Religion through the lens of ‘marketization’ and ‘lifestyle’

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The origin and success of the market metaphor

How can one best define ‘marketization’ for use in the study of religion? This chapter begins by critically examining existing perspectives on marketization before suggesting a fruitful approach for understanding the transformations of religion in global societies.

For over two centuries, religion and economics have been understood as opposites, with economic behaviours portrayed as ideal—typically rational, while religion was cast as representing the irrational. In this view, market-type exchanges, along with the bureaucratic operations of the modern state apparatus, have been cast as favouring functional types of relations in which individuals are interchangeable. In this type of sociality, social bond is neither created nor maintained, and it differs from traditional, friendship and familial sociality. This distinction is captured by Tönnies’ (1940) opposition between Gesellschaft (society) and Gemeinschaft (community), which has been refracted in many other categorizations since. This classical casting of religion and (market) economy as opposites has produced a large body of valuable scientific literature, and still does.

Yet this stark and—for centuries—self-evident opposition was progressively eroded over the course of the last half of the 20th century. We can point to Peter Berger’s The Sacred Canopy (as well as Thomas Luckmann’s Invisible Religion, both published in 1967) as the inaugural moment of such a shift. ‘As a result’ of pluralization, and therefore the end of religious monopolies in favour of voluntary adhesions, Berger wrote, ‘the religious tradition has to be marketed. It must be “sold” to a clientele that is no longer constrained to “buy”’ (1980 [1967], p. 138, emphasis added). Writing in the congregational context of the United States rather than the denominational one of Western Europe, Berger continued by stating that the:

[p]luralistic situation is, above all, a market situation. In it, the religious institutions become marketing agencies, and the religious tradition become consumer commodities. And at any rate a good deal of religious activity in this situation comes to be dominated by the logic of market economics.

(p. 138, emphasis added)
For Berger (as with Weber), market economics are the *sumnum* of rationalization and appear to be therefore constitutively *secularizing*, in the sense that they erode the former social function of religion—providing an unquestionable ‘sacred canopy’ for pre-modern societies—and contribute to religion’s privatization. While Berger’s version of secularization has been widely repudiated, including by himself, and while the terms in which he understood privatization have been contested, he did highlight the ways in which religion has become reconfigured according to the moral and therapeutic ‘needs’ of modern individuals. Similarly, while he overstated the disappearance of ‘supernatural’ elements in religion, he did foresee how religion would become increasingly voluntary and guided by the logics of ‘choice.’ Symptomatically, Berger ([1980] [1967]) defined neither ‘marketing,’ nor ‘selling’ nor ‘buying.’ He appears to have used these terms in both a literal and metaphorical sense, such as when he notes how ‘consumer demand’ impacts products supplied in the ‘religious market.’

For Berger as for most sociologists, religion in pre-modern societies was not thinkable in economic terms. Secularization, as a constitutive feature of modernization, was meanwhile the result of various rationalization processes, including the development of capitalism. Religion *became* marketable once its social functions had been sufficiently eroded, and thus thinking of religion in economic terms appears as the outcome of a historical process. Three decades later, another US sociologist of religion, Wade Clark Roof, made a similar argument when he defined the religious landscape of contemporary societies as a so-defined ‘spiritual marketplace’:

> ‘An open, competitive religious economy makes possible an expanded spiritual marketplace which, like any marketplace, *must* be understood in terms both of “demand” and “supply.”’ (1999, p. 78, emphasis added).

Roof’s formulation is starker than Berger’s, and for him marketization means that the formerly watertight divide between religion and economics has been blurred in favour of the market, and that religion has become a product in its own right. It may be a peculiar product, but in the end, one can apply a neoclassical calculus to the outcome of the encounter of individual religious ‘needs’ and suppliers ‘offers.’

The most radical offspring of Berger’s prophetic chapter is therefore, and paradoxically, the Rational Choice approach to religion (RCAR). It is a paradox since Rational Choice authors have energetically contested secularization theory and have sonorously beaten the drum of its death, self-appointing themselves as a ‘new paradigm.’ Yet they simply developed Berger and Roof’s market argument to its full extent. That religion is a ‘product’ here is anything but metaphorical and the aim of such a theory is even to extend to modelling and predictions, as in pure sciences. Incidentally, Rational Choice does not do away with the distinction between *Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft* per se. By positing that non-functional—i.e. non-economic and non-bureaucratic—phenomena can be analysed with the standard theory of neoclassical political economy, it rather stipulates that the distinctiveness of *Gemeinschaft* sociality is negligible in the end and that individuals behave in love, friendships and religion much like they do in a supermarket and any other market-type exchange. This means that as self-interested, pre-social and rational agents, they seek to maximize their utility, pleasure or profit, as the *homo economicus* in liberal political economy’s neoclassical model.

Authors like Berger and Roof write that religion could or should be analysed in market terms, yet do not resort to the arcana of utilitarian calculus themselves. Neither do they provide any substantial theoretical discussion on market-related concepts, and how this may apply to a non-economic ‘good’ such as religion. The same is true of almost all authors who resort to market terminology. As Taira argues, such works do ‘not contain any theorization of the concept of the market, nor any type of deeper substantial theoretical discussion of other closely related concepts such as “economy,” “product,” or “consumer.”’ As
a consequence, their ‘engagement with economics and market theory really amounts to little more than a selective and rather shallow employment of its language and terminology’ (2008, p. 242). Yet the implicit assumption does seem to be that social scientists could benefit from turning to liberal political economy as a heuristic avenue for understanding religion. This situation begs us to take a closer look.

**Neoliberalism and the rational choice approach to religion**

The concern of political economy (i.e. economic theory) in the late 19th and early 20th century was to solidify the claim that market economics were the only type of economics and that the market operated according to the laws of supply and demand. Pareto (1848–1923), as other economists, sought to detail the ways in which markets ‘cleared’ (i.e. naturally produced equilibrium), making an increasing use of mathematics. Yet for Pareto, human beings behaved as homo economicus ‘in economic actions’ only, and behaved as homo ethicus or homo religiosus in moral or religious affairs (Pareto 1909, p. 18). Homo economicus was therefore an abstraction that made political economy’s interrogations possible. This state of affairs consecrated a division of intellectual labour within social sciences which lasted about two centuries (from the times of Adam Smith to the turn of the 1980s), and according to which political economy was essentially and exclusively concerned with economic affairs.

It is this division of labour that was overthrown following the neoliberal revolution in political economy. Neoliberalism as a doctrine, which went from marginalized to dominant over the course of the 1970s, promoted the extension of the domain of application of the neoclassical model to the whole of society, especially in the Chicago school. According to economist and historian Robert Nelson: ‘Chicago economists developed their analysis on the basis of the assumption that the full-fledged pursuit of individual advantage—necessarily including opportunistic calculations—was motivating virtually every social actor in virtually every area of society’ (Nelson 2014, p. 232). Among these, Gary Becker was the one who most systematically developed the idea that all human actions could (and should) be analysed using the neoclassical model, based on the idea of market exchange as a ‘relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses’ (Becker 1976, p. 1).

Backed by mathematic formulae and graphs deduced from the principles of this standard model, Becker developed his analyses on a score of non-economic phenomena such as discrimination (tossing aside such motives as hatred and bigotry), marriage (cast as a beneficial long-term contract in terms of utility), sex (a commodity like others made available by commitment or marriage), criminality (criminals are homo economicus like everyone, except their ‘benefits and costs differ’ (Becker 1968, p. 41)), and euthanasia (the most rational and cost-effective choice if future utility previsions are negative). In his 1981 *Treatise on the Family*, which Becker found to be his most important work and won him the Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel in 1992 (Gauthier 2020, pp. 92–3), familial, marital and friendship-type relationships are presented as being founded on ‘individual incentives’ rather than altruism, love, duty or obligation. For Becker, mutual devotion within a marriage therefore appeared to be ‘just a disguised way of achieving a higher rate of return on individual investment’ (Nelson 2014, p. 177; see Becker 1981, 1992; Gauthier 2020, pp. 91–117). Similarly, Becker’s notion of ‘human capital,’ which has been widely adopted across social sciences and expanded to include ‘cultural,’ ‘religious’ and ‘spiritual’ variants, aimed to translate individual talents, heritage, social determinations, acquired knowledge and social relations into quantitative and computable economic notions. For Becker, not only is the individual a being of (insatiable) needs, as

François Gauthier
neoclassical political economic theory has it, he is also an investor, an entrepreneur who can (must!) convert these different non-economic capitals into economic capital, under the form of revenue and profit. It is important to note that Becker and Chicago neoliberals did not think that the application of the neoclassical formal model of rationality to social phenomena was an inventive and interesting addition to sociology and the social sciences. They thought it was the best way to understand social realities and that their model should be adopted by social sciences as a whole and replace existing concepts, in the same way that neoclassical theory reigns supreme in mainstream economics worldwide.

While Rational Choice proceeded to evacuate non-individual notions such as society and culture, it took less than a decade for scholars to complete the hostile takeover of social sciences by introducing Rational Choice theory in the study of religion. Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge published their first piece in 1980, yet the RCAR only really took off in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when it became mainstream in US sociology of religion and disseminated worldwide, including in regions such as China (e.g. Stark and Bainbridge 1980, 1987; Finke and Stark 1988; Iannaccone 1990, 1992, 1995; Finke and Iannaccone 1993; Warner 1993; Yang 2006). The ‘economics of religion’ view on marketization is simply the application of the neoclassical framework to religion and relies heavily if not solely on Becker’s work. It therefore rests on the small set of assumptions of liberal political economy’s standard model, summed up by Iannaccone as follows: ‘maximizing utility, market equilibrium, and stable preferences, used relentlessly and unflinchingly’ (Iannaccone 1995, p. 77, quoting Becker 1976, p. 5).

The main proposition of RCAR is that the more a ‘religious market’ is freed from state regulation, the more pluralism there is, as ‘religious consumers’ are faced with more variety and choice to meet needs. As in economic affairs, the translation of liberal economics to religion sees the state as an efficiency waster and an unwelcome regulator. State regulation leads to monopolies (of one particular religion or non-religion), while deregulation leads to religious vitality. By opening the religious market to competition, deregulation is believed to ‘improve the quality’ of the religious offer, i.e. adaptation of the supply to the demand. Since religious producers must compete for market shares according to the mechanisms of the market, they become more in tune with consumer needs and ‘give the customer what he wants.’ The model’s emphasis on the positive effects of deregulation is presented as an explanation for the religious vitality one finds in the United States in comparison with Europe, as well as for the ongoing religious revival in China.

Following in the steps of Becker’s takeover of sociology’s traditional domain—social interactions—RCAR scholars marched in triumphantly and announced a self-proclaimed ‘paradigm shift’ that was to (finally!) move the sociology of religion from ideology (secularization) to science (Warner 1993; Stark 1999). Proceeding ‘deductively’ from a set of ‘axioms’ (Stark and Bainbridge 1980, p. 114), RCAR authors ‘immodestly’ (Iannaccone 1992, p. 123) proposed a universal theory of religion that was supposed to solve the issue once and for all. In the words of Iannaccone: ‘Economic theory, or more precisely rational choice theory, offers a new paradigm in the sociology of religion, one that may eventually replace or encompass many of the generalizations and approaches now competing for researchers’ attention’ (ibid.). The aim of RCAR is therefore not to add a heuristic avenue for understanding religion but to replace sociological theory altogether by a ‘conceptually clean and empirically fruitful’ (ibid.) economic approach that promises to explain (like natural sciences) social realities as the former cannot.

Reactions to RCAR’s hostile takeover have been rather weak. Many have been seduced by the simplicity of the model and its ‘cleanliness,’ as well as by its apparent self-evidence
(are people not self-interested?), and have attempted to develop its ‘heuristic value’ along different lines, with less or more critical distance, and with less rather than more convincing results (e.g. Ellison 1995; Stolz 2008; Blasi 2009; Simonnot 2014; Patrikios and De Francesco 2018).

Notable critiques include Beckford, for whom RCAR’s methodological individualism is problematic since it evacuates the importance of social norms and structures. RCAR’s ‘narrow and exclusively instrumental conception of rationality’ (Beckford 2003, p. 169) is problematic, as religion is obviously more a case of Wertrationalität (value-oriented rationality) than Zweckrationalität (instrumental rationality). Turner and Casanova argue meanwhile that the ‘assumption that a society with a state church gives that church a monopoly position is questionable and the assumption that monopoly is an imposition on a society is dubious’ (Turner 2011, p. 119; see also Casanova 2006, p. 9), as the examples of Poland, Russia and Serbia (among others) show. Turner further argues that the ‘idea that competitive religious markets, like secular economic markets, automatically enhance choice of services, quality of products and efficiency of services is questionable’ (Turner 2011, p. 119). One of the most original critiques comes from Spickard, who devised a computer program using the Rational Choice precepts in order to test the ‘aggregate outcomes of individual choices in a religious marketplace’ (Spickard 2007, quoted from abstract), showing the predictions to be false. In another contribution, Spickard examines three ‘key theoretical assumptions’ of RCAR and rejects two as being false, ‘and the third to be so vague as to be useless’ (Spickard 1998, quoted from abstract).

Considering these limitations, it is surprising to read that sociologists of religion have still welcomed RCAR in their discipline. Beckford for instance considers that the ‘potential benefit from analysing religious movements in terms of rational choice is high’ (Beckford 2003, p. 168), while Robertson writes that ‘the economic approach to religion cannot be entirely rejected’ (Robertson 1992, p. 147). Even Spickard refuses to discard RCAR, arguing that his findings undercut ‘neither the utility of the market-model itself nor of a rational-choice model of human behavior (as opposed to action)’ (Spickard 1998, quoted from abstract).

What is missing in these otherwise well-founded critiques is knowledge of the history and constitution of political economy and the neoclassical model, as well as of its numerous critiques, be they from social scientists or economists themselves. Faced with RCAR’s triumphalism, sociologists of religion have not instinctively been renewed with the anti-utilitarian and anti-economic foundations of their discipline, as exemplified for instance by Weber and Durkheim’s overtly critical stance towards political economy. Over a century ago, Durkheim, Simiand, Halbwachs and Mauss developed a complete critical framework which put into question the very validity of political economy as concerns economic exchanges and on subjects such as money, value and contracts (see Steiner 2005). Since then, a landmass of social scientists and heterodox economists have compiled arguments and data to show the essentially tautological and ideological nature of the standard model’s assumptions, for instance the reductionism of homo economicus, the dodgy-ness of the supposedly natural ‘human tendency to barter,’ the idea that markets are the best mechanism for just redistribution of wealth and that markets inherently tend towards equilibrium. Anthropologists such as Sahlins (1974), Douglas (1979) and Graeber (2011), among many others, have falsified many if not all of the assumptions of the standard model which RCAR mobilizes without discussion. Such a situation has led contemporary economists like Jorion (2008, 2012), Nelson (2014), Keen (2011) and Hudson (2017, 2018) to dismiss the neoclassical model still massively dominant today in economics faculties worldwide as being essentially based on either ‘religious fervor,’ ‘blind faith,’ or ‘indoctrination.’
There are therefore many resources, within and without social sciences, to radically question and challenge the validity of political economy’s Rational Choice model as concerns economic phenomena. A quick glance at the history of marketing also shows how the Rational Choice model was already starting to be abandoned in the 1950s in the United States in favour of psychological, sociological, anthropological and even religious studies approaches (Arvidsson 2005; Gauthier, Martikainen, and Woodhead 2013a, 2013b; Gauthier 2020). Consumer research in the meantime has similarly abandoned the Rational Choice model in favour of empirically grounded methods. The recent UK-based ‘Cultures of Consumption’ research program has found that consumption was ‘not about meeting needs,’ as stipulated by political economy, but the creation of meaning and identities, and that ‘attempts to apply an economic model of the rational, individual consumer are fraught with problems’ (Trentmann 2007, quoted from abstract).

The above discussion provides another entry into the evaluation of the pretentions of RCAR. If neoclassical theory is invalid for thinking simple economic behaviours include the consumption of everyday goods, how could it have the slightest relevance for thinking about religion? The roots of RCAR in Gary Becker’s work show how RCAR participates in the translation of society in its entirety and all aspects of human action in the neoclassical mould. RCAR therefore participates in the ideological project of neoliberalism to subsume every social sphere to the rule of the market. In other words, far from enabling an understanding of marketization, RCAR itself operates a neoliberal brand of marketization: it relays the ‘unwavering belief in the power, efficiency, and rationality of the free, non-regulated market’ (Moberg and Martikainen 2018, p. 420) and of the positive effects of the transfer of social regulation from the state to the market. In the light of this, the social scientific study of religion should react to the ‘immodest’ takeover of RCAR with a fair degree of doubt at the very least, if not outright rejection.

Religion vs market

Apart from RCAR, two sets of concurrent theories have attempted to understand the rapsorts between economics and religion in contemporary societies. Both proceed from the idea of strongly differentiated social spheres (here economics and religion), yet provide opposite interpretations of the recent impact of marketization on religion.

The first perspective denounces the instrumentalization of the market by religious actors, and is relatively widespread in research concerned with the exponential development of halal and ‘sharia-friendly’ products worldwide. While this point of view is seldom expressed as bluntly, it sees the ‘halal explosion’ as the result of a manipulation of the possibilities offered by globalized markets by fundamentalists aiming to disseminate their fanatic and ideological project (e.g. Kepel 2012). The purity of the market (and of ‘the secular’ in general), in other words, is co-opted and soiled by religion.

The second perspective worries about the reverse trend, meaning the dangers of ‘commodification’ for religion. This is the case of works that warn of the impact of consumer culture on Christianity and other religious traditions (e.g. Budde and Brimlow 2002; Stevenson 2007). Others deal with various forms of alternative spiritualities, healing and self-help techniques, as well as other holistic practices. Most are overtly critical, such as Carrette and King’s (2005) symptomatic Selling Spirituality, which denounces the ‘capitalist takeover’ and sullying of religion and spirituality. The authors lament the dissemination of holistic spiritualities that claim to ‘soothe away the angst of modern living’ and ‘the shallowness of materialism’ (a ‘fallacy’) but which instead legitimate ‘corporate interests.’ In
this narrative, religion and spirituality are ‘hijacked’ and turned into an ‘alienating addiction’ (2005, quoted from back cover; see also Lau 2000; Ezzy 2001; York 2001). Carrette and King’s lament is nothing new, as it simply re-actualizes the old Marxian idea of religion as the opium of the people and an ideological superstructure serving the domination of the capitalist class, with the twist that somewhere under the surface lies not class warfare, but rather an authentic and unsullied spirituality with a potential for resistance. Here it is the purity of ‘true’ religion that is threatened by the sullying potential of evil market forces.

As Taira (2008) remarks, this ‘religion vs market’ literature once again lacks any sort of serious theorizing about capitalism and concepts like the market, commodification, etc. Both perspectives are symmetrical and specular, and view economics and religion as exclusive social spheres, yet diverge in their interpretation. They therefore fail as heuristic frameworks for understanding marketization, and convey the idea that the marketization of religion can only signify the external pressure of one social sphere on the other.

**Recovering the idea of marketization for the study of religion**

Across the social sciences, a consensus exists as to how market economics has risen to dominance and has significantly reconfigured the general landscape of our societies as well as the relations and dynamics between the various social spheres. While it is easy to appreciate how welfare provision, health and education, for instance, have shifted from being embedded in the nation-state to an embedment within a market rationale, the social scientific study of religion has been slow in acknowledging the effects of this transformation.

In order to move forward, the first step is to retrieve the concept of ‘the market’ from political economy in order to historicize its emergence within the Western modern project. The ‘Market’ emerged in early modern thought as a principle for social regulation (Dumont 1977; Rosanvallon 1979; Slater and Tonkiss 2001; Polanyi 2001 [1944]) before it was developed into the idea of an abstract arena in which conflicting interests, in the form of offer and demand, are automatically harmonized through the supposedly automatic (or natural) mechanisms of ‘price.’ Incidentally, ‘the Market’ as an idea and ideal precedes ‘the market’ both historically and logically (Appleby 2010). It has played ‘a central role in organizing the West’s conceptual and normative universe’ (Slater and Tonkiss 2001, p. 9; see Carrier 1997; Gauthier 2020), yet it is only recently that we can say that we live in full-fledged ‘market societies.’

From this angle, the concept of marketization refers to a broader and more encompassing set of processes than simply ‘commodification,’ ‘commoditization,’ or ‘commercialization’; that is how:

[a] market logic has come to provide a means of thinking about social institutions and individuals more generally, such that notions of competition, enterprise, utility and choice can be applied to various aspects of people’s working lives, access to public services and even private pursuits—as well as religion.

*(Slater and Tonkiss 2001, p. 1)*

This set of ideational and ideological processes is also crystallized, produced and reproduced in various institutionalizations, representations and practices (e.g. policies) which ingrain it deeply within social and societal life. As Moberg and Martikainen stress, in this understanding, marketization is therefore not adequately understood as a phenomenon that affects social spheres or sub-systems in isolation from one another’ (2018, p. 430), in a process of co-construction or mutual shaping. It does not start from the idea of neatly
differentiated ‘social spheres’ (religion and economics) as much as the ways in which the Market so defined allows us to understand the specificity of the contemporary social environment in which religion operates. This approach explains why RCAR and market metaphors have become rampant, but also why religious actors themselves, e.g. institutions and organizations, increasingly think about and present themselves as enterprises ‘competing for market shares’ and as providers of ‘religious services’ designed to meet ‘consumer needs’ (see e.g. Schlamelcher 2013; Moberg 2017; Gauthier 2019).

The concept of marketization can be further developed by distinguishing between two sets of processes: consumerization, or the shaping into consumerism-friendly or consumerism-contesting forms; and neoliberalization, as an effect of the implementation of free-market policies. Neoliberalization involves market formatting, although in ways different from consumerism: it presents and shapes social realities (e.g. education, health, welfare, labour, subjectivities, etc.) in utilitarian terms and according to normative standards of valuation (cost-effectiveness, quantity, ‘human resources,’ ‘human capital,’ etc.). It commodifies non-commodities and privileges economic efficiency in societal institutions, including religious ones. It encourages all organizations, big or small, to perceive themselves on an entrepreneurial model, and to perceive their actions as that of actors within market segments, with an obligation to brand and marketize themselves and their missions in order to ‘survive in a competitive environment’ and ‘grow.’

In this respect, it is better to define neoliberalism in a broad manner, as a loose ideological ensemble of doctrines and policies oriented towards the transfer of regulation from the state to the market. Through IMF ‘restructuration’ programs, World Trade Organization regulations as well as EU, MERCOSUR and ASEAN regional economic integration processes, virtually all countries in the world have been subjected to neoliberal reforms from the 1980s onwards, profoundly affecting the rapports between state and society, eroding the container function of the nation, enmeshing human societies within a global network and expanding the reach of the market to formerly protected areas of social life, for example through privatization. In this sense, it is possible to observe a process of neoliberalization up close in all countries in the world (Harvey 2005; Saad-Filho and Johnston 2005; Bohle and Greskovits 2012; Ban 2016).

Consumerization, meanwhile, emerges out of the spread and massification of consumption as a desirable ethos and the transformation of world cultures into consumer cultures. In The World of Goods (1979), Douglas and Isherwood argued that the function of modern consumption is to make cultural precepts concrete—identifying, materializing and stabilizing them, and thus giving them substance, authority and inevitably. Consumption carries meaning and is a way to produce and express identities, statuses and communities. As Slater captures it, consumption has become ‘the dominant mode of cultural reproduction developed in the west over the course of modernity’ (1997, p. 8).

Consumerism first massified in the West in the post-war decades of the 1950s and 1960s, carrying what Taylor calls the ‘ethic of authenticity and expressivity,’ according to which ‘each of us has his or her own way of realizing one’s own humanity, and that it is important to find and live out one’s own’ (2002, p. 83) and express it in order to be recognized. The consumer revolution similarly contributed to usher national societies towards becoming ‘identity societies’ (Beauchemin 2004) against a global backdrop. In non-Western societies and the Global South, research reports a surprising level of penetration of consumerism in some of the most remote places on the planet, namely through the extraordinary outreach of electronic media, and the consequent transformation of traditional ways of life, social structures and socialization patterns (see Gauthier 2018, 2020).
A major effect of consumerization is to reconfigure religion into lifestyles and thereby cater to the need for identity construction, belonging and life ethics. In other words, to provide signposts on how to live and pragmatic/practical solutions for overcoming or conquering obstacles. Grand political projects and social issues tend to cede the way to more direct and ethical ones. As David Lehmann (2009) remarks, the construction of a lifestyle, of a way of life in which religion is part, happens first with respect to the acceptation of religious doctrine. ‘Lifestyling’ reshapes religion to serve the reform of personal life, whether it is on the born-again or the quest and self-realization model. As consumerism is about ‘being on the move’ (Bauman 2007), quest religion is about continuous learning and the feeling of being on the right path (the path to oneself, or to God, or to a conflation of both). In this sense, nothing is worse than walking in circles, or being static, i.e. not progressing (Lemieux 2002). The belief in progress on a collective or universal scale has been replaced by the belief in the possibility (and imperative) of individual progress. In this respect, consumerization aligns with neoliberal values such as adaptability, personal responsibility, seeing obstacles as opportunities to better oneself, self-reliance, mobility and so on.

Lifestylization signifies public expression and visibility, and therefore the erosion of the private/public divide. The case of the return of the Muslim veil is paradigmatic, whether in its fashionable or integral version. Nothing expresses the value of choice more visibly than fashion, and this trend is not limited to Islam. Pentecostalism and conservative Christians, among other religious movements, similarly insist on the importance of clothing as a way to express values, success, and to try to provoke self-fulfilling prophecies (by dressing more richly or more piously than one is for instance).

Lifestyles are encompassing. They are holistic constructs that combine different dimensions, including aesthetics, politics and religion, within a visible affirmation of identity. They are constitutively expressive, and therefore the lifestylization of religion goes hand in hand with alleged deprivatization (Casanova 1994) at the level of individual religiosities. The lifestylization of religion aids the de-differentiation of religion, and is largely inassimilable within the secularization paradigm. The blurring of boundaries between ‘the secular’ and religion as well as between the private and public, which lifestylization and marketization carry, explains why successful religious movements have integrated social services (day-care, counselling, etc.), accessibility, music, entertainment and even shopping within their provisions. Coming out of its box, religion becomes mixed with all these other dimensions as social actors seek to integrate religion in their daily lives.

The lifestylization of religion also accompanies the shift from a religiosity inscribed in the world of indefinitely repeated observances and sustained through habit and social conformity to one centred around intense and extraordinary moments where social actors can discover and express themselves in (sometimes effervescent) ritual frames that ensure feelings of community and togetherness while providing recognition. Global-Market era mobility requires secure community niches and affinity groups, actual or virtual, founded on the communalization of practices, beliefs, values and references, and which provide the social confirmation indispensable to the constitution of individual meaning systems (Hervieu-Léger 2001; Gauthier 2012). This similarly implies the ‘spectacle-ization’ of religion (Possamai 2018), and the return, all over the world, of religious festivals and other mass events. The localized and routinized congregation, which became globalized in the prior nation-state era (see Gauthier 2018, 2020), cedes to the return of traditional, neo-traditional and novel forms such as mass gatherings and intimate settings which cater to the need for experiences, self-expression and self-exploration (Gauthier 2014).
Conclusion

Implicit and explicit approaches to marketization in the study of religion have tended to be metaphorical and radically undertheorized (Stolz and Usunier 2014 is a notable exception), and mostly depend in their analysis on Rational Choice theorists, who have applied Becker’s version of the neoclassical model consistently. However, knowledge about political economy, its history and its critiques suffices to shed doubt on the validity of this model in economic affairs, let alone in matters of religion. A more anthropological and sociological approach to marketization opens new avenues for thinking how religion too is being reshaped and formatted in the wake of the rise to dominance of market economics over social life across the world.

The perspective sketched in this chapter suggests that we understand marketization as a set of processes that are correlative to the transformation of global societies into full-fledged market societies and consumer cultures. Distinguishing between processes related to consumerization or neoliberalization can be mobilized in the analysis of religious phenomena. A question that remains open is how these processes are enculturated, resisted, modified and reconducted in a variety of patterns across the globe, especially in the less researched Global South and its particular modes of sociality. Another important topic, especially in the Global South, is the extent to which religion is a key in the enculturation and appropriation of both consumerism and free market ideologies (see e.g. Njoto–Faillard 2012; Gauthier 2020). As the reader may have noticed, many contributions in this volume do indeed suggest that understanding religious transformations across global societies can greatly benefit from a workable conception of marketization.

References


