportunities for men created by the oil economy and the country's modernization enabled more Saudi families to live solely on men's income. These changes enabled women to leave the house less and thus adhere to the ideal of not being seen in public. This ideal was promoted by leading religious scholars ('*ulamā*'), whose opinions were not necessarily legally binding but were still socially significant. According to Madawi al-Rasheed, more than 30,000 fatwas on women were produced by the Saudi '*ulamā*' from the 1980s onward (al-Rasheed 2013, pp. 111–112). They actively discouraged all women from leaving the house more than absolutely necessary (Doumato 1999, p. 578). Whereas in the past, avoidance of the public realm had marked the economic status and social distinction of a woman and her family, it was now beginning to be perceived as an expression of piety.

It may seem surprising that many Saudi women endorsed the conservative lifestyle promoted in the numerous fatwas dealing with the female body, regulating women's behavior, and limiting their movement. As al-Rasheed explains, they offered women from the lower economic stratum, who could not afford the luxuries of Western-style modernity and consumption, a way of asserting their piety and morality. They provided an ideological framework that allowed them to condemn what was not affordable to them anyway (al-Rasheed 2013, p. 120). In fact, women of the relatively liberal, Western-educated elite came to be more likely to leave the house to attend university, go shopping in the latest of Jeddah's opulent shopping malls, or spend a day at a private beach resort than women of the middle and lower classes. For all this, they depended on a male driver, as women were not allowed to drive themselves, and distances in Jeddah tend to be too far to walk because of an extremely low urban density and a long north-south extension of the urban area that is limited by the Red Sea in the west and the mountains of the Hijaz in the east. The public transportation system is insufficient, and the few operating public bus lines were, and still are, generally considered inappropriate for women whose economic situation does not require taking a bus. Even taxis are not an option for many Saudi women.¹¹

Viewed from a slightly different perspective, as proposed by Nilüfer Göle (2000), among others, one can also consider the pious lifestyle of the conservative sections of the Saudi society as part of a genuinely Islamic modernity. Conservative women, for whom the absence of unrelated men was a condition for participating in any forms of economic and public life, appreciated the increase in women-only spaces protected from men's prying eyes (van Geel 2018, pp. 125–129). The same is true for men: both men and women may consider the spatial division in work, educational, and commercial spaces as a religious demand and *ikhhtilāt*, or 'mixing,' as being against God's will. Given the mutual attention required to be paid by both men and women to avoid verbal and visual contact, some felt (and still feel)

more at ease in the homosocial environment of gender-divided cafés, sports clubs, etc. The lifestyle of this Islamic modernity was no less consumerist than others, with products ranging from abayas, socks, and gloves to soap, food, and children's toys advertised as 'Islamic' or 'Halal.'¹² The Islamic consumer culture emerging in the 1980s and 1990s thus allowed conservative Saudis to be pious and modern at the same time.

Saudi Consumer Culture in the Twenty-First Century

At a time when leisure activities in Saudi Arabia were limited (no cinemas, theaters, concerts, bars and nightclubs, no freedom of association and assembly, hardly any public gardens or spaces for outdoor activities), shopping malls and other gender-segregated spaces of consumption became popular places to spend one's spare time and socialize, especially for women. Inside the family section, many women forwent the veil. The male section was usually much smaller and less attractive. For less conservative Saudis or expats living in Saudi Arabia, the families' section of shopping centers also provided opportunities for men and women to meet and interact. A passage from Raja Alsanea's (b. 1981) famous novel, *Girls of Riyadh*, published in Arabic in 2005, illustrates how this was possible, despite the rules of gender segregation:

At the mall entrance the girls got out [of their car]. Behind them appeared a rush of young men, but they all came to a stop uncertainly in front of the security guard. It was his job to keep all unmarried men from entering the mall after the call to the Isha prayer that ushered in nightfall. The weaklings fell back, but one lone fellow summoned his courage and approached Michelle. With her lovely face and delicate features, which she was quite simply incapable of concealing in her eccentric attire, Michelle had stood out from the start as a girl who was possibly bold enough to be looking for adventure. The guy asked Michelle if she would allow him to go in with them as a member of the family, and he offered her a thousand riyals for the privilege. Michelle was astonished at his nerve. But she accepted the deal without much delay, and she and her friends surged forward beside him as if he were one of their group.

(Alsanea 2007, p. 17)

As this episode demonstrates, some men circumvented the rules in the families' section of a shopping center or restaurant by pretending to belong to a woman or group of women as a way to sneak in. One 26-year-old engineer from Lebanon, who had lived in Jeddah for three years, explained to me, 'No one checks if the woman you go out with is really your wife, or your sister' (personal communication, January 2009). However, the passage from Alsanea's novel quoted above also shows that one needed to be bold, as an unaccompanied man, to use this loophole and get into the family's section of a mall. It was the exception rather than the rule.

It was never actually acceptable for men to strike up a conversation with women or vice versa, neither in gender-divided upmarket shopping malls and cafés nor in mixed shopping centers for the middle- and lower-income groups in Jeddah's city center. Yet, before social media and smartphones made it much easier for everyone to get to know each other and communicate online, the relatively anonymous environment of the mall allowed for the hidden exchange of phone numbers while passing by one another, e.g., by dropping a small piece of paper containing one's number or using the Bluetooth technology to connect

mobile phones (Alhadar and McCahill 2011). Calling or texting was then up to the person who picked up the number, usually the woman – and many did to get to know one another on the phone and possibly arrange a date. For gay and lesbian people, interacting with a romantic interest in public homosocial spaces was less conspicuous, as a man striking up an acquaintance with another man, or a woman with another woman for that matter, was considered normal. Of course, shopping malls were not the only places where phone numbers were exchanged: this also happened when cars stopped at red lights and intersections. Some men had their numbers written on their car windows for this purpose. However, it is precisely within shopping malls and other spaces of consumption, like cafés and restaurants, that many women in Saudi Arabia socialize and enjoy having a public life.¹³ And while unrelated men and women were not supposed to meet in Saudi Arabia, in shopping malls, they sometimes did.

Under the reign of the late King Abdullah, more public debate on the position of women in Saudi society was permitted, and stronger participation of women in public life was promoted to enhance the country's image abroad. This was also due to continuous pressure from women's rights movements in Saudi Arabia. Nurah al-Fayiz was appointed the first female deputy minister in Saudi history in 2009. New women's universities were founded, and the participation of women in future municipal elections was announced. In 2009, the co-educational King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) was inaugurated (al-Rasheed 2013, pp. 148–153; Le Renard 2014, pp. 40–43). Approximately 80 km to the north of Jeddah, it was considered a testing ground for *ikhṭilāt*, in spaces open to men and women alike – and disapproved of by the conservative '*ulamā*' condemning the increased mixing of the sexes in work and education as a door opener for adultery and vice (Meijer 2010).

Thus, in the first one-and-a-half decade of the twenty-first century, two observable and diverging trends existed in the approach to gender in Saudi society. The first, favored by both male and female Islamists (among others), was the duplication of spaces described above – the creation of male and female versions of the same public space or female institutions parallel to existing male ones (van Geel 2018, pp. 99–106). While the concept of separating male and female public spaces still prevailed under the reign of King Abdullah, an increasing number of mixed spaces were introduced, as in the co-educational KAUST.

This latter trend has been further promoted under the reign of King Salman (b. 1935) and Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman (b. 1985). Since 2017, establishing contact between men and women has become easier, as gender segregation has been lifted in spaces of consumption such as shopping malls and cafés. Generally speaking, the range of public spaces has become more diverse since cinemas and theaters were allowed to open. Furthermore, the state has started organizing more events: film festivals like the Red Sea Film Festival, electronic dance music parties (Derbal 2020), art events like Jeddah 21'39 or the Islamic Arts Biennale, and funfairs like the Mawsim Jeddah/Jeddah Season. Private art galleries like Athr Art (founded in 2009), cultural centers like Hayy Jameel (opened in 2021), and event locations such as the Jeddah Superdome (inaugurated in 2021) became more visible, organizing exhibitions, workshops, conferences, festivals, and concerts. Regarding gender in the public sphere, women are now allowed to drive and work in fields formerly limited to men, including cafés and shops. In addition, rules of clothing and veiling have loosened. For example, one can now observe women wearing fashionable abayas in various styles and colors, no longer just the long black variant covering their entire bodies. One can also see women riding bicycles at the corniche. One might even see women not covering their hair.

Many of the changes above only concern the middle and upper-middle classes who can afford the entrance fees to events like these or the prices of upscale cafés and restaurants. They can be considered part of a political strategy to appease the young, educated, relatively liberal-minded middle and upper-middle classes and enhance the country's image abroad. Yet, at the same time, political freedoms have been further curtailed, with more political prisoners (often without legal judgments) and executions than ever, intimidating journalists and silencing critical voices. Furthermore, the living conditions of the lower-middle and working classes, including many non-Saudi nationals, have deteriorated immensely due to Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman's destruction of large parts of the so-called unplanned neighborhoods, which are mostly located in the south of Jeddah. In the past, these were some of the liveliest neighborhoods in the city. But, between 2021 and 2022, the densely populated districts of al-Kandara, al-Hindawiyya, al-Baghdadiyya, al-Sabeel, al-Thaghr, al-Ghulail, and Petromin, to name just a few, have been systematically destroyed. A total of 0.5–1.5 million inhabitants, according to most estimates (official figures do not exist), were forced to evacuate these lower-class residential and mixed residential/commercial areas before their homes, dozens of street markets, and hundreds of shops, cafés, and restaurants were bulldozed. By the end of 2022, no official plan for the reconstruction of these areas seemed to exist, only rumors about the biggest land grab by the Saudi royal family in the city's, if not the entire kingdom's, history.

The only thing that seems inevitable is that new shopping centers will be constructed in Jeddah, soon. Meanwhile, although gender segregation in shopping centers and other spaces of consumption has been officially abolished, unwritten rules of conduct still regulate men and women's interactions and movements. While unaccompanied men now have access to the food courts of a shopping mall, for example, many families dining there will still consider it to be offensive if an unaccompanied man sits down at a neighboring table, facing the women. He may be asked to sit down elsewhere – just as in other mixed spaces elsewhere in the city, such as the popular picnic areas at the corniche.

Conclusion

The inquiry into spaces of consumption in Jeddah from a gendered perspective that takes both men and women, as well as the relationship between them, into account has shown that, while, in the past, shopping in Jeddah was primarily done by men, today, shopping malls are among the most popular places for women to spend their spare time and meet friends, and for men and women to meet. In the first half of the twentieth century, the male sphere of commerce and trade stretched from the market streets of the *sūq* to the ground floors of residential buildings, whereas the sphere of women's sociability was mainly on the upper floors of the houses. Even though the walls of the buildings did not define fixed physical boundaries between male and female spaces, the division between unrelated men and women had to be maintained inside the homes and on the streets. Thus, both men and women were required to take measures to avoid verbal and visual contact. Women traversed the places usually occupied by men quickly and only when necessary, and men actively avoided seeing them and warned them when they passed through parts of a house where they might encounter unrelated women.

Since the large-scale export of oil has brought tremendous wealth to Saudi Arabia, shopping in Jeddah is no longer a mere household chore – it has become a leisure activity. From the 1980s on, after a brief period of relative liberalization in the 1960s and 1970s,

the proliferation of urban spaces defined as either male, female, or families-only created protected spaces for women and new opportunities for them to engage in female public activities. At the same time, the boundaries between male and female public spaces were increasingly stabilized, making encounters and contact between unrelated men and women more unlikely. In the conservative cultural climate of the 1980s and 1990s, women's visibility in mixed public spaces like the streets was severely limited. Families-only spaces of consumption, such as the families' sections of shopping malls, cafés, and restaurants, especially in the city's northern districts, became a focal point of Saudi public life – to which unaccompanied, mostly young and unmarried men did not have access, unless they snuck in.

As gender segregation was abolished in shopping centers and other spaces of consumption under the rule of Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman, it has become easier for men and women to meet and get to know one another. However, many unwritten gendered rules of conduct persist, and mutual caution of both men and women to avoid visual contact is still required. Rather than becoming obsolete, such rules spread to formerly gender-segregated places where the mixing or social co-presence of men and women is now allowed.

Notes

- 1 For a general history of Jeddah, see Freitag 2020.
- 2 An overview of the estimated number of pilgrims in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is provided by Lewis 2012.
- 3 For a history of merchant families from Hadhramout in Jeddah, see Pétriat 2016.
- 4 *Hay'at al-amr bil-ma'rūf wal-nahy 'an al-munkar*, in Arabic. See Cook 2001, pp. 181–188 for the circumstances leading to the establishment of the *hay'a* in the late 1920s in the Hijaz.
- 5 Among the first to highlight the new forms of sociability enabled by shopping malls was Mona Abaza (2001, 2006), in her detailed inquiry into the changing modes of consumer culture in Egypt.
- 6 For Saudi Arabia, see, e.g., Yamani 1996, 2000, 2004; Doumato 2000, 2009; Hamdan 2005; Le Renard 2008, 2011, 2014; Meijer 2010; al-Rasheed 2013; van Geel 2016, 2018; for the Middle East in general, see, e.g., Kandiyoti 1996; Joseph 2000.
- 7 A noticeable exception is Menoret 2014.
- 8 Burckhardt (1829, p. 31) noticed women in the street selling bread, and Ṭarābulī (2008, pp. 248, 308) mentions a few women selling beans and cooked meals in Sūq al-Nūriyya in al-Yaman quarter.
- 9 Wahhabism is a term often used to denote the dominant school of Islam in Saudi Arabia, named after the eighteenth-century scholar Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab from the Najd area in central Arabia. As a branch of the Hanbali school of jurisprudence, it is known for a rigid distinction between right and wrong, true Islam and *bid'a* (undesired religious 'innovation'), and monotheism (*tauhīd*) and idolatry (*shirk*). The concept of 'commanding right and forbidding wrong' (*al-amr bi l-ma'rūf wal-nahy 'an al-munkar*) is central to Wahhabism, justifying the policing of public spaces and the enforcement of moral standards defined by religious scholars. The terms Wahhabism and Wahhabi are not used by followers of these teachings, who refer to themselves as *ahl at-tauhīd* (monotheists).
- 10 In 2004, 72 percent of women in employment were working in girls' education, 22 percent were working in the health sector, 5.3 percent were social workers, and 2 percent were employed by a university, see Za'zū' 2004, p. 17. In her study of female employment in Jeddah, Za'zū' (2004, pp. 57–59) shows that, in the 1990s, women of all social strata were working in the education sector. While two thirds of all female employees working in this field lived in middle-class neighborhoods to the northeast of Jeddah, she found women working as teachers, kindergarteners, and university professors, or in the administration of a school distributed in all districts across the city (Za'zū' 2004, pp. 90–94).
- 11 Za'zū's (2004) above-quoted empirical study of employed women's way to their workplace is, again, illuminating in this regard. 83.5 percent of the 1,222 female employees participating in her study used private cars driven by a privately employed driver or a relative to commute to the

workplace, as compared to only 6.5 percent traveling by taxi and 4.1 percent traveling by bus, see Za'zū' 2004, pp. 183, 188–189.

12 Cf. Kokoschka 2016; for some examples of such products, see Maneval and Bauch 2021.

13 For the use of different forms of privatized urban spaces in Saudi Arabia, such as gated communities, beach resorts, amusement parks, and shopping malls, to constitute publics and occasionally what Michael Warner, among others, has called counterpublics, see Maneval 2019b.

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18

MUSLIM DISCUSSIONS ABOUT TATTOOING AS BODY MODIFICATION

Göran Larsson

Without making any claim to be representative, this chapter consists of a brief overview of the research literature dealing with Muslim discussions about body modifications with a special focus on tattooing. Like most of the previous literature, it should be remembered that my focus is on the opinions of Muslim scholars and not on how lay Muslims (i.e., most Muslims who lack a formal Islamic education) ask for advice on these matters, or if they follow, alter, or reject the recommendations of Islamic institutions and individual scholars who have issued *fatwas* on them. It should therefore be emphasized that there has always been a discrepancy between theory (i.e., what Muslim scholars say or demand) and practice (i.e., what individual Muslims do with the recommendations issued by Muslim scholars).

Questions concerning body modifications, or more specifically Islamic opinions about tattoos, is a topic that has received attention in both printed books and online media platforms, not least in so-called online *fatwa* services, i.e., sites that answer questions regarding various issues that require an ‘Islamic’ answer or guidance.

The use of various communication media, like the printing press, radio, or television, is not a new phenomenon, and Muslim scholars have always engaged with and made use of them to spread their own interpretations of Islam (Larsson 2010). For instance, media technologies have been used by emerging nation-states in the wider Muslim world to establish control and instill nationalism, but these technologies have also been employed to question or topple such regimes. A well-known example is how cassette recordings were used prior to the revolution in Iran. With their help, it was possible to circulate anti-regime criticism and prepare the population of Iran for the revolution that took place in 1979 (Sreberny and Mohammadi 1994). Another example is the use of social media like Twitter or Instagram during the so-called Arab Spring uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa in 2011. But communication media have also been employed by various Islamists to spread their messages, not least after the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the rise of the Islamic State in 2014 (cf. Awan 2017). The development of new communication technologies like satellite television and the internet has therefore been of great importance in the spread of various forms of Islam. Some scholars, like the Egyptian Yusuf al-Qaradawi (d. 2022) or the popular preacher ‘Amr Khaled (b. 1967), to mention just two well-known examples, have become

global celebrities by using the latest media to disseminate their specific interpretations of Islam. With the emergence of new technologies, global television shows like *al-sharia wal-hayat* (broadcast by the satellite television station *Al Jazeera*) have become popular (e.g., Gräf and Skovgaard-Petersen 2009; Olsson 2015).

Today, a vast number of internet sites provide online guidance (often in the form of *fatwas*), while a similarly vast number of YouTube channels and social media platforms offer lectures and guidance on any topic that deals with Islam. This development can be understood as a sort of democratization of Islam – i.e., all interpretations are out there – but at the same time, it has created a new situation in which old educational structures are being threatened (Hamdeh 2009). On this development, Peter Mandaville writes:

Due to the largely anonymous nature of the Internet, one can also never be sure whether the authoritative advice received via these services is coming from a classically trained religious scholar or a hydraulic engineer moonlighting as an amateur *'alim*.
(2001, p. 183)

Without delving more deeply into the media history of Islam and Muslims, the development of communication technologies has also had an impact on questions and debates about body modifications and tattoos. Today, it is easy to search for and find guidance that supports any decision, both for and against body modifications or tattoos. Influences and warnings, or even support, are basically just a mouse click away from the individual who has access to the internet and some basic skills when it comes to language and computers.

In this chapter, I focus on Islamic opinions on tattooing, both past and present. Even though I give some historical examples, my focus is on contemporary Sunni *fatwas* that mainly target Muslim audiences in the West. The sources have, therefore, either been published in English or been translated from Arabic into English, and they are produced primarily by Muslim scholars who can best be labeled as belonging to some of the broad categories of Islamism, Salafism, or the Muslim Brotherhood. Compared to discussions found among Sunni Muslims, Shii Muslims tend to be more accepting of tattoos. One example is the Iraqi *marja*, Ayatollah Al-Sistani (b. 1930), who argues that there 'is no authoritative prohibition on tattoos' (Turner 2011, p. 94). This opinion is echoed by Sayyid Ali Hosseini Khamenei (b. 1939), the supreme leader of Iran, who makes the following conclusion regarding tattoos. He states:

Tattooing is not *ḥarām* [forbidden], and the mark it leaves under the skin does not form a barrier to water reaching the skin. Thus, *ghusl* and *wuḍū'*, with a tattoo on any part of the body, are valid.

(Khamenei 2005, p. 288, question/answer 1220)

Even though this attitude is different from those of most of the Sunni Muslim scholars in the following pages, the choice of images, texts, or symbols that are tattooed on the body is of great importance for Shii Muslim scholars, and motifs that are deemed offensive or against Islamic creeds and ethics should be avoided. But how to make this distinction is seldom made explicit, and what is considered improper is therefore related to prevailing power structures and cultural norms.

Muslim Discussions about Body Modifications

Given the rapid advances in medical treatments and biomedicine, questions about body modifications and beautification techniques are closely related to the fields of bioethics, medical anthropology, and the study of Islam (e.g., Brockopp and Eich 2008). But these topics are also associated with practical Islamic teachings, i.e., how Muslims ‘should’ reason and respond to the new possibilities and challenges posed by such advances and changes in society for the individual believer (for instance, when it comes to fashion and taste, as well as technological developments). These discussions are generally normative and driven by theological convictions. Whether addressing the past or the present, a central message in the Quran is that humans should accept God’s creation and their own personal destinies. Consequently, they should not alter God’s creation. For instance, in Surah 4:119, it is said that Satan has installed a desire in humans to alter God’s creation. This passage reads:

And surely I will lead them astray, and surely I will arouse desires in them, and surely I will command them and they will cut the cattle’s ears, and surely I will command them and they will change Allah’s creation. Whosoever chooseth Satan for a patron instead of Allah is verily a loser, and his loss is manifest.

(*Quran 4:119*).¹

However, if humans fall for this temptation, it means that they have been deceived by Satan and thus are not going by God’s will (cf. al-Qaradawi 2001). Moreover, as humans are created in the best of molds (cf. Quran 82:7–8), to change what God has created can also be interpreted as believers not obeying or following God’s commands. This passage reads:

Who created thee, then fashioned, then proportioned thee? Into whatsoever form He will, He casteth thee.

(*Quran 82:7–8*).

It is also argued that humans are born with a natural disposition (*fitra*), and consequently, they shall not leave the path of or make alterations to God’s creation (on the concept of *fitra*; see Hoover 2022). This is yet another aspect that Muslims should consider if they want to change or modify their bodies in any way. For instance, in Surah 30:30, the concept of *fitra* is addressed and put in relation to alteration. This passage reads:

So set thy purpose (O Muhammad) for religion as a man by nature upright – the nature (framed) of Allah, in which He hath created man. There is no altering (the laws of) Allah’s creation. That is the right religion, but most men know not.

(*30:30*).

At the same time, humans have always tried their best to adorn and beautify themselves with, for instance, cosmetics (Helmecke 2006), clothes, perfumes (Anderson 2006), or jewelry, and it is not uncommon in both the past and the present for humans to use different physical exercises to make the body more beautiful, or to hinder or slow down the process of aging (for several examples from Islamic history and Islamic literature, see Ben-Ari 2013). For instance, when writing about cosmetics in medieval Islamic traditions, Giesela Helmecke explains that ‘The traditional ideal of beauty stated that women’s skin should

be white, soft, smooth, and hairless' (2006, p. 177). Even though humans are born with a certain amount of hair, a specific physical body (with both strengths and potential weaknesses), or a certain amount of pigment, there are numerous examples of local practices in Islamic history that can be seen as being usable for alteration or beautification. For instance, the use of *kubl* as an eye decoration or of henna for coloring the hands, feet, or hair is well-documented in early historical sources (Hirsch 2021). While some temporary forms of make-up, like *kubl* or henna, are easy and painless to remove, others entail permanent bodily alterations, like circumcision or tattoos (Larsson 2011).

Even though permanent modifications are usually criticized or even forbidden, this should not be taken as an indication that they were not used by Muslims in past periods – on the contrary. It is also worth highlighting that it is mandatory for Muslim males to be circumcised even though they are born uncircumcised.² Leaving this paradox aside, most Muslim scholars have tried to solve the problem of body alterations by making distinctions between what is seen as essential (*darura*), necessary (*haja*), and complimentary (*tahsin*). When discussing these matters, it is also usual to differentiate between what is *maslaha* (beneficial) and what is *mafsada* (harmful) to the individual or society (Naqib Hamdan 2021; cf. Zaman 2004; Ben-Ari 2013).

Echoing these principles, it is often emphasized that God is good and thus would not inflict unnecessary pain on humans. In line with this reasoning, it has even been argued that God tests or 'selects' individuals who are born with a specific disability. Instead of viewing, for instance, the blind or deaf as less perfect, many Muslim scholars have seen them as having been selected or chosen by God (Ghaly 2010). This, of course, is an ideal, and it is likely that many individuals have suffered scorn and hardship because of their handicaps in both the past and the present (cf. Taha Hussein 1997). Even though this should be seen as an indication that physical differences are all part of God's plan, several Muslim scholars have argued that some operations and modifications, even though they might be permanent and non-reversible, are permissible under the right circumstances. Naqib Hamdan writes:

Procedures categorized as *darurah* and *hajah* are surgeries performed with the stated purpose of either saving a patient's life, or treating a patient, or restoring the normal functions (or appearance) of a defective body part. Hence, these two types of surgery aim to expunge any kind of injury that afflicted the patient, whether physical types such as burn injuries and post-cancer breast reconstruction, or emotionally debilitating abnormalities like the oversized nose or even a breast larger than normal, inducing shame and loss of self-confidence in interacting with the wider society.

(2021, p. 74)

The above quotation indicates that some operations or alterations are sound and permissible and may even be prescribed by some Muslim scholars. For example, male circumcision is justified by saying that it prevents drops of urine from remaining on the foreskin after Muslim males have conducted the obligatory ritual cleansing (*wudu* or *ghusl*) to pray (Hirsch 2021, p. 731; cf. Wheeler 2004). However, returning to the quotation above, it appears that some operations are not considered legal or sound by most Muslim scholars. For instance, alterations solely for the purposes of beautification or vanity are generally not approved of (Hirsch 2021; Naqib Hamdan 2021). This is also one of the reasons why tattoos can become a problem. For instance, when a Muslim performs the ritual cleansing (*wudu*

or *ghusl*), they cannot wash away the ink inserted into the body (cf. Rokib and Sodiq 2017, pp. 55–56). Does this violate the prerequisite to be ritually clean before praying? This seems to be the case if you listen to one of Mohammad Rokib and Syamsul Sodiq’s informants discussing the so-called Indonesian Muslim punk scene. This minor counter-culture movement associates itself with Islam but is also positive about tattoos, punk music, and what is often seen as an anti-social lifestyle, at least according to the majority (cf. Day Howell 2010). He says:

Islam clearly forbids a dirty thing such as tattoos. If our body is dirty, our mind can be dirty too. Look at the Punk Muslim’s styles. They are dirty people because they didn’t clean their tattoos out of their body. It is forbidden in Islam to have a permanent tattoo because it can invalidate their *wudu* (ritual ablution) before prayers. Being Muslims, they must be clean and pure. They cannot claim their self as Muslim before erasing their tattoos.

(Quoted in Rokib and Sodiq 2017, p. 56)

Even though Muslim scholars might provide different answers to this question, it is not uncommon to argue that it is, for example, necessary to remove nail polish that has been applied before the *wudu* is valid (cf. Mirpuri 1998, p. 79; *Islamic Fatawa Regarding Women* 1996, pp. 272–274). For instance, Mahmood Ahmed Mirpuri, a graduate of the Al-Madinah Al-Munawwara and a promoter of Islamic Da’wah in the UK, argues that nail polish is a problem for ritual purity. He argues:

Nail polish is a thick substance, like plastic, and obviously water cannot go through it to wet the nails. Therefore, they will stay dry in that sense and hence *Wudû* will be considered incomplete.

(Mirpuri 1998, p. 80)

In line with this argument, Mirpuri would most likely find tattoos to be a problem for ritual purity as well. His attitude is not generalizable, but it resembles that of many other modern Muslim scholars that want to purify Islam from what they see as un-Islamic beliefs and practices; Mirpuri can therefore be viewed as the producer of a so-called halalization of Islam, i.e., a producer providing clear yes (*halal*) and no (*haram*) answers to complicated questions. As shown by François Gauthier, this ‘halalization of Islam’ is a recent phenomenon: ‘Halal is born as a bottom-up process that resulted from the encounter between the consumerists “needs” of Muslims and market-born initiatives.’ This development, argues Gauthier, was not the ‘initiative of traditional or moderate Muslims’ but an outcome of ‘the theological reductionism of fundamentalist Muslim modernists’ providing arguments in favor of *halal* products (2021b, p. 139).

However, the earlier quote from Naqib Hamdan indicates other potential problems. For instance, how should ‘normal function,’ ‘abnormal,’ or even ‘normal’ be defined, by what criteria, and by whom? Is it up to the individual wishing to undertake a specific body modification, or should social norms and values (even fashions) be the measuring stick? Although some Muslim scholars are attentive to emotional stress or personal insecurities caused by a patient’s individual perceptions about their body – for instance, too big a nose, brownish teeth, a small chest – this is not generally something that would make body modification acceptable or permissible. Still, it is not uncommon for Muslim scholars to have a patriarchal tendency or bias. Thus, it is generally considered admissible for Muslim women

to have their ears pierced (*thaqab*), an alteration motivated by the claim that women are created imperfect compared to men, who are perfect (Hirsch 2021, pp. 728–729).

When discussing these and similar topics, Muslim scholars generally make a sharp distinction between necessary and unnecessary interventions in the body. This difference is, for instance, stressed in the collection, *Islamic Fatawa Regarding Women*.

Beautification is of two types. One is beautification to remove blemish or disfigurement that is the result of an accident or something else. There is nothing wrong with that ... The second type of beautification is superfluous and is not done to remove blemish or disfigurement. It is done only increase one's beauty. This is forbidden and not permissible.

(Islamic Fatawa Regarding Women 1996, pp. 346–347)

In this *fatwa*, the possibility of Muslim women undergoing plastic surgery to become more attractive is rejected. However, in the collection *Fatawa Islamiyah*, it is possible to find a similar question, but, this time, asked by a Muslim male. He writes:

In America, when a person is afflicted with baldness, the doctor takes hair from the back of his head, and 'plants' it in the affected area. Is this practice permitted?

(Fatawa Islamiyah 2002, pp. 227–228)

Although the *mufti* declares that it is wrong to undergo operations to change the body to make it more beautiful, he provides this man with an affirmative answer and writes:

Yes, since this operation consists of returning Allâh's creation to what it was, to removing a defect, and not to beautify, or add to what Allâh Almighty created, then it does not fall under the category of changing the creation of Allâh. Rather it is a form of rectifying a deficiency and removing a defect.

(Fatawa Islamiyah 2002, p. 228)

Without judging the validity or soundness of these arguments, it is not difficult to argue that the specific conclusion addressed above is far from the ideal expressed in the Quran, i.e., that humans should not alter God's creation, at least not out of vanity or sexual desire. Leaving aside this question, it is a reminder that interpretations and understandings of Islam are closely related, on the one hand, to questions of authority and power (not least over interpretations and practices) and, on the other hand, to prevailing legal norms and medical developments (i.e., what is possible with the aid of surgery or other forms of medical treatment, a topic of great relevance when discussing Islamic bioethics; cf. Brockopp and Eich 2008). However, it is also necessary to consider that what is seen as beautiful, 'normal,' or 'abnormal' is a matter of preference and prevailing cultural norms or ideas. These positions are not given – on the contrary, they are socially and culturally constructed.

Tattooing

One of the earliest forms of body modification in human history is the tattoo (*washm* in Arabic). Numerous examples of *hadith* and *fatwas* show that Sunni Muslim scholars have regarded both those who do the tattooing and those who get themselves tattooed

negatively (Larsson 2011). To provide one example, the following report is included in Bukhari (d. 870 CE):

Allāh's Messenger said, 'Allāh has cursed the lady who lengthens (her own or someone else's) hair artificially, and also the one who gets it lengthened, and also a lady who tattoos (herself or someone else) and also the one who gets herself tattooed [*al-wāshima wa-l-mustawshima*].

(*Bukhari, Vol. 77, Book 77, No. 5937, p. 434*)

This line of reasoning is still used by contemporary Muslim scholars to provide answers regarding the harmfulness of getting a tattoo (cf. Qaradawi 2001). Besides Mohammad's ban against tattoos, it is often argued that God will ask the image-makers (e.g., tattoo artists or painters) to breathe life into their images when they face their maker on doomsday. This is a rhetorical question emphasizing that only God can bring dead things to life (Quran 15:29; 38:72; cf. Larsson 2011).

Despite this condemnation, it is possible to find examples of Muslims, both past and present, who have adorned themselves with tattoos (see Sinclair 1908; Oberling 1962; Carswell 1965; Lane 1973; Lancaster 2002; Ibrić 2010), partly for purposes of beautification, but also for medical and magical purposes (Smeaton 1937), in relation to rituals (Chehabi 2002),³ or as a form of protest (e.g., Ammar 2016). Furthermore, a growing literature deals with Indonesia and the so-called punk scene, adherents of which embrace tattoos as part of their Muslim identity. For instance, Mohammad Rokib and Syamsul Sodik show that there is a class perspective associated with tattoos in Indonesia: while the majority culture looks down on tattoos and those who are tattooed, some young Indonesians have a different and more positive attitude toward this specific form of body modification (2017). Similar reports are also provided from Malaysia (Lim et al. 2013).

However, when outlining these examples, it is necessary to bear in mind the difficulties of making a sharp distinction between cultural and religious norms. While some practices may have been accepted and are seen as part of a culture, they have been scorned or even outright banned by Muslim scholars. The dividing line between what should be seen as a cultural expression and what should be regarded as a 'purified' normative version of Islam is very much a power struggle that is at the center of contemporary discussions and conflicts within Muslim communities when it comes to the role and function of Islamism, especially with the rise of Salafism. It is, therefore, not unusual for those who embrace a Salafi lifestyle in the West to accuse their parents of following a so-called culturally tainted version of Islam that should be purified (cf. de Koning 2013; Damir-Geilsdorf et al. 2019; Olsson 2019; Dogan 2021). Likewise, it is common to accuse Muslims who do not embrace a so-called Salafi *manhaj* ('way of life' or 'methodology') of being impure or even heretics who should be corrected or even persecuted (cf. Larsson 2018). So, when many tribal people and Bedouins have used tattoos as a protection against the evil eye, demons, or *jinn*, it is often difficult to say whether this practice is part of their culture or if this is part of their understanding of Islam. No matter how one defines the sources, an illustrative case is found in Edward Willian Lane's classic book, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, in the following description:

Among the females of the lower order, in the country-towns and villages of Egypt, and among the same classes in the metropolis, but in a lesser degree, prevails a custom somewhat similar to that above described [i.e., colouring with henna]: it consists in making

indelible marks of a blue or greenish hue upon the face and other parts, or, at least, upon the front of the chin, and upon the back of the right hand, and often also upon the left hand, the right arm, or both arms, the feet, the middle of the bosom, and the forehead: the most common of these marks made up the chin and hands ... The operation is performed with several needles (generally seven) tied together: with these the skin is pricked in the desired pattern: some smoke-black (of wood or oil), mixed with milk from the breast of a woman, is then rubbed in; and about a week after, before the skin has healed, paste of the pounded fresh leaves of white beet or cloves is applied, and gives a blue or greenish colour to the marks: or, to produce the same effect, in a more simple manner, some indigo is rubbed into the punctures, instead of the smoke-black, etc. It is generally performed at the age of about five or six years, and by gipsy-women. The term applied to it is 'dakk.'

(1973 [1836], pp. 39–41)

Besides this detailed account of how tattoos were made in Egypt in the nineteenth century, Lane's description is an important reminder that tattoos were already performed on the body in earlier periods. Similar descriptions are also found in Edward Westermarck's *Pagan Survivals in Mohammedan Civilisations* (1973 [1933]). Furthermore, the above-mentioned *hadith* attributed to the Prophet Mohammad in the highly respected collection of al-Bukhari points to tattooing as an early practice in the Islamic world.

Turning to the modern period, it should be emphasized that tattoos have become more common in the wider Muslim world today. This has to do with the impact of popular culture (e.g., film stars, musicians, athletes, adorning themselves with tattoos), global tourism, and migration to the West (Udelson 2008; Ben-Ari 2013). However, general changes in cultural norms, social attitudes, and preferences regarding tattoos are also important factors. Consequently, tattoos have become more visible, and it is not difficult to find a tattoo parlor in most parts of the world. For the above-mentioned Yusuf al-Qaradawi, an influential Egyptian Muslim scholar sometimes associated with the Muslim Brotherhood (Gräf and Skovgaard-Petersen 2009), the popularity and pervasiveness of tattoos is a disturbing development that can pose a serious danger to Muslims.⁴ Besides violating the prohibition on tattoos (as expressed in the *hadith* quoted at the beginning of this section), al-Qaradawi points to a serious problem of Muslims around the world striving to imitate non-Muslims when they undergo various forms of beautification (e.g., getting a tattoo, 'cutting or shortening the teeth,' or undertaking plastic surgery). He writes:

Surgeries for beautification are in vogue today as the result of the materialistic outlook of Western civilization, a civilization stressing the body and its desires. Men and women spend hundreds and thousands of dollars to reshape their noses or breasts, or whatever they consider misshapen. This behavior most certainly belongs in the category of excessive beautification, unnecessarily changing what Allah has created, and it merits the curse of Allah and His Prophet (*pbuh*). It likewise involves torture, pain, and moreover an expression of an individual's preoccupation with form rather than substance, with body rather than with spirit.

(2001, p. 86)

This quotation from al-Qaradawi argues that 'unnecessary' body modifications are associated with the decadent West and a growing individualism linked to vanity and superficiality rather than spirituality. If Muslims decide to have tattoos, they violate the prescriptions and guidance

that the Prophet Mohammad has given, at least according to al-Qaradawi. Therefore, the question of body modifications is seen as a dividing line between a Muslim and non-Muslim lifestyle and outlook. Here, the superficial showcasing of the body (i.e., the non-Muslim body) is contrasted and compared to the spiritual body (i.e., the Muslim body). To adorn oneself with a tattoo is a stigma in many Muslim cultures, and tattooed people are often looked upon as criminals or deviant individuals (cf. Rokib and Sodiq 2017). This negative public perception of tattoos resembles how they have generally been viewed in the Western world until recent decades. Even though some still might find tattoos offensive and associate them with negative values and an anti-social lifestyle, it is fair to say that tattoos have now become part of mainstream Western society (cf. DeMello 1995). According to DeMello:

tattooing has moved from being a symbol of the outcast to that of the rock star, model, and postmodern youth, and with this shift in public perception has come a shift in meaning as well, as tattoo moves from stigma to status.

(DeMello 1995, p. 49)

Irrespective of the warnings given by Muslim scholars like al-Qaradawi, many Muslims (not least among those who live in the West) seem to have accepted a more positive attitude and embraced the possibility of having themselves tattooed. While a person born as a Muslim can make an active decision to abstain from or acquire a tattoo – especially if they live in the West – the subject of tattoos has also become a potential problem for those who convert (‘revert’) to Islam. It is, therefore, not uncommon to find questions about tattoos that were made before the individual embraced Islam. For some, having a tattoo can be a visible sign attracting unwelcome attention in the mosque or during the obligatory *hajj* to Mecca and Medina (Larsson 2011). While these tattoos violate the guidelines ascribed to the Prophet Mohammad, since they may have been acquired before the person embraced Islam, to what extent these tattoos are subjects for public discussions in mosques, and whether they cause anxiety among converts, are relevant topics for future research.

Discussion and Conclusions

This chapter has dealt with Muslim discussions about tattooing as body modification. However, to unpack and contextualize how Muslim scholars have discussed these issues, it is also necessary to pay attention to larger socio-economic changes in the world like globalization, the rise of a neoliberal global market, and the growing demand for *halal* products (cf. Gauthier 2021a). As shown by, for instance, Humeira Iqtidar (2011) and François Gauthier (2021b), while twentieth-century Islamism was focused on the nation-state, current Islamism is more concerned with morality, habits, and consumption. In other words, the very meaning of what it is to be modern and Muslim has changed, and today, a Muslim lifestyle is often entwined with consumption patterns and moral codes. For instance, ‘shopping’ for religious commodities and demanding *halal* products have become ways of showing you are religious. Gauthier writes:

Halal now defines the contours and substance of religion while fitting it in a consumerist frame in a such a way that being a ‘good Muslim’ today basically means consuming and behaving ‘halal’.

(Gauthier 2021b, pp. 146–147)

This turn is related to the rise of a neoliberal global market, the dismantling of the state, and a new focus on the individual and consumerism, as well as novel ways of interpreting Islam. But, according to Gauthier, it is the modern fundamentalist and Islamist movements that have facilitated the arguments and anchored the argumentation in an Islamic framework. In this chapter, I have attempted to illustrate how these changes have impacted how Muslim scholars, both past and present, have addressed and talked about tattooing and body modifications.

As demonstrated, both Muslim scholars and lay Muslims – i.e., those who have not been trained in the Islamic sciences – tend to come up with different answers when asked to distinguish between what is beneficial and what is harmful. A grave challenge for Muslim scholars is to ensure that the decision to have an operation that is permanent and difficult to reverse is not based on mere personal whims but on aims sanctioned by divine revelation. This is, of course, an ideal that may have little to do with real life or with the decisions made by clients and doctors in hospitals and medical clinics or by tattoo artists, or, for that matter, by individuals with a Muslim cultural background. In the words of Bishara S. Atiyeh et al.:

Islamic law regarding cosmetic surgery ... is ambiguous. Objection is not absolute. It is rather objection to exaggeration and extremism. Whenever there is genuine need, there may be a dispensation of permissibility.

(2008, p. 8)

However, what is to be regarded as an ‘exaggeration’ and a form of ‘extremism’ varies in time and space. What is fashionable today might be wrong or frowned upon in the future. Another challenge for Muslims is that there is no unifying authority in Islam that can speak for all or most Muslims, like, for instance, the Pope or a Patriarch capable of providing a ‘Christian answer’ to a specific question. That said, there is great diversity within most, if not all, religious traditions and discourses. The practical problems addressed in this chapter, namely whether it is acceptable for Muslims to make modifications to their bodies, are therefore not unique to Muslims; it is a general problem for both believers and non-believers. As stressed by Shosh Ben-Ari, the cosmetic industry (including plastic surgery) is booming in all parts of the world (including in Muslim-majority countries), and there is no sign that this industry is declining – on the contrary (2013, pp. 158–159).

While this chapter has mainly addressed what some Sunni Muslim scholars think about tattoos as body modifications, there are hardly any studies dealing with how lay Muslims respond to these questions. There are some anthropological studies that indirectly address the question of body modifications and tattoos among various Muslim groups (e.g., Sinclair 1908; Molesworth 1909; Smeaton 1937; Oberling 1962; Carswell 1965), but to the best of my knowledge, few studies focus specifically or explicitly on how lay Muslims view or position themselves toward the possibility of getting a tattoo (one important exception is Rokib and Sodiq 2017) or undergoing plastic surgery (see Krawietz 1991). This is a lacuna in present research on Islam and Muslims that should be addressed in the future. For instance, how do those who self-identify as Muslims in the West view tattoos and those who are tattooed? How are those who had acquired tattoos before they became Muslims viewed? How do tattooed individuals who view themselves as Muslims justify having tattoos? These are some of the critical questions that future research might address with the aid of more field studies, interviews, and participant observation. However, to do so, it is also necessary to

consider how Muslim scholars discuss and debate tattoos (both past and present) and how they relate these discussions to past theological debates and cultural changes in the wider society, as well as attitudinal differences and developments over time. It is also necessary to study how attitudes intersect with cultural norms and socio-economic factors, such as class distinctions, habitus, and religious markets.

Notes

- 1 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the Quran into English are taken from the ‘verse navigator’ published in Corpus Coranicum 2007-2024.
- 2 However, some *hadith* texts indicate that some prominent Muslim males were born already circumcised, for instance, the Prophet Mohammad; cf. Kister 1994.
- 3 See also Molesworth Sykes 1909 on Shii Muslim male wrestlers (*pablevan*) and *zurkhaneh* athletes, who have used tattoos as a form of initiation.
- 4 However, al-Qaradawi is not alone in his concern, and it is quite easy to find both *fatwas* and YouTube clips that deal with Islamic opinions about tattoos and body modifications.

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19

MODERN FATWAS ON SMOKING

Ava Nojoumi

Introduction

Smoking is an ever-present phenomenon worldwide. Whether in the form of water pipes, cigars, or cigarettes, around 1.1 billion smokers worldwide consume tobacco. In the wake of its import from America to Europe, it found its way to North African and Middle Eastern countries in the late sixteenth century (Birnbaum 1956, p. 24). Since that period, smoking has become a contested topic for Islamic scholars on how to deal with this practice and which standpoint should be taken in Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). In the first millennium of Islam, tobacco and smoking had been generally unknown, so primary religious sources to which the issue could be directly related do not exist. Hence, it was up to the scholars of Islam to articulate their normative evaluations of the problem.

This chapter traces how Islamic jurisprudence has tried to handle this new consumer good, and it aims to provide insight into the breadth of arguments and various statements raised by Muslim scholars regarding the smoking of tobacco. It focuses on fatwas from Sunni and Shii authorities that have been influential in modern times. After a few historical snapshots, it starts with the fatwas of Yūsuf al-Qaraḏāwī (1926–2022), an Egyptian scholar who was for decades based in Qatar, and the Egyptian Grand Mufti of al-Azhar Naṣr Farīd Wāṣil (b. 1937), whose fatwas are well reputed among Muslims. Furthermore, this chapter also pays attention to some more minor voices in the new media, given that the realm of the normative discourse, with the advent of the Internet Age, shifted more into the digital sphere, hence gaining unprecedented global reach and influence. This chapter examines online fatwas on smoking from the 1990s to the present. However, it places them, first and foremost, against the background of a much longer normative debate between Muslim scholars on the topic. I highlight some fatwa discussions of smoking from the viewpoint of Islamic jurisprudence, for which I took not only samples from different fatwa websites with a significant broad reach, such as the Sunni ‘islamqa.info’ and the Shiite ‘al-islam.org’ but also some popular posts of speeches from scholars on highly consumed social media platforms such as Instagram or YouTube.

Historical Snapshots of the Smoking Debate

The beginnings of tobacco use are linked to the settlement of the Americas in the fifteenth century, from where the tobacco plant was first exported to Europe and a century later also found its way to the Middle East and South Asia. From an expensive import commodity, mainly consumed by people of the higher class, tobacco grew into a common consumer good available for nearly all strata of society and age. This was made possible when tobacco no longer had to be shipped across the Atlantic as the Ottoman Empire began to supply itself mainly via its own market around 1700 and ‘supplemented by highly esteemed imports from Iran, where the plant had also established itself’ (Grehan 2006, p. 1355). This even undercut the prior import price so that tobacco became more consumed than the also highly popular coffee, which had an earlier history in this region. Furthermore, the equipment for smoking became easier to handle when the originally bigger pipes were shrunken in size so that they could be carried around in everyday life.

With the advent of new popular goods and practices, the political and religious authorities were repeatedly confronted with new challenges. Not only smoking but also the new coffee culture was associated with civil upheavals, so the ruling authorities implemented various, although short-lived, prohibitions. Kissling, the German Orientalist (1912–1985), analyzed a contemporary chronicle of the Ottoman polymath Evliya Çelebi (1611–c. 1683) and drew a line between the ‘orthodox’ camp and the Dervish orders. The former (referring to certain religious scholars or authorities) initially rejected both consumption practices because they classified smoking and drinking coffee under both narcotics and stimulants. They perceived the state caused by these substances in direct analogy to the effects of consuming intoxicating drinks, like alcohol and other drugs. The Dervish orders, however, held the opposite opinion and even embraced them as practical means to more easily perform their extended *arba’ım, samā’*, and *dhikr* rituals. The popularity of the Dervish orders played a crucial role in the spread of these two indulgences. However, in the mosques, there were fervent efforts to preach loudly against smoking, although such endeavors remained largely unsuccessful. Under the reign of Sultan Murad IV (1623–1640), there was a vigorous crackdown on these frowned-upon leisure consumption practices. As a result, coffee houses were closed down, and after several fires had been caused by smokers, smoking was likewise declared forbidden. Yet, even death penalties could not deter the population, and the number of smokers began to exceed that of non-smokers. Among the aspects that Evliya Çelebi discussed regarding the practice of smoking are the questions of whether tobacco causes any benefits or harms, whether it can be considered an innovation (*bid’a*) in Islam, and to what extent it should be regarded as reprehensible, forbidden, or indifferent. Çelebi concluded that there is nothing good to be attributed to tobacco consumption because it encompasses issues ranging from unpleasant odor and health damage to addiction, all of which call for its prohibition. Nevertheless, he proposed to declare the practice as indifferent because an outright ban would only lead people to persistently engage in sin and pursue the ‘forbidden fruit’ (Kissling 1957, pp. 345–346).

One of the most significant events concerning the politicization of smoking is the Tobacco Protest in Iran in 1891 (see Moaddel 1992), which is also declared as the ‘first civil disobedience’ (Taimūrī 1982) and the awakening of political consciousness in Iran (Soudavar Farmanfarmaian 2014, p. 595). At the same time, it marks the beginning of a series of boycott fatwas that aim to challenge the hegemonic world order (Halevi 2012, p. 49).¹ In the early nineteenth century, the first anti-colonial resistance gradually arose in Iran

(Keddie 1966, p. 69). Here especially, Mulla Ahmad Naraqī was decisive in mobilizing Iranians against Russian colonial encroachments in the territories of the Qajar Empire. The role that Naraqī played in Iran at the beginning of the nineteenth century was picked up on at the end of the century by Ayatollah Mirza Shirazi (1815–1895), but this time against the British. The latter claimed, among other demands, the monopoly of production and distribution of Iranian tobacco and awarded the Shah an annual sum of £15,000 in return. This agreement between the Shah and Major Gerald F. Talbot completely shattered the image of the former, who appeared corrupt (Dabashi 2008, p. 46). A series of letters from the leading Shiite *mojtahed*,² Mirza Hasan Shirazi, to the Shah – interdicting the Shah to make concessions to the colonialists – went unanswered.³ Thereupon, Shirazi took the religious legal route and issued a fatwa on December 3, 1891 forbidding the trade and use of tobacco. Because in the Shiite context, fatwas are regarded as binding by the Shiite authoritarian institution of the *marja'-e taqlid*,⁴ a qualification that was ascribed to Shirazi at that time, the consumption of tobacco was abruptly stopped nationwide. This sudden ban on tobacco was unfamiliar to the population, and even in the Shah's court, tobacco was no longer smoked, so 'the forbiddenness to consume tobacco made even the women's gatherings dreary' (*ħormate este 'māle tanbākū majlese khānum-hā rā ham sūt o-kūr kard*) (Taimūrī 1982, p. 132). However, a year later, in 1892, the boycott was lifted as a result of numerous correspondences and complaints from Talbot. Still, the consequences of the 'political awakening' of Iranian society can be traced to the present day.

Normative Approaches

In the past, Muslim scholars had predominantly expressed their discomfort regarding the immorality and nuisance caused by the pastime of smoking, drawing parallels to the frowned-upon and indecent coffeehouse culture or, later, in anti-smoking fatwas driven by anti-colonialist motivations. However, today's normative interpretations primarily rely on knowledge derived from science, medicine, and psychology, focusing on the well-being of the individual and the community, which is elaborated in the following section. Yet, when it comes to the debate about tobacco smoking, many treatises first have to acknowledge the following:

One of the great difficulties concerning tobacco, carried over from the earlier wrangling about coffee, was that jurists could not count on any explicit guidance from scriptural sources, which could not possibly have had anything to say about substances that would not appear until later times.

(Grehan 2006, p. 1359)

The first and most striking feature mentioned in that regard is the non-existence of tobacco smoking during the Prophet's lifetime and throughout the early phase of Islam up to the sixteenth century, which goes hand in hand with the absence of corresponding divine sources, be that in the Quran itself or as Hadiths (Arab. *ħadīth*, pl. *aħādīth*, transmissions about the sayings and deeds of the Prophet, his Companions, and their Followers or, in the Shiite case, the Imams). In contexts that are related to processes of modernization and innovation, Muslim jurists often have to resort to the hermeneutics, sources, and principles of Islamic jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) that, after finding no or imprecise statements in the Quran and Sunna, offer additional methods in a (contested) hierarchical sequence, depending on the respective

legal school or scholar. Theoretically, scholarly consensus (*ijmā'*) and conclusions by analogy (*qiyās*) from similar cases with greater certainty concerning their judgment come third and fourth in the hierarchical range of the Sunni *uṣūl al-fiqh*. Thus, also in the case of tobacco smoking, the extended tools of *uṣūl al-fiqh* had to be resorted to.⁵ However, despite their dearth with regard to smoking, both Quranic verses and Hadiths were included in the evaluation of the problem.

Smell

When talking about tobacco smoking and normative views from an Islamic perspective, the discourse of health probably comes to mind first. However, one argument found in the earlier fatwas, before the harmfulness of tobacco smoking to health was scientifically proven, is the nuisance of its smell. In this regard, an analogy (*qiyās*) has been drawn to the Hadith about the Prophet that even entering a mosque for prayer is not permitted if one has previously eaten garlic or onions so as not to annoy one's fellow human beings with the smell (*Man akala thūman aw baṣalan fal-ya'tazilnā aw la-ya'tazil maṣjidanā wal-yaq'ud fī bay-tibi*).⁶ Because the smell emanating from a smoker is far worse, argues the popular Muslim orator Zakir Naik based on this Hadith, Islamic scholars have, for the time being, classified cigarette smoking mainly as *makrūh* (disapproved) but not *ḥarām* (forbidden) yet. But this argument is still being narrated in contemporary fatwas as well, for example, Shaykh Sa'd Al-Humayd, who states at IslamQ&A:

How many people are offended by the smell of smokers, especially when you are unfortunate enough to have one of them standing next to you in the mosque. [...] The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) forbade those who had eaten garlic or onions from coming to the mosque so that they would not offend their fellow-worshippers with their smell. The smell of onions and garlic is easier to bear than the smell of the smoker and his mouth. These are some of the reasons why smoking is haram.

(*Al-Humayd 2000*)

Health Issues

One of the main arguments mentioned in the health context lies in the medical knowledge about the harmfulness of tobacco smoking for the body and the psyche. As early as 1959, a committee of experts from the Royal College of Physicians in London commissioned a report on 'Smoking and air pollution in their relation to lung cancer and other diseases,' the results of which were published on October 26th, 1961. The study, conducted in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, found that while mortality from cancer (excluding lung cancer) and other lung diseases in general, such as pulmonary tuberculosis, had fallen significantly since the early twentieth century, deaths from lung cancer had risen in direct proportion to the increase in cigarette consumption and advertising expenditures for tobacco products.

In 1977, following the results of proliferating scholarly reports of that kind and a major medical study of 1967, al-Azhar University in Cairo issued its first anti-smoking fatwa on the subject (Hassan 2005). However, it was not until the late 1990s that the Egyptian Grand Mufti of al-Azhar Sheikh Nasr Farid Wasil was the first to publish an official tobacco fatwa due to medical findings, which received the utmost attention. Therein,

he states ‘that smoking is forbidden according to all Islamic law criteria’ (*inna al-tadkhīn ḥarām bi-kull al-maqāyis al-shar‘iyya*); he cites verse 195 of Sura 2 (*al-Baqara*): ‘And do not plunge into perdition! And be righteous! God loves the righteous’ (*wa-lā tulqū bi-aydikum ilā al-tabluka wa-aḥsinū inna llāha yuḥibbu al-muḥsinīn*). Here, *tabluka* (damage) refers to the deterioration of health, which one should not inflict on oneself with one’s own hands (*aydikum*, ‘your hands’) – or through one’s own fault. Smoking, in view of the new medical findings presented above, is ‘nothing but slow poisoning,’ Naik 2012, 1:24 min. and according to Wasil and al-Qaradawi, it stands against the summon listed in Sura 2, verse 195. Wasil also mentions verse 29 of Sura 4 (*al-Isrā’*) in this context: ‘and kill not one another. Lo! Allah is ever Merciful unto you’ (*wa-lā taqtulū anfusakum inna llāha kāna bikum raḥīman*). This verse was used by some scholars for the prohibition of suicide, but it gets polyvalently employed here by Muftis like Wasil to criticize smoking for medical reasons.

Even if Muftis react to changes in scientific knowledge in their fatwas, the time lag between the 1960s and the first prominently effective anti-smoking fatwa in 1999 shows that it took a long time for medical arguments to be widely assimilated in Islamic legal opinions. On the one hand, this could be due to the fact that until the 1990s, the networks were probably not developed to the extent of today. Furthermore, it was not until the end of the twentieth century that new media and the internet made communication and access to scientific knowledge much easier. On the other hand, the change in fatwa issuing by including scientific findings occurred in reaction to the late-twentieth-century rise in health discourse. It could be argued that knowledge about specific aspects needs to gain attention in public first before having the ability to be heeded in fatwas as well. However, the relevance of interdisciplinarity and the need for counseling science have increased in the modern fatwa system. Consequently, nowadays, even scientists who have not been trained in Islamic jurisprudence also comment on the subject of tobacco smoking on a religious level, evoking medical knowledge.⁷ Al-Qaradāwī even refers to the discoloration of the skin and the severe coughing caused by pulmonary tuberculosis resulting from smoking as reasons for the ban on smoking (2019, p. 32). It should be noted that al-Qaradāwī only describes external symptoms, which can result from various diseases, rather than exclusively being caused by tobacco smoking.

One argument that can be found frequently among the proponents of permitting smoking tobacco states that, if not proven otherwise, ‘all things are principally allowed’ (*al-aṣl fī al-ashyā’ al-ibāḥa*) as a justifying Islamic principle, which states that everything has to be regarded as generally permitted unless it is explicitly mentioned as forbidden. Such scholars often claim that the Quran and Sunna do not mention a literal ban on smoking and that, therefore, a strict prohibition on tobacco smoking would be illegitimate. They also reject the reasoning that tobacco smoking can lead to intoxicating states or a feeling of lassitude (al-Qaradāwī 2019, p. 34).

Meanwhile, proponents of banning tobacco categorize tobacco as a drug because the nicotine in tobacco acts as a neurotoxin. In connection with that, al-Qaradāwī refers to a Hadith of the Prophet that calls for the prohibition of anything ‘slackening’ (*muftir*, languishing, becoming limp) (*nahy ‘an kull muskir wa-muftir*), meaning that any means that can lead to that state are forbidden (al-Qaradāwī 2019, p. 32). Al-Qaradāwī apparently did not consider it necessary to further explain what exactly is meant by *muskir* and *muftir*. This could include, among others, the ‘slackening’ of cognitive abilities, which are caused by withdrawal symptoms resulting from addiction, further inducing people to behave aggressively, compared to symptoms caused by the consumption of other drugs.

Environment

One of the oldest and yet most omnipresent arguments mentioned in fatwas from the Ottoman Empire until the emergence of contemporary fatwas is the aspect of effects that cigarette consumption can have on the environment:

How many disasters have been caused by smoking, because of cigarette butts which are thrown away and cause fires. Other disasters have been caused in other ways, as when a house was burned down with its occupants inside, when a man lit his cigarette when there was a gas leak.

(Al-Humayd 2000)

In more recent contemporary fatwas, a new aspect has emerged as an argument that is being mentioned with increasing frequency, namely secondhand smoking. Many quantitative studies only deal with the absolute number of smokers, thus ignoring a significant characteristic of smoking: the impact of passive smoking. If the households being considered have at least one smoker in their family, the numbers differ considerably. For example, in a study of Muslim Pakistanis and Bengalis living in the UK, their smoking rate – at 40 percent among males – constitutes the highest in the UK. However, if one considers the whole household of these families in which the members are exposed to tobacco smoke by at least one smoker, the number amounts to 90 percent of all households. This is precisely what is special about the phenomenon of tobacco smoking: one smoking individual exposes other people to his smoke. Passive smokers of this kind suffer hardly any less damage from the health consequences than the consciously active smoker experiences, which makes it a crucial aspect, though only marginally discussed among Muslim scholars. In 2022, a video clip of a speech by American preacher Yusuf Estes (originally in 2006) went viral on social media, in which he explained:

Cigarettes. Halal! As long as you don't light it. [laughing] [...] Cigarette smoke kills innocent people because anybody in the room with you or in the automobile with you, even a child breathing that can contract cancer and they can have that latent inside of them for years, and then later develop it after they're fully grown. It happened to my wife, she never smoked in her life, yet she had cancer, which almost killed her. She still suffers from the effects 20 years later because her parents were heavy smokers. So not only can you be asked about the damage you do to yourself. You may actually be, on the day of judgment, accused of murder.

(Estes 2012)

Considering that '[t]he central aims of the Islamic legal framework are to minimize the risk of harm to society and individuals and, simultaneously, maximize the opportunities for collective and individual wellbeing' (Ghouri 2006, pp. 292–294), is a guiding principle for correct Muslim action, it applies disparately to a smoking Muslim, both on an individual and on a collective level. Smoking disregards the danger to the health of others, although it is the duty of every Muslim 'to avoid causing willful annoyance, distress, or harm to other people' (al-Qaraḏāwī 2019, p. 32). Therefore, smoking in the presence of others would, in addition to harming oneself, also harm other people, which stands against the above-mentioned principles and the responsible handling of God's creations, which means to protect every Muslim as a so-called *khalifa* (deputy).⁸

The relevance of medicine in the normative discourse on smoking in Islam has been more important than ever since the late 1990s. The change in tobacco fatwa evaluation is particularly evident on the Aalim Network, an online Shiite fatwa website that was active until 2001.⁹ There, in 1996, Bashir Rahim denied the existence of an absolute smoking ban in Islam, although the same website stated in September 1998: ‘If it is established that there is substantial harm to the smoker, it is haraam, irrespective of whether he or she is a beginner or already addicted to smoking’ (Jaffer 1998). The malleability of tobacco fatwas is even more evident in Mustafa Jaffer’s statement on Aalim Network, asking for the opinions of the three most influential Shia Grand Ayatollahs Khomeini, Kuhi, and Sistani:

Ayatullah Khui and Ayatullah Seestani consider smoking as Makrooh. And if it is identified as specifically harmful by a doctor for his patient, then it is haraam. As for Ayatullah Khomeini, he considered it Makrooh as well, but he also ruled that it is haraam for the beginners.

(Jaffer 1998)

The particularity of this response is that the legal interpretation was juxtaposed with the assessment of the respective physician. These and the subsequent fatwa of 1998 illustrate how uncertain the medical knowledge regarding the health consequences was in the awareness of scholars at that time. However, the chronological sequence of tobacco fatwas shows that the medical assessment of tobacco smoking became decisive for the scholars’ opinions, moving increasingly away from the category of reprehensible (*makrūh*) toward forbidden (*ḥarām*). Al-Qaradawi (in Salahi 2003) explains even more clearly: ‘On such matters, when doctors say that something is certainly harmful, Islamic scholars have no option but to pronounce it as forbidden.’ Transferred to the current time, the doctor is no longer the only reference from which one can obtain information about the latest medical findings, but there are all sorts of institutions, magazines, and other media that scientifically deal with the topic of tobacco smoking and can offer relevant information for a Mufti’s fatwa. The above statement by al-Qaradawi shows the importance of medical knowledge, to which he gives a considerable impact on the final judgment, which, in turn, can determine the consumer behavior of a Muslim individual in this case. Whether a fatwa classifies something as *mubāh*, *makrūh*, or *ḥarām* used to lie solely in the recognition and awareness of the scientific and economic knowledge of the respective Mufti, but experts of Islamic jurisprudence have become increasingly aware of and received pressure from modern medical and other scientific findings.

Dissipation of Money

It is not only medical knowledge that has shaped the normative discourse in fatwa deliberations. Al-Qaradāwī, for example, devotes much more detailed attention to the financial harm associated with tobacco smoking under the category of ‘*al-ḍarar*’ (harm) than the health aspect. Spending money on things that do not benefit the body, soul, or the worldly and afterlife is considered wasteful (*tabdhīr*, *iḍā‘a*, *isrāf*) because the Prophet prohibited wasteful expenditures.¹⁰ Although harm to health is the most popular response to Islam’s ban on tobacco smoking, there are many more Suras in the Quran related to excessive living and waste.¹¹ For this argument, Sura al-Isrā’ (17), verses 26–27, is used among

other examples: ‘And do not spend wastefully! Indeed, the wasteful are brothers of the devils, and ever has Satan been to his Lord ungrateful’ (*wa-lā tubadhdhir tabdhīran. Inna al-mubadhdhirīn kānū ikhwān al-shayāṭīn wa-kāna al-shayṭān li-rabbīhi kafūran*).¹² In actual practice, the example of Indonesia, with the largest national Muslim population in the world, shows what drastic consequences this addiction has. Most tobacco cigarette customers are low-income men who can barely support their families and spend about 15 percent of their income on cigarettes. This amount is three to five times more than the money spent on their children’s education (Webster 2013, p. 97; Kruchem 2019).

A Hadith of Tirmidhī about the statement of the Prophet reports that on the Day of Judgment, no one’s foot will move from its spot until being asked what one has done in life, what knowledge the person had, how he or she acted on it, what the body was used for, where they earned their money from (literally: *iktasabahu*), and for what it was spent (al-Nawawī, n.d., hadith 407). This Hadith shows that even the manner of spending money carries relevance for life in the hereafter on the Day of Judgment, and thus, spending money lavishly on something which is of no use and, as in the case of tobacco smoking, that is even harmful, constitutes a highly problematic burden for (devout) Muslims.

It should be kept in mind that all arguments listed on the normative level assume that the scientific findings (here from medicine, science, and business) are recognized by the respective addressee as relevant findings for human life. Otherwise, the fatwas lose their basis and, thus, their effect. This demonstrates the changeability and dependence of religious legal opinions on scientific knowledge.

Another argument mentioned against the use of tobacco and tobacco smoking is the often-quoted maxim of *al-amr bil-ma’rūf wal-nahy ‘an al-munkar*. This phrase is often translated as ‘commanding right and forbidding wrong’ (Kruchem 2019), which is based on several quotes from the Quran but has been a thriving topic in Islamic theology and law over the centuries (on this topic, see Cook 2000). This guiding principle and, by extension, the subdiscipline of Islamic jurisprudence named after it could also be related to the method of *sadd al-dharā’i’* (blocking the means to evil) as a preventive means within the *uṣūl al-fiqh* spectrum. The latter method urges the devout Muslim not to approach anything reprehensible or even only potentially dangerous in the first place but to abstain from it by way of precaution. Furthermore, in most cases smoking tobacco cigarettes marks the very beginning – as a so-called gateway drug – of the reprehensible use of intoxicants, such as cannabis and cocaine, which the Islamic majority opinion has prohibited. According to al-Qaradāwī (2001, p. 33), it is irrelevant whether the poisonous effect occurs at once (*daf’an*) or gradually (*tadrijīyyan*) (al-Qaradāwī 2001, p. 33).

In this regard, one question still needs to be clarified: why is tobacco not as vehemently declared and rejected as a drug (*mukhaddirāt*) by Muslim scholars, as are cannabis and cocaine? The problem here lies in the narrow definition that drugs are to be classified as prohibited solely because of their intoxicating effect. The consumption of these substances originated from medical purposes but transitioned into predominantly non-medical use. From an Islamic legal point of view, four lines of argument against drug consumption exist. They are the feature of drugs being (1) intoxicants (*muskirāt*), (2) narcotics (*mukhaddirāt*), (3) harmful to the five basic values (*maqāṣid*) of Islamic jurisprudence, or (4) consensually denied by scholars (Opwis 1999, pp. 159–161). While the first two points are rarely argued nowadays in the case of tobacco smoking, a broad conviction among scholars regarding its ban can be noticed due to findings of medicine and science and even more clearly with regard to the argument of waste. However, here attention should be paid to point 3: the five basic values acknowledged

as fundamental and all-pervasive in Islamic jurisprudence include the ‘elements worthy of protection,’ which are life, wealth, offspring, reason, and religion (Opwis 1999, p. 170). Drugs can be taken from this perspective as having an adverse effect on all five of these elements. When applied to the smoking of tobacco – its impact as health-damaging or fatal, as wasteful expenditure, as damaging to the offspring in a mother’s womb, as mutagenic in men, and as having the potential to contribute to psychosomatic diseases due to addiction – all suggests that tobacco smoking strongly encroaches on the basic values of Islamic jurisprudence.

The Tobacco Industry and the ‘Islamic Threat’

The development of tobacco fatwas over the past few decades has not gone unnoticed by the tobacco industry but has been followed with concern. The tobacco industry quickly realized what financial damage they would suffer from a ban imposed by Islamic scholars, even if only a part of their Muslim customers were deterred from consuming tobacco due to fatwas that declared tobacco as *ḥarām*. The reason behind it is that the percentage of smokers among the population in Muslim-majority countries is among the highest on the globe. In addition, smoking rates are increasing in these countries, although the percentage of smokers in total is falling worldwide (Petticrew et al. 2015, p. 1086). One of the most remarkable examples is Indonesia, the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) country with the most smokers, with 40 percent of adults aged 15 and over being smokers (OECD 2017). After China, it is the second largest tobacco market in the world and is therefore also known as the ‘gold mine of the tobacco industry’ (Kruchem 2019). But the above-average consumption in this predominantly Muslim country is just one side of what makes the country so attractive for the tobacco industry. Indonesia is one of the largest tobacco producers itself. The tobacco industry has focused its attention primarily on developing and low-income emerging markets, including Muslim-majority countries, which are of particular interest because of their rising living standards, predominantly young societies, and rapid socio-political changes. The tobacco industry, like the British American Tobacco (BAT) group, has maintained long-standing relationships with Egypt, Algeria, and other Muslim-majority societies such as Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Pakistan.

Regarding the upcoming statements of scholars in the industrial context, the term ‘the Islamic threat’ can often be found. To combat this ‘Islamic danger,’ the tobacco industry has meanwhile started to interfere in religious events. The Martin Haley Companies Inc., for example, recommended addressing this ‘issue’ by denouncing Islamic scholars advocating for a smoking ban as ‘extremists,’ positioning themselves particularly as counterforces to radical extremism.¹³ Those consultants of the tobacco industry utilized theological argumentation to interpret the matter in their own favor. Another threat that may have worried the industry would be the constant comparison of tobacco to alcohol consumption by some Islamic scholars. For example, the Wahhabi fatwa website IslamiCity draws this line but also differentiates that the damage caused by alcohol consumption is different from that caused by smoking tobacco. While the former ‘way of inebriety mainly damages the mind, tobacco is the most destructive to the body’ (Brückner 2010, p. 52). This statement of the fatwa issued in 1997 is in line with current medical knowledge but can be extended regarding smoking because addiction to tobacco is accompanied by behavioral disorders and other psychosomatic illnesses. The Grand Mufti of Egypt, Wasil, caused much of a stir when he criticized smoking as ‘more forbidden’ than alcohol (Hassan 2005). The BAT noticed the position of Islamic scholars against tobacco early on. Consequently, in 1979 they declared in an

annual outlook for the next 20 years: 'The rise of militant Islam poses serious problems. Smoking, and the consumption of alcohol, are forbidden under this creed' (Hirschhorn 1999). In response to this and to the 1983 World Conference on Smoking and Health in Winnipeg, where the Secretary General of INFOTAB (International Tobacco Information Center) observed anti-smoking campaigns, hoping to gain support from religious opinions, they started their own *Project Winnipeg*. In 1985, the tobacco lobbyist Martin Haley advised the largest tobacco company, Philip Morris, to adopt a strategy according to which 'Our invisible defense must be individualism which Islam allows its believers' (1985, p. 23). Individualism, which Haley sees here as a gap in Islamic practice, could be the ambiguity-tolerant view in Islam. However, this discourse enjoyed far more acceptance in the pre-colonial period. Haley went on to say that smoking must be made more attractive at the government level and continued to describe the opposing position as extremist. He tried to relativise the tobacco ban by including it among interpretations rather considered 'extremist,' such as the prohibition of images (Haley 1985, p. 24).

Conclusion and Outlook

Tobacco smoking among Muslims is a normatively contested phenomenon. As a relatively young practice among Muslim societies that found its way to the Near and Middle East only in the later sixteenth century, it had induced Muslim scholars to classify tobacco smoking as either reprehensible (*makrūh*) or forbidden (*ḥarām*). In so doing, they employed various criteria, socio-normative and political ones, beginning with their criticism of uprisings in the Ottoman Empire allegedly due to the popular coffeehouse culture (a setting in which tobacco consumption proliferated) and extending to the tobacco revolt in Iran against the prevailing hegemonic influence of Great Britain. The revolt of 1891 reveals the extent of development for the sales market of the tobacco industry in that region. Mirza Hassan Shirazi's famous fatwa shows the political use of Islamic legal advice, employing it as a means of rebellion against the British colonial encroachment and the corrupt rule of Mozaffar ad-Din Shah. It highlights the way boycott fatwas can be used as effective political weapons.

Apart from the political sphere, Islamic scholars devoted themselves to studying the characteristics of tobacco and, in revisiting the hermeneutics, sources, and principles of Islamic jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), started elaborating on various problematic aspects of tobacco smoking. Ever since the major medical insights of the mid-twentieth century became more prominent, the discourse on health has formed the main basis for scholarly arguments. Nowadays, a strong majority can be noticed among the scholars who declare tobacco smoking as *ḥarām* due to the severe diseases it causes. The health impacts are not just limited to physical damage, but some authors also include a wide range of mental diseases and, therefore, no longer assume a wide gap between tobacco smoking and so-called 'hard' drug consumption. What is special about tobacco smoking is that it must be considered within its social context due to its impact on the environment, such as bystanders through passive smoking or destructive fires, which have also been mentioned in both fatwas during the Ottoman Empire and contemporary fatwas. In addition to the health aspects, wasting money has evolved into one of the most relevant arguments in many jurisprudential rulings. In both cases, financial and health-related, the scholars, nevertheless, most frequently refer to general Quranic verses and Hadiths that forbid one's self-destruction in order to anchor this independent legal reasoning.

Notes

- 1 According to Halevi, the purpose behind a boycott fatwa is to ‘represent a significant development in the Muslim understanding of what it means to strive in God’s path’ (2012, p. 46).
- 2 A *mojtahed* (or *mujtabid*) is an Islamic scholar who is authorized to practice *ijtihad* (creative legal interpretation). Thus, by undergoing training as a *mojtahed*, he has acquired the necessary methods to be able to produce a legal opinion through independent intellectual effort related to the Holy sources.
- 3 It should be noted that toward the end of the nineteenth century, the political power in the Qajar dynasty increasingly shifted to the clerics rather than the Qajar shahs, due to their failure to protect the ‘Muslim subject’ against colonial powers (Dabashi 2008, pp. 46, 75).
- 4 The *marja’-e taqlid* is a legitimized scholar whose legal opinion may be resorted to.
- 5 However, the Ottoman Shaykh al-Islam Baha’i Mehmed Efendi, who was himself a heavy smoker and aware of the popular sentiment, held the opinion that for a practice unknown during the early Islamic period, the traditional *usul al-fiqh* could not be applied and therefore smoking should be deemed permissible (Kissling 1957, p. 351).
- 6 Jabir reported: ‘He who eats garlic or onion should remain away from us or from our mosque and stay in his house,’ in: Muslim, 564 a, Hadith 91.
- 7 For example, physicians Nazim Ghouri, Mohammed Atcha, and Aziz Sheikh (2006) argued that smoking contradicts the religious guiding principles.
- 8 See Foltz 2006, p. 121 and Sura (2:30): ‘*Innī jā’ilun fī l-ardī khalīfatan.*’
- 9 See Aalim Network 1995-2001 for the archive of questions and answers.
- 10 See al-Qaradāwī 2001, p. 32: ‘*nahy al-nabī ‘alayhi l-ṣalātu wal-salām ‘an idā’ati l-māl.*’
- 11 See Suras (7:31, 156–157), (6:141), (40:34), (40:43), (20:127), (17:26–27), and (25:67).
- 12 Translation: Saheeh International.
- 13 In the report from the tobacco firm The Martin Haley Companies Inc. 1985, recommendations are outlined on how to counteract the growing opposition against tobacco products as follows: ‘[...] it is suggested we talk not about “fundamentalists” but “extremists”, who are much more threatening to organized government and whose presence helps base our case against restriction on the implied threat of extremism’. Furthermore, they attempted to reference other Islamic statements by so-called ‘extremist’ representatives and draw parallels, such as the prohibition of images and women’s education.

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PART 5

Mediated Religion and Culture



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ARTFUL QURAN RECITATION (*TAJWĪD*) IN LEARNING, BROADCASTING, AND COMPETITIVE ENVIRONMENTS

Rosy Beyhom

Artful Quran recitation (*tajwīd*) has a pre-Islamic genealogy: it is one of the descendants of the pre-Islamic Arabic oral tradition that was used for the sciences and especially poetry. It established itself as a religious genre in early Abbasid Iraq and spread throughout the world of Islam as an important spiritual device. *Tajwīd* is an elaborate musical style with complex melodies to emphasize the recitation of the Quran. It is mainly used at festive events as it attracts audiences because it triggers profound emotions. That is the main difference between this more affect-oriented *tajwīd* and another style known as *tartīl*, which has simple ‘melodies’ and is more like a syllabically applied mode of pronunciation for the Quran rather than a musical style.

Before one can be taught the *tajwīd* style, it is expected that one knows the Quran by heart and is able to accurately recite it with respect to all the rules of phonetics, diction, etc. Like all teacher-pupil relationships, then, the learning of *tajwīd* is inscribed into a social exchange where one part knows less until it knows as much or more. The pupil will listen, learn, and repeat until the teacher deems the level reached sufficient and satisfying. A talented pupil with a nice voice will make this social process of acquiring the correct melodic knowledge, i.e., learning the art of *tajwīd*, a highly pleasant experience, as additional layers of enjoyment, delight, and gratification will be embedded into the basic interaction around repeating the sacred text.

The phenomenon of music is a social one; it comes into being because there are two poles involved in an interaction. One is performing the musical act, be it singing or instrument playing, and the other is listening, appreciating, criticizing, applauding, or protesting the performers. It is the reaction that makes the music happen, like when the audience goes silent in total admiration when a singer starts the *layālī* prelude during his session.

The structure of these two active agents is omnipresent in any musical happening. Whether the event is live or delayed, there is always the performer and the receiver, the ‘client.’ The performer, an interpreter herein called ‘maker’ (Arabic: *ṣāniʿ*), prepares her or his act, repeats, trains, and performs many times alone or with a mentor or any other more knowledgeable person who can help improve upon stage skills. Wherever music is happening, there is a stage, even if it is only the sidewalk on the street. A church¹ is a stage

for sacred music and religious musical liturgy. And a mosque turns into a stage every time an imam leads the prayer by reciting the Quran, although Muslims do not usually rubricate that under ‘music.’ Moreover, it is a highly professional stage: the imam is often talented, has a beautiful voice, and knows how to attract² an audience, particularly when reciting in the more demanding *tajwīd* style.

This chapter³ deals with the client’s quest for emotions that emanate from musical events, especially the religious ones that carry a plethora of virtues. Religion, therefore, gets emphasized by its musical display to shine on the Logos and make the divine word more accessible and *experienced*. Since music is meant to serve and amplify the sacred words or the ceremonial service, it is also supposed to convey sincere-but-anticipated reactions, such as piety or crying, undoubtedly signifying a renewed belief at the end of the religious ritual. Thus, with carefully selected case studies from the corresponding literature and the internet, this chapter shows that religious events in the context of Islam – in the cases chosen – profoundly impact the above-mentioned formula of maker-client.

The Perils of Musical Joy and the Quran as the Non-Musical Other

The famous and still extremely influential (even after his death) Egyptian sheikh whose Quran recitation is always heard in Cairo and beyond, streaming from a radio or DVD playing on a screen,⁴ is ‘Abd el-Bāsiṭ ‘Abd al-Ṣamad (1927–1988).⁵ Although he had learned music and its rules, he claimed in a study about singing⁶ that it is impossible to apply both musical and *tajwīd* regulations together due to the necessary respect for the dogma of the sacrality of the Quran (al-‘Usaylī al-‘Āmilī 1984, p. 188). The regulation of *tajwīd* includes approving different musical scales, ensuring that the music has a lower volume than the words, and preventing the musical arrangement from changing anything about the sacred text itself. According to the same source (pp. 184–185), the female Egyptian singer and national icon Umm Kulthūm⁷ (1904–1975) stated that the music in the Quran is sufficient in itself for the listeners and that the *tajwīd* will produce enough effects in the hearts of the audience to achieve its goal of making the divine word more accessible and experienced.

My personal attraction to the power of music that I perceived as a musicologist in methodically sophisticated Quran recitation somehow started in 2007, with my admiration for Sheikh Mustafa Ismail and his art of reciting the Quran (Nelson 2001). Ismail was born in 1905 and died in 1978; he traveled a lot but was mainly the official reciter of Anwar al-Sadat, the Egyptian president from 1970 to 1981. At the time of his death, he had been promoted to reciter at al-Azhar mosque in Cairo, the most famous and influential traditional institution of religious learning in the Islamic world. I sensed and appreciated his deep musical comprehension because of the amount of improvisation he managed to put in each and every one of his found performances. I gained that impression even from the two cassette tapes of mediocre quality that I could find. After listening for hours to the same cassette, I understood why their quality had diminished and why they had been copied so many times. At that time, I started to look avidly for more audio samples of his art, but nothing was available yet on the internet.

Deeply impressed, I decided to interview a certain sheikh in Lebanon to inquire about the possibilities of researching that specific art in a suitable context. His name will be kept anonymous at his request, but his rank was high at the time of the interview. The interview in Lebanon was highly revealing – I was at the sheikh’s office, and every now and then, someone would knock on his door, and one of his pupils would enter and recite a passage. The

sheikh always corrected something: the *tajwīd* regulations not followed properly, a better melody, a wrongful word not well memorized, etc. The men coming in were rather young. At some point, one of them entered, and the sheikh told me, ‘that one has a very nice voice.’ Around the end of the interview, the sheikh was talking about himself, saying that he had started a YouTube channel for featuring his lovely voice in various religious performances.

However, despite all the enthusiasm put around the importance of melodies in showing the meanings of Quranic chapters (sing. *sūra*) and all the talk about the musical *maqāms*⁸ used, his very last recommendation to me was to let this all go and work on *something else* for my doctoral thesis in musicology. Music was – and to a certain degree still is – considered taboo in an Islamic religious context. Therefore, studying it in relation to the improvisational *tajwīd* would endanger my career and would invite much aggressiveness in replies to my research in the future. Furthermore, I am a woman coming from a non-Islamic culture, and that alone can cause problems in a sectarian and gender-discriminating country such as Lebanon. An echo of that occurred during a conference at the Nile University in Cairo in 2023, where I was firmly instructed repeatedly (in the discussion round and also afterward) that music and *tajwīd* are worlds apart.

My anonymous interviewee in Lebanon enjoyed music and appreciated *tarab*.⁹ He could distinguish a nice voice reciting well from someone out of pitch, he had the ear and the voice, and therefore I trusted his recommendation and sincere wishes for success in my thesis project – as long as it does not approach the alleged ‘musicality’ of Quran recitation, a topic that he, paradoxically but tellingly, was curious to know more about.

The Problem of Music in the World of Islam

The never-ending polemic¹⁰ of *samāʿ* is always just around the corner. As well expressed by Kristina Nelson in a dedicated chapter of her dissertation (1985, pp. 32–51), *samāʿ* generally means ‘listening’ but can refer more specifically to listening to Quran recitation.¹¹ The *samāʿ* polemic starts with efforts to keep away any associations between the Quran and musical art (*mūsīqā* as music and *ghināʿ* as singing). This has resulted in manifold writings and normative guidelines to establish what is respectful toward the sacred in a Muslim context of recitation. In this regard, the enjoyment of music, as explained by *tarab*, would be controversial.

However, it is important to note here that there are no conclusive arguments for proponents or opponents of *samāʿ* in a Quranic frame because the authority of the Hadith (transmitted reports about the Prophet Mohammad, his companions, and their followers) and the Quran itself do not induce the one and only interpretation of what should be the right attitude. The complex normative evaluation of singing and music throughout Islamic history has not been systematically researched yet. For the purposes of this chapter, this larger music controversy is just mentioned to point out the sensitivity of the *tajwīd* issue.

In a recent study (Alkanz and Akbar 2022) on the effect of music, moreover the existence of music, and its influence on Muslims, two scholars from Pakistan apodictically claim that all Islamic jurisprudence is against music. Most unexpectedly, both scholars are not related¹² to the musical field. While one of them has a degree in Islamic Studies, they nevertheless build their theories and conclusions from various decontextualized articles and their own judgment.

In contrast to that, an encouraging evaluation of musical culture and a more academic study is the extensive article by an Indonesian author in a *Journal for Islamic Studies*

(Akmaliah 2014). The author¹³ emphasizes the open-mindedness of Indonesian society toward singing in general and, in particular, even the support of women, veiled or not, participating in Quran competitions (cf. Rasmussen 2010). Concerning this defense of female vocal artists, the author concludes his line of reasoning:

Fatin's performance also showed that Indonesian Muslims can practice Islam in their unique way and in which there is dialogue between Islamic texts (Quran), Hadiths and cultural modernity. On the other hand, for more literalist, conservative [Muslims], Fatin's performance was not in accordance with the source of both the Quran and Sunnah in which women are not permitted to perform in public, as her voice and appearance may provoke male desire.

(Akmaliah 2014, p. 363)

The world of Islam contains all sorts of opinions regarding music and its role as a vehicle for the sacred word in the Quran. *Tajwīd* is only one festive way to emphasize the Quran with a 'musical' addition; other forms sustaining also non-Quranic texts are known and accepted, such as religious hymns (*anāshīd*, *tawāshīh*) at special feast celebrations (like the Eid al-Adha) and commemoration days (like the Shiite *āshūrā*) where music is used for the sole purpose of steering emotions and orchestrating the intended atmosphere for the event.

Who Is the Client? Who Is the Maker?

In the following case studies, I argue that in sync with the development of society's wishes and demands in the virtual market, clients and makers increasingly overlap so that borders are merged and clear-cut frontiers no longer or barely exist while the main focus is to please, promote, and market. Advertisements that have long used gender (mostly targeted at women) and age (mostly targeted at children) to appeal to a wider public are still following that same path in the virtual market.

Apparently, according to the explicit remarks of the attendees of my presentation at the Nile University Conference in 2023, if the object of marketing is religion, there is no harm. The example of Fatin, as described by Akmaliah (2014), resonates clearly with religion's promotion. The young, veiled woman mentioned above had won the Indonesia X Factor show despite the many technical mistakes she made and notwithstanding the stronger competitors during the final round – because she was massively supported by Muslim scholars. They encouraged the Muslim nation to send SMS messages in Fatin's favor over her competitor, a young Christian Indonesian woman with more talent who had even improved her performance over the show's phases (Akmaliah 2014, p. 365). Adding to the dimension of consumption, the exploitation of Fatin's win and success was huge (pp. 367–369). She became an iconic, religiously sanctified figure and an inspiration to youth; this is why she was 'instrumentalized' by various parties while benefiting herself simultaneously.

Fatin, a young veiled Muslim woman who was 16 in 2013 when it all started, has opened the path for acceptance and even support from the religious authorities for women performing in Indonesia due to their pious self-presentation.¹⁴ Indonesian society, with its language and history, is not always accessible to the rest of the world, despite their relatively high consumption of online goods.

Fatin was a young woman with a nice voice who liked western songs and performed them during the show, sometimes with dancing (Akmaliah 2014, p. 353). On an international level, her voice is not extraordinary, and the videos I watched of her do not set her apart as an elite singer, but perhaps the whole package was found attractive for the jury on the show and in the Indonesian cultural frame.

The scheme that underlined the dynamics of her breakthrough can be explained in the following formula: a Muslim woman who is veiled can win a singing competition regardless of her musical abilities and can market her religion (thus, keeping the veil after winning as part of her artistic identity is a *sine qua non* condition). I will revisit this scheme after exploring some internet case studies.

The New Modalities for Teaching Quran Recitation

The first case study is a YouTube video¹⁵ for teaching Quran recitation in the sense of *tajwīd*. It involves two actors: a teacher who is knowledgeable in music and who starts the video with lots of musical information and theory (though not entirely accurate) and a pupil who has apparently memorized the text of the Quran fully and correctly and is ready to upgrade himself toward ‘musicality.’ After the introduction, the teacher moves on¹⁶ to the application of *maqām Rāst* (one of the more popular scales) in a practical Quran recitation, while his pupil repeats after him. During this part of the educational video,¹⁷ the teacher, Taha Abd-el Wahab, makes two important points related to the music of the Quran. First, the person reciting should neither add nor remove any part of the sacred text. Second, there are no pre-established melodies or scales for the recitation of the Quran. Only the revitalized meanings of the text via artful recitation can induce the (necessarily) improvised and spontaneous use of one melodic scale and not another.

The rest of the video shows the pupil continuing to make mistakes with the *tajwīd* rules. But what is really problematic here is that he is receiving the way to introduce musicality in a Quranic context.

Another video shows a completely different scale of ‘teaching’ that I prefer to call coaching.¹⁸ In it, a young boy named Adham is having a back-and-forth game of musical interplay with his mentor on the text of the Quran. This video stages a highly advanced improvisation scene where a musically talented boy answers every proposed improvisation (in any musical style) with an adequate response. The mentor, Ahmad Mustafa, pushes the young talent progressively until an extreme amount of musicality and energy is let out¹⁹ by Adham, and everyone takes a short break. The mentor smiles in admiration of the young talent and seems to enjoy each improvisation. To non-accustomed ears, this kind of improvisation may seem uncoordinated because of the big difference in voice ranges between Ahmad and Adham. Yet, there is a structure: young Adham completes the proposed musical sentences, which inspires his mentor Ahmad to suggest yet another one. On a musical level, this kind of improvisational exercise can only happen when two experienced musicians or singers share a similar background with a repertoire and dialogue freely with their music in a responsorial frame.

Returning to the Quran as the holy book of Islam, the text is precisely the shared repertoire that inspires all these improvisations. Yet, the coaching scene analyzed above seemed more focused on the music, and it used the short Quran chapters as a way to trigger this musical element. Nevertheless, the revitalization of the sacred text through an inspirational

spur of the moment did not appear to be in the foreground of this coaching. In other words, it is because of his recitation talent that young Adham could improvise with Dr. Ahmad Mustafa in such complicated musical idioms; it is because of the Quran that this whole thing could happen, and yet, in this case, the music seemed more important.²⁰ What does this sort of video say about the relationship between the sacred text and music? Does broadcasting such scenes blur the declared and demarcated strict boundary with music? Or does this kind of video suggest a strategy of engaging talented children in the promotion of a religion?

The Talented Children in Marketing the Quran

In another example also found on YouTube,²¹ a young boy with a powerful voice is the star. The talent is definitely there: the voice of the child is extraordinary, and his performance is mature for his age. However, after a few minutes, the listener may discern that the sensitive microphone placed in front of Jawad is also transmitting a repetitive playback record that the reciter is following. The playback is likely meant as a reminder of the complicated musical phrases Jawad is performing from memory. Two main problems can be discussed in this case. First, the imitation that the child is doing turns the whole recitation into a repetition, which is unacceptable in a Quranic context where improvisation is the main ingredient of recitation: one is not supposed to imitate or repeat exactly what one has learned. Repetition makes the recitation more like a playback of a pre-composed piece, which is a highly forbidden and problematic matter. Furthermore, the question arises: are the adults who made this record available for him to learn and imitate aware of the problems that underlie such activity? And on another level, is the audience really listening and catching the transmission from the microphone, and if so, are they cheering for imitation?

In a nutshell, my assessment is that the audience is not learned or sophisticated enough in the formalities and regulations and is, therefore, unaware that the sacred and, in its artful recitation, the non-fixed text is merely being repeated:²² the people are in awe only because of the imitative talent they are witnessing. However, the adults who contributed to this performance – perhaps to find fame, show off, or commercially promote the young voice – knew exactly what they were doing by forcing the child since his early youth into an imitation²³ pattern. In a way, this incorrect use of the Quran meets what an untrustworthy oral tradition could be; a culture that has misused the power of the voice and the sound and has thereby badly influenced both passive and active listeners.²⁴

The *Hāfiẓ(a)* Phenomenon

Moving on to another phenomenon that not only showcases talented children but is also found among adults is the memorizers of the Quran. Anyone who has memorized the Quran, a feat that requires constant practice to maintain, is called a *hāfiẓ* (m) or *hāfiẓa* (f). YouTube and TV channel owners know – and employ as a marketing tactic – the fact that audiences like to witness the miraculous, the wonderful, the fantastic, and what's beyond imagination, and the memorization of the Quran (particularly by children and also adults with any sort of mental or physical disability) falls into these categories and triggers emotional and passionate responses from audiences. The fact that a performance like this can elicit such responses from an audience establishes more credibility in the power of the sacred text to manifest itself.

For the next internet-based case study, I would like to analyze the performance of Kaysa, a young Indonesian girl who learned how to memorize the Quran using signs as a mnemonic method, in a live-broadcast TV competition entitled *Hafizh Qur'an*. There are many videos that show her reciting the same chapter (*al-Takwīr*) at around the same age, but I invite the reader to check the specific one noted here.²⁵ In it, Kaysa is veiled, and it is worth mentioning that some communities would find her age (in this video, she is clearly under ten years old) to be too early for veiling. The show consists of a jury that, over different phases, demands several recitations of various chapters and also has a quiz. When examining the video, one finds that there is nothing exceptional about Kaysa's performance: it is a human combination of a cute child (a girl in this case) who is clearly displaying a determined Muslim identity and melodically reciting with great confidence one of the short chapters of the Quran. Her cute little voice and her candor are what appear to have inspired the audience in that video to give her a standing ovation and mimic the signs like her in what looks to have been a fun experience, full of laughter and a tremendous sense of piety that seems to be rooted in the sacrality of the text. After her performance, the show presenters and their guests all gathered around her to applaud and marvel at her for being such a precious human.

Kaysa's case is another Indonesian example, like that of Fatin above, and requires careful scrutiny with the right cultural binoculars. I will borrow here the words of David Harnish and Anne Rasmussen on music and Islam in Indonesia:

Expressive cultural practices, including collective ritual, music, and dance, and even mass-mediated forms of entertainment, have been handmaidens in the process of articulating religious identity – whether these arts are consciously manipulated or not.
(2011, p. 9)

Competing at a young age is culturally approved, in this context, due to its relation to a religious identity, but would it also be culturally acceptable to use this religious identity as a marketing icon to attract audiences? What is suggested by this example is that Kaysa and her performance are the reason that people would want to memorize the Quran using this mnemonic method rather than the method itself, which existed already. Of course, at that time, young Kaysa was unaware of her popularity. With becoming a star in this particular competition show and with more children like her competing and winning, what morals would be at stake? Are competitive feelings in harmony with religious morals, or would there be repulsion? Is not competitiveness in all areas a frame that encourages the 'ME' at the expense of a more open and generous attitude toward others (the 'WE')? As a consequence, would not the winner be a shining star surrounded by admiration and attention from the media? Finally, analyzing Kaysa's performance pushed me to wonder whether any religion could sustain so many 'stars' in so many different areas. After all, the maker caters to the demands of the client, and with a more avid client, the individual desires of the people involved might push the spiritual to the background – and marketing to the foreground.

Religious Performances in Talent Shows

One of the most intriguing religious performances I found was in the context of a talent show. In this instance, the case study is an Indonesian show and competition. However,

other religious performances can be found on YouTube as well, such as individuals that use the call for prayer (*adhān*) as a voice sample. Behind these numerous *adhān* cases on shows like X Factor, The Voice, [any country's] Got Talent, and others, made in their majority by well-edited video-makers, there is a complex reality of channel owners, sponsors, marketers, and makers. There seems to be an effort to influence the way the West perceives Islam and its practices.²⁶ However, there will always be a divergence of opinions in an audience if religious activities are happening outside of their usual frame. The audience will take sides. The proponents of a beautiful non-violent Islam will say that such videos illustrate that the message of Islam is not terrorism. These proponents might also, like the caption of the video of Kayza, emphasize the profound reactions: that the child with the beautiful voice 'made the jury cry or at least tear.' In contrast to that, opponents might describe these kinds of performances as brainwashing and exclaim that there are 'fake' emotions triggered by the sight of a Muslim child performing the call to prayer on an American stage.

I now ask the reader to have a look and listen to the exquisite mature voice of Vania.²⁷ Vania is a young adult whose appearance seems even more mature on stage with the professional camera and make-up. She was a participant and competitor in the national talent show in Indonesia, the LIDA,²⁸ a singing competition. While *dangdut*²⁹ singing is the show's main style, the competition reaches beyond it to other styles in order to show the competencies of the participants. For this case study, I would like to take the reader to the stage to look at its details, the beautiful lighting and decoration that stimulates and encourages deep empathies with religion. Arabesques have often been in the background of Muslim cultural structures (see al-Faruqi 1978, pp. 17–32). With the subtle changes to the background and the lighting effects, the audience can be even more moved by performers like Vania. In the video noted, she is reciting a specific verse from a specific chapter – I could not find if it was proposed to her or she had chosen it, but it was clear that she did not know it by heart and needed to look at the sacred book from time to time. Therefore, she was seated in a story-telling pose with a big format Quran placed in front of her. All this staging seems to have helped induce and move the people present. It seems evident that her voice played the key role in the process of impression she was participating in. Some people in the audience were in tears, which is but one of the many intended effects of music whenever it is in a Quranic context.

At the end of her performance, the Sheikh and the jury stood next to her and evaluated her recitation, and they said, among many positive things, *sawt al-janna*, which means the voice or sound of heaven. The Sheikh also said something particularly interesting for the context of the Indonesian scene: that not only is she a great *dangdut* performer, but she also proved to be a magnificent Quran reciter.

Later in the video, the Sheikh proposed that Vania partake in a 'collaboration' and sing something else that has a religious flavor. The Sheikh then started singing a hymn related to the celebration of the birth of the Prophet (*mawlid*). Vania joined in and surpassed him by singing louder and at a higher range. The microphone in Vania's hands was fully filled with her voice. The Sheikh then invited the audience to join in and tried (with apparent effort) to make himself heard on some high-pitched occasions.

This particular case reveals a dimension of religion when in a comparative situation with talent. In this case, it seems that Vania's talent held more emotional sway than the religion.

The presence of a religious section in a singing competition is peculiar but apparently approved in Indonesian society:

In Indonesia and Southeast Asia in general, flexible attitudes regarding the acceptability of artistic expression in connection to religion prevail, distinguishing this region from the Middle East and even South Asia (Hooker 2006, 128). We find some of the most obvious evidence for compatibility between music and religion in the terms ‘*seni Islam*’ (Islamic art) and ‘*musik Islam*’ (Islamic music) or ‘*seni musik Islam*’ (Islamic musical arts), which are coined in many contexts and even among the most conservative religious authorities. Some artists and officials further distinguish *musik Islam* (forms originally from the Middle East or Islamic South Asia) from *musik islami* (Indonesian music with Islamic characteristics). [...] These kinds of categorizations reveal [...] that music is not banned out of hand and in fact has an acknowledged place in Indonesian Islam. (Harnish and Rasmussen 2011, pp. 12)

When it comes to the melodic arrangement Vania applied to the Quran verse, there are several issues. First, the low-pitched sentence at the beginning, *al-isti‘ādha* (*a‘ūdhu bil-lāhi min-a-sh-shayṭāni r-rajīm*, trans. I take refuge in God from the power of the lapidated devil), could have been simply declaimed, without music, and thus spared her the (surely unintended) error of placing the words Allah and *shayṭān* on the same musical pitch, a mistake that many beginners commit and that sheikhs often warn about. Second, the verse contains many images or *tableaux* and is rich in meaning, so Vania seized this opportunity and performed as many changes in the *maqāms* as possible, but it is nonetheless necessary to say here that, based on the principles of recitation, she over-did this modulation of melodies, which made her recitation feel more like a show than a religious activity. Yet, it is undeniable that this had a favorable effect on the audience and the jury. However, based on the video of this performance, it is almost certain that she prepared this verse in advance – and, further, that she had difficulties doing so because she is not a talented Quran reciter but a singer, and that is completely different (even though the musical genre of *dangdut* was inspired and influenced by Quran recitation; see Weintraub 2011 p. 320).

What makes the artful recitation or ‘melodically enhanced recitation’ (al-Faruqi 1987, pp. 2–25) so special is the ability to improvise in the moment and the fact that the music that correlates with the sacred text will come from within the reciter. Vania was far from improvising; one can watch another video signaled here³⁰ and compare it personally with her performance at the LIDA. From a Quranic perspective, it is not recommended to use the same melodies on another verse or chapter in a different event that requires a recitation. Unfortunately, at the wedding celebration to which Vania was invited in the video, she repeated the same melodic pattern used at the LIDA competition. This evidences her lack of improvisation or training in Quranic recitation; furthermore, it suggests that she does not have the melody from within.

Final Discussion and Conclusion

The media experts Mosemghvdlshvili and Jansz made the following statement in 2013:

What makes YouTube a particularly interesting case for investigating the representation of Islam is the finding by Paolillo (2008) that among the diverse content shared

and stored on YouTube, religion (Islam predominantly, followed by Christianity) forms the second biggest thematic cluster, after music videos. Islam is one of the most hotly debated topics among YouTubers (Heffernan, 2007), and unsurprisingly some 4900 videos a week tagged with the word Islam are uploaded to the site.

(Mosemghvdlishvili and Jansz 2013, p. 483)

Muslim culture and community have a strong media presence and impact, especially on YouTube. It is a powerful example of the maker and client dichotomy where religion is the object of interest. Let me now try to establish or at least understand what happened in all the YouTube cases reviewed in this chapter with regard to this essential polarity. Each case had a talented individual invited to perform on some stage, though they were of different ages, genders, and nationalities. However, they have lots in common. For instance, it is adequate to state that in all the cases explored, the individual performer often seems to put the sacred in the shadow of the entertainment. Such is the case of young Jawad, who got himself in an imitation pattern, or the high talent of Adham, who earned his fame even before hitting puberty and reaching his full voice capacity. What this suggests is that talented children are the main attraction, and religion is in the background, that the power of the show is more salient than the essence and the reason for it, the Quran. The various channel owners and intermediate makers (video editors, promoting teams, deeply impressed fans, etc.) apparently feed this hunger, hence promoting talent over religion.

Perhaps these intermediate makers did not intend to promote talent more than religion, but as they operate in a context of consumption, they were surely aiming for digital recognition and a big audience for their channels.

The Indonesian cases are exceptional in a sense because this is a country where art, music, and religion can collaborate and produce still unwitnessed forms in the Arab world. The reader can find many other examples of Indonesian women reciting the Quran with melodic embellishments at celebrations and in front of crowds of mixed genders on YouTube. Its openness gives hope to Muslim women from other contexts who may wish to become Quran reciters and perform for mixed crowds.

Despite the more open approach to Islam and art in some parts of the world like Indonesia and Southeast Asia in general, there are still theologically important rules and regulations to consider. Even if approved, certain trespasses or blurring of the frontiers between the religious and the artistic cannot be ignored.³¹ Thus, where the performing arts stop and the religion begins (or vice versa) remains a contested issue.

Considering the case of Jawad, for example, and the imitation patterns from his childhood that persisted with him at an older age, I wonder how that affected his musicality and, moreover, his potential as a good reciter. He is now known as a good imitator, at least on YouTube. My thoughts go as well to all sorts of clients and their quests for the marvelous, the amazing, and the unusual. While technology has provided teaching-learning means and offered the digital world as a platform for many kinds of knowledge, religions (and Islam in particular) seem to have altered the perceptions of the viewers of the world about its fundamental principles. The main promotion happening from within seems to be on the path to re-establish a peaceful balance, especially in a post-9/11 context.

Perhaps the exposure via modern media was needed and is a strategy to show the 'others,' whomever they may be, that Islam is a journey that has rules and regulations, disciplines, education, and, especially, a correct attitude toward hierarchy. But at the same time, fun and entertainment are part of religion; it does not enforce seriousness, boredom, or

sadness. It is motivating – like being challenged to memorize or repeat the *al-Takwīr* chapter with Kaysa, being out of breath with every super verse that Jawad recited, or watching how Adham answered every time with an adequate and elegant reply while driven to the edge of his improvisational creativity, or hearing the subtle inflections in the voice of Vania while reciting this powerful verse.

Whatever has led to the change in the maker-client relation and the presence of an intermediate, which made that relation a triangular one, at this stage, pending more elaborate and systematically designed studies, it can only be said that this relationship evolved due to show (*spectacle*) and entertainment quests within a context of enlarged borders between the sacred and the secular. This erosion of sacrality through mediatized consumption and production can no longer be captured by insisting on the simple binary opposing music on the one hand and the Quran as quintessentially non-musical on the other. The agency and system logic of certain widely embraced media have, in various ways, invaded the taboo border zone put around the Quran.

Notes

- 1 I am mentioning only the Christian and Muslim examples because I am familiar with both religions and their rituals.
- 2 ‘The powerful effect of a beautiful voice may even have medical properties. The Andalusian writer and poet ibn ‘Abd Rabbih (d. 940), in the chapter on music in his encyclopedic work *al-Iqd al-farīd* (The Unique Necklace), refers to the experts in medicine who claim that a beautiful voice infiltrates into the human body and flows in the veins, causing purification of the blood, delighting the heart and elevating the soul. [...]’ in Shiloah 1995, p. 15.
- 3 The core of this chapter was presented at the conference ‘Living in a Digital Age: Technology and its Effects on Religion and Popular Culture,’ 11–13 March 2023 at the Nile University in Cairo; a project organized together with the Orient-Institut Beirut.
- 4 The last time I experienced that was in 2023, not only during a short stay at a popular hotel in downtown Cairo but also while walking the streets, in taxis, etc.
- 5 He was the first to make a commercial recording of his Quran recitation and traveled a lot outside of Egypt. In this regard, his impact has been bigger than any other sheikh’s. ‘Abd al-Bāsiṭ ‘Abd al-Šamad was, in his time, also among the top four sheikhs in Egypt and the first president of the Egyptian reciters’ union. He is known for his instantly recognizable, unique sound and his subtle acoustic ethical inducement with which he inspires people who are listening to his Quran record. See on this matter Hirschkind 2006, pp. 124–125.
- 6 In this study and survey about singing, al-Usaylī al-‘Āmilī copied (from *al-Hilāl*, a journal) the opinions about music and Quran recitation that different icons in the Egyptian social and cultural scene had.
- 7 The most famous woman on the Arab singing scene in the twentieth century. Her opinion is important because her Muslim education, including Quran recitation, as a child affected her musicality; see Danielson 1990–1991, p. 122.
- 8 A *maqām* is a combination of scales, genre, and melodic and rhythmic formula associated with various ethoses. There are as many *maqām* as there are human expressions. The Arabian, Iranian, Turkish, and Indian worlds share a common root of the *maqām* in their traditional music. The most common *maqām*(s) used in Quran recitation are eight: *Rāst*, *‘Ajām*, *Sikā*, *Šabā*, *Nahawand*, *Kurd*, *Ĥijāz*, and *Bayyātī*. The sheikh had a musical ear, a correct one, and he could distinguish, feel, and train his pupils in using one *maqām* instead of another to express a particular idea of joy or sadness or intimidation. See sheikh Muhammad al-Ghazali that introduces these *maqām*(s) as part of the project VIAMAP, CERMAA 2018. The caption provides an extended explanation on the *maqām* evolution, and the reader interested in more details can check Beyhom 2018, pp. 145–258.
- 9 It is the feeling of extreme joy, happiness, sadness, arousal, enjoyment, and many others that cannot be categorized because every human reacts differently when hearing a piece of music that

resonates with their status. Some people shout loudly *Allah, Aman, Abhh*, and other responsorial expressions of the emotions they cannot keep inside. Some people weep over *ṭarab*. Not only in the Flamenco culture, but also all around the world and the musical traditions, the same exists. *Ṭarab* is also associated with *zahzaha*.

- 10 The whole polemic cannot be completely resolved and is still a source of a multitude of studies. See a different display of arguments in Shiloah 1997, pp. 143–155.
- 11 *Samā'* can also relate to Sufi performance. See the polyvalent effect of music within the frame of mysticism expressed in a digest format in *ibid.*, pp. 149–150.
- 12 As clearly announced on their first article page, Fatima Alkanz is in the Department of Islamic Studies at the National University of Modern Languages in Lahore, Pakistan, while Muhammad Akbar is in the Department of Management Sciences at the same university.
- 13 Wahyudi Akmaliah does not provide his academic degree but writes under his name his affiliation to the Social Culture Research Center at the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (PMB - LIPI), Jakarta, Indonesia.
- 14 For the broader trend, see the publication by Karin van Nieuwkerk 2013.
- 15 See Istūdiyū Ṣawt al-Qur'ān n.d.
- 16 In the video, from 3:10 to 5:20; this is what I showed in my 2023 presentation.
- 17 I highlight here education because the video's title can be translated as 'An original and quick way to teach *maqām Rāst* with doctor Taha Abd-el Wahab.' Interestingly, the propagator/maker/promoter of this video is a channel signed in Arabic as 'Studio of the Voice of Quran.'
- 18 Bawāba al-Mawhūbīn 2021. The Arabic title can be translated as 'Look how Adham al-Dasuki performs "by the Sun and its dawn" and how Ahmad Mustafa stays quiet [in response].' The broadcaster of this video can be translated as 'The Gate of the Talented.'
- 19 This powerful musical sentence starts at 1:31 and ends at 1:55 when Adham takes a breath of tire-some and the person making the video is exalted and cheering.
- 20 The first frame of the video, which appears before the recording plays, suggests a promotion of musicality because it displays this text: 'Before the genius of Adham al-Dasuki, the expert in *maqāms* keeps silence.'
- 21 Jawad Farughi is promoted by a source called MyQuran.de 2021, with the catchy title for his performance translated as, 'See how the audience is crying during the recitation of the child reader Jawad Farughi for the chapters al-Safat, al-Tin, and al-Alaq.'
- 22 This is apart from the fact that, over the course of history, certain manners of Quran recitation (*qirā'āt*) have been developed.
- 23 When one looks up all Jawad's performances on YouTube, it leads to a link gathering all his videos and he can be seen as an adult still performing by imitation to great crowds, such as MyQuran.de 2020.
- 24 See for more details Hirschkind 2008.
- 25 M.S 2014, until 2:13. I showed the video at the presentation in Cairo (2023), and the audience manifested the same sympathies, empathies, and feelings that they saw emanating from the crowd that was filmed, as a reaction to Kaysa.
- 26 On the West and its perception of Islam, especially after the 9/11 attacks, see the analysis by Jared Ahmad 2021.
- 27 See Liga Dangdut Indonesia 2021.
- 28 LIDA is the acronym for Liga Dangdut Indonesia, a national talent show where competitors can progress and win thanks to votes.
- 29 As explained by a specialist and a scholar in this music style, *dangdut*, is 'a wildly popular genre of Indonesian music and dance. Mass mediated through radio, television, film, and the Internet, *dangdut* sounds, images, and meanings circulate widely through the mediascape of the archipelago. Performed in streets, bars, nightclubs, stadiums, and at outdoor parties and festivals, *dangdut* has wide public appeal among Indonesian Muslims of different classes, ethnicities, genders, and generations. It is arguably the most widely circulated music of the majority Islamic nation of Indonesia, and generally has little appeal for non-Muslims in the country.' See Weintraub 2011, p. 320.
- 30 Mario Shooting Darwis 2022. Vania's stage this time was a marriage celebration. Apparently, she was asked to recite, which is a common thing at Muslim events. Vania started the same way she

did at the LIDA. It seems she did later try to move beyond the memorized melodies, but somehow got stuck in the same maqam and the same melodic process known by heart.

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THE NIGERIAN CINEMA INDUSTRY OF KANNYWOOD

Competing Views on Being Muslim

Musa Ibrahim

‘Kannywood,’ a predominantly Muslim cinema in Africa, emerged as a result of globalization, the encroachment of consumerism (broadcasting media, cell phones, the internet), neoliberal reforms of the state, religious reforms, and changing lifestyles. Globalization, as Gauthier et al. (2016, p. 1) rightly describe, is ‘a cultural phenomenon, with interlinked social, political, economic and religious dimensions.’ Drawing from this assertion, this analysis of Kannywood approaches it as a cultural phenomenon that has emerged out of this context of globalization and creates new contexts with social, political, and religious dimensions.

The name Kannywood is a portmanteau of ‘Kano,’ a historical Muslim city in Nigeria (nowadays, the capital of Kano state, with over four million inhabitants), and ‘Hollywood,’ a district in California whose name is synonymous with the American film industry. The appellation ‘Kannywood’ was first used as the name of a column in the August 1999 issue of a Hausa film magazine, *Tauraruwa*, by Sanusi Shehu Daneji, the magazine’s founder (Adamu 2009). However, the label ‘Kannywood’ was spread by the popular press and adopted by audiences before eventually being accepted by filmmakers as the name of the industry (McCain 2013).

Starting from the late 1980s, the Nigerian government, under the supervision of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, implemented neoliberal policies known as the Structural Adjustment Program. These policies saw the introduction of stringent economic measures, including either privatizing many institutions hitherto controlled by the government or reducing their funding to ease government expenditure and encouraging private sector service provision. These policies were followed by an unemployment crisis resulting from massive job cuts in the public service sectors. Following the decline in the purchasing power of Nigerians due to currency devaluation and inflation, some Nigerian traders started importing used or mostly worn-out consumer products, including electronic gadgets from Europe, which were being repaired and sold to Nigerians at affordable prices. This shift to consuming cheap second-hand electronic appliances (popularly referred to as *Yan Cotonou* in northern Nigeria and *Tokumbo* in southern Nigeria) not only provided alternatives for low-income-earning consumers but also transformed the country’s cultural production and consumption structure.

Some people who lost their jobs with the state-owned broadcasting media and were unable to find new jobs with private companies, like cameramen and theater performers, teamed up with various private theater performers and started recording their dramas using Video Home System (VHS) cameras. They would sell these substandard edited video recordings to people who have increasing access to second-hand television and VHS video player sets. Cameramen who did not have their own recording gadgets hired them from a colleague. While camera hiring became a business of its own, many more apprentices learned to professionally use them. This dynamic increased audio-visual media content production and consumption across Nigeria, including recorded religious sermons and dramas (Larkin 2004). The period also witnessed a rapid revival of cinema culture, with a lot of local movies premiering. Thus, many scholars (Haynes 2000; Fagge 2004; Jibril 2004; Larkin 2004; Ibrahim 2018) have opined that the media liberalization and increased accessibility of cheap electronic gadgets that happened simultaneously from the late 1980s onward have facilitated the emergence of a popular video culture and aided its development into a vibrant video film industry in Nigeria. As Nigerian filmmakers improve their skills and the quality of their films, the industry transforms along with technologically facilitated consumerism, such as transitioning from VHS cassettes to CDs, DVDs, and now online content.

The Nigerian video film culture is a national phenomenon that happened simultaneously across the federation of Nigeria, albeit in ways that showcase the country's socio-cultural and political diversity (Jedlowski 2011; McCain 2013; Ibrahim 2020). The northern part of the country is predominantly Muslim, with a significant minority Christian population. Likewise, southern Nigeria is mainly Christian, with a large Muslim population, especially in the southwest. Rooted in this socio-cultural pattern between the two major regions, the Nigerian film industry was divided into two major components. A mainly Hausa language 'Muslim' video film industry, Kannywood, emerged and dominated the north, distinguishing itself from the mostly 'Christian' English-language films in the south (Jedlowski 2011; McCain 2013; Haynes 2016; Ibrahim 2019). A *lingua franca*, Hausa is spoken in Nigeria and some other African countries as a first language by nearly 50 million people and as a second language by another 25 million.

However, when Kannywood is described as a 'Muslim cinema,' it does not mean that it is entirely owned by Muslims, as there are pockets of Christians within it. Nor does the expression mean the people who constitute Kannywood represent what Muslims in the Hausa-speaking areas across West Africa unanimously accept as Islamic or signify a kind of homogeneity in how Islam is or should be represented in movies. Rather, Kannywood is a 'Muslim cinema' in Africa because it is a popular site for expressing, contesting, and negotiating contemporary Muslim cultures in many of its manifestations. The film industry influences the transformation of Muslim society in the same way that socio-cultural, economic, and political subcontexts within and without said Muslim society have shaped its emergence and transformation. In fact, Kannywood represents Muslim diversity and highlights shifting dynamics in cultural production and consumption among Muslims in and beyond Nigeria.

The first successful commercial Kannywood film, *Turmin Danya* (The Draw), was produced in 1990 by Ibrahim Mandawari, the then president of Tumbin Giwa Drama Group in the city of Kano (Adamu 2002; Ali 2004). Following its success, some established authors in the production of romantic Hausa novels, also known as Kano Market Literature (Adamu 2002; Whitsitt 2002; Hirokazu 2012; McCain 2013), started transforming their novels into low-budget video films (Adamu 2002). Some examples of these are Ado Ahmad

Gidan-Dabino's *Inda So Da Kauna* (Where There Is Love, There Is Affection) and *Wani Hanin Ga Allah* (Some Failures Are Blessings in Disguise), produced in 1993 and 1994, respectively, and Bala Anas Babinlata's *Tsuntu Mai Wayo* (A Clever Bird) (1994). These novelists-turned-film producers and directors represent the first generation of Kannywood filmmakers.

With the success of the first generation of Kannywood filmmakers and the huge employment and market opportunities it provided in the 1990s, Kano became a Mecca of sorts, or, rather, what Hollywood is to California. Young people, both males and females, from across northern Nigeria and its neighboring countries came to Kano to join the industry. Zoo Road is a neighborhood within the Kano metropolis where most Kannywood studios are concentrated – it is for Kannywood what Universal City is to Hollywood. While Kano remains the Kannywood center, activities there also inspired persons who could not relocate to the city to start their own filmmaking activities in their regions. They set up their studios in major cities such as Kaduna, Jos, Abuja, and Sokoto.

From the start, Kannywood films have been influenced by Indian films (Larkin 2000; Adamu 2007a, 2007b) and also *littattafan soyayya* (romantic Hausa novels). The Indian influence was a result of decades of consumption by Nigerian cinemagoers since the 1960s, as well as some cultural similarities between Hindu and Hausa cultures (Larkin 2000). One of the enduring influences of Bollywood on Kannywood is that most of its storylines are based on love triangles and contain intermittent dance sequences (Ibrahim 2022). In this regard, the religious zealots among Kannywood critics view imitating Indian songs and dance sequences as akin to promoting *shirk* (polytheism), which is 'the greatest sin in Islam' (Yusha'u 2004, p. 131). This is because Indian songs and dances have been intimately associated with the Hindu religion. These competing views on what being Muslim means have evolved into something like a cultural battle between liberal and conservative-fundamentalist ideologies and identities.

By 1998, Kannywood had become a well-established film industry that produced no less than three hundred movies every year¹ for consumption by primarily Hausa-speaking Muslims across West Africa. Its films cover diverse topics such as romance (*Kilu Ta Ja Bau/A Little Trigger, Huge Impact*), family life (*Saudatu/The Name of the Protagonist*), crime (*Wata Shari'a sai a Lahira/Some Aspects of Justice Will Only Be Attained on the Day of Judgement*), social problems (*Wasila*), corruption (*Wasiyya/Will*), and politics (*Gaskiya Dokin Karfe/Truth Is an Iron Horse*) (Adamu 2002). Larkin (2004, p. 299) reports that 'in 2001 alone, two hundred Hausa videos were released, easily making this one of the most vibrant forms of African media.' To further highlight the size of the Kannywood film industry, a press statement by Motion Pictures Practitioners of Nigeria (MOPPAN) declared that by 2008, Kannywood had directly employed more than fifty thousand people and contributed 35 percent of the total films produced in the Nigerian film industry (Sarari 2008). By the same year, it has been argued that the Nigerian film industry generated over thirty billion naira (circa 260 million US dollars) worth of economic activities. This figure implies that Kannywood generated over nine billion naira (ca. over 75 million US dollars) in economic activities representing 35 percent (Sarari 2008) of the Nigerian film industry. By 2015, the broader Nigerian film industry was described as the country's second-largest employer after agriculture. This is in a country that has the biggest economy in Africa (McCain 2014, p. 341). In 2017, some Kannywood filmmakers told me that although it is difficult to provide accurate figures on the impacts of Kannywood, various guilds under its banner have estimated that they provided direct and indirect jobs to over 1 million people.

Furthermore, the recent explosion in smartphones and internet access has strengthened Kannywood as one of the dominant means of mass cultural production, the products of which are consumed even in some of the remotest places across Hausa-speaking communities in West Africa. Kannywood films are marketed through home-grown start-up technologies, notably the Northflix, Haske247, and Kallo mobile apps (modeled after Netflix, Hulu, etc.), which provide video-on-demand platforms and pay-per-view options. Additionally, several Kannywood producers have set up YouTube channels that broadcast their movies for free while making money from Google based on the number of views their films generate. Many Kannywood producers ventured into 'series' movies uploaded at intervals to attract and sustain viewership. An example of this is Bakori TV on YouTube, which consistently gets an average of 1.5 million views per week for its weekly episode of the *Izzar So* series. Some of these series are also aired on free-to-air satellite TV stations as prime-time shows sponsored by multinational corporations and local companies. Some examples of this category are *Labari na* and the *Gidan Badamasi* film series shown on Arewa 24 TV.

In what appears like an expanded consumer network within the Kannywood microeconomic structure, thousands of youths who could afford portable computers and electricity-generating sets earn a living by operating kiosks known as 'download centers' (Adamu 2019). They download the free Kannywood movies from the internet and use some free or cracked versions of premium software to format those films into versions watchable on smartphones. They collect money to upload copies on their clients' smartphones for offline consumption. These download centers can be found in every neighborhood across northern Nigeria, including some of the remotest villages that are not connected to electricity through the national power grids. Also, these kiosks provide add-on services like charging their customers' smartphones for additional fees using their portable electricity generators, mostly imported from China. Nowadays, some use solar panels.

Like other film industries elsewhere, Kannywood is connected to the consumer goods manufacturing industry through brand promotion (Ibrahim 2022). Some filmmakers who have amassed enough money have started their own consumer brands, mostly beauty products. Over the last three decades, Kannywood has turned many filmmakers into rich Muslim celebrities. But this does not happen seamlessly.

Kannywood and the Transformation of Muslim Consumer Culture

Along with the economic aspects of consumerism introduced by the entertainment sector, Kannywood engages various social actors in a range of issues and ways of moving toward cultural reconstruction. It creates a competitive environment where filmmakers engage with creative story writers at the grassroots level in producing storylines about the lives of ordinary Muslims. Filmmakers usually write their phone numbers on the covers or inside their films for their audience to call and comment on the movies they watched. Some filmmakers mentioned that they receive no less than six hundred calls per day during the first days after releasing their films. What initially was intended as a conventional consumer satisfaction service turned out to be a unique way of interaction leading to a massive cultural revolution. Many viewers call the filmmakers' phone numbers to share their own real-life experiences that relate to what they have watched. Some of them share their true-life stories with the filmmakers consenting that they could be adopted for movies. If the producers find any of those stories worthy, they can adopt it into a movie and acknowledge that the film was produced based on a true-life story. Some Kannywood filmmakers attributed their success

to their commitment to satisfying their consumers' needs. In addition to serving as a useful marketing strategy, this process has enabled many young men and women into creative writers.

Embedded within this Kannywood consumer and prosumer culture, filmmakers employ themes that engage with realities on the ground, and some of their movies directly reflect the lives of the people that consume them. The films not only captivate the audiences' imagination and curiosity but emotionally appeal to them. In other words, Kannywood transforms filmmaking into a process of interaction between the filmmakers and the consumers, thereby creating one of the most effective ways for ordinary persons to talk about what they think of themselves via a format they enjoy.

Furthermore, a print-based consumer culture has sprung out of Kannywood. In addition to entertainment pages in the national and local newspapers, Kannywood-specific magazines such as *Tauraruwa*, *Fim*, and *Taskira* have emerged. They provide Kannywood film news, gossip, movie reviews, opinions, and adverts. They also produce special editions that feature some established Kannywood superstars. In addition to promoting their magazines, how the publishers put glossy pictures of Muslim female actors on the cover pages points to new ways of expressing being a Muslim woman and a celebrity in a Muslim-majority society (Ibrahim 2022).

Several radio and television programs on Kannywood have brought different stakeholders, including viewers, either physically or electronically (via call-in and instant messaging formats), for discussions about the Kannywood and Muslim cultures. Some examples of these programs include *filin fina-finan Hausa* (Hausa Films Program) on Freedom Radio, *Kundin Kannywood (Kannywood Collection)* on Arewa 24 Television, *Daga fina-finan Hausa* (From Kannywood Movies) on Raypower, and *Dandalin fim* (Films Platform) on Radio France International (RFI Hausa Service), among others. These interactions between filmmakers and consumers, facilitated by telephone, the internet, and broadcasting technology, make Kannywood a cultural phenomenon that blends the interest of filmmakers and that of their viewers through participatory movie production.

Since its inception, most Kannywood filmmakers were and are still conscious of their religion and local cultural dynamics. Most of them believe that, as Muslims, they are representing Islam, or at least the Muslim cultures of the Hausa-speaking people, in the popular video film industry, and this representation is indispensable for Muslims. They believe that their objectives, expressed through their storylines, and their attitudes are largely influenced by Islam and local Muslim cultures more than any other thing. As a prominent producer mentioned, whenever he produced a movie and irrespective of its content, he starts the opening of that movie with *Bismillahi-r-Rahmani-Rahim* (In the name of Allah, the most benevolent, the most merciful), which is the opening verse at the beginning of every chapter in the Quran except one.² He also ends it with *Alhamdu-lillah* (All praise be to Allah), sometimes written in both Arabic and transliteration. Some directors anticipate Allah's reward whenever one of the watchers recites those statements because they are *azkar* (litanies for the remembrance of Allah; Arabic: *adhkār*).

These activities associated with Kannywood show that the filmmakers are not only culturally literate but also active producers in the Muslim cultural field. While explaining how their movies inculcate good attitudes, some directors mentioned how those movies engage in cultural debates and reflect multiple perspectives of trends and events with the idea of influencing or helping people make positive judgments and choices in their actual life. In other words, in addition to job creation, many filmmakers believe that Kannywood

provides them with opportunities to review their past experiences and seek to redefine their future within the frame of Islam.

However, this raises some alarms within the camp of Islamic reformers. Islamists, who are also actively pursuing Islamic reforms in northern Nigeria, have viewed the cultural input and output of Kannywood as a threat to the 'authentic' Islam their reforms are promoting. Thus, they felt the need to intervene and included Kannywood as a major aspect of their reform. The next section discusses how the Islamists' response, Kannywood's resistance, and various negotiation strategies have further reshaped Kannywood as a site of Muslim cultural production and consumption.

Sharia Reforms and the Consolidation of Kannywood as Muslim Hollywood

Gauthier et al. (2016, p. 2) posit that 'the current transformations affecting religion (both institutions and religious phenomena in general) are best understood if cast as integral to the recent shaping of culture by economics (both consumerism and neoliberalism) from a global [...] perspective.' Kannywood's emergence overlapped with sharia reforms implemented by the '*ulamā*' (traditional Islamic scholars) and Western-educated Muslim activists who teamed up to execute their reform through political and democratic processes. These '*ulamā*' and Western-educated Muslim activists (henceforth referred to as Islamists) came from different Muslim groups, specifically Sufism (also *taṣawwuf*: mystical or ascetical Islamic beliefs and practices) and Salafism (anti-Sufi Islamic reform, which is also based on the strict emulation of *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ* – the first three generations of Muslims).

Until the 1970s, when the anti-Sufi Salafi reform movement known in Nigeria as *Jamā'at Izālat al-Bid'a wa-Iqāmat al-Sunnah* (the Society for the Eradication of Innovations and Establishment of Sunnah, short: *Izala*) emerged, the vast majority of Muslims were followers of Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya, two prominent Sufi brotherhoods in Nigeria (Kane 2003; Thurston 2016). While both Sufi and Salafi groups are active in the country, the Saudi Arabian-backed Salafi reform movements have dominated cultural production in northern Nigeria, especially from the 1990s onward, through formal and non-formal education, as well as political activism (Umar 2001; Larkin 2009; Renne 2018). It is also worth noting that during the same period, Shia-based Islamic reform movements emerged as significant in Muslim-minority groups in the country (Ibrahim 2022).

Taking advantage of the political and neoliberal economic changes in Nigeria, some Islamists agitated for the adoption of a complete Islamic legal system in the country. Between 1999 and 2000, 12 democratically elected governors in the overwhelmingly Muslim northern region formally adopted sharia (Islamic law) as the legal system in their states (Ostien 2007). However, the Islamists' concern about moral decadence among Muslims is due to the same globalization, neoliberal policies, and consumerism of which they are also beneficiaries.

The successful takeover of 12 states by Islamists heralded a period of direct state intervention through Islamic reform with a significant focus on Kannywood. Those Islamists, who are averse to popular art and culture, have accused Kannywood filmmakers of promoting immorality in many ways. In addition to some of them viewing filmmaking as generally un-Islamic, they also strongly oppose some cinematography practices in Kannywood, such as innocuous body contact with the opposite sex, which they consider a flagrant violation of Islamic values. They are also wary about how Kannywood has become a powerful tool of

cultural expression that challenges the didactic construction of northern Nigerian Muslim-gendered public culture. One example is how Kannywood attracts young women (expected by custom to remain at home) to leave their secluded zones and engage in filmmaking, a profession that requires them to rub shoulders with men. They live autonomously in their own houses and host newcomers in the entertainment industry. This constitutes 'a significant challenge to women's seclusion values, which are deeply entrenched in northern Nigerian Muslim culture' (Ibrahim 2022, p. 9). However, before the adoption of sharia reforms, the Islamists could only rhetorically criticize those un-Islamic Kannywood practices.

As Wherry and Woodward (2019, p. 1) suggest, understanding consumption should go beyond input and output models 'to encompass the constraints and opportunities generated from ongoing social interactions and the stability of cultural meanings which shaped and gave force to consumption.' The sharia regime introduced official film censorship that, however, has further consolidated Kannywood as a site for producing, consuming, and contesting religion in both local and global contexts.

Local cultural discourse about Kannywood was influenced by the Islamists' awareness of global cinema discourses, particularly the influences of Hollywood and Bollywood, which they watched and also read about, based on my interviews with them. In the pre-sharia period of modern Nigeria, Islamists had limited their reactions to what they considered Kannywood's un-Islamic practices to speaking against them from their pulpits. However, the adoption of sharia as state law and the subsequent appointment of some Islamists to head agencies in the sharia-oriented state government have allowed them to take tangible actions. For example, the Kano state government established official bodies to regulate Kannywood in line with the Islamists' interpretation of Islam. Notable among the state-sponsored censorship institutions are the Kano State Censorship Board and the Kano State Hisbah Board. The Kano State Censorship Handbook (2008, p. 24) described its establishment 'as a response to popular demand for the implementation of Sharia legal system in this [Kano] state and many parts of Northern Nigeria.' Since their establishment, the censorship agencies have been mainly directed or influenced by Islamists, who have introduced stringent regulations that prevent some filmmaking practices.

In 2007, the Kano Censorship Board banned Kannywood from producing new films for six months. At the expiration of the ban, the board revoked the license of all the Kannywood film production companies and rolled out new stringent regulations under which they could be relicensed. The regulations required that any Kannywood production must, from script development to shooting and final production, comply with the stringent guidelines issued by the censorship board. The final copy of the film must be approved by the Film Preview Unit, which is made up of a committee headed by the Deputy Director of Film Production and Development. Other members of the committee comprise representatives from sharia institutions: Sharia Commission, Hisbah³ Board, and Council of Ulama. The Kannywood filmmakers and film marketers associations each had a representative in the Film Preview Unit. This group sits in a room to watch the submitted films for approval. The head of the Film Preview Unit told me that their main function is ensuring that what people watch conforms to 'Islamic ethics and Hausa customs.'⁴ When asked to explain what exactly he meant by Islamic ethics and Hausa customs, he mentioned an example:

Holding a hand of a woman, as seen in Western movies and those produced in southern Nigeria, contradicts Islamic teaching and the custom of the Hausa people. You would

not see a man holding a woman's hand either in standing or walking gestures in our society, and sharia upholds this. If we saw this in a film, we ask the producer to remove it.⁵

While all Kannywood filmmakers were requested to register individually with the censorship board, the regulations for women were stricter. They must provide written permission from their parents and the traditional leaders of the places they come from, stating that they have approved their participation in Kannywood. This condition seems hard to fulfill because, even if their parents consent to their participation, it is difficult to get approvals from traditional leaders who, like the censors, are under government control. In this regard, it becomes clear that the Islamists devised those stringent censorship regulations as a means of reasserting their control over Muslim cultural production, especially concerning the vibrant home-grown Muslim film industry. In doing so, they used Quran and *hadith* injunctions, which entreat Muslims to 'enjoin what is good and forbid what is bad,' as religious justifications. In this context, they would only allow Kannywood films that promote Islam in ways the Islamists consider appropriate.

However, Kannywood does not operate independently from other Nigerian and international film industries. Hollywood, Bollywood, and Chinese films were popular among Hausa Muslims before Kannywood's debut. Because of this competition, Kannywood filmmakers initially resisted the Islamists' pressure on them to produce theologically inspired content. However, the pressure made some of them succumb. They started adapting and appropriating some Quranic parables into film storylines. As Krings (2005, 2008) observes, the 2000s saw a significant shift to theologically inspired themes and contents. Many of those films revolve around Islam and pagan vampires, where Islam always prevails. Some examples of these are *Ga Duhu Ga Haske*/Darkness and Light (directed by Aminu Saira 2010), *Ashabul-Kahfi*/People of the Cave (directed by Aminu Saira, 2013), *Ana Muslim*/I Am a Muslim (directed by Abubakar Shehu 2014), and *Ablul Kitabi* /People of the Book (directed by Falalu Dorayi 2015).

Polygyny as a Topic of Kannywood Films

While the censorship dynamic repositioned the filmmakers as more active religious actors, they started reinterpreting Quran and *hadith* texts in their movies. They do so in ways that address social discontent among people, which is not something one can discuss anywhere with relative freedom. For instance, one of the core social issues in northern Nigeria is how polygyny is affecting the social and economic well-being of society. While the '*ulamā*' strongly promotes polygyny, the filmmakers challenge this one-sided patriarchal interpretation of the Quranic verses that approve of it. For example, the movie *Abokina* (My Friend), produced by AS Maikwai (2013), is about polygyny and the maltreatment of women in their matrimonial homes. It opens with an exchange between Ali Nuhu (starring as Buhari), who wants to marry a second wife (who is his friend's ex-wife), and his wife, Fati Ladan (starring as Aisha), who opposes this. Fati Ladan opposes this, firstly, because she does not want a *kishiya* (co-wife). A second reason is that she specifically would not want her husband's best friend's ex-wife as her co-wife. In response, Ali Nuhu argues that polygyny is permissible in Islam, and he wants to practice it. Also, according to him, there is nothing wrong with marrying his best friend's ex-wife because it is permissible in Islam. He justifies his decision further by saying that he was following the example of Prophet Mohammad, who married Zainab after Zaid divorced her. The marriage took place even though the

Prophet was a foster father of Zaid. Fati Ladan, with tears cascading down her cheeks, interrupted her husband with the following:

I already know what you would say. I know, the only thing you would say is religion allows you to marry more women... But you should not forget that the same religion implores us to avoid what would create chaos among us [the believers]. Let me remind you that the Prophet Mohammad, peace be upon him, said: 'Sin is what the mind cannot withstand.' And I know you are not comfortable with what you are about to do. It is only that your desire blinds you, and I see it as my duty to bring you back on the right track.⁶

These dialogues show how meanings are made and how women use Kannywood movies to deconstruct religious interpretations and misgivings about some religious texts in male-dominated societies (Ibrahim 2018).

Another example is *Da Kishiyar Gida* (2013), a movie directed by Ali Gumzak. It is about a husband, Ali Nuhu, who is determined to marry a second wife even though his wife, Aina'u Ade, has vowed never to allow him to do this. The movie derived its title from a statement pronounced by the leading actress in the movie, Aina'u Ade, as her strategy against polygyny: '*Da kishiyar gida gara ta waje,*' which I roughly translate as 'It is better (for a wife) to allow her husband to keep a mistress than marry a second wife.' The same statement serves as a background song played throughout the film. During one of the dialogues in the opening scene, Ali Nuhu (husband) tries to convince his raging wife about his justification for polygamy. He says: 'God has permitted me to marry three more wives; how dare you are to think that you can stop me. I challenge that you are too small for that.' The wife replies: 'Allah's permission should not be misinterpreted as an obligation as many of you [men] do.' The argument continues with no side willing to compromise. Later, when Ali Nuhu meets the woman he intends to marry as his second wife, he hesitantly tells her: 'I am afraid, I am married and want to marry you as my second wife.' The woman, Fati Musa, replies: 'Whether you are married or not [it] does not matter to me at all. I know, men interpret the polygyny verse as if they are competing with their peers. You never consider at all the reasons and logic behind it [the verse]. So, it does not matter to me because even if I am the first one, I know you will marry another one after me.'⁷

This pattern of dialogue with men in support of and women in opposition to polygyny, and both arguing from different religious perspectives, is a representation that is common in Kannywood films. It alludes to how the expectations of women viewing those movies are represented. The filmmakers present two arguments around the same religious texts like Quran (4:3)⁸ that allow polygyny within strict conditions. In doing this, the films expose the suffering, mainly of women and children, that comes from ignoring the strict regulations attached to the permission. Sometimes, as in the case of *Da Kishiyar Gida* (It Is Preferable to Keep a Mistress to Having a Legal Co-wife), the women resort to legalizing haram or opting to let their husbands keep mistresses rather than marry. By keeping mistresses, they minimize the tension, unhappiness, and problems that often result because the husband fails to be just toward all his wives.

Although the above interpretations of polygyny contradict the Islamists' view and are opposed to it, the filmmakers end up sticking to them due to market forces, particularly the consumers' need for diverse cultural nuances and the products appearing in their movies. In fact, one of the motivations underlying Kannywood's success amidst religious censorship

is the filmmakers' ability to provide alternative cultural products and advocate socio-cultural, including religious, changes in northern Nigeria.

Arnould and Thompson (2019, p. 95) discuss how consumer culture studies illuminate the dynamic interactive relationships among consumer actions, marketplace systems, cultural meanings, and broader socio-structural forces, such as socialization in class and gender practices and ideologies. To further counter the Islamists' discourse that Kannywood filmmakers were agents of 'moral corruption' (Hausa: *bata tarbiyya*), the filmmakers started to openly use religious justification to explain why they do films. They changed how they describe what they do from *nishadantarwa* (entertaining) to *ilimantarwa* (educating) and *fadakarwa* (enlightening) in their own definition of their roles as Muslim filmmakers. They mainly use *nishadantarwa* (entertaining) as a method through which they educate rather than a role they perform in filmmaking. For them, entertainment is a method that makes the (religious) messages they convey less boring as they express them to consumers. They justify this with a Quranic verse that enjoins people to engage in *da'wa* (invitation to Islam) using *bikmah* (wisdom) in their communication, filmmaking in this case. Through this discourse, they deconstruct the Islamists' claim that filmmaking is un-Islamic and adjust the content of some of their films to make them more Islamic, yet they continue to address societal issues such as forced marriage, sexual molestation, lack of female education, and domestic violence, while at the same time entertaining their audience. In this regard, the Kannywood filmmakers consider themselves to be the most Islamic film industry in the world. Justifying this claim, a Kannywood leading director, Ahmad Alkanawy, explained, 'Nowhere in the Muslim majority societies would you find a cinema where men and women act as married couples but never touch each other. Cinemas in Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Egypt allow some degree of contact between opposite sexes.'⁹

Kannywood and the Fragmentation of Religious Authority

As Roof (1999, p. 78) posits, 'an open, competitive religious economy makes possible an expanded spiritual marketplace which, like any marketplace, must be understood in terms both of "demand" and "supply."' Gauthier (2020) adds that while we should not take this to mean we need to turn a Rational-Choice-type of approach, social scientists need to pay attention to how the logics of consumerism shape religion in terms of service provision and the consumers' 'needs.' Therefore, Kannywood's strategy of Islamizing its movie contents has led to the fragmentation of the religious authorities. By fragmentation, I refer to how the debate over Kannywood and Islamic cultural production is not a means to prevent venality; rather, it is a means by which the '*ulamā*' attempts to reassert authority and quash challengers to that authority. However, even as they try to do this, they fragment further because neither the '*ulamā*' nor the filmmakers (as sole big entities or subgroups) represent a single cohesive point of view; they compete among themselves over different claims to authority. The Salafis' harsher stance towards Kannywood and their insistence that every aspect of it must conform to their views of sharia raised concerns among their Sufi counterparts on the topic of censorship. For example, when Abubakar Rabo (affiliated with Salafism) was the head of the Kano State Censorship Board, he declared that all forms of songs and dance sequences in Kannywood movies were haram and must stop. The Sufis felt that the censorship equally targeted their beliefs and practices. Some ritual practices by both the Tijaniyya and Qadiriyya Sufi orders involve music, singing, and dancing, and include *majalisi*,¹⁰ *maulidi*,¹¹ and *maukibi*,¹² during which they beat drums (*bandiri*), sing religious songs, and dance. They consider those performances as acts of worship and the veneration of saints.

In response to the Salafis' assertion of hegemony through film censorship, some prominent Sufi shaykhs, such as Shaykh Yusuf Ali (affiliated with the *Tijani* order) and Shaykh Musal Qasiwiniy (associated with the *Qadiri* order), among others, started to openly support Kannywood. They encouraged the filmmakers to be as natural as possible in their cinematic representation of society, including innocuous touching between opposite sexes, which the Salafis strongly objected to. The Sufis justified their changing position based on the maxim derived from a *hadith* that '[The qualifications of] deeds are determined by their intentions' (*innamā al-a'māl bil-niyyāt*). Furthermore, some Sufi clerics also strived to get into the state-sponsored censorship institution to counter the dominance and influence of the Salafis.

Both Kannywood and the Islamic reform movements in Nigeria are products of globalization, which 'refers to both the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole' (Robertson 1992, p. 8). Global and/or Middle Eastern Islamic politics influence the Nigerian '*ulamā*' and shape their discourses. This is reflected within the Kannywood phenomenon.

Sometime in the late 2010s, the Kano State Censorship Board banned a movie titled *Tarihin Annabi Yusuf* (The Story of Prophet Joseph). It was a film produced initially in Iran, and the Hausa version was created by a Kannywood-associated company, Algaita Dubbing Studio, which has a reputation for decoding foreign language films (Hindi, English, and Arabic) into Hausa and selling them in northern Nigeria. I do not know whether the Hausa version of the film was supported by Iran or any religious organization in Nigeria. Like the famous story of Prophet Yusuf in the Quran, the movie also became popular and one of the best-selling videos in northern Nigeria's sharia states. However, due to the portraying one of the prophets of Islam (Yusuf), the Abubakar Rabo-led leadership of the Kano State Censorship Board banned the movie, a decision that corresponds to the views of the many Salafī '*ulamā*' members I interviewed. The censorship board ordered its staff to confiscate and destroy copies of the film found in markets stores.

The above was understood by some of the Sufi '*ulamā*' to be a deliberate plan against other Muslims' beliefs that oppose Salafism. Shaykh Musal Qasiwiniy Nasiru Kabara, a Qadiriyya Sufi brotherhood leader in Kano, mentioned that

To tell you the truth, the censorship board used the visual representation of Prophet Yusuf as a pretext to ban that film. The main reason was the origin of that movie. It came from Iran, and the people in the censorship board have their ideology from Saudi Arabia, a country that is executing a *jihād*, no, we should not call it *jihād*; Saudi Arabia is waging *yaki* [unholy war] against Iran and anything related to Iran in the whole world. It [the film] came from Iran, and it was well accepted here by all people because it was of high quality and conformed to the sharia. You will find this film in every household. I can assure you, had it [the film] come from Saudi Arabia, nobody would have uttered a word against it. So, there are problems.¹³

The above interaction indicates the impact of globalization (global Muslim politics and global cinema) on Islam in Nigeria.

The fragmentation of the '*ulamā*'s authority neutralizes the hardline reformers' views about Muslim cultural production through filmmaking. As Gauthier et al. (2016, p. 2) rightly capture, 'neoliberalism believes in the efficiency and rationality of markets, and seeks to place as many social functions as possible on a market footing, thus introducing the

element of profit into every “service.” Linking this to the mass production and consumption of religious views shows a situation where religious services offered by the ‘*ulamā*’ become contingent on their ‘profit,’ either individually or as groups. In other words, Kannywood brings out theological diversities or brands of Islam among Islamic reformers as they compete to influence their followers-cum-consumers in their choices of values and ethics. This dynamic presents Kannywood filmmakers with the option to choose a *fatwā* (religious verdict) that suits their filmmaking interests and enables them to reposition themselves as competitive religious actors through the filmmaking industry.

To conclude, this chapter has examined how Kannywood, as a major Muslim film industry in Africa (along with Cairo), emerged and has been shaped by different global forces, such as the secular neoliberal policies of the Nigerian government, Islamic reform movements, transnational media flows, changing lifestyles, and the lifestylization within the local Muslims cultures. As producers of subcultures of consumption, filmmakers and Islamists continue to rebrand their products in response to consumerism influenced by state intervention through neoliberal policies and changes in lifestyles. The competition between Islamists and filmmakers in cultural production further solidified Kannywood as an influential and lucrative Muslim film industry through which traditional and modern cultural elements are negotiated. The more the Islamists have sought further control over Kannywood because they see it as ‘un-Islamic,’ the more the filmmakers and consumers have resisted, and the further they have created room for divergent religious views packaged and promoted through oral *fatwās* and videos.

Notes

- 1 Blueprint Newspaper 2020.
- 2 Surah al-Tawbah is the only chapter in the Quran that does not start with this formula. The widely accepted reason among Quranic commentators is that Prophet Mohammad did not dictate Bismillah at the beginning of this Surah. Therefore, his scribes and companions who had memorized the whole Quran did not prefix it and their successors followed them. Adherence to this directive has been used by Muslims as further proof that utmost care has been taken to keep the Quran intact so that it should remain in its complete and original form. See Ünal 2008.
- 3 Evoking the general Islamic idea of enjoining good and preventing bad and the related pre-modern institution of market regulation.
- 4 Aminu Musa. Interview with author. Kano, 2014.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 A conversation in *Abokina* movie.
- 7 A conversation in *Da Kishiyar Gida* movie.
- 8 Quran (4:3) reads, ‘And if you fear that you will not deal justly with the orphan girls, then marry those that please you of [other] women, two or three or four. But if you fear that you will not be just, then [marry only] one or those your right hands possess [i.e., slaves]. That is more suitable that you may not incline [to injustice].’
- 9 Ahmad Alkanawy. Interview with author. Kano, 2015.
- 10 It is a regular (weekly) meeting of the followers of both *Tijaniyya* and *Qadiriyya* respectively. *Majlisi* has different formats, some of which involve drumming, singing religious songs, and dancing.
- 11 It is the commemoration of the birth of Prophet Mohammad and some of the Sufi saints. It is practiced by both *Tijaniyya* and *Qadiriyya* followers.
- 12 It is an annual religious procession involving thousands of *Qadiriyya* followers during which they visit the graves of their saints.
- 13 Shaykh Qasiwiniy Nasiru Kabara. Interview with author. Kano, 2014.

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GHOSTBUSTERS IN JORDAN

Popular Religion Meets Netflix Teenage Drama in *Jinn* (2019)

Viktor Ullmann

Cold drinks in red plastic cups are ready at the bar, dozens of excited teenagers stand around a blue lit swimming pool, and relaxing electronic beats fill the mild night in the suburbs of Amman. Large golden gas balloons reveal the purpose of the event: this is a surprise birthday party for Mīrā, organized by her ex-boyfriend Fahid at his parents' home. Mīrā is grateful for the opportunity to get some distraction from the stress she has been experiencing lately, but her relationship with Fahid is complicated. Ever since she broke up with him earlier that day because of his jealousy and pushiness, he has been trying to win her over again – and with the surprise party, there actually seems to be a chance.

But when Kīrās, the boy with the dreamy eyes and wild hair that Mīrā has been meeting recently, suddenly appears next to the pool, Fahid's hopes begin to fade. On top of that, Kīrās is on a secret mission on which the fate of the whole high school depends, and he urges Mīrā to assist him. The angry Fahid intervenes and grabs Mīrā as the situation gets out of hand: Kīrās stretches out his arms and telekinetically pushes the enraged ex-boyfriend into the swimming pool. Unbeknownst to everyone but Mīrā, Kīrās is not only a mysterious stranger but also secretly a *jinnī*.¹

Cultural Representation in Times of Global Availability

The scene described above serves as the climax of the third episode of *Jinn* (2019) and already gives a taste of the recipe that defines the first Arabic Netflix Original Series: a blend of teenage drama with supernatural suspense that is meanwhile quite familiar to subscribers of the US-based streaming service. As such, *Jinn* serves as a particularly interesting piece of entertainment when it comes to the global representation of Islam.

First, since streaming became the paramount audiovisual entertainment in the late 2010s, with convenience and global availability as its defining features (Hadida et al. 2021), the medium has served as an intriguing case of cultural representation that works in two directions:² to Arabic audiences, who are (allegedly) interested in seeing 'their' culture represented on the global stage; and to Western audiences, who are invited to use Netflix as a quasi-portal into the Middle East. Larger theorizations of streaming as a multidirectional global media sphere are still rare.³ Most endeavors in this direction focus on specific countries of

origin.⁴ Therefore, any analysis of this double-directional representation will have to enter an academic field largely unmapped for now, one that uses both media and area studies.⁵

Second, as Netflix's first effort to commission and produce a series in Arabic – with a Jordanian film team and cast attached⁶ – *Jinn* also reveals which elements the streaming service considers suitable for its first global representation of Muslim culture. In this particular case, these are first and foremost the titular *jinn*, the prominent demonic beings well known both in Islamic⁷ and Western media cultures. To understand what makes *jinn* so suitable as the protagonists and poster boys of the first Arabic Netflix series, a brief introduction to their nature and cultural significance might be helpful.

Although *jinn* are often addressed as demons, their morality is far more ambiguous than the English word might suggest. *Jinn* can either be helpful to humans or act as their enemies and are thus, per se, neither good nor evil.⁸ They can also appear in many different shapes, such as natural phenomena like whirlwinds, as animals, and sometimes even as humans (both male and female),⁹ although the appearance in human form is said to be comparatively rare.¹⁰ Despite these occasional physical manifestations, *jinn* are generally assumed to be invisible in their natural form of very thin materiality.¹¹ This makes them highly compatible with, but in many ways quite distinct from, all kinds of ghost imageries in Western media.

It must be pointed out that the belief in *jinn* predates Islam and can be found in Bedouin cultures on the Arabian Peninsula (Chabbi 2003). Although anything supernatural is hard to reconcile with the Islamic creed of strict monotheism, *jinn* appear frequently in the Quran, where a whole chapter is named after them (Surah 72) (Orlomi 2021, p. 146), and they remained popular in Arabic culture even after the rise of Islam in the seventh century. As such, they were gradually integrated into a monotheistic worldview, although debates on their status in the religious hierarchy are ongoing until this day, from music-accompanied possession rituals in Egypt (Nelson 1971) and Morocco (Leistle 2011) to arguments about the prohibition of anything related to sorcery in the United Arab Emirates (Kruk 2011). *Jinn* are, consequently, deeply embedded in both the Little and the Great Traditions of the Middle East, making them a vibrant object of the study of Islamicate cultures.¹²

This cultural prevalence, in tandem with their ambiguous nature and morality, makes *jinn* continuously popular in global media, which might serve as an initial explanation as to why Netflix deemed them particularly fitting to inspire the title of its first original series in Arabic. The demonic beings are, however, not the only element of *Jinn* that stands out. They are mixed with other pre-Islamic identifiers, like the ancient Nabatean cave complex in Petra, Jordan's most prominent touristic site, as well as with liberal markers that are well-known sources of scandal, such as drugs and premarital sex.

By unpacking and contextualizing this mix of elements, I hope to contribute to a better understanding of the impact of the streaming format on the global representation of Muslim cultures. To achieve this, I first give a brief overview of *Jinn*'s storylines and the context of its reception in Jordan. The subsequent analysis focuses on the different topics featured in the series, from the titular demonic beings to the markers of liberal youth culture that are widely present in its five episodes. Since the blend of ancient and modern phenomena is also deeply inscribed into the series' aesthetics, a more formal look into the style of *Jinn* concludes the analytical part. A fleshed-out understanding of the streaming format in the context of global Islam, however, will require far more than the preliminary efforts of this case study. I thus conclude with potential implications for the field, as well as suggestions for further studies of the phenomenon.

From Enthusiasm to Condemnation and Disappointment

When *Jinn* premiered in early June 2019, Netflix already had a number of Arabic series in its global catalog. Many of them were produced in Egypt, such as the period drama *Grand Hotel* (2016) or the satire *Arḍ an-Nifāq* (Land of Hypocrisy 2018), some in other countries, like the Lebanese smuggling thriller *Al-Hayba* (Prestige 2017) or the legal drama *Qalb al-‘Adāla* (The Heart of Justice 2017) from the UAE. All these series, however, had been produced by Middle Eastern media networks and were acquired by Netflix afterward for global distribution. *Jinn*, on the contrary, was the streamer’s first Arabic original series, meaning that it was commissioned, produced, and released entirely by the platform itself, with dubs available in eight languages and subtitles in 26 countries.¹³ This approach continued the broader trend of Netflix producing non-English language content that started in the mid-2010s with the Mexican *Club de Cuervos* (Club of Ravens 2015) and the French *Marseille* (2016), followed in subsequent years by an array of other series in Hindi, Japanese, and Korean.

When it became public that the streamer would enter Arabic territory, journalists in the region monitored the anticipation. Already a year ahead of its premiere, the Saudi entertainment website *About Her* published an enthusiastic profile of *Jinn*, quoting Jordanian screenwriter Bāsil Ghanadūr:

I love that Netflix is investing a lot in the region, it’s a real turning point. We have such a rich storytelling culture, and we’ll finally be able to enjoy Arabic content with Netflix quality.¹⁴

The anticipated ‘Netflix quality’ ultimately turned out to be the template of soft supernatural horror mixed with teenage drama and nostalgic comedy, a genre crossover the streamer had already relied on in other productions, most notably *Stranger Things* (2016–). *Jinn* revolves around a group of students from an Amman private school on a field trip to the ancient ruins of Petra. After a group of bullies starts harassing the outsider Yāsīn, the bully-in-chief dies in an accident, apparently being thrown off a cliff. Back in Amman, Yāsīn forms a friendship with Firā, a mysterious new student that gives him a lot of confidence. From this point onward, Yāsīn’s bullies start to have more inexplicable accidents: one suddenly cuts his own throat with a knife, and his abusive stepfather chokes to death in a steakhouse.

Parallel to this, fellow student Mīrā is starting to get visits from Kīrās, a boy previously unknown to her. Appearing out of thin air, he warns her of a great danger: an evil *jinniyya* is haunting the school. Kīrās soon turns out to be a *jinnī* himself, although a friendly one, with the mission to stop his evil counterparts from taking over the realm of humans. When Mīrā and Kīrās learn that the *jinniyya* in question is Firā, who attempts to unite with Yāsīn to possess his body and produce an ally, they try everything to stop her. This turns out to be a difficult task: not only does Mīrā have trouble with her jealous ex-boyfriend Fahid, but the insecure Yāsīn is also deeply in love with Firā, who gives him some much-needed confidence.

Assisted by the enthusiastic *jinn*-hunter Ḥasan, Mīrā and Kīrās travel back to Petra just in time to disrupt Firā’s ritual. But since her connection to Yāsīn is too strong already, the effort is unsuccessful: The *jinnī* possessing Kīrās abandons his body and leaves the human world, while Firā’s spirit transfers to Yāsīn’s body, who now becomes a powerful evil *jinnī* himself. On top of that, Mīrā discovers back in Amman that she is now haunted by an

additional evil *jinnī* – possessing none other than her ex-boyfriend Fahid. Upon this revelation, the final episode ends, keeping audiences waiting for a potential second season, which (as of this writing) was never produced.

It was not only the rather cruel cliffhanger that caused the poor reception and even anger among Jordanian audiences. An *Al Jazeera* article, published a week after the release of the series, chronicles an uproar among Jordanian users debating on *Twitter* if a show that depicts alcohol and cannabis consumption, as well as an unmarried couple kissing and talking about sex, was fitting to be watched by teenagers (Singh 2018). Independent of the morality of the series, all users agreed on the fact that the behavior of the protagonists and the portrayal of Jordanian society were extremely inauthentic and irritating. One user stated pointedly: ‘The only thing Jordanian in the #*Jinn* series is Petra.’¹⁵

In religious circles, *Jinn* was rejected even more fervently. Already in the first days after the premiere, the country’s grand mufti Muḥammad al-Khalāyala (b. 1967) weighed in on the debate, calling the show a ‘decline of morals and virtues that does not represent the customs of Jordanians and their morals.’¹⁶ At some point, even official institutions responded to increasing calls for censorship. First, the Royal Film Commission released a statement on *Twitter* reminding the public that it was never involved in the production and had no legal instruments to interfere with an international streaming platform (@FilmJordan 2019). Following this statement, the attorney general of Jordan apparently wanted to proceed anyway and tasked the country’s cyber-crimes unit to ‘take immediate, necessary action’ (Debre and van Ruymbeke 2019) to pull the show from the streamer’s website.

Ultimately, both the uproar and the official efforts came to nothing. *Jinn* remained available on Netflix, which stated that it took official requests seriously but pointed to its adamant no-censorship policy (Debre and van Ruymbeke 2019). It is unclear if the outrage was as strong and decisive as media coverage portrayed it or if isolated incidents of criticism were blown up in a case of online sensationalism. Regardless of the actual scale of the outrage, however, what can safely be assumed is the widespread disappointment about *Jinn* among audiences – in the *Internet Movie Database*, it currently holds a poor 3.4 rating.¹⁷

Jinn Possession as a Story Effect

The adverse reactions to Netflix’s first foray into Arabic territory call for a closer look into the story elements of *Jinn* that are locally specific, most notably the titular demonic beings. Building on an analysis that attempts to relate the series’ representation of *jinn* to the larger context of their role in Islamic demonology and folklore, I argue that the series shows little interest in the rich tradition of *jinn*-related Islamic doctrines spelled out in various scholarly disciplines and in mythology. While it often claims to be derived from this corpus, its portrayal of the demons has far more in common with storytelling practices prevalent in US series and films of the supernatural horror genre.

The character through which we learn most about the on-screen nature of the *jinn* is the nerdy sidekick Ḥasan. With little backstory and defining features besides his quirky personality, oversized glasses, and an eccentric passion for everything supernatural, Ḥasan’s job is to be both the comic relief and the explainer of the series’ mythology. Combining these two story functions into one character is a common strategy in almost

any Western ghost comedy (and many other film genres), from Dr. Egon Spengler in *Ghostbusters* (1984) to the four boys at the heart of Netflix's own *Stranger Things*, who all share broadly the same traits as Ḥasan.

Ḥasan explains everything about *jinn* to both the audience and the protagonists, using ancient Nabatean legends,¹⁸ a library book with a calligraphed cover,¹⁹ a self-made PowerPoint presentation,²⁰ and a biology class on evolutionary theory.²¹ This combination of narrative markers is an apparent attempt to relate traditional knowledge about the supernatural to modern sensibilities: in the biology class, for example, Ḥasan philosophizes about the place of *jinn* in the evolution of the species and Kīrās points out that *jinn* had existed long before humans,²² merging Darwin's evolutionary theory with Quranic revelation, which states in (15:27) that *jinn* were created before humans.²³ However, their annoyed teacher interrupts their conversation, and the audience does not learn more about the issue in the rest of the series.

Generally, most of the mythology around the nature of the *jinn* seems to be made up on the way, as the screenwriters provide only crumbs of information rather than a large and coherent picture. For example, we learn that humans and *jinn* live in two different realms, with the latter originating in the 'jinn world' (*'ālam al-jinn*) (Olomi 2021). Moving between the realms is possible for *jinn* in both directions, and they can travel either following their own wish or by being forcibly summoned. The series' story relies heavily on the first path of being summoned into the human world, which is explained and shown at several points in time. The easiest way is by calling a particular *jinnī's* name, which is what Mīrā does to summon Kīrās,²⁴ but Ḥasan also knows a ritual that summons a random *jinnī* for assistance.²⁵ It is furthermore possible to call *jinn* without intention, namely as a cry for help in a hopeless situation, which is how Yāsīn summons the sinister *jinnīyya* Firā in the first episode after being thrown in a deep cave by his bullies.

So far, this is reasonably in line with Islamicate knowledge about *jinn*. In his seminal book on demonology in Islam, Tobias Nünlist points out that *jinn* are usually associated with spatial and temporal transition periods, notably life-cycle rituals, which is where humans are most likely to get in touch with them.²⁶ Unintentionally summoning a *jinnīyya* in a teenage crisis, as Yāsīn does, could thus be understood in this context. Nünlist also extensively reports of elaborate rituals to summon *jinn*, usually requiring a combination of a spoken formula and, for instance, drawing or spilling something in the sand (Nünlist 2015, pp. 230–234). In very general terms, this is what Ḥasan does, too – although it must be mentioned that his particular method of speaking the formula 'in the name of the *jinn*, emerge' (*bi-sm-al-jinnī, fal-takbruj*) while spilling vodka and lighting it,²⁷ has no actual base in Islamicate demonology.

When it comes to the vehicles of the *jinn's* travel between realms, and the very nature of their physical appearance, however, the representation also transgresses from traditional understandings of these beings. One of the series' most important plot elements is the concept of possession. Congruent with traditional knowledge about *jinn*, the beings are never visible on-screen in their natural form. Instead, they exclusively act through the bodies of those they possess – Kīrās is actually a Bedouin boy called Ḥusnī, and Firā works inside the body of an innocent unnamed girl. The possessed have neither consciousness nor any power over their body, and we are told that long-term possession can even lead to their death.²⁸ The *jinn* can also quite easily change between the bodies of those they possess,

which is something that happens multiple times during the final episode, where Fīrā ends up in Yāsīn's body and Fahid is possessed by an unknown, apparently evil *jinnī/jinnīyya*²⁹ who has been jumping through two other bodies before.

The possession of a human body by *jinn* is traditionally seen as a possibility in folklore and demonology, although it is usually discussed as a very rare case. Furthermore, possession is usually understood in a much milder form than it appears to be in the series: in traditional conceptualizations of *jinn* possession, the possessed still has some control over their (momentarily shared) body (Nünlist 2015, pp. 266–271). For this reason, the phenomenon of *jinn* possession often occurs within the context of mental health disorders (Wessel 2021). None of these conceptualizations come close to the absolute power over the host bodies that *Jinn* grants its titular beings. It can thus be assumed that the show's concept of possession is only loosely inspired by Islamicate tradition. There could be many reasons for the departure from traditional conceptualizations of possession. First and foremost, it creates a compelling narrative arc, namely the mystery of mistaken identity and the surprising twists it can offer. The generation of mystery through this narrative device is a classic tool in Hollywood, from the aliens in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) to the Faceless Men in *Game of Thrones* (2011–2019) or the Armitage family in *Get Out* (2017), and the mythology of *Jinn* seems to be primarily informed by this and not the Islamicate tradition.

Other, more miscellaneous, markers associated with *jinn* are superficially inspired by folklore and demonology but are exploited for story effects in a similar way. At times, animals are used to hint at the presence of *jinn*: when goats are bleating in Petra, Ḥasan fears they might warn of *jinn*,³⁰ and scorpions are shown several times before the arrival of Fīrā in a scene.³¹ Secondary literature reports that both goats and scorpions are indeed mentioned among the creatures assumed to be especially susceptible to becoming incorporations of *jinn*³² but not to be their precursors. Other repeated signs of an imminent *jinn*-arrival in the series are mysterious whispers,³³ electrical disturbances,³⁴ clefts,³⁵ and water flowing upward in steamy bathrooms.³⁶ Sand also plays a crucial role, namely both as the substance into which *jinn* can dissolve before they materialize somewhere else³⁷ and as a weapon against them: Ḥasan discovers that throwing a handful of sand at a *jinnī* while saying 'I swear to you to leave this body!' (*Aqsamt 'alayka an takhruja min hādihā al-jaṣad!*) will lead to their disappearance.³⁸

Few of these elements seem to be directly derived from Islamicate conceptualizations of *jinn*, apart perhaps from some loose associations: *jinn* have sometimes been referred to as 'beings from below the earth' (*makhlūqāt taht al-arḍ*), to which the clefts seen in the series might be a reference. Likewise, the mysterious whispers could be inspired by the idea of 'foul whispering' (*waswasa*), a Quranic term for evil whispers that demons use to tempt humans to transgress Islamic rulings. In the Quranic context, however, *waswasa* is more of a metaphor for an inner voice insinuating evil, whereas the whispers in *Jinn* are actual, audible whispers that can even be recorded. Also, there seems to be no intention to tempt humans since the *jinn* of the series have the method of possession to take influence over humans. On the contrary, the elements of sand, electrical disturbance, and water have no association with *jinn* in Islamicate demonology (apart from perhaps the idea that *jinn* can also take the shape of a whirlwind).³⁹ Consequently, the audiovisual cues the series showcases – just like the concept of possession – draw very loose inspiration from traditional knowledge about *jinn* and twist it into narrative devices that turn the show into an entertaining piece of television heavily informed by Western standards of storytelling in supernatural genres (Nünlist 2015, pp. 146–148).

Between Arousing *Jinn*-Romance and Provocation

The one element in *Jinn*'s portrayal of the titular demons that is well in accordance with their traditional occurrences is that of romance. Both Muslim folklore⁴⁰ and Islamic jurisprudence⁴¹ have historically shown a heightened focus on flirtatious relations between *jinn* and humans and mention instances of either the former seducing the latter to manipulate them (more frequently with female *jinn* and male humans)⁴² or the tragedy of honest but forbidden love. The Netflix series prominently features both versions, first in Firā's seduction of Yāsīn and second in the romance between Mīrā and Kīrās.

The villain Firā works well as a modern update of the trope of the evil and seductive *jinniyya*. The combination of her rebellious look – complete with a pierced nose and tight, but casual clothes – with her confident and careless behavior, is perfectly catered to the shy Yāsīn, who finds in her everything that he lacks. Their romance is mainly portrayed through the dynamic of Firā pushing Yāsīn to defend himself and take what is his. Physical contact is apparently never needed to seduce the highly susceptible outsider. Although the ritual of unification always carries a strong sexual connotation, presumably with the purpose of *jinn*-human procreation, it is ultimately shown as merely allusive: Firā simply needs to stare deeply into Yāsīn's eyes to transfer her spirit into his body.⁴³

In contrast, the relationship between Mīrā and Kīrās gets a bit more physical. Rather than seducing her, Kīrās is initially only interested in helping with the *jinn* problem at Mīrā's high school. However, a certain romantic magnetism between the two is on the table from early on. When he gets more involved with Mīrā, Kīrās transforms into an attractive boy wearing a jeans jacket, with curly black hair and deep, dreamy eyes. Although hesitant at first, Mīrā soon starts to fall for him. Intriguingly, their first kiss comes directly after Kīrās proves not only attractive and interesting but also deeply caring: on the eve of her birthday, he would rather let Mīrā meet her friend for dinner than make her join him in his fight against Firā.⁴⁴ The understanding behavior of Kīrās stands in stark contrast to Firā's obsessive manipulation of Yāsīn in a similar situation and apparently serves to educate the teenaged audience less about the dangers or merits of *jinn* than about empathy and respect in romantic relationships.

In these parallel storylines, *Jinn* successfully adapts the tropes of the seductive *jinniyya* and the arousing magnetism between *jinn* and humans to the format of the teenage drama series. Here, the traditional demonological representations apparently work most effectively. It should be noted, though, that similar themes are far from exclusive to Islamicate storytelling traditions. Love affairs between supernatural creatures and humans are just as engrained in European fairytales and have been proven highly adaptable and successful since the dawn of commercial cinema, from *La belle et la bête* (The Beauty and the Beast 1946) to the *Twilight* film series (2008–2012). These examples support the argument that classic *jinn*-tropes find their way into the series only as long as they comply with existing Western storytelling traditions, in this case, the supernatural romance.

This argument is further supported by recalling that it was a *jinn*-related romance that became a particular matter of provocation among Jordanian audiences. As detailed above, the reception of *Jinn* included accusations of normalizing behaviors deemed immoral. In this regard, the example of Mīrā kissing two different boys over the course of only two days (Fahid in episode 1 and Kīrās in episode 3) was brought up most frequently. While the second kiss is brief, the first one goes on for quite some time and includes Fahid opening the belt of Mīrā's jeans.⁴⁵ Upon this, they are interrupted by the mysterious whispers associated

with *jinn*, which initially seems to suggest an interpretation of them as moral guardians.⁴⁶ This scene is, however, the only instance pointing in that direction. When Mirā ends up kissing Kirās later, no whispers warn her or the audience. Consequently, the *jinn*-as-moral-guardians seem to disapprove particularly of Fahid's intrusive and rushed behavior, not the kissing itself.

This storyline already suggests that the series takes a perspective closer to liberal than traditional Jordanian moral codes, an assumption supported in other parts of the series. For example, in episode 2, the long kissing scene between Fahid and Mirā is repeated in a dream sequence,⁴⁷ which suggests that none of the decision-makers in the series' production had a particular interest in catering to the more pious sensibilities of the audience. This is confirmed by the costuming choices, which generally favor tight and short clothes over a more conservative style of dressing. In addition to these visual cues, sex and dating are openly discussed among all characters; even Ḥasan admits that he uses #*jinnhunters* on social media mainly to attract female followers.⁴⁸ On another similar note, the series often problematizes the use of certain drugs as a source of conflict and abuse; yet the consumption of alcohol and cannabis is shown frequently and in a normalizing fashion.

These depictions of behaviors that are well known to be deemed immoral in many parts of the Muslim world can be located somewhere on the spectrum between cultural insensitivity and calculated provocation. In addition, socio-economic affiliation undoubtedly plays a role since *Jinn* is notably set in the US-styled high school attended by the highest class of Amman's society. Taken together, it can be assumed that these factors serve a double function best understood in the context of the doubled audiences of *Jinn*: first, to provoke Jordanian and other Muslim audiences, and second, to signal to global audiences an unexpectedly liberal side of Jordanian society. Since both functions are ultimately aimed at generating attention (and thus subscriptions), *Jinn*'s portrayal of romance, drugs, and liberal culture might be more telling of Netflix's marketing strategies than of anything else.

Irritating Language and Netflix Aesthetics

The producers' apparent aim to create a show that is loosely inspired by Arabic elements, but very much feels like a US series, is not only found on the level of storytelling. It also heavily informs *Jinn*'s aesthetic aspects, including the language. One of the recurring criticisms among users on the *Internet Movie Database* is that the characters speak an unidentifiable and unnatural Arabic dialect that irritates many Jordanian viewers.⁴⁹ Assessing this more thoroughly would require a systematic analysis of the specific idioms used in the series, ideally performed by a native speaker of Jordanian Arabic.⁵⁰ However, some language-related issues are quite striking even to a non-native speaker in both the original Arabic and the English dub, which further emphasizes the double aims of the series.

Namely, what supports the suspicion of a spoken language rooted in an undisclosed fictional realm rather than in actual practice is the series' many anglicisms, some of which are quite inexplicable. The most striking is 'summoner,' describing one who summons *jinn*. Given that it is a central term in the show's mythology, the fact that it is anglicized locates it more in the realm of technical terms from Hollywood ghost movies than in Islamicate demonology.⁵¹ The same goes for 'jinn hunters,' a phrase that Ḥasan introduces in the fourth episode. In this case, the untranslatedness, the use of the plural, and the neologism suggest an attempt to create a distinctive English group name that locates *Jinn* within the canon of popular American ghost comedies (like the *Ghostbusters* franchise).

A similar tendency to situate the show within or closer to Western standards through the means of language can be found in the English dub. Especially in the first episodes, the characters often use profanity. It needs to be noted that profane language is problematic for broadcast TV stations in the US, while subscription-based TV services like HBO and Netflix often use it as a unique selling point. Interestingly, the profanities seem to be exclusively in the English version. For example, in the first episode, Mirā states to Fahid: '*Last mithl Laylā faqaṭ li-anna lā urīd an anām ma'ak.*'⁵² In the English dub, this becomes: 'I'm not like Layla just because you can't fuck me.' The same thing happens in an argument between Yāsīn and his stepfather, who states in English: 'Oh you are such a fucking man!' while in the original, it is '*Ilā shāyaf ḥālak zalami?*'⁵³ This addition of profanities to the English version intriguingly reverses Netflix's practice of toning down the language of its American shows for its Arabic subtitles, where most pertinent formulations are translated into euphemized alternatives or omitted altogether.⁵⁴ It can consequently be understood in the same context as the portrayal of love affairs and drug consumption discussed above, namely, as a way to cause controversy domestically while signaling a liberal attitude to non-Arabic speaking audiences.

Corresponding tendencies of alignment to Western media standards can also be found on the visual level. First, again on the level of language: despite the show's setting in Jordan, Arabic letters are only visible on-screen at one point, namely on the cover of the book that Ḥasan rents from the library.⁵⁵ Apart from this instance – clearly added to signal the show's claimed roots in ancient knowledge about *jinn* – every visible writing is in Latin script, from the signs in front of the school teachers' offices⁵⁶ to the messages⁵⁷ and social media posts⁵⁸ on the characters' phone screens. Second and more broadly, it affects the style of aesthetic direction that makes *Jinn* almost visually indistinguishable from any other Netflix production of the same genre.

In terms of cinematography, editing, and music, the series adapts the streaming service's established set of aesthetics, even when showcasing the distinctiveness of its Jordanian setting. The most telling case in this regard is the camera's obsession with the ruins of Petra. Impressive on their own, they are well known to Western audiences ever since their heavy presence in the final scenes of *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), which are screened on repeat in nearby hotel lobbies to this day. The sheer amount of drone footage, always starting with a particular cave and then flying high to show the full extent of the complex, gives the mix of their reddish stone and the beige of the surrounding valleys a strong presence on the series' visual surface. In the episodes set in Amman, this is contrasted by drone shots that stage it as a sprawling metropolis with heavy traffic and a glass-facade skyline. This use of drone shots speaks of a will to show viewers the literal bird's-eye perspective on Jordan and thus falls into the category of what John Urry has identified as the 'tourist gaze': a visual technique that reads a place along the lines of quasi-semiotic markers that must be as distinctive and large as possible to make them accessible to the viewer (Urry 2011).

The regular insertion of drone shots between character-focused scenes also fits the broader aesthetic standards of Netflix. Another noticeable editing element in *Jinn* is the construction of cliffhangers, which end every single episode, including the finale. The fact that most of them are resolved within the first seconds of the following episode makes clear that they are not natural developments of the story but are, instead, brief arcs of suspense that are forcibly constructed. As a technique, this is well established in US television, but it has become especially virulent in streaming, where the next episode is immediately

available to viewers, who are thus enticed to addictive binge-watching by even more obviously constructed cliffhangers.

Finally, the soundtrack of the series is well embedded in Netflix's other offerings within the same genre, particularly *Stranger Things*. In fact, *Jinn* often seems to be produced using the template of the service's most successful show (at that time), which also focuses on teenagers confronting an ancient supernatural menace. This is especially notable in the music. Both series share a suspiciously similar opening theme: a black background, onto which the show's name is written in letters framed in pulsating neon red, accompanied by menacing synthesizer beats from the 1980s. The same style of music can be heard whenever tension and mystery build up in both series. In *Jinn*, traditional *darbuka* drums and Arabic singing are occasionally added to the electronic beats. Given the template of a *Stranger Things*-inspired soundtrack, however, these additions apparently have an exoticizing function. Just like the aesthetic choices addressed above, the music, too, suggests that the production is less interested in independent artistic expression from an Arabic Muslim society than in creating a Jordanian version of a Netflix template that has already proven to be popular with a global audience and is, thus, commercially viable.

Jinn as Global Media Ambassadors

This analysis of the different aspects of *Jinn* shows the producers' reliance on well-established templates from Western filmmaking traditions. Notably, these templates are spiced up by locally specific elements that appear in the series only as far as they can be reduced and adapted into the tight framework of the genre of supernatural teenage drama. This is especially evident in the show's representation of *jinn*, which is only loosely inspired by traditional Islamic knowledge about the demonic beings, and more interested in established supernatural comedy tropes that turn the '*jinn* hunters' into a Jordanian version of *Ghostbusters*.

This chapter set out with a question about the character of the elements that Netflix considers suitable for its first Arabic series, its first global representation of Muslim culture. The most significant commonality is that none is particularly related to Islam. Given that *Jinn* is Netflix's first foray into a Muslim society, this demands some reflection. In terms of the contemporary elements of the series – mainly related to the representation of youth culture in Amman as partying, dating, and consuming drugs – the answer lies in the double function of provoking scandal among audiences in Jordan while signaling a high degree of liberalism to global viewers. This is hardly surprising in the larger context of representing contemporary Middle Eastern culture in Western media spheres.

The question becomes far more intriguing concerning *Jinn*'s portrayal of more traditional aspects. Both the titular demons and the strong presence of the ancient ruins of Petra hint at a well-reflected preference for folklore over religion. This allows Netflix to represent tradition while avoiding religious aspects that might prove too controversial in a series screened in local and global contexts. Furthermore, it shows that *jinn* continue to be a particularly suitable element of popular religion to be adapted into global media culture. This trend can be traced back well into early modern Europe, for example, to Antoine Galland's (1646–1715) retroactive integration of the tale of 'Alā' ad-Dīn into the canon of his translation of *Alf Layla wa-Layla* (One Thousand and One Nights) (Mahdi 1995). It is notable that *jinn* still seem to be the creatures that authors first consult when tasked with

adding Islamicate elements to Western supernatural genres, from the TV comedy *I Dream of Jeannie* (1965–1970) to Disney’s adaptation of *Aladdin* (1992).

In this regard, *Jinn* can be seen in relation to a particular line of arguments made in Islamic studies research. For example, Celia Rothenberg finds that popular debates about *jinn* in online religious forums can be understood in the context of Roy’s diagnosis of an ‘objectification of Islam’ in global contexts, for which the beings are apparently particularly well-suited (Rothenberg 2011, p. 368). On a similar note, the last of Birgit Krawietz’s ‘Ten Theses on Working with *Jinn* in Islamic Studies’ proposes *jinn* as a ‘part of self-Orientalization in contemporary cultural management’ in the arena of transnational mediatization (Krawietz 2018, p. 335). The fact that the Jordanian screenwriters chose *jinn* as the central and even titular plot element of Netflix’s first original Arabic series tracks well with these arguments.

Moreover, *Jinn* is not the only recent example of this. When Marvel Studios debuted their first Muslim superhero on the Disney+ streaming platform, the authors also chose *jinn* as the central element of their supernatural mythology. In *Ms. Marvel* (2022), the Pakistani American hero finds that she is a *jinniyya* herself and must fight an ancient order of rogue *jinn* who want to destroy the human world. A further case is the horror series *Ghoul* (2018), also produced by Netflix, which uses the titular demons⁵⁹ to tell a metaphoric story about sectarian politics in Narendra Modi’s India. These examples suggest a trend that increasingly employs *jinn* as global ambassadors for Islamicate cultures in the realm of streaming television.

More research into the status of *jinn* and other demonic beings in contemporary streaming series will be necessary to test and elaborate whether the points made here prove salient for other series and films.⁶⁰ As a case study, this chapter has shown that further analyses of *Jinn*, *Ms. Marvel*, *Ghoul*, and others might require approaches that combine those of media and Islamic studies. The case of *Jinn* underlines that the phenomenon can hardly be understood without taking both the (aesthetic and commercial) strategies of Netflix and the tradition of Islamicate demonology and folklore into account. Popular culture in global contexts has been an emerging research object in Middle Eastern studies for quite some time. While, the focus has been chiefly on the reception of popular culture by Muslim societies so far, the aspect of its (co-) production should not be forgotten, especially in the case of streaming series. Since streaming, as a primary form of transnational entertainment, will continue to impact the representation of the Middle East in popular culture and beyond, such hybrid endeavors can help understand Muslim cultures’ current role on the global media stage.

Notes

- 1 *Jinn* is the Arabic collective plural for the mostly invisible demonic beings of Islamicate tradition, while *jinnī* denotes the masculine singular.
- 2 Stuart Hall understands cultural representation as a practice that involves far more than the artifact itself (i.e., in this case, a TV series) but is embedded in a wider circle of cultural identity, production, dissemination, and reception. In this understanding, the different directions in which representation works become visible. See Hall 1997.
- 3 Exceptions would be Australian media scholars Ramon Lobato and Amanda Lotz, who made first attempts at ‘mapping the geographies of Netflix as a multinational service,’ but both had to ultimately admit that media studies were only at the beginning of the herculean effort to grasp the vastness of the streamer’s output, not least due to its secretive policy of publishing viewership data. See Lobato 2019; Lotz 2021.

- 4 Examples include studies of Netflix's programming policies in Spain (Hidalgo-Marí, Segarra-Sávedra, and Palomares-Sánchez 2021), South Korea (Ju 2020), and Saudi Arabia (Khalil and Zayani 2021).
- 5 Earlier studies on the global impact of satellite TV in the 1990s could serve as a template for this. In the case of Netflix, however, there is not only the factor of global availability, but also the question of the brand as an agent of its own to consider, which reconfigures the issue significantly. For a detailed discussion of this reconfiguration of transnational TV from satellite to digital streaming, see Lobato 2019, pp. 47–73.
- 6 Most of the film team is from Jordan, with the notable exception of the duo of showrunners: Mir-Jean Bou Chaaya (*1989), who has produced and directed most of the episodes, is a Lebanese director whose debut film was shown and awarded at several Asian and African film festivals in 2015; and Elan Dassani (*1979), credited as the series' producer and leading screenwriter, is a US-born and US-based special effects expert with previous work in the American TV industry.
- 7 The term 'Islamicate' was introduced by historian Marshall G. Hodgson in the 1950s to describe actors, societies, and concepts that are culturally associated with Islam, but not necessarily Islamic, in the sense of being connected to religion. Since this is true for many parts of the discourse around *jinn*, I will rely on the term in the following.
- 8 For a concise overview of the ambiguous morality of *jinn*, see Nünlist 2021, p. 17.
- 9 It is assumed that *jinn* have a gender, which also has a terminological impact: *jinniyya* is the Arabic term for a single female demon.
- 10 Amira El-Zein gives an overview of the different shapes of *jinn* in el-Zein 2009, pp. 89–102.
- 11 For more on the question of the visibility of *jinn*, see Nünlist 2015, pp. 100–113.
- 12 The 'Great Tradition' usually refers to institutionalized practices and textual fixations, while the 'Little Tradition' means folkloristic beliefs and rituals practiced by a wide range of people. The distinction has been introduced by Robert Redfield, refined by Milton Singer in the 1970s, and since become common in anthropological terminology. Islamic Studies have often identified *jinn* as beings that are featured heavily in both the Great and the Little Tradition and move easily between the two. See Badeen and Krawietz 2003; Fartacek 2005.
- 13 In addition to the original Arabic, *Jinn* was dubbed in English, French, Portuguese, Polish, Spanish, Turkish, and Hindi. The languages of the subtitles are too many to list here.
- 14 *Al Jazeera* 2019.
- 15 'Al-shay' al-urdunnī al-wahīd fī musalsal jinn huwa al-Batrā', *ibid.*
- 16 'Akkada muftī 'āmm al-mamlaka samāḥat al-duktūr Muḥammad al-Khalāyala anna musalsal "jinn": inhīdār akhlāqī wa-qiyaṁī lā yumaththilu 'ādāt al-urdunniyyin wa-akhlāqahum wa-khurūj 'alā al-ta 'ālīm al-islāmiyya', see Nabd 2019.
- 17 On a 1–10 scale, based on 10,141 votes. See International Movie Database 2019.
- 18 *Jinn*, Episode 4. Min. 1:35.
- 19 *Jinn*, Episode 3. Min. 5:30.
- 20 *Ibid.* Min. 11:45.
- 21 *Jinn*, Episode 2. Min. 22:15.
- 22 *Ibid.* Min. 23:10.
- 23 *Ibid.* Min. 24:50.
- 24 *Jinn*, Episode 5. Min. 7:45.
- 25 *Jinn*, Episode 4. Min. 11:50.
- 26 Islamic heritage comprises also the divinatory art of geomancy, employing, for example, sand (Nünlist 2015, pp. 387–402), but that is a different story.
- 27 *Jinn*, Episode 4. Min. 11:50.
- 28 *Jinn*, Episode 5. Min. 16:45.
- 29 Within the conceptualization of *jinn* that the series offers, the *jinn*'s gender becomes an intriguing question: they possess bodies of different genders during the story. They are, however, not addressed with their hosts' names but with their own, which implicates a fixed gender. The series, however, does not pursue this question.
- 30 *Jinn*, Episode 1. Min. 15:30. In contrast to humans, goats appear to be able to see *jinn*.
- 31 *Jinn*, Episode 1. Min. 9:45 and *Jinn*, Episode 2. Min. 16:25.
- 32 For an overview on *jinn*-susceptible creatures, see El-Zein 2009, pp. 89–102.
- 33 *Jinn*, Episode 1. Mins. 4:30 and 21:15.

- 34 *Jinn*, Episode 2. Min. 0:30.
- 35 *Ibid.* Min. 5:40 and 18:25.
- 36 *Jinn*, Episode 1. Min. 19:30 and *Jinn*, Episode 2. Min. 13:05. Phenomena of inversion are often ascribed to *jinn* but not this particular one.
- 37 *Jinn*, Episode 4. Min. 12:45.
- 38 *Jinn*, Episode 2. Min. 17:40.
- 39 From the clefts tearing apart Manhattan in *Ghostbusters II* (1989) to the mysterious whispers in *Lost* (2004–2010) to the electrical disturbances in *Paranormal Activity* (2007), these cues have been used as signifiers of the presence of ghosts in Western supernatural films and TV series for decades.
- 40 For example, in *Alf Layla wa-Layla* (One Thousand and One Nights), where *jinn* frequently appear as potential romantic partners of human protagonists. For an overview of these instances, see Marzolph and van Leeuwen 2004, pp. 534–537.
- 41 The question of the legal status of marriages between *jinn* and humans has been a much-discussed subsection of Islamic law. See Krawietz 2002.
- 42 A tendency for malevolent seduction is apparently more frequently found among female demons. See Nünlist 2021, p. 29.
- 43 *Jinn*, Episode 5. Min. 21:10.
- 44 *Jinn*, Episode 3. Min. 16:50.
- 45 *Jinn*, Episode 1. Min. 27:30.
- 46 This function of *jinn* can indeed be identified in some folkloristic stories. See Fartacek 2005, pp. 72–74.
- 47 *Jinn*, Episode 2. Min. 1:50.
- 48 *Ibid.* Min. 17:30.
- 49 ‘Jinn’. 2019.
- 50 Ibrahim Darwish and Noora Abu Ain have attempted this on the level of a preliminary quantitative analysis with a focus on the use of ‘taboo language’ in *Jinn*, however, without giving or contextualizing specific examples. See Darwish and Abu Ain 2020.
- 51 Although the original Arabic dub leaves ‘summoner’ untranslated, the Arabic subtitles offered by Netflix interestingly use an Arabic term instead: *mustad’ī*. Although this is the literal translation, I had difficulties locating it in *jinn*-related literature. Tobias Nünlist rather identifies *istiḥdār* as the term that would be used in this context (Nünlist 2015, pp. 393f.). This suggests that the producers’ limited interest in traditional demonology is also affecting the show at a terminological level.
- 52 Literally: ‘I’m not like Laylā just because I do not want to sleep with you.’ See *Jinn*, Episode 1. Min. 21:20.
- 53 Literally: ‘So, you feel like a tough guy?’ See *Jinn*, Episode 1. Min. 30:55.
- 54 Alanoud Alsharan has identified this practice in her quantitative study of the Arabic subtitles of five American Netflix series. See Alsharan 2020.
- 55 *Jinn*, Episode 3. Min. 5:30.
- 56 *Ibid.*, Min. 8:25.
- 57 *Jinn*, Episode 2. Min. 14:30.
- 58 *Jinn*, Episode 3. Min. 2:10.
- 59 A *ghūl* is a particular type of *jinn*, sharing many of their attributes despite their morality: the *ghūl* is generally thought to be malevolent and usually appears in more monstrous shapes. Furthermore, the belief in *ghūl* is located more exclusively in the folkloristic realm, since, in contrast to *jinn*, they are never mentioned in the Quran. See Szombathy 2014.
- 60 For *Ghoul*, Max Kramer has offered a brief initial analysis from the perspective of anthropology (Kramer 2020). As of writing, *Ms. Marvel* is too recent to have prompted any academic debate.

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JOINING THE GERMAN SALAFIST IBRAHIM AL-AZZAZI ON TIKTOK

Alina Maschinski

International Salafism

In their religious practice and in their everyday life, Salafists orient themselves with the Prophet Mohammed and the first three generations of Muslims (seventh to ninth centuries CE), the so-called ‘*al-salaf al-salih*’ (the pious ancestors). They idealize this exemplary early Islamic community as a golden age. It should be noted that Salafism is by no means a homogeneous movement but rather a spectrum of currents, which cannot be divided into clear-cut classifications.¹ The transitions between these currents can be fluid. What they seem to have in common, however, is a specific kind of conservative understanding of Islam, although things are again slightly different for some reformist Salafis.

Salafists strive to ‘return’ to the Quran and Sunna as the sole sources of their faith. Salafists believe that their understanding is independent of time and place and obey to a literalist type of interpretation. This, in turn, means that they reject all other non-literalistic and metaphorical hermeneutics of the Holy sources that have emerged over the course of the many centuries, which they deem illegitimate religious innovations (*bid’a*). Their aim to return to the holy sources (including the authentic role model, or Sunna, of the Prophet) serves as the basis for their religious conduct as well as that of everyday life. Important is the understanding of the oneness of God (*tawhid*) and the belief that Allah requires unquestioning submission on the part of His creation. According to many Salafists, accepting man-made rules equals the worship (*ibada*) of another entity besides God (*shirk*) and therefore polytheism, which is not permissible because nothing and no one should be worshiped but Allah. Another characteristic of Salafism is their belief to be the one and only true faith. As such, they are convinced that they are also the only ones who will eventually go to Paradise (*janna*). According to many Salafis, all other people, whether they belong to other religions or happen to be Muslims of a non-Salafist persuasion, especially Shiite and Sufi Muslims, will go to hell (*jahannam*) as unbelievers (*kuffar*). According to such a self-understanding, the majority of Salafis refuse to be called ‘Salafists’ since they see this as an exogenous determination. They rather identify themselves as ‘people of the Prophetic tradition and community,’ or again the so-called ‘people of the Sunna and

the community' (*abl al-sunna wal-jama'a*), or simply as Muslims (Wiedl 2012). It is also this point of view that leads them to self-distance from wider society and everyone they perceive as non-believers under the principle of *al-wala' wal-bara'* (loyalty to God and renunciation from non-believers). For a better understanding of the spectrum of Salafism, international publications often use a tripartite division coined by Quintan Wiktorowicz (2006) that divides the Salafist community into purist, political, and jihadist groups. While the purists focus on non-violent methods for spreading the faith and refuse to participate in political discussions, the political group believes that political activism and targeted *da'wa*² are necessary to spread Islam. The jihadists, on the contrary, believe that a purely political-activist approach is not enough to achieve their goals, which, in their view, makes armed conflict necessary.

Salafism in Germany

In Germany, Salafism has, over time, developed into the fastest-growing and, as such, the most important Islamist movement in the country.³ The number of people involved in Salafism in Germany grew from around 3,800 to over 12,000 between 2011 and 2020. However, the 2011 numbers were initially only estimates by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, and were probably understatements (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung 2022). German Salafists can be found in all Bundesländer, with Berlin, Bremen, Hamburg, Leipzig,⁴ the Frankfurt am Main area, Cologne-Bonn, and the Ruhr area forming important strongholds (Kraetzer 2014, p. 101).

Salafism is not a homogenous movement, in Germany as elsewhere. However, Wiktorowicz's tripartite division is difficult to apply to the German case, and this is translated in the authorities' own definitions of Salafism. The Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, for example, divides the German Salafist scene in two currents – a political and a jihadist one. Transitions between these two categories are just as fluid as everywhere else since they are based on the same religious authorities and give the same basic ideological principles for political as well as jihadist actions, but the majority of Salafists in Germany can be labelled under political Salafism (Bayerisches Staatsministerium des Innern, für Sport und Integration 2022, p. 61).

German expert on extremism Claudia Dantschke, meanwhile, divides the Salafist spectrum into four categories (2013): purist, political-missionary, political-jihadist, and jihadist Salafists. While the first two categories correspond in their respective definitions with those suggested by Wiktorowicz, Dantschke divides the third of his categories into two subcategories. She defines political-jihadist Salafists as those who preach hatred against infidels and defend violent jihad but do not themselves actively engage in violence. The jihadist Salafists, however, are those who not only legitimate violent action but become involved in armed jihad and are willing to kill to achieve their goals (p. 3).

More recent accounts show that the number of followers within the Salafist scene in Germany is stagnating and, according to figures recorded in 2021, has even decreased slightly (Niedersächsisches Ministerium des Innern und für Sport 2021, p. 209). The Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution reported a Salafist potential of 11,000 people (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung 2023). There are several possible reasons for this; it could be because the German security authorities now have a better overview of the Salafist scene and the personalities involved. But it can also be assumed that armed jihad has lost a great

deal of its appeal after the defeat of the so-called 'Islamic State' in Syria and Iraq. Another reason is likely to be society's heightened sensitivity to the Salafist radicalization process because of the terrorist events that occurred in Germany and elsewhere in western Europe in recent years (e.g., the 2016 Christmas market attack) (Niedersächsisches Ministerium für Inneres und Sport 2021, p. 209). Furthermore, prominent personalities within German Salafist networks have seen their activities being severely restricted following the official ban of certain associations and *da'wa* actions. The ban on the association 'Die wahre Religion'⁵ (DwR) and its Quran distribution campaign '*Lies!*' (Read!) in 2016, for example, ensured that the *da'wa* stands run by its members disappeared from the pedestrian shopping zones of German cities and, with them, opportunities for proselytizing. The association's ban came after it was allegedly caught distributing videos containing violent Islamist rhetoric and after 140 people involved in their 'LIES!' campaign had traveled to Iraq and Syria to join the 'Islamic State' (Abdi-Herrle et al. 2016). During the proceedings preceding the ban, more than 200 apartments and offices of organizers and supporters of the DwR were searched. Association funds, information material, and laptops were confiscated, depriving the movement of important resources for its public proselytizing efforts (Süddeutsche Zeitung 2016). While recruitment strategies involved associating people with a certain street credibility, like in the case of former-rapper-turned-terrorist Denis Cuspert, most *da'wa* efforts and initial contacts today seem to take place online (Senatsverwaltung für Inneres und Sport Berlin 2014). The virtual realm has long been central to *da'wa* strategies and the dissemination of information on Salafism (Niedersächsisches Ministerium für Inneres und Sport 2021, p. 198). However, the last few years have seen a certain withdrawal from the public space and further investments of the virtual realm, including by well-known members of German Salafist networks, namely as a result of the bans and increased surveillance by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution.

Salafist Online Content

Even though popular preachers still give live performances, classes, and sermons inside mosques linked to Salafism, increasing efforts have been made to invest the virtual realm. They post videos from and of their lectures, sermons, and seminars either on their own websites or on their social media accounts. The subjects of these videos are typical of Salafism and range from discussions about the golden age of Islam and how it only lasted until Muslims started to admit new cultural aspects into their religion to explorations of how they must go back to Islam's fundamentals before it is too late. Incidentally, the apocalypse is another prominent subject within Salafist sermons and online content. Only the ones that turn to Allah and follow the *salaf salih*, they proclaim, will be able to go to Paradise. *Da'wa* and the correct way to convince others of the Salafis' way of life is another big aspect of Salafist online content. The content itself is aimed both at people who are not yet Muslim and people who are but do not follow Salafists' interpretation of Islam. What makes Salafist preaching and online content appealing to non-Muslims and converts in Germany is that they are mostly presented in German, and spares the public of understanding Arabic. Especially on YouTube and recently also on TikTok, Salafist influencers have gained a certain notoriety, specifically among young people within but also beyond the Salafist scene. The following highlights developments on the online platform TikTok, and in particular the stellar rise of a now well-known young German Salafist preacher, Ibrahim al-Azzazi.

TikTok as a Platform

Developed in 2016 by Chinese IT entrepreneur Zhang Yiming, the app-based platform was initially known as ‘Musica.ly.’ A year later, it was given its current name, TikTok. It should be noted that while the video-sharing platform is globally known as TikTok, it operates under the name DouYin in China. Over a short period of time and with 2.6 billion downloads worldwide, the app, which is available for both iPhone and Android, became the most successful Chinese made app. As early as September 2021, TikTok officially announced that it had one billion active monthly users worldwide (Firsching 2021). With the app, users can easily create, edit, and publish short videos that can then be watched, stitched,⁶ or commented on by other users. What distinguishes TikTok from other social networks like Instagram or Facebook is the comparatively young audience that it attracts. Even though TikTok has users of all ages, it is the so-called ‘Gen Z’ (the generation born roughly between the late 1990s and early 2010s) that represents the core of its aficionados. According to a 2019 source, 69 percent of active users are between 16 and 24 years old (Firsching 2021). TikTok initially gained popularity thanks to karaoke and dance videos, as well as various acting challenges posted by a young public, before attracting a wider population. Over time, the app has become a hub for a variety of interests, virtual communities, and lifestyles. Some authors promote their novels in creative ways, for example, and the platform has become a relay for political and religious communities. As with other social networks, the platform works via an algorithm that registers the search-and-click behavior of its users and processes this data to suggest new content specifically tailored to their interests. As with other social media, algorithms and artificial intelligence recommend contents similar to those consumed, commented on, or ‘liked.’⁷ The more the person interacts with videos of a given type, the more often and faster they will be recommended similar contents in the future. This can result in users slipping into a so-called ‘filter bubble.’ This may occur when the assumptions made by the algorithm regarding the user’s interests lead it to no longer recommend or completely filter out content that seemingly does not correspond to the user’s point of view (Dahlgren 2021). As a result, consumers grow decreasingly likely to encounter differing or opposing voices.

Ibrahim al-Azzazi and Islamcontent5778

As other people who lack scholarly credentials in the traditional sense, young TikTok preacher Ibrahim al-Azzazi keeps a low profile when it comes to his biographical data. The Bavarian Office for the Protection of the Constitution classifies him on the Salafist spectrum (Bayerisches Staatsministerium des Inneren, für Sport und Integration 2021), although he himself does present himself as a Salafist (Islamcontent5778 2023a). When, in 2022, Arafat Abou-Chaker, a well-known ‘leader’ of the feared Abou-Chaker clan, asked al-Azzazi about his age during a TikTok live stream, he only replied that he was still ‘under thirty’ (himbeer_pi 2022). The Office for the Protection of the Constitution in Baden-Württemberg provides a more precise answer. According to the Office, al-Azzazi was born in Munich in 1996 (Verfassungsschutz Baden-Württemberg 2022). Even though he is invited as a guest preacher in German mosques on a semi-regular basis, his main field of action is online. He is active on YouTube, Instagram, and especially TikTok, where he is called ‘Sheikh Ibrahim,’ a title that al-Azzazi claims is given to him by his young followers (TikTok Schule

2023). Whether he has official theological training or not, however, cannot be proven, which confuses some of the more critical – but not all of the – visitors on his channel. In an interview with one of his viewers, he claimed that he had been studying in Egypt for around ten years, where he learned from the generally controversial scholar Mustafa al-Adawi (Verfassungsschutz Baden-Württemberg 2022; Gazi D 2023). In the past, al-Adawi has appeared as a scholar for the Egyptian radical Islamic broadcaster ‘Al-Nas-TV.’ In one program, he was asked what Islamic law says about marrying young girls who have not yet reached puberty. He then replied that a girl before puberty could be married off if she was able to cope with the sexual relationship (Gerlach 2012). Al-Azzazi admits that he has no documents that directly prove his scholarly credentials since he did not follow the classical route of a religious scholar (who obtains education from an institution of higher learning or a university) but through his direct studies under al-Adawi (Gazi D 2023). Nevertheless, his followers and fans seem all too willing to believe him, rarely questioning him and his self-proclaimed Islamic authority. Ibrahim al-Azzazi and his content polarize, and as his online presence grows, so does the interest from outside the Salafist movement. He and his content have been under surveillance by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution because of alleged statements in favor of violence (Y-Kollektiv 2022), something in which he says no longer interests him (Y-Kollektiv 2022). All in all, and despite his young age, he seems to be generally well-connected within Salafist networks in Germany. Apart from producing the content for his own YouTube and TikTok accounts, he further collaborates with a number of other well-known Salafist preachers from the by appearing in and producing content for the accounts of the DMG e.V. in Braunschweig.⁸

Al-Azzazi’s TikTok account, called @islamcontent5778, uploads new material several times a week. The number in the account name probably alludes to the surface temperature of the sun, which scientists has evaluated to be of 5.778 Kelvin. This number has been taken up by esoteric-minded Muslims: if you count the verses in the Quran between the first mentioning of the word sun (*shams*) in Sura 2:258 and the last mention of the word in Sura 91:1, the number of verses in between is 5,778. The TikTok account itself has almost 353,600 subscribers and a total of over 15.3 million likes, and follows 99 other people who are not visible due to privacy settings. Visitors of the account currently have access to 1,491 video uploads (as of 15 June 2023). Many content providers posting on TikTok also upload their content on YouTube, including other German Salafists. In some cases, such as Islamcontent5778 and the DMG e.V. in Braunschweig, the videos published on YouTube and the content posted on TikTok are the same on both platforms. In other cases, such as on the private accounts of another German Salafist, Abul Baraa,⁹ longer format, including whole sermons, can be found on YouTube but not on TikTok, partly because videos on TikTok can only be up to 15 minutes long and partly because TikTok users seem to prefer shorter videos. Shorter videos, in general, are on the rise and tend to perform better within social media algorithms. That is to say, the shorter the videos are, the more likely they are to be watched at length without being swiped away (Yeshanew 2021).

In addition, there is a whole subcategory of channels on YouTube and TikTok that repost original content, as well as snippets on private ‘fan accounts.’ In a 2022 report by the German Federal Agency for Civic Education entitled ‘Monitoring the Periphery of Religiously Based Extremism (PrE),’ these channels are called ‘mirror channels’ because they merely mirror YouTube (Hänig and Hartwig 2022, p. 12). Content-wise, al-Azzazi’s platform is far more successful on TikTok than it is on YouTube. As of June 2023, al-Azzazi

has one of the most popular account of its kind in Germany, if not the most popular. In his postings, he appears in traditional garb, wearing a beard, a white jellabiya,¹⁰ and a white turban or white and red keffiyeh.¹¹ In his posted content, he presents himself as a friendly, easy-going, and approachable man who has made it his mission to bring Islamic knowledge to young people in particular. While al-Azzazi himself can be seen in most of the videos, he does seem to have support from a small management team and from other popular figures within the German Salafist movement who appear in his videos from time to time.

The content posted on Islamcontent5778 consists mainly of video snippets in a question-and-answer format that last only a few seconds. These short units can be taken as a kind of contemporary digital fatwa format. A fatwa is an Islamic legal opinion based on sharia law, which is issued by an Islamic legal scholar. Traditionally, there is a widespread opinion that only professionally trained and recognized legal scholars are entitled to provide normative evaluations, but in principle, any Muslim can publish a fatwa on the basis of his (or her) specific expertise. In the past, it was common for a Muslim to turn to a local imam, sheikh, or religious scholar with a question. The person asking the question could then either accept this usually non-binding judgment or, if necessary, turn to another legal expert. Because these fatwas are always just the opinion of the respective scholar, which is arrived at through his own knowledge or creative understanding and assessment of the sources, the same question may be answered differently by different scholars. These days, due to internet, those seeking advice no longer need to go to a local scholar. Since the 1990s, there have been multiple websites devoted solely to the creation and distribution of online fatwas. A good example of these sites, which function as an online fatwa service, is the Saudi Arabian website Islam Q&A,¹² where those seeking counsel can contact the operators anonymously via e-mail and ask their questions. These problems can relate to all areas of life, and there are hardly any topics that are taboo. On Islam Q&A, these normative issues and their corresponding judgments are then published so that people with the same or similar concerns might be able to find answers to their problems more quickly. As of June 2023, the Islam Q&A website boasts that its services are available in 16 languages, including German. The site was launched in 1996 by Sheikh Muhammad Salih al-Munajjid, who still manages it to this day (Islam Q&A 2023). Al-Munajjid is a Salafist whose worldwide fame also comes from his appearances on two satellite channels (Iqra TV and Al-Majd TV), as well as his general presence on the social networks Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Clearly, al-Munajjid is by far not the only Salafist using social media to disseminate his content.

Ibrahim al-Azzazi's Content

In his videos, questions previously collected by his manager are read aloud to him by another person. The question is also visually displayed at the top of the video. In the background, images matching the selected issue are displayed via the 'green screen' technique. For example, in a videoed response to the question as to whether one is allowed to take medication while fasting, an image showing different pills is displayed in the background (Islamcontent5778 2023b). The questions range from personal ones asking al-Azzazi's his opinions regarding other well-known Salafist preachers like Pierre Vogel (Abu Hamza) (Islamcontent5778 2023c) or his favorite football club (Islamcontent5778 2023d) to questions about how to live one's religious and daily life correctly and according to the pious early generation of the *salaf salih*. In his videos for Islamcontent5778 and for the

DMG e.V. in Braunschweig, al-Azzazi propagates fundamentalist, conservative-orthodox morals, worldviews, and ideals. Men and women are assigned classical gender roles. Both sexes have fixed roles in society. Men are supposed to protect, provide, and work outside the house. Women are to protect their modesty, stay (mostly) at home, and raise children. When asked if the first wife has to consent to her husband marrying a second wife, al-Azzazi answered with a 'no,' though he then went on to explain that the husband still has to make sure to make his first wife happy (Islamcontent5778 2023e). His views on a woman's role are clear. When he was asked if a woman could divorce her husband if he decides to marry a second woman against her own wishes, he answered that she could tell him that she wants to divorce him but that she should always ponder whether that is really the right thing to do, that is the right thing for her family and children – not for herself or her own happiness. He further asked her to contemplate if divorcing her husband for what he understood to be part of the Sunna would bring her closer to Allah (Islamcontent5778 2023f). The ideal family is organized patriarchally, and men have a responsibility towards their wives and children, as well as with respect to their own behavior (Islamcontent5778 2023g). Men and women are not to be seen as equal, and men are responsible for women. When asked about women's right to self-determination, he equated women with children (Y-Kollektiv 2022). Outside of marriage and in public, men and women should be separated. When out in public, girls and women need to wear the hijab or preferably the niqab. Men are not allowed to shake hands with women who are not part of their family (Islamcontent 2023h) and must lower their gaze (Islamcontent5778 2023i). Having a girlfriend or boyfriend before marriage is unthinkable (Islamcontent5778 2023j). Other themes that often come up are the afterlife, the Islamic conception of the apocalypse, and the question of who will be allowed into Paradise. According to his and other Salafists' understanding, there will only be one group allowed to access Paradise: those Muslims who closely follow the Prophet plus the *Sahaba*,¹³ or all *salaf salih* (Islamcontent5778 2023k). Others are destined to hell. In order to stay on the path to Allah, friendships and close contact (apart from at school or work) with non-Muslims should be avoided (Islamcontent5778 2023l).

On his TikTok account, al-Azzazi reaches mostly younger age groups, something he seems to actively cater to with his selection of topics, choice in language, demeanor, and video material. Issues specifically aiming a younger public include whether it is permissible to work certain jobs, such as police officer in a drug squad (Islamcontent5778 2023m), nurse (Islamcontent5778 2023n), or soldier in the German army (Islamcontent5778 2023o). Other themes such as gender roles and rights, the status of other Muslim groups in the afterlife, inquiries about Paradise, questions about Islamic dietary laws and whether certain foods are allowed for consumption can be understood as bearing interest for 'older' audiences as well. While a large number of commentators and people interacting with his content seem to be Muslim, questions about the meaning of various Islamic and Arabic terms used by al-Azzazi that can be found in the comments section of many of his videos indicate that his content is interesting not only to Muslims, but to non-Muslims as well.

It is striking that he rarely underpins the answers for his question-and-answer videos with direct quotations from the Quran and Sunna. Complex questions are usually followed by short answers without further explanations. This suggests that each question has a unique and universal answer. In the case of many of the questions put to him, they get merely served through a binary decision of either halal (permissible) or haram (forbidden).

Important aspects of the faith are conveyed only superficially. The fact that there are different views and opinions on certain questions is not addressed.

The Comments Section on the Videos of Ibrahim al-Azzazi

The comments section of the individual videos is interesting on its own because of the mixed reactions of the commentators. For most of al-Azzazi's videos, there are both positive, affirmative, negative, and even scornful comments. A good example of this is the video entitled 'May one evade taxes?' Here, 'Sheikh Ibrahim' answered the question as follows: 'We cannot exactly say that it is obligatory under Islamic law to pay taxes to a non-Muslim state, but of course, we do not call on anyone to do anything illegal' (Islamcontent5778 2023p). While there were quite a few commentators who agreed with him and wrote that he 'speaks *haqq*',¹⁴ there were others who pointed out that whether you are Muslim or not, you are obligated to follow the rules of the country you live in. Still, others remarked that taxpayers' money goes to essential things like the country's public institutions, such as schools, hospitals, and firefighters, as well as the country's other infrastructure, which is generally used by everyone, including Muslim citizens.

Some commentators, in turn, countered, probably out of pure bewilderment, with the question: 'Are you allowed to accept citizen money?'¹⁵ This is an allusion to the fact that there seems to be a pattern where German Salafist preachers in the past have financed their lives by unclear means and through various businesses, such as stores for halal food, online shops for Islamic clothing and books. In the past, some popular preachers, such as Abul Baraa, Pierre Vogel (Abu Hamza), and al-Azzazi himself, have been involved with a travel agency by the name of 'Bakkah-Reisen' for which they acted as tour guides for luxury Hajj-¹⁶ and 'Umra-¹⁷ trips (Verfassungsschutz Baden-Württemberg 2022). There have also been cases where prominent figures from the Salafist movement have been investigated for different types of financial fraud. For example, Abul Baraa, another popular preacher, has had problems with the Attorney General's office in the past: he and his wife, both of whom are presumably Hartz IV recipients, allegedly applied for and received a total amount of 18,000 euros in emergency corona aid, 9,000 euros of which they got for a grocery store that does not exist anymore, and the other 9,000 euros they got for an online store for Muslim women's clothing that did not really have problems during the pandemic. This story came after his wife was said to have concealed an income of around 25,000 euros generated by this successful online shop from the German job center (Jansen 2021). When al-Azzazi was directly asked how he finances their travel, be it within Germany or abroad, as part of a documentary about him, he did not want to disclose this information and requested for this question to be cut from the documentary (Y-Kollektiv 2022).

In general, under various videos – not just al-Azzazi's, but other preacher's videos as well – one can find warnings that the creators of the content are members of the 'Wahhabi sect.' But when directly asked if he and his followers are Wahhabi, al-Azzazi has answered that other sects would describe them as such, but that he just calls himself Muslim (Islamcontent5778 2023q).

In addition to all the different comments and all the criticism that 'Sheikh Ibrahim' receives, the question of how to convert keeps coming up. The first video pinned at the top of his TikTok page is on how to contact him on Instagram, so they can carry out the conversion (Islamcontent5778 2023r). Also, in the account's profile description, there

currently (as of June 2023) is another link for those who are interested in converting to Islam.

Conclusion

Media literacy and deep knowledge of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) do not necessarily go hand in hand. On the contrary, a number of self-made religious entrepreneurs have staked their claims on YouTube and extended their activities from there to the more recent platform of TikTok. Presenting the TikTok account of a quite successful German ‘Sheikh’ of dubious scholarly credentials named Ibrahim al-Azzazi shows how this figure manages to reach out and appeal to young people in need of orientation. As described above, over 69 percent of TikTok users are between the ages of 16 and 24. These users correspond to the demographic categories targeted by Salafists’ da’wa efforts, namely young people from their teens to their late-20s who are looking for purpose and a general direction for their life in a world that appears chaotic and increasingly hard to navigate. These youths may be searching for something to hold on to or someone to show them how to navigate and overcome the challenges of everyday life. In their desire for orientation belonging they may come across individuals or groups that give them exactly what they are looking for. Adolescents and young adults may come into contact with people in various ways in their everyday life, for example, via sports and youth clubs, but encounters occur increasingly via the internet and its easily consumable mediatized fatwa snippets. Conversely, these groups, be they political or religious, find and recruit their new members in a targeted manner in both virtual and real space. For people looking for guidance or easy answers for everyday life, clear instructions, seemingly uncomplicated answers, and charismatic leading figures can be very appealing. Furthermore, for people turning to religion or, more specifically, Islam in their search for guidance, there is a high chance of running into Salafist information first since their websites and accounts currently dominate the offer of German-speaking information about Islam. At the same time, the short videos are simple to produce and easy to consume. By producing and posting multiple videos a week, al-Azzazi and other content producers from the Salafist movement provide a constant flow of content improving their online profile and growing their follower count. Preachers like Ibrahim al-Azzazi and Abul Baraa are especially polarizing on social media, where it is often young people that look up to them and too often do not question their judgments, expertise, and authority.

Notes

- 1 For a general discussion of Salafism as an analytical category, see Nezda 2014.
- 2 Arabic for an invitation/call to God, but there is also a different definition as propaganda.
- 3 For a detailed account of the emergence of Salafism in Germany, see pertinent chapters of Schneiders 2014.
- 4 On the scene in Leipzig and its use of the digital realm, see Böttcher 2013.
- 5 In English, The True Religion Organization. Founded in 2005 by former-boxer-turned-preacher Pierre Vogel (Abu Hamza) and former businessman Ibrahim Abou-Nagie.
- 6 The ‘stitch’ function: embedding a five-second content excerpt from another user to quote or put them in a new context.
- 7 On algorithms, AI, and its many uses within the digital realm, see Cohen 2022.
- 8 Deutschsprachige Muslimische Gemeinschaft e.V. (DMG e.V.) is a Salafist association and mosque in Braunschweig, Germany, that also produces online content.

- 9 Ahmad Armih (aka Ahmad Abul Baraa) is a well-known preacher of the Salafist scene in Germany.
- 10 Jellabiya is a long loose-fitting traditional garment mostly worn by men.
- 11 Keffiyeh is a square, white-checked cloth usually made of cotton, worn on the head by men.
- 12 For a deeper insight into German-language fatwa services, see El-Wereny 2014.
- 13 The Prophet's Companions.
- 14 *Al-haqq* is Arabic for truth or 'right.'
- 15 German citizen money, colloquially also known as Hartz IV, is a conditional basic income that can be obtained by job seekers or people with low income, see: <https://www.buerger-geld.org/>.
- 16 Hajj is the Arabic term for the annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca, a mandatory religious duty that must be carried out at least once in a person's lifetime if they are able; it is one of the five Pillars of Islam.
- 17 Umra denotes an Islamic ritual visit to Mecca that can be done throughout the year.

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ISLAMIC HERITAGE AT THE AGA KHAN MUSEUM SHOP

Transcultural Crafts and Contemporary Art as Conspicuous Cosmopolitanism

Philip Geisler

Islamic Heritage in Singularistic Consumer Culture

In a dimmed space lined with shelves and vitrines, a handful of small golden and silver pendants lie in an open, velvet-clad display case. Small suns with radiating rays and ornamented circles are all attached to curb-shaped chains with flattened and twisted links interlocking tightly. Another tiny, symmetrical silver object resting on the spotlight dark velvet has three cylinders hanging under a bell-shaped arch with pointed cusps and vegetal ornamentation, its center highlighted by a mandorla resembling an eye.

This display setting of a *khamsa* amulet, the most important, globally dispersed talismanic symbol of protection against the evil eye, carrying distinct meanings in Shiite and Sunni Islam, could well be a museum gallery of Islamic art, but two hints tell us otherwise. The objects are too loosely arranged, and we find price tags attached to these pendants and their chains. The tag of the *khamsa* pendant disrupts the solemn atmosphere brought about by its display. The price is listed as two dollars, making it one of the cheapest items in the shop, as well as the most frequently purchased. In popular Islam, the *khamsa*'s power to protect its bearer derives from the belief that its human hand shape carries a blessing (*baraka*) as a bodily representation of the word *Allāh* in Arabic script, serving the remembrance (*dhikr*) of God as the creator (von Kemnitz 2013, p. 583). In the museum-shop-without-a-museum in 1973 Cedarhurst, Long Island, however, it was divested of its Islamic apotropaic symbolism and described in secular and regional terms as 'a symbol of friendship from Morocco' (Murray 1973, p. 122).

The history of museum shops connected to Islamic art began in the early twentieth century, presumably with the official opening of the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo in 1903. In countries that were not marked by the presence of European colonizers, museum shops emerged when global capitalism established its presence in places like Turkey, whose Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art opened its first museum shop as late as the early 1980s. Products inspired by or reproducing collection objects that were framed under the category of Islamic art have since proliferated in museum shops across the globe. From the so-called universal museums like the MET (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) and the Louvre (Paris) to more dedicated and younger institutions like Doha's MIA (Museum of Islamic

Art) in Qatar, replicas, reproductions, and products inspired by (often more accurately clichés of) the typical colors, motives, and ornamental designs of Islamic art have become attractive components of product lines across institutions. Some museums offer more general items of everyday use. Other museums in the narrower field of Islamic art, like the MIA, have started to offer ‘exclusively designed products inspired by the Museum of Islamic Art’s outstanding collection and exhibits’ (Museum of Islamic Art 2023). The recently renovated and then reopened MIA (established in 2008), echoing Islamic art historian Richard Ettinghausen’s (1951, p. 47) problematic Cold War concept of Islamic art as an ambassador of culture and goodwill of the Muslim world, further highlights that ‘from high-quality replicas, handmade glassware, art books and jewelry to stationery and accessories, each object is an ambassador of the museum’ (Museum of Islamic Art 2023).

This chapter builds on existing studies on the history of the museum shop as a space between art and retail through a discussion of the Aga Khan Museum Shop in Toronto (henceforth referred to as the AKMS). The chapter is concerned with shops as an integral part of one specific type of museum, the art museum. Opened at the same time as the private Aga Khan Museum (AKM) in 2014 as part of the transnational *Ismā‘īlī* (henceforth *Ismaili*) institutional framework, the AKMS is both unique and representative of a recent trend among museum shops to offer more upscale product lines. I argue that they utilize Islamic art for conspicuous consumer displays of educated taste and as a signifier of elegant cosmopolitanism. I see cosmopolitanism as a cultural and cognitive orientation entailing cultural capital. In focusing on the contemporary commercial uses of the notion of cosmopolitanism in Islamic art, I build on Bruce Lawrence’s discussion of the ‘Islamicate Cosmopolitan Spirit’ while at the same time expanding its scope to include the materiality and cultural-religious practices informed by *Ismaili* faith. Lawrence frames his concept of cosmopolitanism as an embodied practice and episteme that problematizes essentialist regional or linguistic notions of a uniform and singular Islamic tradition or perspective. Instead, he foregrounds networks of artists, historians, scholars, and poets that formed and continue to form interwoven histories (2021, p. 123). In order to offer unique products, the AKMS collaborates with vernacular artisans and visual artists in the MENASA region (the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia) and stages shop products as signifiers of transculturality rather than Islam. In relating its commercial activities to such preservation and promotion of culturized Islamic heritage, the shop serves both consumers’ desire for tangible signs of authenticity and singularity and the consolidation of the *Āghā Khān*’s global charisma and hence the legitimization of his *Sevener Shiism* within global Islam.

In this chapter, I assess the AKMS’s architectural design, product line, and tonality in public communications, building on three kinds of sources: (1) observations and photographs gained during field visits between 2018 and 2023; (2) advertising media, including newsletters, website content, and social media; and (3) semi-structured online interviews with museum staff conducted in 2022, particularly with shop curator Shoheb Gwaduri. By analyzing the museum shop in discussion with the AKM’s art displays, institutional frameworks, and Islamic art historiography, my examination combines art historical methods geared toward an analysis of art and craft objects, collections, and display with an anthropology of material culture oriented toward reproductions, consumer practices, and the materiality of commodity aesthetics in the globalized twenty-first century. This allows me to discern the ways in which the retail offered here connects to the design-oriented historiography of Islamic art and is brought about by a unique institutional strategy within *Shiite Islam* that differentiates our understanding of the functions of museum shops.

In a broader perspective, I aim to contextualize the museum shop as a conjunction of shifting consumer culture and strategies within global Islam in the early twenty-first century. This approach is sparked by two sociological interventions that underpin my arguments. First, I build on Sharon Macdonald's terminology for product categories and her plea to integrate museum shops in more comprehensive understandings of the 'complex object-identity work that the museum performs' (2012, p. 53). Secondly, I draw on the sociologist Andreas Reckwitz's notion of singularity, which allows me to read the AKMS as a site where Islamic art is transformed into contemporary, transcultural crafts that seamlessly integrate into consumerist ambitions of late modernity to curate authentic subjects through particular experiences and objects (2020, p. 218; Balzer 2014). Reckwitz grounds his notion of singularity in the observation that in post-industrial markets, subjects, practices, and objects compete to be recognized as goods of unique cultural value that seek attention and develop affective power through their ascribed, valorized singularity status (Reckwitz 2020, p. 75). He highlights that 'the singularistic lifestyle of the new middle class treats all of world culture – all places, times, and social heritages – as available resources for the fulfillment of self-actualization' (p. 216).

By the 'new middle class,' Reckwitz is referring to a global, highly educated class of subjects who form their cultural capital in response to a shift away from the industrial economy and toward a knowledge and culture based economy marked by post-materialistic values of self-actualization (p. 73). What is new about this rather upper-middle (yet often precarious) class, according to Reckwitz, is its pursuit of singular and authentic experiences and objects, a trend which differentiates it from the modern bourgeoisie (p. 218). In the following sections, I explore what resources the AKM's collection and Islamic heritage at the AKMS embody for the curating practices of this class as they substitute materialist and uniformist consumption with the curation of the particular and authentic. I analyze how the consumer culture established by this museum shop is generated by the religious-political agenda and historical experiences of the Sevensh Shia. Eventually, I elaborate on how the AKMS's investment in heritage preservation and art innovation reconfigures the aura of artworks through the meta-narrative of transculturality embodied by crafts and contemporary art.

The Aga Khan Museum and Its Institutional Frameworks

The AKM opened in Toronto, Canada, in 2014.¹ It belongs to the transnational institutional framework of the Āghā Khān, the forty-ninth Imām of the Nizārī Ismā'īlī Shī'a branch of Sevensh Shiite Islam, namely His Highness Shāh Karīm al-Ḥusaynī Āghā Khān (b. 1936) (henceforth referred to as Aga Khan).² He is the spiritual leader of 15 million Ismaili Muslims that are dispersed across ca. 25 countries (Kassam 2003, p. 480). The museum holds the private collection of the Aga Khan's family and is primarily based on the collection donated by his late uncle, Prince Ṣadr al-Dīn Āghā Khān (d. 2003). In both his religious and civic engagement, the Aga Khan promotes the notion of pluralism. Read in this context, the museum culturizes complex Nizari theological concepts like 'the unity of existence' (*wahdat al-wujūd*) as civic and ethical values. Its permanent display authenticates such theological convictions as historical undercurrents of culture through the presentation of Islamic art as a manifestation of global connections, as well as ethnic, cultural, and artistic heterogeneity. This narrative is based on a collection of temporal and geographic breadth and depth. It includes Quran folios and manuscripts, metalwork, woodwork, stone, glassworks, ceramic

objects, works on paper, and a few textiles. Their provenance covers the geographical areas of the Iberian Peninsula, North Africa, West, South, and East Asia, and Southeast Asia from the eighth to the twenty-first centuries.

The Collection Gallery is structured in a chronological and geographical order that mirrors a conventional curatorial approach focused on dynasties. With its bright and transparent design as a unified open space, the display allows for non-linear movement and does not construct temporal and geographic boundaries very strictly. It thereby invites visitors to apprehend the connectedness of different cultural periods and places presented in one fluid space. Half of the gallery space is dedicated to the Shiite arts of present-day Iran (the display identifies geographies through modern nation-states). Section panels often emphasize cross-cultural influences of earlier or simultaneous global intellectual and artistic traditions, cultural encounters, ethnic diversity, and the fluidity of artistic forms in the Muslim world. With few exceptions, the display does not elaborate on religious rituals and practices – in fact, the museum is not even referred to as one of Islamic art in official profiles but as an institution showcasing the contributions of Muslim civilizations to world heritage. As iconography, materiality, and style are mobilized to exemplify cross-cultural exchange, objects gain paradigmatic status expressing global and temporal interconnectedness (Kana'an 2014, p. 9; Kim 2014, p. 11). The museum's mission statement reflects the objective of these engagements: 'We connect cultures through art' (Aga Khan Museum 2021). In this way, the display constructs a vast interconnected global region with distinctive subcultures in constant exchange with neighboring cultures to narrate the plurality in Islam itself (Aga Khan 2014, p. 8).

As a private institution, the AKM is part of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, the cultural and heritage-related agency of the endowment-based Aga Khan Development Network. It counts 140 institutions and mainly engages in music, architecture, and urban preservation. The Network merges features of developmental NGOs and faith-based charities to foster socially productive for-profit and not-for-profit enterprises that translate Islamic ethics of the Nizari Sevener Shiite tradition into social action through institutions and thereby, according to its own mission, realize the social conscience of Islam (Ruthven 2011, pp. 189, 191). The AKM's staff, though, invariantly portrays the institution as strictly secular. Scholarly contributions, too, often financed by the Aga Khan's educational programs, take on the form of eulogies praising the Network's secular humanism and sustainability. The Aga Khan himself, however, describes the basis of the Network's activities and his spiritual leadership (*imāma*) as driven by Islam, an understanding that is taken up in the Aga Khan Trust for Culture and the Development Network's open references to Islamic ethics and faith (Institute of Ismaili Studies 2000; Kassam 2003, pp. 480–482). Besides heritage and culture, the Network is engaged in social, economic, educational, and health-related development activities based on an Islamic ethical framework that bridges the realms of religion (*dīn*) and this world (*dunyā*) by improving social environments as an inherent part of Muslim spiritual life on earth and preparation for the life to come. The Development Network has previously collaborated with Canadian institutions to support the developing world and promote human diversity, and it realizes many of its projects through the efforts of volunteers. The Trust for Culture is mainly active in preserving and restoring historic cities, and it has sponsored projects in Syria, India, Pakistan, Mali, and Central Asia. In addition, it has previously created or supported museums in Egypt, Zanzibar, and France. Notably, most of the Network's beneficiaries are non-Ismailis (Ruthven 2011, p. 219). I elaborate on the religious-political agenda behind this below. Like the AKM itself, the Trust's research program for Islamic

architecture at Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), as well as the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, forms a part of its renowned educational and heritage-related programs. This approach is also tangible in the AKMS's engagement with contemporary art- and craft-making.

Culturizing Islam at the Aga Khan Museum Shop

Architecture

The AKM is part of the larger Aga Khan Park, which also encompasses the Ismaili Centre (built by Charles Correa; completed in 2014), a place of communal gathering and prayer. With its location in a northern, suburban district of Toronto, it is removed from mainstream commercial venues in its direct environment. This urban and architectural localization is relevant for the museum's shop, elevating it above common retail while infusing the store with the museum's creative, artistic ambiance. The AKMS itself is located in a designated space right next to the museum's well-frequented main entrance and opposite another facility essential to the AKM's public image and visitor orientation, the Diwan restaurant, which was repeatedly nominated for the World Culinary Awards as North America's Best Landmark Restaurant. Both facilities take up various devices typical for museum display. While restaurant guests dine amidst ornate wooden panels hand-carved in Damascus for a private house in 1799, the museum shop resides in a long, low-ceilinged space with open front and white-cube aesthetics. Just like the museum's restaurant, performing arts auditorium, and workshop rooms, architect Fumihiko Maki (b. 1928) integrated the shop as a permanent and spatially marked facility in the architectural design. The oblong open storefront is headed by a fixed, narrow panel with a succession of the AKM's logo. The logo shows an interlocking knot work found in the center of a polychrome earthenware bowl with a calligraphic band from tenth-century Samarqand, which is part of the museum's collection.³ The museum shop website states that the design 'can be seen to represent the interconnectedness, harmony, and dynamism of pluralism' (Aga Khan Museum 2023a), with pluralism being a central concept of both the Aga Khan's Ismaili denomination and his museum's meta-narrative of the diverse and transcultural nature of Islamic art in its permanent gallery (Dewji 2018a, 2018b).

The storefront directly displays almost the entire array of spotlit products assembled on white or glass-fronted shelves, on frameless glass vitrines, and on white tables and cubic consoles. The shop invites visitors in with touchable, low-stake products like pens, journals, bookmarks, and bags with the museum's monogram which are all displayed on loosely positioned tables in the atrium in front of the shop itself. The invitation to touch and the offer to take something away balances the sensually deprived gallery experience (Gottschalk 2006, p. 117; Hampel 2017, p. 111) and connects to the material culture of tourism (Stewart 1993; Macdonald 2012, p. 51). These small-scale items lead to the more expensive products inside the shop, where jewelry, textiles, and ceramics are the most prominently displayed objects. The cash desk on the right-hand side of the shop is hidden, connecting the space to the display modes of art and reducing its commercial appearance. As of March 2023, the (online) shop offers ca. 750 different products, many of which are different designs of the same type, a range that is very extensive compared to the conventional museum shop product palette. Products range from inexpensive note cards (4 CAN\$) and magnets (10 CAN\$) to original artworks such as *Emergence I*, an acrylic work of calligraphy on canvas (130 x 130 cm, 2020) by Iranian artist Sasan Nasernia (b. 1974) for 13,000 CAN\$. The most expensive

product is a limited-edition jewelry set with a necklace and earrings exclusively designed for the museum. Fabricated by Meena Jewelers in Dubai and inspired by the 2015 exhibition *Visions of Mughal India*, the set with diamonds, aquamarines, amethysts, rubies, and onyx, rendered in 22K white and yellow gold, is listed at 14,000 CAN\$. The shop is not tax-exempt despite the museum's status as a Canadian charity.

While museum shops often take up the white-cube museum gallery form (Macdonald 2012, p. 47), the AKMS is marked more clearly as a space of retail and only subtly evokes museum aesthetics. Products are not spaced out but presented in a crowded, amassed way compared to the display mode inside the galleries, where the status of objects as individual art pieces is highlighted by more generous spacing. Jewelry is displayed in vitrines, yet most products are placed on open shelves. Items are grouped roughly by category (books, artists, material, clothing). While the shop seems to buy a limited number of items from individual artisans and artists on consignment, some pieces are more permanent, while others follow rotations for seasons or exhibition themes, catering to local stakeholders of the museum and attracting them through changing offers. More visible correlations with the galleries are established by the relative invisibility of price tags. Instead, labels provide information on artisans, cite past exhibition titles or regional and material themes as slogans ('Turkish ceramics'), evoke connections to the museum collection by interpreting styles or colors, or highlight how the collection served as inspiration for products.

The AKMS is further integrated into this museum's spatial configuration through an architectural component located next to the cloak check. The Bellerive Room is a replication of Prince Šadr al-Dīn's Persian Guestroom (Chambre Persane), a collection space with red wooden display cabinets in his private home, Chateau de Bellerive, in Geneva, Switzerland. In this room, the museum exhibits 60 ceramic objects. While the shop and the Bellerive Room are not immediately adjacent to each other, the latter furthers the integration of the shop into the museum's art context by softening the spatial transition from the gallery's interior aesthetics to the exterior addendum of the commercial shop by adding a visually differentiated room displaying art outside the Collection Gallery.

The shop's white walls are then mitigated by various large-scale reproductions of details of Islamic miniature paintings held in the museum collection. They depict a portrait of Mughal emperor Shah Jahan surrounded by his three sons from the first half of the seventeenth century, a 1650s painting of Prince Siyavush undergoing a trial of fire from the museum's Mu'in Musavvir *Shāhnāme* (Book of Kings), and two miniatures of a 1527 manuscript of the *Khamsa* of the poet Nizami. One reproduction shows the Seljuq ruler Sultan Sanjar encountering an old woman while hunting, who provides him a lesson on princely virtues. With their opaque watercolors, gold, and ink on a large visual scale and their epic or royal contents and themes of courtly virtues and craft-making, these reproductions create a solemn, sophisticated, and atmospheric historical backdrop for the products. Especially, the objects placed in front of the scene of Shah Jahan seem to seamlessly integrate into this scenery. Islamic art reproductions are thus mobilized to encourage consumption and raise the cultivated aura of the displayed contemporary design products through imaginative associations with royal splendor and elevate shopping into a cultural practice and tasteful experience. The royal imagery of this staging, which resonates with the spiritual royalty and immense wealth of the Aga Khan himself and matches the design of pricey products offered for an affluent clientele, is continuously broken by the white walls signifying a space of aestheticized art. These dichotomous spatial aesthetics imbue products with the museum's promise of durable value and affirm the cultural knowledge and public brand of the AKM.

Advertising and Digital Media

Communication (newsletters, social media platforms, the website, etc.) pursues a similar tonality. The online shop, in particular, displays high-profile fashion or product photography and a constant emphasis on pieces as made-to-order originals and on the fair-trade compensation of their artisans. The shop navigates between reflecting the AKM's own cultivated image and relations to the museum's exhibitions, collection, and individual objects, and meeting expectations of profitability while avoiding overly banal commercialism. The serious and celebrative tonality of the shop's advertising reproduces the terminologies and sophisticated rhetoric of art. This rather unique shop profile can be seen as a strategy responding to considerable retail slides in North American museums in the early 2000s (Toepler 2006). Yet, the nature of the site and of the collection owner plays into this as well, creating the need to balance commercial viability with an appropriate reflection of the Aga Khan's royal status and the shop's location vis-à-vis a site of Muslim prayer and community life.

With its emphasis on collaborating with local artisans from the MENASA region, the AKMS acquires an image that is grounded less in retail as such and more in a strategy of mission-based social entrepreneurship. Interestingly, the museum's positive celebration of the skills and crafts of local artisans is at the same time invested in what Larkin (2016) termed retailing and negative heritage: the plans to open the AKM as an institution displaying the contributions of Muslim civilizations to world heritage were propelled with the global rise of Islamophobia in the aftermath of 9/11. The museum and its shop have thus been conceptualized to educate visitors about the Muslim world and reduce ignorance through educational activities, programming, and public image building (Aga Khan 2014). Highlighting the living traditions of diverse regions of Islamic hegemony through crafts, contemporary art, and design thus adheres both to this mission of improving the image of Muslims and the MENASA region and to the larger educational objectives of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture and the Aga Khan Development Network. It is in this sense that in an interview with me, Shoheb Gwaduri, the shop curator and senior manager of retail operations and product design, highlighted that the shop products, which he develops collaboratively with MENASA artisans for Western markets, are thought to act as conversation starters in the private homes of their buyers (Gwaduri 2022).

Product Line

The theme of transculturality is taken up in the shop's product line both by reproducing details of collection objects that the museum highlights as having emerged through cultural interconnectedness and by actively engaging in the creation of new, contemporary crafts that adopt diverse traditions from the MENASA region. The shop also relates some of its products to exhibition themes of transregional exchange and human experiences of migration. The museum's online shop categorizes products as fashion accessories for women or men, jewelry, books, and lifestyle. Regarding more interpretive categories of products, we first see 'relocated reproductions' (Macdonald 2012, p. 50). Such items carry images of museum objects, particularly ornaments from the museum's large ceramics collection and details from the museum's illustrated manuscripts – the two most prominent components of the collection. They are reproduced in print or as embroidery on dresses, bags, shawls, magnets, coffee mugs, stationery, and paperweights. Italian silk ties carry

ceramic tile patterns and manuscript illustrations, and cufflinks come with tiny reproductions of *Shāhnāme* miniature paintings.

Second, the AKMS offers ‘insignia’ or what commonly has been called merchandise – products with the museum’s logo, monogram, or architectural renderings displaying elements of the museum’s corporate design. Here, one finds umbrellas, purses, ties, silk scarves, wristlets, and bags with the museum’s monogram, as well as some puzzles, t-shirts, and even crystal miniature models staging Maki’s museum building. These are (in many publications and public interviews) associated with the element of light as an inspiration for the architect and a central aspect of Islamic (and here especially Shiite) faith and cosmology (Elias 2003; Beinhauer-Köhler 2010).

Third, and most importantly for my analysis, the shop displays and sells ‘associations’ – items that (loosely) relate to the collection. Here, the product line consists of mission-relevant products and items that, though their design is refined, are more generic and unrelated, such as artful stationery like notebooks, journals, cards, and coaster sets, sometimes taking up Islamic geometric designs, porcelain diffusers for scented oil, tin boxes and teacups with similar patterns, date-inspired perfumes, and colored socks without any connection to museum objects or traditional craftsmanship.

As for mission-relevant products, the shop offers bookmarks in *mashrabiyya* design – the latticework screen-windows frequently used in Islamic architecture – and a wide variety of books. Customers find an Aga Khan biography, novels relating to the MENASA region, books on lifestyle and design, multicultural children’s stories from across the world, Islamic poetry, and books about Islamic faith like Bassam Saleh’s *Rediscovering Prayer: Communicating with Allah*, *The Penguin Dictionary of Islam*, and Salem Azzam’s *Islam: Its Meaning and Message*. There is also a wide variety of general art books on Islamic art, traditional costume, calligraphy, Ottoman embroidery, Indian jewelry, Islamic architecture and modernity, and Arabic Ismaili manuscripts. Finally, cookbooks for Indian, Persian, Indonesian, and Palestinian cuisines, Middle-Eastern street food, and books filled with recipes from what might be termed ‘global Halal kitchens’ form a considerable part of the product line.

The major and unique selling proposition of the AKMS is, in Sharon Macdonald’s words, its mission-related products ‘that might be reproductions of museum objects’ (Macdonald 2012, p. 50). This might-be-status is efficiently served by shop curator and former fashion designer Shoheb Gwaduri’s practice of working with artists and multigenerational artisans, workshops, or collectives in the MENASA region, as well as with Toronto-based artists, many of whom are recent immigrants to Canada. In collaboration with Gwaduri, they create handmade crafts and design items that either incorporate traditions in contemporary design from various world regions or are inspired by museum collection objects. Gwaduri’s process reflects the typical specificities of marketing crafts at museum shops (Borrus 1988). He commonly starts by studying collection or exhibition objects and defining a fitting customer demographic for a new product line. This initial design-based study is followed by extensive travels to Turkey, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Syria, India, Pakistan, or Kashmir, where he collaborates with artisan families who have practiced crafts for up to five generations: ‘I’m working with them to understand how their product needs to reflect Western and European tastes’ (Gwaduri 2022). He commonly chooses regions where the Aga Khan Development Network has established a presence, thus connecting the AKMS back to the larger institutional agenda of heritage preservation. Gwaduri stresses that this process is driven by the desire to invest in vernacular artistic practices, families, and communities.

Framing these products through exclusivity and luxury – notions connecting to shop curator Shoheb Gwaduri’s previous experiences in the luxury goods sector – the museum shop offers textiles like embroidered shawls from Northern India with tradition-inspired patterns and silk-waistcoats connecting Ottoman craftsmanship with English fashion styles. Jewelry products include pearl pendants, necklaces, and earrings by Toronto-based artisan Jehan Teja and geometric bracelet designs inspired by the architecture of the AKM by Jordanian artist Nadia Dajani. The Toronto-based brand Sanaz Doost’s sculptural 18K gold earrings are advertised to take inspiration from ancient Middle-Eastern art and to be ethically crafted. Some jewelry pieces come from countries like Nepal through private collectors. There are also serving bowls and 24K gold-ornamented pitchers with mosaic patterns reminiscent of Andalusian architecture and metal plates inspired by the mosques of Mashhad, Isfahan, Tabriz, and Tehran that are exclusively made for the AKM. Most of the candles on offer are held in vessels with contemporary adaptations of Iznik (Turkish: İznik) ceramic designs – a type of fine pottery works in the Ottoman Empire named after the Northwestern Anatolian town of Iznik – each made by an Iraqi female artisan who is individually introduced on a corresponding card.

Most of these products are subsumed under a separate category in the museum’s on-line shop called ‘The Vault,’ which promotes ‘a meaningful art-collecting experience’ (Aga Khan Museum 2023b) featuring exclusive products rooted in the artistic traditions of the museum collection. The Vault’s goal is to serve emerging collectors by gathering potential collection pieces traced by the shop curator, whose expertise promises to establish connections to artisans from around the Global South. Offering small sculptures and ceramics, the Vault resonates with the museum’s mission and often relates its products to Islamic lifestyles, faith, and poetry, promising to ‘reflect you – your values, identity, heritage, your aspirations’ (Aga Khan Museum 2023b). Products framed through materialistic and stylistic luxury entered museum shops in the late 1980s when high-culture merchandise was developed for consumers who were increasingly conscious of design as a tool of identity construction (Larkin 2016, p. 115). A major artisan featured here is Keyvan Fehri from Iran, who recently emigrated to Canada and dedicates an array of his small ceramic sculptures to the AKMS, taking stylistic inspiration from the museum’s frit ware and ceramic collection. A pomegranate with vegetal ornamentation, calligraphy, or animals for 250 CAN\$ is said to represent bounty, health, and prosperity, while small bird figures with floral designs for 620 to 1,000 CAN\$ are explained to reflect the flight from oppression and new beginnings. The shop website emphasizes that each piece is handcrafted and connects to ‘the rich legacy of Persian decorative design, while infusing elements of western artistic style’ (Aga Khan Museum 2023c). Connecting Sufi poetry with contemporary clay design, Asian-Canadian artisan Hannun Lyn supplies the museum with paper scroll-like vessels paired with Rumi quotes that are largely (and commonly for North America) de-Islamicized (Elmarsafy 2013, p. 264). Besides such identified creators, the Vault also holds handcrafted pieces made by third-, fourth-, and fifth-generation craftspeople located in Izmir and Kütahya, Turkey, who, in close collaboration with the shop curator, produce plates, bowls, and vases inspired by Iznik-tile designs and museum collection items and sold for 340 up to 900 CAN\$. This direct engagement of the Aga Khan’s institutions in vernacular creative and artistic practices – that both preserves skills and, at times, adapts them for a Western market – is also an essential feature of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture’s work in urban conservation and revitalization (Ruthven 2011, p. 216).

Finally, parts of the product line are generated through collaborations. One recent collaboration with the Shanghai-based JUMA Studio evolves around elegant sports clothing and sustainability. The studio advertises itself as a sustainable design platform working with recycled water bottles that co-creates products with other brands, artists, or interior designers. The AKMS and JUMA merged to develop bomber jackets, t-shirts, shirts, dresses, tote bags, and travel bags, whose designs are inspired by the museum's *Shāhnāme* scrolls from the eleventh to the seventeenth centuries. With contemporary artworks emerging through interconnecting visual traditions of the Middle East and Western artistic practices, the shop's Damascus Room aims to spark 'wonder, excitement, calmness, contentment, or even flashes of joy – whatever mood you wish to evoke in your home' (Aga Khan Museum 2023d). This collaboration with the online gallery Emergeast promises to have clients 'find a legacy piece that channels your identity, your values, and your dreams' (Aga Khan Museum 2023d). Many of these paintings and photographs depict Muslim identity and contemporary everyday life, including photographic series with prayer rugs, women of all ages portrayed wearing *hijabs* and engaged in digital and urban environments, and nostalgic Middle-Eastern street sceneries. With the contemporary artworks and crafts of the Vault and the Damascus Room, the museum balances the display of historical arts in its Collection Gallery, which primarily mobilizes dynastic and formalistic art historical frameworks.

Staff

The staff of the shop consists of the shop curator and senior manager of retail operations and product design, Shoheb Gwaduri, as well as a retail supervisor. Additionally, the AKMS employs part-time paid staff who handle cash and volunteers to assist and converse with customers. During my fieldwork, I mostly saw two volunteers and two part-time staff, dressed in elegant black and white suits, often wearing silk handkerchiefs around their necks that are nowadays a widespread fashion feature of scholars of art history. The museum's marketing department has fashioned the shop curator as the face of the shop on social media platforms and in press reports; his job title authenticates the pricier crafts and artworks through regional and aesthetic expertise. The shop itself engages in marketing and public relations. In this context, it places ads and offers the curator's top picks relating to 'one-of-a-kind pieces inspired by the Aga Khan's Collections and art inspired by the history of the rich material cultures of the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Africa, China, Japan and Europe all relating back to Islamic civilizations' (Aga Khan Museum 2023e). Here, one sees the logical continuation of a role that was previously filled by museum curators themselves, who, in the expansion of museum shops in the 1970s, were often featured prominently in museum shop products like cookbooks that placed photos of collection items next to the favorite recipes of curators and other museum staff (Kovach 2013, p. 112). In the early twenty-first century, the new museum shop, exemplified by the shop curator, has become the place to represent and pioneer a shifted form of individualistic consumption based on the museum's own practices of selection and display, with the art curator as a lifestyle model (Terlutter 2000). This dynamic folds into the expansive machine of museum making and collecting practices that are made available for singularistic consumption: as the shop staff become curators and art dealers, museum visitors and shop customers become collectors (Mencarelli and Pulh 2012, p. 159; Larkin 2016, p. 115). This correlation is also visible in the generous and jovial, yet cautious, gestures of care with which shop staff handle products.

However, in the AKMS, this does not remain an entirely secular practice of consumer culture. Most of the shop's many volunteers perform their service in the context of earning *thawāb*, or spiritual reward in the Hereafter, that accrues from the performance of *ḥasanāt* (good deeds). The Aga Khan, in 2022, established the global motto of *khidma* (service) for this voluntary work based on unconditional service, along with the new name of 'Ismaili Volunteers' substituting the term 'Corps,' a new uniform, and corporate design (The Ismaili 2022a). In 2007, upon completing 50 years as Imam, the Aga Khan especially encouraged his followers to embrace the spirit of community work and volunteerism to promote the social conscience of Islam in the broader societies of Canada, Europe, and the United States (Ruthven 2011, pp. 189–191; The Ismaili 2022b). As a consequence, a visit to the AKM, where Ismaili volunteers work at the cloak check, in the shop, and as tour guides, often entails an informal invitation to see the Ismaili Center next door or a short conversation about the volunteer staff's personal faith. Such conversations, both in the shop and elsewhere in the museum, are less academic than the official museum rhetoric. Products, the museum, and the Muslim faith are instead rendered in personal emotional ways, which, as Jamie Larkin has noted in more general terms (2016, p. 118), offer local insight and humanize the museum as an institution.

Conspicuous Cosmopolitanism: Ismaili Strategies of Transcultural Crafts and Contemporary Art

With this profile, the AKMS mirrors a more global dynamic that has recently shifted museum shops from passive retail facilities to agents of cultural production, which translates the collection into what Larkin (2016, p. 115) has called a 'contemporary idiom' for visitors. Toepler (2006, pp. 101, 110) cites surveys that suggest that only through mission-related product lines can shops raise the acceptance for retail activities in museums, which are generally skeptically received in public opinion, but which can acquire a positive connotation for stakeholders if they directly relate to a broader cultural mission and to a museum's public good output. In order to sell successfully, integrate the collection into visitors' lives, and at the same time remain truthful to the museum collection, the AKMS's products predominantly reflect the most common general aesthetic associations of museum visitors with the term 'Islamic art' surveyed recently by Xenia Gazi: the products invariably display pattern and ornament as the most dominant associations to Islamic art as well as the color blue, calligraphy, and geometry (Gazi 2022, p. 98). The product line also seamlessly reflects the demands of the MENASA community members who were part of the Chicago-based survey, asking museums to serve as generators of new art forms, including fashion and jewelry, in which old and new artistic forms become juxtaposed.

The AKMS formulates this juxtaposition of old and new in its dedication both to Islamic heritage, expressed through craft-making and Islamic art, and to contemporary art from the MENASA region and the Canadian diaspora that equally relate to the incorporation of different vernacular traditions in what the shop highlights as transcultural artistic practices and artworks. This commercial strategy, paired with the association of products with terms that mark their uniqueness, elegance, and value, results in the culturization of Islamic heritage practices through the discourse of transculturality and interconnectedness. This, then, is what Gwaduri (2022) marks as the 'story' behind purchases that support a livelihood or a community instead of simply offering mass-produced items. Just like the gallery

display at the museum, the shop addresses Islam peripherally and, instead, substitutes it with creative adaptations that build on a narrative that constructs Islam as a transregional heritage. The museum's different means of communication function as an apparatus that generates value and persuasive cultural and historical narratives. It authenticates such narratives by implicating objects in a display that presents them as metonyms for broader cultural realities. This process of identifying Islamic culture as a transcultural heritage formative for contemporary artistic and crafting practices is an inherent component of what Farhad Daftary has described as the Ismailis' successful construction of a modern, progressive identity (2018, p. 277). While Daftary has highlighted this for the sphere of communal faith, the AKM and its shop, together with the broader activities of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, testify to a complementing process of culturizing Islam toward a global community of middle- and upper-class intellectuals, art lovers, and consumers. Ruthven (2011, p. 217) has observed that this is true for the more global activities of the Aga Khan's institutions as well, which frame Islamic crafts and aesthetics as smart, cosmopolitan, and modern through conservation aesthetics that overcome the image of backwardness associated with Orientalist conceptions.

This engagement echoes the modern emergence of the Aga Khan as the major actor of this transnationally dispersed community that often had to practice precautionary dissimulation of one's belief (*taqīya*) under political prosecution, and that is today essentially connected by a shared leader, by faith, and, since 1986, by its own universal constitution. The deeply positive, celebratory framing of the shop products excludes any form of difficult or dark heritage that would relate to arms and armor as objects testifying to territorial battles, violence, sectarian conflict, and doctrinal tensions between Sunnis and Shiis. Controversial images from miniatures are not printed on products. This generates products as tangible signs that sublimate the legacies of cautionary practices of denial, suppression, and the diversity inherent to the Ismaili expression of ritual and the global dispersion of the Aga Khan's followers into topoi of translocalism and transregional exchange.

Seen in the context of the global community of Muslim believers (*umma*), such Ismaili narratives, including the commercial practices and heritage constructions at the AKMS, expand into a more clear-cut religious-political agenda. While the Shia represent a minority within global Islam, the Nizari Ismailis have been marginalized to an even greater extent within both Sunni and Twelver Shiite spectrums since their emergence. From its more codified materialization in the Fatimid period of the tenth and eleventh centuries in North Africa, the Seveners' system of religious thought was built around esoteric interpretation (*ta'wīl*). Their emphasis on the hidden (*bāṭin*) character of the Quran (Halm 1997, pp. 17–29) has been reputed as a devious mechanism obscuring the sacred texts despite these concepts' prominent meaning for Islamic perceptual culture across North Africa from the tenth century onward (Daftary 2013, pp. 5, 113; Shaw 2019a, p. 22). With this historical backdrop, the Aga Khan's culturized activities capitalize on global (and Western) recognition to advance the community's symbolic capital and legitimize the standing of the Nizaris within the global *umma*. Additionally, the Aga Khan's social and educational engagements in the Middle East, Africa, and Central Asia have helped to secure the safety of his dispersed community across countries (Ruthven 2011, p. 190). The shop's strategy to elevate Islamic heritage into the consumerist sphere of unique, 'one-of-a-kind' (Gwaduri 2022) products, to display the living artistic practices of the MENASA region, and to engage in the prestigious activity of heritage preservation and contemporary arts lends itself to such broader legitimization.

In this sense, the Ismaili political-religious agenda, the community's collective memory, and contemporary transnational identity configure a culturized strategy invoking the meta-narratives and terminologies of global and transcultural art history.

The strategic communication of Islamic heritage as contemporary art and transregional crafts is not only historically and aesthetically authenticated by the museum display next door but also inserted into a commercial space that imbues products with the values and paradigms of the museum exhibition. In the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, museum shops themselves acquired meaning as sites that convincingly embody the themes of cultural capital and educated design taste. The historiography and collection history of Islamic art clarifies this agency of the Islamic art museum shop, as well as the ways in which the AKMS, in particular, reconnects to the early days of collecting and displaying Islamic art before the emergence of a larger market. In the years after 1880, objects from North Africa and the Middle East, positioned in seemingly informal, cluttered domestic spaces, served their owners' social distinction like few other collection items, and thus, they quickly generated profits in novel interactions between art dealers, private collectors, and the evolving art market. David Roxburgh has shown that the particular agency embodied by Islamic art in this context lies in its categorization between Orientalism, fine art, and decorative art, lending it a 'curative power for the modern European fine and industrial arts' (2000, p. 12). It capitalizes on the appreciation of aniconic calligraphy, ornamentation, and abstractionism accredited to Islamic art, together with its invocation of past civilizational glory, amalgamated history and modern industrial progress. At the same time, it served as a tool for imaginative travels to distant times, geographies, and lush Orientalist fantasies (Roxburgh 2000; Grunenberg 2002). This double mythology of Islamic art stimulated practices of a bourgeois milieu that, in Roxburgh's words, dramatized distinction and affirmed social status in usually exclusively male circles engaged in strictly regulated connoisseur debates and united through 'aesthetic predilections to commune with objects' (2000, p. 14). Due to the attractiveness of such distinction potential, these early displays of Islamic art in private homes of collectors in France and Denmark became a major influence for the abundant and seductive commercial aesthetics of department store displays (Roxburgh 2000, p. 30; Macdonald 2012, p. 47).

Here, the intersections of museum display – and Islamic art historiography, more specifically – with the history of consumer culture become evident. In a time of fantastical World Exhibitions, Islamic art entered a process in which cultural and commercial displays incorporated each other. Immersive exotic environments like the display mounted at the Machine Gallery at the 1889 World Exposition in Paris were taken up in the Oriental salons and Egyptian halls of department stores that staged syncretic objects, 'creating a phantasmagoric dream-world of consumerism in which sales were achieved through appealing to the imagination' (Grunenberg 2002, p. 24). This had implications for how the Islamic art museum shop developed. While this particular kind of shop often followed the more conventional history of museum shops, probably the earliest example of a shop in an Islamic art museum established this particular commercial space as a place of unique objects reconnecting either to such phantasmagoric pasts or to connoisseurship in the form of antiques. The Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo (as well as the Egyptian Museum, established in 1902) opened a museum shop early in the twentieth century. Until the 1950s, the shop sold parts of the museum's antique collection to gain storage space for objects seen as more important and to reinvest profits in museum acquisitions (Mostafa 1955, p. 79).⁴ This allowed museums to control the antique trade (Volait 2021, pp. 90–125). In certain parts of Europe, though,

what was sold in such early museum shops was connected to the field of design rather than to Orientalist dreamworlds. As Wendy Shaw has observed, the categorization of objects from Islamic hegemonic regions as decorative art figured in a broader context of utilizing them as global samples for the innovation of European industrial design (Shaw 2019b, pp. 356–357). As the defining paradigm before World War II, the category of crafts and design, according to Shaw, neutralized history and culture. It was only with the exhibition ‘Meisterwerke Muhammedanischer Kunst’ (Masterpieces of Mohammedan Art) in Munich in 1910 that a novel way of displaying spaced, aestheticized objects in modern white-cube interiors evolved that henceforth framed these same objects in the paradigm of masterwork and art (Roxburgh 2000, p. 30). The early museum shops in Cairo and elsewhere not only served these shifting demands but also became synonymous with the whole spectrum of such associations, from Orientalist dreamworlds to fashionable design. As they made these paradigms readily available to be purchased in the form of tangible objects, the shops legitimized collecting while translating the mechanisms of the museum and the varying paradigms of Islamic art historiography to commerce.

Such historical significations of museum shops operate in public perceptions and constitute the cultural capital attributed to the AKMS as a distinct commercial site of early twenty-first-century consumer culture. As the AKMS incorporates the design paradigm of Islamic art historiography, the cultural capital, durability, and aestheticization embodied by the museum, and Ismaili narratives constructing Islam as a transcultural heritage, it emerges as a site that ideally meets the shifted consumer demands of the globalized and highly educated middle classes of the current century. Read in the context of Reckwitz’s (2020) analysis, museum shops connecting to collections of distinct cultures carry immense potential. The structural changes of late modern societies have provided regional cultures with currency as foreign and authentic sources of meaning. Within this frame, ‘potentially everything is fit to contribute to a lifestyle driven by authenticity and self-actualization’ (Reckwitz 2020, p. 217).

Museum shops respond to this mythology of self-curation and authenticity by the implementation of curating practices and gallery aesthetics, as well as by their connection to historical art collections. The gratification experienced by a store purchase becomes entangled with the tastefulness and elevation experienced at art fairs (Harris 1978, pp. 171–172; Falk and Dirking 1992). In this way, museum shops offer to re-stage and mimic the museum process – from archaeological exploration or curatorial research that ‘discovers’ things to selecting them for public display – in the curation of the self. The museum visit and shop purchase are thus translated into experiences of durable value and the tasteful, stylistic self-fashioning of individual lifestyles. As a symbolic commercial site, the shop confirms the prevalent self-image of cultural connoisseurship of the late modern middle classes, as noted by Reckwitz (2020, p. 218). In a valuing system marked by singularity and curationism, museum shops come to signify, like few other commercial spaces, the promise of uniqueness and authenticity. As Gwaduri explained in our (2022) interview,

We recognized that there was a clientele who was walking in here, saying: [...] We are coming to you because we want something unique and individualistic that represents who I am. And so my role was to really find a product assortment that marries east and west beautifully.

This construction of Islam as transcultural heritage, driven by the Nizaris’ religious-political agenda, allows for the AKMS to propose Islamic signs of educated and tasteful

cosmopolitanism. Lawrence has argued that throughout Islamic histories, cosmopolitanism has served as an expression of education, mobility, tolerance, and globalism (2021, p. xxii). Reckwitz (2020, pp. 218–219) emphasizes that, as a form of globalism capitalizing on the value attributed to local diversity, cultural cosmopolitanism was a key goal of the singularistic curation of the authentic self. The urge to conspicuously display cultural cosmopolitanism seems especially relevant in a society like Canada, whose global image has for decades been constructed on the basis of diversity and multicultural liberalism (Thobani 2007, pp. 143–144). The projected cosmopolitanism of Canadian Islamis has been a central factor in this process (Karim 2011). The AKMS serves this dynamic by framing vernacular objects as unique artworks and crafts and making them available for selection, appropriation, and integration in crafted cosmopolitan lifestyles that favor colorful mixes over industrial monoculture. In Reckwitz's terms, the museum shop serves as a site for exploring the world to find things that make one's life exciting. This is manifested, for instance, in the interior design of living spaces: 'Curated living means arranging diverse and interesting heterogeneous things into a clever and harmonious whole [... to] create a unique space [...] of the self' (Reckwitz 2020, pp. 229–230). The interior design incorporates a stage-like function of displaying conspicuous cosmopolitanism by way of products framed through transculturality and interconnectedness.

Conclusion: Reinventing a Transcultural Aura

The AKMS embodies a convergence of the symbolic site of the Islamic art museum shop rooted in both consumerist dream worlds and tasteful design, the Aga Khan's religious-political agenda and pressure to demonstrate legitimacy within the *umma*, and Ismaili approaches of culturizing Islam as transcultural heritage. In conjunction, these factors generate a commercial site offering products that ideally meet the consumer demands of late modern consumer culture in their ability to display conspicuous cosmopolitanism. While the upper and upper-middle classes, with their standard of education and globalism, disregard the provincial on the grounds that it lacks diversity and connoisseurship, they celebrate exotic regionalisms as a paragon of world cultures and cultural cosmopolitanism. As such, Islamic cosmopolitanism represents the *umma* as an interrelated 'cosmos of cities' (*polis*) that transcends geographical, temporal, and social boundaries (Lawrence 2021, p. 122). One can thus read the commercial success of the AKMS through its strategy of constructing Islam as a reserve of unique craft items and contemporary artworks that efficiently responds to the curation of authentic experiences in contemporary consumer culture.

In its approach of collaborating with artists and craftspeople from across the MENASA region, the AKMS's promotion, adorned with a fair-trade label, complements the museum galleries' display of historical objects by raising the presence of these contemporary makers in the museum.⁵ The AKMS meets the urge to 'get hold of an object at very close range' – observed by Walter Benjamin (1992, p. 300) – while also eschewing the trap of a loss of aura by means of creating reproductions. In its endless production of images of history, contemporary consumer culture mobilizes Islamic art as a reserve of forms (Barthes 2001, p. 118) and authenticity, evoking the meta-narrative of transculturality within a cosmopolitan value system. This system, as Reckwitz (2020, p. 218) and Haug (2009, p. 288) observe, is less imperialistic (in the sense of serving a sentiment of dominance over the exotic other) as it is made to serve self-actualization in the global empire of capital. In other words, the art and craft products of the AKMS are conspicuous signifiers of educated cosmopolitanism rather than of Islamic distinctiveness.

This is not to say that Islam is absent from the shop, however. The Aga Khan's translocal heritagization strategy of (trans)culturizing Islam generates artworks and craftworks that obliterate the Sunna-Shia (and inner Shiite) divide(s) while lining its shop with the promise of authenticity and curating the charisma of the Aga Khan in the global Muslim world. Put differently: by reconnecting with the early usage of Islamic art objects for the curation of the self and making this reservoir available within the changed context of public individuals seeking authentic signs of cultural cosmopolitanism, the AKMS offers a reinvented kind of transcultural aura after the age of mechanical reproduction.

Notes

- 1 The Aga Khan has repeatedly highlighted that the choice of the museum's site was closely connected to Canada's acceptance of Ismaili refugees in the 1970s and their ability to rebuild their social and religious structures in Canada; see Aga Khan 2014, p. 7.
- 2 Āghā Khān is the modern title of the Nizārī imams. The terms mean 'lord' and 'master.' This title emerged when, after his father was murdered, Ḥasan 'Alī Shāh (d. 1881) became the 46th Nizārī Imam in 1817 at the age of 13. As a gesture of rehabilitation, the Qājār ruler Faṭḥ 'Alī Shāh gave Ḥasan 'Alī Shāh lands in the Maḥallāt area and the hand of one of his daughters. He made him governor of Qumm and granted him the royal honorific title (*laqab*) of Āghā Khān (Daftary 2007, p. 464).
- 3 The logos of the Aga Khan institutions incorporate different forms of Islamic material culture. The logo of the Aga Khan Foundation, for example, is a stylized *khamsa* (see my comments above).
- 4 I thank Philipp Zobel for making me aware of this; his forthcoming dissertation explores the deeper connections of traditional crafts, antique dealing, and twentieth-century ceramics as emancipation in the work of Hudā Sha'rāwī.
- 5 This goes hand in hand with the AKM's engagement to establish the presence of artists in the museum through the performing arts, a topic that I discuss in my dissertation and forthcoming book, titled *Dis-Playing Islamic Art in the Early Twenty-First Century: Objects, Performance, and Space in the Museum*.

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PART 6

Consumer Culture, Lifestyle, and Senses of the Self through Consumption



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25

THE CELEBRATION OF ISLAMIC CONSUMER GOODS IN LONDON

Design, Production, and Consumption

Jonas Otterbeck

This chapter investigates Islamic consumer goods of different kinds, kitsch as well as art. It is not necessary for the main argument to enforce a distinction between art, crafts, kitsch, or the like; rather, it is the phenomenon of Islamic consumer goods that takes center stage. Using examples from the Islamic consumer goods market in London, specifically focusing on emerging middle-class artists and consumers and their tastes, the chapter argues that we need to understand creativity and consumer goods in relation to communication in order to reach a better understanding of their design and use.

The chapter begins by pointing out the change in Islamic consumption provision in the UK in recent decades; then, in three different sections, it dwells on the design, production, and consumption of Islamic consumer goods with a special focus on what is trending in London. Throughout, it draws inspiration from social semiotics and genealogical discourse theory when trying to pinpoint how Muslims relate to the new consumer goods market.

Islamic consumer goods? Here, I am using Islamic as a shorthand to specify consumer goods that, in one way or another, make reference to Islam and thus have the ambition to be included in a world of associations and in the material culture that is possible to label Islamic.

The Change

When I first engaged with the study of contemporary Islam as a PhD student in 1992, the abundance of consumer goods connected to Islam, now commonplace, simply did not exist in Europe. Of course, some Islamic consumer goods were on sale, not least books on Islamic topics, frequently printed on low-quality paper and with unimaginative titles and designs, as well as ritual objects like rosaries of various qualities, clay prayer stones for Twelver Shiites, prayer carpets, traditional toothbrushes (*miswaks*),¹ an abundance of perfumes, and the Prophet's medicine-related products (*tibb an-nabi*) like dates, black seeds, and honey, but without elaborate packaging. There were no Islamic-themed computer games for teens and no animated series featuring Quranic narratives (Sayfo 2023). Nor were there Islamic-themed novels for youth (Janson 2003), a flourishing modest fashion

industry (Lewis 2015), English language Islamic pop music (*nashids*) (Otterbeck 2021), Mipsters,² and Generation M (Janmohamed 2016); no halal holiday resorts (Shirazi 2016), and no devout Islam-positive metal bands (LeVine and Otterbeck 2021). There were US hip-hop acts drawing from a pool of Islamic semiotic resources, not least those channeled through Five Percenter interpretations of Islam (Ackfeldt 2019), but most certainly no mocktails called Berry Nice or Nojito on sale at Islamic venues like the London Muslim Shopping Festival, described below.

The change took place gradually, but we can certainly observe an acceleration that coincided with an increase in Muslims born as minorities in western Europe, in its turn providing a socialization that differs depending on country, region, or city, on the one hand, and reasons for migration, country of origin, type of Islam, class, and gender, on the other (Nordin and Otterbeck 2023). Shirazi (2016) claims that the growth of European and North American halal markets is intertwined with the surge in Islamophobia following the 11 September 2001 attacks on the US. The fixation on Muslims and Islam in world media led to an increased emphasis on the category of ‘Muslim’ in all relations, making it difficult to avoid as a prime identification (Otterbeck 2015). Furthermore, the attacks and the ensuing situation caused Muslims to search for security and positive identification in response (Shirazi 2016), but while this is an important cause, it is not all. The growth of halal markets, notably in Malaysia, Indonesia, Turkey, and Egypt, precedes 2001 and is thus not connected to the US 9/11 context. Through their transnational connections, these markets created expectations and creative initiatives, affecting sartorial choices, music consumption, lifestyle expectancies and other aspirations. A budding Islamic-themed children’s culture in some European countries and North America pioneered a broader Islamic children’s culture in the 1990s, not least in Canada, which hosted both the TV puppet show ‘Adam’s World’ (Moll 2009) and musician Dawud Wharhaby (Otterbeck 2021). Most likely, these changes are interwoven with the causes identified by Shirazi.

London

The London Muslim Shopping Festival is a two-day annual event, first arranged in 2018. I visited in 2019, 2022, and 2023.³ Some 20,000 people attended the event, with more than 250 stalls in 2023. It is, as far as I know, the largest Islamic shopping festival globally, with people traveling to it from all over the UK and mainland Europe. London tends to set an example of what might eventually trend in other places in Europe, yet the development is certainly not linear, with London being a couple of decades ahead of Copenhagen or Lisbon. Further, what happens in London is not representative of events in other parts of the UK. While the London Muslim Shopping Festival, Eid in the Square (at Trafalgar Square, London), the London Eid Festival (at Westfield Shopping Mall), and the yearly World Halal Food Festival (at London Stadium) are integrated elements of London’s economic energy, similar events are hard to find elsewhere in the UK. Nonetheless, businesspeople estimate the worth of the halal market to be £31 billion in the UK alone.⁴ I cannot corroborate the figure, but similar estimates can be found in various market institute reports.

When engaging in the analysis of consumer goods, creativity, and Islam, researchers do well to heed the warning of Nina Glick Schiller about methodological nationalism and scaling. Together with her co-authors (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002; Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2009), she encourages researchers to find the scale of their field (a neighborhood, a city, a transnational movement) rather than assuming that a state territory is the

correct frame. Most fields are difficult to demarcate today as parts may happen online, very locally, and translocally – at the same time. Other parts may be connected to popular culture consumption, and media use, and religious local and global movements, all in relation to regional politics, state laws, global economic initiatives, and logics and ideoscapes (Appadurai 1990) of various sorts. To be able to understand the context and analyze one's material, one needs to sort out what is happening in relation to what, when, and where without losing control. In relation to the London Muslim consumer goods market, one needs to take both the globalization of a halal economy and local conditions into consideration, as artists, producers, and consumers are not constrained by the local or the national context, although local conditions are generally crucial for any activity.

When discussing Islamic consumer goods and creativity, one should consider three distinct yet overlapping spheres: design, production, and consumption. I start by addressing the creative design needed for the industry to flourish.

Design

Creativity in New and Older Forms

Negus and Pickering (2004) distinguish between a notion of creativity that is widespread in society and their own research-informed understanding. The first, discarded notion stresses originality and emphasizes free, creative spirits that break the shackles of tradition, creating anew without restraints. It is closely associated with unreflective assumptions about the independence of creative thinking from previous expressions, forms, and genres. In contrast, Negus and Pickering argue that creativity needs to be considered as communication. And communication always relates to earlier forms of expression, be it regarding the sites of expression, the ways of presentation, the materials used, or the specific forms to which it relates. In their understanding, traditions are enabling. Those that have passed become references for the creative communication involved, either as a point of departure or as what a new direction is meant to upset.

Seen as relating to communication, the art, craft, and industrial design of various consumer goods on the halal market can be better described and understood. Communication requires attention and open-mindedness that rarely benefit from the compartmentalization implied in words such as 'Western' or 'European' placed in contrast to 'Islamic.' Rather, a Foucauldian genealogy (Foucault 1998) inspires the researcher to look beyond artificially separated, ordered systems, and maybe even beyond the face value of the goods, into their production and use. This has been pointed out before by specialists in Islamic art studying the introduction of European painting techniques to Mogul arts (von Folsach 2001) and mosque architectural features to European cathedrals (Darke 2020). Thus, instead of compartmentalizing an Islamic consumer culture, part of the design of objects can likely be traced to other communication and meaning systems available to the designer rather than purely to Islamic discourse (in the broad understanding of ideas about ethics, rituals, aesthetics, theology, and jurisprudence within any interpretation of Islam). Most people will draw not only from their socialization and personal experience of art, crafts, and popular culture but also from their arts and crafts education when creating (Warren 2022). That someone 'relates to,' 'has,' or even 'belongs to' a culture or a religious tradition does not exhaust the creative communication they may draw from and aspire to. On the contrary, it is typical to relate to or even partly belong to dominating cultural trends regardless of

whether they are coded as one's own, whether one's body, sexuality, or religion smoothly passes as part of normality or not, or whether one detests the given cultural phenomenon or likes it. Dominant culture is called dominant for a reason.

The Semiotic Resource Approach

I share the belief common in semiotic studies that we do well to identify the details of the whole to be able to describe and evaluate a trend, genre, or individual work. Some call such an exercise a semiotic inventory (van Leeuwen 2005, p. 6), one assembled with the purpose of finding meaning-carrying units – semiotic resources – in any modality (text, sound, image, etc.). Many popular culture products are multimodal, and a skillfully made inventory identifies semiotic resources in all modalities. The next step is to figure out how these are ordered in relation to semiotic regimes – or discourses, as I prefer, a metaphor covering similar theoretical thought. In the case of Islam and consumer goods, where inspiration comes from many different directions, we can clarify the discourse by identifying why and how something may be considered Islamic and how it relates to parts generally not considered so. The first persons with whom to discuss this are those actually engaged in the creative work. In what way have they considered or envisioned the connections?

Creating Pop-Nashids⁵

In my research on the Muslim media company Awakening, which is particularly successful in the music market – spawning stars like Sami Yusuf, Maher Zain, and Harris J – I detail how the leadership of the company, the individual artists, and the production teams are involved in discussions about how to signal Islam (Otterbeck 2021). I performed fieldwork during concert tours and interviews and conducted media analysis for the research.⁶ Much semiotic signaling consists of using well-established visual Islamic semiotic resources like the Quran as a printed book, the veil, a mosque, or a Muslim cap (*kufi*) in a video or promotion photography. Generally, though, videos are filmed in affluent environments signaling belonging to a global middle class, using few but significantly placed Islamic semiotic resources anchoring the general specifically in the Islamic. Islamic discourse is also present in the lyrics and the ethical portrayal of artists and Awakening.

The lyrics of Awakening songs generally celebrate Allah, Mohammad, or a Muslim lifestyle. Further, artists also sing about love for spouses, parents, and children, but never lovers. At times, political issues like racism, political freedom, or Palestine are addressed. Lyrics provide 'abbreviated narratives' – words that suggest 'other stories without themselves being stories' (Straub 2005, p. 62) – in which semiotic resources hint at richer Islamic discourse. English lyrics tend to be straightforward, but lyrics in Arabic, Turkish, or Urdu are usually richer in metaphors. The reason is likely that when writing in Arabic, Turkish, or Urdu, the religious imagery is more established than when navigating the English language. Further, Awakening has employed poets and lyrics writers to a higher degree when writing in 'Islamic' languages than in English. Maher Zain, who has been a top-selling singer/composer since 2009, disclosed that Awakening had analyzed the impact on fans by comparing the lyrics from his two first albums. They found that the simpler and more direct lyrics from the first album – featuring the most common Islamic phrases, like *al-hamdu lillah* (praise be to Allah) and *insha Allah* (if Allah wills) – were more beloved by the fans.

During my fieldwork with Awakening, the importance of ethics was often stressed. These draw from Islamic tradition but also relate to global ethical flows like the importance of the environment, which has increasingly found Islamic guises. Most importantly, the artists (all men) continuously negotiated Muslim ethical masculinity to try to ensure that the claim of being devout came across as authentic. Ethics were discussed in the green room before performances, when writing lyrics, when deciding what to wear on shots and on stage, and when planning career moves. While most such discussions were not public, the audiences met the informed choices of Awakening.

Typically, Awakening artists rarely dance in videos or on stage, even though a slight change has occurred in the last few years. Why? In Islamic revivalist groups, not least in the Arab world, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, dance is too closely associated with sexuality. To practice the ‘art of no seduction’ (van Nieuwkerk 2011) and to come across as authentically Muslim, the male artists abstained from getting into the groove. In this case, audiences and consumers familiar with these ethics can read the non-dancing body as a semiotic resource. It is decodable precisely because bodies are loaded with meaning. Instead of dancing, artists developed creative solutions to fill the stage. As a simple trick to keep the attention of the audience, Maher Zain started throwing the mic between his hands to mark passages in songs. Similarly, the dance steps introduced in recent years by the very same artists are performed in relation to prior non-dancing, for example, compare how Maher Zain moves in the videos to ‘I’m alive’ (2016) and ‘Tahayya’ (2022, ‘Get ready’). The slow movement in the first of these videos regardless of the beat, is typical of Awakening videos at least until 2017, while the rather discreet dancing in the latter is opening to new expressions. What does it signal? According to CEO Sharif Banna, Awakening believes the audiences want a more spontaneous artist, not least due to the immediacy of social media (Otterbeck 2021). Therefore, marketing has introduced more impulsive, fun ways of communicating.

Getting the Message Across

Sometimes, what an artist wants to communicate may appear obvious. The painting ‘Ha Mim,’⁷ by painter and designer Ruh al-Alam, includes the letters Ha and Mim, which, apart from being letters of the Arabic alphabet, when together but not as a word, introduce six chapters of the Quran.⁸ The association should be decodable by many who have a basic level of understanding of Islam. Yet, others will quickly make an association with Sufism, as Ha Mim features in Sufi *dhikr*, ‘remembrance of Allah.’⁹ However, during the discussion, Ruh al-Alam made it clear that he had no connection to Sufism but rather with Islamic spirituality more broadly. Sufis are not the only ones nurturing a spiritual path within Islam. To know that last part, however, requires a conversation with Ruh al-Alam. In the study of consumer goods, this aspect is frequently ignored for various theoretical reasons. I would, however, claim that studying the thoughts and intentions of the artist or designer may lay bare interesting relations that these have to tradition, aesthetics, and ethics.

In many ways, the painting ‘Ha Mim’ communicates other things, too. It is a standing rectangular painting, oil on canvas, using a combination of modern splash techniques and the Arabic letters mentioned. In fact, the letters that carry the semiotic signals to Islam are the least elaborate parts of the painting, while the other elements signal contemporaneity and feature techniques that Ruh al-Alam acquired while studying at Central St Martin’s, possibly the most renowned art school in London. The Arabic letters are kept clean instead

of featuring elaborate calligraphic styles and even developing new styles, something for which *Ruh al-Alam* is well-known.

At times, artifacts need accompanying texts to anchor the Islamic semiotics that the creator had in mind. Belgian chocolate specially made for Ramadan displays ‘Eid Mubarak’ printed in both Arabic and transliteration and is packaged in boxes printed with ‘Ramadan Kareem’ and ‘Eid Mubarak’ and accompanying Islamic semiotic resources such as a crescent moon, lamps, and stars. At the end of the day, the chocolate is simply Belgian chocolate made into consumer goods, a fetish, by a packaging style common to any luxury chocolate, a phenomenon already observed by Karl Marx (1976, p. 163). The Islamic semiotic resources mobilized are the result of the ambition of the company to associate the buying and eating of its chocolate with Ramadan through the clearest of means, a text expressing this.

Summing Up

When creative designers, music makers, or artists make use of non-traditional expressions but would still like to communicate their devout attachment to Islam, tradition becomes vital. Islamic semiotic resources are mobilized and anchored in a web of associations linked to previous expressions. Their interpretation and legitimation rely on communication with the intended audiences and consumers. The ethical messages of the art and also of the artists are vital when seeking acceptance of consumer goods. For understanding the creative initiatives in art and design, much can be learned by discussing them with the creative people involved. Clearly, they have ideas about what they do and want to achieve, and how to achieve it. If researchers approach these ideas as strategies and ambitions in relation to communication, much is gained. Semiotic resources and the discourses related to them are rarely uniquely Islamic; rather, Islamic semiotic resources and discourses are enmeshed with those connected with consumerism, style ideals, techniques, and forms: sometimes these enable, sometimes hinder. Therefore, the focus now turns to production.

Production

Most researchers, including myself, have paid little attention to the actual production of Islamic consumer goods. To start with: after being designed, where are the goods produced? Often, a little tag gives away that an object is produced exactly where you would expect: plastic and electronic stuff in China or any of its neighboring competitors, using raw material from all over the world; cotton, linen, and silk in the industries of China, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Turkey. At times, the goods are locally produced in Europe but often with raw materials or fabrics from other places. Long-haul transportation and environmentally endangering industry in the production of raw materials for any craft or art can – but should not – be ignored. The halal economy is not necessarily environmentally friendly or progressive regarding labor-rights.

Yet, extensive research and monitoring are increasingly being conducted, especially in regard to the halal food business. Muslim consumers are powerful by virtue of their numbers. Companies like McDonald’s, Kellogg’s, Nestlé, and Campbell, as well as those in Malaysia, Turkey, Indonesia, and China that export food internationally, all apply for halal certificates and accept controls on their chains of production and ingredients (Shirazi 2016). Furthermore, orders other than halal are increasingly becoming important.

Vegan ethics have worked their way into Islamic gatherings, with ‘vegan’ becoming a code for accepting responsibility that marries together halal, vegan, fair-trade ethics, and eco-friendly Islamic theology. For example, discussing the idea of Veganadan – a vegan Ramadan – British journalist Remona Aly (2019) has noted that the idea has engaged many in a pros and cons discussion.¹⁰ Further, veganism has gained ground as a selling point in Muslim contexts with the marketing of vegan silk dresses or vegan non-alcoholic wine, sometimes by non-Muslim companies reaching out to Muslim consumers. Even if some veganism becomes particularly difficult to pair with the above-mentioned *tibb an-nabi* (which praises honey consumption and the general lawfulness of eating meat), a moral, Muslim, vegetarian/vegan trend is developing. Ultimately, it will likely not be entirely vegetarian or vegan but will draw from the ethical discourse of both to create a restrictive moral diet demanding that, when eaten occasionally, meat and eggs should be sourced from small-scale farming (Masri 2007; Zaki et al. 2021).

The do-it-yourself ideal of the Muslim hipster generation – the Mipsters – had an impact at the London Muslim Shopping Festival in 2023. The fascination evoked by a machine that produced cold-pressed black seed oil spoke volumes.¹¹ I was not the only one seduced by the craft happening in front of our eyes, and the taste of the oil still warm from the process was fantastic. At other stalls, I heard salespersons announce their goods as locally produced, hand-made, small-scale, fair trade, and so forth. Thirty years ago, the argument was mainly ‘cheap’ or ‘high quality, but good price.’ However, awareness of the risk of losing control of the chain of production is widespread among companies. The number of subcontractors and the globalization of manufacturing make control difficult, if not impossible, yet manufacturing costs are so vastly different around the world that even small crafts are making use of the globalized economy.

Negus and Pickering (2004) argue that available production techniques and marketing logics frame almost all creative acts and mold goods in their image. That is, new creations come about, but conventions decide much of the outcome. It is a rare occasion when a creator rules supreme over decisions. For example, Sami Yusuf’s first album, *al-Mu’allim* (‘the teacher,’ i.e., Mohammad), was recorded in a small studio in Manchester and released in 2004 (Otterbeck 2021). The artist worked with Bara Kherigi, one of the four owners of Awakening, to issue the record. Just months earlier, Bara Kherigi had introduced the music genre called *nashid* to his childhood friend Siamak Radmanesh Berenjan – performing under the name Sami Yusuf. *Nashid* at that time was typically recorded with no other instruments than voice and percussion. Furthermore, it entailed rather simple productions. While following suit in terms of sparse instrumentation, with access to a digital studio, the two built up much larger soundscapes using digital pads, changing the face of *nashid* by consciously closing the gap with general pop music. The ambition was to sound contemporary yet different, with lyrics in English and some Arabic, praising Mohammad, Islam, Allah, and an Islamic lifestyle. Yet, the act of recording and producing relies on established conventions. The length of the songs, production methods, the sound levels (typically even, regardless of whether the touch is light or strong), the number of songs, the printed CD, the folder with thanks, and production info – all build on conventions. The music industry requires a myriad of people to practice their craft and add their magic touch to produce the end result, be it photographing the artist, printing the folder and ensuring the colors are true, or cleaning the tracks in post-production. The result is not always to the liking of the artists. Sami Yusuf chose to rebel against the restriction of instruments on his second album (*My Ummah*, ‘my community,’ 2005), recording a fully instrumentalized version. Yet, as a concession to those who reject instruments, a ‘vocals-only’ album was also recorded. Another compromise.

Summing Up

The neoliberal market often imposes the conditions for the production of goods. High ideals about accountability and fairness are difficult to uphold for almost every manufacturer. There is always a risk that the message of arts and crafts will be contradicted by the ways that raw materials are mined or grown. This is increasingly a concern among the halal market stallholders of the London Muslim Shopping Festival.

Conventions or traditions, in the understanding of Negus and Pickering (2004), need to be understood when Muslim artists and designers manufacture goods. Which discourses are acute? Clearly, some Islamic discourses come into play, but others – stemming from the arts, the infrastructure of industry, and other traditions – are also relevant. As shown above, a penned song needs to find a form, and many people are involved, using their professionalism when recording, producing, and packaging. In the end, any product is out there – how and why it is consumed or appropriated is an open question.

Consumption

There is a body of market research on the prevalence of recognition and active choice in the purchase of halal brands by Muslim consumers, especially in Muslim-minority settings in Europe and North America and in Malaysia and Indonesia. There is further research on ‘halal literacy’ – that is, the ability to decode lists of ingredients and so forth – and on concerns among consumers about possibly fraudulent halal claims (Shirazi 2016). Yet, I struggle to find thorough research on the actual use or appropriation of Islamic consumer goods by consumers. I have, however, numerous anecdotal examples that I believe are representative, especially when it comes to music. Being in the field at commercial events where Islamic consumer goods are displayed and sold and at *pop-nashid* concerts has given me a fair understanding of how such goods are put into use, and I dare to convey some observations I think are pertinent, drawing from experience and the scant research out there. Evidently, systematic research is needed.

A key theme is empowerment through identification and recognition. From ethnographic research on the Muslim hijab (headcloth) from all over Europe, it is safe to say that it provides a fair number of hijab-wearing women and youth with a form of empowerment; there are, no doubt, other Muslim women who do not see it the same way, both among those who wear and who do not wear a veil (Tarlo 2010), but that is not the focus here. The creative arranging of hijabs makes a visual statement about identification and style. This forms a parallel with subculture expressions in that the nuances in communication are not generally understood by non-Muslim majorities, and indeed, the practice is often recognized as something other than that intended (Tarlo 2010). However, the hijab is not the only example of semiotic material culture used to self-identify as Muslim and signal belonging within that broad category. Below, I investigate the use of Islamic consumer goods by Muslims in different zones.

Muslim Spaces: Decorations and Images

At the London Muslim Shopping Festival events I attended, several stands sold decorations for the home, some fabricated in rather cheap plastic and others that were more luxurious. As a result of visiting Muslim homes since 1985, I know that these kinds of objects make

their way into private everyday spaces, thereby marking them as Muslim (cf. Burckhardt Qureshi 1996; McCloud 1996). Frames with gold- or silver-colored calligraphy – often on a black background and quoting the throne verse of the Quran (2:255) – decorate living rooms across Europe.

While such calligraphic quotes are still popular today, new forms of decoration are becoming increasingly popular, allowing for other palates and tastes. At the Festival, some artists were selling unique paintings or reproductions of their works of either landscapes in Muslim environments or abstract paintings, at times featuring calligraphy. Potential consumers were gazing at such objects, either disregarding them or wanting and sometimes buying them. One of many UK companies selling art at the Festival in 2023 was Artz-i Islamic Art & Gifts, which uses the slogan ‘Bring sophistication and purpose to your space’¹² and works together with artists from Turkey, Egypt, and Morocco, among other countries. In her forthcoming PhD dissertation in religious studies at Copenhagen University, Tessie Bundgaard Jørgensen discusses how this type of art decorates the offices of Islamic therapists in the UK to provide an aura of modern middle-class taste and professionalism.

Muslim Bodies: Clothes and Jewelry

At all three of my visits to the London Muslim Shopping Festival, so-called ‘modest fashion’ was the dominant feature, along with a special admission fashion show. Many women visitors were stylishly dressed in artfully arranged hijabs and carefully planned outfits that connected to a range of different traditions from clearly West-African or Pakistani to H&M garments worn in the modest fashion tradition à la Islam. Some men marked their Muslimness in Pakistani or Arabic fashion traditions, although most did not. Men’s clothing is rarely thematized as modest fashion even though that is what it is, as clothes are designed to cover the *awra*, the body parts that need to be covered to uphold decency. In other respects, women’s fashion was far from modest, with rich embroidery, colorful palettes, and eye-catching, albeit not exposing, cuts. However, such extravagant modest fashion was more common on the catwalk and in the most expensive boutiques than among the visitors, who instead admired and nodded at the trends according to personal taste and pocket.

Many stalls display jewelry that connects to arts and crafts traditions in different Muslim contexts. Calligraphic names in Arabic or Urdu and Islamic semiotics featuring a crescent were also common. Jewelry may communicate identification claims, but as silver filigree work and larger stones set in gold or silver rings are generally popular, those do not anchor cultural and religious identifications as efficiently as a crescent pendant. Yet, there is no shortage of people wearing religious semiotics like the star of David, a crucifix, a crescent, the so-called hand of Fatima/Miriam (*khamsa/hamsa*), the *nazar boncuğu*,¹³ or the ancient Egyptian *ankh* (key of life) for aesthetic reasons or to honor the relative or friend who has gifted it. Researchers need to engage in conversation with the wearers.

Returning to the producers, this is the abbreviated vision of the jewelry company called Sultanesque, one of the recurrent participants at the Festival, according to one of its owners:

We are ... two London-born Turkish women that have a love for stunning jewellery and admire women in business. ... Sultanesque jewellery is modern yet ethnic, just like us. The designs are inspired by the Ottoman motifs that were used on jewellery and ornaments over 500 years ago, yet are handcrafted into modern jewelry to suit today’s trends.¹⁴

The proclamation suggests the possibility that Sultanese's customers share a romantic idea of 'neo-Ottoman cool' that has spread in Muslim circles in Turkey over the last 20 years (al-Ghazzi and Kraidy 2013).

Muslim Minds: Hearing and Reading

A phenomenon I have encountered of late is Ramadan playlists – easy enough to find on Spotify. For example, I have asked Muslims of my acquaintance if they have one, and many do, generally containing the type of *nashid*-pop music that I have researched (Otterbeck 2021). The Ramadan playlist is curated to consist of halal music, in comparison to their more general playlists containing any music they like. Rather than not listening to music at all, or not during Ramadan, some simply focus on Islamic soundscapes during the holy month. Several artists write specifically Ramadan songs, like Raef's 'Ramadan is Here' and Maher Zain's 'Ramadan,' knowing that to have a Ramadan song – and a wedding song and so forth – can be timely at concerts. Today, people in their 30s and 40s have grown up with the new type of *nashid* music, but many have also grown up with the music of older generations and are equally passionate about Pakistani *qawwali*,¹⁵ masters like Abida Parveen and the Sabri Brothers, or singing Muslim scholars ('*ulama*) like Egyptian Sheikh Sayyid al-Naqshabandi (d. 1976). Many make practical use of these songs: for example, marriages now connect to certain songs in an unprecedented matter; according to Awakening artist Raef, his song 'You are the one' has become a wedding song in Indonesia, where he is popular (Otterbeck 2021). Listening practices build identities. The sonar coloring of homes, in conjunction with their visual design, enacts ideas of belonging. Headphones make music portable and contribute to creating soundtracks for Muslim lives when moving around outdoors.

Self-help books were all the rage at the London Muslim Shopping Festival in 2023. I have encountered them before, but seldom in such abundance, and there was something for most people. Titles like *You Can Be the Happiest Woman in the World* by Dr. 'Aid al-Qarni, or *A Handbook of Spiritual Medicine* by Jamal Parekh Ibn Daud were sold in volumes. They contain advice on not only how to improve well-being and attitudes but also how to traverse rough periods, drawing from, in order, the Quran, the Sunna (the examples of Muhammad and his Companions), and classical scholars. There were also books on *akhlaq* (good manners and character) for children, like *Keeping Promises* and *Controlling Your Anger* by Ali Gator, Islamic Children's Books, and books on puberty for girls and boys such as *A Muslim Girl's (or Boy's) Guide to Life's BIG Changes* by Rayhana Khan and Sami Khan, respectively. The idea of self-help through new-style Muslim discourse was clearly filling a need. The most advanced help offered was by therapist Samia Quddus and her company Taqdeer, advertised as 'the UK's first psycho-spiritual Islamic gratitude and wellbeing brand.' She is part of a new trend among spiritual guidance for Muslims, one that includes an innovative type of relation between helper and helped that includes a legal-rational discourse flaunting academic titles and an aesthetic drawn from middle-class expectations of how help should be offered. Yet, as far as I know, no one has discussed the impact or use of these books with their actual readers.

Summing Up

How do Muslims build identities with contemporary consumer goods – or, for example, react ironically or playfully to them? We only have scant research from which to draw. But judging from discussions with the Muslims I encounter, the Islamic consumer goods on

offer to which people positively relate include *nashid* music, which has found a place in the hearts of many. Books, clothes, jewelry, and home decoration items are also bought, with bodies and homes being ordered and decorated to signal identity, pride, and community. But new tastes among the re-cultured middle class also draw from the dominant consumer culture in London to create a market in which to express new forms of Islamic semiotics.

Consecration

I have suggested that there is no mechanization in the acceptance of creative work as Islamic, nor is there any coordination among Muslims in deciding whether the ambition to be perceived as Islamic is accepted or not. Research tends to focus on the intellectual dimensions, such as the legality (in a sharia sense) of music or dance, but there is another important aspect, too: the emotional. Ole Riis and Linda Woodhead (2010) developed a model of the insigation (when a sign or creative work is inscribed in the public consciousness) and consecration of signs or creative work that is relevant to my reasoning. In clarifying figures marking ‘agent,’ ‘community,’ and ‘symbol’ as separate spheres, Riis and Woodhead expand on the creation and reception of symbols (which we can read as Islamic consumer goods). Classical religious artworks have already been created when they are met by an agent-believer. The community has consecrated them, and through socialization, expectations, and the very act of holding something holy, the agent is likely to experience certain emotions when seeing a statue, a building, or a work of art of this sort. Islamic consumer goods have not yet reached that status. Instead, they partly draw on established semiotics but are framed by new forms that are accompanied by communication that is rarely controlled and sometimes not even intended. However, once an agent-creator has had their ideas produced, the product may be embraced, discarded, ridiculed, beloved, or ignored. Some items will emotionally engage consumers, who may find like-minded people and together cause a consecration of some sort that will then lay the foundation to produce emotions in yet others: friends, children, parents, or religious scholars. While plastic bric-a-brac may not cause collective euphoria, obviously, pop-*nashid* has. The emotional power of the music, together with religious sentiments, causes complex emotions of love, pride, and inspiration, quite an achievement.

Discussion

The London field may not be representative of any other place. However, following the development of Islamic consumer goods for 30 years and specifically researching it for the past ten, I dare claim that once something becomes a trend in London, it often becomes popular in other places in Europe. The growth and popularity of pop-*nashid* music is one example, with London taking the lead in Europe in a development that has changed the listening practices of Muslims all over the continent (and in other places, too).

Appropriating forms and filling them with new content has interesting effects. The most obvious is the appearance of a Muslim popular culture accompanied by new consumer goods. Taking the medium-is-the-message idea (McLuhan 2013) into account – that is, that the medium carries its own message – we can see that consumer goods come with ambitions for cultural inclusion, contemporaneity, and fashion, set in our neoliberal economy. Non-Muslim fashion creators, magazines, and consumers have lately marveled at the creativity and style of modest fashion designers who create cultural inclusion through a difference

that still celebrates similar ideals of beauty, using the same tools as fashion shows, with catwalks and tall, thin models.

But how does the change of form, or medium, affect the message? I have not mentioned the many refutations of pop-*nashid* music (Otterbeck 2021) or other consumer goods available. Generally, these reject the new forms by claiming they do not fit or that they distort the message. Instead, I have concentrated on those who embrace the development: the artists and craftspeople creating new objects, music, stories, and food; the many companies engaging in manufacturing and marketing them; and the numerous consumers buying, consuming, and appropriating them. In the course of these processes, new investments are made – economically, emotionally, theologically, and ritually – and other discourses are drawn into Islamic ones. But that process is not new; it is the situation that is new. New consumer goods are making their way into Muslims' everyday lives and changing the once taken for granted.

Notes

- 1 A *miswak* is a root used to cleanse teeth. I have made an English plural form by adding *s*, instead of the Arabic plural: *masawik*. I will do so with other Arabic words too, like *nashid*, (Islamic) song.
- 2 Muslim hipsters (Mipsters or Mipsterz) have been called this for some time. The term was likely coined in 2012 by the social media profile Abbas Rattani.
- 3 2020 and 2021 were not arranged due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 4 London Muslim Shopping Festival, webpage.
- 5 *Nashid* (pl. *anashid*) is a generic word in Arabic for song. It is also the preferred word used to describe a broad genre of popular music that actively relates to Islam. The modern *nashid* (often spelt *nasheed* in Latin script) has a complex history, but seminal to its contemporary development are the commercial breakthroughs of Malaysian vocal group Raihan in 1996 and British-Azeri Iranian singer and composer Sami Yusuf in 2004 (Otterbeck 2021).
- 6 I have gathered this type of music on a Spotify playlist called The Awakening of Islamic Pop Music.
- 7 Ruh al-Alam, webpage.
- 8 The Ha Mim combination appears in the beginning of Sura 40, 41, and 43–46 of the Quran. Ha Mim is part of the disconnected letters, *al-huruf al-muqatta'a*, that can be found at the beginning of 29 chapters (Massey 2023).
- 9 Ha tends to be understood as *hayat* (life) and Mim as the *mamlaka* (kingdom), which is the abode of Allah.
- 10 Personal communication with Remona Aly, 1 November 2022.
- 11 To view the machine, visit Cold Press Oil Machines, webpage.
- 12 Artz-i Islamic Art & Gifts, webpage.
- 13 The amulet (*boncuk*, lit. bead) worn to avert the gaze of the evil eye (*nazar*).
- 14 Sulantesque, webpage.
- 15 *Qawwali* is a very popular genre of Sufi music originating in South Asia. It is popular not least in Pakistan. Since the 1990s, it has been marketed as world music, rendering it a globally appreciated music style.

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26

BOOSTING MODERN MUSLIM SUBJECTIVITIES THROUGH CAPITALIST CONSUMPTION AND CONSUMER CULTURE

Dietrich Jung

Among Kuala Lumpur's major tourist attractions are its shopping malls. In the Malaysian capital, people are immersed in modern consumer culture. This applies to Malaysians and foreigners alike. Right in the middle of Kuala Lumpur's busy city center (KLCC), you will find the Suria KLCC shopping mall. In this large complex at the foot of the landmark Petronas Twin Towers and surrounded by luxury hotel complexes, consumerism determines the pulse of life. Walking through the expansive halls of this shopping labyrinth, you become – willingly or not – absorbed into the consumptive world of global capitalism. Here, people from all parts of the world – Muslims and non-Muslims – are united by the attraction of an overwhelming market of commodities. You pass through stores with clothing, confectionery, cosmetics, entertainment accessories, household items, jewelry, leather products, shoes, sporting goods, and watches. Exhausted by your tour, you eventually sit down in one of the center's more exclusive restaurants, or you take a quick meal at one of the large food hawkers. The Suria KLCC is a consumptive spectacle no matter whether you pass through its halls as a purchaser or just as a flaneur. No place better demonstrates the project of merging Islam and capitalism that was embarked on under former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad. This temple of modern consumerism is the epitome of Malaysia's policies of an Islamic capitalism in which economics, politics, and religion meet.

Starting with the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1971, Malaysian governments increasingly combined the development of capitalist economics with state policies of nationalist Islamization (Andaya and Andaya 2017, p. 307). The contemporary Malay middle class has emerged at the intersection of world market strategies and nationalist state policies within the context of an ideological Islamization of the public sphere. With the NEP, Mahathir aimed to break the economic dominance of Chinese citizens in Malaysia's economy and finance. The generally rural and economically weaker Muslim segment of the population was to be transformed into a new entrepreneurial middle class. At the same time, these Malay-Muslim capitalists are classified as *bumiputera*, the original representatives of the Malay nation. Today, Malaysia is a leading country in the fields of both Islamic finance and halal markets. In the course of the past four decades, state policies have created a new generation of this Sharia-minded Islamic-Malayan business class catering to customers in the

country and beyond Malaysia's borders. The new Malayan middle class combines a broad range of consumer practices with an Islamic worldview (Fischer 2008, p. 8). Malaysia became a pioneer in Islamic economics, and the Suria KLCC perfectly represents what Patricia Sloane-White described as a combination of the triumph of capitalism with the triumph of Islam (Sloane-White 2017, p. 183).

This brief description of consumerism in Malaysia¹ serves as the backdrop for the three arguments I make in this chapter. First, what is described above challenges the almost grotesque assumption that modern consumer culture is a significant feature of daily life in the West alone (cf. Featherstone 1990, p. 5; Warde 2005, p. 137). Instead, I argue for perceiving Muslim consumer culture as an integral part of modern global culture. Having lived and traveled in many countries in Asia and the Middle East, I can look back on numerous instances that evidence this assertion. Second, in the formation of modern subjectivities, consumption and religious practices are ambiguous but not contradicting features of individual identity constructions. Furthermore, consumption in both its material and its cultural/symbolic forms plays a significant role in forming the religious subject. Third, the study of modern Islam should pay more serious attention to the interlacement of Islamic traditions with globally relevant patterns of consumer culture. The commodification of everyday life has impacted the interpretation of Islamic tradition and vice versa. This chapter examines the relevance of consumer cultures in modern Muslim history and the ways in which Islam and consumption interlace. Through this examination and an emphasis on social theory, this chapter answers the more general question: in what ways can we understand Islamic modernities from the vantage point of consumerism?

In the following pages, I sketch out a theoretical frame of reference for analyzing the merger of Islam and capitalism with regard to consumptive practices. From this vantage point, I consider specifically Islamic ways of consumption as historical variations of a more general theme. Thus, the chapter is an exercise in combining diversity and unity. The following section briefly introduces my perspective on capitalist modernity and takes the discussion about consumption studies as its starting point. As a global social macro-structure, capitalism does not exclude any religious or ethnic group and is the context in which different forms of consumerism have emerged. The next two sections deal with varying forms of modernity, i.e., theories of successive modernities, and their specific modes of consumption. First, I discuss the ideal type of organized modernity with its peer-group-oriented forms of subjectivity. It is in the social configuration of organized modernity that consumption first attains the role of being a significant element in the construction of modern identities. Second, I analyze forms of subjectivation in the context of so-called postmodern or pluralistic forms of modernity. In this context, specifically Islamic consumer products emerge on a global market. I illustrate these theoretical and conceptual reflections using examples from Islamic history and Muslim social practices. Then, in the final section, I discuss these elaborations with regard to the sociological tradition. More precisely, I look at the relationship between modern economics and religion in general and Islamic consumptive practices in particular. I conclude by again taking up the relationship between diversity and unity in the study of modern consumer cultures.

Shaping the Modern Subject Through Commodification and Consumption

As money develops into world money, so the commodity owner becomes a cosmopolitan. The cosmopolitan relations of men to one another originally comprise only their relations as commodity owners. Commodities as such are indifferent to all religious,

political, national and linguistic barriers. Their universal language is price and their common bond is money.

(Marx 1859, p. 384)

This quote concisely describes the structural relationship between commodification, commodity owners, and consumers. According to Karl Marx, modern capitalism generates a universal type of subjectivity in the consumer of commodities. As such, consumption relates to a 'bewildering range of goods and services' (Edgell and Hetherington 1997, p. 1). In this way, modern consumer culture is premised upon the capitalist production of commodities yet should not be reduced to the economic cycle of production and consumption (Featherstone 1990). The global spread of capitalism went along with the increasing social significance of consumerism as a modern way of life. Consumption plays a dual role: simultaneously an economic and a cultural phenomenon (Miles 1998, p. 3). Consequently, the consumer as a type of modern subject represents a linkage between the macro-structures of modern society and the cultivation of the modern self. The Suria KLCC, therefore, is a palpable meeting point of social structures and individuals who are interpreting and enacting these structures in their daily life routines (Miles 2010, p. 9).

Given this salience of consumption in modern culture, the expansion of consumer studies far beyond 'shopping' comes as no surprise (Evans 2019, p. 502). While Karl Marx still focused on the material exchange value of goods, today, their cultural exchange value has come to the fore. In the twentieth century, consumerism infiltrated multiple areas of social life, such as religion and the arts, constantly altering its forms. All the while, it has remained a pervasive feature of our everyday experiences (Miles 1998, p. 1). Consumption is a cross-cultural part of contemporary ways of life. It intersects with other layers of culture, and consequently, Muslim believers constantly have to negotiate profane consumption practices with religious norms (Jafari and Süerdem 2012). This empirical observation of the increasing cultural meaning of consumption is reflected in the trajectory the field of consumer studies has taken. Originally, consumerism was theorized as a culture of excess associated with vices such as overproduction and waste (Evans 2019, p. 514). This somewhat pejorative view of consumption was predicated on perceiving it primarily as a derivative of capitalist material production. This perception finds its echo among scholars of Islamic economics, who tend to address consumerism with a staunchly negative attitude (Sandıkçı 2018, p. 456). Generally speaking, the Islamic critique of capitalism has been directed against forms of social behavior such as excessive individualism, moral egotism, profit-oriented action, and wholesale commodification (Tripp 2006, p. 97). In this way, Islamic economists have treated consumption in keeping with the mainstream trend (Zubair 2005). Since the 'cultural turn' in the Social Sciences and Humanities, however, the study of consumerism has developed into a multidisciplinary and diverse topic area, focusing on symbolic rather than material rewards (Warde 2014, pp. 280–282). In cultural studies, consumption is not merely the activity of engaging with material commodities but a process of constructing meaning with the help of symbols and signs.

In the 1990s, theories of practice reduced this strong emphasis on symbols and signs that characterized the approach of cultural studies to the field. By applying the lenses of theories of practice, consumption appeared to be the ubiquitous appropriation and appreciation of goods, information, performances, and services in routinized everyday practices (Warde 2005, p. 137). As a critique of the methodological emphasis on the discretion of the individual, theories of practice stress collective properties in consumer subjectivities such

as body management, social dispositions, habituation, practical know-how, and routine (p. 140). In this way, these approaches represent a kind of counterpoint to cultural studies following the legacy of Baudrillard's critique of understanding consumption through the lens of use-value alone (p. 147). In *La société de consommation* (1970), Baudrillard emphasizes the role of images, signs, and symbols in consumption and their loss of meaning in contemporary consumer society. Moreover, theories of practice broke with the overwhelmingly negative attitude that materialist and culturalist studies of consumption broadly shared. As most daily practices entail consumption, the study of consumer culture as a field of practice has at least partly lost its normative bias, bringing analytical perspectives to the fore (cf. Warde 2005, p. 137).

The study of consumer culture, however, should always take place within larger social contexts. The example of Malaysia in the introduction shows the embeddedness of consumption in economic, political, and religious contexts. The NEP of Mahathir Mohamad is a perfect example of the way in which a new class of nationalistic consumers was created by combining national branding, commercial strategies, and nationalist Islamization.² In terms of this social contextualization, I suggest integrating theories of consumption with theories of successive modernities. To this purpose, I draw on the works of the social theorists Peter Wagner (b. 1956) and Andreas Reckwitz (b. 1970). Wagner developed a theory of three successive forms of social orders that have characterized modern society since the nineteenth century. These three specifically modern orders are neatly complemented by the ideal types of three forms of modern subjectivity outlined by Reckwitz. Together, they link macro- and micro-levels of the social and provide a broader analytical framework for studying the rise of and changes in consumer culture.³

Consumerism in Changing Social Environments: From Bourgeois to Postmodern Culture

In the history of European modernity, Peter Wagner discerned three ideal types of social order: (i) in the nineteenth century, the order of restricted liberalism was characterized by liberal rules, which only applied to a small bourgeois minority, excluding the majority of the population. In the context of imperialist policies and due to the pressing domestic social question, the multiple social conflicts resulting from the exclusionary policies over the majority of the population that had characterized restricted liberalism, this elitist liberal order was gradually replaced by (ii) the second type, which Wagner defined as organized modernity. This type of highly organized mass society in the first part of the twentieth century is closely associated with the institutional features of the bureaucratically administered and territorially demarcated national state. This state-centered social order included the masses but was based on the ideal of 'a strong standardization of practices and homogenization of life courses' (Wagner 2012, p. 37). After the Second World War, organized society gave way to a new hegemonic form of social order: (iii) the third form of modernity, which consumer studies generally refer to as neoliberalism and Wagner defined as a form of extended liberalism. It is characterized by the pluralization of social practices and a reconfiguration of social conventions. Previous discourses about individual obligations to the state were gradually superseded by the emphasis on individual rights (Wagner 1994, 2001, 2008, 2010, 2012).

According to the work of Andreas Reckwitz, three different cultural types of the modern subject attained relative hegemonic roles along the above-outlined three subsequent imaginations of modern social orders. Reckwitz defined three ideal types of the modern subject

whose cultural roots he discerned in the practices of everyday life: (i) the classical bourgeois subject of restricted liberalism, which he defined predominantly as a working subject whose core technologies of the self were related to literacy. Bourgeois elite culture used to combine the liberal code of the autonomous reflexive individual with rather conservative norms of strict moral regulations. However, the rise of organized society in the early twentieth century ran parallel with the erosion of the cultural ideals of the bourgeois subject. In organized mass society, Reckwitz defined (ii) the hegemonic type of subjectivity as the peer-group-oriented citizen of the salaried masses. This type replaced the individual work ethic of the bourgeoisie with the ideal of efficient work coordination and the top-down management of the collective. In contradistinction to the elite culture of restricted liberalism, forms of subjectivity in organized mass society were predicated on a combination of the formalized and efficient coordination of social action with the collectivist desire for social adaptation. This orientation toward an average type of subjectivity, then, lost its hegemony in (iii) the new pluralistic order of extended liberalism. The dominant cultural type of this third kind of modernity is what Reckwitz described in terms of the creative worker and entrepreneur. Putting its focus on the individual, the subject of extended liberalism cultivates the neoliberal image of a self-reliant, dynamic, and creative actor who is constantly involved in shifting projects.⁴

In Reckwitz's typology, changing forms of consumption and shifting attitudes to it play an important role. In nineteenth-century bourgeois culture, consumption always remained precarious. With its largely consumption-critical attitude, the bourgeois subject distanced itself from the 'excessive and parasitic' lifestyle of the nobility. Yet following the rise of organized society with its peer-group-oriented culture of the salaried masses, consumptive practices became a core feature of modern subjectivation. The rise of organized industrial capitalism within the framework of the national state was accompanied by a lifestyle in which mass consumption played an eminent role. This cultural form trained its subjects to use consumer objects to achieve a collectively recognized form of personal perfection, which was oriented toward a standard of social normality. Moreover, for the average type of the salaried masses, consumption increasingly included the arts and assumed importance in terms of self-gratification (Reckwitz 2006, pp. 400–409). At the same time, with advertising, fashion, and design, organized capitalism developed a new kind of aesthetic economy. While these aesthetic features of the economy remained supplementary in organized society, they became leading formats in the neoliberal economics of the post-Second World War era (Reckwitz 2012, p. 165).

The conceptual tools of Wagner and Reckwitz are ideal types derived from European history. However, when applied critically to non-European contexts, they have more global relevance. In a previous article (Jung and Sinclair 2015), we illustrated how we can make sense of the course of the Islamic reform movement with the help of these concepts. We argued that in the history of this movement, we can observe shifting modern imaginaries similar to the three successive forms of modernity illustrated above. The 'grand old men of Islamic reform,' Muhammad Abduh in Egypt and Sayyid Ahmad Khan in India, advocated Muslim subjectivities with close approximations to the ideal type of the bourgeois subject. Their reform agendas prioritized education and rational thinking based on literacy. They constructed a modern Muslim subject that was self-disciplined, productive, and rational, with a moral foundation in family and religious life. In achieving moral autonomy based on Islamic traditions, however, they only advocated the independent recourse to Islamic traditions for an intellectual elite. For ordinary Muslims, religious consciousness and moral guidance were expected to be transmitted by the state-governed education system.

In the first part of the twentieth century, then, newly emerging social mass movements reinterpreted this elitist discourse of nineteenth-century Islamic reform. Paradigmatic for this historical development was the foundation of the Muslim Brotherhood by Hasan al-Banna in 1928. Hasan al-Banna, who frequented religious reform circles in Cairo during his studies, propagated a model of Islamic governance according to which state authorities organize society around Islamic principles. In this Islamic version of organized society, the Muslim subject was clearly oriented toward the collective. The Brotherhood employed the extroverted and performing modes of peer-group-oriented selfhoods, epitomized in the usage of badges, the implementation of general dress codes, and the public holding of ceremonies and prayers (cf. Krämer 2022). In his life and work, Hasan al-Banna was a typical representative of the *efendiyya*, the newly emerging Egyptian middle class of bureaucrats, journalists, and teachers, or more generally, a group of nationalist white-collar workers from an urban or recently urbanized social background (Ryzova 2014, pp. 4–11). Rejecting Western colonial modernity, the vanguard of the *efendiyya* found authenticity in Islamic traditions and constructed a form of Islamic organized modernity. They articulated this social construction through new media, such as the emerging film industry, the printing press, and newly established publishing houses (p. 21). The ideal Egyptian of the Muslim Brotherhood was a nationalistic and religious subject whose identity construction increasingly involved the still scarce means of collective consumption. This construction of an idealistic top-down organization of society combined with peer-group-oriented individual behavior applies even more to postcolonial Arab-nationalist regimes. The road to independence was accompanied by the ‘golden age of Arab movies’ from the 1940s to the 1960s (Hammond 2015, p. 165). In the cinema, the cultures of Arab nationalism and consumption met. However, in their ideologies, both the Muslim Brotherhood and the Baathist and Nasserist regimes applied the blueprint of organized modernity, assigning different roles to religion in this process.

When it comes to Islamic imaginations of modernity, however, scholarly observers have noticed a gradual departure from the Islamist version of the Muslim Brotherhood ideology. The literature on Islamic reform movements discusses this departure as a new merging of piety with elements of neoliberalism. The sociologist and expert on Middle Eastern Studies Asef Bayat (b. 1954), for example, pointed to new Islamic frameworks in which the collectivist and obligation-oriented concepts of the Brotherhood have been replaced by new values such as concerns about personal morality, individual improvement, and the social development of the community (Bayat 2007, p. 13). These observations indicate a shift from the patterns of organized modernity to those associated with Wagner’s ideal type of extended liberalism. New patterns of individualistic and self-reflexive forms of subjectivity seemingly challenge the previously hegemonic orders of Islamist and Arab-nationalist provenience. The overwhelming majority of studies on consumption precisely articulate this shift, a move from organized to more pluralistic imaginations of modernity. The following section explores this historical change in the character of Islamic reform ideas and their relationship to global consumer culture.

Consumption and Post-Islamist Religious Reform Movements

I returned to Cairo in the early 2000s after more than a decade of absence and noted how features of the lifestyle of global neoliberalism had left their imprint on urban life there. After decades of dilapidation, the facades in Cairo’s city center had received a facelift. As I

walked from Tahrir Square along Talaat Harb Street to the north, it appeared that the policies of economic liberalization, initiated by President Anwar al-Sadat in the 1970s and continued under the Mubarak regime (1981–2011), might have finally succeeded in shaping a vibrant Egyptian middle class. On a Thursday night, at least in this neighborhood of *wust al-balad*, one could encounter a critical mass of youth and young families, who, equipped with mobile phones and upper-middle-class cars, launched into the Muslim weekend with happy consumerism. Yet, only a few hundred meters away, to the east of Opera Square or at Ramses Railway Station, these signs of economic prosperity and consumptive culture revealed themselves to be a kind of illusion for the majority of Cairo's citizens. For the emerging urban middle class, a minor stratum of Egyptian society, these new pleasures of leisure and consumption were available. However, for the overwhelming majority of Egyptians, this scene of Thursday-night consumerism still remained nothing more than a mirage.

The late Mona Abaza (1959–2021) pioneered the study of Egypt's emerging consumer culture. Comparing the scene in Cairo with her observations in Malaysia, she realized that a new kind of consumption had arrived in the Egyptian capital. This was particularly visible in Madinat Nasr (Nasr City), a newly constructed upper-middle-class district that included five recently built shopping malls (Abaza 2006, p. 4). At the same time, however, Abaza argued that Cairo remained a divided city. Parallel to the evolution of a newly affluent middle class, the city experienced the growth of slums (p. 22). Similar to what I described above, she noted how poverty lived alongside the public display of 'designs, fancy lifestyles, good looks and advertisements' (p. 165). The postmodern culture of extended liberalism coexists with the poverty and marginalization of large parts of Egypt's population. This situation harkens back to what Wagner called the 'crisis of restricted liberalism' toward the end of the nineteenth century in Europe (Wagner 1994). In the context of these contradictions, the current combination of consumer culture with Islam may not come as a surprise.

The new post-Islamist religious movements perfectly represent this combination of neoliberal lifestyles with piety. Manifested in various youth organizations, these new Islamic movements fuse the creative and artistic values of extended liberal modernity with faith, social awareness, and ethics, appealing to Egypt's young middle-class consumers (Peterson 2011, p. 124). Through adherence to active piety, their followers simultaneously assert their individuality and thus bring 'art, leisure and entertainment in accordance with religious commitments' (Nieuwkerk 2008). Identifying the major problems of Egyptian society as poverty-related phenomena, the youth organizations promote a new kind of Islamic activism in which they combine voluntarism and Islamic morality with an internal discourse of neoliberal business strategies and management practices. Drawing on Reckwitz's general types of the creative worker and entrepreneur, these organizations seem to propagate the ideal type of a 'Muslim professional,' reconciling Islamic religious authenticity with the contemporary values of global economics (Jung 2020). In contradistinction to the Brotherhood's ideal of an organized Islamic modernity, the Muslim professional represents a new kind of modern subjectivity according to which Islamic traditions are fully compatible with the personal and economic life expectations of the young urban middle class, including the consumer culture in which they live.

Products of Islamic fashion play a significant role in the lifestyles of these new Egyptian consumers (Abaza 2006, p. 7). In Indonesia, too, new lifestyle magazines demonstrate the compatibility between consumption and individual piety. This fusion of the subject types of the consumer and the believer is most explicitly exemplified by feminine piety and its relationship to Islamic fashion (cf. Jones 2015, p. 118). The bodily performance of Islamic

fashion is also an integral part of the new Islamic movement in Turkey. In her *Muslimism in Turkey and Beyond*, the Turkish sociologist Neslihan Çevik describes the rise of a new kind of Islamic movement for which she coined the term 'Muslimism.' In her analysis, the worldview of this movement tends 'toward the liberal state model that allows individual agency, choice, and autonomy with respect to religious, economic, political and civic action.' Like the Egyptian youth organizations, Muslimism emerged in the economic context of financial liberalization policies in Turkey (Çevik 2016, p. 6). One of the iconic features of these new Islamic movements is veiling fashion. The veil is central in defining and visualizing the new Islamic female subject. Veiling fashion expresses the 'multiple cross-currents of femininity, piety, modesty, sexuality, class, age and urbanity' (Gökarıksel and Secor 2009, p. 13). Moreover, it is a perfect example of the combination of religious symbols with profane consumption. Together with halal products and religious tourism, Islamic fashion is a core feature of contemporary Muslim entrepreneurship, 'satisfying the demands of Islamic style consumption' (cf. Sandıkcı 2018, p. 465).

Meanwhile, the merger between the present neoliberal world of ideas and Islam, and therewith studies on 'religious consumption,' is a growing theme in Islamic studies. However, as shown in the previous section, the rise of consumerism in the Muslim parts of the world has deeper historical roots. In Iran, for instance, mass consumer culture emerged in the context of the Shah's modernization policies among Tehran's urban middle class in the 1950s. In combining politics of repression with those of developmental promises, Mohamad Reza Pahlevi pursued the authoritarian project of an organized modernity based on his absolutist claim to power (Schayegh, 2012). In Egypt, a new consumer culture had already developed by the second part of the nineteenth century. Thereby, the European residents of Cairo and Alexandria served as 'channels and pacesetters' for the new consumptive lifestyle of Egypt's upper class (Russell 2004, p. 29). The spread of modern education was instrumental in this social process, which helped generate the above-discussed formation of the *efendi* subject, the core representative of the new religio-nationalist group of the Egyptian *efendiyya*. At the same time, female education created a new kind of modern Egyptian woman combining the subjectivity types of the believer, citizen, mother, wife, and worker (p. 99).

These initial variations of consumerism developed in the context of the arrival of mass society and concomitant ideals of organized modernity, such as in Turkish Kemalist, Arab-nationalist, or Islamist ideologies. Today, however, we can observe another type of consumer culture in which we clearly detect the elements of the post-Second World War societal transformation toward extended liberalism. To clarify, neoliberal consumer societies are not necessarily liberal in political terms. Contemporary consumerism seems to be compatible with illiberal political regimes. The examples of Egypt, Iran, and Turkey mentioned above (as well as other non-Muslim countries, such as China and Vietnam) are evidence of this insight. These examples render the predictions of classical modernization theories wrong. Economic liberalization does not automatically come with political liberalization and the establishment of participatory democracy. The subject of consumption is not necessarily a democratic subject. The same applies to the relationship between religion and economic development. The phenomenon of Islamic consumption underpins the flaws in considering modernization to be equivalent to secularization in the sense of a progressing decline in the social relevance of religion. In that case, what is the relationship between religion and consumption?

Religion, Islam, and Consumption in the Sociological Tradition

A cross-cultural survey of over 7,000 consumers from Christian, Islamic, and Buddhist backgrounds concluded that religion represents a ‘major ethical driver’ in their consumption habits (Cornwell et al. 2005, p. 531). Indeed, scholars generally assume that religion exercises a form of control over the behavior of believers (Vittell et al. 2005, p. 175). Therefore, the relative marginalization of the religious factor in consumer studies may come as a surprise. Out of a sample of 7,000 journal articles published between 1959 and 1989, only 35 analyzed the role of religion in consumer behavior (Lindridge 2005, p. 142). This kind of considerable scholarly disregard becomes even more visible when considering consumer studies in Muslim contexts. More than eleven years after launching the journal *Marketing Theory* in 1990, none of its issues contained a single article in connection to Islam (Jafari and Süerdem 2012, p. 61). It is only since the cultural turn in the Social Sciences and Humanities that religion – slowly – has made inroads into the study of consumer cultures.

While consumption was not a major issue in classical sociology, it was treated as a kind of entirely secular activity under the hegemonic influence of classical modernization theories from the 1950s until the 1970s. The cultural turn, then, drew attention to both the symbolic meanings and the ethical positions in the activity of consumption. This general shift in sociology introduced consumer ethics in addition to religion (and Islam). Meanwhile, new ‘Islamic Marketing’ journals appeared (Sandıkcı 2018, p. 456). Currently, studies on ethical consumption often revolve around the question of sustainability (Gramm-Hanssen 2021), but the concept of ‘moral economy’ also includes religious and, consequently, Islamic normativity.⁵ If Islam provides a general normative framework ‘in which people could practice the good life’ (Jafari and Süerdem 2012, p. 73), then the connection between Islamic traditions and consumer behavior should almost be self-evident.

When it comes to the relationship between religion and economy in more general terms, there exist three basic paradigms in the sociological tradition. With reference to Marx and Weber, the (i) first narrative emphasizes a strong opposition between the two. This narrative has underpinned the negative attitude to consumption in both leftist and conservative positions. Going back to the sociology of Émile Durkheim, another school argues from a functionalist perspective. Scholars in this tradition predicted (ii) the gradual absorption of religion by the economy (Haddorff 2000). In their reasoning, consumption becomes a ‘secular ritual’ performed at shopping malls and cultural temples, such as theaters and opera houses (Belk 1989). Finally, there is (iii) a theoretical position of relative ambiguity. From this perspective, the market is neither sacralized nor demonized. While the expansion of the market economy challenges religion, religious ethics may curtail strict economic rationality at the same time (Haddorff 2000, p. 499). Regarding the study of Islamic consumption, we can discern all three narratives at work.

Without references to Marx or Weber, the first narrative guides normative understandings of Islamic economics as an alternative to capitalism. Proponents of this kind of Islamic economics, such as the former Saudi financial advisor Umer Chapra, demanded embedding economic behavior in a normative Islamic worldview to remedy capitalist vices (Chapra 2000). From this normative perspective, unconstrained consumption generates negative social behavior, such as excessive individualism, moral egotism, profit-oriented action, and wholesale commodification (Tripp 2006, p. 97). With respect to the emergence of a vibrant Islamic fashion industry in Turkey, in particular veiling fashion, one can easily observe a lively public

debate. In this debate, Islamic scholars and conservative, religiously oriented journalists have heavily criticized this new religious market and ‘condemned veiling-fashion as contrary to Islamic principles’ (Gökarıksel and Secor 2009, p. 7). In short, there is a strong tendency among Muslims following this tradition to perceive consumption practices as a threat to religion and, therefore, to deem Islam and capitalist consumption as mutually incompatible.

The second tradition is most visible in scholarly works on Islamic finance and the expanding global halal market. Here, scholars argue that, for instance, Islamic banking hardly established a clear alternative to capitalist financing. Instead, Islamic financial schemes employ the language of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) to accommodate their pietistic consumers’ normative claims. This process of accommodation, so one argument goes, also becomes apparent in the fact that Islamic banking has meanwhile become a firmly established part of major international financial institutions such as HSBC, Citibank, Deutsche Bank, UBS, and Standard Chartered (Rehman 2010, p. 90). Likewise, scholars of halal markets – whether food production, cosmetics, or tourism – identify the gradual absorption of Islamic traditions into the global market. Similar to Islamic banking, transnational players such as Carrefour, Colgate-Palmolive, Nestlé, and Unilever significantly invest in expanding their product range with halal goods (Shirazi 2016, p. 13). This camp of academic literature largely endorses the general conclusion of Charles Tripp that Islamic consumption is nothing more than a new variety of global capitalism (2006). In short, global capitalism is on its way to absorbing Islam.

The third tradition became more salient in the general turn to theories of practice and has left noticeable traces in the study of Islamic consumption. The practice approach generated a vibrant field of research, especially from anthropological perspectives, which are more or less embedded in the third type of sociological narrative. These studies want to go beyond ‘bi-polar discussions about the alienating or emancipating character of consumption’ (Gauthier, Martikainen, and Woodhead 2013, p. 270). Instead, they look at the social practices of consumer society as an arena for the ‘struggle for recognition.’ In this struggle for recognition, ‘imperatives of self-exploration, authenticity and self-definition’ become related to both religious and consumerist practices (p. 272).⁶ In this way, studying consumption as social practice at least implicitly employs the ideal types of postmodern forms of subjectivity in extended liberalism. Following the standards of halal consumption, for instance, serves the dual purpose of constructing one’s own self and receiving recognition of one’s own identity construction from others. In these processes, the new forms of Islamic piety ‘are informed by both religious sensibilities and market dynamics’ (Sandıkçı 2021, p. 278). When applying theories of practice to the study of consumer cultures, one can observe a rather ambiguous relationship between economics and religion in which these two fields of social practices mutually reinforce each other.

One final example of this merger of diversity and unity in Islamic consumption, and an ideal arena for this merger of consumptive practices, is tourism. Mass travel did not arrive before the railway permitted it in the second half of the nineteenth century (Ury 1990, p. 24). The rise, expansion, and technical transformation of mass travel is another characteristic feature of the three successive forms of modernity from bourgeois to postmodern modernity. Tourism, therefore, is an utterly modern phenomenon. In addition, in tourism, religion is a visible factor of social diversity at work. In her ‘(auto)ethnographic’ study, Mona Moufahim analyzes pilgrimages as social sites of inquiry into symbolic, spiritual, and material consumption (Moufahim 2016, p. 173). Pilgrimages to the holy sites of Islam, particularly the hajj to Mecca, are a specific kind of religious tourism that combines a wide array of economic interests and religious desires. At first glance, the decisive difference between religious tourism

and other forms of tourism is its purpose. Religious tourism, especially the performance of pilgrimages, is clearly motivated by religious terms.⁷ In her study on Islamic pilgrimages, Moufahim described the core aim of the pilgrims as their ‘yearning for an authentic experience,’ an imagination of authenticity connecting them with ‘real Islam’ (2016, p. 181). She describes the search for authenticity as the central driver for undertaking the pilgrimage, serving the pilgrims in both the sense of self-identification and the recognition of their Islamic selfhood by others (pp. 184–185).

Axel Honneth declared authenticity to be a key concept in the intellectual self-understanding of modernity (2004). In their search for authenticity, modern subjects orient themselves ‘toward the recovery of an essence identifying the genuinely real with the help of imaginations of the past’ (Bendix 1997, p. 8). As a genuine feature of modernity, the quest for authenticity is a part of modern identity constructions. When it comes to tourism, together with leisure and sportive activities, the search for authenticity is at the heart of these practices. Tourists long for authentic experiences in architecture, culture, historical places, monuments, nature, or the arts. In this sense, the Islamic pilgrims in Moufahim’s study represent this feature of unity in the modern search for authenticity. Whether embarking on a pilgrimage to Mecca, visiting the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, or hiking up to the summit of a mountain in the Bavarian Alps, these consumptive activities share the aim of making authentic experiences, though utterly different in their concrete forms. They represent variations of a common theme; they are good examples of the relationship between diversity and unity.

Conclusions

In the introduction, I defined this chapter as an exercise in combining diversity with unity, more specifically, combining the unity of global features of modernity with the diversity in the concrete historical practices of social actors who enact these features. In theoretical terms, I introduced the theories of successive modernities by Reckwitz and Wagner. With the help of their ideal types, it is possible to explore the interlacement of global patterns of modernity with respect to their local historical manifestations. Moreover, in their concepts of social order and modern subjectivity, consumption plays a critical role as a specific practice of modernity. The study of consumption, therefore, provides a broad and promising field for investigating diversity within unity, which is even more applicable since the approaches to consumer cultures left the confines of economic determinism that reduced consumption to the other end of production. Methodological turns toward culture and social practices profoundly influenced consumption studies in general and research on Muslim consumption in particular. Most importantly, studying the global phenomenon of consumption in its multiple articulations by Muslims offers an exciting opportunity both to cast aside the century-old but anachronistic question of whether or not Islam and modernity are compatible and to demonstrate that Islamic consumption exemplifies the inseparable entanglement of practicing Islamic religious traditions in modernity.

Notes

- 1 For more details, see Fischer in this volume.
- 2 For a similar strategy of national branding, see the article about Malaysia’s neighbor Singapore (Duffy and Ng Hui Xian 2021).
- 3 I have elaborated on this theoretical approach in a number of journal articles and books (Jung, Sparre, and Petersen 2014; Jung and Sinclair 2015; Jung 2017; Jung and Sinclair 2020).

- 4 This summary of Reckwitz's theory is based on his detailed elaborations in Reckwitz 2006, pp. 97–615.
- 5 For a discussion of this concept, see Carrier 2018.
- 6 See also the book of Gauthier 2020.
- 7 For a discussion of the difference between Islamic and halal tourism, see Xiong and Chaozhi 2020.

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MUSLIM COMEDY

From Social Purpose to the Consumption of Culture

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Introduction

This chapter looks at Muslim comedy and comedians through the lens of consumer culture and Islam. In it, ‘Muslim comedy’ is defined as professional entertainment by a comic performer who openly identifies as Muslim and whose comedic set consists of jokes, improvisations, skits, and other forms of acts about a variety of topics, including religious and non-religious themes, intended to make audiences laugh. I focus mainly on Muslim stand-up comedy and stand-up comedians in mostly Western non-Muslim-majority contexts, notably in North America, the UK, and Western Europe. I am particularly interested in Muslim stand-up comedy against the background and at the intersections of humor and ethnic comedy with cultural and faith-based consumerism and Islamic marketing. While this chapter pays special attention to Muslim comedians in Western societies, it is also important to note the existence of comedic practices of many Muslim humorists, such as comedians and cartoonists, in Muslim-majority contexts, including North Africa and the Middle East (see Sardar 2021; Schweizer and Molokotos-Liederman 2022).

Humor is ‘one of the most pervasive elements of public culture’ (Pickering and Lockyer 2005, p. 3). As Michael Billig argues, ‘fun has become an imperative and humor is seen as a necessary quality of being fully human’ (Billig 2005, p. 13). Holm places particular attention on the ‘political aesthetics’ of humor and its potential for ‘political work’ in the ‘negotiation, contestation and distribution of power’ (Holm 2017, p. 12). Similarly, Webber argues that, at least in the US context, ‘in the absence of thoughtful political analysis and responsible journalism, political comedy emerged as the only strategy to challenge the hegemonic norm of earnestness and ignorance. The smartest thing about American cultural life was its comedy’ (Webber 2013, p. 4). Furthermore, referring to media scholars, Webber notes that ‘news and entertainment had been blurred to such an extent that no one knew what objectivity meant anymore’ (Webber 2013, p. 4).

Humor can be found in many aspects of social interactions and is not confined to a specific form of narrative or genre (Pickering and Lockyer 2005). Therefore, humor comprises but is not synonymous with comedy, which is performed in both physical and virtual settings, such as comedy clubs, television, film, and other mass media formats (ibid.). Humor

extends beyond comedy and comes in many genres, styles, forms, and formats, from the written word (e.g., literary humor) to visual forms (e.g., cartooning) and performances (e.g., comic theater). The focus of this chapter is comedy, mostly stand-up comedy. I concur with humor scholar Lawrence Mintz, who, in the mid-1980s, argued that stand-up comedy is the ‘oldest, most universal, basic and deeply significant form of humorous expression’ (1985, p. 71). Comedy lies at the intersection of society, culture, and politics and encompasses humor’s broader physical, psychological, socio-cultural, and political functions and benefits. The ‘tripartite structure’ (Holm 2017, p. 9) of humor theories and models corresponding to key functions of humor is particularly relevant to comedy: (1) the psychological function of humor (as relief); (2) its superiority function (punching down and its relation to power); and (3) the incongruity aspect (a discrepancy between expectation and reality, which triggers surprise and laughter), a fundamental building block of humor (e.g., Raskin 2008; Carrol 2014; Holm 2017; Eagleton 2019).

I focus on Muslim comedy in the West, which, since the early 2000s, has become an increasingly appealing and successful genre in North America and western Europe attracting a growing number of Muslim and non-Muslim audiences but also people of no faith. Muslim comedians perform a rich repertoire of stand-up comedy on stage in comedy clubs, as one-off shows, or as part of comedy tours. They also host or appear in special events, including fundraisers for social causes and humanitarian organizations. A great deal of comedy featuring Muslim stand-ups is also on offer in different formats and mediums, including online streaming and social media platforms, which have become veritable spaces for comedy. Muslim comedy, just as the comedy space more generally, is constantly evolving with a regular flow of stand-up comedy shows and tours, including *Ramy*, *Muslim Funny Fest*, *Allah Made Me Funny*, *The Muslims Are Coming!*, *The Axis of Evil*, and *The New York Arab-American Comedy Festival*. Aiming to bridge relations and make connections between different faith groups through comedy, several Muslim comedians, mostly in the US, have also appeared in comedy shows, events, and festivals with a distinct interfaith aspect. These feature Jewish, Christian, and Muslim comedians performing alongside each other, such as the ‘Laugh in Peace Tour’ in the US, ‘Prophet Sharing’ in the UK, and ‘Younès et Bambi’ in France.

Comedy and Laughter Out of Tragedy

Muslim comedians have been performing on stage in non-Muslim-majority countries since the 1990s.

As every other ethnic group, the various Muslim communities had their internal humor, their own comedians. But they were completely obscure from the point of view of the larger society. They lacked both common language with and a reputation among mainstream audiences. [...] They were either obscure ethnic comedians or generic mainstream ones.

(Bilici 2010, p. 197)

Muslim comedians happened to be Muslim: their Muslim background and identity were there but not necessarily out in the open and promoted as such. Moreover, their performances did not include religious themes (Aidi 2021).

Then came the 9/11 terrorist attacks, which became a critical turning point in the ‘explosion of *Muslim* [my italics] comedy,’ especially in the US (Bilici 2012, p. 172). As Dean Obeidallah, an Arab-American comedian, recalled, ‘On September 10, I went to sleep a White guy. On September 11, I woke up an Arab’ (*The National* 2021). The tragic events created and brought to the fore two key ingredients for the deployment of a new genre of Muslim comedy: otherness (unfamiliarity with the outsider, the ‘other’) and negative social relevance (‘negative charisma,’ according to Bilici 2012, p. 193), with Muslims becoming the new source of ‘social anxiety’ in the US but also more globally (Michael 2011; Bilici 2012).

If the 9/11 attacks became a turning point for the boost of Muslim comedy in the US, they were only a piece of the puzzle in Europe, where the Danish Mohammad cartoons crisis in 2005 and the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks in 2015 also played a crucial role in reinforcing public perceptions of Muslim humorlessness (i.e., that Muslims have no sense of humor). These events generated multiple debates on Muslim attitudes and responses to humor, especially in relation to freedom of speech, but most importantly, they were responsible for a dramatic deterioration of Western perceptions of Muslims. Muslims were viewed, at best, as an anti-Western monolithic group of 1.9 billion people in opposition to secular modernity and, at worst, as mostly predisposed to violence, thus posing a danger and a global security threat. The growth of anti-Muslim sentiments that followed and the emergence of anti-Muslim prejudice, coined as Islamophobia, impacted Muslims directly.

Yet, an unintended consequence of the tragic events of 9/11 was that out of tragedy came solidarity and laughter through comedy. Anti-Muslim prejudice generated Muslim solidarity across ethnic and national lines and a sense of urgency among Muslims to respond in a novel way using unconventional and creative means to challenge negative perceptions. Humor and laughter were deployed as a tool to challenge misconceptions, challenge stereotypes, and defuse fear in an effort to generate more nuanced and positive representations of Muslims. Muslim stand-up comedians took to the stage in North America and western Europe not only to entertain but, more importantly, to invite audiences to see things from a different perspective in an attempt to help humanize Muslims. While Muslim comedians who were already performing pre-9/11 continued to write comic material and perform on stage, many more decided to start or switch careers and become professional comedians.

More than Entertainment: Comedy with a Social Purpose

As a creative response to 9/11, Muslim stand-up comedy generated a new and unique ethnic form of comedy with a distinct Muslim label. Furthermore, as a humorous social exchange between an insider (Muslim comedian) and an outsider (non-Muslim audience), Muslim stand-up comedy consists of a dynamic form of communication with a double purpose: entertainment mixed with social activism (Michael 2011). Showing diverse audiences what Muslims are really like, that ‘they’re like us,’ and that they can both take and make a joke, Muslim comedians aim to explain and eventually dispel Islamophobic views in an attempt to incrementally shift social attitudes about Muslims (Michael 2011; Aidi 2021). As such, Muslim comedy can be credited with an educational and social corrective aspect, thus also illustrating that humor, as a form of insight, can help us understand the world (Lash 1948). Moreover, as an observational ‘comedy of recognition’ (Quirk 2015, pp. 29–30) and social commentary, Muslim comedy, just like comedy more broadly, arguably brings out and

exposes shared experiences, feelings, and common attitudes while getting the audience to think outside the box, to ‘think more flexibly and reframe situations’ (Goldman 2013, p. 5). British comedian Shazia Mirza, one of the first Muslim women comedians, suggests comedy as granting ‘permission to laugh at things they [the public] normally wouldn’t be able to laugh at’ (Mirza 2002).

Looking a bit more closely at Muslim comedy and acknowledging that there are certainly nuances and variations, I highlight here some common threads and running themes of Muslim comedy in the West as manifested in its variety of mediums, platforms, and comedic techniques. To start with, when performing live, on stage in comedy clubs or other venues, Muslim comedians typically interact and engage with their audiences, especially at the beginning of the show, by addressing their audience with questions (e.g., ‘where are you from?’). Muslim comedians openly identify themselves as such in their comic persona on stage during their show but also beyond the stage in their public image. Yet, if they appeal to and attract ethnically and culturally diverse groups of both Muslims and non-Muslims, given the social activist aspects of their comedy, it seems that their primary target audiences consist of mainstream *non-Muslim* audiences.

Muslim comedians’ repertoire of jokes includes a range of topics, from jests about everyday life to addressing wider and more complex issues, such as identity, religion, current events, politics, and discrimination. Muslim comedy mixes social commentary and criticism with humor to squarely question the perceived incompatibility between faith and modernity, between being Muslim and being able to laugh. Using self-deprecating humor mixed with social commentary and critique that tackles ‘big issues’ wrapped in humor, Muslim comedians become more likable and relatable.

Muslim comedians play on negative stereotypes, turning negative perceptions of Muslims into a punchline or even a selling point of the comedy show, such as with the *Arabs Are Not Funny*, or *The Muslims Are Coming!* series. Shazia Mirza starts her performance by saying, ‘Hello my name is Shazia Mirza, at least that’s what it says on my pilot’s license’ (Mirza 2002), while Imran Yusuf jokes that ‘We are cabbies but we fly planes too.’

A distinct characteristic of post-9/11 Muslim comedy is the prevalence of ‘religiously themed comedy,’ specifically Islamic-themed comedy. This was a novelty in the early 2000s, perhaps less so now, but it is certainly in contrast to pre-9/11 Muslim comedy, where religious themes did not feature in their repertoires (Aidi 2021). A prevailing theme in these new Muslim comedy acts was ‘Muslim everydayness’ in a post-9/11 world, featuring the funny side of living as a Muslim, laced with jokes about food, dress, travel, dating, marriage, and family (Aidi 2021). Such biographically based themes are part of an appeal to the audiences to relate to Muslim comedians. But the humor goes one step further since Muslim comedians’ repertoires also feature jokes about the daily micro-aggressions of falling victim to stereotyping, stigmatization, and racial/religious profiling. One staple feature of Muslim comedy is the airport and travel experience, particularly in the US (Aidi 2021; Michael 2011).

Muslim comedians bring two key archetypal Muslim stereotypes on stage: the angry and violent terrorist Muslim man and the voiceless and oppressed veiled Muslim woman (Aidi 2021). In doing so, they prompt their audiences to come face to face with racist and bigoted representations before deconstructing them with laughter and ridicule. By making fun of such tropes, Muslim comedians reveal the fatal flaws of such representations, thus aiming to undercut and take them down in an effort to undo Muslim ‘otherness’ and ultimately (re) humanize and normalize Muslims (Bilici 2012). ‘They invert social hierarchies’ on stage by

becoming the agents behind the humor rather than the butt of the joke (Spielhaus 2013). In so doing, they capitalize on one of the fundamental building blocks of humor: incongruity, playing on the discrepancy or paradox between expectation and reality (Spielhaus 2013).

Female Muslim comedians, especially veiled comedians, some of whom wear their hijab or chador as a ‘performance costume’ (Michael 2022), use comic performance as a way to challenge the image of the supposedly voiceless and oppressed Muslim woman and to promote an alternative representation that creates discussions about gender, sexuality, and agency (Michael 2022). They also illustrate and normalize the diverse ways of living one’s religion as a Muslim woman (Aidi 2021). Yet, female Muslim comedians who perform a subversive kind of comedy while wearing a hijab as a symbol representing their Muslimness can also open them up to further criticism or rejection by some Muslims (Aidi 2021; Michael 2022).

If Muslim comedy is primarily about social commentary, some of the humor can be described as ‘safe’ or harmless, prompting the audience to laugh *with* people rather than *at* them or their misfortunes (*Schadenfreude*). As French comedian Hassan Zahi, from *À part ça tout va bien* (translation: everything is fine, notwithstanding), says, ‘we laugh *with* Islam and not *at* Islam!’ [my translation] (as cited in Guidi 2020). This approach mirrors what Yolanda van Tilborgh refers to as the ‘conditional view’ of art and music that is conditionally permissible (van Tilborgh 2018). Shalina Janmohamed discusses humor’s appreciation among the ‘Generation M’ (Muslim millennials), who ‘are happy to laugh at their predicament, as long as they are being laughed with, not mocked. People, cultures, and traditions can be treated with humour, but it takes skill and insight and true dedication to see the struggles of Muslims as they really are, not their stereotype’ (Janmohamed 2016, p. 314). Therefore, (some) Muslim comedy is more about making jokes about everyday life than making jokes that directly target religious figures (irrespective of religious faith); it also often leaves out vulgar language and sexist or racist jokes.

This brings us to the topic of halal humor, performed by certain Muslim comedians such as US-based comedian Azhar Usman, whose comedy work upholds ‘Islamic parameters and standards of propriety’ in order not to offend families and not to be blasphemous, all as part of a general rule that ‘Islamic culture can be satirised, but not the religion’ (Khan 2007); ‘We do not curse. It’s halal entertainment’ (Globe and Mail, 9 Aug. 2005). Halal (literally meaning permissible in Arabic) humor is an example of the extension of the Islamic certification and compliance of halal to a growing and diverse spectrum of goods and services, but also modes of behavior, namely the process of ‘halalization’ and its limitless and multifaceted applications, including in the area of popular culture and entertainment (Gauthier 2021, p. 144). In this context, halal humor is one more illustration of how Islam, influenced by the marketization of religion, has been refashioned and ‘lifestyled’ with the expansion of consumerism and Islamic marketing across the Muslim world.

Halal humor also illustrated an underlying tension that some Muslim comedians have to manage, namely adhering to the Islamic tradition and avoiding jokes about something that may not always be ‘consistent with the values of Islam’ (Ervine 2013), while at the same time being funny and appealing to diverse audiences. In trying to appeal to Muslims and non-Muslims alike, Muslim comedians often have to tread lightly in order to strike a delicate balance in the tone and content of their humor. Yet, according to Usman, ‘the notion that somehow we are going to deliver this white-miraged show that has been certified 100% halal with a sticker on it from some religious authority is not how it works’ (as cited in Ervine 2013).

This issue also relates to a broader question, that of adapting humor to a particular country or catering to the sensitivities of audiences. Muslim comedians often have to respond (or not) in different ways to requests by comedy organizers to tone down their humor or refrain from sensitive topics on stage (e.g., race, sex, religion, and politics) that may be viewed by the audience as inappropriate, disrespectful, or offensive. For some Muslim comedians, this means that if they were to perform in front of primarily Muslim audiences, they might consider adapting some of their jokes. Others have had their appearances canceled from comedy shows when their humor and/or overall comic profile was viewed by the organizers as inappropriate for more traditional audiences. This also points to the controversies around freedom of expression in comedy and the fraught issue of regulating (or outright banning) humor perceived as offensive or punching down on vulnerable or victimized groups:

Even if the punchline in an offensive joke is not the same as a real punch, harmful words can be equivalent to harmful acts – individually by causing subjective pain, or collectively by inspiring, enabling and perpetuating forms of bullying, abuse, systemic discrimination or oppression.

(Schweizer and Molokotos-Liederman 2022, p. 276)

There is a fine line that comedians, including Muslim comedians, have to tread carefully: finding the right balance between adapting humor to the audience, self-censoring, and being outright banned or canceled. It is a question that is particularly topical and relevant for all comedians in the twenty-first century, especially those who are just starting out and need to keep themselves employed in the comedy market.

Comedy, more broadly, is more than entertainment. Its value is credited both positively and negatively with the constructive or destructive potential to break down, confirm or reinforce stereotypes, create or disrupt a sense of togetherness, build or take down bridges, and the like. Yet, the effective mobilization capacity of comedy's potential to shift people's minds and attitudes and thus ignite or produce any meaningful change in the long term is an open question. The case of Muslim comedians illustrates comedy's politically and socially activist potential (Zoglin 2009). Whether Muslim comedy undermines or defuses Islamophobic tropes among audiences or ends up perpetuating and reproducing them is intensely debated and far from being settled (Michael 2011; Spielhaus 2013; Tsakona and Popa 2013; Hirzalla and van Zoonen 2016; Nickl 2020). A key factor is whether the intended target audience – those who would benefit from comedy with a corrective, social goal – would actually attend a Muslim comedy show or whether Muslim comedians are attracting audiences that already have more positive views and attitudes of Muslims, thus merely preaching to the converted (Herding 2014). Another issue is that since humor is relative and contextual, its impact depends on the wider socio-political context in which it takes place, that is, the space (venue) where the joking takes place and the social attributes of the audiences, including their knowledge reservoir, which contributes to their ability to understand a joke. When it comes to comedy more broadly, differences in culture, religion, and education, among other factors, can influence humor's appreciation, comprehension, and interpretation (Schweizer and Ott 2018). All these factors collectively help determine how a joke is perceived, appreciated, and interpreted and whether a Muslim comedy show ultimately has a unifying and/or dividing potential. At best, Muslim comedy *may* ignite modest positive changes in short-term public attitudes toward Muslims.

Regional Variations in Western Muslim Comedy

Starting with the US, ethnic stand-up comedy emerged in the 1920s as a way to address the marginalization of minorities, particularly of black Americans. In the 1950s and 60s, pioneering comedians in the US put stand-up ‘in touch with the real world’ and made it personal but also politically provocative, mixing ‘social criticism, political commentary, pop culture satire’ (Zoglin 2009). As the most recently stigmatized minority group since 9/11, Muslims have continued the American tradition of stand-up comedy as self-empowerment to voice their experiences as a feared and marginalized minority, just as other minorities, especially black Americans, have used humor as resistance and laughing as a coping mechanism (Michael 2011; Ervine 2013). The success of Muslim comedy and the appeal of Muslim comedians to mainstream audiences thus point to what Bilici calls ‘Muslim Americanization’ and the emergence of an American Muslim ethnicity (Bilici 2012, p. 197).

Across the northern border with the US, Canadian comedy is typically conflated with US comedy (Cwynar 2013; Friesen 2021). Yet, the Canadian television series *Little Mosque on the Prairie* (first broadcast in 2007) became a milestone as the first Muslim comedy to appear on mainstream North American television screens. Playing on the American classic pioneer family drama *Little House on the Prairie*, this first sitcom about Western Muslims was about the experiences and challenges of an average Muslim community integrating into a small Canadian prairie town. The show featured Muslim characters ‘using a conservative genre of humour, the sitcom, to do something entirely new, creating the first Muslim TV comedy’ (Friesen 2022, p. 246). Despite the sitcom’s ‘construction of Muslim communities through the lens of a mainstream sitcom product,’ the show generated discussions about the challenges of Canada’s Muslims to integrate into a country with an ostensibly multicultural profile and the potential of Muslim comedy and comedians to help break stereotypes (Friesen 2022, p. 263).

Further east in the Anglophone cultural sphere, comics in the UK started performing in music halls in the early twentieth century, while stand-up comedy began in the 1960s and 1970s. As Aidi points out in her comparative study of Muslim stand-up comedy, although there are differences in the historical evolution of ethnic comedy in the US and the UK, comedians from marginalized groups on both sides of the Atlantic joined the art of stand-up and infused it with their own unique experiences and perspectives by addressing common stereotypes (Aidi 2021). In the UK, Muslim comedians use humor mixed with political and social commentary to defy and push the boundaries of how British Muslims have been typically framed by the media. They often engage with and lampoon the usual representations, including the terrorist man, the obedient hijabi, and the intrusive (South-East Asian) auntie, all as part of a patriarchal British Muslim family; alternatively, they also engage more broadly with the structures and systems in place in the UK that perpetuate these stereotypes (e.g., the police) (Ilott 2018).

The influence of North American ethnic comedy is evident across the continental European comedy scenes (Ervine 2019; Nickl 2020), even if there is resistance to what is sometimes denounced as yet another example of US cultural imperialism. In Germany, stand-up comedy partly evolved out of the tradition of the political, literary cabaret of the early 1900s, which typically included sketches, satire, and parody of socio-political issues using sarcasm and irony (Spielhaus 2013). The comedy genre that developed, including stand-up comedy, featured ethnicity more than religious affiliation, reflecting the prevalence of ethnicity as a minority identity marker. Comedians have thus typically positioned themselves as Turkish or Arab without directly addressing their religious affiliation; being Muslim was implied rather than affirmed (Spielhaus 2013; Nickl 2020). Turkish German comedians like Fatih

Cevikkollu, Serdar Somuncu, Bülent Ceylan, and, more recently, Idil Baydar (a woman) started to emerge in Germany in the early 2000s. From making jokes about ethnic minorities in an effort to ‘wipe [stereotypes and racist representations] with shared laughter’ (Spielhaus 2013), Muslim comedy in Germany has evolved to include themes of race, ethnicity, religion, class, and gender (Nickl 2020). The theme of politics and religion gained particular social and political relevance after the 2015 refugee crisis (Nickl 2020). Turkish German Muslim comedians, borrowing from North American models, created ethnic comedy shows and moved from the margins to the mainstream in an effort to signal their presence and the place of Muslimness in German society while also contributing to German popular culture (Nickl 2020).

In France, more recent developments in ethnic comedy reflect the different ideals of color- and religion-blind community relations in France, in contrast to the multicultural model of the US and UK. The universalist and republican principle of *laïcité* and the relegation of religion to the private sphere help explain the absence of the community-focused humor (*humour communautaire*) that we find in the US and the UK (Ervine 2013, 2019). This contrast helps explain the reluctance of comedians in France to evoke religion, ethnicity, and race until the late 2000s, when openly Muslim comedians emerged. Celebrity comedian Jamel Deboozes’ *Comedy Club* and the *Marrakech du rire* comedy festival (Ervine 2019; Bharat 2020) have marked the evolution of the stand-up genre not only as a tool of self-representation for Muslim identity (Ervine 2019). The website *À part ça tout va bien* was an icebreaker featuring humorous videos *about* Muslims, but it was also a way *for* Muslims to become visible joke tellers and thus not only be the target of the joke by other comedians. In that sense, Muslim comedians in France are progressively venturing into humor aiming toward an intercultural and inter-community form of dialogue (Ervine 2017).

Muslim Comedians as Cultural Mediators

One of the novelty factors of Muslim comedy across the board has been its aim to address head-on Western perceptions of Muslim humorlessness, namely the view that Muslims cannot make or take a joke. This Western assessment is part and parcel of the presumption that the Muslim world is historically a religious and cultural sphere that lacks a sense and appreciation of humor. Perceptions of Muslim humorlessness date back to the views of colonialist and orientalist scholars, novelists, and poets that Muslims, including Arabs, were humorless (Mahamdallie 2021). An additional and important consideration is the rigorism and puritanism of the Islamic tradition, including some of the *ulama* (scholars of Islam) who denounced comedy, satire, and laughter based on excerpts from the Quran that were taken out of context and that seemed to condemn laughter (Irwin 2021). Despite several *hadith* collections reporting instances when the Prophet Mohammad smiled or laughed, and many examples of Arabic anecdotes and words with humorous connotations (Amin 2022; Ghalli 2022), a ‘mixture of poor theology and social despair’ (Abdulsater 2021, p. 23) shaped deeply rooted views on the incompatibility of Islam and humor, which has permeated public discourse and been amplified by the media, especially after the controversies and violent conflicts over the Mohammad cartoons and *Charlie Hebdo*.

The question of Muslims, Islam, and humor is a complex one, and there are differences in how humor is exercised and perceived in Muslim-majority and non-Muslim-majority contexts. Debates revolve partly around the idea of what constitutes permissible humor, joking, and laughter (Schweizer and Molokotos-Liederman 2022). There are Islamic principles on permissible types of behavior and codes of conduct that extend to the realm of humor and joking, some of which have been enforced through multiple forms of censorship (including

self-censorship) and violence in Muslim-majority contexts (Schweizer and Molokotos-Liederman 2022). Yet, the situation on the ground is far from being uniform, just as there are many different ways in which Muslims live and practice their religion. Comedic and satirical practices in the Muslim world reflect local and historical variations but also depend on the religious sensibilities, social norms, political regimes, and legal frameworks in these Muslim-majority societies.

The idea that Muslims, Islam, and laughter are incompatible has only highlighted and accentuated the novelty factor of Muslim comedy, making it more intriguing and attracting audiences curious about funny Muslims cracking jokes. The novelty factor, back in the 2000s when Muslim comedy first emerged, rested on a two-fold pattern and a common thread: Muslim comedians appeal to and attract diverse Muslim and non-Muslim audiences as part of a concerted effort to use a socially conscious comedy to fight anti-Muslim prejudice and capitalize on humor's potential to build bridges and connections between Muslims and non-Muslims. Navigating between two worlds, Muslim comedians use humor that 'speaks' to both Muslims and non-Muslims: it is understood by non-Muslims who are part of a Western culture, but it also makes sense to Muslim audiences. Non-Muslims laugh at themselves and some of the incongruities of negative perceptions and representations of Muslims, while Muslims also laugh at themselves and at the variety of mocked stereotypical ways in which they are viewed by the mainstream non-Muslim majority (Michael 2011). In that sense, Muslim comedians use humor-based cultural know-how that plays on two levels: the 'ethnic' and the 'mainstream' (Bilici 2012). They have also been described as cultural 'arbiters' and 'mediators,' uniquely positioned to combine 'cultural leadership' (Amarasingam 2010, p. 474; Spielhaus 2013) with 'humorous social insight' (Michael 2011). Faced with a sense of urgency to act as 'cultural entrepreneurs' (Bilici 2010) in a post-9/11 context, Muslim comedians responded by creating a highly successful brand of a socially relevant and timely ethnic comedy genre.

Muslim Comedy and Digital Media

Beyond its socially conscious dimension, the high appeal of Muslim comedy can also be attributed to the close links between comedy, the internet, and social media culture. They have all contributed to the success stories of Muslim comedians and the appeal of their Muslim comedy brand. Technological changes have affected media and the ways information is disseminated, which have impacted stand-up comedy as an industry and the way it is distributed and consumed (Belanger 2019). The internet has become salient in both the dissemination and consumption of comedy through online offers (Michael 2011). These changes are taking place globally across transnational comedy spaces, so they are far from a solely American phenomenon. As comedians perform across multiple media formats and as 'transmedia communication' becomes the norm (Belanger 2019), comedy has entered the digital landscape through social media, networking platforms, and websites. There is a plethora of comedic Twitter handles or campaigns, podcasts, websites, blogs and vlogs, films, TV shows, documentaries, and recorded stand-up comedy shows that are available globally for immediate consumption. Especially during the COVID lockdown, comedians turned to the virtual stage and digital formats, prompting audiences to attend comedy shows virtually. Comedy material is thus becoming accessible to diverse audiences around the world (Michael 2011; Nickl 2020; Aidi 2021). Nickl refers to a '21st century comedy wave' following the transnational dissemination of the Anglophone comedy boom of the 1980s and 1990s and the subsequent global 'inclusive mainstream comedy culture fuelled by technology' of the 2000s (Nickl 2020).

Comedians upload video clips or entire comedy shows online to promote themselves and cultivate their image and brand on websites, social media/networking sites (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.), and other online platforms (YouTube, TikTok, etc.). In this context, Muslim comedy is produced and consumed on stage but also virtually through the internet, thus becoming available to diverse audiences around the world. While audiences can stream, download, and share comedy clips using a diverse range of digital formats, Muslim comedians can further grow their fan base and benefit from international recognition (Michael 2011). In addition to acting as a substitute for the stage, social media have become a tool to build a personal brand that can transform a comedian into ‘a cultural icon’ (Kesvani 2021, p. 128).

Muslim comedians, like all other comedians, further cultivate their own brand and expand their fan base by producing a variety of humor outputs in different formats that go beyond the stage of a comedy club. Some Muslim comedy television shows, such as *Allah Made Me Funny* and *The Muslims Are Coming*, became film documentaries. Beyond video and film, some Muslim comedians also turned to other formats and humor genres, including humorous social media campaigns, humorous podcasting, and writing comic memoirs. Further afield, also note popular fiction and non-fiction books using popularized Islamic themes with a light-hearted and humorous approach to show the various challenges of being Muslim or living as a Muslim in Western societies.

Muslim Comedy as a Cultural Consumable

Comedy’s social and political role and its growing popularity are also evident in the market of mass media and popular culture with the production, distribution, and consumption of comedy (Donian 2018). In a globalized world marked by consumerism, comedy itself is a concrete and material cultural product to be consumed, experienced, and then replaced since it is subject to the novelty factor and the supply and demand of diverse audiences (consumers) with different profiles and tastes. Related to this is also the fact that culture is created, consumed, and appreciated collectively as a community and in response to the social circumstances and concerns at a specific point in time (Brooks 2022).

In this context, Muslim comedy is part of a growing Islamic popular culture market and part and parcel of the culture and brand of ‘cool Islam,’ as evidenced in the growing multidisciplinary literature on Islamic consumption and marketing (cf. the works of Aliakbar Jafari and Özlem Sandıkcı among others). The creation of Ogilvy Noor in 2010 as the first Muslim branding consultancy to capitalize and appeal to the different categories of Muslim consumers is a further indicator of the growing socio-cultural and economic significance of Islamic consumerism. Muslim comedians are Muslim millennials, young Muslims who are engaged socially, politically, and culturally. For some, faith and modernity go together, beyond politics, theology, and traditional authorities (Janmohamed 2016). ‘Their faith affects absolutely everything they do, and they believe it can make modernity better. Equally, they are fully immersed in modern life and harness its benefits for both individual and communal good, as well as improving their faith’ (Janmohamed 2016, p. 5).

Similarly, Amel Boubekeur refers to ‘Muslim cultural elites,’ mainly born in the West, who insert their Islamic affiliation in their daily and cultural lives, evident in their consumer choices and in the Islamic-inspired brands they create, all as part of a ‘revalorization of consumption, success and competitiveness’ (Boubekeur 2005, p. 13). Herding’s study on Islamic youth culture in western Europe also points to the growing sense of Muslimness at grass-roots levels with the mobilization of diverse cultural and artistic outputs, including pop and

rap music, mass media (internet, television, radio, and film), art, design, and fashion, and performance and comedy. This Muslim artistic and cultural repertoire reflects the vibrancy of the capital of young Muslim creators and entrepreneurs, including singers, rappers, comedians, actors, artists and designers, television and film personalities, social media influencers, and business entrepreneurs (Boubekeur 2007; Herding 2014). What is distinctive here is that despite different motivations, the opportunities of Islamic ‘coolness’ blend with different levels of adherence to key Islamic practices and principles within the parameters of halal (Herding 2014). Thus, halal is combined with a transnational Muslim identity that is both local and global, that is, glocal (as coined by Robertson 1995). With a predominantly young Muslim population that is a rapidly growing pool of consumers, ‘Islam has been embedded in capitalist markets’ within a Western global culture (Boubekeur 2005, p. 12).

The commercialization and marketization of Muslim identity, as part of Islamic faith-based consumer culture, reflects the business potential of ‘Muslimness’ and Muslim identity. This is further evidenced by the growth of the halal lifestyle market comprised of consumer goods, cultural products, and services, all presenting a massive business opportunity, further illustrating the broader influence of neoliberal consumerism on both religion and culture, as evident in the marketization and commodification of religion (Gauthier 2020; Woodhead et al. 2021). More particularly, the ‘consumerization’ of religious symbols into cultural products and services that are publicized and made available to buy globally includes a broad spectrum of faith-based consumables, ranging from religiously inspired design and fashion, arts, and entertainment, to religious festivals, tourism, and souvenirs. This is part and parcel of Roy’s (2010) argument that multiculturalism and its celebration of diversity end up reducing religion to culture, while globalization makes local cultures subject to the laws of the market with a standardized religiosity across space, ethnicity, and culture, stripping them of local and ethnic properties. Yet, the world’s religions have been described as ‘the original’ globalizers (Lehmann 2002, p. 345) with a kind of globalization that comes in at least two forms, if not more: one that is based on a cosmopolitan worldview and another, ‘disorganized’ form of globalization that is more characteristic of fundamentalist or charismatic movements (Lehmann 2002). In this context, new and globalized forms of religiosity are expressed through art, music, and performance, including comedy, as part of an ‘accommodationist attitude’ of adapting beliefs to culture and vice versa (van Tilborgh 2018, p. 105).

When it comes to the marketization of Islam, Muslim creators and consumers of faith-inspired products, from halal food, drinks (such as Mecca Cola), cosmetics, and fashion, to art, music, and performance (including comedy), are vital players reconciling Islam with modernity through consumerism (Boubekeur 2016). The marketization of Islam rests on the support of the internet and social media that help spread images of a commodified Islam through the global dissemination of a plethora of Islamic products and brands, including culture such as art, music, television, film, radio, performances, and comedy, ready for consumption.

In this context, Muslim comedy is not only a socially conscious initiative but also a promising commercial enterprise riding on the increasing growth of the fun and humor industry, including comedy, as a cultural product to be marketed, delivered, shared, and consumed to taste. Muslim comedy offers a new aspect of Muslimness and what it means to be Muslim as part of faith-based consumer culture. With the rising public visibility and awareness of Islam, coupled with an equally growing visibility of Muslim identity and youth, ‘brown humour’ (Aidi 2021, p. 8) with a distinctly South Asian or Middle Eastern identity is an appealing part of the Muslim comedy label and inherent to its branding and success (Michael 2018).

Conclusion

In the broad context of Muslim consumerism and the growing market of a lifestyled ‘Muslim cool’ culture, a distinct feature of Islamic-inspired cultural products, such as comedy and music, as opposed to halal consumer goods (e.g., food, drinks, and beauty products) and services (e.g., sharia-compliant holiday resorts, Islamic finance), is that arguably the former may have wider appeal and attract a diverse pool of *both* Muslim *and* non-Muslim consumers. Halal products and services are more Muslim-specific, thus catering to a global and ethnically diverse market of predominantly Muslim consumers. Yet, the case of Muslim fashion is interesting since the target audience comprises any customer, Muslim or not, who wishes to abide by modesty codes of dress by wearing modestly fashioned clothes. As it developed post-9/11 with the socially activist and corrective aim described above, Muslim comedy targeted mostly non-Muslim audiences even if it also appealed to Muslims, especially millennials. At the same time, halal humor and comedy, as part of the halal popular culture and entertainment sector, seem to present high-growth market areas in the growing process of halalization (Gauthier 2021).

Beyond the question of the target audience, as one looks ahead, even if the future of Muslim comedy may still seem bright, given the presumed ongoing success of ethnic comedy, I conclude with few answers and more questions that shape the landscape and horizon of Muslim comedy. Comedy is a cultural product and is subject to the never-ending cycle of consumerism and demand for novelty. How long will the novelty factor of Muslim comedians and comedy last? Will Muslim comedy continue attracting public interest and grabbing the attention of current viewers and/or manage to expand its appeal to larger audiences in the future? How long is the shelf life for Muslim comedy and its spectrum of jokes?

In the current climate, where comedy has become a serious target of identity-based politics, Muslim comedians have to carefully tread a delicate balance between the need to continue entertaining audiences and generating commercial appeal while also making their voices heard in the cultural landscape by forging comedic connections with Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

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DIFFERING ETHICAL APPROACHES TO FRUGALITY AND CONSUMPTION OF MODEST FASHION

Marita Furehaug

Introduction¹

The global environmental challenges we currently face, caused by contemporary human ways of living, are historically unprecedented. Climate change, global warming, pollution, extreme weather conditions, deforestation, and the loss of biodiversity, along with large amounts of plastic, pollution, and toxic waste, are but a few examples of the pressing environmental challenges constituting huge threats to all living creatures on earth. These issues can all be linked directly to contemporary human consumption habits. Consumption usually includes the acquisition, use, and disposal of things. However, increasing attention has been brought to the processes before the acquisition of goods, namely, the chain of activity that attaches consumption to the production that enables consumption (Hansen 2019, pp. 4–5). This broader understanding is significant as it highlights the complex production processes invisible to the average consumer and connects it to a broader environmental framework. In addition, thinking of consumption as the circulation and exchange of cultural symbols can add another layer to the mixture (Gauthier 2018). In consumption studies, there is a rise in practice theories and practice-oriented approaches to consumer behavior, where the consumers are seen as carriers of social practice and as participants in a variety of social practices, including important aspects of culture, norms, and power relations. This represents a rejection of rational choice² as an appropriate starting point for understanding consumption and shifts attention toward the social, historical, and institutional contexts that shape consumer behavior (Ackerman 1997; Shove 2012, p. 418; Wilhite 2012). This chapter examines how consumption is treated in eco-Islamic discourse, arguing that Islam encourages sustainable consumer practices. Furthermore, it explores Muslim consumers of modest fashion in different geographical and social contexts to discuss how a variety of factors participate in the shaping of Muslim consumer behavior. This involves, among other things, the reframing of Islamic ideals, which are employed to align with an increasing consumer culture. Thus, the following identifies and outlines varying camps of ethical approaches to consumption that draw on Islamic sources.

This is done in two main parts: first, I examine how actors from the eco-Islamic discourse conceptualize an ethical and sustainable approach to consumption by interpreting

texts from the Islamic tradition. The field has become known as Islam and ecology, Islam and the environment, eco-Islam, or Islamic eco-theology, which is a modern construct that arose as a response to contemporary environmental concerns from an Islamic point of view. For the sake of brevity, I apply the term eco-Islam/eco-Islamic whenever I refer to the writings accumulated within this field.

In the second part, attention is brought to the Islamic culture industry, referring to a growing market for commodities, media, advertising, businesses, and consumer segments identified as Islamic (Gökariksel and McLarney 2010). More specifically, I explore secondary research from different disciplines, such as marketing and the social sciences, that deals with Muslims who engage in modest fashion in different contexts. Here, the aim is to explore the ways in which the impact of neoliberalism and consumerism, social structures, religious and cultural expressions of identity, and lifestyle contributes to shaping consumer behavior, whether conscious or unconscious. How are expressions of 'Islamic' communicated through Muslim consumption? Before proceeding with the analysis of consumption in the eco-Islamic discourse, it is necessary to clarify what I mean by Islamic.

Contradicting Expressions of Islamic

To emphasize the diverse and contradictory expressions of Islamic (eco-Islamic and Islamic culture industry), it is useful to draw attention to the ways in which the term 'Islamic' operates in different realms. In this regard, Shahab Ahmed's conceptualization of Islam is particularly useful, as it sheds light on the dynamic and sometimes contradictory expressions of Islamic thought and practice. In his posthumous book, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*, Ahmed conceptualizes Islam as a *hermeneutical engagement* referring to engagement by an actor or agent with a source or object of (potential) meaning in a way that ultimately *produces meaning for the actor* by way of the source (Ahmed 2016, p. 345). Being Islamic, in this sense, means producing a meaning that rests on a hermeneutical interpretation of the sources of Islam and which is relevant and meaningful in the given context. The analytical project is then to conceptualize Islam as a historical and human phenomenon dealing with the interpretation of God's revelation, the Sunnah, the *hadith* literature, and the overall Islamic tradition. Understanding what it means to be Islamic in this way sheds light on the complex, diverse, and contradicting aspects embedded within the formation of theological, ethical, and practical expressions of Islamic meaning-making. *Hermeneutical* draws attention to truth and meaning, to the processes of interaction, interpretation, and understanding, to the identity of the sources of meaning, and to the methods employed in the formation of truth and meaning. Further, *engagement* draws focuses on the human actor in the processes of truth- and meaning-making and to the articulation and implementation of Islamic (meanings) in the real lives of Muslims (Ahmed 2016, p. 345). This leaves room for the contradiction between ideas, values, and practices that claim normative affiliation with Islam and provides the opportunity to look at multiple phenomena that are glaringly contradictive without taking a normative position and declaring them 'un-Islamic.' Further, to see these displaying expressions of Islamic as hermeneutical engagement with Islamic sources emphasizes the human and social component in the ways Islamic meaning is produced. In addition, it illustrates that these expressions of Islamic also exist in the same realm as, and influence how Muslims engage in, contemporary consumer practices.

Eco-Islam: Cultivating Moderation and Frugality

The rising environmental concern that began in the late 1960s was first addressed from an Islamic perspective by Sayyed Hussein Nasr. Other voices apparent in the 1970s and 1980s were Ziauddin Sardar and S. Parvez Manzoor, who approached the environmental crisis from an Islamic science perspective (Schwencke 2012, p. 12). Since then, there has been a slow but steady increase in publications that argue for the potential and possibility for religion to infuse a spiritual dimension to the environmental challenges and for the potential of religious communities participating in transformative social change. Many scholars within this discipline explore and identify profound environmental teachings in the Quran, *hadith* literature, and the Islamic tradition (ranging from legal, mystical, classical literature, poetry, etc.) (Nasr 1997; Ouis 1998; Dien 2000; Ammar 2001; Özdemir 2003; Ramadan 2007; Abdul-Matin 2010; Tlili 2012; Fagan 2016; Gade 2019; Khalid 2019). However, it should be noted that this is not part of the mainstream theology. Thus, there are a considerable number of Muslims who are not taking part in this discourse or in explicit environmentalism. In fact, it has been argued that the eco-Islamic discourse is still in its *information state*, in which the primary focus is spreading knowledge and increasing awareness of the environmental perspectives in Islam and placing this in the context of today's challenges (Mohamed 2013, p. 325). Nevertheless, empirical studies over recent decades indicate a presence of Muslim environmentalism in both Muslim-majority countries and the Western diaspora, where Islamic theological concepts are emphasized as motivational factors for environmental engagement. Prominent examples of this are found in Indonesia (Schwencke 2012; Mohamed 2013; Gade 2021), Iran (Schwencke 2012, pp. 34–37), Egypt (Foltz 2005), South Africa (Mohamed 2013), Zanzibar (Mohamed 2013), Senegal (Schwencke 2012), Turkey (Foltz 2005; Schwencke 2012), the UK (Hancock 2018), and the US (Abdul-Matin 2010; Hancock 2018), to name but a few. This list is far from exhaustive; however, it does indicate the presence of a growing social movement.

At the core of many eco-Islamic writings is that the environmental crisis is also a spiritual crisis in the sense that the modern way of being human lacks the metaphysical knowledge pertaining to nature, and its sacred quality must be retrieved (Nasr 1997, p.14). Thus, the central Islamic notion of *tawheed* (God's Oneness) is highlighted in a way that also stresses the interconnectedness among all creatures in God's creation. Another central notion is that of *ayat*, referring to both Quranic verses and the signs of God in creation on a micro and macro level (e.g., ranging from the mechanisms of a fly to the oceans and the sun).³

These aim to connect creation with the creator and to situate the human within the creation. Many authors from the eco-Islamic discourse recognize overconsumption and consumerism as key components in the cause of the ecological crises. Several authors critique capitalism, interest/usury, the growth paradigm, and materialism (all driven in one way or another by the need for increased consumption) and present Islamic concepts and theoretical frameworks as part of the solution to tackle these issues, especially by drawing on spiritual practices (Nasr 1997; Ouis 1998; Dien 2000; Abdul-Matin 2010; Fagan 2016; Khalid 2019). While few authors actually define what they mean by spiritual, the frameworks presented often include cultivating and reflecting upon individual relationships with God and an inner struggle and self-awareness to improve actions. Several offer concrete advice on changing unsustainable habits by drawing on teachings from the Islamic tradition (Abdul-Matin 2010; Fagan 2016; Khalid 2019). The following section explores how verses

from the Quran are highlighted in connection to contemporary consumption and further examines one Islamic concept appearing in some of the writings: *iktisad*.⁴

In their work, Abdelzaher et al. have highlighted three terms from the Quran that deal directly with consumption practices (2017, p. 633). In some verses, *wasatiyya* (middle, centered, balanced) refers to a conscious moderation (in the use of resources), while *israf* (immoderateness, waste, exaggeration) is connected to extravagance or overconsumption. This includes overconsuming goods that are allowed or even necessary (eating, drinking, etc., i.e., everyday consumption). Finally, the term *tabdhir* (squander, waste, dissipate) refers to wasting unnecessary things. These authors emphasize that the Quranic message on consumption stresses excessive waste and overconsumption as damaging to human spirituality, leading them to unjust actions (Abdelzaher et al. 2017, p. 633). In an article published in the *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* entitled 'Islamic Iktisad (Frugality): Solution to Consumerism as the Root Cause of Environmental Destruction,' advocate for Islam Heather Fagan makes similar claims. Fagan argues that the Quran does not approve of lavish or unjust consumption of resources, wastefulness, or extravagance. She refers to the following Quranic line: 'But waste not in excess, for God loves not the wasteful' (Fagan 2016, p. 72; Quran 6:141, 7:31). The line indicates an excess in food consumption as the previous lines address various kinds of food and fruit crops. Hence, the terms used here are *asrafa* (to be extravagant/excessive) and *al-musrifin* (those who are extravagant/excessive), referring to consumer goods of necessity. In addition, Fagan employs a verse from the Quran to emphasize its disapproval of lavish, wasteful, and unjust consumption, linking it to evil and ungratefulness: 'Verily, spendthrifts are brothers of Evil Ones; and the Evil One is to his Lord (Himself) ungrateful' (Fagan 2016, p. 72; cf. Quran 17:27). In this regard, Fagan presents the Islamic concept of *iktisad* as an alternative to consumerism and overconsumption. *Iktisad* incorporates the meaning of frugality; however, this definition alone is not sufficiently accurate, as it includes being economic and spending exactly what is necessary – no more, no less. In addition, it carries a spiritual aspect, as it seeks to address inner desires for material goods and build a foundation for greater satisfaction by focusing on gratitude and personal relations (Fagan 2016, p. 68). Environmental *iktisad*, Fagan argues, means the utilization of natural resources without wasteful, excessive, or extravagant consumption.

To further illustrate Prophet Mohammad's position on consumption, examples of how he would not waste natural resources by mending his own clothes and repairing his own shoes are seen in relation to the contemporary campaign slogan 'Reduce, Reuse and Recycle' (Fagan 2016, p. 74). It could be useful to note in this regard that attitudes and actual practices of getting the maximum utility of commodities must be assumed to be widespread in seventh-century Arabia, simply due to radically different historical circumstances that consequently influenced consumer habits, such as access to natural resources, the development of production and distribution methods, and other relevant historical and social circumstances. This would, thereupon, influence an entirely different attitude on the use and acquisition of commodities, in addition to creating completely different conceptions of needs and what constitutes moderate consumption. However, it can also be assumed that these narrations carried a relevant and valuable message in their time. The status enjoyed by the Prophet would have provided a more comfortable lifestyle than these prophetic narrations suggest, thereby conveying the message of a frugal and moderate attitude to consumer goods.

Two prophetic traditions from the al-Bukhari (d. 870) collection are especially highlighted by Fagan, in which the Prophet stated: (1) 'Wealth is not a lot of goods but it is

being satisfied with what one has,' and (2) 'If the son of Adam has two valleys filled with wealth, he will demand a third, but nothing fills the stomach of the son of Adam like dust' (Fagan 2016, p. 71). Fagan argues that the latter narration deals with human desire and the urge to always want more. However, the spiritual focus emphasized through *iktisad* serves as a tool to curb the feelings of greed and the inner inclination toward consumer goods. Through the lens of accountability, human beings must train and contain their greed, as they will never be satisfied with wealth and material items. In addition, contentment is not obtained through material possession but through the satisfaction of heart and mind (Fagan 2016, p. 71). It should be mentioned that Fagan stresses *iktisad* should not be understood as a prohibition on enjoying material goods or taking pride in how one dresses or presents themselves but instead refers to the Islamic message of moderation (Fagan 2016, p. 75). In this sense, based on the examples of the Prophet and the formulation of *iktisad* in the Islamic tradition, there is a possibility that there are Muslims that exercise a moderate take on consumption and material lifestyles regardless of environmental concerns.

Another author who engages with the concept of *iktisad* is the Sri Lankan-British eco-theologian Fazlun Khalid (b. 1932), who is also the Founder-Director of the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Science based in Birmingham, England. In his book *Signs on the Earth: Islam, Modernity and the Climate Crisis* (2019), he writes that the concept of *iktisad* encourages moderation and simplicity. Further, he clarifies that material benefits are not denied, but hoarding and the accumulation of wealth for its own sake are discouraged. In other words, the Quran is not anti-materialistic; however, it clearly warns against consuming and accumulating in excess: 'It is [Allah] who created everything on the Earth for you (Q 2:29); Do not forbid the good things Allah has made lawful to you. And do not overstep the limits' (Khalid 2019, p. 159; Quran 5:87). While Fagan's treatment of *iktisad* is presented more along the lines of personal consumer behavior, Khalid notes that *iktisad* deals with Islamic thought on finance, banking, economics, trade, commerce, and industry (Khalid 2019, p. 177), and thus connects it to a social and environmental critique of the structures of the global economic systems. Khalid quotes the first verses in *Surat al-Takathur*, stating that: 'Fierce competition for this world distracted you until you went down to the graves. No indeed you will soon know! Again, no indeed you will soon know!' (Khalid 2019, p. 159; Quran 102:1–4). Khalid associates this verse with the competition of modern-day capitalism and stresses that distribution and sharing are encouraged, as indicated by central notions such as *zakat* (obligatory alms) and *sadaqah* (voluntary giving of surplus wealth). Finally, *al-infaq* is an extension of *sadaqah* whereby the deprived are seen as having a right over the surplus wealth of others (Khalid 2019, p. 159). Khalid relates several dire consequences, such as the drastic decline of insects, pollution, global warming, and plastic pollution, to the human lifestyle, the production of goods to accommodate it, and the capitalist system. There is a disconnect between the way we consume and the way human lifestyles affect the natural environment. One way out of this dilemma, Khalid argues, is to discover that everything we do is connected in one way or another to everything else. In other words, Khalid argues the need for a holistic approach to consumption that attaches consumer habits to the natural resources utilized and the environmental harm it causes. This is in line with the definition of consumption outlined in the introduction of this chapter, which includes the processes of production invisible to the consumer. Further, the aim of this holistic approach is to communicate the ways this practice is harmful, thus emphasizing the ethical component. Moreover, Khalid adds a spiritual

element that includes connecting the consumption of natural resources more explicitly to God's creation and engaging in an ethical relationship with God and God's creation.

One major challenge not addressed in relation to *iktisad* is how one draws a line between moderate and excessive consumption, especially considering socio-economic aspects and changing attitudes. While it is possible to deduce from the Quran that extravagance and conspicuous consumption are strongly discouraged, and moderation encouraged, consumption of luxury goods is not entirely prohibited if one consumes in accordance with one's means (Ali 2016, p. 148). Further, needs are often individual, socially dependent, relative, context-based, and difficult to define. So how does one define moderate consumption? And how should consumption be approached holistically in Islam, attending to both the spiritual and religious aspects and to the invisible processes of environmental exploitation and degradation that are attached to it? These questions are raised to indicate the complexity of consumer behavior and will not be given any clear-cut answers. However, I do argue for the importance of recognizing the ways the structures of neoliberalism and consumerism (as a dominant and globalizing cultural and social ethos) are penetrating and transforming the 'religious' worldwide in locally embedded forms (Gauthier and Martikainen 2013). To treat consumer behavior as a carrier of social practice, acknowledging this structural perspective would be a more realistic approach to dealing with consumption holistically.

Islamic Culture Industry: Expressing Muslim Identity and Lifestyles

While there seems to be a consensus regarding the damage the capitalist market and overconsumption have on the environment, the eco-Islamic discourse has yet to engage with the impacts consumer culture and the capitalist market have had on Muslim practice and thought. From a different angle, many publications in recent decades have paid attention to the ways Islamic knowledge, performances, and selves are increasingly mediated through commodified cultural forms and spaces, and Muslim identities are constructed through commodities and consumption practices (Gökariksel and McLarney 2010, p. 1; Jafari and Sandikci 2016). Gökariksel and McLarney refer to this as the 'Islamic culture industry' and emphasize 'the way it uses – and creates – networks to circulate signifiers of Islamic identity while also reconfiguring Islamic practices according to the exigencies of the capitalist market and its power structures' (Gökariksel and McLarney 2010, p. 7). While there has been a tendency to view economics and religion as two strongly differentiated social spheres, a growing consensus across the social sciences recognizes that market economics has significantly reconfigured the general landscape of our societies, including the relations and dynamics between the various social spheres (Gauthier 2021, pp. 493–494). Central notions pertaining to market logic, such as competition, enterprise, utility, and choice, have provided a mode of thinking about social institutions and individuals that has come to be deeply embedded within most aspects of social and societal life, including religion. Scholar of comparative religion François Gauthier provides a theoretical framework for the concept of marketization, in which he distinguishes between two sets of processes, namely, *consumerization* and *neoliberalization*. Neoliberalization refers to the effects of the implementation of free-market policies and the ways in which they shape different social realities in utilitarian terms. These social realities include health, education, welfare, labor. Gauthier describes how neoliberalization 'commodifies non-commodities and privileges economic efficiency in social institutions, including religious ones' (Gauthier 2021, p. 495). Neoliberalization, in this sense, is more about the process of market formatting, while consumerization deals

with the ways consumption has transformative cultural significance, carries meaning, and contributes to shaping and expressing identities and communities. Further, consumerization ‘emerges out of the spread and massification of consumption as a desirable ethos and the transformation of world cultures into consumer cultures’ (Gauthier 2021, p. 495). One major effect of consumerization, highlighted by Gauthier, is the way religion is reconfigured into lifestyles, which fosters a need for identity construction, belonging, and life ethics (2021, p. 496). These sets of processes are particularly useful for exploring the various expressions of the Islamic culture industry and the construction of both distinct and diverse Muslim consumer segments.

In trying to map out the development of the Muslim consumer, scholar of marketing Özlem Sandıkcı has identified three phases of how the Muslim consumer has been perceived within mainstream Western marketing theory, namely, *exclusion*, *identification*, and *stylization*. While Muslims in the exclusion phase remained almost invisible, and Muslims tended to be stereotyped as holding anti-market, anti-capitalist, and anti-Western sentiments, the identification phase is characterized by the emergence of a more consumer-oriented culture. Mass production of commodities drawing on Islamic references became increasingly visible in the 1980s and 1990s, signaling the changing nature of the relationship between Islam, the market, and consumption. Muslim consumers were identified as a unique marketing segment requiring products and services specially tailored for them. This encouraged Western companies to better understand Islamic principles and values so as to design commodities that are in accord with religious requirements (Sandıkcı 2018, p. 461). Many marketing analyses hold the same claims. For example, a marketing analysis from 2013 that conducted a quantitative study with 300 Iranian students suggests that companies aiming for the Muslim market would benefit from employing communication strategies signifying modesty, as opposed to sophistication, snobbery, or sex appeals which may be controversial (O’Cass et al. 2013, p. 453). However, as Sandıkcı notes, these analyses tend to treat Islam as a homogenizing force directing all consumer behavior.

The third phase, *stylization*, then represents a shift of attention to subgroups. Overall, this correlates with general strategies in contemporary marketing, where consumption is related to the stylization of everyday life. This entails an emphasis on individualization, where identity is communicated through commodities, sensations, and experiences. Sandıkcı highlights a growing number of Muslim entrepreneurs, bloggers, and lifestyle magazines, as well as subgroups referred to as ‘Mipsters’ (Muslim hipsters), ‘GUMmies’ (Global Urban Muslim consumers), and ‘Generation M.’ These subgroups of Muslim consumers embrace brands and pursue a lifestyle that seamlessly blends (over)consumption with faith and modesty (Sandıkcı 2018, p. 466). This indicates the existence of a growing industry in which actors, including Muslims, utilize Islamic symbols, concepts, and ideas to encourage consumption. The following section explores examples of consumers of Islamic modest fashion as a component of the Islamic culture industry.

Mipsters, Generation M, and Pop-Islam

The apparel industry is the second most polluting industry in the world (after the oil industry), and its environmental impact can be traced through every single step of the process: disrupting entire ecosystems through soil erosion, smog, and freshwater pollution. In addition, it accounts for 10 percent of global carbon emissions and uses 25 percent of the chemicals produced worldwide (Słominski 2019, pp. 29–30). The Islamic modest fashion

industry constitutes a relatively new global segment; nevertheless, it is a fast-growing trend noted by many fashion brands, and ‘many have rushed to cater to this relatively untapped global billion-dollar industry’ (Berjikian and Limam 2020). According to a 2018 report by *Thomson Reuters* and *DinarStandard*, Muslim consumers spent \$270 billion on modest fashion in 2017, while a report the following year showed \$283 billion was spent in 2018. A growth projection for the sector estimates that sales are expected to reach \$402 billion by 2024 (Berjikian and Limam 2020). This indicates an ambivalence between theoretical ideals of consumption presented in the eco-Islamic discourse and actual consumer practices among many Muslims globally. The point here is not to stress unsustainable consumer habits or assign blame but rather to explore the ways expressions of Islamic identity and lifestyle are communicated through consuming modest fashion and shaped alongside multiple societal structures.

In the Indonesian context, American anthropologist Carla Jones has examined how Muslim women negotiate borders of materiality and piety (2010). Jones argues that a growing number of fashion brands and fashion magazines promote a ‘modest’ style that maintains Islamic clothing conduct in terms of covering the female body and how the increased use of Islamic cultural symbols as fashion accessories, such as the hijab, reveal a new type of discourse on consumption. This discourse frames Islamic ideas of modesty and piety alongside conceptions of beauty and cleanliness. Arguments like ‘God appreciates beauty’ and ‘It’s sunnah to always look clean and presentable,’ which refer to Prophet Mohammad’s example as an exemplary source of conduct, are employed to promote the consumption of modest fashion (Jones 2010, p. 619). According to Jones, this framing is not without critique, as some religious actors accuse women engaging in modest fashion of being vain, superficial, and not engaging in pious behavior.

Another study situated in the Kuwaiti context interviewed young Muslim women who are reframing Western luxury fashion brand meaning through consumption in upper-class Kuwaiti society (Al-Mutawa 2013). The article is directed at marketing agencies, providing insight into advertising appeals for this specific consumer group. Contrary to the research that concludes that advertisements aimed at the Muslim female consumer should use culturally congruent appeals (especially when it comes to expressing sexuality), this study examines how luxury brands (e.g., Chanel, Dior, Dolce & Gabbana, Gucci, Prada) are not only consumed by these young Muslim women but are coveted. These brands, however, are used in novel and hybrid ways, expressing what the girls in the study referred to as ‘moderately sexy.’ New representations of the brands associate them with modest, high-class, and fashionable young women. Thus, consumption of these brands is ‘neutralized’ and accepted in a large part of Kuwaiti upper-class society. Al-Mutawa suggests that inferring the lifestyle of young Muslim women based solely on Islamic texts can be misleading as it conjures an image of the ideal Muslim woman rather than the more complex reality. By wearing these brands in a different way than in ads, a way that is not revealing the body, the author suggests that young women are creating a synthesis of opposing identities. Giving them the ‘best of both worlds’ in the consumption domain so they do not need to compromise between social prohibitions and personal desires (Al-Mutawa 2013, p. 240). What this study indicates is that Islam or cultural signifiers of the Islamic can, in fact, co-exist with conspicuous and status-seeking consumption in the realm of fashion clothing.

Expert on contemporary Muslim identity, Imène Ajala explores the case of Islamic streetwear in mainly Western countries. She employs terms like ‘cool Islam’ and ‘pop-Islam’ to describe Islamic streetwear that abides by conservative religious practices while also

adopting the codes of youth and pop culture (Ajala 2017, p. 61). Islamic streetwear is defined as a style of urban clothing that considers religious prescriptions in terms of dress and occasionally conveys Islamic messages. The focus of this particular study is on the Islamic messages printed on T-shirts and hoodies that are sold by online brands, such as StyleIslam. The buyers are generally young Muslims, with university students constituting high shares, not only from Europe but also from Middle Eastern countries such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates (Ajala 2017, p. 62). Some of the printed messages read 'I love my Prophet,' 'Tawhid' (oneness of God), 'Sabr' (enduring in hardship), and 'Keep smiling its Sunnah.' By employing theories of multicultural identities and secularism in globalized religious communities, Ajala argues that clothing carrying messages like 'Hijab – My right My choice,' 'I'm Muslim Don't panic,' and 'Don't trust media ask me about Islam' must be understood within the sociopolitical reality these young Muslims live in. In this sense, in a Western setting, 'cool Islam' and 'pop-Islam' are conciliatory ways to claim pride in being a westernized Muslim (Ajala 2017, p. 68). Ajala's research points to some important findings about Muslim consumption in the geopolitical context of post-9/11 Western societies. According to Jafari and Sandıkcı (2016), 9/11 marked the beginning of a new era in world history in the sense that it created an exceptional global awareness about Islam. In the post-9/11 context, many Muslims 'felt the urge to counteract the negative label of terrorism attached to them by trying to "normalize" their image as modern and ordinary citizens in contemporary society' (Jafari and Sandıkcı 2016, p. 6). The authors stress the importance of the above-mentioned dynamics for researchers interested in the intersections of Islam, consumption, marketing, and markets.

The final two examples are taken from my own local context, Norway. The empirical material presented is mainly from magazines and online interviews. Muslims in Norway are a fragmented group from many different backgrounds. The first Pakistani immigrants arrived as laborers in the 1960s and 1970s, while immigration since then has consisted mainly of those seeking asylum (Vogt 2008). Pakistanis are the largest group, followed by Somalians, Iraqis, Bosnians and Herzegovinians, Iranians, Turkish, and other countries. As of 2021, the number of Muslims living in Norway was estimated at 169,605 (3.1 percent of the total population of 5,415,166) (SSB 2022). Expression of modest fashion in the public sphere in Norway is a very recent phenomenon, showcased on the covers of mainstream fashion magazines, in tv-shows, and among public figures on social media.

My first example is Rawdah Mohamed, a model, activist, and influencer. In 2021, she became the first Norwegian fashion editor of *Scandinavian Vogue* (Brunstad 2021). In an interview with *American Vogue*, Mohamed highlights the hijab as a form of expression, as opposed to oppression (which is the common understanding of the veil within mainstream fashion). She explains, 'I'm definitely using it to make a statement that, yes, I'm a Muslim woman, I'm doing this, and you guys have to deal with it,' referring to the exclusivity in the fashion industry (Borrelli-Persson 2019). Mohamed hopes to pave the way for other girls wearing the hijab, making it more acceptable. Rawdah Mohamed has also become a spokesperson against racism, drawing on her own experiences as a Somali refugee in Norway, and is a prominent advocate for Muslim female rights. In 2021, she started the social media campaign #handsoffmyhijab, which went viral.

The second example is Iman Meskini, a 'hijabi' influencer and actress from the popular Norwegian youth TV series *SKAM* who has received international attention. In 2022, Meskini was listed by Forbes as a top 30 under 30 in the category of social impact. The website highlights how Meskini has used her large fan base (with over 500,000 followers

on Instagram alone) to spark critical conversations about representations of Muslim youth in Norway and other Western countries. It describes how she is ‘often breaking barriers as the first woman to wear a hijab in many situations, such as during her service in the Norwegian Army and on the cover of popular fashion magazine *Costume*’ (Forbes 2022). She was the first woman in a hijab to appear on the cover of a Norwegian fashion magazine in 2017. In an interview with *Costume*, Meskini explains it can be challenging to shop for clothes that align with the requirements of Islamic clothing in mainstream shops, so she has developed a shopping routine (Fuglehaug 2017). By first scanning the contents of the shop, she quickly passes by shorts and miniskirts (or other items that fail to meet the requirements). Other potential garments are quickly assessed by asking questions such as: Is it transparent? Is it long enough? Covering enough? What clothes would be needed over or under the garment to be able to use it? Then, she decides whether it’s worth buying – or if it’s simply too much fuss. In the interview, Meskini highlights Islam as a belief, a great passion, and a lifestyle: ‘For Islam is my lifestyle. Because Islam is a lifestyle. Islam explains how you should behave and how you should live. In a way, it describes everything’ (Fuglehaug 2017, my translation). Meskini expresses pride in being Muslim and over her hijab while affirming that clothing communicates identity. The emphasis seems to be on Islam being an integrated aspect of lifestyle, one that can be aesthetic but may also be eco-oriented, as expressed in Abdul-Matin’s *Green Deen* (2010). Islamic lifestyles reflect a wide diversity and convey multifaceted expressions. However, what does it entail that Islam is increasingly described as a lifestyle – and one which consequently describes everything? Lifestyle as a concept has come to emphasize issues of agency, practice, and meaning-making within the spaces of everyday life as a key feature for understanding the character of contemporary society so that ‘people create lifestyles out of their interests, enthusiasms, hobbies, and style preferences through an aestheticization of daily life’ (Hetherington 2011). However, it might be important to note that the idea of lifestyles has a long history that is closely associated with consumption practices and consumer culture, as it is a term often associated with matters of how people communicate their tastes through their individual everyday interests and practices. Viewing this in light of the theory of marketization (Gauthier 2021), where the process of consumerization describes the reconfiguring of religion into lifestyles, the presence of identity construction, belonging, and life ethics – highlighted as vital components in this reconfiguration – are present in social media content. Due to Meskini’s wide range and popularity among non-Muslims, her posts on social media often attempt to educate her followers on the basic tenants of Islam and common misconceptions, to present political and ethical content, and there are also ads, fashion or hijab tutorials, and general lifestyle posts.

These two examples from Norway are important because they point to other aspects involved with consumption for Muslims in addition to reframing ideals of modesty in fashion. These women both highlight their position as role models and emphasize the feedback they get from young Muslim followers, especially girls who share that they finally feel represented (as a minority in Western European society). Therefore, there is also an aspect of belonging to a community. It is significant for these young Muslims to witness a woman who is in a hijab on the cover of a fashion magazine or on television and who is not portraying a stereotype of veiled Muslim women. Relatedly, because of their popularity and exposure among the non-Muslim population, Mohamed and Meskini contribute to breaking down common stereotypes. Issues of inclusivity and representation are important factors when it comes to consuming modest fashion and

communicating a Muslim identity that intends to address stereotypical representations of Muslims (especially veiled women) in the public sphere.

Further, both Meskini and Mohamed highlight personal religiosity, emphasizing rituals like praying and fasting, something they openly display on TV and in social media, thus indicating that spirituality can exist alongside expressions of consumption. This further complicates any assumption that Muslims engaging in conspicuous consumption or modest fashion might not be 'sincere Muslims.' Instead, it argues for a complexity that allows for both pious sincerity and conspicuous consumption to co-exist within the same person and points to reframing the concepts of religion to understand 'how Islam is experienced and practiced in daily life in particular sociopolitical contexts' (Lewis 2016, p. 85). The highlighting of the hijab as a statement for strong, independent women and as an expression of personal choice and pride similarly fits into a secular discourse that draws on a frame of human rights (Døving 2012, p. 38). Thus, attire and commodities become a way to communicate Muslim identity in a secular public space. At the same time, this illustrates that many young Muslims do not see any contradiction or problems with displaying a Muslim identity through commodities and consumption practices. On the contrary, in an interview with *Vogue*, Mohamed stresses that the fashion industry should recognize the potential for increased revenues by displaying more diversity (Borelli-Persson 2019). Such voices emphasize that neither consumerism nor fashion are necessarily antithetical to religious belief (Khan 2017).

Concluding Remarks

The formulation of an ethical and sustainable approach to consumption from an Islamic point of view is a significant and convincing endeavor. The eco-Islamic discourse connects environmental ethics to consumer behavior, and, thus, seeks to create a holistic approach to consumption that addresses the spiritual aspects of the pious consumer by drawing on the conception of *iktisad*. This notion ties together key terms dealing with consumption in the Quran and attempts to cultivate moderation through spirituality and gratitude while warning against excessive waste. The potential for social transformation stemming from religious beliefs should not be underestimated; however, it should not be overestimated either. While Islam in the eco-Islamic discourse is presented as the antidote to Western capitalism and consumerism, Muslim identities are increasingly negotiated and communicated through commodities. Moreover, consumerism and overconsumption, along with their environmental impacts, are major challenges in Muslim-majority countries as well. Exploring the massive impact that the processes of marketization have on multiple levels in society, including religion, could be fruitful for tackling the underlying social structures of overconsumption. Further, viewing the expressions of the Islamic culture industry within a broader social, historical, and geopolitical framework is essential to understand how global neoliberal systems employ signs and signifiers of the Islamic to promote and encourage consumption. While the examples in this chapter must be seen in their specific contexts, they cannot be separated from the larger globalized cultural and social ethos in which they are embedded. These perspectives invite future studies in the field of eco-Islamic thought, Muslim environmentalism(s), and how Muslims' consumer practices (especially everyday consumption) are integrated into religious practices and daily life. They also show that a holistic approach to consumption must pay attention to the perspectives of lived religion and the dynamics of the neoliberal market. Finally, examining the eco-Islamic discourse,

when faced with the new Islamic culture industry, reveals the meaning of being Islamic as shaped and developed in relation to contemporary realities. This uncovers a need for Islamic values and modern structures to be re-examined considering each other and in light of a new ecological awareness.

Notes

- 1 Parts of this chapter draw heavily on the seventh chapter from my master's thesis (2020), which is entitled *Islam in the Age of the Ecological Apocalypse: A Content Analysis of the Islamic Eco-Theological Discourse*.
- 2 Rational choice theory is generally the dominant framework for understanding social and economic behavior, where individual actors all engage in (individual) rational decision-making. These agents are assumed to consider rational calculations and make rational choices aligned with the person's self-interest (Ganti 2020).
- 3 For a more elaborate discussion on these and other central notions in the Islamic eco-theological discourse, see the fifth chapter in my master's thesis (2020).
- 4 The authors of the eco-theological literature write *iktisad*, which is why I have chosen to write it in this manner; however, a more accurate way of writing *iktisad* in English letters would be *iqtisad* – as the Arabic root letters are *qaf-sad-dal*. The term derives from a root that means to move in a straightforward, direct path, and means prudence or economy of use – hence, 'moderation.' As an example, al-Ghazali's classical work *Al-Iqtisad fi al-i'tiqad* often translates to *Moderation in Belief* (Davis 2005, p. 6).

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MEDIATED CONSUMERISM AMONG SALAR MUSLIM WOMEN IN NORTHWEST CHINA

Circumventing Marital Disobedience via WeChat

Tang Man

Introduction

The Salar Muslims are a Turkic-speaking ethnic minority in China whose origin traces back to Central Asia. According to Salar oral histories, the ancestors of Salars left Samarkand several centuries ago to flee persecution and settled in what is now Xunhua Salar Autonomous County on the northeast corner of Qinghai Province, northwest China (Ma and Stuart 1996). Based on linguistic and ethnographic evidence, scholars have identified the Salars as decedents of the Salur branch of Oghuz Turkmen migrants from Central Asia who were likely to have followed Chingis Khan as part of the invading army in the thirteenth century (Mi 1981; Dwyer 2006). For around 800 years, the Salar descendants have cohabited with Tibetans, Mongols, Hui,¹ and Han Chinese. Then, in 1954, they were officially identified as one of the 55 ethnic minorities in China and labeled Salar.

Located on the northeast of the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau, Qinghai Province is adjacent to Gansu, Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, and Tibet and has been historically the ‘middle ground’ where different cultures, religions, and ethnicities meet and intertwine (Lipman 1997, p. 28). Qinghai is one of the three largest yet least populated provinces in the western part of China,² with 64.6 percent of its population concentrating on 2.8 percent of the land in its northeast area: the capital city of Xining and the Haidong District.³ Xunhua County, an administrative part of Haidong District, stretches on the valleys of the Yellow River, surrounded by barren mountains. Due to unfavorable geographical and climate conditions, communications within the region and beyond have been for a long time severely limited.

Since the late 1970s, China started its opening and reform policies, which have brought about fundamental economic transformations manifest in marketization, industrialization, and internationalization (Yang 2019). Toward the end of the twentieth century, the country embraced global consumerism and pop culture via mass media, and the concepts of freedom, independence, and personal development became widespread in contemporary

Chinese society (Yan 2008). But the northwest of China remained relatively isolated until the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century when the Chinese state initiated its Western Development Strategy (*xibu da kaifa*) in 2000 and the *Belt and Road* Initiative proposed in 2013. These plans for the social and economic development of the Western region were initiated to address the problems of unbalanced development between the Eastern and Western areas of China. Since then, Northwest China has witnessed investments and infrastructural construction on a massive scale, which provides opportunities for business and facilitate mobility. From the 1990s to the early 2000s, many Salar men were engaged in the transport business, running road transport companies on the Qinghai-Tibet road with workers sourced from Xunhua County (Goodman 2008, p. 62) and exchanging goods like barley, timber, minerals, and household commodities between destinations in Qinghai, Sichuan, Xinjiang, and Tibet.⁴ But since the late 2000s, the operation of the Qinghai-Tibet railway connecting Golmud to Lhasa greatly impacted Salar businesses, forcing them to look for economic opportunities elsewhere. The profit made from decades of involvement in the transport business in the Qinghai-Tibet plateau enabled them to quickly develop other enterprises, including hotels, restaurants, and petro/diesel stations, many of which are still operational today. Notably, many Salars started to migrate out of Xunhua and open family-based halal lamian⁵ restaurants in cities like Xining, Golmud, and Lhasa, as well as in major cities in the Chinese hinterland. The outward migration of Salar Muslims and their subsequent encounter with an urbanized and commercialized society has led to significant changes in their lived experience. This is particularly the case for Salar women, as a large number of them have had the experience of migrating outside of Xunhua along with their family members to engage in the lamian restaurant business in hinterland China. The material growth thus gained feeds back into the changing landscape in their hometown, which goes in tandem with the state-initiated infrastructural development of transport and telecommunication that has enormously facilitated the circulation of goods, people, ideas, knowledge, and identities within the region and beyond.

During my fieldwork stay in Xunhua between 2020 and 2021, while walking along the paved streets of the town, it was not uncommon to see halal bakeries, bubble tea shops, and baby's and women's clothing stores. Outside these, poster stands caught my eye as they displayed images of fashionably dressed women wearing sunglasses and a wide-brimmed sun hat. These images reflect the development of social infrastructure and the marketization of the economy, which triggers drastic changes to the townspeople's social life, consumption, taste, and behaviors. Transportation infrastructure has also undergone significant transformations. Compared to the street scene that David Goodman (2005, p. 1) depicted during his fieldwork in Xunhua between 2001 and 2003, the walls and sidewalks once made of pressed mud have been replaced with higher and wider ones made of bricks and concrete. At times, I came across a couple of senior-aged women covered in the traditional *gaitou*⁶ and long black robes. But most prominently, there were young women with delicate makeup and a draped headscarf made of light material (some with shiny beads or stripes or embroidered patterns). These women were primarily dressed in bright-colored chiffon shirts tucked into black harem trousers, leaving their feet visible, wearing black tights and pumps, plus a Saint Laurent or Dior crossbody bag to add some luxuriously branded credentials. This seems to be the trendiest fashion of clothing and dressing among Salar women in the early 2020s. The scene of leisurely walking and fashionable-looking young women was most significant to me because, in Goodman's depiction, the presence

of men on the town streets was overwhelming, and ‘women almost invariably wear a black headscarf, and have their arms, legs and shoulders also clothed... [and they] walk at a discreet distance behind their husbands’ (Goodman 2005, p. 1). Nowadays, in this small town that 130,000 Salars consider home, the streets strike me not only as a theater for demonstrating and observing the latest fashion style of Salar women but also as a witness of the changes in terms of gender relations, the presentation of the self, and marital intimacy among Salar communities.

These changes are also evident on social media platforms where Salar women have tended to exhibit their fashion and leisure consumption. Social media has become a significant part of their everyday life, as they conduct a wide range of activities through online platforms, such as religious learning, socializing, and business. These activities constitute a lifestyle that has made them morally dubious in the face of the effective normativity in Salar society. The normativity takes expressions in both Islamic and patriarchal forms yet has met continuous challenges from the market-driven consumerism in Northwest China, triggering moral debates about women’s role in the family and participation in public life. These moral tensions that Salar Muslim women are experiencing have been paid much less attention to⁷ but are no less significant than those observed among the non-Muslim communities in China that have been well-documented by anthropologists. Among them, Lisa Rofel (2007) examines the production of desires, cosmopolitan consumer identity, and the expression of the self in Chinese public culture and regards the rise of the individual in contemporary Chinese society as part of the processes of global capitalism and neoliberalism.⁸ This chapter, then, asks how Salar Muslim women experience these transformations, particularly the expansion of global consumerism into Northwest China initiated by the state’s infrastructural development plans and technological advancement. And how is this reflected in their newly developed consumerist lifestyle as observed on the streets, on social media, and in their everyday lives?

In response to these questions, this chapter aims to explore Salar Muslim women’s mediated practices of consumerism in contemporary Northwest China. Specifically, by examining Salar women’s activities of conducting business on WeChat, traveling, and dress styling, it explores the role of social media and infrastructural development in opening up new spaces in which they can negotiate not only their identity but also their range of mobility in life. Based on a sustained period of fieldwork in the two localities of Xining and Xunhua, Qinghai Province, from 2020 to 2021, I first illustrate the ways in which Salar women use social media to exploit business opportunities and are at the same time appropriated by them. On the one hand, social media enables women to be emancipated from certain normative constraints and provides venues for expressing individuality. But on the other hand, Salar women are made agents for consumerist marketing and are subject to new requirements and norms in terms of appearance, dress, fashion, leisure, and self-presentation. These recently developed lifestyles reveal important insights into the moral tensions in Salar society between Islamic normativities and consumerist values, which are explored with particular reference to the Islamic concept of *nushuz* (marital disobedience; in Arabic, *nushūz*) and *kouhuan* (Islamic permission). The following sections examine two *nushuz* cases that are relevant in the discussion on Salar women and their use of social media, specifically concerning their aspirations to engage in business on WeChat and their desires to travel outside the house. Attention is paid to the role of social media in offering Salar women the opportunity to circumvent marital disobedience and how they navigate the compatibility of their consumerist aspirations with a harmonious marital life.

Women and Business on Social Media

The most popular social media platforms used among Salar women are WeChat (*Weixin* in Chinese), Kuaishou, and Douyin (the Chinese version of TikTok). WeChat was first released in 2011; it is a platform for communication, social interactions, online payment, and e-commerce. The 'social' element of WeChat is not only manifest in its basic functions of messaging and calling but is also powerfully exhibited in the feature of the WeChat Moment (McDonald 2016, p. 43). This feature allows users to post texts, photos, or videos to their Moments page, which is, by default, only visible to all of their WeChat friends. Another significant feature is WeChat Subscriptions. By subscribing to an official WeChat account that is open for registration by ordinary people, celebrities, brands, businesses, public institutions, or government bodies, users can follow the Account's announcements. The feature of Official Accounts thus provides a platform that allows individuals, businesses, and organizations to share various forms of information that cover almost all fields of knowledge and interest: personal stories, literary writing, news reports, commentaries, academic articles, language learning, videos or audios of religious sermons, etc.

In every Salar household I visited, WeChat is a very popular platform for women, particularly those between 30 and 50,⁹ to learn to recite the Quran and scriptural books. Such religious learning classes are conducted flexibly in WeChat chat groups. These groups can be created informally without any authentication requirement. Any group member can, by default, add other individuals from their WeChat friend list or share the QR code¹⁰ of the group with individuals to scan and join until a maximum of 500 members is reached. This has allowed learning groups to grow quickly and their members to network easily. For Salar women, these learning groups are gender-segregated, as the teachers, administrators, and students are women only, and men's presence is not allowed. To maintain the sacred space of learning in the groups, all non-Islam-related messages and information are forbidden. Administrators prevent advertisements of commercial products, recreational links, or personal pictures/videos from being sent in the groups. But on the more private sphere of WeChat Moment, Salar women have created a space for marketing and commercial promotion that is separate from the public space of sacredness in the learning groups. On WeChat Moment, they would share, sometimes daily, a series of postings of a wide range of products: headscarves, scriptural books, women's clothing, bags, children's wear, and, predominantly, certain brands of cosmetics and skin-care products. As WeChat Moment is visible to one's friend list only and not any strange browsers, Salar women seek ways to enlarge the audience of their WeChat Moment advertising. Quite a few Salar women I encountered in the field who were engaged in organizing, teaching, or learning in the Quranic groups on WeChat took advantage of the group membership to add WeChat contacts from the multiple learning groups. Once this type of WeChat 'contactship' was established, they would usually send their individual contacts messages of Islamic greetings, followed by product advertising, including texts and pictures. Drawing on the wide social and commercial network hence developed, they would also establish WeChat groups where they could not only spread advertisements of these commercial products but also seek to enroll their WeChat friends to work as agents for the brands they sell, thus expanding the network of the business.

The expansion of the WeChat business agent network constitutes a part of the growth in micro-businesses that China has witnessed over the past ten years. According to a research report on China's micro-businesses conducted by the data consultant company iResearch,

the concept of micro-business has evolved alongside the changes in the internet social ecosystem (2021). Micro-businesses have come to refer to the businesses and merchants that deal with sales and marketing based on social media platforms, including big companies and brands, individuals, and e-commerce platforms.¹¹ As China's most popular social media platform, WeChat has served as an important social media platform for micro-businesses. The latest WeChat user statistics in 2021 show that the number of active users of WeChat reaches 1.2 billion per month.¹² Furthermore, WeChat's visibility makes it a desirable communication app for trusted personal relationships. Studies have shown that for many Chinese social media users, while other social media apps like QQ have many friends that are less familiar and even some unknown persons, WeChat represents a valuable space reserved for contact between close kin, family members, and good friends (McDonald 2016, p. 46). What is also important is that the feature of online payment offered by WeChat has made buying and selling – be it in the shops, on the internet, or on social media apps – significantly faster, safer, and more convenient. In addition to online payments, users can make direct money transfers or send 'Red Packets'¹³ in their WeChat chat box (an area primarily used for messaging).

WeChat business has thus emerged as a mode of business based on personal relationships and social media contacts. In fact, the large user base and mobile social functions of WeChat offer WeChat business favorable conditions for development. In 2014, the GMV (Gross Merchandise Volume) of WeChat businesses totaled 81.97 billion RMB (or 12.90 billion US dollars); in 2016, the number quadrupled.¹⁴ As with the market expansion, WeChat business began to develop in China's 3rd and 4th Tier¹⁵ cities, such as Xining in the Northwestern region. According to the iResearch report, the majority of the customers of WeChat businesses are women aged 18 to 35. Women also constitute the majority of the operators who promote the sales of cosmetics, clothing, food, and so on. This is also true for Salar Muslim women.

The forceful trend of social media marketization in China has dramatically shaped the formation of Salar women's subjectivities and provided them with space to explore other possibilities in life. But at the same time, social media also subject these women to the constraints of a consumerist lifestyle and facilitate them becoming consumerist marketeers. For example, one Salar woman in her 20s who teaches Quran recitations in several learning groups has been an active WeChat business agent for a couple of branded cosmetics produced in China. She posts daily pictures of skin-care products, texts with emojis that are emotionally appealing, and screenshots of WeChat transactions, bills, or positive comments from customers to showcase how popular the products are and how profitable it is to join the agent's business. Moreover, her Moment is also a site to show her sophisticated 'modern' lifestyle demonstrated in photos and videos of nicely made fruit platters, meals in fancy restaurants, car-driving, styling a woolen coat, and head-scarfed women with delicate makeup holding a thick pile of Chinese banknotes. At times, she posts consumerist declarations that explicitly assert an enthusiastic pursuit of the material: 'Life cannot tolerate your laziness and superficiality; as a woman of the New Era, we [should] pursue independence, wealth, and beauty.' In this sense, being 'radical and new' (Abu-Lughod 1998) is ultimately understood as being independent, beautiful, and rich, which are traits obtained by the business they control.

But women's engagement in WeChat business and the consumerist ideology they proclaim in 'beauty and wealth' frequently arouse moral stigmatization surrounding their online career-making and marital relationships. The following section explores the normative

scrutiny in Salar society, which renders these women as being too exposed and morally dubious, and the ways in which Salar women seek to negotiate these normative constraints, specifically with reference to two relevant *nushuz* cases exemplified in Salar women's career pursuits and their desire for traveling.

WeChat Business As a Career: Consumerism and Marital Discord

In 2020, a WeChat official account named *Minzu*¹⁶ *Digest*, operated by Qinghai Muslims, posted a video that is critical of women engaged in WeChat business. The title conveys the message on its own, 'Attention Muslim folk: what happened to a woman who went from WeChat business to divorce?' In this video, a man appeared on the screen and raised a question: 'what are the professions on WeChat Moment that lead to the highest rate of divorce?' The answers were as follows: 'insurance, finance, and WeChat business.' He then points out the problematic nature of WeChat business, which is the manipulation of women's minds with brainwashing techniques. More importantly, he emphasizes that by catering to women's psychology, WeChat business spreads false ideas that turn spouses against each other and sow discord in their families. Following that, he explains how this marital discord arises:

They [the women engaged in WeChat business] would buy beautiful suits, join the travels/tours and offline activities hosted by the companies, they would leave behind their children for some big occasion, thinking they have shifted to a different social circle... as time goes by, her heart and mind are no longer with her family, she'd rather have frequent gatherings with her teammates, being happy and chirpy in conversations. They say this is what women should be like.¹⁷

Then, he demonstrates that some women start to fight with their husbands who do not permit their WeChat business, and so they turn to their teammates or bosom friends for support, emphasizing that these women, once they have earned money through the business, would feel they are superior to their husbands in terms of 'thinking, competence, and vision.' As a result, they would loathe their husbands and then devote all their hearts to pursuing personal independence and success; and gradually, they would end up choosing divorce so that no one could ever stand in their way. Noticeably, the video states a clear thesis that pits women's career success against the possibility of a happy Islamic marriage and family life and attributes divorce entirely to a wife's choice to pursue economic independence against the husband's will.

In the broader Chinese social context, women have the lawful right to pursue a freely chosen occupation, and it has become the norm, not the exception, for married women to be employed and economically independent.¹⁸ But within Salar Muslim communities in Northwest China, the possibility of a wife's career pursuit has been largely premised on the husband's permission.¹⁹ Permission, locally known as *kouhuan* in Chinese,²⁰ is a very commonly used religious term in the everyday lives of Salar Muslims and other ethnic Muslims in China. According to the *Encyclopedia of Chinese Islam* (2007, p. 298), *kouhuan*,²¹ deriving from the Arabic *idhn*,²² means permission or demand from Allah, or guidance and approval from the head of a certain Sufi order. On the ground, the concept of *kouhuan*, with its original reference to God, has been applied to the context of interpersonal relationships, and it plays a significant role in stipulating not only the relationship between

Allah and Muslims but also between individual persons. Noticeably, several imams and religious scholars from the Qinghai local communities referred to the Arabic equivalent of *kouhuan* as *ijaza*, which means, in an Arabic context, the authorization or license granted by a higher Muslim authority to transmit a certain religious text. This creative equation is understandable because there seems to be no clear distinction between the concept of *idhn* and *ijaza* (*ijāza*) among the local Islamic scholars, and the quotidian use of the Sinitized concept of *kouhuan* carries strong religious implications in dealing with interpersonal matters, particularly over such issues as marriage, divorce, property inheritance, and loan relationships. But in the context of Muslim marriages, *kouhuan* does not work on a mutual basis because only the wife is subject to requesting permission from the husband and not the other way around. In this respect, getting permission from the husband is essential for the wife because failing to do so implicates a lack of *kouhuan* – Islamic permission. It can thus be argued that the appropriated use of *kouhuan* with reference to *ijaza* in Arabic legitimizes the elevation of the husband to the status of a religious authority and expresses an explicit gender bias.

This obligatory one-way act of the wife seeking religious permission from the husband echoes the concept of *nushuz* in the marital relationship in Muslim societies. *Nushuz* is a Quranic concept that means the rebellion of a wife against her husband's authority. It has been applied to various cases ranging from a wife's refusal to meet her husband's sexual needs or bear children to a wife's insistence to work or study outside the home and leave the house alone for travel (Rispler-Chaim 1992). The concept of *nushuz* is not an explicitly recognized religious term in the everyday life of Salar and other Muslim communities in Qinghai and is only known to local religious scholars. But although the term as such does not enjoy quotidian use, it has been traditionally held that Muslim women should submit to the wishes of the husband and that a disobedient wife is generally deemed responsible for the discord in a marriage and even divorce. As some scholars of Islamic studies have suggested, the fear of *nushuz* stems from the fear of the invasion of Western, capitalist, consumerist individualism that is viewed as a disruption of the social fabric and a collectivist Islam (e.g., Mernissi 1986). Similarly, the moral condemnation of the Salar women engaged in WeChat business can be understood in relation to the perceived threat of market-driven consumerism against Salar society's Islamic (patriarchal) norms. Therefore, the normative concept of *nushuz* offers a lens to examine the specific cases of moral tensions that Salar women experience as they navigate between the dynamic forces of consumerist values, individualistic aspirations, and normative Islamic ideals.

Two cases of *nushuz* on the part of Salar women are exemplary: their aspirations to work and their desires to travel outside the house. Both illustrate constraints on women's freedom of movement, and they constitute the discussion about the development of social media in the rest of this chapter. As social media expand the space for women's social interactions and open new economic opportunities, the boundaries of *nushuz* have tended to dissolve. In this regard, scholars like Musfata Kamal Rokan et al. (2020) have argued that it is necessary to reconstruct the concept of *nushuz* for the digital era because social media enable women to conduct social interactions anytime and anywhere and to present themselves in a way that, in their view, violates Islamic norms. Using a conceptual approach to *nushuz*, they argue normatively that the wife's *nushuz* can no longer be limited to the act of leaving the physical house without the husband's permission and should also include the use of social media by the wife without the husband's permission. In contrast to the normative discussion of *nushuz*, this chapter takes an ethnographic approach by focusing on the

concept of *nushuz* as a site of moral tensions surrounding women in Salar society and how the development of social media enables them to generate new practices in navigating these tensions.

Without blatantly challenging the Islamic normativity in terms of *kouhuan* and *nushuz*, these Salar women have developed strategies to circumvent marital disobedience and negotiate religious permission from their husbands. For one thing, more and more Salar women are aware of the importance of having a paid job or a stable income in negotiating permission from their husbands. One Salar woman gave me an account of her observation in a flower shop in Xunhua where she used to work:

A woman [who] entered the shop with an income was free to buy whatever flowers she wanted, with her husband remaining silent aside, whereas those housewives would always ask the price and would not dare to buy anything without the husband's permission.

The husband's silence is thus seen as passive permission acquired through using an independent source of income as leverage, and it further reflects the changing dynamics of the marital relationship in the Salar Muslim families influenced by consumerist individualism. The dramatizing slogan 'do not be a princess of a man and be only the queen of yourself' is widely circulated and marketized among Salar women engaged in WeChat business. The cultural shift from being a princess to a queen, informed by the rise of individualism in China, shows Salar women's wish and attempt to change their status of being obedient and dependent on their husbands. In this light, while it can be argued that Salar women are being appropriated by social media as subjects and objects for consumerist marketing, one should not overlook the fact that social media also facilitate the process whereby they navigate their own space in the face of the patriarchal form that has been normalized through the concepts of *nushuz* and *kouhuan* in Salar society.

Furthermore, Salar women engaged in WeChat business have tended to emphasize that they work not only for wealth but, more importantly, for 'affording what one's parents and children want' without 'having to ask for money' from their husbands. They try to show that being economically independent not only enables a Muslim woman to achieve her self-worth but can also fulfill her obligations of filial piety and family care. Indeed, observing the WeChat Moment postings, one of their frequent themes has been how women have successfully managed to strike a balance between their business and family life. As a counter-narrative against the claim that 'the women calling for success and independence are either single or divorced' or 'the women's heart and mind are no longer with their family,' many women share photos/videos to showcase the husband's support in the wife's WeChat business and to display their efforts to take care of their baby or child. The latter includes preparing nice-looking fruit salads and nutritious breakfasts for their children.

In the face of the perceived conflict between women's pursuit of an online business and their fulfillment of family obligations, these Salar women also draw on religious piety to legitimize their consumerist and individualist aspirations. Noticeably, amidst the myriad advertising postings for cosmetic products, they concomitantly post religious texts and preaching messages. On Fridays and during Ramadan, they would post religious texts of moral exhortation that often emphasize the importance of health, inner peace, and the everyday practice of Islamic ideals. Significantly, these postings suggest that Islam is not treated as a constraining power in patriarchal forms over their self-expression but rather

something that empowers women to be who they are and what they aspire to be. Many of the postings circulated on WeChat Moment stress that women need to please Allah in their fear and submission if they want to be granted what they long for; and that if Allah has given women what pleases them, they should also do in return what pleases Allah. This seems to indicate that material wealth and beauty are considered Allah's blessings bestowed on women. Through posting religious messages concomitantly with product advertising, these women show that they have religious permission to pursue their desired career as long as they show awe to Allah, even if this might go against the wish of their husbands. In this way, they manage to go beyond marital disobedience by developing a new understanding of the relationship between Islamic piety and personal pursuits.

In the next section, I examine another *nushuz* case related to social media, manifested further in the activity of traveling, often accompanied by fashionable dress styling. Attention is paid to how Salar women use social media to form a specific sociality of leisure and create a relatively safe place, thereby avoiding *nushuz*. Traveling and dress styling are two important themes of social media postings, reflecting the consumerist lifestyle that is becoming prevalent in everyday life. As two major venues of consuming leisure and fashion, traveling and dress styling further reveal the moral tensions about marriage and the role of women in the family between consumerist values and the traditional Islamic normativity that stresses the wife's obedience to the husband, restrictions on women's travel, and the importance of modesty in public spaces.

Fashion and Leisure: Traveling Amu – 'Aunts' on Social Media

With the advancement of digital technologies and the expansion of consumerism into everyday life, many Salar women have become internet influencers on Kuaishou and Douyin,²³ a highly open space where they post videos of their travels and fashion style, demonstrating their virtual projects of beauty, wealth, and leisure. Traveling thus constitutes another case of *nushuz* where Salar women are made the subject of moral debates among the local Muslim communities.

On Kuaishou and Douyin, a recent popular hashtag among Qinghai Muslim users is 'Xunhua Amu' or 'Black Tights Amu.' In the Salar language, *Amu* is a kinship term used to address their aunt. But on social media and in everyday discourse, it began to take on a sarcastic and even derogatory connotation, referring to Salar women who are featured in the short videos on Kuaishou and Douyin wearing pumps, black tights, and particularly a headscarf that leaves a part of their hair uncovered in the front. The videos of *Amu* are usually dubbed with Tibetan songs or pop songs in English or Chinese. In the videos, these Salar women are filmed with beauty filters while traveling on the road, standing beside or lying inside a car, zooming into their luxurious handbags, wristwatches, hands on the steering wheel, or feet in black tights and pumps.

The clothing and dressing style of these Salar women featured on social media are closely linked to their aspiration for travel and touring, which is considered by many of the local Muslims an outspoken embodiment of their moral character. However, many local Muslims, including Hui Muslim men, have tended to express their sarcastic contempt for *Amu*, accusing them of being vulgar and mindless. Some Salars show a deep concern for women's blind pursuit of consumerist fashion at the cost of undermining the Salar spirit and noble values long held in the Salar Islamic tradition. A relative few, however, voice their appreciation for these women seeking to express their individuality and style. Several Salar

women who are young and educated share sympathetic feelings for *Amu*, who are believed to be either unaware of what they are doing or the victim of an unhappy marriage and divorce in the patriarchal structure of Salar society.²⁴

The dubious moral connotations of traveling and dressing are thus fundamental to categorizing *Xunhua Amu* among the local Muslim communities. As one of my Salar interlocutors remarked, *Amu* refers to Salar women between their late 20s and 40s, in pumps and black tights with their feet and hair partially covered; they are often divorced, acting pretentiously for attention, and love to *lang* everywhere. The idea of '*lang*' (meaning to tour or travel in the Qinghai Chinese dialect and in some other dialects in the Chinese hinterland) is prevalent in the everyday life of Salar women and the larger population in Qinghai. Many Salar women are interested in traveling both locally and regionally. On social media, they frequently post videos of driving a car, traveling on the road, visiting a local scenic spot, walking along the banks of the Yellow River, going on picnic tours in the woods, by the river, and on the pasture mountains of Tibetan villages. For many of them, the most attractive destinations for regional travel are those in Southern China with a modern look or pleasant natural/cultural climate.

The practice of *lang* is very important for Salar women because it offers them opportunities for seeking leisure and expressing individuality in a society where patriarchal forms of family life are normalized. Traveling provides a chance to relax their minds and get away from family obligations and complicated family relationships. A woman married into a Salar family used to share with me her early experience of traveling with her good friend to a populous seaside city in Southern China, where she tried swimming for the first time. With great passion and nostalgia, she remarked that her experience of swimming was so comfortable that she felt like she was in Heaven. However, such momentous experiences were few and far between, as it was the norm for married women to be confined at home to fulfill their filial obligations to their mothers-in-law. Consequently, Salar women who love to travel are subject to moral stigmatization in the local communities. The notion of *lang*, once meaning simply to leave home and seek leisure on trips to elsewhere, now connotes a sense of moral corruption.

To many local Muslim men, *lang* suggests women's disloyalty in their marriage – a desire to seek an illicit sexual relationship, which makes women themselves responsible for the divorce. A Muslim man in Xining named Ahmed expressed to me his moral contempt for *Xunhua Amu* and remarked with confidence that 99 percent of the divorced Salar women were divorced for a similar reason; that is, married women would readily agree to go out with their male contacts on WeChat. He then gave me an illustration of a typical conversation as such:

Say on WeChat, a man would ask a woman where she is going to *lang* tomorrow, and the woman would reply that tomorrow she's going somewhere so and so, where the scenery is nice and the food is good, then the man would ask the woman to take him with her, and the woman would agree to it saying 'okay let's go.'

For Ahmed and many other local Muslims, a wife is definitely not allowed to go out without her husband's permission or without the company of her husband or a *mahram* (unmarriageable relative); hence, the practice of *lang* itself is seen as morally problematic. However, for Ahmed's wife Sophia, a Salar woman in her 30s, the moral implications of *lang* are rather contextual. On some occasions, Sophia told me how her mother had to

ask for her own husband's permission every time she wanted to go out of the house for a stroll or ride. 'Heaven is under the feet of the husband,' Sophia explained, in a sentiment mixed with both respect for her mother and fear for the Islamic creed, given the fact that she herself was at times having intense arguments with her own husband. On other occasions, she used to complain to her family and me about her sister-in-law who is married to her younger brother. The sister-in-law left her husband and went back to her parents in the village and refused to return. Irritated by her sister-in-law, Sophia remarked to me: 'All she thinks about is to "*lang*," and to have her husband make money so that he could take her to "*lang*.'" For Sophia, it was the act of escaping from family obligations that made the practice of *lang* morally problematic. As a woman who loves and aspires to travel locally and regionally, Sophia is well aware of her husband's negative view of *lang*. Therefore, she has been consciously contesting a space between Islamic normativity and her own pursuit of leisure and pleasure. Social media have played a facilitating role in this regard.

Through WeChat, Sophia networked with quite a few women in the Quranic learning groups, and they would organize regular get-togethers for meals and tours to scenic spots. In the late summer of 2020, about a dozen of her friends – mostly Quranic teachers from the learning groups – rented a van and traveled to the famous tourist destination of Qinghai Lake, which lies 180 km west of Xining city. Against the background of blue water and sky, they took many pictures of each other in bright-colored dress. Back from the trip, Sophia lay on her bed, selecting the pictures and selfies to post. Using a photo-editing application, she quickly put a flower image to cover her face on each of the chosen pictures, which were then ready to post online. She then told me her husband would not be able to see these posts and make a fuss because she had him blocked from viewing them.

In Salar society, where the public gaze on women is intense, Muslim women are not allowed to expose their bodily image on social media, which runs counter to their impulse to openly exhibit their fashion style in the online public space. The outcome of this tension is a compromised act of using technological aid to hide or blur their faces in posted images or videos. Moreover, the levels of visibility that WeChat offers through its privacy setting have facilitated many Salar women like Sophia to have a private space,²⁵ thereby avoiding arguments with their husbands in the framework of *nushuz*. It is clear then that there is a generational difference in women's response to allegations of marital disobedience. In the cases of Sophia and many of the Salar women engaged in WeChat business who are considered responsible for their problematic family relationships or broken marriages, it seems to be a feasible strategy to block their husbands from viewing their social media platforms where they post photos and videos of themselves on leisurely trips. But for the younger generation of Salar women who have received higher education in Chinese universities, the norm of the wife's subordination to the husband and the restrictions on women's mobility is no longer binding. It is instead considered a residual element of the still culturally active 'feudal patriarchy' that is against the liberation of the 'modern' women.

Conclusion

This chapter has offered an ethnographic study of Salar women's mediated experience of consumerism in the face of the constant negotiation between Islamic normativity and global consumer culture in the digital age. It has examined the two-way process of appropriation between Salar women and social media by focusing on the newly developed consumerist lifestyle manifest in the mediated activities of learning and business, traveling, and dress

styling. It has shown that these activities are the sites of moral tensions manifest between (i) Islamic norms and traditions that stress the importance of the wife's obedience to the husband, i.e., restrictions on women's travel and the importance of modesty in public space, and (ii) the global consumerism present in the lifestyles of Salar women that is considered detrimental to the Islamic norms, as well as the Salar tradition. An examination of the moral debates shows a scenario of diverse and competing normativities and how local Salar communities have responded to them. In particular, the study has highlighted the role of social media in affording women the opportunity to circumvent marital disobedience that is frowned upon in Islamic teachings, specifically when discussed in reference to the Arabic term and Islamic jurisprudential concept of *nushuz*. But while social media allows women to hide communications and postings from their husbands, they also bring more nuances into marital intimacy. The higher divorce rate and the changing dynamics of gender and marital relations found among Salar communities will have a lasting impact on the family and social structures at large, generating moral and ethical issues perhaps at a deeper level. With the ongoing infiltration of secularist and individualist values, Salar women will continue to be faced with the interplay between their own aspirations and different normativities – ethics of authenticity, consumer culture, filial piety, Islamic piety, marital norms, intimacy, etc. In navigating these ethical normativities, they search continuously for understandings of and reflections on what it means to be a good modern Muslim woman in contemporary China.

Notes

- 1 Hui has the largest population among China's ten Islamic ethnic minorities; the other nine are Uyghur, Kazak, Dongxiang, Kirgiz, Salar, Tajik, Uzbek, Baoan, and Tatar. Hui people are generally considered to be the descendants of Arab and Persian traders who settled in China during the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE). The Hui population is scattered over many cities and provinces in China with Islam as their unifying ethnic identity.
- 2 The other two are Xinjiang and Tibet.
- 3 For the latest statistics on the Qinghai population distribution, see Qinghai Provincial Bureau of Statistics 2021. For statistics on the area of Xining and Haidong District, see respectively Xining Municipal People's Government 2022 and Haidong Municipal People's Government 2023.
- 4 Based on accounts collected during fieldwork, between 2020 and 2021.
- 5 Lamian is a type of hand-pulled noodle, made with flour, water, and salt. Many of the lamian restaurants are owned by Salar and Hui families from Qinghai Province, particularly Hualong and Xunhua. Interestingly, outside of Northwest China, these restaurateurs from Qinghai usually presented their restaurants under the single brand of Lanzhou lamian, because noodles in Lanzhou, Gansu Province, are better known and more popular in the wider country.
- 6 *Gaitou* (in Chinese, 盖头) is a traditional type of head covering local to Qinghai Muslims, often colored in green or black with flower petal patterns.
- 7 Goodman was one of the few anthropologists who worked on Salar Muslims. The main question that he was interested in was how Salars' self-understandings as being 'exiles' from the Samarkand region shaped their 'social and economic activism' in northwest China in the wake of China's Western Development Campaign (*xibu da kaifa*).
- 8 Yan, however, views the individualization process as part of China's quest for modernity that actually started in the 1950s. See Yan 2010, pp. 489–512.
- 9 Salar women who fall into this age group are usually characterized by a relatively lower level of literacy in terms of their ability to read and write Chinese, compared to the younger generation of Salar women who have generally received higher levels of education in Chinese public schools and universities. Those Salar women who are over 60 are, generally speaking, less frequent users of WeChat, and those under 30 are less interested in Quranic learning on WeChat. This, however,

- is based on my fieldwork observations, for there is a lack of official statistics on the distribution of WeChat users by age and gender among the Salar communities. But according to Statista 2022, as of March 2022, the age distribution of WeChat users in China is quite even among different age groups. WeChat users in their 30s, 40s, 50s, and beyond account for an average of about 20 percent of the total users. See Statista 2020.
- 10 QR is short for 'Quick Response.' A QR code is a square made up of two-dimensional barcodes, which stores information that can be read fast by a digital smartphone. On WeChat, a QR code of a group can be selectively shared among one's WeChat friend list, and the receivers can easily access the group by scanning or extracting the QR code.
 - 11 See iResearch 2021.
 - 12 For the developments in the last years, see Iqbal 2024.
 - 13 Traditionally, money wrapped in red packets is considered auspicious in Chinese culture.
 - 14 See the iResearch report at http://www.iresearchchina.com/content/details7_53166.html
 - 15 Chinese cities were originally categorized into four respective tiers, according to their population size and affluence. In 2017, a new ranking was introduced that classified 6 tiers, including the 'New 1st Tier cities', which was a label created to reflect the rapid urban development of a few 'up and coming' cities. See an overview of China's city tiers at <https://www.chinacheckup.com/blog/china-city-tiers>.
 - 16 *Minzu* is a Chinese term that is hard to render into English. It refers to the officially recognized ethnic groups or nationality in China, but in reality, it has complex racial and religious connotations. For instance, some Salar Muslims would identify themselves as belonging to the same *minzu* with Hui Muslims because of their shared Islamic belief. In the case of *Minzu Digest*, the term *minzu* emphasizes its religious connotation.
 - 17 The video was posted on the WeChat official account *Minzu Digest* in June 2020 but was later deleted. The same video was uploaded respectively by *Hui Brochure* in June 2021 and *Creed Media* in February 2022 – two other WeChat official accounts with Qinghai Muslim background, but again, the video is inaccessible on both accounts by now.
 - 18 The Chinese state laws grant women the right to work, and it has been believed since the founding of People's Republic of China in 1949 that paid employment outside of the home was the key to the liberation of women from the 'feudalism' of the imperial times. In the early decades of socialist China, the process of modernization and the liberation of women took place under the banner of 'gender equality' that emphasized women's equal participation in the workforce. But this early model of 'gender equality' connoted 'gender sameness' and tended to masculinize women by encouraging them to be the 'Iron-Girl' who should work and behave like men in public spaces. Following reform in the 1980s, a new scholarly and public discourse about femininity emerged in China and grew critical of the 'Iron-Girl' model, advocating gender differentiation in terms of behavior and emotional sensitivity. For a detailed discussion on the changing role of women and the model of femininity in China, see Honig and Hershtatter 1988.
 - 19 The financial roles of the spouses in an Islamic marriage are stipulated in the Quran and Hadith. In general, the husband is obliged to provide maintenance (in Arabic, *nafaqa*) to the wife including food, clothing, accommodation, and other expenditures; a Muslim wife is not obliged to work as she should be dedicated to her husband, but she is allowed to have her own private funds. See Mohd and Hj Ibrahim 2010, pp. 104, 106, 109.
 - 20 Since the advent of Islam in China in the seventh century, Chinese Muslims have been creatively reconciling Islamic teachings with Chinese culture and society. These efforts include the invention of Scripture Hall Education (*jingtang jiaoyu*), which utilized Chinese phonetic pronunciation to represent Arabic pronunciation. In addition to the innovation of this new transliteration system, Chinese Muslims also creatively combined two or more ideographic Chinese characters to form a new set of religiously connoted terms for Muslims' everyday use. The term *koubuan* is a combination of two Chinese characters of *kou* (meaning mouth) and *huan* (meaning to call or summon).
 - 21 *Koubuan* also refers to the oral transmission of Sufi leadership from the shaykh to his successor, see Wang 2001, p. 132.
 - 22 *Idhn* in Arabic is a general term simply meaning authorization, without reference to religion, see Linant de Bellefonds 2012.
 - 23 Kuaishou and Douyin are the two most widely used short video sharing platforms in China where a plethora of short videos are posted, recording people's various lifestyles.

- 24 The description of the range of local attitudes toward *Xunhua Amu* is based on open conversations conducted with a few Salar and Hui Muslims in Qinghai, and the consultation of digital ethnographical materials, particularly the comments posted by local Muslims on various social media platforms.
- 25 While research on Western societies often focuses on social media as a threat to individual privacy, studies on social media usage among migrant workers in urban settings in China have shown that social media are considered by many as privacy in and of itself, which is the same case with Salar women's use of social media. See Boyd 2008; Lee 2014; Wang 2016.

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PART 7

Markets



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THE CREATION OF ISLAMIC FINANCE

Religious Conservatism, Capitalist Logics, and Secularization

Samir Amghar and Ezzedine Ghlamallah¹

Introduction

For the past thirty years, scholars who study the Muslim world have noted an original phenomenon affecting contemporary Islam: the emergence of ‘Market Islam,’ to use the expression of Swiss sociologist Patrick Haenni (2004; see also Gauthier, this volume). This new brand of Islam is characterized by a growing interaction between the ‘spirit of capitalism’ and Islamic ‘values’ and law (Awass 2019). Feeding on managerial culture, this Market Islam is carried by new entrepreneurs and redefines the capitalist modes of production and consumption in light of Islamic principles. Performance, competitiveness, self-fulfillment, and the search for excellence are the main pillars of this new spirit of ‘Islamic capitalism’ (Nasr 2009).

This dynamic is particularly observable within the contemporary Islamic finance industry (Sor 2012). More and more banks, insurance companies, and international organizations throughout the Muslim world are claiming to follow Islamic values. For example, the international organization of the Islamic Development Bank (founded in 1975 in Jeddah) provides aid and financing ‘in accordance with Islamic values’ for infrastructure projects in member countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Countries such as Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates have become hubs for this new form of finance. This dynamic does not only concern countries with a Muslim majority but also Western countries (the US, Great Britain, Luxembourg, Switzerland, etc.). In addition, major Western groups such as HSBC, BNP Paribas, and the Bank of Tokyo Mitsubishi have been offering ‘Islamic’ financial products for many years. This boom also explains the numerous initiatives undertaken by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the United Nations in favor of the development of Islamic finance, which see it as a tool to increase the rate of banking and to finance the achievement of sustainable development objectives in the many countries in which this industry is developing, particularly in Africa. This continent, with nearly 500 million Muslims, has become an area where Islamic finance is growing fastest and is considered a market with high development potential. Sudan, Kenya, Ivory Coast, Mauritania, and Senegal are countries where the authorities have understood the interest that this economic sector could represent for the development of their countries.

Estimated at 2,880 billion dollars at the end of 2019 by ICD-REFINITIV (2020), Islamic finance only represents a little more than 1 percent of global finance. However, since the early 2000s, it has experienced double-digit annual growth. This globalized sector comprises 1,389 institutions and has the potential to grow significantly and is expected to reach 3.69 trillion dollars by the end of 2024 with a projected average annual growth rate of over 10 percent.

Finance as a Product of Both Islamic Tradition and Contemporary Jurisprudence

Although Islamic finance is a recent creation, it is based on elements directly drawn from Islamic tradition. Thus, it is based on a traditional and orthodox reading of Islam. When the promoters of Islamic finance laid the foundations of their field, they ‘recycled’ what they saw as the fundamental elements of Islamic business ethics (Beaumont 2019). For example, the reason Islamic finance prohibits usury (*ribā*), unlike conventional finance, is because of a Quranic verse that clearly states, ‘O believers! Fear God and give up the residue of usurious interest, if you are believers. And if you do not, then receive the announcement of war from God and His Messenger’ (Surah 2, verses 278–279). According to the Quran, time belongs to God, so money cannot grow without work and by the mere passage of time. We find here an idea that was also present in Western Christianity, in particular, the Thomistic idea that the lender does not own time and cannot sell it. This is why the Islamic prohibition of usury takes, in most cases, the form of a prohibition of interest and why theologians do not differentiate between interest and usury.

Other principles such as the prohibition of speculation (*gharar*), the prohibition of uncertainty in contractual relations (*maysir*), or the prohibition of participating in operations involving sectors of activity that are said to be inconsistent with Islamic values, such as trade in alcohol, pork, or pornography, are the other religious elements on which Islamic finance is based. Here again, there is no need to ‘reinvent’ or ‘reread’ texts to put into practice and implement this economic sector; its promoters refer to the Muslim religious-economic thought developed over the centuries by many authors such as Ibn Khaldun in the Maghreb (1377), Ibn Rushd, better known as Averroes (1179), or al-Ghazali (Ghazanfar and Islahi 2020).

While Islamic finance is rooted in a centuries-old Islamic tradition, it is also the product of a contemporary reading of Islam. Thus, the essence of this reading revolves around an interpretation of Islam or *ijtihad*. By *ijtihad*, we mean, following French Islamologist Éric Chaumont (2004, p. 71),

The cognitive effort aimed at understanding the revealed legal discourse (since the Law is revealed in the form of a discourse, i.e., the Quran): the legists-mujtahids, the great men of Islam, are the artisans of this effort and their work has led, on the one hand, to a legal theory (*usūl al-fiqh*) and, on the other hand, to various *fiqhs* (literally: understanding, sub-understanding: of the Law), i.e., normative systems encompassing the totality of human acts and consigned to a monumental body of legal literature (treaties of *fiqh*, compendiums of legal consultations (*fatwā*)).

This ‘invention of tradition’ on the part of many scholars of Islam known for their religious conservatism tends to undermine the – anyway problematic – thesis that the doors

of *ijtihād* were closed in postclassical times. For instance, Tunisian intellectual Mohamed Charfi writes: ‘After the golden age has come the twilight of old age where the imagination is reduced, the creative faculties diminished and thought ankylosed’ (Charfi 1999). However, it is noted, *inter alia*, from the ‘jurisprudential creativity’ in Islamic finance that the doors of *ijtihād* have never been closed and even remain wide open.

With the aim of developing and clarifying the contours of Islamic finance, which cannot be summarized and embodied exclusively in the prohibitions that have been mentioned above, contemporary jurists have enriched the Muslim law of business: the *fiqh al-mu‘āmalāt*. Religious figures who are both specialists of finance and religious sciences, such as the Pakistani Taqi Usmani, the Saudi Mohamed Ali Elgari, and the Bahraini Nizam Yaquby, have developed a body of work to frame and regulate financial activity according to Islamic standards. This branch of Islamic law functions ‘horizontally’ and governs the relations of creatures to the rest of creation in terms of morality, civil law, and criminal law, on subjects such as business ethics, financial transactions, endowments, inheritance rules, marriage, divorce, child custody, food, war, peace, criminal offenses, court cases, etc. In this branch of law, everything is permitted except what is explicitly forbidden according to the principle of original lawfulness, *al-ibāḥah al-asliyyah*. It complements the *fiqh al-‘ibādāt*, the ‘vertical’ law of creaturely worship toward the Creator, with regard to the liturgy: worship, prayer, almsgiving, fasting, pilgrimage, etc. In this vertical branch of law, only that which is explicitly prescribed in Islamic sources is permitted. In *fiqh al-mu‘āmalāt*, commerce and free enterprise are encouraged, but so is the respect of a set of values, such as the rejection of capital accumulation through usury and speculation or the commitment to the duty of sharing, moderation, and redistribution (Ghulamallah 2022).

To enrich *fiqh al-mu‘āmalāt*, shariah scholars call upon the tools provided by the various legal schools of Islam that allow for the creation of ‘jurisprudence.’ *Qiyās* (analogical reasoning), *maslahah* (general interest), and *urf* (custom) are the few examples of legal tools available to jurists to practice *ijtihād* and clarify the contours and content of Islamic finance (Maouchi 2015). With these tools, Muslim jurists and theologians specializing in finance and economics have for the past 50 years created ‘new’ financial instruments and products; the aim being to establish a modern banking and financial system that conforms to Islamic rules of economic and financial ethics.

Thus, in order not to resort to interest-bearing loans, the principle of *murābahah* was admitted. It was recognized as legitimate in 1979, on the occasion of the first conference of Islamic banks in Dubai (Abdul Alim 2014). This system is the product of ‘religious reconstruction’ following an *ijtihād*. Indeed, while the *murābahah* was already mentioned in the *Muwatta’* of Imam Malik Ibn Anas (eighth century), its use was rare, so the conditions for its application were restrictive. It was never really encouraged by the founders of the legal schools (Maliki, Hanafi, Shafi’i, and Hanbali). Therefore, since Islam prohibits the lending of money at interest, the Islamic banking institution undertakes to buy the good that its client wants, and the latter undertakes to pay it in installments with a profit margin determined at the conclusion of the contract. Of all the financial products offered by Islamic banks or windows, this is the one that is most in demand. This financial instrument has enabled tens of thousands of households across the Muslim world to acquire real estate. While the *murābahah* aims to satisfy the needs of the Muslim consumer, other *mushārahah*-type financial instruments based on the principle of profit- and loss-sharing have been developed

to respond to infrastructure financing logics, often emanating from states or companies, notably with the help of *ṣukūk* (plural of *ṣakk*, the ancestor of the word ‘check’), more commonly known as Islamic investment certificates.

The *ṣukūk* represent an alternative to illicit bonds in Islamic finance whose equivalent in conventional finance could be asset-backed securities (ABS), whose flows are derived from an asset or portfolio of assets against which they are backed. They are defined in the Accounting and Auditing Organization for Islamic Financial Institutions (AAOIFI) Shariah Standard No. 17 as ‘securities of equal value representing undivided shares in the ownership of tangible assets, usufruct, provision of services, specific project assets or a particular investment activity; and this after the closing of subscriptions, the collection of the value of the *ṣukūk* issued, and the commencement of use of funds in accordance with the purpose of issuance.’ These securities give their holders (investors) a direct or indirect right of co-ownership in an underlying asset (a building, a fleet of vehicles, a company, etc.). Thus, the investor’s remuneration depends on the profitability of the underlying asset. The *ṣukūk* allow for compliance with the prohibition of interest and the principles of risk sharing and backing on tangible assets. A *ṣakk* is, therefore, an investment certificate, a securitized financial product more similar to stocks than bonds. This is because bonds give the right to a claim, whereas *ṣukūk* give the right to a co-ownership interest in an asset that generates a cash flow. A *ṣakk* is termed ‘sovereign’ when issued by a government and ‘corporate’ when issued by a private institution. The *ṣukūk* holder is interested in the proceeds generated by the underlying asset; one is subject to a risk of capital loss in case of a decline in the value of the asset. In 2021, the Islamic Development Bank raised 2.5 billion dollars with a *ṣukūk* listed on Euronext Dublin and NASDAQ Dubai; these funds were earmarked as sustainable projects. The same year in the UK, just after the Bank of England launched an Islamic deposit facility in the first quarter, the British government returned to the *ṣukūk* market and issued another 500 million pounds’ worth of sovereign bonds. Recognizing the potential value of *ṣukūk* to attract Muslim investors, the majority of these securities were purchased by investors living in the UK and in the major Islamic finance centers in the Middle East and Asia.

Another example of religious innovation is the case of cryptocurrency. The numerous works published recently on the legal qualification of cryptocurrencies in Islam testify to this dynamism in contemporary *ijtihād*. Faced with the recent development of cryptocurrencies across the Muslim world, Islamic jurists have had to quickly decide whether or not this ‘financial technology’ is lawful. Because neither the Quran, the Sunnah, nor the traditional legal opinions had yet to formulate anything in this area, jurists had to take a position quickly. Here again, jurists must try to interpret. While some jurists have explicitly forbidden the use of cryptocurrencies, arguing that the non-existence of a central regulatory authority entails a risk (and therefore a form of extreme *gharar*, of *maysir*) for those who use it, other jurists have shown greater flexibility in the matter. These jurists rely on the rule of *al-ibāḥah al-aṣliyyah* peculiar to *fiqh al-mu‘amalāt* to defend the lawfulness of money. This consists of the *a priori* acceptance of any contract until an element of prohibition appears. This is, for example, the position of Monzer Kahf, who was a professor of economics at Yarmouk University (Jordan), who explains that Bitcoins should be considered like ‘all other currencies’ and that the Islamic rules that apply to monetary exchanges also apply to them. Other jurists who took a neutral stance toward cryptocurrencies due to their novelty and the need to master the technical details of how these systems work before issuing an opinion now share this idea that cryptocurrencies meet the various ‘religious’ conditions (preservation of wealth, liquidity, transparency,

sustainability, and fairness), as defined by the professor and rector of Zaituna University, Sheikh Tahir Ashour, to qualify as currencies and be treated as such.

The existing divergences and controversies in Islamic finance also show by virtue of their vividness and topicality that the doors of *ijtihād* have never been closed and remain wide open in contemporary *fiqh al-mu'āmalāt*. For example, consider the liberal *fatwā* of the European Council for Fatwā and Research (CEFR), chaired by the Egyptian-born theologian Yusuf al-Qaradawi (1926–2022). Going against the ultra-majority position defending the prohibition of interest-bearing loans, the CEFR issued a religious opinion, invoking the principle of necessity (*darūrah*) and the absence of an alternative, authorizing the use of a home loan from conventional banks for the purchase of the primary residence. Far from being unanimous in Islamic jurisprudence circles, worldwide, this *fatwā* has been heavily criticized. Nevertheless, it opens the possibility for Muslims living in Europe, and in the absence of an Islamic bank, to take out an interest-bearing loan for the purchase of their primary residence. On the contrary, this dynamic of theoretical elaboration of the Islamic economy and its operationalization by Islamic financial institutions have not been unanimously accepted by some world-renowned theologians who are particularly followed in the Muslim world. They have not hesitated to issue criticisms or to assert that certain instruments of Islamic finance, such as the *murābahah*, are nothing more or less than ‘disguised’ interest loans, and that the juriconsults who authorize them use legal subterfuges to justify their licit character. To be convinced of this, it is enough to recall the *fatwās* issued by the Jordanian Muhammad Nasir Din al-Albani and the Saudi theologian Uthaymin, in which they strongly condemn the practice of *murābahah*, which, nevertheless, remains the preferred mode of financing for Islamic bankers.

Finally, the scope of prohibitions may evolve in line with contemporary scientific discoveries. Thus, while financial activities around tobacco were ‘tolerated’ by some Muslim scholars because jurisprudence did not consider this product illicit, the latest medical findings of the 1980s confirming the health hazards of cigarettes have led theologians to unanimously prohibit any commercial activity around tobacco (see Nojoudi, this volume).

A Sector Created and Carried by a Multitude of Initiatives and Public Policies

If Islamic finance has been able to develop, it is because of the conceptualization and theorization of a number of intellectuals, preachers, and imams from primarily the Indian subcontinent and the Middle East (Siddiqi 2014). These authors laid the foundation of Islamic economics on which to base Islamic finance. These theorists – who defined the contours of Islamic economics – are in part linked to the Islamic ‘awakening’ (*sahwah*) movement that emerged in the early twentieth century in the Arab world, some of whom were promoters of political Islam. On the Indian subcontinent, modern Islamic economics has its origins in the religious and political activism of the reformers who worked for the constitution of Pakistan in 1947. Among these reformers was Muhammad Iqbal (1876–1938), who collaborated with Muhammad Asad (1900–1992) in thinking out the bases of the Islamic state of Pakistan and who described Islam as a social order that could provide practical solutions to contemporary economic problems.

Muhammad Iqbal’s economic ideas were taken up and developed by Sayyid Abul Ala Maududi (1903–1979), founder of the Pakistani Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami in 1941 (Al-Daghistani 2021; see Iqtidar, this volume). Maududi thought, which considers that

Islam provides a holistic solution to contemporary issues, including in the economic and financial sphere, has been a major influence, so much so that Aziz and Mahmud (2009) have considered him to have established ‘the economics of Islam’ as a distinct branch of knowledge (Cavatorta and Amghar 2020). In the Middle East, it is possible to mention Mohammed al-Ghazali (1917–1996), one of the most prolific theologians of al-Azhar University, among the first authors who appeared in the 1950s and 1960s. In the Shiite world, especially in Iran, Muhammad Bâqîr al-Sadr (1935–1980) also participated in the construction of Islamic finance by publishing a work that has become a reference, *The Interest-free Bank in Islam*. Published in 1969, it was written at the request of the Kuwaiti Ministry of Awqaf. For Beaumont (2019, p. 205):

The book is thus distinguished from the outset by the articulation of an intransigence on Islamic principles with a pragmatic, almost operational approach. It is not a question of drawing principles from the religious law but of laying the foundations of a banking practice in conformity with the sharia in the world as it is. An interest-free finance could only be successful insofar as it is integrated into an economy that is fully governed by the principles of Islam; the absence of such an ‘Islamic system’ in reality, however, does not justify any compromise with the religious law. Therefore, it is a matter of ‘seeking a reasonable jurisprudential solution’ by questioning the modalities of the existence of a finance that respects the general principles of Islamic law, ready to sacrifice a part of its profits to the religious mission it serves, but efficient in a capitalist environment where interest-free banking will inevitably be competed with by the attractiveness of the remuneration of the capital ensured by usury banks.

Other Muslim intellectuals and theologians who are not connected to political Islam but to traditional Islamic trends have also participated in the conceptualization of contemporary Islamic economics. For example, Mustafa Zarqa (1904–1999), a Syrian-born theologian who did not belong to any ideological movement and whose major work, written in 1959 and entitled *Al-madkhal al-fiqhî al-‘amm* (General Introduction to Islamic Jurisprudence), bridged the gap that existed at the time between traditional Islamic scholarship and modern academic studies. Since the 1970s, the movement to theorize an economy based on Islamic principles has provided a critique of conventional economics in general, but especially of the financial economy based on the practice of interest lending and speculation. The authors of Islamic economics have exposed the motives, characteristics, and main parameters of this critique and have disseminated it in many institutions and research centers around the world.

Although the influence of political Islam in the early days of Islamic finance should be noted, it should also be pointed out that another social group has played a cardinal role in the practical implementation of Islamic finance theories. These actors, who can be described as ‘secular,’ are essentially students from the Muslim world who, after obtaining postgraduate degrees in economics, management, or finance from leading universities in Europe or the US, returned to their home countries with aspirations of meeting their socio-economic needs. An example of someone who obtained a postgraduate degree in finance in the US and returned to his home country to contribute to the growth of the Islamic financial industry is Saleh Mailakah, who, after obtaining a PhD from the University of Michigan, served as a director of many Islamic financial institutions in the Middle East. This was also the case of the German-trained economist Ahmad Al-Najjar who returned to his village of Mit

Ghamr in the Nile Delta after completing his studies. By creating the Mit Ghamr Savings Bank in 1963, inspired by German cooperative banks, Al-Najjar wanted to help farmers who had difficulties financing their production. Thus, the first modern experience of Islamic banking was born. With its success and an increase of 367.2 percent in deposits during the first years, the bank extended its operations from farms to all agricultural lands. Mit Ghamr Savings Bank was forcibly closed down by the Nasser government in 1967, which, drawing directly on this experience, established the Nasser Social Bank in 1972. Ahmad Al-Najjar was instrumental in training a new generation of Islamic bankers by establishing an Islamic banking training institute, which he later transferred from Cairo to Cyprus.

The development of Islamic finance is also the result of the proactive policies of some states that have decided to set up regulations and public policies to implement Islamic finance. For example, the first initiative of the Tabung Haji, created in 1963 in Malaysia, was supported by the government. Concerned with the completion of the pilgrimage to Mecca, this institution is dedicated to collecting savings and investing them in a shariah-compliant manner in real estate, industry, and agriculture. This has led Tabung Haji to invest these funds collected in a shariah-compliant manner and produce substantial returns (Abdul-Rahman 2010). In Malaysia and Indonesia, Muslims consider the most successful and blessed marriage to be the one consummated during the season of pilgrimage to Mecca. Thus, the Tabung Haji has been very successful as an institution that allows parents to build up savings from the time of their child's birth in order to finance the child's marriage as an adult.

Another example of the cardinal role of states in the development of Islamic finance: in 1977, Saudi Prince Mohammed bin Faisal Al Saud (1937–2017) opened the Faisal Islamic Bank in Egypt, which became one of the largest banks in that country with more than 700,000 clients, as well as the Faisal Islamic Bank in Sudan. In the same year, under the auspices of the OIC, the Prince also played an active role in the creation of the International Association of Islamic Banks (IAIB), which at that time included the first four Islamic banks in history: the Islamic Development Bank, the Dubai Islamic Bank, the Kuwait Finance House, and the Faisal Islamic Bank. In 1981, he established a trust to hold his two banks based in Geneva, Switzerland, called *Dar Al-Maal Al-Islami* (DMI), literally, 'House of Islamic Wealth.' The DMI was endowed with one billion dollars of capital and counted among its founding shareholders many heads of state and investors from all over the world. Other examples include the abolition of double taxation on Islamic finance in the UK in 2003 and the tax instructions adopted in France in 2009 to encourage the growth of Islamic finance on their soil. Further examples of the pivotal role of states in the development of Islamic finance are the case of Morocco, which in 2014 adopted specific regulations for so-called 'participative' finance operations, and Algeria, which followed suit in 2018.

By 2020, more than 35 countries around the world had already partially or fully adopted the AAOIFI standards to promote the development and resilience of the Islamic finance sector within their jurisdictions. These standards were formed in the nascent years of the development of the Islamic financial system and in the absence of a normative framework when it was necessary for industry players to undertake standardization and rating efforts. On 26 February 1990 in Algiers was the signing of the agreement by Islamic financial institutions to establish the AAOIFI. AAOIFI gathers more than 200 members (central banks, Islamic banks, auditing firms, etc.). The function of this institution is to develop and disseminate in order to harmonize and improve policies and procedures of accounting, auditing, governance, and ethics, creating standards related to the activities of Islamic financial institutions and considering international standards and practices in line with the shariah rules.

Toward a Secularization of Islamic Finance: Between ‘Ethicization’ and Profitability

The objective of some of the founders of Islamic economics, at least for those who belonged to the Pakistani Islamist party *Jamaat-e-Islami*, was based on ideological and political rationality: the Islamization of the economic and financial system. This was a prerequisite for the Islamization of the state and the establishment of an Islamic state in Pakistan. However, Pakistan’s experience in developing Islamic finance has shown that its implementation has been much more difficult than expected. The decline in the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood, resulting from both the repression it was subjected to in a large part of the Muslim world (Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Turkey, etc.) and the impossibility of it organizing itself as a political movement as in Saudi Arabia or Syria, was a condition that prevented the Islamists from succeeding in taking control of banking institutions and exercising hegemony over Islamic finance.

The failure of political Islam led to a paradigm shift in the way Islamic finance was thought of and understood: Islam is no longer thought of as a norm that structures the principles of Islamic finance but rather as a set of values to be translated into the economic and financial sphere (Amghar 2012). Islamic finance is thus presented as an ethic that can inspire economic philosophy. The process of the ‘ethicization’ of Islamic finance put forward by its promoters can be seen, for example, in their desire to moralize the world of finance and to fight against the excesses of the capitalist system (Coste 2019). It can also be observed in the desire of more and more actors to orient the sector toward so-called alternative or ethical finance. This is visible in particular with regard to the rapprochement between Islamic and socially responsible investment. As an example of Islamic financial institutions that have integrated the principles of corporate social responsibility into their management, one can cite the Saudi asset manager *SEDCO Capital*, which has integrated environmental, social, and governance (ESG) criteria into two of its equity funds, and *Arabesque Asset Management*, which has also integrated ESG principles that allow its funds to be marketed to socially responsible investors.

In France, a country where the expression of Islam in the public space is not well perceived by society, this dynamic also responds to a strategy of the ‘dilution’ of Islamic finance. This is why most of the actors of Islamic finance in this country have decided to ‘attenuate’ the religious dimension by substituting the epithet Islamic with that of ethics to defend their conception of finance. The idea is to defend the concept of ethical or alternative finance. The objective is clear: to reassure not only public opinion but also institutional partners on the non-religious, non-communitarian, non-political, and above all, universal character of the term ethics. This is one example of how the global development of Islamic finance has led it to adapt to different implementation frameworks and, in some secularized societies such as France, to ‘undermine’ its Islamic identity.

Thus, since the beginning of the development of Islamic finance in France, many actors have secularized their discourse and marketing positions. The aim is to euphemize the normative dimension of Islamic finance by proposing a friendlier, more accessible, and more acceptable model and, in doing so, developing a more ethical, more moral position than the so-called ‘traditional’ and ‘secular’ finance, for example, the company *YoChBee*. Its founder states on the company’s website, ‘*YoChBee* is the result of a reflection that feeds on all these experiences. Through this project, we are building a financial offer that meets the needs of citizens and residents in France from diverse places, diasporas, or multiethnic

and multicultural backgrounds' (www.yochbee.fr 'Founder's Note' 2023). No mention is made of Islam. The Islamic principles that govern the financial management of YoChBee's organization are clearly 'drowned' out by a more 'multicultural' identity. However, this does not prevent other companies from adopting a clearly religious- and community-based marketing position. On a personal note, one of the authors of this chapter observed the same phenomenon in the Islamic finance course he followed in a business school: the conferences he attended and was involved in were careful never to display the Islamic identity of their financial approach, and they managed this by embedding it in a broader ethic.

The logic of profit maximization and the search for financial efficiency are also part of the secularization process of Islamic finance. It is noticeable that when one speaks with executives in this sector, they express constant concern for economic efficiency (Awass 2019). Regarding the secularization process affecting Islamic finance in some countries, what is striking in the discourse and 'ideology' of bankers, investors, or even international organizations is that little place is given to Islam as such, but rather, importance is given to profitability. Islam is not presented as an end in itself but as a lever for generating income. One does not solely reason through 'profane' filters such as the commercial, financial, shareholder, stock market, or partnership performance of Islamic financial institutions, even though, at the board meetings of Islamic banks, as in any joint-stock company, the share of dividends to be paid to shareholders is discussed. Thus, Islamic finance executives do not reason exclusively through a religious logic but also through a capitalist logic. It is not a question of using Islamic finance as a starting point for the Islamization of society or as a tool for religious propaganda, but rather as a lever for economic development. If Islamic finance institutions are composed of 'religious' staff (shariah boards) in charge of verifying the Islamic character of the financial operations carried out, they are nevertheless marginal compared to the 'secular' staff who constitute the bulk of the executives and employees of Islamic finance, generally trained in finance and management. Within the banks or financial institutions in which they work, they are driven by managerial, certainly ethical, logic but are, above all, guided by economic rationality. Therefore, the concern of rationalizing in order to make it more efficient (and therefore more profitable) is a major issue for the actors in this sector, particularly due to the competition with conventional actors. The current research in economics and Islamic finance testifies to this with hundreds of articles comparing the performance of Islamic and conventional financial institutions (Ghلامallah et al. 2021). Gaining market share, being competitive, and attracting an ever-growing clientele are the pillars that define the economic logic of Islamic finance.

Conclusion

The contemporary Islamic finance industry was born out of private initiatives and then supported by the public authorities of many states. In the Middle East, the role of entrepreneurs has been decisive in its development. Indeed, as Schumpeter (1912) demonstrated, economic evolution is a function of new offers conceived and put on the market by entrepreneurs capable of implementing new solutions that respond to needs not yet satisfied or expressed and of modifying consumption habits. It is currently possible to distinguish four phases in the development of the Islamic finance industry: a phase of theorization and experimentation (1920 to 1970), a phase of operationalization and expansion (1970 to 1990), a phase of institutionalization and sophistication (1990 to 2010), and a phase of internationalization and consolidation (since 2010).

The Islamic finance industry has experienced meteoric development since the experimentation conducted in Mit Ghamr in 1963 (Hassan and Lewis 2009). A sector in perpetual growth, it is not based on a rigid normative system but rather on a set of general principles capable of evolving and adapting according to financial imperatives. The product of a synthesis between Islamic religious imperatives and economic liberalism, the sector has become considerably professionalized, specialized, and consolidated, supported in part by certain governments or international institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund or the Islamic Development Bank. Even if the creation of Islamic finance was a response to the desire to Islamize the economic and financial system and that certain actors of political Islam played a cardinal role in the establishment of a first theoretical corpus, it has gradually ‘emancipated’ itself through a process of ‘ethicization’ and search for profitability. Far from feeding any political project of Islamization of the economy, Islamic finance institutions are not composed of supporters of political Islam but mainly of financial professionals, driven by a managerial (if also ethical) logic and, above all, guided by the will to reconcile respect for Islamic law and economic rationality. That said, organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood or Jamaat-e-Islami and many theologians believe that this system is the best alternative to conventional finance and welcome the efforts of the public authorities to ‘Islamize the banking system’ in their country.

The religious and ideological rationality of the early days of Islamic finance has been replaced by ethical, but most of all, economic, rationality. By converting to neoliberal values, Islamic finance has become normalized and accepted. Islamic finance is no longer merely a substantive alternative to globalized capitalism but has become a financial system almost like any other (Asutay 2012). We are currently witnessing a blending of cultures between Islamic finance, espousing current management standards on the one hand, and institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, or the African Development Bank integrating Islamic finance programs on the other. We conclude this chapter with a final, striking example: Western banks such as Société Générale, Credit Suisse, and HSBC have created Islamic ‘windows’ in many Muslim countries in order to open up to new markets. It seems as if Islamic finance has finally become a means not to ‘Islamize society’ as political Islam wanted until the 1980s but, instead, to make certain forms of capitalism ‘Islamically’ acceptable.

Summary Table – Development of the Islamic Financial Industry (Ghlamallah 2022)

1929	In Algeria, Ibrahim Abou Al-Yaqadhan applied to the French colonial administration to set up an Islamic bank and file its articles of association.
	<i>Establishment of a theoretical corpus in Islamic economics and finance</i>
1950s	1957 Creation of Al-Rajhi Bank in Saudi Arabia.
1960s	1963 Creation of Mit Ghamr Savings Bank in Egypt (until 1967).
	1963 Creation of Tabung Haji in Malaysia, a local fund for the organization of the pilgrimage to Mecca.
	1969 Creation of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), which launched the idea of creating a multilateral Islamic bank for its member countries.
1970s	1973 Oil crisis, the oil-producing countries of the Arab world have high levels of liquidity.
	1974 Creation of the Islamic Development Bank under the aegis of the OIC.
	1976 First Islamic economics conference in Mecca.

(Continued)

1979 First Islamic finance conference in Dubai.
1979 Pakistan becomes the first country to Islamize its banking sector.

Islamic commercial banking movement

1975 Creation of the Dubai Islamic Bank in the United Arab Emirates.
1977 Kuwait Finance House founded in Kuwait.
1977 Faisal Islamic Bank founded in Egypt.
1978 Foundation of the Al-Baraka Bank in Saudi Arabia.
1978 Foundation of the Jordan Islamic Bank in Jordan.
1979 Foundation of the Bahrain Islamic Bank in Bahrain.

Expansion of the Islamic banking movement

- 1980s 1981 Dar Al-Maal Al-Islami founded in Switzerland.
1982 Al-Baraka International Bank founded in the UK (until 1993).
1983 Faisal Islamic Bank founded in Egypt.
1983 Creation of the International Islamic Academy of *fiqh*.
1983 Sudan begins to Islamize its banking sector.
1984 Iran Islamizes its banking sector.
1984 Founding of Bank Islam in Malaysia.
1986 Creation of the Amana Income Fund in the US.
1987 Founding of the American Finance House Lariba in the US.
- 1990s 1990 First *ṣukūk* corporate issue by Shell MDS in Malaysia of 125 million ringgits.
1991 Creation of the Accounting and Auditing Organization for Islamic Financial Institutions (AAOIFI) in Algiers and Bahrain.
1991 Creation of Bank Muamalat, Indonesia.
1995 Launch of the Harvard Islamic Finance Project, US.
1996 Creation of Citi Islamic Investment Bank, Bahrain.
1998 Creation of HSBC Amanah, Malaysia.
1998 Creation of the FTSE Islamic Index, UK.
1999 Creation of the Dow Jones Islamic Market Index, US.
- 2000s 2001 Creation in Bahrain of the General Council for Islamic Banks and Financial Institutions (CIBAFI).
2002 Malaysia establishes the Islamic Financial Services Board (IFSB).
2002 Creation in Bahrain of the International Islamic Financial Market (IIFM).
2002 First *ṣukūk* sovereign issue in Malaysia (600 million US dollars).
2002 First listing of *ṣukūk* in Luxembourg.
2003 Abolition of double taxation for Islamic financing in the UK.
2003 Creation of the Liquidity Management Center (LMC) in Bahrain.
2004 Creation of the Islamic Bank of Britain, UK.
2004 First issue of sovereign *ṣukūk* by the Federal State of Saxony-Anhalt (100 million euros).
2005 Creation in Bahrain of the Islamic International Rating Agency (IIRA).
2005 Malaysia established the International Centre for Education in Islamic Finance (INCEIF).
2005 The World Bank issued its first *ṣukūk* of 760 million ringgits.
2006 Faisal Private Bank established in Switzerland (until 2012).
2006 Dubai Financial Market announced its restructuring to become the world's first Islamic stock exchange.
2007 First issue of sovereign *ṣukūk* by Indonesia.
2009 Creation in the United Arab Emirates of the International Islamic Center for Reconciliation and Arbitration (IICRA).
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(Continued)

- 2009 First tax instructions for Islamic finance operations in France.
2009 First issue of sovereign *shukūk* by Singapore (200 million Singapore dollars).
2010s 2010 Establishment of the International Islamic Liquidity Management Center (IILM) in Malaysia.
2012 First instructions for Islamic banks in Djibouti.
2013 Tunisia adopted specific regulations for *shukūk* and Islamic investment funds.
2014 Morocco adopted specific regulations.
2015 Libya adopted specific regulations.
2018 Algeria adopted specific regulations.
2018 Adoption of specific regulations for Islamic finance operations by the Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO).
- Internationalization and intensification of shukūk issues*
- 2014 First issue of corporate *shukūk* by Goldman Sachs (500 million US dollars) becoming the first US company to issue them.
2014 First issue of corporate *shukūk* by Tokyo Mitsubishi becoming the first Japanese company to issue them (double tranche: 25 million and 2.5 billion yen).
2014 First *shukūk* sovereign issued by South Africa (500 million US dollars).
2014 First sovereign *shukūk* issued by Hong Kong (1 billion US dollars).
2014 First sovereign *shukūk* issued by Luxembourg (200 million euros).
2014 First sovereign *shukūk* issued by the UK (200 million pounds).
2014 First sovereign *shukūk* issued by Senegal (CFA 100 billion).
2015 Banking license granted to KT Bank, Germany's first Islamic bank.
2015 First sovereign *shukūk* issued by Côte d'Ivoire.
2016 First sovereign *shukūk* issued by Togo.
2017 Issue by Tadau Energy in Malaysia of the world's first green *shukūk* (760 million ringgits).
2017 First sovereign *shukūk* issued by Nigeria (326 million US dollars).
2020s 2021 Issue by the Islamic Development Bank of a sustainable *shukūk* (2.5 billion US dollars).
2021 Second issue of sovereign *shukūk* by the UK (500 million pounds).
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Note

- 1 This original chapter, including the in-text quotations, was translated from French by Camille Liederman with the help of François Gauthier.

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LATERAL COLLABORATION

Exploring Financial Expertise in Malaysia

Daromir Rudnyckj

Introduction

On my first visit to Kuala Lumpur to begin research on the Malaysian state's ambitious efforts to make the country's capital a central node in the emerging global network of Islamic finance, I arranged a meeting with Dr. Rifki, a senior official at the International Shariah Research Academy for Islamic Finance (ISRA). ISRA was only a few years old at that point, having been established in 2008 to be what one interlocutor later described to me as 'the research arm of the Central Bank.' At the time, ISRA occupied a cramped set of offices in Menara Tun Razak, a 30-story office building that has since been demolished to pave the way for a more modern edifice in the country's insatiable thirst for physical signs of progress. Upon finishing my introductory explanation of my plans to research Islamic finance, Dr. Rifki looked at me with an expression that was simultaneously bemused and quizzical. 'What,' he asked, 'does anthropology have to do with Islamic finance?'

The puzzlement that Dr. Rifki expressed at a qualitative social scientist among experts in Islamic finance was not unusual. Until I became a regular sight at various events and meetings focusing on Islamic finance in Kuala Lumpur, new interlocutors regularly expressed bewilderment at having an anthropologist turn up to participate in discussions, join workshops, and schedule interviews. On more than one occasion, upon disclosing my scholarly identity, interactions suggested that my interlocutors thought I might be better suited to the forests of Malaysian Borneo rather than the concrete and steel of the country's capital city. However, as I spent more time conducting fieldwork in Malaysia, I became increasingly convinced of the value of empirical social science research in sites where expert capitalism is practiced, such as Islamic finance.

This chapter documents the common interests and lateral traffic between the ethnographic study of financial practices and Islamic finance. I contend that Islamic finance illustrates the emergent, experimental nature of contemporary capitalism and the commitment to renewed profit that undergirds it. This is especially evident in arguments that the natural checks on leverage characteristic of the investment-oriented version of Islamic finance create greater sustainability and long-term stability. Furthermore, an analysis of Islamic finance illustrates how a retooled study of expert capitalism can attend to macroeconomic

problems and questions rather than being consigned to a focus on microeconomic objects, such as the household, the bazaar, or the firm. Ultimately, I conclude that the relationship between Islamic finance and the study of financial expertise might be best captured by what I term ‘lateral collaboration.’ Indeed, an engaged social science that seeks to address big-picture concerns through fine-grained empirical methods offers a compelling vision for how the human sciences can better understand the diverse contours of contemporary capitalism.

Financial Expertise and Islamic Finance

Over the course of my fieldwork, it became apparent to me that research in Islamic finance was largely framed primarily by two disciplines: Islamic sciences and conventional economics/finance. Most scholars researching and writing about Islamic finance at universities in Malaysia and elsewhere are credentialed in either of these two areas, although rarely in both. As an effect, most knowledge about Islamic finance has either been framed, on the one hand, by economics and finance or, on the other, by classical Islamic sciences, such as shariah (Islamic law) and fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence). Work framed by economics and finance has tended to apply technical analysis to Islamic financial practice, for example, deploying mathematical formulas to measure the ‘performance’ of Islamic financial instruments in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis (Kassim and Kami 2012; Akbar and Barkely 2015). In this vein of analysis, Kassim and Kamil use standard economics methods such as the Sharpe ratio and Jensen’s alpha index to ‘evaluate the performance of Islamic unit trust funds’ (Kassim and Kami 2012, p. 66).¹ Alternatively, work framed by the classical Islamic sciences employs the hermeneutic methods of classical Islamic scholarship to analyze the religious legitimacy of concepts and tools in conventional finance. For example, Bouheraoua and his colleagues analyzed whether the concept of intangible assets was compatible with shariah prescriptions (Bouheraoua et al. 2014). This work largely applied the methods and modes of reasoning characteristic of the Islamic sciences to determine whether aspects of conventional finance were compatible with Islam. In contrasting the two approaches, it becomes apparent that the economic approach uses a Western epistemic framework to test the viability of Islamic finance, thereby rendering it in terms of positivist science. The Islamic sciences approach uses an epistemic framework based on Islamic interpretive traditions to test the validity of conventional economics and finance, thereby rendering it in terms of shariah permissibility.

An empirical, interpretive approach to Islamic finance offered a third option. Rather than subjecting Islamic finance to positivist forms of knowledge largely developed in the West or subjecting conventional finance to the litmus of shariah, the approach that I deployed put both epistemic frameworks into play relative to one another, asserting the primacy of neither. Rather than subjecting one set of knowledge practices to the test of a specific epistemic framework, the approach I developed examined the production of Islamic financial knowledge and the implications of that knowledge for human practices and relationships. As such, it denotes something that I term ‘financial expertise.’

By developing an approach that sought to put distinctive epistemic frameworks in conversation rather than privileging one over the other, I came to realize that Islamic finance experts were engaged in projects that resonated with the disciplinary concerns of qualitative social science. One domain in which this became evident was in the critique of the sovereign subject of liberalism. The presumed universality of liberal personhood upon much of which Western knowledge is based has been subjected to extensive critique in the human

sciences (Strathern 1988; Mehta 1999; Povinelli 2002). This work has shown that, far from being a universal disposition, the rational, individualistic figure of classical liberalism is a historically contingent artifact of Western history and Enlightenment thought (Kant 1991; Descartes 1993).

A similar challenge to the universality of the individualistic subject of Western liberalism was evident in the claims made by proponents of Islamic finance in Malaysia. This was strikingly evident in the work of the prominent Islamic economist Abbas Mirakhor. Mirakhor was born in Iran, obtained a PhD in economics at Kansas State University, and subsequently worked in a senior capacity at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in Washington, DC, for several decades. After retiring from the IMF, he was named to the first chaired professorship at the International Center for Education in Islamic Finance (INCEIF), which was established by Malaysia's central bank (Bank Negara) and intended to be the world's preeminent university for education in Islamic finance. Officials at Bank Negara held Mirakhor in high esteem, and his vision of Islamic finance was especially influential on regulators at the central bank. Mirakhor's critique of the sovereign subject of liberalism is evident in his characterization of Islamic finance as premised on risk sharing rather than risk transfer, which he views as characteristic of conventional finance.

Mirakhor's critique of the individualistic assumptions of Western liberalism begins with the oft-invoked Quranic injunction against interest. The prohibition of interest is perhaps the most salient difference between Islamic and conventional finance. The verse reads:

Those who live on usury will not rise (on Doomsday) but like a man possessed of the devil and demented. This is because they say that trading is like usury. But trade has been sanctioned and usury forbidden by God. Those who are warned by their Lord and desist will keep (what they have taken of interest) already, and the matter will rest with God. But those who revert to it again are the residents of Hell where they will abide forever.

(*Qur'an* 2:275)

In collaboration with his colleague Wang Yong Bao, Mirakhor points to the fundamental opposition between commercial exchanges, such as sales (*bay'*), and interest on debt (*riba*) in the Quran. They then interpret the 'non-permissibility of the contract of al-Riba' as 'surely due to the fact that this contract transfers all, or at least a major portion, of risk to the borrower' (Mirakhor and Bao 2013, p. 33).

When I asked Mirakhor about the significance of the opposition between exchange and loans, he explained that in trade, both parties assume risk. Thus, he considered it shared between them. In contrast, he explained, a loan entails one party extending credit to another and receiving collateral, either from the borrower or from a third party, and there is little or no risk on the part of the creditor. When I objected that lenders also take risks, such as the possibility of default, he acknowledged that although this was theoretically true, in practice, major creditors always insulate themselves against risk, usually by requiring collateral on credit. For example, in a home mortgage, the bank covers the risk in the loan by having recourse to selling the house in the event the borrower is unable to pay. By maintaining the right to dispose of a collateralized asset, the lender ensures that their capital and interest are protected. According to Mirakhor, the risk transfer practices inherent in loans make interest immoral according to Islam. He argues, 'it appears that the reason for the prohibition of Al-Riba contracts is the fact that opportunities for risk sharing do not exist

in this contract' (Mirakhor and Bao 2013, p. 35). Since *riba* is a 'contract of risk transfer' and it is expressly prohibited, Mirakhor and Bao conclude 'it is clear that by declaring the contract of Al-Riba nonpermissible [sic], the Qur'an intends for humans to shift their focus to risk-sharing contracts of exchange' (Mirakhor and Bao 2013, p. 35).

In attempting to reformulate economic action around risk sharing rather than risk transfer, Mirakhor offers a critique of the individualized, rational subject of Western liberal capitalism. Further, he suggests that such relationships provide the possibility of creating stronger collective relationships than conventional finance and, ultimately, a more stable system, as there is an acceptance of financial risk rather than a ceaseless attempt to find a counterparty on which to offload risk. In this sense, Mirakhor's arguments about the subjective dispositions intrinsic to contractual relationships and assertion of distinctive subjective relationships resonate with arguments in the social sciences. He demonstrates how Islamic finance is a kind of empirical critique of finance insofar as it asks how finance might be thought of, and practiced, differently.

Renewed Profit as Technical Problem

Islamic finance also offered analytical purchase into thinking about expert capitalism. An underrecognized insight Weber made regarding capitalism was its tendency to endorse not just the pursuit of profit but the pursuit of 'forever *renewed* profit' (Weber 2001 [1920], pp. xxxi–xxxii, italics original). Marx held that ever-worsening crises precipitated by commercial cycles would ultimately create internal contradictions so extreme that capitalism would inevitably implode and enable other economic formations, such as socialism and, eventually, communism, to emerge.² However, the economic crises that have afflicted capitalism over the past two hundred years have not yet triggered its demise. Some have sought to account for the persistence of capitalism as an effect of the strategies deployed by elites to use crises as an opportunity to accelerate capitalist policies (Mirowski 2013). However, these accounts miss the tremendous resilience of capitalism and the fact that crises serve as an opportunity to reevaluate the pursuit of renewed profit.

The problem of figuring out how to renew profit was profoundly evident among the Islamic finance experts working in the orbit of Malaysia's central bank. To illustrate this, it is useful here to point out that my interlocutors in Malaysia rarely spoke of Islamic finance as an alternative *to* capitalism. Rather, they saw it as an alternative form *of* capitalism. This was manifest in the fact that they took the objective of commerce to generate profit as a given. However, while they did not question the imperative to profit or see the generation of surplus value as problematic, they did view certain practices characteristic of conventional capitalism as illegitimate.

The legitimacy of profit was evident in an essential distinction that was made between debt-based contracts and investment-based contracts. As noted above, the prohibition on interest is defining feature of Islamic finance. While conducting fieldwork in Malaysia, a central question I asked my interlocutors was how to create a viable mechanism for financing business without resorting to interest-bearing debt arrangements. The primary mechanism Islamic finance experts sought to deploy to achieve this goal was investment-based contracts that facilitated the creation of joint ventures characterized by what Mirakhor called 'risk sharing.' These 'equity-based contracts' were based on splitting the ownership (or equity) between the partners, thus enabling both risk- and profit-sharing between partners.

One particularly popular contract was known as the *mudaraba*. In this contract, a party with surplus capital (in Arabic, the *rabb al-mal*) forms a partnership with an entrepreneur (the *mudarib*, the root of *mudaraba*). The two parties agree to share in any profits generated by the company. The *mudarib* typically possesses ideas for profit generation and entrepreneurial acumen but no capital. The *rabb al-mal* would not only provide capital but also offer financial expertise to the concern. Profits generated by the business venture are split between the parties according to a ratio that the parties agree to in advance. In a *mudaraba*, the investor who provides the capital bears all financial losses, while the *mudarib* is only responsible for the opportunity costs associated with managing the venture. Thus, the investor not only accepts the risk that the enterprise may not produce any returns but also offers his or her guidance and advice to the entrepreneur to mitigate that risk. Proponents of *mudaraba* contracts contend that they create greater collective solidarity (through yielding collaborative partnerships) than debt (which yields individualistic economic actors).

In a hypothetical example, a software engineer (*mudarib*) might seek funding from an investor (*rabb al-mal*) to develop a new iPhone app. The investor would provide the funds necessary to launch the business and bring the product to the market, whereas the entrepreneur would handle the day-to-day mechanics of running the business. In a *mudaraba*, the investor might offer guidance and advice to the software engineer on general business strategy but would largely remain external to routine operations and management. Once the app was developed and began to generate profits through Apple's app store, those profits would be shared between the investor and the entrepreneur at the pre-agreed rate.

Another common equity-based contract was known as called a *musharaka*. In this contract, two or more parties agree to pool their investment funds and labor in a business venture. Like a *mudaraba*, this is a collaborative contract in which both risk and profits are shared. All parties hold equity stakes and are entitled to a pre-arranged share of the profits. However, unlike a *mudaraba*, in a *musharaka*, all parties participate in the day-to-day management of the firm, and all are jointly liable for any losses, again at a pre-agreed ratio.

The problem that framed the actions of most of my interlocutors was the global financial crisis that reached its peak in 2008. The crisis raised the question of the alternative potential of Islamic finance with heightened urgency. The consensus view held by experts in Islamic finance was that the crisis was an effect of a surfeit of debt. They saw debt as central to contemporary capitalism and often attributed economic instability and social problems to the ubiquity of debt and the problems created by over-indebtedness. They further held that because Islamic finance eschewed debt in favor of contracts based on investment and equity, such as the *mudaraba* and the *musharaka*, it would not be prone to the same volatility as the conventional financial system characterized by 'fast capitalism' (Holmes 2000). They argued that the greater stability of equity-based Islamic finance, when compared to conventional finance, was due to the fact that equity-based instruments inhibited leverage.

Leveraging refers to the practice of purchasing assets with borrowed funds under the presumption that the income generated by the asset will exceed the cost of borrowing those funds: the interest payments. When an economic expansion is underway, leverage can bring tremendous profits. However, during a downturn, leverage can lead to devastating losses. Leverage greatly multiplies the risk in a given financial strategy. For example, the widespread use of credit default swaps to insure collateralized debt obligations precipitated the near collapse of insurance giant AIG at the height of the 2008 financial calamity, an example of high-risk leveraging (Roitman 2014, pp. 51–53).

In contrast to the debt-fueled excesses of conventional finance, Islamic finance experts posed an Islamic system based on equity and investment. They argued that the proliferation of leverage had produced the calamity of 2008. Rather than lending money, an Islamic system would put limits on the hazards of leverage by making investments the central mechanism for the mobilization of capital, using contracts such as the *mudaraba* and *musharaka*. Advocates of these equity-based contracts argue that they put limits on leverage because, in the words of one Islamic finance expert, ‘You can’t invest what you don’t already own.’

Advocacy for an equity-based version of Islamic finance converges with what Weber identified as capitalism’s enduring inclination toward ‘renewed profit.’ My interlocutors argued that debt-based finance produced the hyper-leveraged conditions that led to the 2008 crisis and the massive instability that it precipitated. In contrast, the equity-based Islamic version offered the possibility of greater stability that might not hold the possibility of phenomenal returns but would be more sustainable and better suited toward generating *renewed* profit. In developing financial instruments that mobilize capital in accordance with Islamic injunctions against interest and usury, proponents of equity-based instruments contend that they will create a form of capitalism less prone to crisis and the possibility of systemic breakdown. Thus, Islamic finance experts advocating equity-based finance seek not profit maximization itself but the creation of conditions of possibility for the sustainable accumulation of profit, with an eye on the looming specter of crisis. And its greater sustainability would more effectively fulfill the objective of renewed profit.

Provisional Devices

Some seeking to reform Islamic finance according to investment-based devices, such as the *mudaraba* or *musharaka* contracts discussed above, have criticized the use of debt-based contracts. Their criticism stems from the use of multiple sales to essentially replicate interest-bearing loans. One particularly controversial contract of sale that became widely used in Malaysia is known as the *bai al-inah*. In this contract, a party with surplus capital, such as a bank, sells an asset to a customer on a deferred payment basis. The second party then immediately sells the asset back to the bank at a discounted cash price. In so doing, the two parties effectively circumvent the Quranic prohibition on interest through two sales, the deferred payment, and shrewdly indexing the price difference and deferral to prevailing interest rates. Most Islamic finance experts acknowledge that these types of contracts obey the letter of religious injunctions but do not conform to their spirit. Because they effectively replicate interest-bearing loans through deferred payments and marked-up prices, they are often referred to as debt-based. Whereas shariah scholars in the Middle East deemed these contracts impermissible, Malaysian scholars deemed them acceptable, and they became a pivotal part of the infrastructure of Malaysian Islamic finance.

Nonetheless, the rationale for implementing *bai al-inah* contracts illustrates the experimental nature of Malaysian Islamic finance. Although Malaysian shariah scholars approved the *bai al-inah*, they did so with the caveat that approval was provisional and only effective until a superior device was devised. The interim nature of using the *bai al-inah* contracts is evident in the rationale provided by Bank Negara’s shariah advisory committee for its approval. The committee intoned that the *bai al-inah* ‘concept is used in the Malaysian Islamic banking and Islamic capital market system to fulfill the various needs of market players, *mainly during the initial development stage of the Islamic financial system*’ (Bank Negara Malaysia 2010, p. 109, italics added). In large part, the popularity of *bai al-inah*

contracts in Malaysia was due to the fact that they could easily replicate the features of a conventional loan with a markup on a deferred sale of an asset, essentially duplicating market interest rates. The Central Bank's justification for approval demonstrates both the pragmatism of shariah scholars and the experimental, contingent nature of Islamic finance in Malaysia. Experts are cognizant of the emergent nature of Islamic financial knowledge, in that certain products used in the present will not be used in the future.

Indeed, in December 2012, the Central Bank issued guidelines that dramatically altered the terms of *bai al-inah*. This change led to a decline in the popularity of the contract among Islamic financial institutions in Malaysia. The shift entailed the removal of what was known as the 'interconditionality clause' from *bai al-inah* contracts. Prior to this new regulation, Islamic banks in Malaysia routinely required that the first of the two sales in a *bai al-inah* transaction be conditional on the second. But the new regulation broke this link, imposing a requirement that the bank would have to hold the asset without any guarantee of being able to resell it back to the customer. This presented the possibility that the two sales in a *bai al-inah* (or a similar sale-based transaction) would not be completed. A customer could sell an asset to the bank and then abandon the deal without buying it back from the bank at an increased price, leaving the bank holding the asset. This change increased the risk associated with *bai al-inah* and caused a great deal of consternation among executives at Islamic banks.

Central Bank regulators were unsympathetic to the worry of these executives, convinced that changing the regulations governing Islamic finance would lead to more experimentation and innovation in the industry. Umar, a senior regulator in the Islamic Banking Department, explained to me that the goal behind the new regulations was to make banks more innovative and take more risks. He asserted, 'This is a whole new game for the banks. They complain...[but] we told them, "this is the opportunity for Islamic banks to do something bigger than what the conventional banks can do!"' Here, Umar illustrated the pastoral role that the Central Bank plays in Islamic finance. It acts not only to regulate Islamic finance but, more importantly, to foster experimentation and risk-taking. In this regard, one key role is to get the Islamic banks to heed the calls of critics who saw them as 'merely replicating' the instruments of conventional banks. The sense that commercial banks were too risk-averse and conservative and needed to be encouraged to be more innovative and experimental was widely shared by regulators.

Toward an Anthropology of Macroeconomics

For most of its disciplinary history, anthropology has been framed by the assumption that the microeconomy, rather than the macroeconomy, is its appropriate mode of analysis. Thus, the discipline focused on gift exchange and systems of redistribution, such as the potlatch, in non-market economies (Mauss 1990 [1925]). In situations with capitalist relations of exchange, the discipline tended to focus on the division of labor in households and exchanges in small-scale markets, such as bazaars (Bohannan 1955). It also addressed the subjective experiences of individuals and collectivities in the context of the introduction of capitalist relations of production (Nash 1979; Taussig 1980). This disciplinary emphasis has largely accepted the contention that a proper understanding of macroeconomics is achieved through numerical data and statistical abstraction. The problem with this presumption is that it takes the arguments of economics at face value, thereby ceding the analysis of macroeconomics to other disciplines. However, as Michel Foucault argued, economies are

representations (Foucault 1991). As representations, they are constituted as much through speech as through other forms of expression, such as mathematics and statistics. Douglas Holmes has shown how the language deployed by central bankers acts on the actions of members of a population in an ‘economy of words’ (Holmes 2014). Those tasked with governing the economy use language to create conditions conducive to economic growth. Holmes shows how in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, central bankers

depended heavily on words to perform the labor of monetary policy. Modeling the economy linguistically and communicatively was an overriding concern; averting disastrous outcomes depended fundamentally on shaping public expectations preemptively with persuasive communications.

(Holmes 2014, p. 131)

In this sense, macroeconomics is not simply numerical data but is framed by linguistic practice. Therefore, it is amenable to ethnographic analysis.

The macroeconomic imperative of Islamic finance is evident upon the reconsideration of the objective, namely shifting the economy from debt-based to equity-based modes of financing. The aim of enabling renewed profit through deploying investment-oriented contracts, described above, was a macroeconomic project insofar as it created a representation of the economy and of appropriate economic action to reform what might be termed the Islamic welfare state. The origins of this version of the welfare state stem from affirmative action policies that sought to redress the effects of colonial administration under British rule.

As the colonial occupation of the Malayan peninsula expanded, Islam was a category through which the British distinguished between the Malay population, considered indigenous, and inhabitants whose ancestors had migrated to the area from elsewhere in Asia. Those considered outsiders were mainly from China and India, and their numbers increased rapidly as the colonial economy expanded. Malays and Malaysians of Chinese and Indian descent were differently incorporated into the colonial economy. Citizens of Chinese descent benefited more from the colonial economy and enjoyed better economic standing at the end of British sovereignty when compared to the majority Malay population. The Malaysian government introduced the New Economic Policy or NEP to address these lingering inequalities.

The NEP had two fundamental objectives. First, it was meant to eradicate poverty and increase economic opportunity for all groups; second, it was meant to accelerate the ‘process of restricting Malaysian society to correct economic imbalance, so as to reduce and eventually eliminate the identification of race with economic function’ (Crouch 1996, p. 25). This led to the introduction of affirmative action policies that provided those classified as ethnic Malays with privileged access to public resources. These policies have created what has been called ‘the world’s first affirmative action system tied exclusively to ethnicity’ (Ong 2006, p. 80). In the most recent census, the state identified around 67 percent of Malaysia’s population of roughly 30 million as *bumiputra* (indigenous or literally ‘sons of the soil’), 24 percent as Chinese, and 7 percent as Indian (Department of Statistics Malaysia 2017). Most of those classified as *bumiputra* are further identified as ethnically Malay and are granted special rights by the state in virtue of their claims to be the original inhabitants of Malaysia (Ong 1999, p. 284 n.83).

The macroeconomic objective of transforming the Malay population is usefully illustrated through consideration of the Islamic welfare state created to achieve the aim of advancing the *bumiputra* population. Islam is a defining feature of Malay identification,

and this is evidenced by the Malaysian constitution, which reads, ‘Malay means a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, [and] conforms to Malay custom’ (Federal Constitution of Malaysia 2013, article 160). This state definition of Malays as Muslims and the affirmative action policies effectively created an Islamic welfare state in which Muslim citizens received a disproportionate share of public benefits: civil service positions, government contracts, university scholarships, and even differential access to medical care.

Nonetheless, by the mid-2000s, this welfare state arrangement was under reconsideration in some quarters due to changes in domestic politics. Although they had largely benefited from these initiatives, some Malay Muslims realized that privileged access to the state’s largesse did not always work in their favor. This was due to the fact that the achievements of indigenous bumiputra were, in some cases, attributed to affirmative action rather than the individual initiative of those who were perceived to have benefited. For example, following the 2013 election, an editorial in the venerable *Straits Times* opined,

One negative perception of the community is the belief that every successful Malay who reaches the top of his career achieves it not through his own ability and merit, but through the special assistance provided for him by the state under the race-based policy.

(Osman 2013)

Malaysia’s Islamic finance ambitions dovetail with the macroeconomic imperative of reforming the Islamic welfare state. In its initial phase, Islamic finance had been dedicated to creating an Islamic identity conducive to this welfare configuration. But, to achieve this goal, Islamic finance needed to be Islamic in form only, whereas its religious content was left mainly implicit. By the 2010s, however, Islamic finance was redeployed as a technique for the entrepreneurialization of Malay Muslims as the welfare provisions came under reconsideration.

The goal of fostering entrepreneurship among Malay Muslims is evident in the promotion of equity-based financial devices, such as the *mudaraba* and *musharaka* contracts described above. Efforts to deploy *mudaraba* contracts to create risk-taking entrepreneurs are apparent in government planning documents. For example, the Tenth Malaysia Plan, published by the prime minister’s office, makes multiple references to cultivating entrepreneurship in the country. The report connects entrepreneurship to race politics by claiming that the goal is to facilitate ‘the bumiputera entrepreneurs’ ability to become independent of Government assistance’ (168). Perhaps most illuminating is that the Plan explicitly connects the problem of entrepreneurial development to *mudaraba* contracts. According to the document, under

the Tenth Plan, the Government is committed to investing in creativity, including efforts such as stimulating entrepreneurship ... The Government will provide a larger pool of funds for venture capital, especially on a *mudaraba* basis through co-investment with private sector funds.

(Economic Planning Unit 2010, p. 16)

The Plan lays out a scheme to use *mudaraba* contracts to facilitate entrepreneurship:

During the Plan period the risk capital industry will be strengthened to increase access to funding for innovative start-ups. New funding modes for public venture companies

will be introduced to better match investment risk profiles and promote greater private sector participation and risk-taking. Government funding to public venture companies...will shift from the current lending model to an equity structure.

(Economic Planning Unit 2010, p. 86)

The key here is the way in which state resources were deployed to foster entrepreneurship, risk-taking, and innovation by the so-called bumiputra. The Plan's interest in cultivating these qualities highlights the centrality of *mudaraba* contracts in the project of configuring entrepreneurial subjects adroit at developing enterprises, managing risk, and producing profits.

In this sense, outwardly non-economic phenomena, such as religion, ethnicity, and identity, are enlisted in macroeconomic objectives. For example, in the 1980s, the Malaysian state sought to deploy religion in its efforts to improve the living conditions of the majority Malay population. The state sought to create an educated, middle-class population with the skills desired by transnational corporations and deployed a version of Islam to achieve these goals. Nonetheless, as shortcomings in the state's affirmative action project became clear, a new interpretation of Islamic finance was deployed to enlist Malays in a different macroeconomic project.

By the 2010s, the state sought to enlist Islamic finance to transform the Malay Muslim population anew. Under the affirmative action policies, this population had become accustomed to rent-seeking, forming what was widely referred to as 'Ali-Baba companies.' In these partnerships, Malay Muslims would obtain contracts, while Malaysians of Chinese descent would largely execute them, handling the administration and day-to-day operations. In macroeconomic terms, the state sought to move the Malay Muslim population away from rent-seeking and, instead, to enhance their profit-making capacities. Thus, they sought to transform the passive objects of the affirmative action system into active, entrepreneurial agents capable of calculating risk. A new version of Islamic finance was re-enlisted in this project. Experts thus sought to emphasize economic devices that enhanced entrepreneurship, such as the *mudaraba* contract.

A long-held assumption of liberalism has been that economies are natural phenomena and, as such, can be analyzed and described using methods analogous to those of the natural sciences. Macroeconomics, in its attempts to model the correlations between supply and demand and between prices and outputs, is complicit in this tradition. However, efforts to use devices, such as the *mudaraba*, to transform the Malaysian Islamic welfare state reveal that the object of macroeconomics is far from natural. In fact, macroeconomics is a profoundly representational project. As such, it does not merely observe populations and economies but is actively engaged in producing them.

Conclusion: Lateral Collaboration

Ultimately, I found the interests of the human sciences converging in several different respects with those of Islamic finance, a relationship captured by the concept of lateral collaboration. Lateral collaboration involves recognizing the proximity of the concerns of anthropologists and their interlocutors and identifying a space of overlapping but not necessarily isomorphic interests and concerns. Both my interlocutors in Malaysia and myself had been profoundly shaken by the global financial crisis of 2008. Islamic finance and my interdisciplinary investigation of it both took the crisis as a kind of inflection point in

seeking alternative economic practices. We were both profoundly interested in how capitalism might be transformed to make it, possibly, less destructive and more humane.

Along the way, the critical impulse of Islamic finance became clear. The human sciences have historically sought to problematize taken-for-granted phenomena to illustrate their contingency and identify the human practices that go into making them appear natural. Islamic finance experts were making a similar move in practical rather than conceptual terms. They used an unquestioned pillar of the machinery of capitalism, debt, and working to develop alternative forms of financing based instead on investment and equity.

Lateral collaboration offers a means of conceptualizing the overlapping concerns of anthropologists and their interlocutors while simultaneously recognizing the irreducibility of those concerns. As a research strategy, it illustrates how the human sciences can document the emergence of new forms of knowledge and how those forms resonate with (or perhaps) depart from standard ones. For example, the classical project of anthropology was to document cultures that were thought to be disappearing through ‘salvage ethnography.’ In contrast, empirical attention to the practices of expert capitalism, premised on lateral collaboration, recognizes the emergence of new forms of knowledge. Thus, it illuminates a shared zone of ethical and political commitments on the part of the scholar and their interlocutors.

Notes

- 1 The Sharpe ratio is a mathematical measure of the profitability of an asset in relation to the risk taken. Jensen’s alpha measures how much the return of a security differs in relation to its theoretically expected return.
- 2 In volume 3 (chapter 15) of *Capital*, Marx writes, ‘The real barrier of capitalist production is capital itself. It is that capital and its self-expansion appear as the starting and the closing point, the motive and the purpose of production; that production is only production for capital and not vice versa, the means of production are not mere means for a constant expansion of the living process of the society of producers. The limits within which the preservation and self-expansion of the value of capital resting on the expropriation and pauperisation of the great mass of producers can alone move – these limits come continually into conflict with the methods of production employed by capital for its purposes, which drive towards unlimited extension of production, towards production as an end in itself, towards unconditional development of the social productivity of labour. The means – unconditional development of the productive forces of society – comes continually into conflict with the limited purpose, the self-expansion of the existing capital.’

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REPRESENTATIONS OF THE TRIBAL-MODERN SELF ON QATARI BANKNOTES

Hannah Vongries

Introduction

In November and December 2022, Qatar attracted global attention by hosting the Men's World Cup. However, this has not been the only stage for the tiny but immensely rich Gulf emirate. Qatar has been trying for some time to generate importance and visibility on various stages. Due to its relatively late independence in 1971 and its extremely small size and population, the country has faced the challenge of forging the requisites of a state both theatrically and actually. This is particularly evident in the mushrooming of, for example, extravagant landmark architecture over the past two decades. This chapter turns to the showcase of money. Banknotes and coins count among the most widely produced objects in the world and are used by millions of people every day (cf. Hewitt 1994, p. 11). The images, symbols, and messages depicted on them are widely circulated, thus making banknotes an effective representational surface for state-desired narratives about national identity (cf. Pointon 1998, p. 231).

On 18 December 2020, Qatar's national holiday, the Qatar Central Bank (QCB) issued the fifth edition of the Qatari Riyal (QR). It differs from the previous edition in new security features, the introduction of a new denomination, the 200-riyal note, and, most notably, a new design characterized by new motifs and a changed color scheme. With this new riyal design, the small Gulf emirate took the opportunity to circulate updated 'portraits of the nation' (Schwarzenbach 1997, p. 15) around two years before the start of the controversial World Cup, thus strengthening the Qatar brand both internally to the citizens and other inhabitants, and externally to the World Cup tourists.

In the context of the young European nation-states of the nineteenth century, historian Eric Hobsbawm assessed the role of national currencies as 'the most universal form of public imagery' (Hobsbawm 2010, p. 281), comprising the potential to create a collective identity, a sense of belonging, and loyalty. Hence, 'currency marks the uniqueness of its nation, both for tourists who view it as a souvenir and local citizens who see it as an emblem of their nation' (Hawkins 2010, p. 228). A country's currency represents that country both internally and externally and, at the same time, manifests the real, material (monetary) value, and the ideal value of the national identity. Although the potential of money to

create and enhance identity has been known and used since ancient times, the relationship between currency and national identity only established itself as a main research area from the late 1990s onward and has since developed into an interdisciplinary field at the nexus of political science, international relations, nationalism studies, history, and geography (cf. Sørensen 2016, pp. 173–174). Eric Helleiner's article, 'National currencies and national identities,' and Marcia Pointon's book chapter, 'Money and Nationalism,' both published in 1998, were fundamental to this. Helleiner's article suggests that currencies may function as effective vehicles for evoking feelings of national belonging and collective memory, while Pointon's chapter shows how banknotes produce and reproduce state-authored narratives of national identity by means of an in-depth analysis of the pictorial content of French, British, and German paper money. Her analysis identifies various frequently depicted groups of motifs, including persons, flora and fauna, landscape, and architecture (Pointon 1998, pp. 232, 236–250).

In this literature, banknotes are often interpreted as artifacts of a 'banal nationalism' in Michael Billig's sense. The notion of banal nationalism sheds light on the (mostly unconscious) everyday reproduction of feelings of belonging and loyalty to an existing nation-state, thereby naturalizing the concept of the nation (Billig 1995, p. 6). Banal nationalism takes place on a material and immaterial level: it is just as visible in the allegiances presupposed in political statements and the press (during the World Cup in Qatar, the media frequently referred to 'our team') as it is in flags on and in public buildings, national anthems, national teams, postage stamps, and in the national emblems depicted on banknotes (Billig 1995, p. 41). To a country's population, such means function as continual reminders of their 'national place in a world of nations,' which are so ubiquitous and commonplace that – although they are 'embodied [in the] habits of social life' – they are rendered unconscious and forgotten (Billig 1995, p. 8). Billig's concept of banal nationalism has gained widespread acceptance since its introduction in 1995 (cf. Sørensen 2016, p. 174).

However, cultural studies on currencies of Islamic and Arabic-speaking countries are scarce; the few exceptions include Simon Hawkins's (2010) interpretation of national symbols on the Tunisian dinar, Raja Saleem's (2017) comparative treatment of Islamic iconography on Pakistani and Turkish currency, and Shaima Elbardawil's (2020) semiotic analysis of the Jordanian dinar. Comparable publications on any of the currencies of the Arab Gulf states are not yet available.

National Identity of Qatar as a Small Gulf State

This chapter examines how the motifs depicted on the new QR bills represent Qatari identity and what discourses the visual language of the banknotes thus links to.¹ Whereas much has already been written on identity construction and heritage management in the Arabian Gulf, this does not apply to its manifestation on banknotes.² For the interpretation of national emblems on the QR bills, I will predominantly draw on Miriam Cooke's concept of the Tribal-Modern, with which Cooke opposes the unreflective transfer of US-Canadian-European conceptualizations of national or other collective identities onto the states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).³ She identifies the cultural distinctiveness of the Arab Gulf states⁴ with the co-presence and convergence of the tribal and the modern, dissolving the apparent contradiction between the two. She argues that the notions of tribal and tribal-ity in the twenty-first century GCC states do not only refer to the past as backward-looking, traditional, or even 'primitive,' but are an integral part of Arab Gulf modernity (Cooke

2014, pp. 7–9). This is not the notion of modernity as understood in the Enlightenment, but rather a globalized utilitarian-consumerist one, that uses tradition for authenticity claims.

Indeed, the rubbing up of the tribal against the modern in today's Gulf states does not represent a clash of conflicting values, but, rather, the desired effect of common aspirations. [...] [T]o begin to understand the culture of the Gulf and to appreciate what is new and different in it, we must see how the modern and the tribal, the high-rises and the tribal regalia, converge, each reinforcing the other.

(Cooke 2014, pp. 10–11)

Rather, '[t]he tribal, the national, and the modern are inextricably bound to one another' (Cooke 2014, p. 13). According to Cooke, Gulf Arabs conceive of their national and cultural identity as rooted and tribal on the one hand, and modern and global on the other (p. 14). The Tribal-Modern is also expressed in the marketing of the small Gulf states regarding the increasing tourist commercialization of sites and practices of national heritage (heritagization). In this context, authenticity – whether actual or imagined – is an important buzzword, often used synonymously with the tribal. Hence, Cooke, an expert in Middle Eastern and Arab World Studies, characterizes the branding strategy of the small Gulf states as the combination of 'the symbolic tribal and the material modern' (p. 13).

The small Gulf states of Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates share an inventory of national symbols with a 'tribal signature' that predates the oil boom (Krawietz 2020, p. 3). These are the oryx antelope, natural pearls, the coffee pot, the dhow or incense burner, and falcon⁵ (Cooke 2014, pp. 5–6). These elements constitute a common (but distinctly employed) pool of authenticating stage props that emerge ubiquitously in the wider Gulf region and also on banknotes. In what follows, I explore the extent to which these connections are also reflected in the QR's motifs. Cooke substantiates her concept of Tribal-Modern identity specific to the small Gulf states with a focus on examples from Qatar, which is why her research perspective is particularly suitable for analyzing the imagery of the Qatari currency.

The juxtaposition of references to the modern and the tribal manifests important changes with respect to the meaning of modernity and the constitution of the nation-state. Across the Arab world, the main concern in the twentieth century was to construct a modern nation-state, namely by rationalizing Islam and purifying it from anything that could be deemed superstitious. In this period, becoming modern meant applying what Eisenstadt (2002) calls the 'modern cultural programme,' that is, the French-Enlightenment-inspired Jacobin political project of the construction of a utopian society by doing away with tradition. Muslim modernist currents, such as Wahhabis and Islamists like the Muslim Brotherhood or the Jamaat-e-Islami, opposed the secularist interpretation of this project by reinterpreting Islam in a modernity and nation-state compatible way (Nasr 1996; Iqtidar in this volume).

The 'postmodern' condition, on the contrary, introduces a new rapport with tradition, modulated by the penetration of consumerism as a dominant social ethos and the neoliberal erosion of the nation-state's soteriological functions. Modernity in the current age is no longer defined by the utopian project of a modern state as it is about participating in the global flows of neoliberal capitalism. The tribal past, which was formerly a sign of backwardness and something like a stigma, becomes available for new investments. Consumerism, as the editors have noted in the introduction to this volume, is driven by the circulation of signs of 'authenticity' and a Romantic ethic that reevaluates premodern traditions (Taylor 2007; Gauthier 2020). The 'tribal,' in this respect, is no longer incompatible with an essentially economically

defined conception of modernity. In fact, it becomes synonymous with both premodern authenticity and postmodern mobility and the nomadic cosmopolitanism of the global age.

Historical and Economic Background of Qatar

The Emirate of Qatar (Arabic: *Qaṭar* or *Giṭar* in the local dialect) is an oval peninsula on the west coast of the Persian Gulf or the east coast of the Arabian Peninsula, respectively, bordering Saudi Arabia to the south. The Qatari constitution enshrines Islam as the state religion. The small desert state is characterized by extreme climate conditions with temperatures above 40°C and humidity of up to 70 percent in the summer months (*The Statesman's Yearbook 2022 2021*, p. 939). Although the region has been inhabited for at least 6,000 years (Johnstone 2012), it remained on the periphery of political events until well into the twentieth century.⁶ Before the start of oil production in the 1940s and the oil boom in the following decades, which brought the country great wealth and international interest, the area of present-day Qatar was poor and underdeveloped (Johnstone 2012). The oil boom and the resulting economic growth led to a steady influx of foreign workers, especially from Southeast Asia, increasing Qatar's actual population more than a hundredfold in the last 70 years (from 25,000 people in 1950 to 2.9 million in 2020), but with more than 85 percent of the population not having Qatari citizenship (*The Statesman's Yearbook 2022 2021*, p. 938). This fact calls into question the extent to which common Western⁷ concepts of nationalism and national identity apply to Qatar, as they are often based on the assumption that nationalism is something for national citizens (Koch 2016, p. 43). With the end of the Qatari-Bahraini War on 18 December 1868, Qatar became a suzerain political entity under the control of the Āl Thānī dynasty, which still rules the country today. Since 2007, this event has self-confidently been commemorated as Qatar's national holiday (rather than September 3, 1971, the day the emirate declared its independence from the United Kingdom after having been a British protectorate from 1916 to 1971 (Koch 2016, p. 46).

In terms of foreign policy, Qatar has emerged from the shadow of the other GCC members (especially Saudi Arabia) in recent years, which has led to deteriorating relations with the other GCC states and ultimately to the 2017 blockade (that officially ended in 2021, after the fifth QR edition was put into circulation) and has since become an independent player on the stage of international politics. For example, Qatar made itself indispensable in the diplomatic attempts to resolve the conflict in Afghanistan (including by brokering the Doha Agreement between the Taliban and the United States in 2020) (Deutsche Welle 2020) and has since been appreciated but also criticized as a 'door opener to the Taliban' (Kroll 2021). The economy of the coastal region was historically based on boat building, fishing, trading, and pearling until global interest in pearls increased at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and ushered in the 'golden age of pearling' (*zaman al-ghawṣ*) in what is now Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (Krawietz 2020, pp. 1–2). However, when Japanese cultured pearls entered the market in the 1920s, this plunged the economy of the Qatari peninsula into a deep crisis (about 48 percent of the Qatari population made their living in the pearling industry at that time) (Said Zahlan 1989, p. 22). Qatar's economy only recovered with the discovery of the first oil deposits in 1939 and the beginning of the exploitation of oil resources (Al-Arayed 2003, p. 162). In recent decades, Qatar has sought to diversify its economy away from exclusive dependence on finite oil and natural gas resources toward a highly variegated post-oil economy. The Arab Gulf states owe their economic boom and prosperity to petroleum (Hermann 2011, p. 262). However, natural gas

has become increasingly important economically compared to petroleum because the world economy's dependence on petroleum is decreasing faster than that on natural gas and also because the world's natural gas reserves are two to three times higher than its remaining petroleum reserves (Hermann 2011, p. 262; Primagas 2022). LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas) is Qatar's most important export product (*The Statesman's Yearbook 2022* 2021, p. 940).

The 2020 Edition of the Qatari Riyal

The QR was introduced as the official currency in Qatar in 1973. The word *riyāl* derives from the Iberian silver coin *real* (*de plata*), which was introduced in the mid-fourteenth century by Peter I, King of Castile and Leon, and adopted a short time later by Ferdinand of Portugal. In the wake of currency collapses in the Ottoman and Safavid empires beginning in the sixteenth century, both empires increasingly used foreign currencies, including the aforementioned *real*. The first mention of the term *riyāl* occurred in 1609 in the Safavid Empire under Shāh 'Abbās I. (Freeman-Grenville 2012). Today, *riyāl* refers to the currencies of Saudi Arabia, Iran, Oman, and Yemen, in addition to Qatar.⁸

The fifth QR edition includes seven denominations, one more than the previous fourth edition. The obverse and even more telling reverse share backgrounds of ornamental patterns, which the QCB referred to as 'traditional geometric patterns' (Maṣrif Qaṭar al-Markazī 2020) in the announcement of the edition. The obverse designs differ from each other only in the colors and the denominations (in text and numbers). Regarding motifs, the obverse of the fifth QR edition banknotes features Qatar's coat of arms (a conglomerate of a dhow, a palm tree, and the sea with two intersecting traditional daggers), the Qatari flag, the ornamental entrance gate of the Great Mosque of Doha, and the *Drīma* flower; according to the QCB, this ensemble is meant to symbolize the state of Qatar, as well as its flora and historical architecture (Maṣrif Qaṭar al-Markazī 2020). A state's flag and coat of arms are common motifs on currencies around the world, as they underscore and authorize the official character of the banknotes and coins as pecuniary documents.

The reverse designs of the banknotes are more differentiated; in addition to flora and fauna, they feature various architectural elements. According to the QCB, the motifs used are intended to reflect 'Qatari tradition, Islamic history, culture, flora and fauna, and the development of education, sports and the economy' (Maṣrif Qaṭar al-Markazī 2020). It is striking that the various depicted elements fade into each other, even more so than in the fourth edition. And although a large part of the bills' existing buildings, which can be found in the cityscape, are depicted, their representation is not true to reality. The individual buildings are combined as urban icons, not embedded in their actual surroundings, without consideration of proportions, distances, and perspectives. Rather, they are monochromatized and merged into each other. In the following, I discuss the neo-traditional motifs and modern landmarks displayed in the 2020 edition of the QR notes. Some are spread over more than one note; others constitute a stand-alone topic of a certain bill.

Flora and Fauna: Drīma Flower, Ghāf Tree, Oryx, Camel, and Arabian Horse

Of the 23 motifs that occur on the QR, five are representations of flora and fauna (*Drīma* flower, *Ghāf* tree, oryx, camel, Arabian horse).⁹ Using Israel as a case study, First and Sheffi (2015, p. 332) argue that the images of landscapes and local flora and fauna on banknotes

serve to construct a ‘territorial identity’ that, together with cultural identity, forms the basis of the nation-state. Analogously, one can understand the images of native animals and plants on Qatari banknotes as a geographical localization and legitimization of the emirate. In addition, the motifs refer to a traditional Bedouin way of life in the desert, which is often idealized, re-imagined, and marketed in the course of heritagization in the small Gulf states (see also Simpson 2016, p. 38). In this way, the camel and the Arabian horse, in particular, are used to show how apparent historical continuities are produced or invented:¹⁰ both animals were and are important identity markers for the entire Arab world, although a shift in meaning has taken place over the last hundred years. For example, the camel’s importance historically rests primarily in its function as a transport animal and supplier of wool, milk, and meat; today, the camel represents an important element of the modern tourism industry, with its symbolic capital lying primarily in camel races (see Cooke 2014, p. 105). The Arabian horse was also an integral part of historical tribal life as an animal companion and in warlike conflicts and raids (*ghazw* or *ghazwa*) until the twentieth century. Ownership and breeding of these horses were a sign of wealth and were considered a status symbol in nomadic society (Roche 2020, pp. 322–323). Today’s marketing, in the course of the heritagization of the horses with prestigious horse races and the breeding industry, pretends to tie directly to this Bedouin tradition. However, the animals used today do not have much in common with the historical Arabian horses of Bedouin societies; rather, they are a product of American and British breeding at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, which were (re-)imported into the Gulf states in the twentieth century. This makes the breeding of the Arabian horse a symbol of interconnectedness and exchange between the Arabian Peninsula, Europe, and North America. Roche accordingly characterizes the rise of ‘indigenous’ horse breeding in the Gulf region as a cultural reinvention rather than a historical continuity (Roche 2020, pp. 320–323). The images of the camel and the Arabian horse on the QR thus underscore the Tribal-Modern character of Qatari identity.

Qatar’s Cultural Heritage: Dhow, Hair Tent, and Pearl Monument

The dhow on the 1-QR bill more accurately represents a *battil*; this term refers to the specifically Qatari dhow design. Dhows are traditional wooden sailing vessels from the western Indian Ocean region or the Arabian Gulf, Oman, the Red Sea, and East Africa. They were ubiquitous in the Age of Sail and were used primarily for trading, pearling, and fishing, but were also employed in the trade of enslaved people, piracy, and warfare (Agius 2016). Dhows are an example of cultural exchange between Arab-Iranian and Indian cultural techniques. Portuguese influences are also evident in the structural characteristics of the dhow (Agius 2016). Thus, the dhow depicted on the QR refers to local Qatari tradition and history, but it is actually also a symbol of transculturality and Qatar’s embeddedness in trade networks and exchanges with the Indian subcontinent. Today, the dhow occupies an important position in heritage tourism, for example, in the sense of Cooke (2014, pp. 102–103). For example, the organizers of the tenth Qatar Dhow Festival in December 2020 promised visitors: ‘[Y]ou will thrive to experience a distinctive ambience that will showcase the authentic maritime traditions inspired by Qatar’s past ancestors.’ (Katara 2020).

More specifically, the dhow also represents pearling, to which Qatar owed its economic boom in the early twentieth century. The pearl, or pearling, is a popular heritage trope in the small Arab Gulf states (especially in Bahrain) (Reichenbach and Albash 2002, p. 101).

In the fifth QR edition, this is referenced in two places: first, with the image of the dhow, the means of transport used in pearling, and second, with the image of the Pearl Monument, an example of modern landmark architecture in the form of an open shell with a pearl at its center.¹¹ However, while pearling is stylized into a national emblem, the people involved in pearling (especially the divers), the suffering and danger they faced, the quasi-slave status they held, and, in short, the ‘social and material conditions of the [historical] pearling practice’ (Krawietz 2020, p. 4) are rendered invisible.¹² Instead, only the easily consumable and marketable aspects are shown: the aesthetics of the pearls and the boats (Krawietz 2020, p. 3).

No wonder that only a replica of a pearl is depicted on the QR in the form of an architectural monument, which can be understood via Umberto Eco and Jean Baudrillard as a hyperreal simulacrum of the pearl (Baudrillard 1993, pp. 7, 52). Eco describes hyperreality as a replica or copy that is ‘more real’ than its archetype (Eco 1986, p. 7). The Pearl Monument in Doha is just one of many hyperreal architectural structures in Qatar and the region.¹³ The monument takes the place of the real pearl and pearling practices, replacing the memory of their complex and problematic historicity with the beautiful-looking image of the perfectly rounded pearl in the opened shell, which fails to represent that complexity. Cooke (2014) describes this mechanism as ‘[n]ostalgia for the simulacrum – longing for a past that never was’ (p. 118). She continues: ‘Here again we see the copy of the copy without an original, or the image that shapes the brand. This brand, that picks the best from the past and preserves it for the future, shapes performances of national identity’ (p. 122); i.e., it is displayed in a consumable fashion. In this case, the premodern Qatari past of pearl fishing before the oil boom is selectively remembered, thus becoming a ‘flattened past’ (Limbert 2010, p. 11), which is then idealized and offered touristically in the present. Also, the Bedouin hair tent (*bayt sha’r*) on the 5-QR bill (as well as the flora and fauna described above) refers to the Bedouin-tribal way of life in the desert, although nowadays it is primarily used for tourism as an example of Qatari heritage and thus becomes part of Qatar’s branding strategy.

Qatar as a Modern Sports Hub: The Lusail Iconic Stadium and the Aspire Tower

Qatar, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates have been increasingly making a name for themselves in the sports world since the mid-2000s by hosting several major international sporting events. Bromber and Krawietz (2013, pp. 189–190) argue that sports in these states not only provide a path to a post-oil economy but also serve to enhance the international prestige of these countries in a globalized and consumerized environment. In 2006, Qatar became the first Arab country to host the Asian Games, establishing in view of that occasion in 2003, the Aspire Zone, or Doha Sports City, with the 300-meter-high Aspire Tower as its highly visible landmark. Its design is based on the Olympic torch and became the architectural trope of the 2006 Asian Games. Built specifically for the 2022 Men’s World Cup, the Lusail Iconic Stadium was the designated venue for the final match of the tournament. According to the Supreme Committee (2021), the shape and façade of the all-white and gold stadium are meant to be reminiscent of richly ornamented metal vessels and objects that are supposed to evoke the splendor of past Arab-Islamic civilization. Also, the recesses in the façade are intended to create the impression of the ‘welcoming glow’ of a lighthouse (*fanār*) lantern. Thus, the stadium is designed to represent the ‘rich past of

the country and the region' and its traditional 'culture of hospitality' (Supreme Committee 2021). Furthermore, the Lusail Stadium will also become the focal point of Lusail, the green city north of Doha currently under construction, in which '200,000 people are to live in harmony with the environment' (Supreme Committee 2021). Thus, the stadium shall also function as a symbol of a green and sustainable future for Qatar, which seems unrealistic considering that Qatar is the country with the highest per capita carbon dioxide emissions in the world¹⁴, raising concerns that this is all part of a greenwashing campaign. The depiction of both the Aspire Tower and the Lusail Iconic Stadium on the 10-QR bill symbolizes Qatar's relevance as an international sports destination as part of Qatar's national branding strategy.

Qatar as an Education and Science Hub: Sidra Hospital and Education City

Sidra Teaching Hospital is part of Education City on the western edge of Doha, home to offshoots of several international, mainly American, universities. Education City is the flagship project of the Qatar Foundation, whose goal is to make Qatar the science and education hub of the Gulf. The Qatar Foundation's logo features the Sidra tree, after which the hospital is named. The Sidra tree, which only grows in the harsh desert climate of the Qatar Peninsula, occupies an important position in the Qatari collective memory: it is considered a shadowy place of rest and exchange for travelers and scholars; furthermore, traditional natural medicines were made from its fruit (Höselbarth 2010, p. 80). As a traditional Qatari symbol of learning, strength, solidarity, and determination, it was deemed an appropriate namesake for the Sidra Medical Research Center (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change 2012). Education City was created as part of the education revolution by the small Gulf states in response to the depressing findings of the United Nations Arab Human Development Report of 2002. The report evaluated the educational landscape in the 22 member countries of the Arab League¹⁵ in terms of quality and quantity and found them to have poor educational systems and high rates of illiteracy, fuelling the exodus of well-educated people and accounting for low levels of academic publication (Höselbarth 2010, p. 88). The subsequent significant investments and developments in the education sector (not only in Qatar) enabled an education revolution in the Gulf, the positive results of which are traced in the United Nations Human Development Report of 2020: the Human Development Index for Qatar, for example, recorded a steady increase from 1990 to 2019 – with the result that Qatar is now listed in the best possible category of states with 'very high human development' (United Nations Development Programme 2020, p. 347). The Sidra Teaching Hospital and the main Qatar Foundation building can be taken as symbols of the Education City project in particular and of Qatar's successful education revolution in general. The depiction of the two buildings in the new QR series thus refers to Qatar's self-image as an outstanding international education and science location and the urge to stage itself and be perceived as such. Education City and Sidra Hospital thus stand for (scientific) progress and the education revolution in the Gulf. The name of the Sidra Hospital, however, roots such endeavors in Qatar's cultural heritage and tradition, thereby combining 'design elements from around the Gulf region to build a credible traditional-tribal market for hypermodern consumption' (Cooke 2014, p. 79). Moreover, the Sidra, or Lote Tree, while not indigenous to Qatar alone, already figures in the Quran (see Lange 2021), thus providing additional credibility.

Qatar's Financial Power: The Central Bank and the Ministry of Finance

The motifs of the 50-QR banknote are likewise architectural in nature, depicting Qatar's Ministry of Finance and the QCB, both in Doha.¹⁶ The QCB is the issuer of the currency and regulates the exchange rate (Maşrif Qaṭar al-Markazī 2014). The Ministry of Finance is responsible for Qatar's national budget, fiscal policy, and economic growth. Both buildings are cuboid boxes made of glass and concrete. Unlike the other architectural motifs on the bills of the fifth QR series, there are no elements in the external design of the facades that refer to the cultural heritage of the Gulf region. Rather, they appear as a manifestation of globalized office architecture, as found in urban centers around the world. Thus, the image of the QCB and the Ministry of Finance on the QR are mostly self-referential in that they magnify the QR and Qatari monetary policy. They do not rely on architectural or aesthetic brilliance but remind the public who is in charge and what counts for the stability of the country.

Islam as State Religion: The Imam Abdul Wahhāb Mosque

The reverse side of the 100-QR banknote shows the Imam Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb Mosque (Imam Abdul Wahhab Mosque for short), an imposing sandstone building with 93 domes, which, as the largest mosque in the country, serves as the Qatari state mosque.¹⁷ The original state mosque had been built by Shaykh Jāsīm b. Muḥammad Āl Thānī, known as the founding father of Qatar, in the late nineteenth century in memory of his father. However, in 2006, then Emir Ḥamad b. Khalīfa Āl Thānī commissioned the construction of the new state mosque, which was completed in 2011 (I Love Qatar 2020; Qatar Tourism 2022) and named it after Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb (1703–1792), the Najd-born founder of the *wahhābiyya*. This fundamentalist Sunni current is based on the idea of returning to an 'original' purist Islam and is thus part of the *salafiyya* (Laoust 2012). The ruling Āl Thānī family adopted this interpretation of Islam in the early twentieth century to form a political alliance with the Wahhabi Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Said Zahlan 1989, p. 86). Thus, the image of the Imam Abdul Wahhab Mosque on the QR emphasizes the importance of Islam (especially in its Wahhabi manifestation) to the state of Qatar and to Qatari identity (Partrick 2012, p. 53). Moreover, this is the only banknote with only one motif depicted on its reverse side. This supposedly underscores the singularity and important role of Islam for the Qatari state. At the same time, the construction of the mosque also refers to the so-called founding father of Qatar and thus ties in with the history of the state and the closely related history of the Emir's dynasty. The image of the mosque can also be seen as emphasizing Islamic authenticity, which Qatar claims for itself and which Cooke associates with the tribal social order (2014, pp. 68–69). In this mosque building, which is not even 20 years old but appears as the continuity of a historical (i.e., original) state mosque, the Tribal-Modern character of Qatar is once again affirmed. Compared to other hyperreal and ultra-modern architecture on the QR, however, the mosque appears rather banal despite its exaggerated size. Like the above-mentioned financial buildings, it does not represent a touristic must-see. Still, it seems to have been deemed important for creating a representational space for Islam on the QR. Interestingly, the mosque or any other emblem of Islam is not placed on the highest but only the third-highest banknote, although one of the most used in practice.

*The Museum of Islamic Art and the National Museum as Mediators of National Myths*¹⁸

Opened in November 2008, the Museum of Islamic Art (MIA) in Doha, which appears on the 200-QR bill, was designed by Chinese-American architect Ieoh Ming Pei (d. 2019) as a modern interpretation of ancient Islamic architecture, inspired in particular by the Ibn Ṭūlūn Mosque in Cairo and its geometric form (Museum of Islamic Art 2020). Built in the ninth century under Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn, the Egyptian governor of the Abbasid caliphate, this mosque is considered the oldest Cairene mosque still preserved in its original form. Its spiral minaret is an architectural quotation of the famous minaret of the Great Mosque of Sāmarrā', then the Abbasid capital near Baghdad (Gordon 2016). The merged design of the MIA as a modern interpretation of two of the world's most important mosques thus once again reflects Qatar's claim to join the tradition of historical, political, and religious centers of the Islamic-influenced world, although it by no means played a major role; from a historical perspective, the Qatari peninsula was in the political periphery of the Islamic empires until the twentieth century (Johnstone 2012). The museum houses an extensive collection of religious and non-religious art and everyday objects; however, nothing from the collection was produced on the territory of present-day Qatar. Nonetheless, the museum building's central positioning on Doha's stylized Corniche, its architectural reference to the Ibn Ṭūlūn Mosque and the minaret of the Great Mosque of Sāmarrā', and, most importantly, its invaluable top-quality collection, underscore Qatar's claim to a leading role in today's Muslim *umma* (Cooke 2014, p. 84). The MIA's image on the QR reinforces this claim and emphasizes Qatar's Islamic (more specifically, Wahhabi) self-image.

The new National Museum of Qatar (NMoQ) was built based on a design by French architect Jean Nouvel and opened its doors in March 2019 (cf. Bounia 2018, p. 211). Like the MIA, it is under the Qatar State Museums Authority, Qatar Museums, headed by al-Mayāsa Bint Ḥamad Āl Thānī, the sister of the current Emir (Al-Hammadi 2018, p. 1). The design is inspired by the sand or desert rose, a fragile object of irregular crystalline structure made of sand grains and gypsum or barite, which is formed by the rapid evaporation of water in hot and dry desert areas and the consequent crystallization of salts dissolved in the water. Thus, it evokes the sand rose as a symbol of the desert and, as such, of Qatar's geography, in addition to referring to the Bedouin tradition (Bounia 2018, p. 211). As a newly introduced simulacrum not yet present in the familiar canon of neo-traditional stage props, the desert rose as constitutive of the museum, is another example of Qatari landmark architecture, and its design elevates it to the rank of a new national emblem of Qatar (Bounia 2018, p. 211). Through its replication on banknotes, the desert rose reinforces the distinct character of national Qatari symbolic production. The museum complex includes the palace of former Emir 'Abd Allāh b. Jāsim Āl Thānī (r. 1913–1948), also depicted on the 200-QR bill, which housed Qatar's old National Museum from 1975 until 2007 (Al-Hammadi 2018, p. 1), creating architectural genealogies in a way similar to Qatar's state mosque.

Qatar's Economic Power: The LNG Refinery and Transport Ship

The 500-QR bill, the highest denomination of the fifth QR edition, shows an LNG refinery and an LNG transport ship. LNG is natural gas in liquid form that has been liquefied by cooling it down to -162°C , when it has a much smaller volume than at room temperature.

Therefore, natural gas in the form of LNG can be transported efficiently in large quantities around the world using special transport ships that maintain constant temperature conditions (Primagas 2022). That the gas industry has a place on the currency is remarkable in itself, especially considering that there were no petroleum- or gas-related motifs in the previous fourth QR edition. The fact that it is even depicted on the bill with the highest denomination underscores the outstanding importance of LNG to the Qatari economy, its growth, and the resulting wealth and myriad of future opportunities for Qatar. This becomes even more interesting when comparing the 500-QR bills of the fifth and fourth editions: the falcon, taken from the canon of the pre-oil economy and invented heritage shared with the other small Gulf states, is replaced by LNG infrastructure. This move can be understood as the desire to distinguish Qatar from other Gulf states in the face of the 2017–2021 blockade and ostentatiously highlight its independence and its own formula for economic success. Furthermore, it is striking that a ship appears here for the second time in the fifth QR series: the first time in traditional guise as a dhow, referring to the cultural heritage and historical transcultural trade networks between the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean, and the second time in modern fashion as an LNG transport vessel, visualizing Qatar's current export hit, LNG. Both ships represent Qatar's trading activities, historical and contemporary, and they locate Qatar geographically as operating out of the Persian Gulf. Both vessels demonstrate the continuity of Qatar as a maritime and outbound global player.

Conclusion

In contrast to Pointon (1998, p. 252), who identifies persons as one of the most common motifs on banknotes, no people are shown on the QR of 2020,¹⁹ not even the head of state, the Emir.²⁰ Abstaining from the depiction of people or certain personalities can be understood as paying tribute to the supposed aniconism of Islam, although that prohibition of pictorial and figurative representations never extended beyond religious contexts (Naef 2007). In a chapter on Kuwaiti stamps, Laura Hindelang (2022, p. 196) discusses the absence of the representation of people and argues that, by avoiding such representations, questions of citizenship and the de facto heterogeneity of Qatari society can be avoided. In that sense, refraining from showing individuals or groups of people could theoretically be interpreted as an inclusive gesture, especially in a society that is fragmented and highly dependent on labor migration – a description that applies well to Kuwait and Qatar. Furthermore, persons on banknotes usually refer to past events of great importance to the nation in question (see Hawkins 2010, p. 233), but it would be questionable who exactly should be recruited for such figuration and from which 'national' pantheon. The depiction of women would, anyway, be problematic due to gender-based veiling etiquette. On balance, one might be best advised to interpret the discussed phenomenon in the Qatari case as a precautionary avoidance.

The choice of motifs on the new QR edition appears as a reinvention or repurposing of the reservoir of Qatari identity markers, which not only refer to historical traditions but are primarily based on memorable contemporary modern architecture. In the process, simulacra with Tribal-Modern, or neo-traditional, signatures are produced. In this way, a past that never happened is evoked and idealized, as the cultural heritage is selectively remembered and practiced while simultaneously being made profitable for tourism. Hence,

the Qatar brand emerges from the strategic blending of present, past, and future, tradition and modernity, culture and nature, and the global and the Tribal Modern (in the sense of Cooke). In so doing, two partly overlapping features can be identified regarding the latest edition of Qatari banknotes: there is, on the one hand, a dominating trend to present cherished functional buildings symbolizing financial, cultural, religious, and economic power, and, on the other, a secondary trend consisting in putting Tribal-Modern paraphernalia and traditional/nationalized flora on display. The use of 'natural' symbols serves as an effective mechanism of banal nationalism, thus naturalizing nationalism as an ideology and promoting allegiance to the Qatari state (Billig 1995, p. 8; Bounia 2018, p. 221). The national symbols that Qatar shares with other countries of the Arabian Peninsula, namely pearl diving culture, the dhow, and certain heritage animals, are not only less represented than Qatar-specific icons of heritage and industry but also placed on the least valuable denominations as compared to prior editions. Bounia (2018, pp. 218–219) argues that the 2017–2021 blockade of Qatar by neighboring states reinforced the country's need to diminish commonalities and emphasize its own national symbols beyond the inventory shared with Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. As for the presentation of landmark architecture, the motifs are primarily taken from structures in the fields of sports, education, and science, or finance and industry (LNG refinery and transport ship). Special importance is given to museums (national and far-flung Islamic), religion (in its Wahhabi branch) as a main pillar, and an utmost reverence towards the gas industry: the banknote with the highest designated monetary value, the 500-QR bill, proudly presents the LNG refinery in Ra's Laffān with an LNG tanker ship about to serve global customers. The overall choice of motifs already demonstrates that Qatar stages itself as a 'self-designated hub for business, education, tourism, leisure' (Bromber and Krawietz 2013, p. 191), and claims to be a center of cultural, religious, and economic power. The buildings depicted are located in the metropolitan region of the capital Doha, but the animals and plants are native to the wider Qatari peninsula (and to some extent the wider Gulf region). Thus, the motifs also evoke and naturalize the geographic location of the state and lend legitimacy to the whole national territory (First and Sheffi 2015, p. 332). As has been demonstrated here through the fifth edition of the QR, both strands feed into rich consumption-oriented subtexts.

Notes

- 1 I will focus on banknotes and disregard the QR coins.
- 2 See, for example, Bromber and Krawietz 2013; Cooke 2014; Bounia 2018; al-Hammadi 2018; Krawietz 2020, to name just a few.
- 3 Cooke's concept of the Tribal-Modern (2014) reminds of Michel Maffesoli's idea of neotribalism, but the author does not (critically) engage with Maffesoli.
- 4 Cooke does not see this phenomenon as exclusive to the small Arab Gulf states, but she says it is most pronounced and visible there (2014, p. 15).
- 5 On neo-falconry, see Krawietz 2014.
- 6 Although Islam emerged on the Arabian Peninsula in the seventh century and spread rapidly from there, the center of power of the Islamic-influenced world shifted to Syria as early as the second half of the seventh century and to Iraq from the middle of the eighth century. At no time was the territory of present-day Qatar a center of political or cultural power.
- 7 The term 'Western' at this point does not refer to a geographical location but serves as a marker for hegemonic discourses and patterns of thought in science that were shaped in and with reference to the US-Canadian-European cultural area. Billig's (1995) *Banal Nationalism* could be cited as an example here.

- 8 In the early 2000s, the introduction of a common currency among the GCC states was envisaged, but nothing has been heard of this for some time.
- 9 Oryx and camel were also part of the fourth QR issue, appearing on the 5-QR banknote.
- 10 For more details, see Bromber and Krawietz 2013, pp. 199, 205–206.
- 11 The dhow and the Pearl Monument also appeared in the fourth QR edition on the 10-QR and 50-QR bills, respectively.
- 12 This mechanism is repeated once again in the construction of the World Cup stadiums, among other things; here, too, the victims of gigantomania are left and blanked out.
- 13 For more information on hyperreal architecture in the Gulf region, see Steiner 2010 and Wippel 2016.
- 14 In 2019, Qatar emitted 30.7 tons of CO₂ per capita, see International Energy Agency.
- 15 Strictly speaking, the League of Arab States is composed of 21 internationally recognized nation-states and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) representing Palestine.
- 16 Unfortunately, I do not have detailed literature on the architecture of these buildings, so I cannot provide an in-depth interpretation of them.
- 17 Unfortunately, I do not have detailed literature on the architecture of the building here either, so I cannot provide an in-depth interpretation of it.
- 18 For a detailed analysis of how Qatar uses cultural institutions like museums as means to shape and solidify their global image and position, see Levitt 2015, specifically the chapter about museums in Doha.
- 19 Interestingly, portraits are absent from the previous four QR issues as well. However, there is a lack of studies analyzing the historical transition from British rule and further developments in terms of state paraphernalia choices.
- 20 Yet, a comic portrait of the Emir is ubiquitous in Qatar on WhatsApp profile pictures, stickers, cars, lapel pins, and – particularly conspicuous in the cityscape – meter-high billboard tarpaulins on high-rise walls.

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ISLAM AND ISLAMISM IN THE FACE OF NEOLIBERALISM

The Case of the Justice and Development Party in Morocco

Haouès Seniguer¹

Capitalism, the Market Economy, and Neoliberalism

Is it necessary to distinguish between capitalism, the market economy, and neoliberalism? For the strict purposes of this contribution, I understand these terms as complementary rather than mutually exclusive. That is why I do not go into a debate that can pit economists against each other on this subject. However, I would like to make it clear that neoliberalism, as understood here, is in some ways a deepening and extension of classical capitalist dynamics in that it increasingly restricts the place and role of the state in regulating the economy; it also tends to penetrate and shape social relations at large. Thus, capitalism and the market economy usually refer to an economic system characterized essentially by the sanctuary of ownership of the means of production, which is one of capitalism's structuring pillars, and the promotion of free and undistorted competition, which is another. As a corollary, it is also characterized by the continuous pursuit of profit maximization by the agents involved (Weber 2013, p. 191), even if more ethical, social, and redistributive considerations may sometimes accompany the justification. With regard to neoliberalism in particular, I subscribe to the definition proposed by sociologist François Gauthier (2020, p. 91), who proposes to understand neoliberalism as follows:

A set of socio-political practices and policies, all of which are directed toward extending and deepening capitalist market relations in most spheres of our social lives, namely because they have coalesced into a widely disseminated cultural ideology. [...] neoliberalism represents a major and global turn by which the Market – i.e., market mechanisms and the market understood as a regulative idea, or ‘social imaginary’ – has been made to replace the State as the structuring principle in globalized societies.

From this point of view, neoliberalism and the processes associated with it are also making their mark in conservative Muslim-majority societies, making ‘economics the new embedding social sphere in the place and stead of the political, and by promoting the “Market” as the new preferred actor for the regulation of all social spheres in the place and stead of the State’ (Gauthier 2020, p. 11).

In this light, I ask if, and to what extent, does neoliberalism – understood as an economic doctrine, set of policies, and cultural ideology – influence how Islamist actors relate to the traditions of classical Islamic law in economic matters in the age of globalization?

Islam and Capitalism: A Long-Standing Discussion

Long before the question of whether Islamism and capitalism converge or not, researchers were interested in knowing whether Islam, as a religion and a system of values, norms, and representation of the world, is compatible or incompatible with the market economy, freedom of trade, the consumption of various products, and so on. French Orientalist Maxime Rodinson (1915–2004) was one of the pioneers of this approach, with his book *Islam and Capitalism*, published in 1966. Two central ideas emerged from this seminal work. On the one hand, Islam, as such, neither favors nor opposes any economic system whatsoever: pre-capitalist, capitalist, communist, or socialist. On the other hand, despite a series of religious prohibitions that remained largely theoretical, a commercial type of capitalism did, in fact, exist and develop during the Arab Middle Ages, as well as under the action of the colonial powers, with the rise, during colonization, of industrial capitalism that was not denied once national independence had been achieved. Rodinson also examined the Quranic text and the traditions of the Sunna, demonstrating that there are no passages that explicitly condemn private property, consumption (except illicit products, such as alcohol, pork, and meat from beasts immolated in the name of a deity other than Allah, etc.), the accumulation of wealth, wage-earning, or ownership of the means of production. On the contrary, the Quran is full of commercial metaphors, given the vitality of trade in Mecca at the time of Mohammad (570–632).

In much the same vein, British and Australian sociologist Bryan Stanley Turner wrote an article on the subject in 1974 entitled ‘Islam, Capitalism and the Weber Theses.’ Max Weber (1864–1920), in Turner’s view, erroneously considered that outside Europe, including in the Islamic context, there was no such thing as capitalist rationality. According to the German sociologist, Islamic institutions were originally incompatible with capitalism in their foundations insofar as they were dominated by long-lasting patrimonial logics (Weber 2013, p. 231). Islam, from a Weberian culturalist point of view, could not have produced capitalism. In Weber’s eyes, Islam is ‘not a religion of salvation’ but, rather, it cultivates ‘a feudal spirit,’ being by definition and inclination ‘warlike,’ with, moreover, ‘a mystical acceptance of the world’ as it is (p. 235). For this reason, Islam borders on a fatalism unsuited to the capitalist spirit, which implies, on the contrary, a keen sense of action, initiative, and enterprise. However, a closer look at Weber’s writings shows how the father of German sociology’s thoughts were more nuanced than Turner seems to assert.

Indeed, Weber’s texts on the relationship between Islam, the economy, and capitalism are far more ambivalent than they first appear (Carré 1986). Weber’s position is not systematically clear-cut nor definitive. In certain developments of his sociology of religion chapter in *Economy and Society* (2013), he goes so far as to incorporate the idea of an interpretative plurality and plasticity internal to Islam, which can justify, albeit ex-post, evolutions on one point or another, all the more so when it comes to the economy, seeing in it some analogy with the Puritans’ ‘disposition of the mind.’

Similarly, the power of religion has its limits when it comes to competing with powerful economic interests. The relative impact of the different components of an evolution, and the way they ‘adapt’ to one another, cannot be summed up in a general

formula. When the needs of economic life take precedence, they impose a reinterpretation of the sacred commandments, the invention of casuistic reasons for circumventing them, and sometimes, in concrete terms, the choice to set them aside, in the practice of ecclesiastical jurisdiction over penances and pardons – the Catholic Church's system, as we have seen, entirely nullifies the effects in *foro conscientiae* of such an important determination as the prohibition of usury, without explicitly abrogating it, which would have been impossible [...] In detail, one can hardly say today what of the Islamic Sharia is still valid in practice, and the same is true of all the sacred rights and ethical commandments that possess a character of formal ritualistic casuistry, including the Jewish Law.

(Weber 2013, p. 392)²

As this passage shows, Weber's analysis was actually quite exact regarding the plasticity of Islam's exegetical tradition. Elsewhere, Weber asserts that 'in the real world, religious ethics consequently experience variable fates, given the inevitable compromises that are necessary' (p. 405) and despite the fact that the Islam of the 'legal works' does indeed denounce usury and 'the lure of gain' (p. 400). In other words, there are the texts, which are produced and discussed at a given time, then there are the contexts, which evolve, and there are the individuals who use them, who are necessarily diverse and varied in time and space.

Among these actors are what political scientists commonly refer to as Islamists. The term is applied mostly in reference to the children or heirs of the Muslim Brotherhood founded in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna (1906–1949) in Egypt, and whose influence rose across the Muslim world at the dawn of the 1970s (Kepel 1984; Burgat 1988; Ferjani 1991; Mitchell 1993; Carré and Seurat 2002; Ferjani 2005; Seniguer 2020).

A Muslim Brotherhood Adept at Capitalism

In order to move away from a culturalist or fixist explanatory paradigm on the compatibility (or otherwise) of Islamic teachings with neoliberal capitalist dynamics and their implications, I turn to case studies. In this chapter, I do this first by focusing briefly on Islamism, which is one of several forms of the politicization of Islam (Volpi 2010). Second, I focus on the Justice and Development Party in Morocco (PJD), a political movement that exercised governmental responsibilities between 2012 and 2021. The PJD came into being in 1997 after a merger between an old religious association, the Unity and Reform Movement (MUR), and an established royalist party, the Popular Democratic and Constitutional Movement (MPDC) (Zeghal and Mohsen-Finan 2006; Seniguer 2019).

Islamism, which is an ideological construction based on an interpretation of the traditions and doctrines of Islam (the religion), is no more specifically capitalist in its sources of inspiration than it is, a priori, anti-capitalist. On the contrary, it should be noted that in the late 2000s, Husam Tammam (1972–2011) and Patrick Haenni noted that the 'Islamist utopia' of yesteryear – caliphal and revolutionary, structurally and ideologically organized, political Islamism – had given way to a new 'management' brand of Islamism, bred from 'a managerial reading of the texts' (Tammam and Haenni 2007;³ Gauthier, this volume). These authors emphasize how 'a new Islam' (Abdel Aziz 2004) was taking shape, which tended to free itself from the old watchwords in order to accompany the compartmentalization of Muslim societies and their adjustment to the new economic order conveyed by neoliberal globalization by importing the categories of thought of the business world.

Reinterpreted with management literature principles, the new Islam provides a ‘new spirit of capitalism’ (Boltanski and Chiapello 1999) with the language, categories, and conditions for its local institutionalization and acculturation. In other words, ‘Market Islam’ (Haenni 2005) offers a set of beliefs that help justify the capitalist order and support it, legitimizing its preferred modes of action and dispositions with references that appear consistent with the Islamic tradition (Tammam and Haenni 2007).

In Egypt, the birthplace of Islamism, from where the Muslim Brotherhood spread throughout the world (and notably to Morocco), the end of Nasserism in the early 1970s paved the way for the triumph of neoliberalism in the following decade. Following Tammam and Haenni (2009), Khaled argues that neoliberalism took hold

within the Brotherhood’s senior ranks. They supported the policies of economic openness, market liberalization, and structural adjustment plans. A business lobby took shape within the Brotherhood’s leadership. Its positions reflected the affirmation of a capitalist ethos within the strata of the Brotherhood that was integrated in the business world and its values.

(Khaled 2013)

In 1997, for example, the Egyptian Brotherhood ‘approved the agrarian counter-reform, which restored the land nationalized under Nasser to former landowners and the right to increase leases and send away their farmers’ (Khaled 2013). In 2006, the Brotherhood did not oppose government measures in favor of the capitalist market economy. More recently, during their furtive stint in government following the Arab Spring uprising and the ousting of Mubarak (2011–2013), the Brotherhood indulged in ‘extreme capitalism’ (Achcar 2013), as demonstrated by, among other things, their support for economic experts involved in drafting the new Egyptian Constitution. The Egyptian Islamists also sought to emulate the business class development model adopted before them by the Turkish Islamists of the AKP (Justice and Development Party). To this end, they set up a businessmen’s association along the lines of the Egyptian Business Development Association. Mohamed Morsi (2012–2013), the short-lived Islamist president of the Republic of Egypt, was also satisfied to be at the head of ‘a rentier state’ against a capitalist backdrop, predominantly ‘commercial and speculative,’ and largely marked by ‘decades of neopatrimonialism and nepotism’ (Achcar 2013, p. 2). His government contracted a loan of 4.8 billion dollars from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), saying it was ready to accept all the corollary conditions and, consequently, all the social austerity measures deemed necessary to carry out the reforms demanded by the international capitalist order, and, to this end, to challenge trade union freedoms and the defense of the working class.

In the Maghreb and the Arab world, the Moroccan Islamist Justice and Development Party, which came to power following the parliamentary elections of November 2011 in which they won with a relative majority, was no exception when it came to the capitalist status quo since, first and foremost, it inherited an objective situation. One should, therefore, never detach the action or inaction of the institutional actors of political Islam from the circumstances in which they govern, including the direction given by the King of the constitutional monarchy that is Morocco and the influence of advisors and the business class. Once in power, the PJD quickly adopted measures in line with the long-standing neoliberal orientations adopted by the monarchy and successive governments since the early 1980s, under the authority of its sovereigns, first Hassan II (1961–1999), then Mohammed

VI (from 1999 onward). The influence of neoliberalism in the Sharifian kingdom seems to have been around for a long time and includes the monarchy and the national political class as a whole. However, there have been some fundamental historical landmarks that need to be briefly mentioned in order to better assess the maneuvering room, hypothetical or real, of Islamist-stamped economic policies. These include the adoption of structural adjustment programs promoted by the IMF, such as that of 1983, which, at the time, received the full backing of the country's highest authorities, i.e., the King's Palace. The Moroccan economist Najib Akesbi (b. 1952) assessed that in so backing these IMF policies, the state accepted 'the most orthodox liberal-monetary logic' (1985, p. 103). According to this perspective, the main problems are the state, i.e., public spending, and a lack of competitiveness in products, both exported and domestic. As Akesbi points out, this hinders the Moroccan economy's ability to integrate itself into the global market, which is discursively heralded as virtuous and used as a 'reference' framework. Moreover, he explains how the solution to these problems, unsurprisingly, required 'a disengagement of the State, [...] a curtailment of its activities in the economic and social fields,' and 'a rehabilitation of the predominance of the market which must be invested with the role of regulating all the mechanisms of the economy' (p. 104).

The other major neoliberal act was the Free Trade Agreement between Morocco and the United States, which came into effect on 1 January 2006 and covered the following:

Issues of market access for agricultural products, industrial products, and services, as well as investment, environmental protection, intellectual property, public procurement, and many other provisions (culture, transparency, smuggling, administrative procedures, labor law, etc.).

*(Akesbi 2008, p. 3)*⁴

However, this agreement has increased Morocco's food and financial dependence on its partner due to profoundly asymmetrical levels of development, which has been to the detriment of the indigenous and most fragile segments of the wider Moroccan population.

These neoliberal arrangements were indigenized and routinized through the various 'affinities' that were put forth between traditional and contemporary forms of governance (Hibou and Tozy 2020a, 2020b). Somehow, the PJD, Islamist though it is, was little more than a spectator in these processes, as they sought neither to protest nor to undo the stranglehold of international economic institutions on the national economy when they had the chance.

The PJD Government Experiment (2011–2021) as a Textbook Case of Neoliberal Economic Management

Islamism in general and the PJD in particular have always adopted more or less ambivalent positions on the market economy (Cavatorta and Amghar 2020). A certain capitalist tropism emerged early on in their ranks, as shown by their economic choices and programmatic orientations during the various legislative elections between 1997 and 2021. While sitting for the most part in the opposition between 1997 and 2011, their rhetoric tended to take greater account of the working classes, who, according to a report authored by a state-owned economic institute in Rabat (Daoudim 2020), represent some 34.4 percent of Moroccans, compared with 50.1 percent for the middle class, and 15.5 percent for the

wealthy. Because of these demographics and the mixed constitution of their electorate, the PJD has historically had to curb rhetorical impulses that are too openly favorable to neoliberal tropes while at the same time endorsing them in practice. In this respect, based on a rather socialized reading of the scriptural sources of Islam, they were able to call for support for the poor and destitute, at least theoretically. The PJD's discourse and action on economic matters are threefold: either it offers no specifically 'Islamic' solution to the issues of growth, development, and the reduction of inequalities by seeking more social alternatives to the classic neoliberal economic orientations, or it accepts, willy-nilly, the reality of the neoliberal dynamic as it unfolds, albeit using other words, but without proposing any specific measures to attenuate its deleterious effects, or simply challenge it philosophically; or, finally, by finding political and theological justifications to accompany the implementation of liberal measures.

An Ambivalent and Erratic Position

In fact, prior to 2011, i.e., before the popular uprisings in part of the Arab world during which demonstrators demanded, among other things, an end to the regime of economic privilege for government officials and their clientele based on prebends and bribes, the PJD saw its country's integration into the globalized economy as a break with its traditional vision of the social. This included an egalitarian dimension, and the PJD even considered, for a time, institutionalizing *zakat* at the level of the state. *Zakat* is one of the five pillars of Islam and consists of obligatory alms for every Muslim with enough savings and which is handed over to those in need (Seniguer 2012). Above all, the party pointed the finger at globalization's responsibility for the impoverishment of many sections of society (Yildirim and Zhang 2021, p. 9). In actuality, the party had to constantly reconcile the reality of the two types of socio-economic profiles present in its ranks and electorate: on the one hand, the owners of small- and medium-sized enterprises, who can be seen as 'the winners of the liberalization process' (p. 8) that began in the early 1980s under Hassan II and was subsequently strengthened in the 1990s, reaching its peak under Mohammed VI; on the other, 'the lower and middle classes,' in this case those most in difficulty in the face of capitalist globalization whose effects are poorly or insufficiently addressed and controlled.

However, as the Islamist party has gained notoriety, it has also aligned itself with the idea that the upper-middle class and the owners of small- and medium-sized businesses represent an essential contribution to the Moroccan economy: increased competitiveness, which strengthens the national economy and, as a result, improves the situation of the most disadvantaged. From this point of view, the Islamists are advocates of a kind of happy liberalization and globalization, with tacit adherence to 'trickle-down economics,' which French philosopher Daniel Bounoux (2020) defines as 'the greed of some will make everyone happy.'⁵ What concrete forms did this economic belief take when the PJD took charge of part of the kingdom's affairs?

From the moment of its accession to the government in 2012, as well as throughout the time its members held ministerial or head-of-government positions, the PJD quickly had to deal with two other constraints. On the one hand, a semi-authoritarian regime at the apex of which reigns and governs a King who is, politically and legally, not accountable for any public policy, first and foremost economic; on the other hand, the Islamist party was forced to cohabit with other parties, sometimes at opposite ends of the ideological spectrum. As Akesbi (2017) has pointed out, the PJD, through the voice of the then head of government,

Abdelillah Benkirane (2012–2017), wanted to appear like a good pupil with respect to the IMF's recommendations. And Benkirane did so by adjusting the finance laws in close collaboration with a Washington-based financial institution. Further, when he came to power as leader of the PJD, he declared that he and his colleagues wanted to put an end to the rentier economy, corruption, and nepotism that plagued the kingdom. He quickly put these plans on the back burner, though, preferring not to sue the agents of the country's corruption due to structural constraints and political obstacles, while denouncing, in an impersonal and sometimes conspiratorial mode, 'the control' (*al-tahakkum*) of lobbyists acting behind the scenes. He even declared, drawing on a religious repertoire, that 'God forgives what has happened.' In other words, there is hardly any need to prosecute or put a halt to the (far too many) corrupt and corrupting elements, which are thriving (or have thrived in the past) against a backdrop of ever-increasing economic liberalization.

The PJD as a Good Capitalist Pupil of the IMF and Moroccan Employers

Under Benkirane's tenure, there was little job creation and also a preponderance of taxes, above all, high consumption taxes and direct taxes on earned income. Conversely, the taxation of capital income was comparatively low, and the public effort received no significant contribution from taxes on capital and large fortunes. Typically, the tax burden on households increased, while taxes on corporate profits fell. In addition, tax evasion and fraud continued, and most demands made by top employers were met. The requests and recommendations made by the Confédération Générale des Entreprises du Maroc (CGEM) to the government were translated into policy. Incidentally, the inequalities between tax regimes for income from work and income from capital persisted, as exemplified by the 2016 tax exemptions for farmers, which ended up benefiting agricultural property rentiers. However, these tax breaks have harmed the state budget and even increased its deficit. Meanwhile, the state remained reluctant to tax the wealthy. The country's public debt has consequently increased, bearing in mind that, in this respect, a Moroccan is taxed at 38 percent if she or he is an employee, at 20 percent if she or he is the beneficiary of financial or securities products, and 15 percent if she or he receives dividends from shares listed on the stock exchange.

The Islamist government, even if the PJD players were not the full masters of decision-making, has in no way upset the capitalist dynamic initiated in the 1980s and the first IMF tutelage. Prior to this, national economic policy tended to be oriented toward the 'true price.' The reign of the PJD consisted of continuous liberalization, with prices rising more or less according to conjecture. Meanwhile, the IMF's repeated pressure to reduce budget deficits was hardly denounced by Benkirane and his party members. On the contrary, they stood behind the increase in the price of petroleum products at the pump and the total liberalization of gasoline, industrial fuel, and diesel prices. Indeed, Abdelillah Benkirane today considers his liberalization of fuel prices to have been one of his mandate's 'great achievements,' even though the decision to raise prices at the pump put a strain on consumers' wallets. At the same time, the policy benefited distributors by increasing their margins; distributors then became considerably richer, with Total reportedly 'tripling its profits' between 2015 and 2016, from 'MAD 289 million to MAD 879 million' (Kozlowski 2022).

Lahcen Daoudi, another PJD executive and the Minister of Higher Education and Research between 2012 and 2017, has been dubbed the 'Privatizer' by his opponents. He has campaigned to make public universities fee-paying in order to prevent them from becoming a factory for the future unemployed. He claims this is also to compete with private

universities, soliciting ‘wealthy families’ to enroll their children while paying little attention to the effects for the less wealthy. In the spring of 2018, a movement to boycott Danone’s Moroccan subsidiary based in Casablanca was launched on social media to denounce the high cost of living and the high cost of certain consumer products placed on the national market. Stakeholders denounced the oligopolistic position of Danone, a CAC 40 company (the French Wall Street), which allegedly takes advantage of this situation to hike prices. What’s more, the three brands of the group in question are owned by two key figures: Sidi Ali mineral water is owned by businesswoman and former head of the CGEM, Miriem Bensalah-Chaqroun; Afriquia service stations, meanwhile, are owned by the then Minister of Agriculture and one of the country’s great fortunes, Aziz Akhannouch (2007–2021), currently Prime Minister (Maussion 2019). To illustrate the ambivalence of some of these actors, Lahcen Daoudi, who held ministerial responsibilities at the time, joined a demonstration organized by 2,000 of the company’s employees in front of parliament in June 2018 to call for the end of the boycott. This situation once again put the Islamist party in tension, as it had to reconcile accounting for the social identity of those calling for the boycott, its partners in government, and economic operators (Crétois 2018) in the name of free enterprise.

An Islamic Referent with Variable Geometry

Like many of his other colleagues, Daoudi is hostile to the ‘civil service,’ to the outgrowth of the public employment sector, and to a protective state. Najib Boulif, who held several ministerial posts between 2012 and 2021, has himself been in favor of state disengagement and gradual price liberalization in certain economic sectors since 2013, for example, by gradually lifting subsidies such as those on gas. In his view, these subsidies put an abnormal burden on the national budget. Boulif, who is in favor of so-called Islamic banks and finance, although they do participate in capitalism in practice (cf. Amghar and Ghlamallah, this volume; Rudnycky, this volume), expressed his hostility toward the classic system of interest-bearing loans. This would be at odds with the classical understanding of the scriptural sources of Islam and their ban on *riba* (interest). This is why, in the name of this vision of Islam, and without considering the possible social and economic consequences, Minister Boulif declared himself hostile, in principle, to the royal plan to grant micro-credits capped at 1.75 percent and intended as a priority for rural dwellers, and at 2 percent for those living in the city. While this micro-credit plan is aimed at populations particularly affected by unemployment, Boulif considers that these provisions run counter to the Islamic prohibition on usury, which he thereby places above social issues and equality. These recommendations, supposedly dictated by Islamic law, did not prevent the Islamist party from campaigning for the ‘surtaxing’ of alcoholic beverages, officially to discourage consumption, yet also, such taxes ‘were expected to generate just over 1.25 billion dirhams in tax revenue for the state in 2017’ (see Younsi 2016, para. 1). According to the 2017 Finance Bill, while the sale of manufactured tobacco was expected to bring in 9.16 billion dirhams in tax revenue, gambling, itself also usually condemned by Islamists as ‘illicit’ from an Islamic point of view, was expected to generate 160 million dirhams in revenue for the state. Since the PJD’s accession to the premiership and government, revenues from all these types of products have risen significantly, with tax revenues from alcohol or spirits increasing from 540 million dirhams in 2012 to 790 million dirhams in 2015, while tobacco tax revenues the same year brought in 8.67 billion dirhams for the state. This tax hike has not

affected consumption; quite the contrary: between 2018 and 2019, consumption is said to have risen by 7 percent. The conclusion here is that the Islamists of the PJD are very selective with respect to where they place the Islamic cursor and how they negotiate priorities. Overall, coherence appears lacking, and a clear path wanting.

The PJD Trapped in Neoliberalism and Crony Capitalism

What's more, the PJD, both in and out of government, has never openly denounced the Free Trade Agreements with the United States, despite colossal levels of debt repayment. The Islamist party has never even proposed an audit on the issue. As Akasbi (2022, p. 95) writes,

The liberalization of foreign trade was part of a vast project to develop the national economy and integrate it into the globalization dynamic then in full swing [... with] programs to dismantle tariff and other protections for industry, on the one hand, and to promote exports on the other [...] Thereafter, measures followed one another at a steady pace, as confirmed by Morocco's accession to the GATT in 1987.

At the same time, the social cost of these measures was increasingly heavy, with a growing number of people, both urban and rural, living below the poverty line. By this yardstick, according to 2019 figures (Europa.eu 2023; Medias24.com 2023), the bulk of foreign trade remains with the European Union, which accounts for almost 60 percent of exchanges (with France and Spain forming the leading duo) and only 4 percent with the United States. More significantly, imports from these countries take precedence over exports of Moroccan products to their markets, with the Moroccan economy recording repeated trade deficits. Its national economy is therefore characterized by two elements imports and debt. Moreover, the tax burden, which was supposed to increase state revenues, 'has in fact fallen sharply only for profits and high incomes,' with the growth of 'tax loopholes' and 'shortfalls for the state budget.' Meanwhile, it has also 'remained relatively high on earned incomes and, more generally, on the middle class' (Akasbi 2022, p. 173). Thus, according to the Centre Marocain de Conjoncture, 'the overall public debt ratio rose from 80.4% of GDP in 2019 to 94% of GDP in 2020, although it should not exceed by law the 60% mark' (CMJ 2021, headline).

While the stated aim in the 1980s, 1990s, and beyond was, from the point of view of the governing elites, to return the fruits of the Moroccan economy, which was promised to flourish, to all Moroccans and to be ever more competitive outside its borders, liberalization has resulted in further encroaching the country on the path of 'crony capitalism.' In other words, a premium has been given to the private sector, as the state has withdrawn from certain essential provisions (water distribution, electricity, etc.) to the benefit of private-sector players who happen to be in the circles of institutional power, making the most of neoliberal reforms (Oubenal and Zeroual 2017). Referring to Akasbi once again, he writes that the Moroccan economy is 'gangrened on all sides by rents and cartels, with key sectors controlled by oligopolies, even monopolies, beneficiaries of privileges and blank cheques from another age' (2022, p. 182).

The COVID pandemic and inflation have since aggravated an already complicated situation, namely, by leaving the Moroccan economy 'exsanguinated' with nearly half of all working-age Moroccans being unemployed or inactive (Desrués and Kirhlani 2022). After nine years in government, the PJD was bound to be held partly accountable for all of this,

particularly as regards income distribution, and their power decreased significantly due to major losses in the 2021 general election. Interestingly, instead of losing to a party adamant against neoliberal reforms, the PJD lost to the aforementioned billionaire Aziz Akhannouch, and his party called the National Rally of Independents. There is a dividing line between those who have benefited from the ever-increasing liberalization of the economy and those who have suffered, especially during the health crisis.

Conclusion

From the point of view of the social sciences of religion, and even more so in the age of globalization, it makes no sense to envisage a homogeneous, fixed relationship between ‘Islam’ and ‘capitalism.’ This is even more so with social actors. The scriptural sources of Sunni Islam provide ample scope for contextual appropriations and reappropriations, which are at once contradictory, complementary, and evolving, whether in a capitalist and neoliberal direction, as is overwhelmingly the case today, or in some other direction. However, none of these references – whether the millennium-old webs of the Islamic tradition or the more recent ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood – provide immunity against the neoliberal framework.

Before the neoliberal revolution, the Muslim Brotherhood and then the Islamists were able to associate themselves, according to their interests and following the structures of opportunity, with political currents that cherished ‘socializing utopias’ (Carré 1978). But they did not necessarily adhere to these in terms of *values*. It was first and foremost a question of uniting socialists and Islamists against the communists, who, according to the proponents of Islamism, were the bearers of an openly atheistic culture, in this case, an attack on the Muslim heritage of the Arabs and/or the presumed norms of an Islam deemed sacred and inscribed in the long history of the Arab world. The socialist utopias in Arab lands, of which Michel Aflaq (1912–1989) was one of the heralds, were rooted precisely in ‘Arabism and Islam as a response to European intrusion,’ seeking, in this way, to ‘be like the West (and even much better) thanks to the resources of Arabism or Islam’ (Carré 1978, p. 535). The nationalist and socialist Aflaq effectively distinguished between ‘Islam-religion,’ with which he did not identify, and ‘Islam-culture,’ with which he fully subscribed (p. 538), on the basis of the moral resources he found in Islam. The Syrian Baath of the late 1960s and 1970s, however, radicalized its opposition to religion in general and Islam in particular, publicly hammering home its atheism or a-religiousness.

The relationship of Islamists to capitalism and socialism was thus a matter of contrasting and contradictory destinies so that there is no single truth in the matter: between 1958 and 1961, at the time of the short-lived United Arab Republic (1958–1961) that linked Egypt, Syria, and Yemen, a certain Mustafa al-Sibā’i (1915–1964), then guide of the Brotherhood in Syria, was in favor in 1959 of ‘expropriations and nationalizations in the name of the “divine inheritance over this land”’ (Carré 1978, p. 544). He was also in favor of the Quranic and canonical obligation of *zakat*, ‘for which the state is considered responsible for collection and distribution’ (p. 544), as well as the prohibition of interest-bearing loans. Finally, he supported the idea of a non-capitalist, non-speculative, and non-imperialist banking system that would serve development projects (p. 544), which aligned well with Nasser’s socialist ideology (1918–1970). Indeed, the French sociologist Olivier Carré (b. 1935) was one of the first, if not the first, to distinguish between a ‘left-wing Islam’ with a ‘socializing tendency’ (p. 547), which included a Marxist

ex-Muslim Brotherhood member, the academic Hassan Hanafi (1935–2021), and ‘a right-wing Islam that is self-confident’ and ‘may resort to terrorism’ (p. 547). Carré was also careful to point out that ‘left-wing Islam is inspired by what some call the ‘zakatic order,’ while a right-wing Islam focuses on the rights of large-scale private property and the benefits of oil rents in Muslim states’ (p. 550).

In the world that was ushered in by the erosion of Nasserism and the ensuing neoliberal revolution, Morocco’s legalist Islamist Justice and Development Party provides an empirical case that shows how Islamist principles have faced the practical test of managing ministerial portfolios. The PJD, which was part or even head of various government coalitions between 2011 and 2021, promoted a conservative, right-wing vision of the state and society. This is true in terms of the structuring of power, the allocation of resources, and the conception of religion. It is also true in terms of a neoliberal orientation to the economy and social relations, with the adoption and application of the IMF’s policies, which were never questioned. The Islamists, whose project over the course of most of the twentieth century had been to take power and Islamize society from the state down, as in Iran, actually legitimized the roll-back of the state, privatization, and the promotion of free enterprises in the twenty-first century. In fact, it was under the aegis of a PJD-led government that the final touches were put onto the compulsory liquidation of the country’s only refining company, SAMIR (Société Anonyme Marocaine de l’Industrie de Raffinage), following the IMF’s counsel. This can be seen as the crowning of the intensification of the liberalization process that began in the mid-1990s in conditions of opacity and conflicts of interest between businessmen and politicians. SAMIR guaranteed energy security and independence in a global market for petroleum products that was under constant pressure. The PJD’s main leaders have since consistently opposed the renationalization of the oil refinery, even though it was a major source of revenue for the state, unlike the crony capitalism they de facto endorsed. Morocco’s Islamic banks, whose establishment and development project championed by Najib Boulif seem to have come to little or nothing, now appear as relays for a financialized brand of capitalism rather than an effective bulwark. Researcher Khaled Sor, in the title of his April 2012 study, describes Islamic finance as ‘the adjustment of an identity-based product to liberal globalization,’ with the search for licit or halal products based on identity or religion obscuring the colossal profits made by operators against a backdrop of obedience to the precepts of Allah by Muslim consumers.

Notes

- 1 This original chapter was translated from French by François Gauthier with the help of Camille Liederman.
- 2 The author is quoting from the French translation of Weber’s work in German, which we have translated in turn into English. This also goes for the following quotes from the same work.
- 3 Translated from French by the Editors.
- 4 Translated from French by the Editors. This is valid for all the following quotes when the original source is in French.
- 5 Translated from French by the Editors.

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STATE, MARKET, AND ISLAMIST POLITICAL IMAGINATION IN PAKISTAN AND BEYOND

Humeira Iqtidar

Introduction¹

This chapter examines the dynamic interaction between global political imagination and political activism by focusing on the pre-eminent Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) in Pakistan. The JI is an archetypal Islamist party with affiliates around the world. Founded in 1944 in India, its founder Abul Ala Maududi (1903–1979) chose to migrate to Pakistan after the partition of India in 1947. The JIs in Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh now function as loosely affiliated national parties. The founder of JI, Maududi, was one of the most influential Islamic thinkers of the twentieth century. His ideas were particularly influential for other Islamist thinkers such as Sayyid Qutb (Euben 1999, pp. 55, 75, 189), but more importantly, some of his interpretations, for instance, of ‘divine sovereignty’ (Zaman 2015; Iqtidar and Scharbrodt 2022), have become the common sense within Muslim polities worldwide. Maududi brought together wide knowledge of the Islamic tradition, with European political ideas, and an explicitly stated aim of moving beyond colonial hierarchies of knowledge.

Maududi saw the JI as a vanguard party (Nasr 1994) focused on taking over the state to establish what he saw as a truly Islamic polity committed to the project of justice. Here, I focus on the shifts in JI mobilizational strategies and the distance it traveled from Maududi’s initial vision to tease out the relationship between the state and the market as ideas inspiring political action. I argue that the market has become an important vehicle for individual and collective transformation in Islamist imagination. In this context, Islamists have developed a contradictory relationship with consumerism, seeing it both as a distraction from political aspirations and as a means of achieving a desired political change.

The term ‘political imagination’ is capacious enough to accommodate both intellectual history and popular political discourse. This capaciousness is useful because it allows conversations about some broad trends, which are valuable in their contributions to our understanding of politics. Historians of political thought/intellectual history have employed the term to discuss the rise and use of political concepts such as democracy, empire, secularization, or Europe (Pagden 1990, 2002; Skinner and Strath 2003; Pocock 2009; Stedman-Jones and Katznelson 2010). Whether interrogating the path of particular political concepts

from the works of canonical writers to broad public appeal or contextualizing influential writings by placing them in the concerns of the period, these works have provided an insight into how, when, and possibly even why certain ideas become linked to political action.

Building on such usage, I distinguish it slightly from the concept of social imaginary as used by Charles Taylor (2004, p. 23), by which he means, as do I, ‘something broader and deeper’ than social theories. Taylor distinguishes imaginaries from theories on three accounts: (1) imaginaries are how ordinary people ‘imagine’ their world. This is then represented not in theoretical terms but instead carried in images, stories, and legends; (2) while theory circulates within a small number of people, imaginaries are shared by large groups of people; and thus, (3) social imaginary is that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy. However, rather than taking as given the distinction between theory and imagination, as Taylor does, this chapter explores the ways in which both are implicated together.

Islamists are generally defined as those among Muslim revivalists who focus on taking over the state; they certainly take the state, both as an idea and as a material object, very seriously. However, even as taking over the state remains the proclaimed aim, prompting, in response, an alarmist discourse about the imminent dangers of an Islamist coup, actual strategies pursued over the last three decades have involved a subtle move away from the state as the locus for mobilizations. I argue here that in conversation with the shift in global political imagination where the state is no longer the dominant vehicle of political energies and projects, Islamist strategies belie a move toward using the market as an alternative engine for defining and facilitating moral and political change. This shift does not imply a complete break with the past, and certainly, at the rhetorical level, the focus on the state continues. However, as discussed below, increasingly marginalizing the founder Maududi’s vision of the state as the central agent of change in the modern world, contemporary JI activists are grappling with the many contradictions in their relationship with the market as an engine for the formation and transformation of the moral community. Moreover, the idea of the market remains infused with conflicting sentiments. On the one hand, the market is seen as an arena of suspect and selfish desires; on the other, it is seen as a place of autonomous moral choice and assertion. This shift in strategies flows from the space that the idea of the state has had to concede to a specific vision of the market within global political imagination and is important to analyze critically to build a nuanced understanding of the relationship between ideas and political mobilizations.

Islamism and the State: From Lenin to Gramsci

To understand this shift, one must first grasp the nature of Jamaat-e-Islami’s focus on the state. I have argued elsewhere that the importance of the state in JI discourse is not the result of a theological compulsion within Islam but related intimately to the intellectual and political context in which it was founded (Iqtidar 2020). A key feature of this context is the increased reach and importance of the modern state – a general name for often the particular arrangements of power – in colonial India. It is not just the increased intrusion of the state but also the specific kind of secularism that the colonial state practiced, which has shaped and defined Islamism’s focus. The relationship between Islamism and secularism is not one of negation alone but of creation and suggestion: Islamism can be seen as a creative response to the specific impositions of colonial secularism (Iqtidar 2011). There are two key components of colonial secularism that were critical in supporting the rise of

Islamism, itself an innovation in Islamic thought and practice. The first is the structural vehicle of this secularism: the colonial-modern state that was much more intrusive than the pre-colonial-early modern Mughal state had been because the colonial state engaged in an ontological remapping of individuals as part of the practice of modern statecraft. The second component relates to the substantive aspects of this policy that allowed only particularistic attachment to Muslim practices, attaching universalism to those modes of belief and behavior that seemed secular to the colonial administrators but particularly Christian to the colonized.

Islamism, like many other movements that originated in a period that was particularly thick with debate and alternatives, cannot escape engaging with the state, but it inverts the substantive elements of colonial secularism by attributing universalism to Islam and claiming its compatibility with modernity. In that sense, it is a mirrored reversal of colonial secularism that relied on norms of European Christian experience as universal. Of the various responses possible and produced, Islamism replicates the structure and concerns of colonial secularism most closely by inverting them in an Islamic idiom through its focus on the state, its conception of Islam as a cohesive system that is central to political life, and its aspirations to universal application.

Moreover, the movement and its leaders learned much from the Russian Revolution and local communists in terms of their intellectual and organizational structure, including the set-up of JI, which is organized as a Leninist cadre-based vanguard party that can take over the state to transform society. The 1960s to 1970s was a period during which socialism and communism were major influences in the Global South, including in Pakistan. Socialist focus on the state was, at that time, matched by Islamists' insistence on controlling it. Both were products of a context in which the idea of the state dominated political imagination. This is not to imply that there were no competing ideas at that time, and I shall take this up again later, but that the state was the dominant political idea of the period. More significantly, the shared structural focus on the state did not override fundamental differences in what the socialists and the Islamists wanted to do once they controlled it.

The end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s saw the actual takeover of a state by Islamists in Pakistan's neighbor, Iran. In Pakistan, too, Islamists gained relatively sudden and unexpected access to the state through General Zia's 1977 military coup – access that they had not adequately prepared for nor anticipated, given the JI's disastrous electoral results in the 1971 elections. General Zia-ul-Haq, whose coup against Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was approved of and supported by the US administration, became a key ally in the war against communism in Afghanistan. Zia did not hide his admiration for the ideas propounded by Maududi, who had died in 1979. Maududi's successor, Mian Tufayl, a compromise candidate and a long-term Maududi aide, did not hide how flattered he felt by Zia's attention and admiration for the JI.

Key Jamaat-e-Islami ideologues and leaders had unprecedented access to influence policy decisions in both official and unofficial roles. In universities and colleges, the actual battlegrounds of the competition between the JI and leftist activists, JI administrators, lecturers, and students were handed positions of authority. In public sector enterprises, where left-leaning unions had become quite entrenched before and during the Bhutto years, Islamist unions were supported by Zia to challenge and weaken their hold. Public norms of piety were propagated and supported by JI affiliates. In state departments and the army, pressure for public piety slowly increased. Praying in public view, keeping a beard, and not drinking alcohol all became important for an ambitious career in the army and, increasingly, in

the civil bureaucracy. More than the actual role of JI members in shaping policy, it was Zia's use of Islamist vocabulary that accorded the JI a public role much beyond its actual membership base.

The Zia regime also undertook the privatization of state enterprises, and through the 1980s, Pakistan became increasingly enmeshed in World Bank-led 'market-based reforms' (Zaidi 2005; Munir and Khalid 2012; Iqtidar 2017). World Bank and IMF-led market-oriented reforms became a feature of not just Pakistan but also of other countries around the Global South (Stiglitz 2002). A similar shift toward the ascendance of the market as the dominant framework for actualizing change took place in various European and North American states as well (Stedman Jones 2012). During this period, and even more in the 1990s, the JI underwent significant transformations linked to these global developments that have remained largely below the radar of academic attention. Moreover, one serious limitation within the vast majority of academic studies of Islamism, and in this particular case of the JI, has been their focus on the proclamations and writings of the founding ideologues rather than the ordinary members of the organization. For too long, the JI has been studied only in terms of the writings of Maududi. However, Maududi died in 1979, and his imprint on the organization has grown fainter with each passing year. Under Qazi Hussain Ahmed, the third *amir* of the JI (1987–2009), the JI changed into a national political party, entering into alliances with other national and regional political parties. More critically, since the late 1980s, but particularly during the period 1997–2009, the JI became an important critic of corporate globalization while retaining its social conservatism.

During this period, the JI also underwent a subtle but important shift in the range and nature of its mobilization strategies and tactics, on the kinds of issues that are raised and some of the solutions that are suggested. Through schools and colleges, dispensaries and hospitals, dowry funds and neighborhood clean-up operations, micro-enterprises, and skill-training in low-income areas, the JI's activists spend much more time engaging with 'society' within the framework of the market as the engine of social transformation, than with preparing the vanguard party for an imminent takeover of the state. Taking one important example of this extended reach: the JI's humanitarian/NGO face, the Al-Khidmat Foundation, claims to be the biggest network of humanitarian services in Pakistan. The Foundation has subsumed an earlier initiative started during the 1960s by a JI sympathizer, currently called the Al-Khidmat Trust, which is managed and run by women affiliated with the JI.

However, it was only incorporated formally within the Jamaat-e-Islami organizational structure during the mid-1990s. Maududi was very reluctant to officially affiliate with the Al-Khidmat Trust, even though its founder was keen on such a relationship. Since the 1990s, though, there has been exponential growth in the scope and scale of the Trust's activities. The Foundation and the Trust administer a new school system started by the JI, called Baithak Schools, women's vocational centers, adult literacy programs, hospitals and mobile dispensaries, refugee care programs, prisoner welfare programs, orphan sponsor projects, drinking water projects, subsidized vaccination against Hepatitis B, emergency relief, Ramadan and dowry gifts, Eid gift packages, and *qurbani* (sacrifice – typically refers to the animal sacrifice for Eid) programs. These are all precisely the activities that Maududi had resisted during his lifetime, and the JI had avoided engaging in as an organization for more than a decade after his death, preferring to focus instead on political analysis and state-focused mobilization.

The emphasis away from controlling the 'state' and more clearly toward building a Muslim 'society' through other means can be seen, in particular, through the JI's increasing

involvement in funding, building, and running schools in different parts of the country. Despite the great importance that Maududi attached to education, he had resisted moves to open schools as a part of the Jamaat's activities, choosing instead to focus on public institutions of higher education as recruiting grounds for attracting the vanguard, Islamic elite that he hoped to induct into the party. During fieldwork in 2005, I visited newly opened Baithak Schools in working-class neighborhoods of Lahore with JI activists. These schools were part of a new initiative led by the Women's Wing within the JI to reach out to the poorer segments of society. While the political goal of creating a vote bank within these previously ignored segments was a factor, of equal importance was the language of demand and supply, incentives, and individual choice, which were used to support the program of creating a better 'Muslim society' that would be ready for the Muslim state that the JI would help establish. In conversations with activists, leaders, and JI sympathizers, I was struck by this inversion of Maududi's original formulation.

The Gramscian turn, by which I mean the emphasis on direct cultural and social engagement rather than statist transformation, within the JI is part of the process in which this Leninist party has been socialized. But it is also part of the larger process in which the state has been socialized in both academic theories and popular political imagination. At the theoretical level, this socialization has meant viewing the state increasingly as a social actor enmeshed in specific institutions and path dependencies. At a popular level, it has meant a mounting questioning of the notion of a state as an independent actor standing above and outside society. In the Pakistani context, this questioning may be generated as much through patronage scandals involving politicians or bureaucrats acting out of a socially embedded expectation to support their extended family (or *biradari*) as through the circulation of academic theories and ideas about state(s) through a globalized media. In this context, a question that many JI activists raised when I spoke to them about this shift in their strategies is an important one for theorizing about the state generally: how useful is it to think in terms of a strict division between the state and society?

The State in International Political Imagination

The question of the division between state and society is linked in a profound manner to another: why are very particular arrangements of power in contexts as different as Ecuador or Indonesia, Pakistan, or the Netherlands called 'the state'? The answer would have to go some way toward acknowledging the importance of the *idea* of the state: the state as an idea legitimizing the exercise of power in modern polities. Timothy Mitchell's (1991) argument about the importance of interrogating the idea of the state is very useful in this context for two reasons. First, it forces us to acknowledge the seriousness and importance of the 'idea' of the state, both in facilitating oppressive arrangements and in inspiring liberatory projects. Second, combining Mitchell's insights with the reality of a changed political imagination, where the idea of the state has lost some of its previous currency as an inspiration for projects and movements, raises important questions about the new arrangements and ideas, as well as the disciplinary forces accompanying them. What, then, is the idea that has emerged as a serious contender to the idea of the state for the Islamists?

At a popular level, it is commonplace that across the globe, the state declined in importance from the 1980s onward, particularly after the fall of the Soviet Union. As the Soviet state began to disintegrate, so too did the argument for the state as an engine of social transformation. Thatcher's TINA (There Is No Alternative) and Reagan's Reaganomics,

supported by corporate mass media, put immense pressure on the idea of the state as the creative engine for individual or collective development. Thatcher and Reagan's reforms are often seen as the decisive turn toward liberalization, or what later came to be known as neoliberalism.² Criticism of the state also focused on problems with nationalism as part of a larger critique of the nation-state. During the 1990s, these converged with the slogans of promoters of corporate globalization who highlighted its promise, through common markets and free flows of ideas and people, to draw together populations 'artificially' divided by nation-states. Most critiques of nationalism were locally generated and in response to its homogenizing, repressive aspects, yet they were appropriated by the supporters of neoliberal globalization, as Arif Dirlik (1994) has pointed out.

The failure of the Soviet state was held to be emblematic of the larger failure of 'the state' to be a sustainable engine for individual and collective development. If looked at closely, though, it is possible to discern not a decline in the actual role of the state but a shift in the domains that were previously considered to be under the state's purvey and that went hand in hand with changes in the idea of the state. The notion of the 'developmental' state gave way to the 'regulatory' state (Dunn 1995; Sassen 1996). Neoliberal economic globalization and the associated WTO, IMF, and World Bank injunctions popularized the notion of 'rolling back the state.' The rhetoric of rolling back hides the fact that while there has been shrinkage in one aspect of the state's role – its welfare and service provision role – there has been a great expansion of another one – policing and enforcement mechanisms. Even as service provision was increasingly constructed as residing beyond the responsibility of a state, regulatory mechanisms for supporting intellectual property right protection, private property, and paradoxically, 'unregulated' financial services were added to its core activities, particularly from the 1990s onward. These regulatory mechanisms required greater information-gathering sophistication and policing strength to back them. For instance, the gathering of large amounts of data about individual citizens and their financial sources, and the diversion of policing toward intellectual property rights infringement, became commonplace. To allow all this to happen, relevant institutions within the state were strengthened through a redirection of resources from developmental or social welfare projects.

The more fundamental shift then was not in the 'size' of the actual state but in its place in political imagination. The state did not fail, as neoliberal reformers claimed, but the idea of the state was seriously challenged. The state as a project was no longer dominant, whether in Britain, Argentina, Ghana, or Pakistan. This fall from grace cannot be seen in absolute terms but has to be judged relatively: both by its own past importance and by its relationship with other competing ideas. The idea that emerged as the most potent challenge to the state as a mobilizer of ideas, political energies, and imaginaries is the idea of the market. My intention here is not to suggest an uncomplicated narrative about the failure of the state with the market having to step in to correct the wrongs of the state. Moreover, it is clear that the idea of the market suffers from the same kind of theoretical problems as the idea of the state, e.g., how to distinguish the market from society. Is it a set of institutional arrangements or a product of a regulatory framework? Does it stand above, below, or alongside society?

Many middle-level activists with whom I interacted reflected the complexity of this shift in political imagination. I found the middle-level activists to be particularly perceptive toward changes within the organization. These middle-level activists are often long-term Jamaat members or sympathizers; they are embedded in their particular social contexts and act as a bridge between the national Jamaat leadership and particular localities. The notion

of a bridge, though, is too static to bring out the transformations they are able to facilitate in the process of the movement of ideas, issues, and debates across the two groups to which they have access. In the process of communicating, these middle-level activists also infuse the conversation with their own preoccupations and concerns.

One such long-time activist, Naeem (not his real name), was in his forties when I met him. He belonged to a 'Jamaat-e-Islami family.' This meant that his father was also a JI sympathizer and activist in a medium-sized Punjabi city, Sargodha, which counts about 600,000 inhabitants today. His father's involvement meant that as young adults Naeem and his siblings were exposed to JI literature and study circles. Since the late 1950s, and particularly during the 1960s, Naeem's family had also been involved in door-to-door campaigns in Sargodha for JI electoral or issue-based mobilizations. In the early 1970s, Naeem moved to Lahore and became active in student politics through the JI. He continued his engagement with the party while serving in a government institution, and over the years, he became a locally influential organizer.

As he reflected on his years of engagement with the JI, he spoke about the increasing difficulty in actually persuading Jamaat activists, as well as members of the wider public to attend a *jalsa* or a meeting. Initially, he blamed it on the city of Lahore. Lahore, a city of roughly 14 million people, was, he said, 'too big.' The size of the city was a deterrent to people actually getting to know each other, but also, on a practical level, it meant that commuting calculations played a big role in people's decisions. Having kept his ties with Sargodha alive through frequent visits to his siblings, who still live and mobilize for the JI there, he was struck by the difference between the two cities. In Sargodha, there was a greater cohesion – people knew each other – but, more critically, there was 'more time' (*zyada waqt*). 'In Lahore,' he noted, 'people are in a state of frenzy. They are working two jobs, ferrying their children to tuitions, going shopping. And it takes so long now to get from one place to the next.' Initially, he stated that people were almost forced into (*maj-boor hain*) this frenzied state due to the size of the city and attendant commuting distances, but later he also ruminated that, ultimately, this was linked to the desire to consume new goods, gadgets, and products that consumed time and energies.

People have no time for the movement (*tehbreek*). They are convinced that they need a TV, a DVD player, the latest books [all three in English], or clothes. They work two jobs, kill themselves to buy these things for themselves and their children... Mostly, also they are not sure what they will achieve through political activities, but they know what they can buy... How can we compete with that?

How, indeed, does one compete with the subtle layers of disillusionment and despair that political action directed toward the state can carry in the face of the immense pressures from multinational corporations and international financial bodies? At a pre-election meeting in Mansoorah Women's College at the headquarters of the JI in Lahore in August 2005, many speakers warned against the lure of the market as an alternative to politics. One speaker addressed this gathering of key local activists from within Lahore by declaring,

You will have to struggle against the shopping trips... both in yourself and with others. How can we buy these things? I don't understand – who has the money to buy these things when the country is being bled dry by the MNCs (*international compani-yan*) and the IMF?

She then pointed toward the audience to say,

Can you afford [she used the word in English] that TV? Can we [as a country] afford these cars and these fridges? Do you know how much we owe the IMF? And how did we end up with this loan? Were you asked about this? Is this government (*hakumat*) capable of fulfilling the obligations of the state (*riyasat*) towards the people?

This disenchantment in the state and frustration at the increasing lure of consumerism is also shared by others outside the JI. In the course of my fieldwork, political activists and leaders from the Jamaat, and also from other political parties such as the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz Sharif group, repeatedly emphasized to me that the state has, in effect, been taken over by the market. One way to understand this assertion is that the idea of the state is subservient to the idea of the market as officials and politicians justify actions and policies within the market paradigm. This argument is not about the extent of liberalization and privatization within Pakistan – that has varied even over the last three decades, although the general trend has been toward increased privatization – but about the emergence of an official discourse that recognized the primacy of the market in setting its agenda, what the philosopher Michael Sandel (2009) has called the state's 'market mimicking assumptions.' This refers to the fact that not only is the paradigm of the market used for making state decisions but the main aim of the state is then defined as correcting for market failure.

The conceptual ascendancy of the market is not without its impact on political options and spaces. During the course of my research, politicians, some of them former or current ministers, commented on the very slim margins that they had to play with as state officials. One long-time politician represented the general feeling when he said:

Since our policies are not made here, I can't even get somebody a teacher's job now [particularly after the World Bank-led devolution reforms]. What do we offer our constituencies when we go to ask them for votes? Previously, the biggest favour we could do them used to be a job, preferably in a state institution. Now either the state institutions don't exist, or we don't have control over them, or we find that people don't want those jobs anymore.... I have created my own security company to be able to provide some jobs to the men from my village.

The JI's own relationship with the market is ambivalent: on the one hand, as seen above, JI activists and leaders speak against consumerism as well as the free market rhetoric that pervades Pakistan's public sphere and government decisions – an increasing criticism of the IMF/World Bank conditionalities within JI official discourse is a discernible trend (e.g., JI Election Manifesto 2002) – and, on the other hand, they are not immune to the allure of the market as a mechanism for bringing about societal and individual transformation.

Islamism, the Middle Class, and the Market

Contemporary Jamaat-e-Islami activists and leaders talk of the welfare/developmental state as the ideal they are striving toward. The idea of the developmental state in the immediate postcolonial years of Pakistan was not a complete break from the past. Indeed, there was an important element of continuity, and postcolonial notions of the developmental state were

a nationalist reworking of British ideas about the state. The postcolonial state was seen as an engine of social and political transformation in ways similar to the British imagining of the colonial state. The state was seen to stand above and outside of society, yet at the same time, it had the power to transform society. This ‘scientific empire’ depended heavily on science for legitimizing and enabling structures of power (Gilmartin 1994). This reliance on scientific knowledge and expertise, due to its intrinsic superiority to local knowledge, was also central to the notion of the developmental state of the 1950s through to the 1970s, not just in South Asia but within a global conversation about development (Ferguson 1990; Escobar 1995). However, even at the peak of its hold on political imagination, the idea of the developmental state was not without challenges. A pronounced tension between the ideas of the ‘state’ and the ‘market’ has been a defining feature of late twentieth-century politics.

These tensions often played out most prominently within the middle class. The middle class in South Asia, as elsewhere, is a group particularly defined by its attempts at self-fashioning (Chakrabarty 1991; Joshi 2001; Daechsel 2006; Maqsood 2017) willing to use multiple avenues to realize its aspirations. In an interesting analysis of fascist movements within the Urdu middle-class milieu in interwar North India, Daechsel (2006) highlights the particular susceptibility of the Urdu-speaking North Indian middle class to consumerism as a means of self-fashioning. Yet, for others within the same middle class, the state too has been of considerable attraction for similar reasons of self-definition (Seal 1968; Chatterjee 1986). The vast majority of JI members in Pakistan today are part of the aspiring middle class and bring their conflict-ridden relationship with both the market and the state into their politics as they strive to satisfy their needs for self-fashioning and self-expression.

The current leadership of the JI comprises predominantly first-generation university and college graduates who have, over the last 30 years, moved up the social ladder. This social mobility occurs mostly through state-sponsored schools, colleges, and universities. It is, therefore, no coincidence that the threats to JI membership through the privatization of public universities under General Musharaf’s regime were taken very seriously. The Board of Governors’ scheme, initiated in 2002, was widely seen as a move to privatize the education sector and open it up for international institutions under pressure from the World Bank. The JI’s critique of the privatization of national education was couched in terms of the principle of equal access to health and education, but no doubt shaped by the JI’s continued dependence upon public universities for recruitment. The JI moved quickly through the Islami Jamaat Tulaba (IJT), its student wing, to organize mass protests throughout the years 2002 to 2005. Waqas Anjum, the Islami Jami‘yat Tulaba national Nazim (city and town coordinator) from 1995 to 1998 and now a JI member, was involved with these protests and explained the relationship between different educational facilities and inequality in these terms:

The government is only increasing the segregation in society through these measures. Those who sit on a *tat* [jute mat] in their school will have one board [of education – for curriculum and examination, etc.], the army has its own, and then the Agha Khan Board. They are creating different types of people – those who rule and those who are ruled... It is only the organizational capacity of Jamaat-e-Islami and my involvement in it that sustains me, otherwise the situation in Pakistan is truly depressing (*dil shakista karnay walay halat hain*).

For him, these different educational facilities and curricula were a way of creating hierarchies that further privatization would only perpetuate. At the same time, in some

contradiction with the political activism of IJT, JI activists had also started exploring the potential for alternatives to influencing state policy. While the state remains the rhetorical focus of JI mobilizations, the use of the market as a facilitator of middle-class activism increasingly became an option at a time when the state is seen as ineffective as well as inaccessible. A response to the kinds of problems that Waqas Anjum raised is the group of private schools run by JI affiliates, even as they continue to agitate in support of state provision of education. Over the last two decades, JI activists' engagement with a market that allows them space for politico-entrepreneurial activity as well as consumer activism has increased significantly. The two are related precisely because consumption of designer veils, Islamic CDs and DVDs, Islamic schools, books, pamphlets, and children's stories, catering companies that respect gender-segregated parties, interest-free banking systems, taxi services that provide adequate purdah facilities, decoration pieces that involve calligraphy rather than human and animal forms, television and radio channels that provide Islamic content, etc., all entail both a political stance and public consumption. More fundamental than the actual goods and services bought and sold is a reworked conception of politics as a place of transactions, the need for incentives to structure action, the logic of demand and supply to situate mobilizations, the importance of efficiency and individual choice in locating the role of religion—the many facets of the language and paradigm of the market.

Unthinkable two decades ago, political action for many of the JI activists I interacted with was infused with this new conception of politics. As I accompanied some upper-middle-class JI women from the suburbs of Lahore to their weekly visits to inner-city sewing schools and income-generation projects, it became apparent that the line between social entrepreneurship and political mobilization – one that had been sharply delineated by Maududi for the JI – has become a blurred one today. When I asked them how their work here was relevant to the work of the larger organization, the JI women responded that they were facilitating the work of the organization in two ways. First, through creating a relationship with the underprivileged in an area of the city previously closed to JI influence, they were opening the channels for a 'longer-term relationship,' a euphemistic reference to electoral mobilizations. Second, and more importantly, through the exposure to JI literature and proselytizing messages, these women in the sewing schools and income-generating projects were being told about 'the right kind of Islam' (*sahib islam*) and being made into a 'suitable citizen for an Islamic state.' These would be citizens who were producers, not just consumers, pious, efficient, economically independent, and 'attuned to the laws of demand and supply.' It is the use of market rationality to facilitate moral and political projects that signals an important shift in Islamist imagination. Coming back to the futility of separating society from the state, and in a neat inversion of Maududi's formulation, they would ask rhetorically, what is a state without the right kind of society and citizenry to support it?

Consumption and the Market Idea

Secularism is invariably conceived in relation to the state – whether in terms of a separation from or a management of religion. However, if we recognize the state as an idea that allows particular configurations of power to function, it is important to recognize the competing, but also paradoxically complementary, place of the market in this equation. The role of the market in regulating the 'conduct of conduct' (Foucault's evocative phrase referring to self-regulation by individuals) has received less attention than the role of the state, particularly as concerns religious practices. In his immensely influential alternative reading of secularism as

state management of religion rather than as separation of religion and the state, Talal Asad recognizes that secular modes of governance are tied to the emergence of capitalism and the nation-state: secularization led to the release of ecclesiastical property into private hands and market circulation in the European context (Asad 1993, 2003). More critically, rather than secularism leading to a separation of church and state, Asad pointed out, the historical experience has actually been of the state managing religiosity. Building on Foucault's insights about the willing participation of individuals in their own governance and the regulation of the self in accordance with dominant nation-state norms, Asad focuses on how secularism produces specific kinds of religious subjectivities. In the South-Asian context, the implications of governmentality during colonial rule for political projects and religious identities have been explored in significant detail over the last three decades. However, the changes in postcolonial contexts have remained relatively underexplored. It is critical to nuance our understanding by a deeper look not just across localities but also through temporal variations. Otherwise, rendering inconsequential the differences in governmentality across time and space, we run the risk of attributing too much or too little to certain modes of power. The idea of the state engendered certain particular forms of governmentality or internalized norms in accordance with the demands of the nation-state. However, as the idea of the state weakens its hold on the popular imagination, so does, potentially, the ability of particular institutions associated with the state to manage and direct individual behavior. The kind of skepticism that defines the relationship of the citizen with the state in Pakistan precludes any easy conclusions about the ability of the state to regulate 'the conduct of conduct.' At the very least, it can be easily established that it is nowhere close to the kind of control that the Foucauldian French state exerted. In question here is not just the relative hold of the state idea across different contexts but the perceptible shift from what Gauthier (2020, p. 4) has called a 'political-embedded, National-Statist regime to a Global-Market one.'

The co-imbriation of market and piety in producing a particular kind of self has been perceptively articulated by Rudnycky (2009) through his investigations into 'market Islam,' which 'simultaneously draws on immersion in an Islamic discursive tradition, calculating economic rationality, and instilling principles and practices of self-management.' In his study of Krakatoa Steel, a state-owned company in Indonesia, Rudnycky (2009, p. 187) argues that market Islam involves 'designing a form of Muslim practice commensurate with the goals of eliminating corruption, promoting privatization, and enhancing productivity in an increasingly global market.' These are goals that Rudnycky identifies with neoliberal reforms in Malaysia. Bryan Turner has similarly noted how an increased and specific kind of consumption as leading to a different relationship with time for the individual. Turner (2009, p. 44) points out that, especially in the case of prosperity cults, 'life on earth is no longer merely a prelude to the consumption of happiness in the next world: the promise of consumerism is to have one's desires satisfied now.' For many, consumerism supports a different theology, from 'prosperity religions' to 'spiritual economies' and 'occult capitalism' (Coleman 2000; Comaroff and Comaroff 2000, 1999; Garrett and King 2005; Gauthier 2020). At the same time as consumption becomes a route to practicing citizenship and identity, the decisions around what and where to eat, buying clothes, or choosing a drink cannot avoid becoming invested with political and religious significance (Trentman 2006). As consumers, workers, and producers, Islamists, like others, operate at the nexus of religious inspiration and the market, where subjectivities coalesce in the face of new normativities. Activism structured around the idea of the market has the potential to transform the meaning of the success or failure of the Islamist project itself.

While some, such as Asef Bayat (2013), have made compelling arguments regarding the seepage of energies away from the Islamist project, it remains useful to consider the relationship between the market and the state as competing vehicles for facilitating social concerns, especially as we enter a period of backlash against the corporate globalization that characterized the previous four decades. Much political energy, from the US to China, European nations to South American ones, has shifted away from support for globalization and a free market paradigm. The dominance of the market and, relatedly, of consumption as a mode of activism is by no means unchallenged. The shift in the place of the state in Islamist political imagination presents an interesting opportunity to explore some of the complexities generated at the interface of international political imaginations and local political dynamics. The JI's focus on the state is, in part, a legacy of a period when the idea of the state played a dominant role in global political imagination. The precise relationship between the state and the JI that Maududi articulated at the time was the result of local political configurations infused with a global imagination. As the idea of the state has changed over the last decades of the twentieth century in global political imagination, so has the JI articulated subtle shifts in its mobilizational strategies.

This chapter has looked at why and how ideas about the state have changed within the Islamist imagination and has briefly alluded to the implications of these changes in terms of the relationship between consumption and political activism. I have also suggested that the ascendance of the market in Islamist political imagination is tied to wider global shifts and is not without moral ambiguities. However, recognizing these shifts in political imaginations and the connections between the global and the local compels us to re-adjust the emphasis from theology to context, from the local to the global, and from the particular to the general.

Notes

- 1 This chapter is a modified version of the article 'Secularism Beyond the State: The 'State' and the 'Market' in Islamist Imagination,' 2011, published in *Modern Asian Studies* 45/3, pp. 535–564.
- 2 For the difference between liberalism and neoliberalism, see Iqtidar 2017.

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