

CONSUMING ISLAM: BRANDING 'WHOLESOME' AS LIFESTYLE FETISH

Karim Douglas Crow

The rise of a modern consumerist middle-class in affluent Muslim societies is increasingly marked by 'halalization' and an 'ontology of consumption'—the way the world and Islam are viewed and treated for consumption. A bird's-eye view is provided of the psychic roots of Muslim religiously-flavored consumerism constructed and managed to benefit powerful societal elites. The key to selling 'Islamic Lifestyle' as an object of consumption is packaging this consumer choice into imaginal modes as a psycho-somatic adornment for eliciting fetish-fulfilling appetitive, ritualistic and prophylactic needs. The shifting of wealth East with the rise of Asian consumers is impacting the emergent economies of major Muslim nations. These factors pose pertinent questions concerning future modes of Muslim modernity.

Keywords: Consumerism; Wholesome Life Styles; 'Islamic Lifestyle' as an object of consumption; Islam, Muslims and the challenge of Modernity.

Allah has bought from the believers their persons and their wealth in exchange for the Paradise Garden they shall possess. (Q 9: 111)

A stark contrast marks much of the Muslim world today: across North Africa and the greater Middle East authoritarian abuse and sectarian rivalry fuel insecurity, violence and bloodshed; while in a number of emergent economies increasing affluence nourishes the roots of market society. Growing Muslim

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middle-classes are embracing consumerist attitudes and appetites by blending these with key aspects of their own Islamic practice and identity. This is one of the great unfolding realities of contemporary Muslim societies. It is especially true for the major emergent economies of the Arab Gulf, Turkey, Indonesia, Malaysia—and of course India and China. Shopping is a highly appreciated activity promoting middle-class consumerism, while also servicing the self-interest of the political and wheeler-dealer business classes.¹ Exploiting ‘Islam’ for personal and corporate profit is now avidly discussed by prominent governmental, business, educational, and professional leaders at large international gatherings. Understanding what the rise of the middle-class implies for emergent modes of modernity in Muslim majority nations is vital for apprehending the dominant forces shaping contemporary Muslim societies.

God’s Messenger Muhammad—upon him blessings and peace—stated concerning his fellow Messengers sent to guide humans: “We, the company of Prophets, always turn a profit.”² By this, the Prophet appears to indicate invaluable immaterial returns on spiritual guidance and striving—the interior fruits of ‘knowledge-practice-understanding’ which sincere faith and conviction yields within the human soul. Times have changed and the heavens ushered in our post-Enlightenment scientific technological era, the age of late-modernity, is ruled by positivist assumptions which essentially give no credence to immaterial reality (the spiritual or transcendent realm), and which privilege material gain above all else. This is an age when the global Halal industry works hand-in-hand with governments to manage the extremely valuable consumer market, and when the potential for profit is so great that spiritual striving and genuine knowledge-practice are easily converted into strictly material gain derived from excitation of appetites. Naturally this requires planners and managers of commerce to cleverly mingle irrepressible human impulses for physical satisfaction with deeply embedded psychic and imaginal needs and rewards. The ethical and spiritual may thus become inverted for financial profit by corporate elites. Is not this the era of the “stomach and the genitalia”—of stimulating base appetites and manufacturing needless desires within the ‘biological and social animal’ termed ‘human’? We may invoke here

1. This aspect is well treated by Johan Fischer in his detailed anthropological study, *Proper Islamic Consumption: Shopping among the Malays in Modern Malaysia* (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies [University of Copenhagen], 2008). He provides insight into the particular mode of Islamic modernity being achieved in Malaysia, and the dynamics of implanting globalized capitalist values within a major Muslim society.
2. “*naḥnu mā’āshir al-anbiyā’ lā nuzāl murbiḥūn.*” A *mu’dal* [choked] Tradition ‘raised’ via Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam; in Ibn Ḥibbān al-Bustī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, and al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu’jam al-Awsaṭ*—generally deemed *gharīb shādhidh*.

the famous warning of the blessed Prophet, upon him blessings and peace: “What I fear most for my Community is obsessive pre-occupation with the two interior-cavities: the stomach and the genitals.”³

Psychic Roots of Innate Appetite

Our concern here is the rationale for selling a Shari‘ah conscious or Halal Lifestyle by means of packaging the ‘wholesome’ (*ṭayyib*) and the lawful (or Shari‘ah-compliant) in ways which entertain, satisfy—yet always never quite enough, and which operate by stimulating our appetitive soul-faculty. We also seek to divert attention into a more self-reflective mode, to question assumptions and think the un-thought. In Islamic normative ethics⁴ the inborn human appetitive faculty is named *shahwah*, ‘appetitive-desire’ or craving. It was always recognized as a neutral faculty or soul-energy—not good or bad in itself yet capable of being either used or abused in beneficial or harmful ways. *Shahwah* is necessary and wholesome for ensuring our organism’s individual and communal wellbeing, for without it humans would not be impelled to eat and drink, to instinctively seek out the pleasant and comfortable, or to experience sexual desire required for procreation and lawful satisfaction of bodily needs. Moderation and a balanced constitution (*i‘tidāl*) is the normative guide for satisfying our organism’s inborn needs—whereas ‘wants’ are often acquired, not innate, and require special techniques for incitement and stimulation. Thus, in itself appetite may be understood as a God-given energy necessary for attaining the optimum flourishing of our animal organism, an energy humans share with the beasts.

In a proper Islamic context two related problems arise when one seeks to intensify and stimulate this innate appetitive-faculty—to whet the appetite, so to speak—in order to promote increased consumption of goods and services beyond the recommended needed moderate ratio. One problem centers on *creation of wants* with the accompanying delivery of sought-for rewards by means of encouraging non-essential or even redundant consumption. In the modern era, this has repeatedly been demonstrated to be not very difficult,

3. “*akhwaf mā akhāfa ‘alaykum al-ajwafān al-baṭn wa l-farj*,” reported from the Prophet by Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, in al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī* ed. Ghaffārī (3rd ed., Tehran, 1388) v. 2 *kitāb al-īmān wa l-kufr* p. 79; another version has: ...*shahwat al-baṭn wa l-farj*. A similar utterance is also assigned to ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib; see Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-Jū‘ [On Hunger]*, in *Mawsū‘ah Rasā’il Ibn Abī l-Dunyā*, ed. A. F. al-Mizyadī (Beirut: 2010) vol. 2 p. 230 §70.

4. For a representative collection of Hadith on *akhlāq*, consult al-Ḥāfiẓ Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī, *Shu‘ab al-īmān [Branches of Faith]*, ed. M. S. Basyūnī Zaghālūl (Beirut: 1990) in nine volumes, with chapters on every major praiseworthy ‘character-trait’ collectively constituting the components of faith.

given the inherent vulnerability of humans to such concerted persuasion on a mass scale through sophisticated media methods which so effectively tickle our psyche. Technological advances have immensely facilitated these forms of persuasion. The other associated problem involves *substituting inner contentment with outer-oriented wants* in order to induce widespread conformity by means of physical and emotional-intellectual (psychic) rewards. While both questions are primarily psycho-somatic in nature, the second is clearly more primary and more challenging when seeking to exploit Islamic imperatives for monetary gain, to turn the teachings of the Prophet into profit.

The Creation of Wants

The creation of wants in contemporary Muslim consumption should be viewed in terms of how to achieve an effective balance between inducing and magnifying ‘appetitive desire’ to multiply wants—while yet maintaining the *semblance of conformity* to wholesome moderation and legitimate satisfaction of our divinely provisioned needs. This delicate question is fundamental to selling “Islamic consumption” with its attendant techniques of branding and marketing. It revolves around the vendor’s persuasive reassurance which may impose a non-Islamic agenda of value priorities (whether indigenous to a specific Muslim culture, or alien and imported from the prevailing Euro-American marketized global culture) upon the fragile base of dimly grasped or poorly conceived Islamic values and ideals whose original persuasive force has now faded and lost their authentic social, moral and civilizational center-of-gravity.⁵ This challenge has long exercised the ingenuity and creativity of advertising executives to achieve maximum returns.⁶ They have invested vast sums into market research, product testing, sales techniques, and effective stimulation of appetitive impulses. Such manipulation is frequently performed through the medium of external markers or ‘flags’ operating in predictable ways upon inner neuro-cognitive mechanisms shaped by the dominant social

5. We cannot enter here into the complex reasons for this process of civilizational orphaning which accelerated since the mid-nineteenth century, for which one may profitably consult Wael Hallaq, *Shari‘ah: Theory, Practice, Transformation* (Cambridge University Press: 2009) pp. 357–550 ‘The Sweep of Modernity’.
6. Advertising is communication for persuasion aimed at driving or at reassuring consumer behavior, and/or determining political and ideological choices, with branding and targeted audience serving among its main tools. In 2010 over \$300 billion in the United States and \$500 billion worldwide was estimated to be spent on advertising. For classic critiques of this modern industry of persuasion, see the works by Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 2001; first pub. 1976); and Sut Jhully, *The Codes of Advertising: Fetishism and the political Economy of Meaning* (London: Routledge, 1990).

conditionings peculiar to a specific culture. Nevertheless, despite the best efforts of American carbonated soft-drink corporations to break the tea drinking habit of many Asian societies, they have not yet succeeded. On the other hand, American gourmet coffee outlets are now successfully globalized, with Vietnam and Indonesia becoming the second and third largest coffee producers, while the coffee bean is the second most traded commodity worldwide after oil and liquefied natural gas.

The detailed data accumulated over many decades by advertising agencies concerning the precise cognitive and affective ‘push-buttons’ for inciting human motivations, for manipulating the commonly exemplified types of human delusional self-image, and for inciting lower base impulses are truly impressive. One recalls here classic benchmarks such as flashing ‘subliminal images’, creative branding, use of semiotics, ego-enhancing appeals to narcissistic emblems, and employing affective ‘tags’, along with a host of other proven strategies. The wide acceptance today within more ‘advanced’ affluent contemporary societies of conceptualizing ‘citizen’ status in terms of being a ‘consumer’ clearly attests to the success of these methods. Consumer activism and consumer protection, as well as the alternative– or anti–consumerist movements associated with the alter-globalization movement, thereby merely confirm the very success of consumerism.⁷

Nevertheless, such Freudian, Jungian, and Reichian⁸ techniques with their proven cognitive and affective cues may one day appear rather crude compared to the potential subtleties awaiting possible creative commercial exploitation of the doctrine of the ‘Greatest Shaykh’ Ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 638 H/1240), regarding the powerful psycho–somatic energy bound up within the ‘imaginal realm’. The Imaginal World is described as an intermediate reality situated midway between our physical corporeal existence and the intelligible energy of immaterial archetypes, and exhibiting features of both.⁹ One may

7. On contrasting ‘more is never enough’ against the ‘satisfaction of enough’, go to <http://www.postconsumers.com/>; and consult the insightful work by Benjamin R. Barber, *Consumed: How Markets Corrupt Children, Infantilize Adults, and Swallow Citizens Whole* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008).

8. Wilhelm Reich (d. 1957) was the radical Austrian-American psychiatrist infamous for controversial orgone therapy, whose ideas have recently been rehabilitated.

9. On Ibn al-‘Arabī’s influential understanding of the ‘World of Imagination/‘Ālam al-Khayāl combining qualities of spirit and body bridging the corporeal, psychic and intelligible realms while accessing the ALL, consult for orientation: W. C. Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-‘Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Albany: SUNY, 1994) pp. 67–119; and Henry Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn ‘Arabi* (Princeton University Press, 1969). Study of the reality of the

only hint at the riches awaiting Islamic-inspired exploitation of unified ‘intelligible–psychic–somatic’ push-buttons which the teaching of the Great Shaykh and similar Islamic exponents could unlock for determined consumer-minded marketizers.¹⁰ (All such applications are fraught with danger, since mis-appropriation of spiritual truth for selfish material gain inevitably elicits its own severe penalty.) We suggest that fostering the “image” of perceived benefits mediated by a carefully constructed and projected Lifestyle presented to the vulnerable imagination as being genuinely “Islamic”, might acquire far more efficacy and will-force capacity when it succeeds in tapping the profound resources of symbolic imagery and resonant wealth of aesthetic replications and emotive stereotypes still resident in the Muslim subconscious. The popularity of children’s films with ‘arabesque’ or ‘oriental’ topoi and imagery is a small indication of this reality (*cf.* Aladdin & Arabian Nights).

Misappropriation of the Sacred

In Islamic psycho-physical ethics ‘inner contentment’ is deemed a key praiseworthy trait known under various terms such as *qanā‘ah* (‘frugal contentment’), *ridā* (‘temperate satisfaction’), or *qisār al-amal* (‘curtailing worldly expectation’); contentment also embraced ‘*iffah* and *ḥayā*’ (‘prudence’),¹¹ as well as *zuhd* (‘renunciation’ of appetitive wants). There is a wealth of individual and communal ethico-social benefits to be derived from appreciation of these character traits, hidden in early Islamic sources. The replacement of this inner self-sufficiency of moderating contentment by outwardly-directed appetitive desire may pose a more rewarding challenge for encouraging a crass consumerist Lifestyle among Muslims today. This is not because Muslims remain wedded to inner contentment as an individual ethico-spiritual practice.

imaginative faculty was earlier cultivated by the philosopher Ibn Sīnā, and capitalized on by theologian-jurists like al-Ghazālī, becoming a widespread normative doctrine in later Islamic teachings. Ibn al-‘Arabī’s teaching on the reality of an Imaginal realm had important echoes as far as 14th century Aceh in Sumatra, and as late as 18th century Qing dynasty China. See our study on “Ibn ‘Arabī and Imagination: The Background,” presented at the International Symposium *Ibn ‘Arabi and Modern Era* [sponsored by Turkish Women’s Cultural Association (TURKKAD) & the Istanbul Municipality] convened in Istanbul and Damascus, May 24–28th 2008; forthcoming in our volume of collected essays: *Intelligence, Reason, Wisdom*.

10. For an important overview of techniques of imaginal manipulation as recently practiced, see Stuart Ewen, *All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture* (Basic Books, 1988; 2nd ed. 1990).
11. The term ‘*iffah*’ ‘abstinence, organic modesty’ was linked with moderation and continent restraint of natural desires, as in the frequently invoked phrase ‘*iffat al-baṭn wa l-farj*’; see utterances by Muḥammad al-Bāqir in al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī* ed. Ghaffārī, v. 2 pp. 79–80.

That is far from being the case in popular Lifestyles met with in cosmopolitan urban settings especially among youth.¹² Indeed, the ancient privileging of frugal contentment was never entrenched historically within Muslim mass culture. The simplifying austerity and minimalist satisfaction-of-needs among early generations of Muslims quickly gave way to indulgent luxury and energetic material pursuits among mercantile and ruling classes. As the wife of the Prophet ʿĀʾishah observed:¹³

The first misfortune which befell this Community after the passing of its Prophet—upon him blessings and peace—was satiety [*al-shibaʿ*, satisfying the appetite]; for when people filled their stomachs their bodies grew fat, then their hearts turned hard-to-please [*taṣaʿ abāt qulūbuhum*], and their cravings became unruly [*wa jamaḥat shahawātuhum*, grew refractory].

Ascetic renunciation shrank into the marginal preserve of Sufis and mystics, and served the poorest social classes as a psychic crutch and spiritual balm for unrelieved poverty.¹⁴

Rather, the obstacle which contentment imposes for selling consumption today as “Islamic” reflects its deeply embedded imprint as one among the highest values maintained by Islam’s socio-economic ethic at both individual and communal levels, clearly evidenced both in the Qurʾān and Prophetic Hadith. So the challenge now becomes how to use (or to *abuse*) this ideal value in order to foster its mirror opposite—can one sell contentment as a consumable? In other words: how best may the market package contentment as a desirable commodity to be consumed as a component of an Islamic or Halal Lifestyle?

12. See K. D. Crow, “In Search of ‘Islamic Lifestyle,’” in *Islam and Civilisational Renewal* [IAIS, Kuala Lumpur], vol. 3 No. 3 (July 2012) pp. 655–678.

13. Ibn Abi l-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-Jūʿ* p. 224 §22—transmitted by ʿUrwah b. al-Zubayr. Allied with this is the oft-repeated notion that stuffing one’s stomach (*al-biṭnah*) vitiates the intelligence, debilitates bodily health, renders the heart obdurate and impenitent, and aids appetitive craving to subvert faith; *ibid*, §§82, 158, 160, 168, 171, 176. Mastery over the cravings of the stomach was seen as the first step on the spiritual path.

14. Consult the classical Arabic literature on virtues of wealth or capital (e.g. al-Shaybani, *al-Amwāl*), which admitted a certain validity for poverty as spiritual virtue. Both *faqr* ‘spiritual poverty’ and *zuhd* ‘material renunciation’ were originally apprehended as interior modes of non-attachment and freedom from outward wants: the *faqīr* or *zāhid* may handle great material wealth while remaining unattached and fully conscious of other-worldly priorities. Consult also the important early genre of renunciant literature on *dhamm al-dunyā* ‘blameworthiness of worldly attachment’. This primordial Islamic consciousness is now generally alien to the prevailing contemporary Muslim mindset.

Implications of Coaxing Consumption

The answer to this question requires embracing a central paradox at the heart of “selling Islam”. Clearly the vendor must subtly invert the value of contentment by highlighting certain of its exterior marks as potent psychosomatic ‘tags’, while masking its interior reality. Consumers should be nudged towards acquiring the external trappings, while (hopefully) relying on their widespread shallow comprehension of veritable Islamic values. Thereby, consumers may naïvely fancy they have possession of the whole and achieve a counterfeit contentment through external trappings, while remaining heedless of its inner depths. If carefully executed, this slight-of-hand is not difficult to accomplish—given the prevailing ignorance of genuine Islamic values among the majority of affluent Muslims, with their reigning mindset of judging by surface tokens.

An obvious example may suffice: it hardly needs emphasizing that the venerated early generations of Muslims upheld an ideal of economy and frugal moderation in dress. Unpretentious simplicity in Islamic clothing and moderate contentment with minimal possessions may today be ‘imaged’ as a highly desirable feature of the sought-after Lifestyle. In this manner, consumers could be subtly guided to accept that a complete wardrobe of such clothing (e.g. one for each week day in different colors) made of high quality expensive material could best exemplify this value, thereby finding satisfaction in acquiring an entire set of such robes. The vendor thereby assists consumers to manifest a major external token of ‘Islamic-ness’ by purchasing an entire set of such clothing, at the same time affording consumers the experience of emotional-psychic satisfaction of emulating frugality in appearance by conformity to a venerable Islamic ideal. The key *selling point* here must be appreciated: not merely is the vendor profiting from the sale of costly clothes, but consumers are given the satisfaction of ‘feeling’ and displaying external tokens of ‘contentment’ *via* contemporary Islamic fashion. An advertising strategy to accomplish this may incorporate a range of subtle stimuli by invoking selected ‘Islamic’ cultural components (cloth patterns, traditional robe designs, exotic traditional jewelry, costly perfumes, Islamic classical music, geographic and architectural icons, historical Muslim personalities, etc.), cumulatively reinforcing the projected Lifestyle along with its individual psychic-egoist advantages adapted to the preferences of large-group mentality (namely: ‘commodity fetishism’—see below). The details may be left to the imagination of attentive readers, and to the creative strategy of a well-financed Ad campaign which consciously exploits Lifestyle as a fetish. Similar commoditization of a wide variety of cultural artifacts, boutique items, personal care products, home furnishings or interior design schemes are now effectively being marketed to middle class consumers through the rapidly growing halalization industries, halal parks, and the corollary financial and

banking sectors supporting them.

It is necessary to reflect upon the profound social and psychic transformation such outwardly directed substitution represents for emerging Muslim modernity: during early centuries traditional societies were centred in awareness of the transcendent source of being and upheld the moral ideal of personal frugality, material contentment and economical avoidance of waste as an unquestioned interiorly oriented value for emulation. This (now increasingly discarded) value of moderation and contentment conveyed the benefits of unaffected simplicity, frugal husbanding of resources, vital heeding of just social conscience, and equitable sharing of goods, while also fostering the integrated wellbeing of humans with Nature in sound ecological balance. The umbrella virtue of contentment is indeed the significance of the Qurʾānic phrase *“ḥayāt ṭayyibah, a pious-wholesome life”* (*al-Nahl* 16:97), where the moral ideal of moderation and frugal consumption in one’s wordly provision (*rizq*) is upheld as a mark of righteous faith.¹⁵ Yet now as responsive consumers they are prompted to accumulate and acquire and to embrace a Lifestyle of profligate consumption often devolving into irresponsible waste with its inevitable corollary of environmental planetary degradation. This materialist replacement or substitution is certainly among the most profound transformations within the human psyche over the past millennium.

It is no secret that overconsumption invites resource depletion and massive environmental degradation. Consumption-per-person (or per capita ‘ecological footprint’¹⁶) is far lower in poor countries than in affluent nations. There is no room for complacency: until recently China was about ten times lower in per capita ecological footprint than the United States, while its population is four times greater. However, if China developed materially to

15. *al-Nahl* 16:97—*Whoever works righteousness, man or woman, and has faith, verily We shall certainly enliven him with a good-wholesome life and We will bestow on such their reward according to the best of their actions.* For a discussion of this important ideal with references to early exegesis of this phrase *ḥayāt ṭayyibah*—glossed as *qina’* ‘contentment’, and as ‘wholesome sustenance in this world’ (*al-rizq al-ḥalāl fī l-dunyā*—see Mohammed Farid Ali, “Contentment (*Qanā’ah*): Its Role in Curbing Social and Environmental Problems,” *Islam and Civilisational Renewal* Vol. 5 No. 3 (July 2014). We have taken the translation of this verse from our respected colleague Dr. Farid Ali.

16. ‘Ecological footprint’ measures how much biologically productive land and water an individual, population or activity requires to produce all the resources it consumes and to absorb the waste it generates, using prevailing technology and resource management practices; it is usually measured in global hectares. See the Global Footprint Network at www.footprintnetwork.org, and for the measurement assumptions behind these standards see: www.footprintstandards.org.

the current level of the U.S.A., the world consumption rates would roughly double—with a correspondingly harmful effect on the planet's ecosystem. Recall that Americans presently own 30 per cent of the world's vehicles, yet emit almost half of the globe's vehicle CO² emissions;¹⁷ and that the average North American consumes four hundred liters of water every day, while the average person in the developing world uses a mere ten liters of water daily for drinking, washing and cooking.¹⁸

Lifestyle as Fetish

Treating something as a *fetish*¹⁹ means attributing inherent value and powers to any man-made material object or cultural product. 'Fetishism' involves shifting attention away from relations between humans and immaterial reality, focusing instead on relations between humans and material objects. This deflection is actually a type of *objectification*. Fetishes are frequently visible in advertising, where human qualities, or resonant symbolic human capital, are associated with products in a manner which the vendor encourages people to purchase and consume them. A common application of fetishes is found in 'cause marketing' for public campaigns employing campaign-expressed goods (pens, hats, tote bags, coffee mugs, etc.) which afford consumers the subjective experience of *participation in* and *advancing* the marketed cause—e.g. Green causes, Rights causes, or Boycott causes.

The recognition that modern consumption embodies a distinct mode of fetishism has been explored in European thought for over a century and a half. In his philosophy of historical materialism and major critique of capitalism, Karl Marx (d. 1883) elaborated his influential notion of 'commodity fetishism'. By this idea he conveyed how industrial capitalism transformed economic and social relations between people (especially labour and production) into *objectified* relationships between commodities and money. He argued that this fetishization of commodity relationships radically distorts real economic relations between humans, whereby things produced as commodities take

17. National Research Council: Committee on Health, Environmental, and Other External Costs and Benefits of Energy Production and Consumption, *Hidden Costs of Energy: Unpriced Consequences of Energy Production and Use* (Washington D.C.: Oct. 19th 2009); at <http://www.nap.edu>.

18. Water Supply & Sanitation Collaborative Council, "Water Use", Wateraid Nov 22nd 2011; at http://www.wateraidamerica.org/what_we_do/statistics.aspx?gclid=CKe3j8iVzqwCFYqA5QodPVNPrQ.

19. The term 'fetish' was first used by colonial Europeans when describing African sacral-power artificial objects (e.g. small idols) believed to be endowed with supernatural efficacy and deployed for magical or prophylactic purposes.

on a life or momentum of their own to which humans merely adapt.²⁰ For Marx, such fetishism expresses “the religion of sensuous appetites” where the relationship between the production of commodities shapes or dominates value relations between humans, with the result that the value relation between traded objects gains an objective reality. Price thereby subverts value.

We mention here several of the more sophisticated analyses of commodity fetishism in recent decades by Continental and Anglo thinkers who spotlight consumption as a more adequate context for objectification of value, rather than Marxian ‘production’. The iconoclastic French Marxist Guy Debord (d. 1994) in his seminal work *The Society of the Spectacle*,²¹ extrapolated from Marx’s notion of ‘fetishism of the commodity’ into the conditions of Late modern society, where inter-subjective intimacies and personal modes of self-relating are subjected to commodification and transformed into separate “experiences” to be bought and sold as a consumable “product”. In today’s ‘society of the spectacle’ the instruments of cultural production are wholly commoditized and made subject to commercial exchange. Aesthetic value is dictated by financialized value, and artistic expressions are shaped by their capacity to attract market sales. Debord argued that in this culmination of capitalism the entire sphere of personal consumption becomes ordered on commercial principles, while cultural products attain an objective reality completely independent of the producers. This heralds the ultimate form of human alienation, when people view their whole being as a marketable commodity and regard every human interaction as a potential transaction. In other words, human identity now becomes defined and expressed by what persons possess and consume, since manifesting the proper signals about one’s status depends upon possession of the preferred commodities.

The work of the French social theorist Jean Baudrillard (d. 2007) is primarily concerned with the way technological progress affects social change. In *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*²² he emphasized the

20. For a structural analysis of commodity fetishism as a manipulation of people’s minds in Marx’s critique of capitalism, see Mario Wenning, “The Reality behind Commodity Fetishism”, *Sic et Non: Zeitschrift für philosophie und kultur* (2002); available on line at: http://www.sicetnon.org/modules.php?op=modload&name=PagEd&file=index&topic_id=2&page_id=77.

21. French original 1967, with numerous reprints; English trans. *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1995). Debord portrayed the shared “spectacle” as turning relations between humans into relations among images, where people passively watch while their own representations are active—e.g. on television; and now the world-wide-web.

22. French original 1970; English trans. *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (Sage Publications, 1998).

deformation of citizens into consumers, and how needs are now constructed and manipulated rather than innate. While often dismissed as incoherent or idiosyncratic, Baudrillard nevertheless offered prescient insights. He asserts that post-modernity's search for a coherent global reality has devolved into a bleak hyper-reality—a 'simulation' where everything is reproducible and universal values illusory. Baudrillard views this to be an inevitable outcome of individuals no longer functioning as citizens, but as consumers at the prey of commodities.

More optimistic is the Australian liberal political theorist Clive Hamilton in his best-selling work *Growth Fetish*,²³ which critiques the policies of unfettered liberal free-market capitalism pursued over the past 50 years as now defunct. Creation of wealth globally and vast increase in personal wealth among societal elites has not brought genuine personal happiness nor authentic meaning to human lives. Rather, the pursuit of endless growth has become a fetish—viewed as a magical cure for all societal problems. Hamilton asserts that pursuit of unfettered growth has come at tremendous cost to the environment, the erosion of democratic values of Western societies in thrall to the seductive delusions of consumerism, and especially the decaying sense of life's meaning and purpose. He states: "*People buy things they don't need, with money they don't have, to impress people they don't like.*" He pinpoints the neoliberal "instrumental value theory [which] maintains that, while humans are valuable in and of themselves, the non-human world is valuable only insofar as it contributes to the well-being of humans" (p.191). In its place, Hamilton proposes a political-economic model termed 'eudemonism', not dependent on ever increasing and ultimately unsustainable levels of growth but which "promotes the full realization of human potential through ... proper appreciation of the sources of wellbeing" (p.212). These sources include social relationships, job satisfaction, wise sustainable human development, and even religious faith.

The preceding three theorists concentrated on contemporary European and Anglo societies; yet critical studies of consumerism in Muslim societies are not as common. Fortunately, we may cite the urban anthropologist Johan Fischer in his penetrating work *Proper Islamic Consumption*,²⁴ who employs key anthropological notions of 'ritualization', 'repression', 'fetish' and 'performance of identity'; while also introducing fresh concepts such as

23. *Growth Fetish* (London: Allen & Unwin, 2003). Hamilton was former Executive Director of THE AUSTRALIA INSTITUTE, an independent think-tank which played a significant role in debates over social and environmental policies. For an informed overview of the fallacies propping up free-market global capitalism and the myth of endless growth, consult John Gray, *False Dawn: The Delusions of Global Capitalism* (London: Granta Books, 1998; & New York: The New Press, 1998; 3rd ed. Granta, 2002—with new forward; 4th ed. 2009).

24. See note 2 above.

“halalised piety” and the “ontology of consumption.” By this last phrase he intends to convey: “our *way of being consumers* or *the way the world is viewed and treated for consumption*.” There is a certain utility in conceptualizing consumerist phenomena in light of these ideas. The core of his book (chaps. 3–6 pp. 74–203) examines state-controlled halalization in modern Malaysia as the hallmark of suburban public consumerism molding many aspects of Malay Muslim behavior. Fischer states:

In spite of state nationalist insistence on exorcising the excessively magical, deviationist, ritualistic and *adat*, these repressions seemingly reappear in the commodity form as fetishes and adornments indispensable to modern forms of state power on the one hand, and individual claims of piety on the other. For purist Malays, halalization has caused a deep concern with halalized piety....Middle-class Malays work hard to demonstrate how the particularities of their visions are compatible with religious capitalism and modernity.²⁵

We suggested above that selling an Islamic Lifestyle requires understanding the psychic needs and anxieties of consumers, and addressing their Lifestyle choice by means of packaging those preferred Lifestyle components to ultimately function as fetishes and adornments. However, it must be observed: the danger remains that prevailing forms of material consumption packaged as indigenous national Islamic identity, will continue to serve the marketizing forces of trans-national corporations at the helm of global capitalism. Obsessive concern with purist halal food consumption, outer dress or ritualistic observances yields a banal form of Muslim modernity pervaded by shallow materialist consumerism subject to manipulation by state elites for maintaining power and wealth. Humans thus become outwardly more ‘Muslim’ yet inwardly less Islamic. This paradox lies at the heart of Islamic consumption.

Lifestyle Choice

One may still recognize the latent persistence of timeless Islamic values such as contentment, tolerant respect of diversity in religion or race, cultivation of physical and psychic purity, and compulsory concern for public welfare and wellbeing in a morally directed society. Nevertheless, the rising growth of the urban middle-class and proliferation of wealth among power and business elites in many societies (especially of ‘emerging economies’) has facilitated the growing preference for materialist acquisition spread by globalizing waves emanating from Euro-America which accelerated after the 1990s. Trans-national corporate manufacturing, privatization of service industries, business-oriented higher education, and secularist information media does the rest,

25. pp. 232, 236.

ensuring the immense embrace of Western inspired intellectual fashions, socio-economic systems of organization, management and development, and most persuasively of that Lifestyle which exhibits such compelling mystique and attraction around our globe (jeans, *Gucci* bag, smartphone, fast food). The reality is that the world's dominant economic institution today is the Corporation, while the central activity of our global economy is consumerism which has now become the crucial measure of self identity.²⁶ However, keen social observers raise the alarm over unrestrained pursuit of the consumerist society serving affluent cliques of trans-national corporate and banking circles. They point to the Financial, Social and Ecological crises that our globalized debt-based structure of endless consumption has induced through marketization of urban society yielding growing social inequality and ecological imbalance.²⁷ The most prescient critics raise the question of the moral implications of unfettered financialization, and of the limits to growth. As Z. Bauman observes:²⁸

We know all too well that the limited resources of the planet are too modest to accommodate the levels of consumption that are rising everywhere to meet the standards currently reached in the richest parts of the planet... a feat [which] would require multiplying the resources of our planet by a factor of five. Yet the invasion and annexation of the realm of morality by consumer markets has burdened consumption with functions it can perform only by pushing levels of consumption even higher... The prospect of setting limits to the rise in consumption, not to mention cutting it down to an ecologically sustainable level, seems both nebulous and abhorrent—something no 'responsible' political force... would include in its agenda.

Most people everywhere are hungering for the material blessings of the prevailing techno-scientific culture, and are content to flatten their inherited faith down to external ritualistic deeds animated by shallow simplified dogmas. Many Muslims now appear to believe more in 'Islam' than in God, and privilege the external trappings of religious identity over a deep personal appropriation of faith and heeding of conscience. This feature of contemporary Muslim identity is frequently commented-upon today: the widespread 'inversion' or

26. Consult Joel Bakan, *The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power* (London: Constable, 2004); Raj Patel, *The Value of Nothing* (New York: Picador, 2009).

27. Graeme Maxton, *The End of Progress: How Modern Economics Has Failed Us* (London: Wiley, 2011); Chandran Nair, *Consumptionomics: Asia's Role in Reshaping Capitalism and Saving the Planet* (Infinite Ideas, 2011).

28. Zygmunt Bauman, *Collateral Damage: Social Inequalities in a Global Age* (Polity Press, 2011) pp. 80–81. Further see Bauman, *Does Ethics Have a Chance in a World of Consumers?* Institute for Human Sciences Vienna Lecture (Harvard University Press, 2009).

reduction of religious understanding and practice to outward symbols and communal observances. This reality offers vendors (whether Muslim, or non-Muslim) a golden opportunity to advance the process of selling Islam, and of profiting from the consumerist mindset of many contemporary Muslims. Once this opportunity is seized, then the way opens to packaging of ‘Islam’ for consumerist appropriation as a fashion of clothing, as a religiously sanctioned diet, as a personal choice in goods and services which they may purchase or may avoid, as a cluster of images and experiences they may consume and adorn themselves with—in short, as the touted “Halal Lifestyle”.

The selling of a carefully crafted Lifestyle whose sales pitch and innate appeal operates by invoking recognizably Islamic values and images—including artistic designs and products, music, food, living spaces and even entire communities—will increasingly become a major feature of Muslim modernity. In the manner of modern ‘eco-tourism’ which offers entertaining enjoyment of unspoiled nature coupled with assurances of environmental responsibility, or the North American lumber corporation producing plywood and paper which advertises itself as “*the Tree Growing People*”—spiritual contentment may be marketed as a consumable. Can consumption be constrained to mitigate the dangerous consequences proliferating around us? What should an authentic Islamic Lifestyle choice truly comprise—should it seek to restrain wasteful consumption and curtail the production of waste to mitigate environmental destruction and psychic degradation?

Looking more carefully at ‘Lifestyle choice’, consumer choice theory posits that rising incomes affect consumer preferences. Now, the income effect holds that as the wealth of the individual rises, demand increases and shifts the demand curve higher at all rates of consumption. This pushes consumer choice towards higher-end preference consumption. As wealth rises, consumers will substitute away from less costly inferior goods and services by choosing higher priced alternatives. A number of more affluent societies in Asia have reached this point today. So Muslims have reached a crossroads requiring careful consideration of alternatives and goals and motives—both for vendors and consumers.

Asian Consumers

Over the past two decades increasing attention is being given to the role of middle class consumption as a key driver of global capitalism. Consumption is shaping the integration of Muslim societies into global economic market activities and commercial strategies. In March 2012, ‘The Economist Intelligence Unit’ in London published its report (commissioned by Kuwait Finance House), *The Sharia-Conscious Consumer: Driving Demand*.²⁹ This report gathered data in

29. The Economist Intelligence Unit, *The Sharia-Conscious Consumer: Driving Demand*, commissioned by Kuwait Finance House (Economist

the public domain, as well as thirteen in-depth interviews with executives of companies from the Shari'ah industry, and an on-line survey of 398 executives worldwide. It emphasized the growing importance of the Shari'ah-compliant consumer market with products achieving healthy sales. Muslim majority countries are experiencing the fastest-growing demand: Arabian Gulf states, North Africa, and South Asia. The increasing acceptance of Islamic values is clearly seen in the Halal industry, Islamic Finance and Banking, Halal-friendly tourism, as well as Islamic fashion. The global Halal and Islamic Finance industries (e.g. Sukuk bonds, and Shari'ah-compliant lending) are predicted to witness the fastest growth; according to the World Halal Forum, the European Halal market was estimated at US\$ 67 billion in 2010. To become a player in this freshly arisen global market, the Muslim values of integrity, community, and compassion are held up as the privileged model, and as precious factors which give "added value" to Islamically approved products. Countries such as Malaysia and Turkey are actively engaged in staking out leading positions, even though major investment firms and transnational corporations in Europe and America still command the highest percentage of sales. The single largest purveyor of Halal products today is the Swiss food giant corporation Nestlé. *The Economist* highlights this fast growing segment of the global market as 'driving demand'—contributing to economic growth through increased consumption.

The growing global middle class in the 'South' (or developing world) signals a major change occurring in the global economy. The new global reality of 'Shifting Wealth' over the past twenty years marks the movement of economic and political power toward the emerging economies. The OECD Development Centre provided recent data on the rising consumerism of the global middle class, based on a study by Homi Kharas.³⁰ He suggests the plausible scenario that Asia's emerging middle class will replace the United States as driver of the global economy by 2030—through compensating for falling growth in the U.S. middle class. Of course, the indices for determining the 'middle class' vary relative to social designation, economic classification, or human capital variables such as education, infant mortality, life expectancy and household savings and consumption. Kharas privileges the concept of *purchasing power* and the market for *consumer goods and services* as key markers of the middle class. He focuses on the consumer class in 145 countries comprising 98 per cent of the world's population, and measuring the middle class in terms of consumption levels. The global middle class is defined as

Intelligence Unit Limited, March 2012); written by Nigel Gibson.

30. Homi Kharas, *The Emerging Middle Class in Developing Countries*, OECD Development Centre Working Paper No.285 (Paris: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, January 2010); go to: <http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/>. Kharas is an economist at the Brookings Institute in Washington D.C.

“those households with daily expenditures between US\$ 10 and US\$ 100 per person in purchasing power parity terms” [using 2005 purchasing power parity—PPP].

In 2009 the global middle class comprised 1.8 billion people concentrated in North America (338 million), Europe (664 million) and Asia (525 million). Sub-Saharan Africa is the region with the least number of middle class consumers, and may remain so despite the expected dramatic rise in its population. These population figures mask real differences in purchasing power, with the North American middle class now accounting for significantly more of global spending than its population share, while the reverse is currently true of the Asian middle class. Today the USA is home to 12 percent of the world’s middle class in terms of absolute numbers of people, but it accounts for US\$ 4.4 trillion (21 per cent) of the US\$ 21 trillion in global spending by middle class consumers. This difference is because the American middle class is much wealthier than the average global middle class consumer. Kharas projects “the global middle class growing by 4.6 per cent in real terms in spending power, and by 5.3 per cent in terms of number of people between now and 2020”.

The OECD estimates that in 2009 the Asia Pacific region comprised 28 per cent of the world’s population, and 23 per cent of the global share of consumption. However, in twenty years’ time by 2030 this same region might comprise 66 per cent of the global middle class, and spend 59 per cent of the global share of consumption [measured in millions of 2005 PPP dollars]. This prediction is based on Kharas’ scenario that the size of the middle class could increase from 1.8 billion people to 3.2 billion by the year 2020, and up to 4.9 billion people by the year 2030. Almost all this growth (ca. 85 per cent) will occur in Asia; while the size of the middle class in North America would remain roughly constant, and will eventually decline over time in Europe. His most striking suggestion concerns the growth in purchasing power of the global middle class: it might swell from US\$ 21 trillion to US\$ 56 trillion by 2030—with over 80 per cent of growth in consumer demand coming from the expanding Asian middle class.³¹

The dominant shift in affluence and spending power is to the East in the southern hemisphere, for as Kharas states: “over time, in our scenario for the future, it is India, China, Indonesia and Vietnam that keep pulling the centre of economic gravity in the world to the East”. He emphasizes that these figures are “not a projection or forecast” but merely “one scenario of what the world

31. *Ibid*, ‘The Shift to Asia’ pp. 25–29. In Kharas’ scenario: over this same period from 2009 until 2030 the share of global consumer spending in North America might decline from 26 per cent to 10 per cent, while that of Europe could decline from 38 per cent to 20 per cent; see his Table 3 on p. 28.

could look like” when we try to imagine the implications of the significant movement in the global economy towards Asia. Parallel indications show that not only is wealth shifting East—but knowledge as well. By 2020 four out of every ten of the world’s young graduates will come from two countries: China and India.³²

Wealth and Changing Values

We may highlight Kharas’ key points: the OECD suggests that the size of the global middle class could increase from 1.8 billion people in 2009, up to 4.9 billion people by the year 2030. The bulk of this growth (85 per cent) would occur in Asia—with India, China, Indonesia and Vietnam pulling the world’s centre of economic gravity to the East. Indonesia, from the sixteenth largest economy today with 45 million middle class consumers, by 2030 is projected to become the seventh largest world economy with 135 million members of the consuming class.³³ This scenario for economic growth expects a steep increase in Asian demand driven by middle class consumption over the coming twenty years as the population becomes more urban, wealthy and educated. Therefore, more than 80 per cent of the world’s growth in consumer demand could come from the growing Asian middle class. This would also involve an accelerating trend of replacement of American demand by Asian demand for goods and services.

Such an expansion of middle class consumers will bring a change of values by middle income families that drives economic development. The increasingly affluent Asian middle class will choose what they will consume guided by product differentiation, branding and marketing in the new growth

32. The OECD’s international math, science and reading tests, known as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), placed Shanghai, Hong Kong and other Asian cities on the top in both 2009 and 2012. The OECD projection shows a far-reaching shift in the balance of graduate numbers, with rising Asian economies accelerating ahead of United States and Western Europe. On his trip in 2012 to a poor province in China, the co-ordinator of the PISA program Andreas Schleicher saw that schools were often the most impressive buildings, noting that in the West it is more likely to be a shopping centre. See Sean Coughlan, “End of empire for Western universities?” BBC World News for 10th July 2012.

33. Regarding the rapid expansion of the consuming class in Indonesia (the most populous Muslim nation on the planet), see the glowing report by the McKinsey Global Institute, *The archipelago economy: Unleashing Indonesia’s potential* (September 2012) at: www.mckinseyglobal.com. Further consult Lizzy van Leeuwen, *Lost In Mall: An Ethnography of Middle-Class Jakarta in the 1990s* (Amsterdam: KITLV Press, 2011); and Anthony J. Reid, Ed., *Indonesia Rising: The Repositioning of Asia’s Third Giant* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2012).

markets of Asia. For the Muslim middle class in emergent economies, Shari'ah-conscious industries possess a special niche as an active growth market having their own branding and marketing requirements. Furthermore, the OECD argues that global economic recovery may well be led by this large rapidly growing Asian middle class with its sharp upsurge in demand. This could launch a new era of rapid progress fueled by Asian consumers—ensuring an era of plenty that does not depend on a rebound in US consumer demand or growth in EU economies.

This is an optimistic scenario bringing good news to trans-national corporate interests after the major setback of the 2008 Great Recession. The expanding growth markets in Asia, where Asian consumers could account for over 40 per cent of middle class consumption worldwide, might sustain global growth for the medium term. The inherited Enlightenment belief in unending material progress seems assured. What is omitted in Kharas' scenario is the per capita 'ecological footprint' of such a numerous expanding consumer class, nor the social and human costs this might entail and who might be left out from benefitting from expanded consumption—the poorer classes. Footprint accounts are biophysical measures that do not evaluate the underlying social and economic dimensions of sustainability. Such indices merely provide a rough comparative snapshot of resource demand and availability, yet they convey meaningful insight into the scale of consumption. Thus, the Global Footprint Network estimated that in 2008 the total ecological footprint of the United States was 7.19—while that of the United Kingdom was 4.71, Malaysia was 3.90, China 2.13, and Indonesia 1.13.³⁴

This rising consumer class flourishing in all emerging economies desires a modern urban Lifestyle replete with marvelous techno-scientific benefits ushered in by modernity. In a number of major Muslim societies the growing middle-class eagerly embraces consumer appetites marketed as 'Islamic'. Do they pause to consider what free-market capitalism has wrought? Industrial capitalism first spread on the heels of imperialism through the active promotion of European colonial projects which exported the bureaucratic nation-state model throughout our planet. It was then succeeded by liberal free-market capitalism cemented into place through intensive marketization of societies by globalization. With its wasteful resource-intensity, social and environmental costs harmful to optimum human welfare, and its financialized-inspired commodification of human identity, unfettered capitalism has brought financial, social and ecological crises destructive of alternative values and forms of wealth (human and natural capital).³⁵ In its wake the fragile sense

34. Comparative data available in World Wildlife Fund's *Living Planet Report 2012* pp. 140–145, at: www.worldwildlife.org/science/LivingPlanetReport/WWFBinaryitem28013.pdf.

35. For critiques of neoliberal marketized economics behind corporate driven

of the transcendent source of all life and being, embedded in a moral faith community ordered by higher human values within a moral economy (which is the veritable meaning of *Shari'ah*), is evaporating.

So the question arises: with the spectacular rise in Asian living standards well underway, must the billions of new Asian consumers unthinkingly imitate Euro-American consuming patterns? Will they continue to view Western-centric marketized capitalism as the highpoint of modernity and civilization to which they must aspire, even when its institutional and societal values undermine or marginalize their own civilizational traditions? Instead of urging the Asian middle classes to consciously consume more and thereby save the global economy (as OECD appears to do), should not policy makers and society leaders be thinking hard about the difficult choices to be made in order to achieve a fundamental change of direction? Indeed, responsible thinkers have been pointing to the 'limits to growth' for the past several decades, emphasizing harmful effects of unrestrained consumption upon both our planet and society.

Sustainable Consumption?

It is no secret among thinking persons that *over*-consumption contributes to resource depletion and severe environmental degradation. Consumption-per-person, or per-capita ecological footprint, is far lower in poorer countries than in wealthy nations. What is the wise rate for consuming Earth's finite resources that may insure a sustainable modern Lifestyle for future generations? Informed observers of developmental and societal trends are increasingly speaking of 'sustainable consumption' rather than of sustainable development. Some even propose degrowth and advocate constraining consumption among the richest societies, in order to ensure planetary balance and minimize the accelerating depletion of natural resources (our 'natural capital') and ecological havoc.³⁶

The increasing hunger for materialist acquisition among the growing

globalization, consult: David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Ha-Joon Chang, *Bad Samaritans: The Myth of Free Trade and the Secret History of Capitalism* (Bloomsbury Press, 2007); and the classic work by John Gray, *False Dawn: The Delusions of Global Capitalism* (London: Granta Books, 1998; 4th ed. 2009).

36. Study: The Royal Society Science Policy Centre Report, *People and the Planet* (London: The Royal Society, April 2012); at <http://royalsociety.org/policy/projects/people-planet/report/>; and the Worldwatch Institute, *State of the World 2012: Moving Toward Sustainable Prosperity*, esp. chapter 2 by Erik Assadourian, "The Path to Degrowth in Overdeveloped Countries"; at http://blogs.worldwatch.org/sustainableprosperity/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/SOW12_chap_2.pdf.

urban middle class moves in conjunction with the growing ascendancy of power and business elites in many emergent economies. The influential nexus of local ruling cliques with indigenous ‘wheeler–dealer’ business or moneyed circles is the mainstay of peripheral capitalist economies, and ensures their nations’ subordination to the tiny global elite controlling our world’s financialized order.³⁷ These trends disseminate the commodification of knowledge, the positivist ‘rationalization’ of public and private institutions, and increasing privatization and sequestering of the Commons (i.e. public space) so vital for civic society to flourish and enhance democratic institutions. Cumulatively they facilitate the widespread acceptance of Western-oriented cultural and intellectual fashions and concepts, socio-economic systems of organization, management and development, and above all the stimulation of corporeal and psychic appetites. Rather than reinforcing the old-fashioned virtues of social equity, compassion, generosity, balanced moderation with frugal restraint, an economizing way of life avoiding wasteful extravagance, and contentment with respect to worldly living, people are now persuasively encouraged to acquire more material things by magnifying their appetites and appealing to narcissistic self-image. Shopping is the quintessential hallmark of being modern.

Many Muslims today are sensitive about this issue of ‘being modern’, viewing any questioning of their mode of mimicking the dominant mode of market modernity as somehow implying they may not actually be ‘modern’. In other words: ‘modern’ according to prevailing standards projected by European and American societies—standards to which Muslims unconsciously submit to and blindly adopt as valid benchmarks by which to measure themselves. They rarely ask themselves if being Islamic *and* modern might take expression through alternative forms of social organization, economic and financial structures, or institutional and governing bodies which could help Muslims remain true to themselves and their own tradition of moral values.³⁸ This question has important consequences for development goals

37. Today’s local governing–business cliques in the emergent societies generally perform the similar function of facilitating penetration of global capitalist interests, as the nineteenth century class of the *comprador* in China and S.E.Asia and the *dragoman* in the Ottoman Empire performed for European powers (namely: native contract suppliers buying and selling for foreign companies, or as native managers of European firms, or working in banks). / Note that the current vibrant market for Western-style luxury goods and services in emerging economies, from watches to whisky, also mirrors this shifting of wealth East.

38. Calls for a renewed Caliphate advanced by certain groups (Ḥizb al-Tahrīr, JI, ISIS) reflect an adolescent mythic regression; while the possibility for an ‘Islamic State’ espoused by many others is

and policy choices pursued by governments and by society leaders, as well as for the personal Lifestyle choices made by the individual.

Quo Vadis Islam?

Vali Nasr is correct when he states:³⁹

All over the Middle East piety is shaping consumption. ... This upwardly mobile middle class consumes Islam as much as practicing it, demanding the same sorts of life-enhancing goods and services as middle classes everywhere. Their preference that those goods have an Islamic flavor makes Islam big business. A booming economic sector around the region is catering to this explosive demand, and these rising Islamic consumers comprise as much as a sixth of humanity.

Vali Nasr sees this vital economic transformation throughout the region to have positive implications for global capitalism—“*the rise of a new middle class that is the key to more fully integrating the Middle East into the global economy, and to the building of better relations with the West.*” The same applies beyond the Middle East in the more affluent countries of Malaysia or even Indonesia,⁴⁰ as well as Muslim minority communities of Europe and North America. Consumption Lifestyles are indeed facilitating the global integration of more affluent segments of Muslim societies into the prevailing globalized market order. When one walks into the ubiquitous glitzy shopping malls and up-scale retail establishments in many parts of the Muslim world with eager shoppers buying the latest electronic gadgets, fashionable home furnishings, fast food,

irretrievably eclipsed by the moral inversion of modernity induced by the all-pervasive nation-state and corporation. W. B. Hallaq affirms that “...modern forms of globalization and the position of the state in the ever increasing intensity of these forms are sufficient to render any brand of Islamic governance either impossible or, if possible, incapable of survival in the long run;” *The Impossible State. Islam, Politics, and Modernity’s Moral Predicament* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013) p. 3.

39. Vali Nasr, *Meccanomics: The March of the New Muslim Middle Classes* (New York: Oneworld, 2010) p. 17. Nasr is Professor of international politics in the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University; as well as adjunct senior fellow for Middle Eastern studies at the *Council on Foreign Relations* in New York. His book (reprinted thrice since it first appeared in 2009 under the original title *Forces of Fortune*) was heavily promoted as a triumphalist assertion of American-style capitalism over the threat of Jihadist terror.

40. See Johan Fischer, *The Halal Frontier: Muslim Consumers in a Globalized Market* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), on contemporary Muslim consumer culture in Southeast Asia and Europe; and L. van Leeuwen, *Lost In Mall* for the rapid rise of consumerism in Jakarta.

and people pursuing new forms of leisure socialization—the power of the market cannot be denied.⁴¹ As one prominent UK Muslim community leader affirmed to us unequivocally when questioned whether he had any qualms about selling Islam as an object for consumption: “*It’s a good product!*”

Nevertheless is this consumerist marketizing of Muslim societies an unmitigated blessing, as Vali Nasr would like us to believe? *Islām* as religion-faith-ethic is at risk of losing its authentic individual significance and effective social-communal purpose by submersion within a quasi-religion stressing outward ritualized conformity, simplistic exclusivist dogma, and strident suspicion of the ‘Other’ marked by group-think and the hollowing out of Muslim identity. The religious life and imagination is thereby more easily sidetracked and diverted into inclusive group identities cultivating parochial social practices ritually re-enacted from the past while clinging to external markers or fetishes emblematic of a sought-for ‘Islamic’ identity. Forms of this ethical–civilizational stunting are particularly evident today in those Muslim societies where growing affluence is shaping the personal Lifestyle choices of the expanding consumer class. The reality is that all humanity, not only the Muslims, are experiencing this submersion and hollowing out in our increasingly monolithic cosmopolitan urban culture.

Informed observers raise the alarm over unrestrained embrace of the Consumer Society by the expanding middle class, which ultimately profits wealthy trans-national corporate and banking elites. They reflect on how modern market society projects its own culture embedding specific ideas about human nature and the communal social order—by means of setting the very terms of ‘value’ through its truncated anthropology which elevates appetite and acquisition over contentment and compassion.⁴² Market society fails to properly value our essential humanity and our society’s resources, it fails to observe self-imposed limits and proper constraints which may safeguard our human and natural capital, and it marginalizes the benefits of sharing and equitable distribution for the common good. Further reflection prompts one to ask: What is the responsibility of those entities (both individual and corporate) reaping immense profits from corporate-directed wasteful consumption, for the psycho–physical deterioration of our inner human world and our outer planetary environment? Can there be an Islamic alternative to our present marketized consumer society, and what would a modern Islamic ‘Lifestyle’ actually entail? Are Muslims capable of apprehending and demonstrating

41. Malaysia presently has five hundred and five major shopping malls, while Iran has only two. Once Iran is rehabilitated into the global economy after resolution of the dispute with the United States over nuclear energy, it will undoubtedly begin catching up. Iran’s potential to emerge as a major consumer society is not in question.

42. Consult especially the works of Z. Bauman, J. Bakan, and R. Patel.

a persuasive portrait and convincing example of this possible alternative? Although Islamic Banking and Finance are now actively promoted as providing a potential alternative to the prevailing global economic structure, nevertheless strong doubts persist over the reality behind this claim. Most well informed practitioners recognize that so-called ‘Islamic’ instruments and transactions being applied today merely repackage conventional (i.e. capitalist) financial tools and procedures.

A further question imposes itself: What roles must Government assume when seeking to assure equitable use of sustainable resources for the authentic wellbeing of society?⁴³ Muslim governments’ policy makers and society leaders must reflect upon and carefully appraise consumption patterns in their societies, in order to understand potential benefits, risks, and harms unfolding in their midst. They may be well advised to perform a deeper scrutiny and comprehension of authentic human values manifested in religious conduct and experience, in order to consciously awaken a living concern with Islamic ethical and intellectual resources when responding to growing pressures of consumption and increased affluence. Pondering these issues involves questioning long-held assumptions and shedding illusions imbibed from our prevailing marketized world system. This constitutes the first baby step in liberating our world from the banal trap of endless consumption exciting wants and sublimating needs while yielding spiritual and ecological degradation. We need to open our ears to the wise counsel enshrined in Islamic teaching. *And those who, when they spend, are neither extravagant nor niggardly, but pursue an upright moderate living.* (Q 25:67)

43. For policy implications consult: Erik Assadourian, “The Rise And Fall Of Consumer Cultures,” in Worldwatch Institute, *State of the World 2010: Transforming Cultures: From Consumerism to Sustainability* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2010); and William Rees, *Culture and Behavior: The Human Nature of Unsustainability* (Santa Rosa: Post Carbon Reader Series, Aug 30, 2011); both available at: postcarbon.org.