

**‘Islamic’ Consumers, Markets, and Marketing: A Critique of El-Bassiouny’s (2014)**

**“The one-billion-plus marginalization”**

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**Abstract**

In her article entitled “The one-billion-plus marginalization: Toward a scholarly understanding of Islamic consumers”, El-Bassiouny (2014) attempts to provide “a comprehensive conceptualization for Islamic marketing and its foundational principles within the context of the Islamic faith” (p. 48). The present essay critiques some of the key assumptions that underpin El-Bassiouny’s discussion and her subsequent propositions for “future testing”, which are meant to offer an “enlightened understanding of Islamic consumers” and “benefit academics, practitioners, and policy makers” (pp. 42-43). This critical account argues: (1) apolitical and ahistorical analyses of markets and marketing phenomena in relation to Moslem geographies will only replicate imaginary juxtapositions between the West and Islam; (2) exceptionalist depictions of Moslem consumers can exacerbate inter- and/or intra-cultural misunderstandings; (3) theological and ethnocentric definitions of Islam and the oversimplification of Islamicness are less likely to help advance marketing theory, practice, and education in a global era.

**Keywords:** Islam, Moslems, marginalization, critical, exceptionalism, essentialism

## 1. Introduction

As researchers advocating the study of the intersections of Islam, consumption, and markets for over ten years, we are highly enthusiastic about new publications that seek to broaden our understanding of such interrelationships. Given the gradual growth of scholarship on religion within marketing, the recent emergence of a stream of research that came to be known as ‘Islamic Marketing’ has been a timely development. The term ‘Islamic Marketing’ officially emerged only in 2010 when Bakr Ahmad Alserhan, as the founding editor, initiated *Journal of Islamic Marketing* and published *The Principles of Islamic Marketing*, the first book on the subject, in 2011. The field quickly expanded with the establishment of an annual global conference, introduction of additional international journals, and publication of new books (for a summary, see Sandıkcı 2011). However, despite its growth as an academic subject, Islamic marketing has yet failed to gain widespread recognition in the general area of marketing (Wilson et al., 2013; Koku & Jusoh, 2014) and achieve a legitimate status within the leading institutions of the field, such as the American Marketing Association, (British) Academy of Marketing and the Chartered Institute of Marketing.

Concerned with this lack of acknowledgment, El-Bassiouny (2014) embarks on presenting “a comprehensive conceptualization for Islamic marketing and its foundational principles within the context of the Islamic faith” (p. 48). The author’s main point is that despite their large population in the world, Moslems are marginalized in different areas of marketing research, practice, and education. Such an oversight, she argues, can not only cause opportunity cost to the firms that look for international growth but also lead to conflict and misunderstandings between Islamic and non-Islamic (Western) cultures. Hence, in order to address the “scholarly gap in marketing, communications, and related literatures (e.g., psychology and history)” (pp.42-3), El-Bassiouny proposes a framework to evaluate Islamic

religiosity and offers a number of research propositions to assess its implications for consumers, marketing practitioners, regulatory bodies and educators.

We applaud El-Bassiouny for attempting to “assemble the theoretical foundations of Islamic marketing” (p. 42), offer an “eye-opener” account to its under-researched areas, and discuss “possible positive potentials [of Islamic marketing]...for marketing thought in the millennium” (p. 48). Yet, as the author proceeds in her article, she makes a series of unwarranted claims that raise concerns about her conceptualization of “Islamic marketing and consumers” and her “propositions” that are meant to offer an “enlightened understanding of Islamic consumers” and “benefit academics, practitioners, and policy makers” (pp. 42-43). These claims can ironically counteract the author’s good intention of resolving the potential risks of misunderstandings, conflicts, and divides between the Islamic and non-Islamic worlds. To be more specific, El-Bassiouny’s exceptionalist, apolitical, and ahistorical approach to the study of Moslem consumers as a “distinct market segment” oversimplifies the complicated intersections between Islam, markets, and marketing on the one hand and the heterogeneous and contested nature of Moslem geographies on the other hand. Although, the author sporadically acknowledges the existence of diverse interpretations of religion and religious practices amongst Moslems, her overall theological and ethnocentric definitions of Islam and Moslems overshadow the important implications of such diversities in her thesis.

We believe that El-Bassiouny’s account exemplifies the fundamental ontological and axiological problems that characterize much of the existing work on Islamic marketing. At the ontological level, an essentialist and exceptionalist understanding of Islamic religiosity and identity permeates the analysis, culminating in a simplistic, universalistic, and reductionist view of Moslem consumers and marketers. At the axiological level, a fundamentalist politics informs the approach, establishing the purpose or value of research as propagating a view of the ‘Islamic’ as the morally superior alternative to the ‘secular’ (and

less Islamic). While no research is value free, unreflexive commitment to a particular worldview problematizes the very notion of scientific inquiry and jeopardizes the potential of Islamic marketing to “provoke[s] rational scholars to think about the fairness of trying another paradigm” (p.48)

In our view, essentialist, exceptionalist, and authoritative reading of Islamic religiosity and Moslem identity inhibits productive theoretical engagements between Islamic marketing scholarship and marketing theory at large, and, hence, perpetuates the belief in the marginalization of the subject of Islam in the marketing field. We propose that the underlying reasons of such perceived marginalization should be primarily looked for in the Islamic marketing literature’s lack of sufficient engagement with critical theory and self-reflexivity. To date, the burgeoning literature of Islamic marketing has hardly transgressed the boundaries of ethnocentrism, exceptionalism, and culturalism (see Sandıkcı, 2011; Jafari, 2012; Ger 2013; Süerdem, 2013). Furthermore, as Wilson et al. (2013, p.24) contend, “Islamic consumption and marketing, and scholarship to date have barely scratched the surface of relevant perspectives” broadly discussed in marketing and adjacent disciplines. Indeed, the lack of attention to the significant body of work on Islam and Moslems in political science, sociology, anthropology, gender studies, media studies and several other fields of social sciences and humanities has often led to false claims of ‘scholarly gaps’ and ‘misconceptions’ about the Islamic world. As a result, Islamic marketing scholarship has remained largely as a monotonous monologue within a community of scholars who demonstrate no or little interest in contesting some of the established reductionist definitions of religion and religiosity in an ever-changing world (see also Koku & Jusoh, 2014).

Contrary to the dominant conflict-averse orthodoxy of the Islamic marketing literature, we believe that contestation is not only useful but also crucial to the generation and operationalization of progressive knowledge, one that should relate to the everyday life

reality of markets and marketing phenomena both within and out with Moslem geographies. Therefore, the main objective of this article is to prompt debate and critical thinking in order to re-examine some of most taken-for-granted assumptions about Islam and Moslems in the literature of (Islamic) marketing. Such an endeavor necessitates scholarly collaboration and dialog to address conflictual areas of research such as perceptions of religion and religiosity. To borrow from Kant (1998/1784, in Auer, 2010, p.1180), without conflict, “all talents would remain hidden, unborn in an Arcadian shepherd’s life, with all its concord, contentment, and mutual affection.”

## **2. El-Bassiouny’s core argument**

El-Bassiouny sets out by highlighting that the global growth of the Moslem population coupled with the existing misconceptions about them (e.g., in the post 9/11 world) necessitates engagement with the Islamic world. Such engagement in her view is particularly important due to three reasons: (1) there is an increasing demand for *Shari’ah* compliant products and services (e.g., *halal*) amongst Moslem consumers; (2) as a result of the saturation of domestic markets in the West, companies will have to look for growth opportunities elsewhere; and as an affluent market segment, Moslem societies should be considered as a promising target market; and (3) given such opportunities, still there is a lack of understanding about Moslem consumers who have a distinct “life outlook and buying characteristics that are directly related to their strongly-held religious beliefs” (p. 43).

El-Bassiouny also emphasizes that a lack of understanding the needs, values, and collectivistic cultures of Moslem consumers (particularly in the Middle East) will impose significant opportunity costs on the companies originating from non-Moslem countries: “when firms choose to ignore the Islamic market, they severely reduce their growth potential” (p.44). To support her argument, she refers to “the lack of availability of Islamic dietary

(lawful/*halal*) products in mainstream American retailers”, “the cartoon crisis in Denmark and the subsequent mass boycott campaigns in the Middle East”, and “the closure of Sainsbury’s in Egypt” (p.44). Her conclusion therefore is that in order to successfully penetrate the Islamic market and avoid consumer animosity, firms should have a better understanding of the “Islamic religiosity” (“Islamic ideology”, “Islamic theology”, “*Shari’ah*”, “Islamic creed”, or “*ad-din*” as used interchangeably by the author) and “transcendental values” that guide Moslem consumers’ multiple interactions with markets and marketing phenomena.

To this end, the author recognizes the usefulness of the societal marketing concept which focuses on ‘value maximization’ (as opposed to profit maximization) in order to tackle a series of ills associated with wasteful consumerism, materialism and unethical market behaviors (e.g., deceptive practices, marginalization of the vulnerable, environmental damage). Nonetheless, she contends that even the value maximization philosophy of societal marketing does not adequately address the moral worldview and specific needs of Moslem consumers who exhibit a “unique lifestyle” (p.43). As such, her thesis is that the Islamic marketing paradigm best captures Moslems’ view of marketing as:

“the engagement in mutually-beneficial transactions related to products, services, and ideas that benefit society while adhering to the principles of the Islamic legislation (*shari’ah*), and is a process that holds ethical responsibility for every person/entity engaging in these transactions in front of God” (p.43)

Such a conception of marketing, in the author’s opinion, necessitates adopting a new terminology that could clearly differentiate between the secular (i.e., societal) and divine (i.e., Islamic) definitions of marketing. This distinction is especially warranted when two concepts of “value maximization” and “transcendental values integration” (p.45) are juxtaposed. The former, she explains, “could connote maximizing one aspect of” the multiple relationships

between individuals and their environment; that is, “the relationship of the individual with others”. The latter, on the contrary, offers a “comprehensive and transcendental” picture of the relationship not only between the individual and others but also between the individual and the Creator (p.45). Her distinction between the two conceptions of value is embedded in the difference between two types of transactions/dealings (*mu’amalaat*). While societal marketing renders value maximization to individuals’ transactions with one another through the marketing mix elements, Islamic marketing elevates it to a transcendental level where all aspects of life are included: “A more accurate depiction of the all-encompassing Islamic paradigm is its comprehensiveness and total integration through transcendental integration of values in all aspects of life dealings/mu’amalaat” (p.45). After setting forth these statements, El-Bassiouny proceeds to outline 13 assertive propositions to be tested by future research.

The propositions El-Bassiouny puts forward are clearly formulated as a series of hypotheses geared towards testing whether or not the individual Moslem consumer, marketer, and educator who is high on religious personality is more likely to engage with the market and marketing phenomena in an Islamic manner. Such propositions are founded on the key assumptions that (1) “Muslims need a unique scale to measure their religiosity that is different from the Judeo-Christian framework upon which most of the literature is focused”; and (2) “Islamic religiosity can be divided into affiliation and commitment. Affiliation entails who is a Muslim, whereas commitment refers to what it is to be a Muslim. The former is informative, while the latter is transformative based on level of commitment” (p.45). By the latter, the author means that those who hold an “Islamic Worldview” are more likely to have a “Religious Personality”, which is the manifestation of religious beliefs in practice. Therefore, “an individual who is high on ‘Religious Personality’ will exhibit more of the marketing implications outlined in [the propositions]” (p.45).

To sum up, El-Bassiouny defines Islamic marketing as a paradigm that advocates the implementation and integration of transcendental values through market practices. She also differentiates Moslems from non-Moslems in the sense that, inspired by strong religious values, the former have a unique lifestyle and engage with markets and marketing practices differently. The following sections will expose some of the key limitations of the author's theses. In order to present a concise, clear and fair critique, these assumptions will be discussed under three themes of marginalization, exceptionalism, and Islamicness.

### **3. Marginalization**

El-Bassiouny's approach to marginalization is twofold: firstly, "alienation of different cultural/social systems is [...] against the broad conceptualization and comprehensiveness of marketing theory" and "in opposition to the international values of equity and justice." Secondly, "marginalizing a viable and large consumer segment that exhibits unique lifestyle and consumer characteristics has high opportunity cost in terms of profit loss and organizational effectiveness" (p.43). Theoretically speaking, the first point is credible as other scholars (see, for example, Ilmonen, 1985; Steenkamp & Burgess, 2002; Jafari, 2009; Tadajewski, 2010; Jafari, Firat, Süerdem, Askegaard, & Dalli, 2012) have also raised concerns about the exclusivity of West-centric marketing theory and education.

Yet, the author's ahistorical and imprecise depiction of the marginalization of Moslem consumers in the market is only hypothetical. Although she briefly acknowledges that "businesses are responding with further engagement of Muslim consumers, both at home and abroad" (p.42), she forcefully claims that Moslems have been marginalized in marketing practice. Yet, the only example she provides is the lack of dietary *halal* products in the mainstream American retailers. The author's claim is an instance of 'historical amnesia' (Tadajewski & Saren, 2008) as she overlooks the fact that Western products and services

have, for a long time, been present in Moslem geographies. Markets in such geographies have historically been supplied with all types of products and services across a wide range of industry sectors (e.g., fast-moving consumer goods, home appliances, automobiles, medicine, health and beauty, sports and leisure, travel and tourism, banking, transport, construction, apparels, technology, education, and heavy industry). In the oil industry, British Petroleum, Shell, and Total have been operating in the Middle East since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Lufthansa, British Airways, Air France, Singapore Airline, American Airlines, Austrian Airlines, Japan Airlines, and many others have been flying to many destinations in Moslem countries for decades. Likewise, Turkish Airlines, Emirates, Qatar Airways, and Etihad Airways, all of which emerge from Moslem geographies, are amongst the best airliners in the world. Today, some of the most affluent Moslem populations enjoy Western market resources even more than their counterparts in non-Moslem and Western countries do (Wong, 2007). Some of the world's most luxurious hotels are also located in Moslem geographies including Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Doha, and Istanbul. Perhaps, the oil-rich Persian Gulf Arab countries offer more access to Western luxury products and services than any other society in the world (see Al-Mutawa, 2013; Alserhan, Bataineh, Halkias & Komodromos, 2014). These countries are also amongst the most lucrative markets for Mercedes, BMW, Lexus, Porsche, Lamborghini, and Aston Martin. Most upmarket Western brands are easily accessible and affordable by affluent Moslems not only in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Istanbul, Tehran, Jakarta, Doha, and Kuala Lumpur but also in London, New York, Paris, Moscow, Beijing, and Milan (Jafari and Süerdem, 2012). Similarly, Carrefour, Nestlé, Pepsi, Coca Cola, McDonald's, KFC, Burger King, Kit Kat, Yorkshire Tea, Starbucks, Cadbury, John West, Nutella, Cote D'or, Mars Bar, and so many other brands in the food and beverages sector have also been present in Moslem geographies for a long time. Last but not least, New Zealand and Australia

are amongst the top *halal* meat exporters to Moslem countries. Regarding these examples, one would wonder what kind of marginalization exists and which opportunities are at stake.

Surprisingly, El-Bassiouny does not acknowledge the above-mentioned realities and the historical presence of Western and non-Western brands in Moslem geographies. Her only reference to dietary *halal* products in the mainstream American retailers implies that she specifically suggests that such retailers offer dietary *halal* products as well. But even this is already in place, at least partially. For example, in the United States, Walmart, Safeway, and Costco offer a range of *halal* meat products clearly labelled as *Zabiha*. Of course, it would be more ideal for both Moslems and mainstream retailers if all businesses could offer dietary *halal* products; whilst Moslem consumers could access their *halal* products, retailers would enjoy an increase in their revenue by being more inclusive. But achieving such idealism is much easier said than done, at least for two main reasons.

Firstly, from an operational costs and scale economies viewpoint, it may not be feasible for all retailers to extend their product lines to accommodate dietary *halal* products, especially in areas where, due to their small size and low density, Moslem populations do not form a profitable market segment. Secondly, as appreciated by the author herself, even if retailers are determined to serve such products, they may “risk resentment by other consumer segments due to the latter’s lack of understanding of Islam, lack of familiarity with Islamic dietary products, and a general prejudice that views whatever is Islamic as terrorist-related” (p.47). A good example of such resentment relates to Domino’s Pizza in the UK. During 2009-10 Domino’s Pizza ‘halal menu only’ raised criticisms and caused offence to those who did not want to eat halal food and wanted their pepperoni back; as a result of social pressure the company had to withdraw its offerings from the markets (Wilkes, 2009; The Telegraph, 2010). Currently, grocery retailers such as Morrisons and Asda in the UK are under unprecedented pressure from activist groups such as Boycott Halal Movement to withdraw

their *halal* meat products, which are alleged to have been produced in ways that violate animal welfare (i.e., slaughtering without stunning). Such dynamics, which are deeply associated with socioeconomic, cultural, legal, and political complexities, cannot be simplistically disguised as marginalization of Moslem consumers by businesses. Addressing such complexities requires sophisticated interdisciplinary research programs that would delve into the macro environmental factors and actors underpinning marginalization discourses (see Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins, 2004; Phillips, 2006; Kabir, 2012; Triandafyllidou, 2015). Therefore, the Islamic marketing discourse should not be used as a pretext to oversimplify the intricate geopolitics of marginalization.

Additionally, it is true that not all retailers in the non-Moslem majority countries supply dietary *halal* products; yet this does not mean that Moslems are in the state of *deprivation*. Nowadays, most major cities in the world have ethnic grocery shops for people from different ethno-cultural backgrounds such as Eastern European, Chinese, Thai, Middle Eastern, Mediterranean, and Asian. As such, Moslem consumers are able to buy their *halal* needs from local *halal* grocery shops and butcheries (Shaw, 2006). Oftentimes, this is the case with many other minority ethnic/religious groups who have specific dietary needs. For example, Jewish and Christian communities living in Moslem majority countries are in the same situation. Chinese, Eastern European, Thai, Greek, and African consumers also rely on their ethnic grocery shops to fulfil their specific needs. As the existing literature (see, Visconti et al., 2014 for a summary) alludes, there are pros and cons for both the absence and presence of ethnically labelled products. For example, while the absence of ethnic products and services in the market may be seen as instances of marginalization, their presence can equally lead to new forms of cultural stereotypes and stigmatization (Cui, 1997; Nwankwo & Lindridge, 1998; Rossitera & Chan, 1998). Indeed, this is the nature of market segmentation and targeting that creates dilemmas about issues of inclusion and exclusion. That is, the inclusion

of certain market segments may inevitably result in the exclusion of others (Demangeot et al., 2013).

Based on these discussions, therefore, it appears that Moslem consumers are not *really* as marginalized as lamented by El-Bassiouny. Her exaggeration of marginalization should therefore be analyzed as *perceived* marginalization, which is the outcome of many interrelated and complicated phenomena occurring in the social reality of life nowadays. An in-depth discussion of such phenomena is beyond the scope of this article; yet, it is important to briefly outline the potential reasons for such ‘felt’ marginalization. The tragic event of 9/11 changed not only the perception of non-Moslems towards Moslems (i.e., as potential terrorists, as mentioned by El-Bassiouny) but also that of Moslems towards themselves and non-Moslems (Morey & Yaqin, 2011). The post 9/11 world has witnessed a rise of identity awareness amongst Moslems who want to be recognized as active and normal citizens in the global socioeconomic landscape (see McGinty, 2012). As citizen-consumers, they have become more aware of their rights to access market resources (Kabir, 2012) in order to practice their culture and maintain their identity (Lo, 2009). On the other hand, the acceleration of globalization (e.g., particularly global mobility amongst immigrants, sojourners, refugees) has heightened their ‘cultural reflexivity’ (Beck, 2011) and has broadened their expectations of the governments, policy makers, and firms around them to help enact their cultural identity (Akhter, 2007) through engagement with material culture (e.g., consumption). As Sürdem (2013) argues, this heightened sense of identity and expectation is also oftentimes related to the increasing hype of Islamicness fuelled by the businesses propagating (sometimes opportunistically) Islamic branding. In other words, exaggerations about differences between Islamic and non-Islamic brands and their growing prevalence in the market have contributed to an unprecedented perception of marginalization based not on the absence of so-called ‘Islamic’ brands but on the dominance of non-Islamic

brands in the mainstream market. As such, perceptions about marginalization can be the outcome of deprivations felt in relation to the majority others in multi-ethnic/cultural habitats.

#### **4. Exceptionalism**

Throughout her article, El-Bassiouny argues that Moslems have a “unique” lifestyle and worldview that differentiate them from non-Moslem consumers. This ‘exceptionalist’ (Al-Azmeh, 2006) approach to Moslems implies that they are fundamentally different from other societies and ‘Islam’ is a strong demarcation criterion for such distinction: “It is important to note, in this respect, that the diverse adherents to the Islamic faith have a very specific life outlook and buying characteristics that are directly related to their strongly-held religious beliefs” (El-Bassiouny, p.43). Based on this uniqueness, then, the author develops a series of positive hypotheses implying that the Moslem consumer, marketer, and educator “who are high on religious personality” are more likely to be socially responsible and ethical, and demonstrate higher levels of consideration for transcendental values through market practices and behaviors, and marketing education (see pp. 46-47). Her distinction even goes beyond the dichotomy of the religious and non-religious to differentiate between Moslems and the followers of other religions because their religiosity is “different from the Judeo-Christian framework” (p.45). Such exceptionalism, as already criticized by other scholars (Sandıkcı, 2011; Jafari, 2012; Jafari & Süerdem, 2012; Sandıkcı & Jafari, 2013; Süerdem, 2013), represents Moslems as distinct market actors whose everyday life engagement with the market and marketing practices are governed by a series of rigid Islamic principles; hence, marketing and business practices serving or addressing these individuals should be fundamentally distinct from their non-Islamic counterparts.

El-Bassiouny’s overall conceptualization of Moslems as a “distinct”, “unique”, and “collectivistic” market segment is rooted in the fallacy of essentialism in which Moslem

geographies “are thought to constitute a *Lebenswelt* with an essential and closed homogeneity” (Al-Azmeh, 2009, p.80). The author’s discussion is also ‘transhistorical’ (Asad, 1993) in the sense she overlooks the historical developments and transformations of both Moslem societies and their markets (Karababa & Ger, 2011), their multiple routes to modernity (Sandıkcı & Ger, 2002), and historical interactions with non-Moslem societies (Hirschman, 2013). Contrary to her original intention of narrowing the gap between the non-Moslems’ perceptions of Moslems and the reality of who Moslems are, El-Bassiouny’s exceptionalism recycles the clichéd distinctions between the two groups. The risk of such exceptionalism is already highlighted by critics of Orientalism. Said (1978), Abdel-Malek (1981), Asad (1993), and Al-Azmeh (2003, 2006, 2009), for example, have extensively argued that essentialist and exceptionalist representations of Moslems as a totalizing category of homogeneous *Ummah* (nation-state) are embedded in the discourse of Orientalism, a historical project which had traditionally described Moslem societies based not on their own realities but on the imagination of the European missionaries travelling in Moslem geographies. Orientalization of Moslems draws an imaginary wall between Moslems (largely depicted as a homogenous group strictly governed by religious dogma and a political ideology) and the rest of the world (predominantly the West) (Pieterse, 1996).

El-Bassiouny clearly fuels this dichotomy, albeit ironically in an ethnocentric ‘self-Orientalist’ manner (Jafari, 2012). Despite her brief acknowledgment of the existence of “occasionally-multiple interpretations [of the Koran] and broad inclusion of situations, and the cultural behavior in different [Moslem] societies” (p.43), her ‘aesthetics of otherness’ (Al-Azmeh, 2009) portrays an idealistic and distilled image of Moslems. In the author’s account, Islamic faith underpins Moslems’ aversion from the ills of Western materialism and their inclination towards Islamic transcendentalism. As such, they distance themselves from the manifestations of the secular values of Western culture: “Contrary to other cultures and

immigrant communities in the West, Muslims' strongly-held religious beliefs and the collectivism in the Islamic community insulate Muslims from wholesale adoption of mainstream secular Western culture even while admiring certain values held by the West" (p.43). This statement evidently contradicts the author's own implicit critique of Moslems "who prefer to live on the margins of mainstream Western life to preserve their identity and protect themselves and their families from occasional tensions that emerge [due to cultural misunderstandings]" (p.44). El-Bassiouny's exceptionalism also underlies her opaque analysis of Moslem minorities in the West to such an extent that she mistakenly uses religiosity and ethnicity synonymously. She overlooks the fact that religiosity is not the only criterion that shapes Moslem immigrants' identity projects. The bulk of research on Moslem immigrants (Ajrouch & Kusow, 2007; Klandermans, van der Toorn & van Stekelenburg, 2008; Jafari & Goulding, 2008; see also Visconti et al., 2014) testifies to the existence of multiple identity experiences and encounters amongst these individuals. Jamal & Chapman (2000) and Jamal (2003a, 2003b), in particular, draw attention to the role of markets and marketing in mediating intercultural negotiations and facilitating cultural adaptations between Moslem minorities and non-Moslem majorities.

By the same token, El-Bassiouny's essentialism and exceptionalism unintentionally resonate with the clichéd assumptions that hold Moslems accountable for their marginalization in the geographies of migration. Philips (2006) best explains how Moslem minorities living in Western geographies are sometimes blamed for their self-segregation, the outcome of which is feelings of marginalization, discrimination, and self-stereotypes. El-Bassiouny reinforces such a discourse by her conceptualization of Moslems' cultural protectionism via aversion from Western lifestyles. The author obviously overlooks the abundant literature on ethnicity research in marketing and consumer behavior (see Visconti et al, 2014 and Demangeot, Broeckerhoff, Kipnis, Pullig & Visconti, 2014 for updated reviews

of the literature) that reveals a diversity of possibilities for performing shifting and multiple identities amongst different ethnic groups in multicultural markets. As Rossitera & Montoya (2007), Demangeot et al. (2013, 2014), and Jafari and Visconti (2014) assert, ethnic identities are spatial, performative, and situational; that is, they (re)shape based on the situations and spaces in which they are felt. By ignoring the mounting theoretical advancements in ethnicity research, the author assumes that Moslems exceptionally maintain a uniform and static religious identity which, due to its anchorage in the Islamic transcendental values, remains unchanged and above other ethno-religious identities and cultural values.

## 5. Islamicness

El-Bassiouny conceives Islam as “a total way of life resulting from a state of submission to one God whereby all acts in life are considered a form of divine worship”; the Islamic worldview is “*tawhidic* in nature (focusing on the absolute oneness of God), and comprised of maintaining God-consciousness as the purpose in all aspects of life” (p.43). On this basis, the author deduces that since “the Islamic ideology is a paradigm that transcends all acts of life, Muslim believers naturally expect that business conduct, and hence marketing as well, will be impacted by the precepts of their faith” (p.43). As a key drawback, this assertive inference imposes serious ontological, epistemological and methodological limitations on the author’s thesis throughout her discussion. El-Bassiouny uses the terms “Islamic religiosity”, “Islamic ideology”, “Islamic theology”, “*Shari’ah*”, “Islamic creed”, and “*ad-din*” interchangeably. Her lack of precision in applying these terms clearly indicates that she views Islam from a legislative lens; that is, Islam is understood as a set of rigid set of legislations (*Shari’ah*). This dogmatic conceptualization of Islam evidently underpins her homogenization of “Islamic religiosity”. Hashim’s (1964, p. 36) analysis can best explain the reason for such a flawed conceptualization: “the Arabic *Deen* and Sanskrit *Dharma* are

erroneously translated as ‘Religion’. In fact, religion misinterprets rather than correctly interprets *Deen* and *Dharma*...Deen and Dharma is not dogma and ritual of theology, but is the science of all sciences.” Hashim’s distinction between *Deen* and religion indicates that Islam is not a set of dogmatic doxas but a set of laws of nature set by God to govern all aspects of life and this foremost requires a reflexive critique of the past knowledge. In light of this, it becomes clear why El-Bassiouny solidifies Islam as *Shari’ah* without acknowledging the legitimacy of other and multiple forms of religiosity.

In everyday life situations, Moslem interpret Islam in different ways for a variety of reasons (e.g., political, economic, and sociocultural). For example, since they can afford it, some may seek to ‘make better sense’ of their lives by engaging in ways which may not be seen by others as Islamic enough (Jafari & Suerdem, 2012). Others may not pay much attention to the details of praying norms on the basis of experiencing religion in their own personal way. Similarly, in their day-to-day interactions with markets some may separate their personal religious beliefs from professional business activities (Gökarıksel & Secor, 2010a). Studies demonstrate that even fundamental Islamic concepts such as *halal* and *hijab* are subject to multiple, heterogeneous and even contradictory interpretations, resulting in a plethora of practices across different consumption domains (e.g., Jones 2010; Sandıkçı & Ger 2010; Karatas & Sandıkçı 2013). These examples indicate that Moslems do not pursue a uniform creed-based Islam, or a rigid ‘rational logic’ of religiosity; rather, they follow a ‘practical logic’ and act according to their ‘feel for the game’ of life (Bourdieu, 1977, in Jafari, 2012, p. 25).

Acknowledging that Moslems may and do display varying forms of religiosity calls attention to understanding tensions, negotiations, and power dynamics that shape the meanings and experiences of being a Moslem consumer or marketer in today’s world. For example, Fischer (2011) explains how in modern Malaysia the market-driven consumption

becomes a site of conflict between two sets of ideologies: ‘purism’ and ‘pragmatism’. While the former depicts an inflexible approach to Islam, the latter has a more elastic attitude to the religion. Therefore, it is a mistake to assume that all Moslems have similar and strict religious orientations and sentiments towards Islam. In a global era, these people adopt ‘creolised’ (Ger & Belk, 1996) or cosmopolitan lifestyles based on ‘intercultural learning processes’ (Jafari & Goulding, 2013). They also enjoy the diversity and abundance of products and services markets have provided for them. For example, whilst Mecca Cola and ZamZam Cola have gained success in Moslem geographies, Pepsi and Coca Cola continue to remain as strong brands in the same contexts. Similarly, alongside Lescon and Shukr, Adidas, Puma, and Nike continue to have a strong presence in Moslem geographies.

Prior work (Sandıkcı & Ger, 2005, 2007, 2010; Gökarıksel & Secor, 2010b; Jafari & Süerdem, 2012; Sandıkcı & Jafari, 2013; Karataş & Sandıkcı, 2013; Jafari & Goulding, 2013) has already documented the existence of many voices and trends in Moslem geographies which signal the presence of increasingly dynamic and diverse religious orientations manifested in consumptionscapes, servicescapes and market behaviors. Such religious diversities should also be understood in the wider context of the changing landscape of religion and religiosity in contemporary society. Gauthier and Martikainen (2013) provide a helpful analytical lens that can help investigations of religious change in Moslem geographies. The authors argue that “the twin forces of neoliberalism and consumerism are penetrating and transforming the ‘religious’ worldwide, though in locally-embedded forms” (page xv). Emphasising the importance of consumerism, as a “culturally dominant ethos” of modern society, they invite social theorists to “understand and analyse a growing number of religio-cultural phenomena” through the lenses of the “cultural phenomena that are born and have grown out of consumer cultures” (page xv). In their view, seeing “the world of religions through those lenses clarifies many discussions on contemporary religious change” (page xv).

With reference to the concepts of ‘liquid’ and ‘transient’ (Bauman, 2000; De Groot, 2008) realities of life, Gauthier and Martikainen posit that there has been a shift towards “more experiential rather than creed-based forms of religion”, “a move from a regime of orthodoxy towards a regime of orthopraxy” (page 4). Other factors – such as the rapid growth of communication media, erosion of nation-state boundaries that historically described religion and prescribed religiosity, emergence of new forms of religiosities, and the transformation of traditional religious institutions – have collectively given rise to a homogenous form of religiosity that seeks salvation (not necessarily in the life hereafter but in this very worldly life and now) in different ways. The emergence of the notion of ‘spiritual’ (as an alternative for the ‘religious’) therefore signifies the rise of privatized experiences of religious authenticity. Different forms of religiosities and spiritualities that exist among Moslems are manifested in both private and public spaces in markets (Jafari & Süerdem, 2012; Varul, 2013) which themselves are in constant processes of change. Market evolutions and socioeconomic developments bring with them new ways of experiencing religion and religiosity, which are not necessarily in harmony with established forms of religious traditions and beliefs (Jafari et al., 2014). People’s experiences of religion and religiosity are influenced not only by emotional private encounters (Finlayson, 2012) but also by politics of citizenship and identity (Kong, 1993; 2005), kinship and inheritance (Bruce, 2014), ethnicity (Jafari et al., 2014), historical collective memories (Luz, 2008), global political economy (Sandıkcı & Ekici, 2009; Izberk-Bilgin, 2012; Ger, 2013), and so forth. In the presence of all these multifaceted trends and complexities, insistence on the existence of a ubiquitous ‘Islamic’ market is a simplistic myth. Consumers and businesses in Moslem geographies are embedded in a dynamic global political socioeconomic system in which religious orientations and manifestations of religiosity play on multiple grounds of historical, political, economic, and sociocultural interconnectivities with the rest of the world.

## 6. Conclusion

Since its inception as a branded subject, Islamic marketing has oftentimes been treated as a self-evident term; there have also been contested debates about what constitutes the Islamicness of Islamic marketing (Sandıkçı & Rice, 2011; Jafari, 2012; Sandıkçı & Jafari, 2013; Wilson et al, 2013; Kadirov, 2014; Koku & Jusoh, 2014). Evident in these debates is a caution against the tendency towards cultural relativism, viewing Islam as *sui generis*, an entity “utterly exotic, thoroughly exceptional, fully outside, frightfully different” (Al-Azmeh 2003, p.24) and in need of recognition in its own terms. El-Bassiouny’s (2014) conceptualization reproduces essentializing and exoticizing portrayals of Islam, rendering Islamic consumers and marketers fundamentally different yet ahistorical, decontextualized, and universal analytical categories. While El-Bassiouny advocates her conceptualization of Islamic marketing as a route to elevate marketing from “value maximization” to “transcendental values integration”, she shows little acknowledgment for the great variations in the interpretation of Islamic doctrine (Schacht, 1962) and the multiplicity of lived experiences. Whatever the theological merits of such an approach might be, its application in marketing is questionable as it culminates in a research perspective that conceives of Islamic consumers and marketers in the singular.

We believe that deconstructing this singularity is crucial for theoretical advancement and legitimacy of Islamic marketing scholarship. First, an analytical approach that insists on and searches for singularity will tend to ignore the contemporary and historical structural forces shaping meanings of concepts (e.g., *halal*) and produce only partial and hollow understandings. Second, the emphasis on an over-determining singularity is likely to result in overlooking how individuals construct their identities as Moslem consumers and marketers in relation to multiple sources of identification (e.g., gender, ethnicity, social class) and how

they negotiate tensions, contradictions, and power relations in their everyday lives. Third, an unquestioned and unreflexive acceptance of singularity carries the danger of privileging a particular representation of Islam as the only representation and may result in accounts that are incognizant of their contingent nature.

Overall, we strongly believe that there is much to be learned from the intersections of Islam, consumption, and markets. Our goal in this article has been to problematize the notions of marginalization, exceptionalism and Islamicness, and expand the analytical focus from an essentialist, exceptionalist, and normative view of Islamic marketing to one that is attentive to the multiplicities, fluidities, and complexities of global political economy and socio-historical and cultural forces shaping contemporary marketscapes. We hope that critical approach will foster further research on Islam that can contribute to a scholarly discussion and build effective communications within the field of marketing at large.

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