The Ontological Pitfalls of Islamic Exceptionalism: A Re-Inquiry on El-Bassiouny's (2014, 2015) Conceptualization of "Islamic Marketing"

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Abstract

In response to Jafari and Sandıkcı's (2015a) critique of her 2014 article entitled "The one-billion-plus marginalization", El-Bassiouny (2015) dismisses the authors' key ontological debate over exceptionalism as a historical and political discourse and diverts attention to new areas of enquiry (e.g., disciplinary legitimacy, Islamic jurisprudence and methodological pluralism) to further her original "transcendental values integration" approach to marketing theory, practice and education. While offering new insights, El-Bassiouny's account is still largely driven by discourses of marginalization, exceptionalism and Islamism. This article therefore: (1) reappraises the oversimplification of the marginalization discourse; (2) reiterates the pitfalls of Islamic exceptionalism at an ontological level; (3) cautions against the consequences of ideological readings of Islam in marketing and consumer research; and (4) re-emphasizes the importance of understanding identity dynamics in the analysis of the complex intersections of Islam, marketing and consumption. In conclusion, the article offers some areas for future research.

Keywords: Islamic marketing, Moslem consumers, marginalization, exceptionalism, ideology, ontology

The Ontological Pitfalls of Islamic Exceptionalism: A Re-Inquiry on El-Bassiouny's (2014, 2015) Conceptualization of "Islamic Marketing"

1. Introduction

In her article entitled "The one-billion-plus marginalization", El-Bassiouny (2014) argued that since Moslems are marginalized in global markets and demands for *Shari'ah* compliant products and services are growing around the world, firms should accommodate the religious and moral needs of "Islamic consumers" who have a "distinct" and "unique" worldview and lifestyle; otherwise, such companies would encounter significant opportunity costs. To this end, the author used the notion of "transcendental values integration" (p.45) to outline the Islamic marketing "paradigm" from the perspective of Moslems 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).

In response to this account, we offered a critical appraisal (Jafari & Sandıkcı, 2015a) that rotated around the following three themes:

(1) Marginalization: we provided numerous examples to demonstrate that Moslem consumers are not as marginalized as claimed by El-Bassiouny. We proposed that the marginalization discourse be systematically analyzed in an interdisciplinary manner and in the light of many interrelated critical factors such as the post-911 identity anxieties (McGinty, 2012; Kabir, 2012; Sandıkcı & Jafari, 2013), globalization's acceleration of self-reflexivity (Beck, 2011; Jafari & Goulding, 2013) and the policies and politics of commoditizing and commercializing Islam in the age of neoliberalism (Jones, 2010; Süerdem, 2013).

(2) Exceptionalism: from an 'ontological' perspective, we questioned El-Bassiouny's exceptionalist depiction of Moslems as a collectivistic set of "distinct" and "unique" market actors (e.g., Moslem consumers as a market segment as well as Moslem marketers and educators) whose market behaviors are essentially ruled by the *Shari'ah*. Associating such exceptionalism and essentialism with the historical and political projects of Orientalism (Said, 1978, Abdel-Malek, 1981, Asad, 1993, Al-Azmeh, 2003, 2006, 2009) and self-Orientalism (Jafari, 2012), we highlighted the drawbacks of such restrictive and deceptive discourses. From an axiological standpoint, we also raised concerns about the author's representation of 'the Islamic' as a superior moral order in the global diverse value systems and cautioned that such exclusivity could jeopardize the foundations of scientific inquiry and hamper inter- and intra-cultural dialogs.

(3) Islamicness: we critiqued El-Bassiouny's imprecise use of terms such as "Islamic religiosity", "Islamic ideology", "Islamic theology", "*Shari'ah*", "Islamic creed", and "*ad-din*" that tend to freeze Islam as a rigid set of legislations. We drew attention to the changing landscape of religions and religiosity in contemporary society (Gauthier & Martikainen, 2014) to stress that Islamicness is not uniformly experienced, internalized and enacted by Moslems (Jafari & Süerdem, 2012). With a focus on self-reflexivity, we also argued that we should collectively honor our position as 'social scientists' (rather than hardline ideologists) and endeavor to primarily analyze and explain how, why and under which conditions and mechanisms people in different roles (e.g., as consumers, marketers and educators) and from diverse backgrounds (e.g., religious, social, cultural, political and ideological) may or may not interact with 'the Islamic' in relation to marketing, markets and consumption.

In developing the above discussions, we were especially cautious about presenting a systematic and thorough critique of El-Bassiouny's thesis. Yet, the author's (2015) response (entitled "Where is 'Islamic marketing' heading?") dismisses our key 'ontological' debate

and diverts attention to new areas of enquiry (disciplinary legitimacy, Islamic jurisprudence and methodological pluralism) to expand on the "transcendental values integration" thesis.

As stated in our previous work (Jafari & Sandıkcı, 2015a), we maintain interest in enriching the field by engaging in critical debate and tapping into (new) subject areas where theory would fructify. We, therefore, acknowledge El-Bassiouny's reciprocity in continuing this intellectual conversation. Yet, simultaneously, we stress that debate requires scholars' mutual sensitivity to theoretical reasoning and commitment to accuracy in analyzing and representing ideas. In our view, these two elements are somehow missing from El-Bassiouny's response. Firstly, while in our critique we adopted a post-colonial approach (e.g., Said, 1978) as a central 'critical theory' to guide our discussion, El-Bassiouny's response is wrought with a wide range of ideas such as disciplinary legitimacy, sustainability, morality, ethics, marketing pedagogy, Islamic jurisprudence and methodological pluralism. Each of these concepts carries its own specific theoretical trajectories and criticisms whose analysis cannot be deservedly delivered in a single article. This lack of precision seems to be driven by the author's insufficient attention to the difference between critical theory (at an ontological level) and critique (at a level of a critical review), a topic we will elaborate in Section 4 of this essay. Secondly, in our critique we meticulously used sufficient direct quotations from El-Bassiouny's article to analyze her argument and synthesize our counterargument on a point-by-point basis. In return, the author's response dismisses the core of our debate and turns to new areas where decontextualized extracts from our work result in the distortion of our ideas. Despite these drawbacks, it is still heartening to see that El-Bassiouny acknowledges the importance of debate to advancing theory in marketing at large.

In the remainder of this article, similar to our previous work (Jafari & Sandıkcı, 2015a) and in order to sustain accuracy and preempt misunderstandings, first we summarize El-Bassiouny's core argument. Next, we critique her ongoing marginalization discourse with

reference to disciplinary legitimacy. Then, we reiterate the pitfalls of Islamic exceptionalism at an ontological level. Next, we highlight the negative consequences of ideological readings of Islam. In this section, we also highlight the importance of understanding identity dynamics in the analysis of the complex intersections of Islam, marketing and consumption. In conclusion, we highlight some areas for future research.

2. El-Bassiouny's Core Argument

The author begins by offering a brief review of the history of the development of different schools of thought in marketing to argue that while these schools have enjoyed the liberty of stretching their domains to diverse topics, religion has remained marginalized in the field. The author specifically expresses discontent with critical marketing studies that despite their criticality "are still confined to the groups of scholars advocating them" (p.1[1]). Then, she finds the rise of interest in researching religion promising and introduces her research as part of a "sub-discipline" that investigates "different religious paradigms and approaches, including Islam and 'Islamic marketing,' an emerging sub-discipline that caters to the growing needs of Islamic consumers" (p.1). Here, El-Bassiouny seems to be suggesting that the "discourse on religion and marketing" be recognized as a "sub-discipline" to which "Islamic marketing" belongs (p.1).

In Section 2 of her essay, the author seeks to justify the value of Islamic marketing and its benefits to the field. Yet, a lack of theoretical focus on a particular topic leaves little room for the author's deep theoretical engagement with the various subjects set forth. El-Bassiouny paradoxically talks about the moral vacuum in marketing education and the marginalization of morality in marketing scholarship on the one hand and the abundance of research on morality on the other hand. Equally confusing, oscillating between macromarketing and

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[1] Page numbers in reference to El-Bassiouny (2015) apply to the iFirst version of the manuscript.

micromarketing discourses, she argues that Islam as "a global religion and way of life" and "ideology" (p.2) offers a holistic moral framework to guide Moslems at a behavioral level. Acknowledging the fact that not all Moslems at all times synchronize their practices and beliefs based on the scripture, El-Bassiouny contends that "understanding Islamic marketing in the context of scripture, and not just the practice (without undermining the importance of also understanding the various cultural faces of practice), is more relevant to the discussions around a 'sustainable society.'" (p.3).

In Section 3 of the article, a particular interest in the scripture determines the author's preference for conceiving Islam as a religion over understanding Islam as culture. In this section, inaccurate engagement with our work (Sandıkcı, 2011; Jafari, 2012; Sandıkcı & Jafari, 2013; Jafari & Sandıkcı; 2015a) renders the discussion less effective as the author strives to prove that religion-oriented research is valuable, as if we had said otherwise. The technical problem here is that El-Bassiouny misinterprets our thesis on exceptionalism (to be discussed in Section 4 of this essay). Nevertheless, making a distinction between Islam as religion (at a metaphysical level, the sacred) and Islam as culture (at a practice level, the profane), the author acknowledges the diversity of cultural practices among Moslems. Yet, prioritizing religion over culture, El-Bassiouny's writes: "Mirroring the basics of Islamic creed ("aqidah") of God-consciousness and individual accountability, Islamic consumers should engage in a continuous self-reflective process about their consumption styles and habits in terms of Islam's values, and Islamic marketing scholarship should aid in this critical self-reflective process." (p.3). In other words, for El-Bassiouny, Islamic marketing should remain loyal to the basic tenets of 'the scripture' – albeit with some degree of sensitivity to cultural variations in practice – in order to guide consumers. With this view, the author then outlines the objectives of the *Shari'ah* (*Maqasid Ash Shari'ah*) (p.4) to mean that what Islamic marketing should consider are the objectives of Islam and not Islam itself. She also

maps out (p.5) how Islamic marketing's principles at a macro level can help implement the objectives of *Shari'ah* via engagement with the individual consumer, professional marketers and regulatory bodies and marketing educators. Then, with reference to empirical evidence from past research, she argues that Moslem consumers are increasingly interested in *Shari'ah* compliant products and services. On this basis, the author contends that since Moslems are large in population and also widely spread (geographically), researchers and practitioners should not be misled by occasional erring (e.g., engagement in extravagance and overconsumption) of Moslems from the *Shari'ah* and focus on addressing the religious and moral needs of Moslems who yearn for *Shari'ah* compliant products and services.

Towards the end of her article, El-Bassiouny uses a milder tone and her discussions become more encouraging. She dedicates Section 4 of her essay to advocating methodological pluralism. Making an analogy between the development of methodologies in marketing and Islamic marketing, the author argues that the development of the field needs mixed methods (although, understandably, she cannot help hiding her passion for positivism). In conclusion, El-Bassiouny shows more flexibility towards understanding religiosity in cultural contexts, the same notion we put forward in our previous work (Sandıkcı, 2011; Jafari, 2012; Jafari & Süerdem, 2012; Sandıkcı & Jafari, 2013; Jafari & Sandıkcı, 2015a). Yet, surprisingly but comfortingly, she steps back from her earlier persistence on Islamic marketing's assigned adherence to the objectives of *Shari'ah* (tasked with guiding consumers towards a sustainable society) to a position that allows Islamic marketing a greater degree of sensitivity towards cultural embeddedness of religion and religiosity. However, this, the author maintains, does not mean that the richness of Islam should be compromised. Then, she argues that Islamic marketing researchers should engage with diverse literatures in other areas of marketing for cross-fertilization. El-Bassiouny concludes by hoping that Islamic marketing can serve the Moslem society (*Ummah*) in sustaining its communal and moral

spirit. Having summarized El-Bassiouny's core argument, in the following sections we present our critique of some of main assumptions that underlie the author's thesis.

3. Disciplinary legitimacy: still marginalization

El-Bassiouny's attempt to position her research (and Islamic marketing) in the general field of marketing is problematic because she continues to build her argument on marginalization, a discourse we (Sandıkcı, 2011; Jafari, 2012; Sandıkcı & Jafari, 2013; Jafari & Sandıkcı, 2015a) critiqued for its restrictive nature. Marginalization is not a neutral term; on the contrary, it is a highly political discourse intertwined with power relations in a Foucauldian (1980, 1991) sense (see also Tadajewski & Jafari's (2012) edited collection on power and knowledge in marketing). Riggins's (1997) edited volume (*The language and politics of exclusion: Others in discourse*) also particularly demonstrates how marginalization as a 'discourse' is (re)constructed through complex mechanisms of power relations in the social reality of life. Our critique of El-Bassiouny's thesis, as an exemplar of the Islamic marketing literature, is because this literature oversimplifies marginalization with no or little acknowledgement of the discursive nature of the concept. If Islamic marketing scholars want to seriously argue for the marginalization of Moslems as "Islamic consumers" in mainstream markets, they should seriously too delve into the established multidisciplinary theoretical foundations of the marginalization discourse. As such, Hamilton, Dunnett & Piacentini's (2015) edited 'Consumer Vulnerability' can offer great insights into the 'conditions, contexts and characteristics' of exclusion and inclusion of various people in markets, consumptionscapes and servicescapes.

In our previous appraisal (Jafari & Sandıkcı, 2015a) we explained that the reason why some areas of research have remained understudied is partially related to the history of the development of modern social sciences in the western hemisphere and partially due to the

insufficient engagement of non-western scholars with critical theory. Jafari (2014) and Jafari et al. (2012) elaborate on this issue with regards to the technical (e.g., linguistic barriers), structural (e.g., lack of resources) and intellectual (e.g., overreliance on positivism) issues that cause some phenomena to remain less visible in marketing and business research. In our prior work (Jafari, 2012; Jafari & Sandıkcı, 2015a), we pointedly used the term 'apologetic' to mean that researchers in the Islamic marketing stream constantly refer to *marginalization* to justify the value of Islamic marketing. We see this way of justification as an ineffective logic to legitimize what El-Bassiouny terms a "sub-discipline".

To elaborate, here we examine El-Bassiouny's understanding of Islamic marketing as an understudied area along with research on religion as an overarching subject that has remained "restricted" in marketing. To begin with, the author fails to acknowledge that the emergence of an academic field or a school of thought cannot be divorced from the sociocultural, economic and political conditions of the era in which they are born and evolve. Said otherwise, although El-Bassiouny uses the term 'emerging field' for Islamic marketing (as we did in our prior communications), she does not differentiate between an 'emerging' field and a 'marginalized' one. Here, we provide an example to better convey our point. Slater and Tonkiss's (2001) 'Market Society' tells us how conceptualizations of the market have changed over the past 250 years and how strenuous intellectual interactions between different schools of thought in different disciplines (e.g., political philosophy, sociology and economics) have helped advance our collective intelligence about the market. In their analysis, Slater and Tonkiss depict an overall image of the sociocultural, economic and political conditions (e.g., the relationship between laborers and owners of the capital and the changing social orders) of the era in which conceptualizations of the market emerged and evolved. Our particular interest in the geopolitics of consumption and the sociocultural, political and economic conditions of Moslem geographies (Sandıkcı, 2011; Jafari, 2012;

Sandıkcı & Jafari, 2013; Jafari & Sandıkcı, 2015a, 2015b) is inspired by a similar logic. We see research on the intersections of Islam, marketing and consumption as an emerging field and seek to understand why and how this stream of research came to existence in the first place and how likely it is to evolve steadily.

While El-Bassiouny's work relates the emergence of this stream of research primarily to the marginalization of "Islamic consumers" and "Islamic marketing" theory and education and also the rising interest in *Shari'ah* compliant products and services, we are more profoundly concerned with understanding the reasons why there has been an upsurge of interest in 'the Islamic' not only in marketing theory, practice and education, but also in everyday life situations in diverse Moslem geographies. Unlike El-Bassiouny, whose principal logic for the legitimacy of Islamic marketing (as a sub-discipline) is the marginalization issue and a simple cross-examination of other fields in marketing, we seek to analyze the emerging field at a grassroots level. In doing so, we do not simply compare and contrast the legitimacy of different fields within marketing; instead, we aim to learn lessons from the history of the development of different schools of thought, disciplines, sub-fields, and paradigm shifts so that we can help build theoretical foundations for future research.

In her response, El-Bassiouny also refers to journal ranking systems to justify the legitimacy of Islamic marketing: "Recently, the JIMA has risen to Q2 and achieved a ranking of 64 out of 158 on SCImago Journal and Country Rankings for Marketing (2013) rankings for marketing journals." (p.7). While drawing attention to the complexities associated with journal rankings (see Fırat, 2010), we would like to use Coskuner-Balli's (2013) analysis of the legitimacy of the Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) stream as an insightful example to expand on our thesis. Coskuner-Balli shows that apart from its use of institutional means (e.g., journals, conferences, publications and social media) in order to legitimize itself, CCT leveraged a wealth of established research accumulated at least over 40 years in order to

brand itself as a legitimate academic stream. One may assume (as it seems to be what El-Bassiouny implies) that research on 'the Islamic' can or should follow the same path to leverage the rich repository of the Islamic knowledge (accrued over the past 14 centuries) to brand itself as Islamic marketing. Yet, a closer scrutiny of the legitimacy of the CCT scholarship opens up new horizons before us. For example, Fitchett, Patsiaouras & Davies (2014) argue that CCT is not only a byproduct of neoliberalism; it also serves neoliberalism by propagating its ideology and logic of consumerism and symbolic economy. By this, Fitchett et al. specifically mean that it was neoliberalism's ideology of consumerism that paved the way for consumer culture to become the ethos of modern society as a result of which CCT could then start to conceptualize different consumer culture phenomena. From this point of view, CCT is, in one way or another, an instrumental agent for institutionalizing the neoliberal ideology. Similarly, in her critical analysis of the prevailing postmodern account of consumer culture (a prominent concept in CCT), Hartwick (2000) argues that focus on identity play and construction of imaginative selves disconnects consumption from production. The author contends that such identity based consumption overlooks the politics of production in the sense that it disregards how commodities are produced in the first place (e.g., issues of unethical work conditions) before becoming means of identity construction for consumers.

By using this analogy between CCT and Islamic marketing streams, we want to draw attention to a less visible dimension of the legitimacy of an academic field: that is, a discipline's emergence and legitimacy may be facilitated by forces and conditions outside its own scholarly institution. Süerdem (2013), Sandıkcı and Jafari (2013) and Jafari and Sandıkcı (2015a) already alerted researchers investigating the intersections of Islam, marketing and consumption not to overlook the relationship between neoliberalism and the visibility and prevalence of 'the Islamic' in contemporary spaces of markets and consumption. Contrary to

this logic, El-Bassiouny refers to business and consultancy reports to back up her thesis of marginalization of Moslem consumers and encourage firms to address Moslems' religious/moral needs. Businesses (both private and state owned), as the nature of their economic interest necessitates, would unsurprisingly create and broadcast their discourse around economic prosperity and business opportunities. Yet, analyzing their discourses, policies, politics and practices should be seen as a vital task for researchers; and this is the reason why we are interested in analyzing the intersections of Islam, marketing and consumption from a wider perspective, one that takes into account the macro environmental factors and actors facilitating and propagating the emergence of an academic discourse such as Islamic marketing.

Here, we should emphasize that we are not against firms addressing Moslem consumers' needs, as this is a basic condition for the existence of the market. Neither do we mean to undermine the importance of the existing empirical evidence that alludes to the growth of interest in 'the Islamic' in markets. Yet, what we forcefully refute is the raw assumption that firms and institutions (e.g., consultancy and advertising agencies, government commercial departments, religious institutions) and the political/ideological/economic systems in which they operate have no role in fueling consumerism and consumerism-oriented production, promotion, and distribution mechanisms. Fischer's (2008, 2009) and Bergeaud-Blackler, Fischer & Lever's (2015) analyses of the politics of *Halal* economy support our thesis as the authors reveal the tacit policies and politics behind the rise of *Halal* economy in mass markets. These policies and politics, as Slater and Tonkiss's (2001) wisdom informs us, are designed in 'private markets' and in various institutions of the political/ideological economic system before they become manifest as tangible goods, services and symbols in the 'public markets' of Moslem geographies.

4. Exceptionalism as an ontological concept

In our previous accounts (Sandıkcı, 2011; Jafari, 2012; Sandıkcı & Jafari, 2013; Jafari & Sandıkcı; 2015a) we critiqued the prevailing discourse of exceptionalism in the literature of Islamic marketing at an ontological level. We argued that viewing 'self' (in this case Moslems as the 'other' of non-Moslems) and the 'ideas' of self (in this case, the Islamic as opposed to the un- or less-Islamic) in an exceptional manner does not help advance theory. We used the post-colonial approach, as a 'critical theory', (Said, 1978, Abdel-Malek, 1981, Asad, 1993, Al-Azmeh, 2003, 2006, 2009) to reason that the depiction of Moslems as a "unique" and "distinct" community ("*Ummah*") imposes certain ontological limitations on conceptualizing a variety of research phenomena in relation to this diverse population. Exceptionalism is a historical and political discourse rooted in western colonialism and imperialism that subjected non-western societies (including Moslems) to western colonizers and imperialists' one-way interpretation (Said, 1978).

The term '*Ummah*' to which El-Bassiouny refers in her work is not politically and historically neutral. The literary English translation of the term is oftentimes 'community'; yet, historically contextualized in the social sciences, it connotes a variety of meanings. As Jafari and Sandıkcı (in press) argue, the term *Ummah* emerged as a prominent political concept in the rise of anti-western movements in the twentieth century when, Islam became enacted as an influential means of mobilizing the masses to revolt against western colonialism (e.g., in Libya, Algeria, Palestine, Egypt, Indonesia, and Pakistan) and imperialism (e.g., Iran). What came to be known as 'political' or 'revolutionary' Islam (Esposito, 1998; Roy, 2004) was in fact due to the emancipatory and mobilizing power of the religion that placed it at the center of public attention for both Moslems and the west (Richter, 1979; Pipes, 2003). An important part of such anti-colonial/imperialist uprisings

was the boycott of western products/services and rejection of western lifestyles that signified the colonial/imperialist west (Moaddel, 1992; Ezra, 2000; Dhont, 2012). Yet, censoring the significant impact of the historical projects of colonialism and imperialism on the relationships between the west and Moslems, western propaganda (i.e., media and politics) simply portrayed Islam as the anti-western 'other' of modernity supported by a homogeneous and transnational fundamental community called 'the *Ummah*'. Ignoring Muslim geographies' multiple historical routes to modernity (Sandıkcı and Ger, 2002; Karababa and Ger, 2011; Jafari and Goulding, 2013), and anchored in the project of Orientalism and self-Orientalism, many western as well as uncritical Moslem writers interpreted socioeconomic developments and modernization processes and progresses in Moslem geographies simply as a westernization project that the Islamic *Ummah* ubiquitously resisted. Therefore, Islam was essentially depicted as an anti-western/global movement that sought to re-instigate Islamic traditions against the secular and un-Islamic western projects of modernization and globalization (see Roy, 2004). The proponents of Islamic Marketing who persistently subscribe to such a rigid contrast (i.e., opposition of Islam to the west) fail to acknowledge the complexities of depicting Moslems as a homogenous transnational community.

El-Bassiouny's dismissal of our ontological discussion on exceptionalism drives her essay towards a misconstrued debate about whether or not Islam offers any value to research in marketing. As such, the author assumes that we reject religion's value-based approach to marketing. She mistakenly concludes that we argue for a religion-free marketing discourse as she writes: "The authors critique El-Bassiouny (2014), as an example of most of the works in this field, for proposing (in the authors' perceptions) a more "exceptionalist" values-based religion-oriented approach." (p.2). Based on this misunderstanding, then she strives to position her work (and Islamic marketing) in the macromarketing camp's fight against overconsumption and materialism as she rhetorically asks:

"Should this [overconsumption] be overlooked in Islamic marketing research for the hypothetical and perceptual fear of singularity and exceptionalism? Should it be omitted in studies relating Islam and Islamic precepts to markets, marketing, and consumption? Should we simplistically render and reduce any presentation of Islamic tenets relevant to the consumptionscape as "apologetic" and "exceptionalist" (Jafari, 2012), "essentialist" (Sandikci, 2011), "political fundamentalist," showing "unreflexive commitment," or all simultaneously (Jafari & Sandikci, 2015)?"

Driven by the same misinterpretation of our critique of exceptionalism, and in defense of the Islamic marketing literature, she then ardently continues:

"Islamic marketing includes many studies relating marketing and consumption phenomena to Islamic precepts (e.g., El-Bassiouny, 2014; Kadirov, 2014; Koku & Jusoh, 2015; Wilson, 2012; see also studies in extant literature such as Williams & Zinkin, 2010). These studies are religion-oriented ("exceptionalist," "reductionist," "essentialist," and "ethnocentric," as collectively described by the authors in this and previous works, cf. Jafari, 2012; Sandikci, 2011), and which Jafari and Sandikci (2015) consider the bulk of the studies in the field of Islamic marketing that El-Bassiouny (2014) "exemplifies."" (p.3).

A more accurate contemplation of our previous work (Sandıkcı, 2011; Jafari, 2012; Jafari & Süerdem, 2012; Sandıkcı & Jafari, 2013; Jafari & Sandıkcı, 2015a) would certainly testify to the fact that contrary to El-Bassiouny's reading, we advocate a deeper understanding of Islam as a macro value system in the (re)construction of markets and market making phenomena as embedded in multiple value systems. Nevertheless, the author continues to draw an analogy between macromarketing and Islamic marketing to argue that similar to the former, the latter is also concerned with driving society towards embracing sustainability. Yet, here, a shortsighted analysis traces sustainability to the recent debates

(e.g., the 2010 World Economic Forum and other recent publications) on ecology and issues of societal solidarity. In contrast to the author's analysis, the recent 'formal' (institutional) engagement of religions in sustainability was largely inspired by the writings of Feuerbach (1957) and White Jr. (1967) who blamed the current ecological crisis on Judeo-Christianity's anthropocentrism – a belief that still exists in macromarketing's own literature (see Kilbourne, McDonagh & Prothero, 1997). For example, the 1986 World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) International, the 1995 Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) and the mid-1980s establishment of the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences (IFEES) can be seen as good examples. These organizations have pulled ideas from various beliefs in Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Daoism, Jainism, Shintoism, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism and so forth.

Given that religious and spiritual diversity has already proven useful to sustainability, we recommend that Islamic marketing scholars abandon the discourse of exceptionalism to view Islam as part of broader and more diverse global value systems should they wish to discuss the relationship between Islam and sustainability more seriously. Otherwise, a simple repetition of what Islam says about values is less likely to extend knowledge beyond what we already know. El-Bassiouny's account once again reflects an exceptionalist representation of Islamic values as though such values do not exist in other societies for whom Islam is not a (main) value system (see Wallis, 2010; Varey and Prison, 2013). The author does not really explain whether or not, how, why, where and under which macro (social, cultural, political, ideological and economic) systems and conditions her proposed "percept" of *Maqasid Ash Shari'ah* (objectives of Shari'ah) can work better than non-Islamic ones. And this is specifically the kind of questions critics (see Rice, 1999; Jafari, 2012; Süerdem, 2013; Jafari & Sandıkcı, 2015b; and Saatçioğlu, Sandıkcı & Jafari, in press) ask about various market-mediated structural deficiencies (e.g., poverty and socioeconomic inequalities, cronyism,

unethical labor conditions, and absence of consumer protection, to name but a few) that exist in Moslem geographies where Islamic knowledge should naturally be present.

To avoid being labeled as anti-religious or anti-value scholars, here we should clarify that we are more profoundly concerned with religion as macro value systems at the level of mechanisms of political economy. Therefore, unlike El-Bassiouny, who despite her interest in macromarketing, still views Moslems as a large market segment waiting to be served by companies' *Shari'ah* compliant products and services, we remain interested in the discourses of political economy and the 'embeddedness' of market formations, actors and practices that both create and are created by changing dominant social values (see Slater & Tonkiss, 2001). It is from this standpoint that we see oversimplifications of the intersections of Islam, marketing and consumption dangerous to theory development as superficial analyses can render both Islam and marketing as simple mechanical tools with an esthetic value discourse (see Jafari, 2012).

5. Ideological readings of Islam

Previously, we (Jafari & Sandıkcı, 2015a) argued that ideological readings of Islam can have negative consequences not only in marketing and consumer research but also more broadly in the social sciences and everyday life situations in markets and consumption spaces. Conceptualizing Islam as an ideology divorces Islam from its transcendental position and broad cultural habitat and turns it into politics of power and identity at a human level in ways difficult to control (Soroush, 2002). As Ashouri (2011) also warns, an ideological conception of religion can transform it to man-made 'militant religionism' that legitimizes itself as an exclusive source of authority tasked with fighting the manifestations of the irreligious, less religious and anti-religious. As discussed in our introduction, in both of her articles, and among a wide range of terms, El-Bassiouny (2014, 2015) uses the term

'ideology' in reference to Islam. This may be a technical problem related to her imprecise use of terminology as she also views Islam as a "way of life". Yet, her overall assertive tone in discussing Islamicness raises a series of concerns.

To elaborate, El-Bassiouny bases the scripture as her primary source of reference for drawing the objectives of *Shari'ah* upon which Islamic marketing should act. Here, El-Bassiouny unintentionally opens up the Pandora's Box as she taps into the most complicated and political debate in the history of Islam: 'interpretation'. Surprisingly, El-Bassiouny overlooks the fact that after the Prophet, one of the main factors that have divided Moslem jurists, theologians and thinkers (let alone the masses) has been the issue of interpretation. A glance at the works of Mohammed Arkoun (1988, 1994, 2002) and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (2004, 2006) reveals the depth of the interpretation problem in recent times. While both of these scholars argued for a hermeneutic reading of the scripture, their opponents (e.g., *Takfiri* and *Salafi* groups) in many Moslem countries (especially Egypt) accused them of either blasphemy or contaminating the thoughts of Moslems. A detailed discussion of hermeneutics is beyond the scope of this article. Yet, what we want to highlight here is that one cannot simply assume that a common understanding of religion's objectives (*Magasid Ash Shari'ah*) exists among Moslems. The world we are living in today is becoming increasingly and sadly prone to religion-related violence and conflicts most of which happen in everyday life situations such as markets, servicescapes and consumptionscapes (Jafari, 2015; Jafari, Özhan Dedeoğlu, Üstündağli, Regany & Batat, 2015). A closer analysis of such discrepancies can reveal that what causes conflict is not religion *per se* but the ways people choose to interpret religions and religiosity. Therefore, we believe that the existence of diverse ideas on what Islam's objectives are at a theoretical level is not harmful as such; the real harm comes to existence when ideas become operationalized in extreme forms of power relations, authority

and identity in our neoliberal symbolic economy that marketizes everything, especially

religions (Jafari, 2015).

Overlooking such complexities, El-Bassiouny maintains: "Mirroring the basics of

Islamic creed ("aqidah") of God-consciousness and individual accountability, Islamic

consumers should engage in a continuous self-reflective process about their consumption

styles and habits in terms of Islam's values, and Islamic marketing scholarship should aid in

this critical self-reflective process. However, this self-reflective process is essentially non-

judgmental, since Islam holds that the scale of superiority, judgment, and forgiveness is only

with the Creator, and diversity is a basic principle in the Islamic creed (Qur'an 11:118–9)."

(p.3). We do not see any problem with Islamic marketing's will to help consumers embrace a

better life in a sustainable society as El-Bassiouny wishes. Varey and Prison's (2013)

'Humanistic Marketing' (an edited collection) and Wallis's (2010) 'Rediscovering Values'

(among other authors El-Bassiouny cites) best exemplify how scholars from secular and

religious perspectives can play a role in shaping and advocating a collective wellbeing

mindset in society. From this point of view, Islamic marketing scholars can also contribute to

this vital mission. Yet, the problem is that society in general does not work in quite the same

way El-Bassiouny idealizes. The extensive research in different disciplines of the social

sciences (including marketing and consumer research) that we cited in our previous article

(Jafari & Sandıkcı, 2015a) reveals that, unfortunately contrary to El-Bassiouny's hope,

people do judge each other not only on their practices but also on their beliefs. The examples

of Islamic fashion (Jones, 2010; Sandıkcı & Ger, 2010) and western brands (Sandıkcı &

Ekici, 2009; Izberk-Bilgin, 2012) we put forward in our earlier work testify to the fact that

when materialized as market commodities and consumption practices, religious beliefs do

clash and judgements do occur. And this is an important issue Süerdem (2013, in press) raises

about the serious risks of ideological intensifications should Islamic marketing overlook the

intricate politics of commercializing Islam in the name of salvation, societal integration and piety.

El-Bassiouny's good will of identifying Islamic marketing's potential in combatting unsustainable market practices (e.g., overconsumption) and enhancing morality in marketing education is admirable. Yet, this intention should not lead to hasty and incomplete conceptualizations that can concurrently justify the instrumentlization of Islam in markets and consumption spheres. For example, there is no guarantee that the propositions set forth by El-Bassiouny remain at a voluntary, moral and spiritual level (respecting human dignity and freedom above all) and not turn into ideological means of power abuse (see Jafari & Goulding, 2013; Jafari & Maclaran, 2014). By the same token, no matter how distressed El-Bassiouny and other scholars such as us feel about the terrors created and crimes committed by different groups in the name of Islam and 'the Islamic', terrorists and criminals may declare themselves more Moslem and Islamic than anybody else. Therefore, El-Bassiouny's non-judgmental thesis cannot always yield positive consequences. El-Bassiouny may still choose to regard our caution as "hypothetical" and "perceptual fear of singularity" (p.3) and treat our thesis simply as a "cultural experiential approach to Islamic marketing" (p.3) and religion. But the escalating religion-related conflicts around the world (especially in Moslem geographies) should be taken as a serious sign of what the future may yet bring to us. This is exactly the reason why in our attempt to understand the intersections of Islam, marketing and consumption, we do not use cultural-experiential tools to analyze cultural and experiential aspects of religion and religiosity; instead, we use critical theory (e.g., issues of politics, power relations, political economy, ideology and so forth) to understand how and why and under which conditions and mechanisms religion and religiosity are (re)shaped, transformed, and enacted. If, as El-Bassiouny claims, Moslems largely and strongly adhere to the *Shari'ah* and only "occasionally" go astray, then why bother to map out an Islamic marketing agenda?

But if Islamic marketing seeks to serve non-Moslems as well at a global scale, then it should rethink its distinctive value propositions to a global audience.

6. Conclusion

This article is part of an ongoing intellectual debate over attempts to push the boundaries of knowledge on investigating the intersections of Islam, marketing and consumption. El-Bassiouny's (2014) article and her (2015) response to our earlier critique (Jafari and Sandıkcı, 2015a) of her original work can only endorse the complexities of researching 'the Islamic' in marketing, business and consumer research. While we acknowledge El-Bassiouny's reciprocity in continuing this intellectual dialog, we hope that we have been clear enough in our insistence on the importance of applying critical theory to an emerging field broadly branded as Islamic marketing. Among many possible streams of critical theory that could apply to this stream of research we saw urgency in employing the post-colonial approach because we saw the prevailing discourse of exceptionalism as detrimental to the generation of knowledge in this literature. Although in our previous publications we had already raised concerns about ideological readings of Islam, in this article we offered a more detailed discussion on its hazards.

Given the increasing visibility of Islam in markets, consumptionscapes and servicescapes as well as in academics/practitioners' list of interests, we hope that research in this area will continue to fructify based on solid theoretical reasoning. Therefore, readers (particularly Doctoral students) should not confine their wisdom to the discussions exchanged between us and El-Bassiouny. Neither Islam nor marketing or consumer research, as subjects, are new. There is an ocean of materials and ideas out there even outside these disciplines that need to be contemplated. Therefore, we suggest that researchers embark on new journeys to enrich the field by borrowing new ideas from other disciplines. More specifically, and given

the dominance of neoliberal political ideology in our era, efforts be directed towards

understanding the relationship between this ideology and the rise of Islam in everyday life

situations. As we argued in depth, discussions on Islam and consumption in the narrow

context of supply-demand can distract researchers from many significant factors that shape

this apparently simple equation.

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