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Liquid identities
Mecca Cola versus Coca-Cola

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ABSTRACT The Mecca Cola drink combines in its brand name two contrasting iconic images: one signifies 'authenticity', whereas the other signifies a 'commodity'. The conspicuous juxtaposition of 'Mecca' and 'Cola' and their hyphenization evokes the question: what is becoming of 'authenticity' in a thoroughly commodified world society? This article proposes that a distinction ought to be drawn between the effects of commodification on two distinct levels: the structural and symbolic. Whereas commodification homogenizes structurally, it heterogenizes symbolically. This article maintains that while symbolically Mecca Cola is antagonistic to Coca-Cola, structurally it is a case of an appropriation of the former by the latter. Mecca Cola thus attests to a structural 'Cola-ization' accompanied by a symbolic 'Mecca-ization' of current world cultures.

KEYWORDS *Americanization, authenticity, Coca-Cola, commodification, consumption, globalization, material culture, Mecca Cola, Muslim culture*

Mecca Cola is a bottled or canned sweet, sparkling soft drink, which simulates in taste, design and appeal the world-famous American brand Coca-Cola. The declared purpose of the businessman who created the Mecca Cola brand is to offer Arab and Muslim customers an alternative to the American product, which for many symbolizes American cultural capitalism, and as of late also American military imperialism in the Middle East.

'Mecca' and 'Cola' are strange bedfellows. The brand name Mecca Cola conjures together two iconic images which ordinarily are related to two distinct and even contrasting cultures: the culture of 'authenticity' versus the culture of 'artificiality'. The conspicuous juxtaposition of 'Mecca' and 'Cola', their hyphenization, so to speak, evokes questions about the relations between the 'global' and the 'local', 'modernity' and 'tradition', the 'West' and the 'rest', and 'America' and 'Islam'. In short, it evokes the question: what is becoming of 'authenticity' in a thoroughly commodified world society? No naive concept of authenticity is assumed here and we choose to present the term with quotation marks in order to acknowledge

that nothing is 'really' authentic; everything is socially constructed. Yet despite this caveat, there may be elements of 'authenticity' to any given cultural artifact, which may depend on the conditions of its construction: is it home-grown or 'imported'? Is it evolutionary or revolutionary? Is it engineered or spontaneous? Does it suit the culture in which it is situated or is alien to it? and so forth.[1]

So the question we address here is whether the universalization of capitalist commercialization and commodification poses a threat to the viability of particular communities and identities. Can such communities and identities stave off this challenge? Or does this encounter breed a new hybrid of 'glocal' cultures? Such questions had been immanent before September 11, 2001 and they have become more so ever since. This article argues that while each of the three propositions above is correct in part, their combined composition has remained largely undertheorized. It proposes that a distinction be drawn between the structural and the symbolic effects of commodification and that the effects on these two levels are divergent: whereas commodification homogenizes structurally, it heterogenizes symbolically. It maintains that Mecca Cola is a case in point, attesting to a structural 'Cola-ization' accompanied by a symbolic 'Mecca-ization' of current world cultures.

This material culture study is inspired by Karl Marx's well-known thesis of the 'fetishism of commodities' in the first volume of *Capital* (Marx, 1976[1867]). There and in other texts (notably *The Communist Manifesto*) he (and Engels) decree that in a market-based society, everything solid in human relationships and culture melts in the air; all relationships and values are subsumed by the bare monetary nexus and – even more poignantly in our context – 'all that is holy is profaned' (Marx and Engels, 1972[1848]: 476), or, in our case, 'all that is holy becomes liquid' (Bauman, 2000). This article argues that the case of Mecca Cola, as well as other related instances of global exchanges discussed below, vindicate this Marxian proposition, only adding that it is the peculiarity of present-day, global post-Fordist capitalism that its effects are two-layered; namely structural homogenization accompanied by symbolic heterogenization.

This article proceeds in four steps. First, it examines the new article of consumption branded Mecca Cola. Second, it looks into the original brand of Coca-Cola. Third, it discusses further cases of the commodification of religious articles, especially in the context of Islam. Finally, it discusses the available theoretizations of present commodification and proposes its own contribution to this area, in the form of the aforementioned double-layered structural–symbolic model.

Mecca Cola

The product 'Mecca Cola' was inaugurated in the end of 2002. It was contrived by Tawfik Mathlouthi, a Tunisian-born French businessman

who, in the telling phrase of western media, sought to 'cash in' and attempted to 'capitalize on' anti-American sentiment around the world (Henley and Vassar, 2003: 1; Murphy, 2003: 1; see www.meccacola.com). In this case 'cash in' and 'capitalize on' have a literal as well as metaphorical resonance. Mathlouthi's product appeals to Muslims with the hope of competing with the sales of Coca-Cola, which is identified as an 'icon of American capitalism' (Murphy, 2003: 1). Explaining this to a reporter, Mathlouthi added:

> [It is all about combating] America's imperialism and Zionism by providing a substitute for American goods and increasing the blockade of countries boycotting American goods. (Murphy, 2003: 1)

This is not the first time that Coca-Cola has been imitated by a 'Muslim' substitute. Zam Zam Cola is an Iranian beverage launched after the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and is named after a holy spring in Mecca. It is reported to be a success in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain (Arabic News, 2002; see http://zamzamgroup.com). A parallel article which carries the name Qibla Cola was launched in the UK in 2003. The word *Qibla* means 'direction', and in common Arabic usage it refers to the direction of Mecca towards which Muslims turn when they pray. Qibla Cola presents itself as an 'ethical alternative' to global multinational corporations (see www.qibla-cola.com; Bevis, 2004). Cola Turka (Turkish Cola) was launched by the Ulkar company in Turkey in 2003, and it is couched in Turkish national images (see www.colaturka.com.tr/anasayfa/index.html). All these brands are explicitly *Halal* (permissible for consumption by Muslims). Mecca Cola is a growing phenomenon and not an isolated episode.

Mecca Cola was initially marketed to Muslim customers in Europe. It was launched in France and exported to Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden and the UK. The drink found its way into small 'ethnic shops' in Muslim neighborhoods, and later it arrived on the shelves of large cash-and-carry supermarkets in some European countries (Belgium, France, Germany). Soon afterwards the brand became a great hit in Middle Eastern and other Muslim markets. According to one source, in 2005 Mecca Cola was distributed in 64 countries and sold 148 million cans. It ranks 34th in the top 50 brands in the world (Baranowski, 2007). According to the producer, recent furores in the Muslim world over the Danish cartoons (in which the Prophet Mohammed was portrayed) or the Pope's comments on Islam were directly felt in the rise of sales. Recently, Mecca Cola invested $15 million in an industrial complex in Dubai, which opened three factories by September 2007. Additionally, the company has added Mecca Tea, Mecca Coffee and Mecca Power to the Mecca Cola brand (Baranowski, 2007). The company now plans to launch a Muslim alternative to the Starbucks coffee chain, in the form of a chain of coffee shops under the brand name Mecca Café. The first shop is planned for

Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, to be followed by branches in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and Islamabad, Pakistan (Shakir, 2006). In 2003, Mecca Cola was both the sponsor and the official drink of the summit of the Organization of Islamic Conferences held in Malaysia.

Mecca Cola is fraught with Muslim symbolism yet is encased in the insignia of American capitalism. The shape and size of the bottles, the dark-purple color of the drink, and the 'handwritten' fonts and the swirl shaped logo, all make it an unabashed imitation of Coca-Cola. The difference is first and foremost in the label where 'Coca' is replaced by 'Mecca', the holy city of Islam (in Saudi Arabia). Second, it is publicized that 10 percent of the profits are dedicated to charities operating in Palestinian territories and that another 10 percent are passed to international peace-oriented non-governmental organizations based in Europe. The Mecca Cola label reads 'Don't drink stupid, drink committed', referring to the 'stupid' (or perhaps also 'stupefying') consumption of the American brand, in contrast to the politically committed consumption of the Muslim rival. In the eyes of its founder, each bottle of Mecca Cola sold is 'a little gesture against US imperialism and foreign policy' (Henley and Vassar, 2003: 1).

The Mecca Cola case is another part of a widening multifaceted conflict between the US and the Muslim and Arab world in the wake of the September 11 attack on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, and of the US reactions to these attacks through the 'War on Terror', which began in Afghanistan in 2002 and continued in Iraq in 2003. In the Muslim and Arab world, America has been widely perceived for a long time as the 'Big Satan' who steadily supports the 'Small Satan': Israel. This support is a source of popular Muslim and Arab infuriation, which occasionally erupts in attacks on US targets, demonstrations and riots in front of outlets of American international chains such as McDonald's restaurants, as well as occasional attempts to boycott American brands (see Barboza, 2002; Bayat, 2003). Playing on Coca-Cola's slogan 'The Taste of Life', one reportage on Mecca Cola asserts that 'Muslim activists decided the Real Thing left a sour taste' (Henley and Vassar, 2003: 1).

Thus, what Mecca Cola stands for is a kind of 'Iced war' waged by Arab and Muslim producers and consumers against a product widely perceived as a symbol of America, its culture and imperialism. That such an innocent drink could have acquired such an elevated and protean symbolic status is in itself an intriguing expression of the commodified society.

So why Coca-Cola? How does a trivial object such as a sweet fizzy beverage become a symbol of a nation, or indeed of a whole civilization – the civilization of consumption? What is it about this artifact that attracts so many consumers, so much attention and so much hostility? Igor Kopytoff (1986) proclaims that 'things' have a 'cultural biography' (as particular items) and 'social history' (as brands) of their own. As Dick Hebdige (1988) puts it, 'things' have 'cultural significance'. These claims relate not only to

small-scale shifts in an object's meaning but also to broader transformations in the organization of material culture itself (Lury, 1996). So let us take a brief account of the 'cultural biography' of the Coca-Cola 'thing'. To begin with, how had this commodity assumed the status of the American emblem?

Coca-Cola

The blend of what would become Coca-Cola was first mixed by a pharmacist in Atlanta, GA in 1886 as a 'Coca wine', after a French wine called Vin Mariani. Like many other drinks produced at the time, it was hailed as soothing, vitalizing and healing, and especially appropriate for the nervous American personality. These characteristics were imputed to it because some of the ingredients it might have incorporated, extracts from coca leaves from Central America and kola nuts from West Africa, contain the alkaloids cocaine and caffeine, as well as some other exotic plants. As the Coca-Cola myth goes, in their societies of origin coca and kola allegedly acted for hundreds of years as stimulants, aids to digestion, aphrodisiacs and even life-extenders (Pendergrast, 2000). Due to the pressures of the 'temperance' movement the alcoholic components were removed, and by a trial-and-error process the concentrate was mixed with carbonated water.

The name 'Coca-Cola' was coined in 1886 and the company was granted its official corporate charter and a patent of its trademark in 1892. In short course the beverage has became practically bereft of the two ingredients which give it its name and which were probably present in its inception. Coca-Cola has not contained any trace of cocaine since 1903 and, according to a court ruling from 1919, most of its caffeine now comes from tea leaves rather than kola nuts. Until 1899 the beverage was dispensed by soda fountains in drugstores; since that time it has been dispensed in glass bottles and, much later, in plastic bottles and cans. What began as the venture of a single pharmacist in the late 19th century continued in the early 20th century as a family business, and was fashioned in the 1920s as a professionally-managed corporation.

By 1900 Coca-Cola had become 'not simply a soft drink, but a phenomenon' (Pendergrast, 2000: 87). By 1912 it was reputedly the single best-advertised product in the US and 'had begun to permeate every aspect of American life' (Pendergrast, 2000: 89). In the era between the world wars, Coca-Cola made ingenious use of new, massively-consumed home and family implements such as the radio, refrigerator and automobile to advertise, market and dispense the drink. The Second World War gave the drink an immense boost. Its agents followed American troops on all fronts and served them. While being already an 'all-American' artifact, Coca-Cola acquired an even deeper emotional significance during the war. A letter from a soldier imparts the way in which Coke was widely

perceived by the American troops: 'a taste of home in the midst of the hell of war' (Pendergrast, 2000: 198):

> It's the little thing, not the big, that that the individual soldier fights for or wants so badly when away. It's the girlfriend back home in a drugstore over a Coke, or the jukebox and the summer weather … To have this drink is just like having home brought nearer to you; it's one of the little things of life that really counts. I can remember being at Ponce de Leon Park, watching the [Atlanta] Crackers play baseball as I filled up on Coca-Cola and peanuts. It's things such as this that all of us are fighting for. (cited in Pendergrast, 2000: 206)

Another wrote:

> To my mind, I am in this damn mess as much to help keep the custom of drinking Cokes as I am to help preserve the million other benefits our country blesses its citizens with. (cited in Kuisel, 1993: 53)

While the drink was sold abroad from the 1920s, its presence outside the US was meager. In the wake of the war, as if to vindicate the position of the US as a leading world power, Coca-Cola became truly international. In 1950, one-third of its profits came from abroad (Pendergrast, 2000: 233). Sales expanded exponentially; while it took decades to sell the first milliard gallons of Coca-Cola syrup, it took only seven years, from 1944 to 1953, to sell the second milliard (Pendergrast, 2000: 244). Being a conspicuous capitalist symbol in the eyes of both friends and foes, Coca-Cola accompanied America in the Cold War era. Being conceived by Americans as a representation of their culture, Coca-Cola came to be identified with America by others. For the communist world during the Cold War the drink represented 'degenerate capitalism' (Pendergrast, 2000: 234), to which the president of the corporation, Robert Woodruff, responded that 'it was natural for the Reds to resent Coca-Cola, since it was "the essence of capitalism"' (Pendergrast, 2000: 240). The essential role of Coca-Cola on the ideological front was splendidly depicted by the *New York Inquirer*:

> You can't spread the doctrine of Marx among people who drink Coca-Cola … The dark principles of revolution and a rising proletariat may be expounded over a bottle of vodka on a scarred table, or even a bottle of brandy; but it is utterly fantastic to imagine two men stepping up to a soda fountain and ordering a couple of Cokes in which to toast the downfall of their capitalist oppressors. (cited in Kuisel, 1993: 63)

Coca-Cola was still there when the Iron Curtain collapsed. In the event of the fall of the Berlin Wall the drink was part of the celebration. During the 1980s and 1990s, Coca-Cola further enhanced its universal image without missing any mega-opportunity (such as the Olympic Games) to make itself visible and identified with the 'spirit' of sport, music and joy.

Hence by 1945, observes Mark Pendergrast, the historian of the company, 'Coca-Cola *was* America' (2000: 206) and it 'developed a psychological significance akin to an icon or rare religious relic' (2000: 207).

Richard Kuisel, a cultural historian of France, comments that 'Perhaps no commercial product is more thoroughly identified with America than Coca-Cola' (1993: 52).

The advertisements for the drink have been soaked with a panoply of 'Americana' – views and sounds widely identified as symbols of American life such as shots of the Grand Canyon, wheat fields, cowboys, athletes and the Statue of Liberty, and Coca-Cola itself became a leading symbol of the all-American way of life and the 'American Dream'. More than any single other artifact, Coca-Cola succeeded in blending popular culture with a commercial product.

The special emotional significance of Coca-Cola to Americans, its unique status in American symbolic culture, gained striking expression in 1986, when the company announced a change in the taste of Coca-Cola in response to a steady small decline in its share of sales compared to the main competition, Pepsi-Cola. The announcement provoked an outcry and became a major topic of discussion for months. The public responded with grief and dismay. The company was inundated with messages of protest at the alteration of what had become a revered symbol of American tradition. As one letter put it: 'Would it be right to rewrite the Constitution? The Bible? To me, changing the Coke formula is of such a serious nature'; another wrote: 'There are only two things in my life: God and Coca-Cola. Now you have taken one of those things away from me' (Pendergrast, 2000: 356).

Under heavy pressure from consumers, who turned their backs on the new Coca-Cola, the company was finally compelled to return the old product, which it did under the name of 'Coca-Cola Classic' (skeptics allege, however, that the whole thing was a publicity stunt).

In sum, it became a convention to identify Coca-Cola as 'the American character in a can', as *Newsweek* put it (cited in Pendergrast, 2000: 354). As Pendergrast suggests, 'Coca-Cola was emblematic of the modern American attempt to package pleasure … an instant pick-me-up' (Pendergrast, 2000: 95). Yet, the 'American character' is not one solid whole, and one of Coca-Cola's features as a signifier has been its ability to denote the combined strands of that 'character': the special American blend of popular and commercial culture, the common American national sentiment, and the pervasive American capitalist (and anti-communist) ethos. Furthermore, Coca-Cola excelled in its historical and social flexibility: its image has continued to adapt to changes in cultural fashions and has kept expanding to newer consuming sectors, becoming more and more 'democratic' and 'inclusive'.

One secret of the success of Coca-Cola has been its versatility or even elasticity, such as its blend of the 'new' and the 'traditional'. The image of the drink has changed over time, always representing the spirit of the age. So, for example, while in the first half of the 20th century it depicted American 'family values', it was also quick to latch onto the more profligate

youth culture in the second half of the century. This found expression, *inter alia*, in the female figures appearing in the drink's advertisement: over the years they became thinner and more sexually explicit. The design of the Coca-Cola bottle illustrates the way in which Coca-Cola adapted itself to American taste. In 1916 Coca-Cola designed its uniquely shaped bottle (Pendergrast, 2000). Stuart Ewen, a student of popular culture, explains that Coca-Cola's 'hobble-skirt' bottle (nicknamed 'Mae West') was inspired by the bounteous ideals of Victorian womanhood. The indented waist of it separated a full bosom from broad hips. Fifty years later in 1996, the design of the bottle was brought up to date by drawing upon the changed profile of idealized femininity: the bottled was elongated, and thus put on a diet (Ewen, 1988; Loewy, 1979).[2]

Coca-Cola is one the most, if not the most, recognized icons of modern American culture.[3] The particular shape of its bottle, and the blown logo in its glass surface, represents what cultural analyst David Nye describes as 'the fusions of materiality and meaning through the praxis of design' (1997: 93). The Coca-Cola bottle 'was more than a guarantee of origins; it was advertisement, trademark and product, rolled into one' (1997: 69). In Nye's interpretation, icons of modern consumer culture play a necessary cultural function; they preserve the sense of the 'real' (or authentic) in a world becoming increasingly artificial. In this regard they play a role equivalent to the platonic form: all Coke bottles in the world 'represent' the 'Real Thing' – one of Coca-Cola's most known advertising campaigns ('an icon's form appears to transcend variability and time, to become an idealized object'; 1997: 102).

In addition to American 'authenticity', the icon has what Nye calls a kinetic impact: its visual form is identified with its sensory qualities (in the case of Coca-Cola, the sense of a cool, fizzy and refreshing liquid, a theme intensively elaborated in the advertisements). Coca-Cola, like other items-turned-icons of its kind such as Marlboro cigarettes, blue jeans or McDonald's hamburgers, came to manifest what Nye calls 'the consumer's sublime' of America (1997: 106–7).

Today, Coca-Cola is the top brand in the world with revenues of $67 billion, followed in order respectively by Microsoft, IBM, GE, Intel, Nokia, Toyota, Disney, McDonald's and Mercedes-Benz (*Business Week*, 2006).

The question presented here assumes an additional weight now: what has the 'American character in a can' or the 'consumer's sublime' of America to look for in the realm of Allah? Let us turn now to a few further cases beyond Mecca Cola which demonstrate the effect of 'Coca-Colonization'.

Mega-Cola

Muslim societies, like all world societies, live today under the 'Coca-Cola impact', a shorthand term for the commodification, McDonaldization or

Americanization of the world. Mecca Cola is a product of this zeitgeist. Notwithstanding the declared intent of blocking and countering American cultural influence over the Muslim and Arab world, Mecca Cola is in fact not a response to Coca-Cola, but stands for the categorical adaptation to 'Coca-Cola-ism' or 'Coca-Colonialism'. The fact that consumers 'drink committed' rather then 'drink stupid', as Mecca Cola advertisements suggest, does not reduce the impact of Americanization as culture but only amplifies it, even while 'America' as a state is being vilified.[4] That Muslim culture undergoes such a process of adaptation is documented by other studies. Such studies underscore the extent to which, in order to persist in the context of a global commercial culture created by global corporations such as Coca-Cola, Muslim culture must adapt to the practical ways of life, symbolic codes and material culture of consumer society. Therefore, the more people succeed in 'drinking committed' (Mecca Cola), the more in fact they 'drink stupid' (Coca-Cola).

In their study of the 'branding' of Islamic mosques, Hilday Teegen and Marta Teegen (2000) argue that in today's world, Muslim culture is 'branded' and 'marketed', indeed 'objectified', along lines similar to those of commercial merchandizing. In their study of the 'visual language' of mosques located in urban environments in Cairo, Los Angeles and New York, they found that the symbols used to mark the exterior of storefront mosques are constructed with aims comparable to those applied by commercial corporations: gaining 'customer' loyalty to the 'product', the perceived quality of the 'product', positive associations with the 'product' and 'product' awareness. This is expressed in the visible decorative forms of storefront mosques, such as the usage of Arabic fonts or Arabic words in Latin alphabet in textual signs; the display of dome-shaped images, which are at times cut out of plywood and attached to signs or the buildings; and the extensive use of the color green in decorations on the mosques.

Teegen and Teegen comment that 'the standardized symbols found on the exteriors of storefront mosques have taken on a fixed meaning (namely Islam) and … they are strung together into a coherent picture of the whole' (Teegen and Teegen, 2000: 230). They emphasize that the visual signs which came to be identified as 'Islamic' do not necessarily represent the distinct traditions of the communities who practice Islam in these mosques. Moreover, the creation of a 'standardized' version of Islam by its branding diminishes the great heterogeneity among Muslim communities. By incorporating dome images into storefront mosques, 'Muslims have … successfully appropriated an image identified with Islam in a Euro-American tradition (through such films as Disney's *Aladdin*) in their process of self-identification' (Teegen and Teegen, 2000: 228). In other words, Muslim identity publicizes and reproduces itself through corporate-made images produced by corporations such as Disney, and in

the case of the soft drink, by Coca-Cola. To use Benjamin's Barber powerful metaphors, *jihad* is a creation of McWorld, not its opposite (Barber, 1995: 157).[5] In Teegen and Teegen's words:

> As commodities-on-display, storefront Mosques are themselves sites of consumption; the decorative vocabulary employed on their exteriors is the result of the internalization of a perceived idea of what constitutes an Islamic identity (the so-called 'Disneyfication' of Islam). (Teegen and Teegen, 2000: 230)

What indeed takes place behind the backs of Muslim believers is that religious practice is rendered into commercial forms. This translation, while apparently leaving religion intact or even enhanced, in fact changes radically the meaning of religion, making it into a commodity. Thus

> the investment in the creation of a brand image by the producer of a product or by leaders of a religious community is in effect the creation of a social norm within the relevant market segment … By branding a religion, followship is created through social networks … as in a commercial setting where brand images must visually represent key customer benefits, brands for religions must use symbols and icons that are supported by/positively associated with the (religious) beliefs. (Teegen and Teegen, 2000: 231)

This process of 'marketization' of religion is embedded in the context of globalization. In the case of the mosques, the context is an urban global space. The two opposing mega-trends of globalization are at work here: practical (even material) homogenization, which levels distinctions; and symbolic heterogenization, which is made necessary exactly because of the global 'ironing' of differences. While any 'product' must turn into a standardized 'brand', it must also be branded slightly differently from others in order to gain a promotional advantage over them. Thus, on the one hand, the marketing of Islamic space involves the collapsing of heterogeneity into a single global practice, while on the other, 'local' identity is carefully differentiated from a 'competition' by its visual symbols (such as Arabic calligraphy, dome shapes and green colors). Teegen and Teegen label this process of branding a 'strategic response to globalization' (2000: 232). In summary, Teegen and Teegen maintain that

> strategically, the three symbolic elements: the color green, the dome images and Arabic text elements reduce Islam to a common denominator that can safely transcend the various divisions and distinctions within the faith, and thus the brand's value is enhanced globally in terms of loyalty, association and awareness in particular. (2000: 232)

Another case is offered by Yael Navaro-Yashim's study of the 'fashioning' of the Islamic veil and other attire. Whereas Teegen and Teegen analyze the 'branding' of Islam, Navaro-Yashin analyses the 'fashioning' of Islam. She reports how in Turkey in the 1980s and 1990s, during a period of tension between secular nationalist modernizers (bearers of Atatürk's

heritage) and Islamic (neo-)traditionalists (followers of Turgut Ozal), the commodities market emerged as one of the major arenas in which contending identities were constructed around goods which served as 'identity markers' for each side, so that 'there were now commodities to label every identity' (Navaro-Yashin, 2002: 229).

Navaro-Yashim reports that:

> Politics of culture between secularists and Islamists in Turkey in the [time] … developed in the context of consumer market influenced by globalization [and] so central was consumerism to the social life of this period that political conflicts were organized, expressed and mediated through this medium. (2002: 222)

In fact, capitalism in general, and consumerist capitalism in particular, advanced in Turkey in two parallel versions, secular and religious, so that 'there is now [a] fully fledged commodity market for both Islamist and secularist identities in Turkey'. Navaro-Yashin relates further that 'cultural identities were packaged up to be assumed in commodity form. Battles over political difference were waged through the medium of consumption' (2002: 223). And so, as new goods were put on the market by companies, new forms of 'being' and 'identity' were shaped as well. Businesses began to craft and sell 'Turkish authenticity', whether secularist or Islamist. Consumers assumed that there was 'authenticity' in what they wore and ate, although market-produced (2002: 230).

Of special interest, because of their visibility and because they have come to symbolize a 'clash of civilizations' in Europe, especially France, are the veil and the headscarf. Since the mid-1980s they appeared in the public sphere in Turkey as elsewhere in the Muslim world, and little later also in Europe, as the ultimate symbol of Islamization, and hence one of the most acrimonious bones of contention between secularists and fundamentalists. This re-traditionalization in the conditions of present-day globalization has acquired the name of 'New Veiling' (MacLeod, 1991). Cinar Alev describes the rivalries grouped around the veiling issue as a 'new political paradigm' (2005: 85).[6]

What is important from the perspective of this study is that women's veils, as well as headscarves, overcoats and other 'Islamic' female outfits and attire, have become commodified and fashioned. One businessman from the Tekbir brand, which grants itself the title of 'The world trademark in covered women's clothing', related his concept of Islamic consumerism, especially women's traditionalist 'covered' fashion:

> There were women who decided to cover after seeing the varieties in our exhibition. We worked on this concept in our advertisements: we used the images of covered women as doctors, students and business executives. Women thought that they would be forced to 'enter sack' [i.e. dress dowdily] if they practiced Islam. We broke this conception. All organs of the media had to

> admit that covering is beautiful. What preachers could not accomplish through their sermons, we were able to communicate through our shops and fashion shops. (cited in Navaro-Yashin, 2002: 235)

Yet it did not escape the gaze of more orthodox Muslims that hedonistic capitalism and ascetic Islamism can hardly prevail together. As a Muslim columnist wrote:

> We opposed … fashion shows on the grounds that they eroded a thrifty philosophy of life and the Islamic principles of modesty, asceticism, and abstention from worldly pleasures. These fashion shows were approved by Muslims who submitted to the hegemony of capitalist relations of business. (cited in Navaro-Yashin, 2002: 242).

Navaro-Yashin summarizes the transmutation of the veil (and other such symbols) under the conditions of consumerism in a Baudrillardian reflection upon the 'pure signifier':

> Now women consumed 'veils' in and of themselves, rather than for what they stood for. The struggle for Islamic life and politics had been diluted, in the process of consumerism, into a struggle for 'the veil' alone. It was no longer required of signifiers to even produce neat effects of reality. *Tekbir* veils did not have to represent 'Islamic morality' in an unproblematic way for them to be popularly worn. Veils were only signifiers now, not requiring the other half of the orderly binary pair (a signified). (Navaro-Yashin, 2002: 242)

Navaro-Yashim's own interpretation of her very perceptive observations differs from the interpretation of the same findings which is offered in this article (as expounded more fully below). She accepts the commodification of meaning and authenticity as a common fact, arguing that the fact that identities are produced in the context of the marketplace 'does not diminish their personal or existential meaning and potency' (Navaro-Yashin, 2002: 242). In her view, since identities are not 'real' in the essentialist sense of the term, it does not matter that they are commodified. However, in such a case she loses any critical grounds and has to accept any constructed identity at its face value.

Comparable observations regarding the fashioning of the Muslim female headscarf and related accessories in Turkey are offered by Ozlem Sandikci and Gulez Ger. They also find that consumerism had a great impact on the practices associated with women's covered fashion. They find a major concern of Muslim women with 'beautification'; 'to be well groomed, adorned and beautiful', and they indicate that 'this concern might have been considered as conflicting with two tenets of Islam: avoidance of waste and sexual attention' (Sandikci and Ger, 2004: 75). Yet in their view, 'the emphasis on appearance indicates not only changes in what religious covering means, but at a deeper level the quest for being 'modern' (2004: 78). They contest the notion of a contrast between 'Islam' and 'consumerism' and argue that, rather than considering the scarf to be a 'fixed signifier' of either oppression or opposition, it may

be considered an 'unstable sign', 'a cultural codifier of the tensions and promises of modernity' (2004: 78). They maintain that there is no reason to identify veiled women with traditionality: 'The headscarf ruptures this linear and structural reading of the relationship between Western fashion and modernity, complicating the notion that there is no space for fashion and modernity in Islam' (2004: 78). However, their argument is cyclical. If they convince their readers that there is no tension between Islam and consumerism in contemporary Turkey, they convince them that the Islamic mode of life has been rendered into something undifferentiated from modern capitalist culture. As Olivier Roy puts it, 'When everything has to be Islamic, nothing is' (Roy, 2004: 40). In this case the veil may be considered indeed as just another fashion item of shopping, beautification and other consumerist rituals. But how did this come to pass? Let us now turn again to the meta-empirical concerns raised at the beginning of the article.

Meta-Cola

In the literature on relations between the global and the local, there are two major approaches to the questions of authenticity versus commodification, and the local versus the global: one which gives priority to commodified homogenization, and one which gives priority to local (neo)-traditional heterogenization. The former generally predicts the Americanization of various cultures; the latter usually registers the resilience of local cultures and a variety of fusions between the global and the local. The impulse of the 'local' suspends, refines, or diffuses intakes from the 'global', so that 'authentic', traditional and local cultures do not dissolve; rather, they ingest global flows. The former approach is known as cultural imperialism, Disneyization, Coca-Colonization and McDonaldization (Bryman, 1999; Ritzer, 1995; Tomlinson, 1991; Wagenleitner, 1994); the latter is known as creolization, hybridization and indigenization (Bhabha, 1994; Hannertz, 2000; Nederveen Pieterse, 2003). For the sake of simplicity we shall call the former a 'one-way' approach, seeing the effect as emanating from the commodified global to the 'authentic' local; and the latter a 'two-way' approach, seeing the effect as an interchange between the two poles.

George Ritzer is among the most prominent advocates of the one-way approach. In his book *The McDonaldization of Society* (1995), he considers globalization as a sweeping and unequivocal homogenization based on technological efficiency, or what Max Weber defined as instrumental rationalization. From this perspective, McDonaldization is an upgraded version of the prevalent rationalization of the 'lifeworld', a process destined to annul all sorts of 'local' or 'authentic' cultures. It is not difficult to discern here the footprints of both liberal and Marxist theories of modernization.

Daniel Miller is an advocate of the two-way approach. He considers consumers to be active agents who construct their identity through the material objects that they consume. In his view:

> Estonians, Trinidadians and Philippines all seek to lay claim to what may be regarded as the modernity style of Coca-Cola or Marlboro cigarettes, but in all three cases they have developed mechanisms for disaggregating the qualities symbolized by Western goods into those that they are able to desire to accept as against those qualities that they see as evil or at least inauthentic to themselves. (Miller, 1998: 18)

Miller believes in the 'ability of groups to use the variable objectifications available in a range of commodities to create much more subtle and discriminatory process of incorporation and rejection than that allowed for in simple models of Americanization or globalization' (Miller, 1998: 18). He thus adopts from Hegel and Marx the theory of 'objectification', the development of culture through the externalization of created objects: artifacts, and their sublimation as part of the subjects' enhanced identity. Yet by denying the disruptive moment of alienation, the estrangement of the objects-cum-commodities under capitalist relations of production, he removes from this approach its critical sting.

Based upon the cases and examples discussed above this article now wishes to offer a resolution to the theoretical dichotomy which disrupts the literature and to suggest a way to transcend the one-way/two way, commodification/authenticity or global/local controversy. This proposal reinforces a model suggested earlier, based on analysis of the 'McDonaldization' of Israel (Ram, 2004). In place of this dichotomy a model is proposed which differentiates the effects of global commodification on two distinct societal levels. It works as follows: both perspectives are valid, yet they apply to discrete societal levels. The one-way approach is restricted to one level of social reality, the structural–institutional level: patterns and practices which are inscribed into material culture, institutions and organizations; the two-way approach is restricted to the symbolic-expressive level of social reality: the level of explicit symbolization. Finally, in the model suggested here, the one-way structural homogenization process and the two-way symbolic heterogenization processes are the diverse effects of a unitary system.

Whereas each of the rival perspectives in the commodification–authenticity encounter is attuned to only one of these levels, it is proposed that commodified globalization be seen as a compositional process that is simultaneously one-sided and two-sided, but on two distinct societal levels: on the structural level, commodified globalization is a one-way street; but on the symbolic level, it is two-way street.

Hence the two-way approach to globalization–commodification, which highlights the persistence of cultural 'difference', is valid empirically, but it does not provide a satisfactory theoretical analysis. It rightly accounts

for the diversity which does not succumb to homogeneity – Mecca Cola appeals to Muslim concerns; Mosques are attractive by their colors and shapes; the veil and other women's cover clothing items are popular. But all this happens on the symbolic level. The 'difference' that renders the local distinctive, or 'authentic', has managed to subsist or even flourish anew. Yet at the same time, on the structural level, commodification, the great leveler of 'sameness', prevails: Mecca has become Coca-Colonized; the Mosque has become branded; the veil has become a fashion.[7]

So, while on the symbolic level Islam may not only be preserved, but revived, the actual, even material, terms of life in consumptive Islamic societies coincide with those of other capitalist societies. The common language formed in institutions and practices is the practical language of commercial–instrumental–technological social organization, of the commodification–rationalization of social relationships, material culture, production and consumption. This practical language prevails, even as it tolerates, or at points even promotes, diverse expressive–symbolic languages.

The distinction drawn here between the structural and the symbolic levels, wherein the former is globally homogenized and commodified, while the latter retains local heterogeneity and authenticity, is not entirely new. It was presaged in two contemporary classical analyses, one by Dean MacCannell (1989) and the other by Herbert Gans (1996). In his study of modern tourism, MacCannell (1989) proposed the concept of 'staged authenticity', a commercially manufactured touristic 'authenticity' which incorporates the 'other' within the modern western middle-class order. In his study of ethnic identity in America, Gans (1996) proposed the concept of 'symbolic ethnicity': a nostalgic allegiance of (third-generation) immigrants to the country of origin of their ancestors; a putative 'ethnic revival' which attests to their acculturation and assimilation in the new country. In these cases 'modernity' and 'America', respectively, display the same fundamental characteristics discerned here with regard to commodified globalization: a deep-seated structural uniformity encrusted with a veneer of symbolic diversity.[8]

In other words, the variety of local cultural identities 'licensed' and even manufactured under global capitalist commercial expansion disguises the unified formula of capital, enhancing its legitimacy and fostering its sales. It is in this vein that Fredric Jameson (1991) contends that the kaleidoscope of identities and styles that characterizes postmodern culture is, in fact, an expression of the new – global post-Fordist – production system. The oft-changing, oft-fragmenting cycles of postmodern consumption suit the technologically-driven cycles of production, by constantly creating new markets and constantly marketing inventions. Postmodernity, and the new authenticity and identity that it fosters, divulge the cultural logic of post-Fordist capitalism (Jameson, 1991).[9]

This study has shown a number of instances of the process whereby global commodities appropriate local traditions. Rick Fantasia's deduction about the commercialized, standardized croissant in France is equally applicable to the case presented here: 'the medium (of the social organization of fast food) is the message, and not simply the exchange of equivalent cultural "tastes"' (Fantasia, 1995: 234). Indeed, from the end-user's or individual consumer's perspective, the particular explicit symbolic 'difference' may be a source of some emotional gratification; but from the perspective of the social structure, the system of production, consumption and material culture, what matters is the exact opposite – namely, the implicit structural homogenization spawned by commodification.

This study has illustrated the tensions between commodified and 'authentic' identities and symbols thereof, and has proposed that the relations between the global commodification and the 'authentic' local should be considered as a composite of the structural and symbolic levels, a composite in which the structural inherently appropriates the symbolic, yet without explicitly abolishing it. It proposes the term 'glocommodification' to capture this model of the subsuming of local symbols by commodified structures. Glocommodification is the general drift towards, on the one hand, planetary commodification and instrumentalization, and on the other, towards a proliferation of symbols of local and 'authentic' identities. Mecca Cola achieves the opposite of what it declares it does: it dispenses the Muslim idiom into the vessels of American commodificd culture. While 'Mecca' wins symbolically, 'Cola' wins structurally.

Notes

1. George Ritzer (2003) discusses the difference between the authentic and inauthentic in terms of 'something' versus 'nothing'.
2. For a history and analysis of Coca-Cola's bottle, see Gilborn (1978). In another interpretation the Coca-Cola bottle is described as a 'breast substitute' (Berger, 1970: 31).
3. Icons are images and ideas converted into three dimensions. They are admired artifacts, external expressions of internal convictions, everyday things that make every day meaningful: from the Greek *eikon* – 'an object of uncritical devotion' (Fishwick, 1978).
4. One has to distinguish of course between Americanization as a deep-level process, and the circumstantial objections to American foreign or military policies.
5. In a parallel though distinct argument, Roy (2004) suggests that the new militant Islamism is in large part a result of modern conditions rather than a return to pre-modern ones. (Further discussion of his convincing views would lead us outside the confines of this article.)
6. Alev's (2005) exuberant study explores the cultural dimensions of the rivalry between modernity versus traditionalism in Turkey, and argues that both harness identity politics using similar techniques and for similar modern national projects.

7. The logic of the argument can be illustrated through the example of national flags. On the explicit level, each of the world's 186 national flags is unique in terms of its symbolic make-up (colors, figures, etc.), making it significant to the people that it represents. But on an implicit level, all flags share the same code of 'national "flagness"', so to speak: they consist of a piece of colored cloth on a pole and, more importantly, they lend their followers a sense of common national identity. The same is true of the beverages, the designs and clothes discussed here. While they look 'different', their production and consumption relations, and the material culture that they involve, are the 'same' as the rest of the world.
8. Transnational corporations are quick to take advantage of multiculturalism, post-colonialism and ethnography, and exploit genuine cultural concerns to their benefit. It is worth quoting at some length a former Coca-Cola marketing executive:

   > Concept. We don't change the concept. What we do is maybe change the music, maybe change the execution, certainly change the casting, but in terms of what it sounds like and what it looks like and what it is selling, at a particular point in time, we have kept it more or less patterned ... [Our activity] has been all keyed on a local basis, overlaid with an umbrella of the global strategy. We have been dealing with various ethnic demographic groups with an overall concept. Very recently ... the company has moved to a more fragmented approach, based on the assumption that the media today is fragmented and that each of these groups that are targeted by that media core should be communicated to in their own way with their own message, with their own sound, with their own visualization. (Ohmann, 1996: 6–7)

9. Mattel, the manufacturer of the famed Barbie doll, provides another case of the commodification of identities. Recently, the company decided to diversify the doll's wardrobe with various 'folk customs'. Barbie, who in 1959 began life as a slim American blonde, became multiracial and multinational in the 1980s. One million Barbie dolls are sold each week in 140 countries (see Varney, 1998). Some are supposed to embody in color and form, garments and accessories, the local (feminine) style. But as Varney observes, the 'local' versions of Barbie are shallow, fabricated images of the texture of local life, which is crushed underneath the global marketing press. As local identity is lost, multinational Barbies and their counterparts become the only available signifiers of local cultures. Hence, ironically, the Barbie doll, like other global commodities, offers a surrogate 'identity', a substitute for the absence of a creation of their own. (For a similar analysis of commercial appropriation of the postmodern and post-colonial discourse on 'difference', see Ono and Buescher (2001), who deciphers the commodification of native American women in the movie *Pocahontas*; and Shugart et al. (2001), who analyze the appropriation of feminist themes in the media. For the composite model suggested here, see also Ram, 2004.)

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