

Lifestyle and Ground-setting Training: Exploring the Muslim Culture and Identity

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Introduction

Nowadays, in the Western capitalist world, the religious culture is understood as the determinant of the national identity which is used to get the capital and to win it from the other in the era of liberal industry, so that why the Americans who were religiously converted into Islam were no longer called Americans, but Moslems or quasi-Americans. In this context, national identity marker is politically dealing with the religious identity in the paradigm of culture to win the social modal. In the discourse of global politic, the West and Americans are identical with Christianity; Middle East and Arabs are identical with Islam, and India is identical with Hindu. Therefore, the Western people identify themselves and others with the religious identity which they have followed via the role of cultural elements.

A lifestyle as the main signifier of religious cultural elements has a strategic power to justify the self identity. Lifestyle is the typical way of life of an individual or group in the paradigm of culture. The term was originally used by

Austrian psychologist Alfred Adler (1870-1937). Bernstein states that the term lifestyle was introduced in the 1900s as a derivative of that of style in modernist art.¹ A lifestyle typically reflects an individual's attitudes, values or world view. Therefore, a lifestyle is a means of forging a sense of self and to create cultural symbols that resonate with personal identity. Not all aspects of a lifestyle are voluntary. Surrounding social and technical systems can constrain the lifestyle choices available to the individual and the symbols he is able to project to others and the self.² Lifestyle may include views on politics, religion, health, intimacy, and more. All of these aspects play a role in shaping someone's lifestyle.

Postmodern scholars suggest that all people construct lifestyle as a cultural identity through an ongoing process that resembles the writing, reading and interpretation of a social text. From this view, people continually create and debate with each other about the meaning of all aspects of culture, such as words, performances and concepts. People in Muslim countries, for instance, have long debated over cultural issues such as what constitutes a family, what Muslim women's and men's roles in society should be, what kinds of Islamic lifestyle should be performed. Many anthropologists now study and write about these kinds of questions, even in their own societies.

The term lifestyle is, of course, a contested term with multiple meanings in various contexts and discourses. In the context of semiotics, lifestyle can be viewed as the sum of rule-governed, shared, learned and learnable, transmittable, symbolic activity used by a group in any given place and

¹ J.M. Bernstein (1991) Introduction, in Adorno (1991), p. 23; cf. Adorno (1991) The Culture Industry - Selected essays on mass culture

² G. Spaargaren and B. van Vliet (2000) 'Lifestyle, Consumption and the Environment: The Ecological Modernisation of Domestic Consumption.' *Environmental Politics*. 9(1): 50-70.

time. Lotman (1990) states that lifestyle as a manifestation of culture is the generator of structuredness and the nonhereditary memory of the community.¹ Meanings, values, significance circulate in second-order languages (symbols, values and images) that use both ordinary language (one's native language) and other sign-systems like visual images, mass media, and information technology. All these ways of transmitting shared and stored meanings involve a mediated content. To be in a culture means to be in preexisting but constantly changing sign-systems. This includes lifestyle and its relation with the Muslim culture and identity: values that come from advertising, the entertainment industry, the media, and icons of style and are targeted to the ordinary people in society. These values are distinguished, and at the same time, undistinguished from those espoused by more political, educational, or religious institutions.

Yet, in this context, the religious institutions have a role to create a discourse of the Islamic lifestyle as an identity marker via ground-setting training, and this mission is to build a society for preparing the owner of the future, for the appearance of the Islamic Messiah. Here, the ground-setting training on the Islamic lifestyle is a type of Islamic education that makes this Muslim society accept the requirements of the province and the role of the Messiah of Islam.

Muslim Lifestyle in the Light of Messianic Culture

Postmodern scholars suggest that all people construct lifestyle as a cultural identity through an ongoing process. In

¹ Jurij M. Lotman, *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*, translated by Ann Shukman. London & New York: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 1990, p. xiii. See also, Jurij M. Lotman; Uspenskij B.A.; Ivanov, V.V.; Toporov, V.N. and Pjatigorskij, A.M. (1970). "Theses on the Semiotic Study of Cultures (as Applied to Slavic Texts)" in Sebeok Thomas A. (ed.), *The Tell-Tale Sign: A Survey of Semiotics*. Lisse (Netherlands): Peter de Ridder, 1970, pp. 07-18.

this context, the Muslims early constructed the lifestyle as a cultural identity through an ongoing process too, and they lead a lifestyle that is characterized by following God's commands in the Qur'an and the teachings of the prophet of Islam, doing good deeds for the benefit of the self, community and environment. The episteme of Islamic lifestyle as one of cultural identities, however, refers to the *textus receptus* and the aspects of Muslim lifestyle may be grouped under two wings. The first wing is adopting the five pillars of Islam. These five pillars are, in brief: (١) testimony that God is the One God and that Muhammad is God's Messenger, (٢) praying, (٣) paying specific compulsory charity, (٤) fasting month of Ramadan, (٥) performing *hajj* by whom can afford it. The second wing is performing good deeds for sake of God and for gaining his mercy and satisfaction; among these deeds are: (١) keeping good relations with relatives, neighbours, friends, colleagues in work and all community people, (٢) doing work with good quality and honesty, (٣) respecting the old and be kind to the younger, (٤) be humble to parents and kind to them, (٥) helping the poor, the sick and all who needs help, (٦) being honest and faithful, not gambling, not drinking alcohols, and not performing sex outside marriage and etc. These aspects of Islamic lifestyle, however, are the habits, attitudes, tastes, moral standards, economic level and etc., that together constitute the mode of living of an individual or group among the Muslims and this is a way of life or style of living that reflects the attitudes and values of a person or group. For performing the Muslim lifestyle in the first and the second wings, the religious institutions (*marja'iyah*) have a responsibility to lead the Muslim people through the guidance of Islamic law (*fiqh*) and the Islamic law itself is a manifestation of Islamic education in

an ongoing process in the context of each own history and each own culture. In other words, religious institutions and the Islamic law are like a coin for manifesting the icon of Muslim lifestyle in the paradigm of Islamic education. Therefore, the Muslim lifestyle in the light of Islamic education is a way of living of individuals, families (households), and societies, which they manifest in coping with their physical, psychological, social, and economic environments on a day-to-day basis through the Islamic law. Lifestyle in Islamic education is expressed in both work and leisure behaviour patterns in all activities, attitudes, interests, opinions, values, and allocation of income. It also reflects people's self image or self concept; the way they see themselves and believe they are seen by the others. Lifestyle is a composite of motivations, needs, and wants and is influenced by factors such as culture, family, reference groups, and social class.

Yet, these manifestations of Muslim lifestyle are based on proclaiming the belief on the existence of God and this idea has its relation with the ground setting for appearance of the expected one. On one hand, the believing is in fact ground setting for the expressing the Muslim lifestyle; and on other hand, the waiting is in fact ground setting for the appearance of the Mahdi (AS) and the mission of those who are waiting is to build an ideal society which is prepared for the appearance of the Mahdi (AS) as the Islamic Messiah. The ground setting training is a type of education that makes this type of society which fulfils the requirements of the province and the rule of the Holy Imam and its acceptance by individuals and society in general. The creating the Muslim lifestyle through the Islamic law and Islamic codes in the paradigm of ground setting education is no different from the Islamic education because its emphasis is placed on the role of Imam as in education. The principles emphasize the centrality of Imam and its centrality in matters of selection of the goals. Therefore, the ground setting training is a messianic manifesto to build an ideal society performing the global lifestyle in the domain of global ethics of Islam which is so-called messianic consciousness.

Messianic manifesto (Mahdism) as *ens realissimus* nowadays is, of course, a globally theological perspective to build up the new justice global order in the light of global ethics for expressing the global lifestyle for the coming era of happiness; it is further a spirit to fight against the tyranny of societal powers and cultural abuse. Obviously, the spirit of Mahdism in Islam is to end the cultural riot and emptiness of humanness that is a messianic manifestation to end the collective violence in the world of capitalist globalization. The cultural riot is a cultural violence in the era of capitalist globalization through the *status quo* of quasi-religions, ideologies, and secretive languages. Mahdism which politically reflects the concept of 'expectation' is the secretive consciousness of culture within the global village to fight against the satanic cultural supremacy, injustice and the bad doers expansion among the righteous men. Therefore, the existence of the heavenly ancient writings that voices the messianic consciousness in the world is a significant document of a global village. This world which is a well-known cliché, however, is the house of the global society to embody the messianic consciousness for paving the ground of the coming of the global awaited savior; and the messianic culture is ground setting for the appearance of the Holy Imam through the ground setting education of those who are waiting is to build a society which is prepared for his coming. Thus, as a solution, we have to realize the use of messianic culture in the global societies to fight against the capitalist society through the role of media culture to inject the Muslim lifestyle globally. Therefore, the messianic culture indeed creates the future for performing the representation of religious symbols through the culture industry.

In the political studies, the concept of Mahdism, is the deepest spirit of Aryan/ Semitic religious political movement. As an Arabic term, Mahdism, has an equivalent with the messianism in the theological orientation of the

West-Christianity. It also represents the political orientation of secular Western people to wait the golden era of capitalist globalization through a figure of messianic statesman. As the imitation of materialistic culture of the Latin Christianity which was historically derived from the Hellenic Christianity, the capitalist messianism of the West also inherited the messianic mythology of Ancient Greek in the era of the renaissance. The Western capitalists adopted, adapted, and reformulated the Latin messianic idea in the paradigm of post-modernism, secularism, materialism, and then they used it to find the form of other messianic, that was, the capitalist global messianism to represent the matrix as the hegemonic cultural globalization. In the episteme of the West, one source of confusion is that the term 'messianic' has much wider range of meaning than Messiah. The term 'messianic' is usually applied to everything in the Bible when it refers to the hope of glorious future. This suggests that central feature of the coming golden era is the expectation of the global savior. But, that fact, is hotly debated, for in the minds of most scholars today, the oldest and most general expectation was for the coming era of happiness. Many scholars concerned to a messianic idea, only in much later times, according to this academic consensus, was the hope of the Messiah connected with this expectation.

Islamic Lifestyle, Technology and Media Culture

Islam and technology are like a couple; Islam is the spirit and technology is the tool, and in this context, Islamic lifestyle has a power in the light of the technology to promote and to expose the messianic culture. However, technology and diversity have greatly changed the lives of people in society. Technology has positive and negative effects on our daily lives. However, the positivity and negativity of technology depends on how much we use it

and how much we are exposed to it. In other words, our lifestyle controls our use of technology, while technology influences our lifestyles. To begin, technology has changed the fields of agriculture, manufacturing, warfare, transportation, information, medicine, communication etc., among others. Technology has also made it easier for other factors to affect our lifestyles, such as the media. All in all, technology has made our lives much easier therefore we no longer are required to live vigorous lifestyles that, in the past, contributed to the decline in our health. On the other hand, technology has complicated many lives and has many negative effects. Technology has the power to deliver media to us that can change our values and views on the world, which in return will change our lifestyles. Also, technology has negative effects on the environment such as pollution. Because of technology such as the computer and the television, Americans have a much more sedentary lifestyle which leads to health complications and issues.

Meanwhile, in cultural studies, media culture has a link with technology; and it refers to the current Western capitalist society that emerged and developed from the ۲۰th century, under the influence of mass media. The term alludes to the overall impact and intellectual guidance exerted by the media (primarily TV, but also the press, radio and cinema), not only on public opinion but also on tastes and values. The alternative term mass culture conveys the idea that such culture emerges spontaneously from the masses themselves, like popular art did before the ۲۰th century. The expression media culture, on the other and, conveys the idea that such culture is the product of the mass media. Another alternative term for media culture is image culture.^۱ Media culture is often considered as a system

^۱ A Giddens (۱۹۹۱). *Modernity and self-identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press, p. ۳۵.

centered on the manipulation of the mass of society. Corporate media are used primarily to represent and reproduce dominant ideologies. Prominent in the development of this perspective has been the work of Theodor Adorno since the 1940s. Media culture is associated with consumerism, and in this sense called alternatively consumer culture.

In Islamic point of view, the ground setting training/education for the appearance of the Mahdi of Islam, media culture is not considered as a system centered on the manipulation of society and to represent or reproduce dominant ideologies but it is indeed considered as a system centered on the enlightenment of society and to represent the messianic consciousness of the people on most general expectation which was for the coming era of happiness through the acceptance of global ethics of Islam to affect our lifestyles. This is a key element to create the Muslim lifestyle in the light of messianic culture whereas people always dream of better things with no social problems; and according to religious teachings when the savior as a manifestation of the messianic consciousness emerges the world will become full of all these better concepts. Furthermore, this messianic consciousness becomes an encouragement and motivation of Muslims to build society upholding justice, peace, and quality of life in unity and togetherness as well as overthrowing tyranny. The motivation, of course, must be an established spirit in waiting the presence of Imam Mahdi (AS).

Ground Setting Training

However, lifestyle as an identity marker can be transformed and presented in four pillars for ground setting training, and the religious institutions also play a crucial role to the efforts: (1) manifesting the messianic consciousness in Islamic education, (2) transferring the Islamic ideology and

Islamic civilization in education, (۳) integrating religious and general sciences, (۴) training on the messianic culture via technology and media culture.

۱. Manifesting the Messianic Consciousness in Islamic Education

Messianic consciousness as a mind-set of messianic culture is power, becoming the house of being of our humanity. Even, the messianic consciousness itself is the real manifesto of our heavenly consciousness to believe the Absolute Being. This messianic consciousness in the viewpoint of Abrahamic faiths is surely a significant portion to represent a common ground of our belief in the scriptures. To create a new understanding of the Semitic scriptures on that consciousness is to make possible a new effect of that scriptures on us as the Abrahamic ancient writings. And to make possible a new effect is in turn to provide the conditions for rereading the Semitic culture that the writings reflected. To expose and question that complex of ideas about Mahdism as the episteme of messianic consciousness which exist in our society and are confirmed in the ancient writings is to make the system of power embodied in the sacred writings open not only to discussion even to change. Such questioning and exposure can, of course, be carried on only by a consciousness radically different from the one that informs that sacred literatures. Such a closed system can not be opened up from within but only from without. It must be entered into from a point of view which questions its values and assumptions and which has its investment in making available to consciousness precisely that which the divine literatures wish to keep hidden. Here, both textual criticism and historical criticism will provide that point and embody that messianic consciousness as '*ens realissimus*'. The messianic consciousness is a real consciousness as such in the *Reshīt*

Da'at Sefat 'Eber proclaiming about the appearance of the Messiah *par excellence* in the Jewish religious creed.)

I believe with perfect faith that the prophecy of Moses our teacher, peace be unto him, was true, and that he was the leader of the prophets, both of those preceded and of those that followed him.

I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah, and though he tarry, I will wait daily for his coming.

۲. Transferring the Islamic Ideology and Islamic Civilization in Education

Ideology belongs also to one cultural aspect, because it is a product of the human creativity. It is a system of thought that becomes a principle providing the direction and the aim for the life of a society or a nation. Based on Biblical perspective and social activities, the West stands on apartheid and colonial ideologies. These ideologies can be traced its sources back from the Torah and Bible; and these ideas are theologically used to marginalize other races; so that why they think that the white race was the clever, chosen by God, whereas the black race was the lazy race, cursed by God.^۱ The social violence either direct or indirect violence can be triggered out by an ideology. During the time of apartheid in the South-Africa, an ideology that had been developed at that time had claimed that the white race was superior, even, civilized race, whereas the black race was inferior, even uncivilized race. The episteme of Western ideology in the era of capitalist globalization to the Eastern civilization, especially Islam and Moslems, was exposed clearly by Edward Said, an Arab Christian in his book *Orientalism* (۱۹۷۸). In this book, the image of Orient and Islamic world have politically been constructed and reconstructed negatively by the West-Christianity through

^۱ M. Qerinsqi (۲۰۰۴) *Reshit Da'at: Sefat 'Eber*. New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, pp. ۹۴، ۹۶

^۲ The Bible, Genesis ۹ : ۲۵-۲۷

two colonial strategies; (i) the mission movement, the Westernized *volkscholen*, (ii) the political image to enrich the capital of the West. I think, in the era of post-colonialism, these colonial strategies become the seeds of violence among the Eastern men to understand the West and the Orientalism. Based on the apartheid ideology and colonial orientation, the West have been doing the acts of persecuting, beating, forcing and sending the East into many forms of 'slaveries' such as an economic slavery which was politically justified and legitimated by a such ideology. So, an ideology can become an instrument of justifying the act of violence or of legitimating the act of violence. During the era of capitalist global world, there was very dangerous ideology; and the facts have proved that this ideology have produced many acts of violence. It is the national ideology; namely militarism. The militarism contains a national ideology which followers glorify their clan, tribes, and nation. This own military group is paid to do violence for reaching the political purpose. Both examples can be taken out from the social riots in Iraq and Palestine. Based on democratic-capitalistic ideology, USA conquered Iraq in the name of democracy. Meanwhile, based on the Zionism, Israel imperialized Palestine to fight against terrorists. To minimize the ignorance of Western episteme about the East and Islam, Muslim intellectuals transferred the Islamic ideology to the West and promoted the Islamic civilization to them, even; they developed and enriched the Occidental Studies, such as the research of Hassan Hanafi about the roots of Western knowledge in *Occidentalism* (۲۰۰۱). They already created the dialogue among civilizations to marginalize the prejudice as an effect of clash of civilizations between the Western and Eastern, especially between the Hellenic Christianity and Islam, in the era of capitalist global world. The clash of civilizations is a cultural tragedy to represent an identity of politic as a

superior cultural identity marker.' In this context, both have a common purposes to fight the matrix which represents the Western cultural hegemony in a paradigm of politic, because the matrix is a cultural process through the universalization of particularism, or to universalize the capitalist cultural symbols through the process of globalization without the space to the other. One of the forms of capitalist industry is, of course, *Mc Donald*, etc. Nowadays, the matrix as a reference refers to the domination of Western secularization. In the mind-set of the West, both cultural politic and religion have exclusive characters; and they must be separated from each domain. I think, this matrix in the world of hegemonic globalization will not stop and end in era of capitalism because the spirit of matrix formula itself is to minimize the role of religion (theology) in the context of private space, and to maximize the cultural capitalism in the context of all aspects of the life to other cultures, step by step, through both exploited and westernized global cultural strategies; and these strategies politically can be applied by the Western capitalist states in the form of hegemonic global government.

۲. Integrating Religious and General Sciences

Islamic institutions or religious institution have to develop the integrated sciences in the spirit of Islam. It is not to limit in the paradigm of Islamic sciences like *fiqh* (Islamic law), *kalam* (Islamic theology), *ulum al-Qur'an* and *ulum al-Hadits* etc., but also to develop in general sciences like medicine, pharmacy, architecture, politic, economy, etc. These integrated sciences will become an outstanding Islamic education in the paradigm of ground setting training.

¹ For further information about the theory of clash of civilizations, see Samuel P. Huntington (۱۹۹۶), *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*. New York: Simon and Schuster; and to criticize this theory, see Kaveh Afrasiabi, 'From Clash of Civilizations to Civilizational Parallelism', *Telos*, ۱۹۹۸.

Obviously, this model will be a center of academic/intellectual excellence to develop and integrate the aspect of Islam, science, humanity, and Islamic values. The integrated education, however, is expected to strengthen the role of Islam institutions.

۴. Training on the Messianic Culture via Technology and Media Culture.

The Western people identify themselves and others with the religious identity which they have followed via the role of cultural elements and they represent themselves via the high technology and capitalist media culture. These cultural elements are used by the West to stigmatize Islam as the other, as an inferior civilization. To represent the Muslim culture towards the modernity and self-identity, the Muslims have to develop the high technology in peace and humanity, to educate the people in justice and brotherhood in the light of messianic consciousness: Also, the Muslims have to create the media culture in the spirit of Islam without rejecting the values of humanity and exploitation. In this context, the Muslim reinterpret the Western media culture in the paradigm of messianic culture via mass media for preparing the ground setting education to change their capitalist values in the global episteme. This messianic culture, however, is a humanistic view on the world, which in return will change the capitalist lifestyles in the light of Islam.

Conclusion

Lifestyle is a complexity of episteme, values, attitudes, performance and other cultural elements. The Muslim lifestyle represents the complexity of all elements in the paradigm of the ground setting for preparing the appearance of the Messiah of Islam, the ۱۲th Holy Imam (AS). The one who realizes the messianic consciousness he will perform

the messianic manifesto via the sign-systems like visual images, mass media, and information technology in the light of ground setting which is so-called the messianic culture. Therefore, in the ground setting training as a type of Islamic education, the Muslim lifestyle has four pillars to perform an Islamic identity marker: (۱) manifesting the messianic consciousness in Islamic education, (۲) transferring the Islamic ideology and Islamic civilization in education, (۳) integrating religious and general sciences, (۴) training on the messianic culture via technology and media culture.





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