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The Principles of a Circular Economy in the Light of Islamic Values and Beliefs

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Abstract

The model of circular economy, inspired from the circular nature of the ecosystem, has emerged as an environmentally sustainable alternative against the contemporary environmentally destructive model of organizing the economy. However practical progress toward a circular economy is perhaps obstructed by the ideals and values of capitalism which encourage accumulation and competition for self-interest. So in contrast to the values and ideals of capitalism, this research paper takes the position that Islamic beliefs and values – where the Muslims are expected to view themselves as stewards toward nature, where wastage is a sin, where sharing and cooperating are highly encouraged – may act as facilitators in transition toward circularization and subsequent conservation of the natural environment. Keeping in view the criticality of the environmental crisis, it is perhaps urgently necessary to highlight the shortcomings of the capitalist values and ideals in contrast with the advantages of Islamic beliefs and values for the purpose of bringing the sociocultural and economic transformation necessary to avert the collapse of the ecosystem. Policy makers concerned with the preservation of the ecosystem can therefore engage the religious scholarship to convince the business community and the general public to consider economic circularization as a religious responsibility in the light of the analysis and recommendations put forward in this paper.

Keywords: Circular-economy, Social Embeddedness, Gift Economy, Environmental Crisis, Environmental Sustainability

JEL Classifications: A13, D91, E71, Q54, M14, Z1, Z12

Introduction

Since the extent of the environmental crisis is becoming more obvious,¹ the idea of economic-circularization is gaining relevance globally² though the dominant ideological position in modern western civilization appears to be acting as a barrier in its way. Islamic beliefs, values, worldview and norms, however, may rather act as facilitators toward the economic-circularization. If so, then it becomes urgently necessary to highlight the compatibility between the two. This paper therefore explores the possibility of a synthesis between the idea of circular-economy and Islam's way of organizing the society and economy.

An Islamic way of organizing society may consciously cultivate social embedded-ness in economic activity, may emphasize on waste minimization and make it a religious responsibility to take care of all stakeholders including the natural environment particularly while organizing the economic activity. Owing to such an inclination, a society adhering to Islamic beliefs, values and norms is expected to complement the design of a localized-circular-economy which unfortunately is not complemented well by the modern-materialist-individualistic-secular ideologies prevalent in the modern western civilization.

Dominant ideological position in the modern western civilization fosters a culture of consumerism, hyper-individualism and material accumulation while encouraging individuals to remain indulgent in

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¹Masson-Delmotte, et al. (Ed's.), *IPCC. Global Warming of 1.5°C* (Switzerland: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2018), 10-70.

²Mark Esposito, Terence Tse, and Khaled Soufani, "Is the Circular-Economy a New Fast-Expanding Market?," *Thunderbird International Business Review* Vol. 59, no. 1 (January 1, 2017): 9-14.

hedonistic maximization of pleasures by spending on items of superfluous values.³ Such tendencies may not be welcomed in a circular-economy which rather requires the general public to reduce, refuse, reuse, rethink and recycle.⁴ Such tendencies if prevalent in a society then moving toward circularization of economy would be like swimming upstream.

So, in comparison, Islamic belief system may take an edge over modern ideologies as it offers a strong motivation for the Muslims to organize the society as per the principles of Islam where the idea of economic-circularization appears like a natural fit. To establish the relevance of the idea of the circular-economy for the practicing Muslims, its relevance with the Islamic beliefs, values and norms needs be evaluated. First, a brief outline of the circular economic paradigm will be presented which will be followed by the ideological barriers which the modern-capitalist world poses against circularization. Islamic and metaphysical values and norms are then discussed to evaluate their compatibility with the paradigm of circularity.

2. The Circular-Economy

The idea of circularity of economic activity has emerged from the circularity in the ecosystem. In the planet's ecosystem, nothing is produced in excess or less than what is needed, and whatever is produced is reused by something else in the system. Output of one subsystem of the ecosystem is the input of another subsystem. Nature thus perfectly reuses and recycles everything it produces, while the production is also not more and less of what is needed. A harmonious balance therefore exists everywhere in the inputs and outputs, thus making the planet's ecosystem a near perfectly⁵ closed system.⁶

Before the industrial revolution, the traditional ways of production and consumption were not much different than that of nature's system of production. However, an ideological revolution legitimized the idea of maximization of wealth and ownership of anything considered valuable. This ideological revolution followed by an Industrial revolution began to produce stuff in excess in ways which did not follow the law of balance which prevails in the ecosystem.⁷

Today after becoming dependent on the industrial system and adhering religiously to the ideology of wealth maximization from an individual to national levels, humankind is realizing now that the industrial system of production and consumption cannot sustain because it has rather proven to be deadly for the ecosystem, the very ecosystem on which our life primarily depends. The present form of industrial system creates waste which neither the industry can reuse, nor nature can absorb in general.⁸ For example, Carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases like methane, are produced in quantities many times the absorption capacity of the natural systems⁹. Plastic pollution which can take hundreds to thousands of years to biodegrade, is yet another example in this context which has polluted even the deepest trenches in the

³Kersty Hobson, and Nicholas Lynch, "Diversifying and De-Growing the Circular-economy: Radical Social Transformation in a Resource-Scarce World," *Futures* 82 (2016): 15–25, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2016.05.012>.

⁴Sylvie Geisendorf, and Felicitas Pietrulla, "The Circular-economy and Circular Economic Concepts-a Literature Analysis and Redefinition," *Thunderbird International Business Review* Vol. 60, no. 5 (September 1, 2018): 771–82.

⁵The laws of entropy may still be prevailing.

⁶Walter R. Stahel, "The Circular-Economy," *Nature* Vol. 531, no. 7595 (2016): 435–38, <https://doi.org/10.1038/531435a>.

⁷Norberg-Hodge, "The Pressure to Modernise"; Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*; Sachs, *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power*.

⁸*Ibid.*, 436.

⁹Delmotte Masson, et al. (Ed's.), *IPCC. Global Warming of 1.5°C* (Switzerland: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2018), 44.

largest oceans in the world.¹⁰ Volumes can be filled with examples and data regarding the kind of substances the industrial system has been producing in excess, which are deadly for the ecosystem.

Circular economy		Strategies	
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Increasing circularity</p>	Smarter product use and manufacture	R0 Refuse	Make product redundant by abandoning its function or by offering the same function with a radically different product
		R1 Rethink	Make product use more intensive (e.g. by sharing product)
		R2 Reduce	Increase efficiency in product manufacture or use by consuming fewer natural resources and materials
	Extend lifespan of product and its parts	R3 Reuse	Reuse by another consumer of discarded product which is still in good condition and fulfils its original function
		R4 Repair	Repair and maintenance of defective product so it can be used with its original function
		R5 Refurbish	Restore an old product and bring it up to date
		R6 Remanufacture	Use parts of discarded product in a new product with the same function
		R7 Repurpose	Use discarded product or its parts in a new product with a different function
	Useful application of materials	R8 Recycle	Process materials to obtain the same (high grade) or lower (low grade) quality
R9 Recover		Incineration of material with energy recovery	
Linear economy			

Figure 1: Circularization strategies, figure taken from Potting et al¹¹

The ecosystem has been damaged to the point that it has now begun to bring noticeable impact on human wellbeing. So, to prevent further damage and ideally reverse the damage, the idea of redesigning the economy toward a sustainable alternative needs urgent attention. The idea of a circular-economy is one such alternative. Circularization requires restricting of the supply chain in a way where ideally zero waste is produced, rather all waste is recycled back into a consumable product, and anything which cannot be reused by the system or recycled or absorbed by the natural ecosystem in a healthy way is not produced nor released in the first place. The literature¹² discusses up to 10 different strategies, as shown in Figure 1, which can be implemented to circularize the economy.

3. Barriers in Circularization of the Economy

The transformation from the current linear to circular model is perhaps nothing short of revolutionary; it does not just require a change of the urban and industrial infrastructure and processes employed in the supply chain of each product, but also a change in the dominant ideologies. It may be unrealistic to assume that a circular-economy can be established on the same metaphysical (ontological and teleological) assumptions about the modern-self-interested-secular-individualistic-self-determined human and kind of society and economy which are required to facilitate the purpose of such a human. If wealth maximization is the primary aim for the producer, and from a consumer point of view, perpetual increase in standard of living is the goal, then such aims may not be achieved in a circular system, particularly when it is established with the idea of maintaining an equilibrium with the natural ecosystem.

¹⁰Hannah Ritchie, and Max Roser, “Plastic Pollution,” *Our World in Data*, 2018. <https://ourworldindata.org/plastic-pollution#citation>

¹¹Jose Potting et al., *Circular Economy: Measuring Innovation in the Product Chain* (Netherlands: PBL Publishers, 2017), <https://www.pbl.nl/sites/default/files/downloads/pbl-2016-circular-economy-measuring-innovation-in-product-chains-2544.pdf>

¹²Ibid., 55.

The idea of having more and more for hedonistic pleasures goes against the very idea of creating a balance with the natural ecosystem.¹³ A circular-economy will have upper limits beyond which the damage to the ecosystem begins, such an upper limit goes directly against the idea of perpetual growth in a modern-capitalist-free-market economy, where both the producer and the consumer participate in a competitive race of perpetual maximization.¹⁴

So, in a world where the governments measure their success through economic growth, where International financial institutions like IMF lend to the governments based on their predicted economic growth, where the shareholders of every listed company seek to perpetually maximize their returns, where the business students in every university are taught the same ideology and science of perpetual growth,¹⁵ the idea of circular-economy can only be seen as a work of fiction.

It appears that the primary barriers to the circular-economy are not technological, nor structural, nor political, but the very ideology on which political decisions are made; the very ideology on which the design of the modern institutions like the public and the private institutions are grounded in. Ironically the same institutions are also considered responsible for inventing technology which is perhaps needed to facilitate the transition toward a circular-economy.¹⁶

Private investments in new projects are done on the basis of the return they will generate in financial terms. To generate these returns an economy running on a perpetual growth model has to be in place by default. Any economic model which restricts the production of surplus value due to environmental consideration may find it difficult to finance projects where the cost of taking care of all stakeholders is incorporated¹⁷. Investment for a circular-economy may appear like an expense without sufficient returns in contemporary paradigm or ideology which rather idealizes perpetual growth in capital. However, the mindset of the investor and the political authority and subsequently the mindset of the producer and the consumer in a modern secular capitalist society put barriers in the process towards circularization.

3.1. The Barrier Is Perhaps Metaphysical

A circular-economy which is perhaps meant to operate in harmony with the natural environment, may not be able to feed the addiction-for-more, so the cause behind the addiction needs to be cured first. The cause here is perhaps the existential void experienced by the human inhabitants of the modern secular-materialist culture which eventually brings in the psycho-spiritual suffering¹⁸. This existential void appears to be an outcome of a materialist worldview where human beings or homo-sapiens are seen as a byproduct

¹³Omar Javaid, "Islamic System of Production and Consumption: A Guide for Muslim Entrepreneurs," *Journal of Business Innovation* Vol. 4, no. 1 (2019): 1-12; Omar Javaid, "A Multi-Layer Analysis and Solution for Climate Crisis: From the Restructuring of Production to Restructuring of Knowledge," in *Islamic Finance and Circular-economy: Challenges and Opportunities*, ed. Syed Nazim Ali and Zul Hakim Jumat (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2021); Jack D. Forbes, *Columbus and Other Cannibals* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2008).

¹⁴Kate Raworth, "Why it's Time for Doughnut Economics," *IPPR Progressive Review*, Vol. 24, no. 3 (December 1, 2017): 216–22.

¹⁵Duff McDonald, *The Golden Passport: Harvard Business School, the Limits of Capitalism, and the Moral Failure of the MBA Elite* (New York: HarperCollins, 2017).

¹⁶Patrick Schröder et al., "Degrowth within – Aligning Circular-economy and Strong Sustainability Narratives," *Resources, Conservation and Recycling* 146 (2019): 190-91, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resconrec.2019.03.038>; Kersty Hobson and Nicholas Lynch, "Diversifying and De-Growing the Circular-economy: Radical Social Transformation in a Resource-Scarce World," *Futures* 82 (2016): 15–25, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2016.05.012>.

¹⁷Joel Bakan, *The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power* (New York: Free Press, 2004).

¹⁸Omer Javaid, and Mehboob-ul-Hassan, "A Comparison of Islamic and Capitalist Conception of Economic Justice," *International Journal of Economics, Management and Accounting* Vol. 21, no. 1 (2013): 1-31.

of a material evolutionary process, which accidentally created simple to complex life without any Divine intervention or purpose.¹⁹

Homo-Sapian are thus seen as material beings and their desires and motivations are caused by chemical and neurological processes occurring in their brains and bodies. They are also seen as purely selfish, even their acts of collaboration are considered as purely self-serving. Such a self-serving attitude is also appraised as rational, while altruistic tendencies are demeaned as being irrational.²⁰ Rational thought which occurs anatomically in the human brain, eventually giving the human brain an ontological precedence over the heart, which is rather seen as a source of irrational behavior of Homo-Sapian.²¹

A society which is erected on such ideas eventually also tries to fulfil the material needs of their inhabitants, while the matters of the heart and the soul are also addressed as if they are material problems, or addressed on a mental level at best.²² Human emotions are also seen as a result of chemical processes, and when they are out of control, they are typically numbed through psychochemical agents to reinstate the optimal functionality of the rational brain.²³ The cost of such partiality is a sense of disintegration or incompleteness felt by the modern man thus creating an existential void in his psyche.

Not everyone in the modern world of course blindly adheres to such a disintegrated or partial concept of man, and many thinkers have been questioning such partiality. These thinkers emphasize on the idea that there indeed is a God and there is indeed a human soul which may not be satisfied through material means or intellectual gymnastics.²⁴ However, such views are not taught or discussed in the mainstream, which rather religiously adheres to the materialist and evolutionary perspectives regarding the origin of universe and the life on this planet, while referring to any alternatives as irrational or mythological.²⁵

Again, from an evolutionary perspective, the universe is seen to be progressing in a linear fashion, likewise human society is also a linear project which is seen as continuously progressing from primitive to technologically advanced.²⁶ Such a view also sets the stage for an anthropocentric worldview, where the inhabitants of the (sic) most technologically advanced societies, particularly the inventors and entrepreneurs who are constantly in pursuit of advancement of human civilization are seen at the apex of human evolution and progress.²⁷ Anthropocene thus presumes a moral responsibility of pursuing the advancement and perfection of 'Homo-Sapian' to 'Homo-Deus.'²⁸ A vision which may be shattered in a circular economic paradigm which would rather encourage the Homo-Sapian to maintain an equilibrium with other species as if all are equal and dependent on one another.²⁹

4. An Alternative Metaphysics and Vision for a Circular-Economy

So, it may be implied from the preceding discussion that for the smooth adoption for a circular economic paradigm and reorganize the activity of production and consumption, a metaphysics is needed

¹⁹Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (New York: Harper, 2015).

²⁰Neri Karra, Paul Tracey, and Nelson Phillips, "Altruism and Agency in the Family Firm: Exploring the Role of Family, Kinship, and Ethnicity," *Entrepreneurship: Theory and Practice* Vol. 30, no. 6 (2006): 861-77; Reisman, G. *Capitalism* (Illinois: Jameson Books, 1998).

²¹Peter Gray, *Psychology* (New York: Worth Publishers, 2007).

²²Carl Jung, *The Undiscovered Self* (New York: New American Library, 2006).

²³Gray, *Psychology* (New York: Worth Publishers, 2007); Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo-Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (London: Vintage, 2017).

²⁴Richard Schwartz, "Moving From Acceptance Toward Transformation With Internal Family Systems Therapy (IFS)," *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, Vol. 69, no. 8 (August 1, 2013): 805-16; Jung, *The Undiscovered Self (Reprint)* (New York: New American Library, 2006).

²⁵Reisman, *Capitalism*; Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*.

²⁶Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (New York: Harper, 2015).

²⁷Camplin, "Ayn Rand and Posthumanism."

²⁸Harari, *Homo-Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (London: Vintage, 2017).

²⁹Jack Forbes, *Columbus and Other Cannibals* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2008).

which meaningfully fits humans in the natural order as caretakers and not as tyrant plunderers; a metaphysics which gives humans a sense of meaningful purpose of their lives.

Islam provides such a metaphysics which see humans not as a work in progress but already created in their best form³⁰ Islam fully engages the mind,³¹ heart,³² soul³³ and the body³⁴ of a human being in an integrated manner. Islam also puts human being in the position of stewardship³⁵ and not that of an exploiter for hedonistic gains.³⁶ A human who believes in the metaphysics of Islam will not find the need to be complete as he is already ontologically complete, where the temporary worldly life is seen as a test,³⁷ where our worldly deeds will be evaluated on the Day of Judgment. The teachings of the Prophet (SAW) and the Holy Qur'ān also provide a guideline for how to live one's life in a mutual harmony with other life forms.

The production and consumption activity inspired by the metaphysics of Islam will be there to fulfill the needs of the Muslims and not primarily motivated with the intent to perpetually maximize wealth and continuously increase consumption for the purpose of distracting oneself from the existential void.³⁸ Although wanting something beyond basic needs is not prohibited unless otherwise stated in the scriptures, but unlike the modern consumer, a practicing Muslim's focus would be primarily on his or her needs because Islamic worldview has already taken care of the existential void and given a meaningful purpose to its followers. The psychological significance and necessity of having a meaningful purpose in life has also been recognized by many notable modern thinkers and psychologists.³⁹ This meaningful purpose in Islam is to take care of the people around, particularly those in family, neighborhood and close kinship networks (honor *huqooq-ul-ibād*), and to perform mandatory rituals to maintain a connection with the Divine, while not at all ignoring any aspect of personal wellbeing.⁴⁰

It is little surprise that the production and consumption activity in such a society will appear to be profoundly different in comparison to a society where the purpose is perpetual amassment of wealth and stuff.⁴¹ The activity more localized, need oriented, will take responsibility of its stakeholder including the nature, where wastefulness of any form will be considered as a serious problem. Therefore, economic activity in an Islamic society will tend towards being circular by default.⁴²

³⁰At-Teen 95:4.

³¹Al Mumin 40:54.

³²Ar-Ra'ad 13:28.

³³Al-Fajar 89:27.

³⁴Luqman 31:20.

³⁵Al-Baqarah 2:30.

³⁶Al-An'ām 6:141.

³⁷Al-Mulk 67:2.

³⁸Omar Javaid, "Islamic System of Production and Consumption: A Guide for Muslim Entrepreneurs," *Journal of Business Innovation*, Vol. 4, no. 1 (2019): 1-12.

³⁹Carl Jung, *The Undiscovered Self* (New York: New American Library, 2006); Victor Frankl, *The Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning* (New York: Insight Books, 1997).

⁴⁰Molana Abdul Bari Nadvi, *Ma'ashiyat Ka Islami Falsafa (Economic Philosophy of Islam)*; Al-Ghazali, *Ihya Uloom Ul-Din: Volume 2 (Reprint)* (Multan: Idara Talifat-e-Ashrafiya, 2005).

⁴¹Omar Javaid, "Islamic System of Production and Consumption: A Guide for Muslim Entrepreneurs," *Journal of Business Innovation*, Vol. 4, no. 1 (2019): 1-12.

⁴²Omar Javaid, "A Multi-Layer Analysis and Solution for Climate Crisis: From the Restructuring of Production to Restructuring of Knowledge," *Islamic Finance and Circular Economy: Challenges and Opportunities*, Syed Nazim Ali and Zul Hakim Jumat, (ed's.). (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2021).

4.1. Localized - Social Embeddedness of the Exchange Process

In the west, Polanyi⁴³ was perhaps the first to acknowledge that the process of economic exchange is a socially embedded process, or a prior social relationship involving trust between the parties need to exist before conditional exchange can happen between them. Even if the parties involved in exchange are total strangers, they will evaluate each other for trustworthiness, or if necessary, they take the risk of trusting each other, which will be affirmed or negated during the post-purchase experience. Credibility or goodwill is thus universally recognized as a trader's or an entrepreneur's most critical asset.⁴⁴ Big corporations as well annually spend billions of dollars to maintain a sound public image.⁴⁵

Polanyi⁴⁶ argued that the idea of social embeddedness was a default feature of exchange particularly in traditional or preindustrial societies. Social here refers to the familial or communal ties which exist in a group of people. A look at how the markets were organized and the process of exchange happening since the time of Prophet (SAW) in Islamic history also suggest the same.⁴⁷ If a student of economics intends to understand the nature of economic transaction happening in Muslim bazaars in Islamic history, the student need not ignore the social nature of the relationship between stakeholders involved in the process of exchange in the Muslim history. In Islam, *maqasid-ul-sharī'ah* in particular, the social purpose exceeds in significance over the economic one, while the later serves the former.⁴⁸

The social dimension of exchange unfortunately does not appear to be the point of focus for the last three generations of Islamic economists including the present ones, as they have rather seen the economic system as if it has nothing to do with the social dynamics of a Muslim society. The political dimension, or discussion on political economy of an Islamic (social) economy on a macro scale is another side of the picture which also is largely been ignored, but it is out of the scope of the discussion of this paper. This corpuscularization of seeing the economics, the social and the political, in isolation of each other perhaps suggests how deeply western approach to social sciences⁴⁹ has influenced the Muslim thinkers in the postcolonial era till today. Looking at the social organization of the Muslim societies in history particularly during the time of the Prophet (SAW), it is not hard to see how the social and economic targets were deeply interwoven with each other.

The author has attempted to document the social foundation of economic exchange in Muslim bazaars,⁵⁰ and it can be argued based on the available evidence that the true nature of Islamic economic system cannot be understood while ignoring the social foundation of the exchange in an ideal Muslim society. By social foundation the author specifically means the nature of social relationships between different stakeholders prevailing in a Muslim society where the process of economic exchange is happening. It is needless to mention that the social relationships in a Muslim society will be deeply

⁴³Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1944).

⁴⁴Omar Javaid, et al. "Religious Entrepreneurial Communities as a Solution for Socioeconomic Injustice," *Journal of Enterprising Communities: People and Places in the Global Economy* Vol. 14, no. 3 (January 1, 2020): 415–46.

⁴⁵Joel Bakan, *The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power* (New York: Free Press, 2004).

⁴⁶Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1944).

⁴⁷Omar Javaid, "The Original Socio-Cultural and Economic Context for Practicing Shirkat-Ul-Aqd," *International Journal of Pluralism and Economics Education* Vol. 6, no. 4 (2015): 371.

⁴⁸Molana Abdul Bari Nadvi, *Ma'ashiyat Ka Islami Falsafa (Economic Philosophy of Islam)*; Nyazee, *Theories of Islamic Law: Methodology of Ijtihād* (Multan: Idara Talifat-e-Ashrafiya, 2005).

⁴⁹Manicas, *A History and Philosophy of the Social Sciences*; Sachs, *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power*.

⁵⁰Omar Javaid, "The Original Socio-Cultural and Economic Context for Practicing Shirkat-Ul-Aqd," *International Journal of Pluralism and Economics Education* Vol. 6, no. 4 (2015): 371.

influenced by Islamic teachings due to the significance of maintaining a healthy relationship with family and community in particular.

The social dimension here is also of key significance from the perspective of the circular-economy because of its emphasis toward localization as discussed on Section 3.1. The goal to maintain a healthy relationship between the members of the society is undoubtedly a higher goal in a Muslim society in the light of *maqasid-ul-sharia*. Preservation of economic interest of the members will not be at the expense of severing social ties; rather to preserve the social ties economic interest can be compromised. Social ties of familial nature cannot be broken for the sake of economic benefit as per the teachings of Islam. This preference of *maqasid-ul-sharia* automatically encourage a Muslim trader to prefer exchanging with the people who are a part of their community or neighborhood as compared to the people they are not aware of even if the stranger is offering a higher return. An incident narrated in Sahih Bukhari from the times of Prophet (SAW) is worth quoting here:

Narrated by 'Amr bin Ash-Sharid: While I was standing with Sad bin Abi Waqqas, Al-Miswar bin Makhrama came and put his hand on my shoulder. Meanwhile Abu Rafi', the freed slave of the Prophet came and asked Sad to buy from him the (two) dwellings which were in his house. Sad said, "By Allah I will not buy them." Al-Miswar said, "By Allah, you shall buy them." Sad replied, "By Allah, I will not pay more than four thousand (Dirhams) by instalments." Abu Rafi' said, "I have been offered five hundred Dinars (for it) and had I not heard the Prophet saying, 'The neighbor has more rights than anyone else because of his nearness, I would not give them to you for four-thousand (Dirhams) while I am offered five-hundred Dinars (one Dinar equals ten Dirhams) for them.'" So, he sold it to Sad.⁵¹

This preference goes completely against the capitalist logic of preferring the customers who pay more no matter how far they are, and buying from suppliers who are supplying at a lower price irrespective of their geographical location. The capitalist way of organizing the business often deprives the locals of opportunities and products which they essentially need, often leading to migrations which subsequently lead to social disintegration of communities.⁵²

Islam has put a great emphasis on being responsible for the family, extended family, neighborhood, the entire community, and the entire *ummah*, where the priority is given to people who are more closely related or live in closer geographical proximity. The Muslim traders or producers in history and even today in Muslim societies are seen to engage with people in their kinship and community networks more than outsiders. The reasons for doing so today may not be just religious, but that it is harder to trust strangers. On the flip side, there is a greater pressure to maintain credibility among the people who are closer as compared to the pressure of maintaining credibility with strangers. However, the belief of accountability on the Day of Judgment may encourage the demonstration of righteous behavior with strangers as well because otherwise one may endanger relationship with God who is always closer than any human being can ever get.⁵³

One may argue that the Muslim traders used to travel to distant places and they also eventually became a source to spread Islam in the Far East in particular. This indeed seems like good justification to keep the trade circle as global as possible. However, it can be argued that it is possible to trade at long distances even after prioritizing the exchange process with the local community. The surplus which is left

⁵¹See *Sahih-Bukhari*, Volume 3, Book 35, Hadith Number 459, <https://www.sahih-bukhari.com> accessed: 27th July 2021.

⁵²Goldsmith et al., *The Future of Progress: Reflections on Environment and Development* (Dartington, UK: Green Books, Ltd., 1995); Joanne Jaffe, and Amy A. Quark, "Social Cohesion, Neoliberalism, and the Entrepreneurial Community in Rural Saskatchewan." *American Behavioral Scientist* Vol. 50, no. 2 (2006): 206–25; Wolfgang Sachs, *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power*, Wolfgang Sachs(ed.). 2nd edition (New York: Zed Books, 2010).

⁵³Omar Javaid, et al. "Religious Entrepreneurial Communities as a Solution for Socioeconomic Injustice," *Journal of Enterprising Communities: People and Places in the Global Economy* Vol. 14, no. 3 (January 1, 2020): 415-46."

after fulfilling the local needs can be exported to anywhere needed. Further, it is highly unlikely that the Muslim traders who used to travel long distances would take items of basic necessity with them while depriving the local populations, even if there is such an example then it would go against the directives of Islam in favor of taking care of the people in close proximity.

So, even if the means are available to travel across nations and continents, even if the technology is proven to be green, the exports will not be justified unless the local needs are met. The idea of economic-circularization also pushes for localization but it does so because of the waste generated in the process of managing long distance supply chain, but since the idea is emerging from a society where the religion of individualism may have undermined the significance of social ties⁵⁴ so social consideration (towards the family and community) as emphasized by the teachings of Islam may not be a point of concern in the emerging discourse of economic-circularization in the western world.

4.2. The Sharing Culture

The act of sharing is essentially an act of giving without a condition. It is unconditional by definition. Reciprocity does exist but that may not be the primary reason behind sharing, instead, to have a culture of sharing a prior relationship of trust between people who share stuff needs to exist. The absence of reciprocity may not necessarily suspend the act of sharing as it is essentially an act of altruism on an individual level, as fulfilling the need of the receiver is the primary goal, and the receiver may remain incapable to return the favor in a reciprocal manner. However, if the receivers have the capacity and they refrain from sharing back when they can then such a lack of reciprocity may inhibit fostering a culture of sharing in the long run.⁵⁵

A culture of trust among the members of a community is again necessary to foster a culture of sharing as well. If the giver does not trust the one asking for help, then the giver may not feel an inclination to share. The trust is established between the demonstration of trust worthy behavior between the community members who rely on one another, where there is a fear of social exclusion or at least a fear of loss in reputation among the community members. So, members who are interdependent on each other for their social,⁵⁶ economic⁵⁷ and spiritual⁵⁸ needs may refrain from indulging in an act which may betray their trust with other community members because of the social, economic and spiritual cost attached to doing so.⁵⁹

⁵⁴Tyler Stillman et al., "Alone and without Purpose: Life Loses Meaning Following Social Exclusion," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* Vol. 45, no. 4 (2009): 686-94.

⁵⁵Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000); Margaret Bubolz, "Family as Source, User, and Builder of Social Capital," *The Journal of Socio-Economics* 30 (2001): 129-31; Mels Evans and Stephen Syrett, "Generating Social Capital?" *European Urban and Regional Studies* Vol. 14, no. 1 (2007):55-74.

⁵⁶Humans have a social need to connect with others in the family and community for emotional support when vulnerable, to share their experiences or having shared experiences together, to belong and identify themselves as part of a social group, and establish social ties at the time of marriage.

⁵⁷To fulfill their needs, humans indulge in trade particularly in complex societies, or in simpler tribal societies often a gift economy exist where distribution of food and other items of necessity happens on unconditional basis.

⁵⁸Spiritual needs are the need to be in relationship with the Divine which is also strengthened by taking care of other people, which in turn also give a sense of meaning to one's life as well.

⁵⁹Omar Javaid, et al., "Religious Entrepreneurial Communities as a Solution for Socioeconomic Injustice," *Journal of Enterprising Communities: People and Places in the Global Economy* Vol. 14, no. 3 (January 1, 2020): 415-46.

Figure 3 highlights the relationship between the social, economic and spiritual interdependence between the community members which eventually reinforces trustworthy behavior.⁶⁰ It has been noted that trust and reciprocity are cultural resources which increase with use.⁶¹ Strangers, however, may not be that careful in this context as they do not have stakes involved, unless they believe that they will be answerable to God on the Day of Judgment.

It is difficult to foster such a culture of sharing in a typical modern market society where the values of perpetually accumulating wealth for individual self-interest and competition with others for serving

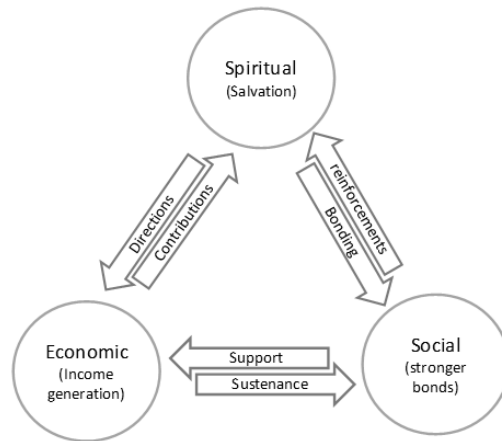


Figure 2: A relationship between the social, economic and spiritual interdependence, the three-level bonding in a religious community increases the cost of betrayal and thus reinforces trustworthy behavior, for details see Javaid et al. (2018)

one's self-interest may triumph over the values of sharing and cooperation.⁶² A market society is a society where the market dominates over social and political institutions, and as a result of this domination, non-market institutions in the social and political arena also absorb the values dominant in the market. This phenomenon has been referred to as McDonaldization⁶³ or market colonialism.⁶⁴

In an ideal Muslim society, a market, or let alone its norms, does not have such a dominating influence on non-market domains. Instead the market norms and dominant values in the market will come from the social and religious institutions.⁶⁵ The source of values and ideals in a Muslim society are ulema or religious scholarship who guide people as per the teachings of the holy Qur'an and Sunnah. The family institution in a Muslim society also plays a key part in transferring the values, beliefs, norms and ideals of Islam to the next generation. Market however is an important institution in a Muslim society, whose

⁶⁰Ibid., 430.

⁶¹Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

⁶²Omar Javaid, and Mehboob-ul-Hassan, "A Comparison of Islamic and Capitalist Conception of Economic Justice," *International Journal of Economics, Management and Accounting*, Vol. 21, no. 1 (2013): 1-31.

⁶³Kenneth Allan, and George Ritzer, "The McDonaldization Thesis: Explorations and Extensions," *Contemporary Sociology* 28 (1999): 200.

⁶⁴Russell Keat, "Colonisation by the Market: Walzer on Recognition," *Journal of Political Philosophy* Vol.5, no. 1 (March 1997): 93-107.

⁶⁵There is a fundamental difference between the institutions of a Muslim society and the institutions in a modern market society. In a Muslim society institutions environment will not be as impersonal and bureaucratic like it is in the modern market society, the agency will play a more significant role than the structure see Wael B. Hallaq, *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

purpose is to serve the needs of the people and their families, not the other way around, so the market will absorb the values from the social and religious.⁶⁶

So, in an ideal Muslim society, the phenomenon of unconditional exchange or sharing may go hand in hand, or even be more active than the phenomenon of conditional exchange, as the social has more significance than the economic, where purpose of the ‘economic’ is rather to serve the maintenance of the ‘social’. Since sharing is more a social activity, therefore a culture of sharing, thus naturally fits with the idea of a circular-economy, where different items can be shared and thus reused by many people. Again, in a Muslim society sharing or reusing has a deeper meaning as it aligns with the purpose of a Muslim in this world which includes serving others in the family and community.

4.3. Preventing Wastage and Protecting Natural Resources

The circular economic paradigm advocates for avoiding wastage by not producing anything which is not needed, producing what is needed in a way which does not create any wastage, nor destroy the natural environment to extract or grow raw material (like deforestation or burning down the rain forests to clear space to grow cash crops). If any wastage is inevitably produced then it is reused or recycled, the items which are produced are used to the fullest, and once their intended life is over, they are reprocessed or recycled into the raw material for new products, and in case if something is needed to be disposed-off to the nature then it is biodegradable, or within the limits of the nature to absorb it.⁶⁷

Contrarily, the shareholders in modern corporations are typically interested only in maximizing their returns, while managers they hire, also are trained and fully committed for the same purpose. On top of that they are also legally required to prefer the shareholder’s interest over any other competing interests.⁶⁸ In such an atmosphere, it is perhaps unrealistic to expect the people involved from the very top to the very bottom in a typical corporation to be concerned about any other competing interest of stakeholders particularly if the stakeholder cannot sue them in the court of law. Natural environment or the ecosystem is unfortunately such a stakeholder, which is rather brutally exploited for the goal of perpetual maximization of capital for shareholders.⁶⁹

Ideal Muslim entrepreneurs will have a different set of motivations because they are answerable to the Creator on the Day of Judgment regarding how they impacted any of the stakeholder dependent on them, including the natural environment.⁷⁰ Ideal Muslim entrepreneurs will see themselves as a caretaker or steward of the natural environment; harming it is a sin so they will avoid harming it for their private material interest. Further any act of wastage is also a sinful act for them as per the directives of the Holy Qur’ān.⁷¹

Such Muslim entrepreneurs will be inclined to avoid wastage and would conduct their business in a way which does not harm the natural environment. Muslim managers are also not just responsible to serve their employers but they are also answerable to Allah s.w.t, so they will also want to work for an entrepreneur who will prefer to avoid violating the limits set by the teachings of Islam.

⁶⁶Omar Javaid, “The Original Socio-Cultural and Economic Context for Practicing Shirkat-Ul-Aqd,” *International Journal of Pluralism and Economics Education* Vol. 6, no. 4 (2015): 371.

⁶⁷Nicky Gregson et al., “Interrogating the Circular Economy: The Moral Economy of Resource Recovery in the EU,” *Economy and Society* Vol. 44, no. 2 (April 3, 2015): 218-43.; Alan Murray et al., “The Circular Economy: An Interdisciplinary Exploration of the Concept and Application in a Global Context,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 140, no. 3 (2017); Patrick Schroeder et al., “The Relevance of Circular Economy Practices to the Sustainable Development Goals,” *Journal of Industrial Ecology* Vol. 23, no. 1 (2019): 77–95.

⁶⁸Bakan, *The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power* (New York: Free Press, 2004).

⁶⁹Klien, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate. This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 2015).

⁷⁰Fazlun Khalid et al., “Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change,” (2015).

⁷¹Bani Israil 17:27.

4.3.1. Minimizing Wastage on the Consumer Side

On the flip side, the Muslim consumers will also be motivated to live within the means of the planet,⁷² unlike the developed world where the resource consumption far exceeds the earth's capacity to produce or replenish. It has been estimated that if everyone in the world tries to adopt the lifestyle of an average citizen of the first world then we will be requiring multiple planets to sustain life.⁷³ Today it is possible to calculate and estimate how much resources an average family can consume to keep within sustainable limits. However, a population who relies on the consumption to distract themselves from the existential void or any psycho-spiritual pain instead of addressing the root cause, then it will find it hard to shift toward a lifestyle where consumption is done to fulfill the basic needs within the limits of the planet.

So, manufacturers alone cannot shift towards circularization unless the customers also are willing to adopt an alternative lifestyle based on the products produced in a circular manner which are consumed to fulfill the basic needs and not to distract them from any psycho-spiritual pain. For the Muslims, Islam's metaphysical position about who we are and what life can act as an antidote to the psycho-spiritual pain felt otherwise by people with a materialist world view. The Muslims also take help from *salah* and *sabr* as per the recommendation of the holy Qur'an during hard times⁷⁴ while spending time in *ibadah* is not seen as a non-productive activity in a Muslim community.⁷⁵ Support from the community may also be readily available in case if a Muslim collapse economically.⁷⁶ So, in the presence of such an ideological, spiritual and social support available to a Muslim, it is unlikely that he/she would suffer from the psycho-spiritual crisis the way materialists do,⁷⁷ thus will be less likely to become addicted-to-more.

5. Recommendations

The Muslim producers and the Muslim consumers therefore will complement each other in the process of adhering or adopting a circular design; thanks to their belief system and worldview. A sociocultural atmosphere based on the same beliefs and worldview, where they will find spiritual rationale for the idea of reducing, reusing, recovering, recycling, refusing and other principles of circularization,⁷⁸ will give them a higher motivation than that of a producer and a consumer in a modern market society. So, the key features of a circular-economy which can find endorsement through Islamic beliefs, values and norms are:

1. The customer will not be emotionally manipulated into buying products through shrewd advertising tactics, rather the customers will be encouraged to address the root cause of their psycho-spiritual crisis;
2. Natural life and environment will not be damaged in the process of extracting raw materials, growing crops, or produce energy unless it is unavoidable to fulfill some basic need of the local population;

⁷²Raquib, Javaid, and Anjum, "Creation of the Islamic Self for Sustainability: Can Muslim Entrepreneurship Positively Contribute to the SDGs through Tazkiya and Tarbiya of the Muslim Youth," *Journal of Islamic Business and Management (JIBM)*, Vol. 10, no. 02 (2020): 323-42

⁷³Wackernagel, et al., "The Ecological Footprint of Cities and Regions: Comparing Resource Availability with Resource Demand," *Environment and Urbanization* Vol. 18, no. 1 (2006): 103-12. <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0956247806063978>.

⁷⁴Al-Baqarah 2:153.

⁷⁵Eunjeong Yi, *Guild Dynamics in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul: Fluidity and Leverage. The Ottoman Empire and Its Heritage* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Publishers, 2004).

⁷⁶Javaid, Shamsi, and Hyder, "Religious Entrepreneurial Communities as a Solution for Socio-economic Injustice," *Journal of Enterprising Communities: People and Places in the Global Economy*, Vol. 14, no. 3 (January 1, 2020): 415-46. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEC-03-2020-0023>.

⁷⁷Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*; Jung, *Man and His Symbols* (New York: Harper, 2015).

⁷⁸Potting et al., *Circular Economy: Measuring Innovation in the Product Chain* (Netherlands: PBL Publishers, 2017). <http://www.pbl.nl/sites/default/files/cms/publicaties/pbl-2016-circular-economy-measuring-innovation-in-product-chains-2544.pdf>.

3. The products are to be produced to last as long as technologically possible;
4. All types of wastage will be avoided to the extent humanly possible;
5. In case if any wastage is produced then it will be reused in the production process;
6. In case if the wastage cannot be reused or recycled by anyone in the market, it will be avoided;
7. In case if the wastage cannot be reused or recycled, then it will be at least biodegradable or easily absorbed into the natural environment;
8. A market for all types of 2nd hand or used products will exist;
9. A sharing or gift culture will exist as well in parallel to the exchange economy;
10. Local resources including the man power and raw materials to be utilized in manufacturing for the local needs; local suppliers to be preferred, and if the ability or capacity is not there, then over the period of time ability or capacity will be developed to produce stuff locally instead maintaining reliance on suppliers from faraway places.

6. Conclusion

The paper has shown how Islamic metaphysical position, belief system and worldview complement the circular economic strategies better than that of modern western civilization. The metaphysics and worldview of the modern western civilization rather are antagonistic to the idea of circular-economy. The social order established under the inspiration of the teachings of Islam also facilitates circularization, while the culture of hyper-individualism, accumulation and competition in the western world is again non-conducive to the cultivation of a circular alternative. A large segment in the Muslims societies unfortunately seems to be more inclined to the modern western ways of organizing the society. So, serious efforts are needed to bring back their attention toward their Islamic roots, while educating them about the impact of western methods on the natural environment and the psycho-spiritual health of its inhabitants. They also need to be educated about how Islamic way of life, the social aspects in particular, can create grounds for the circular economic alternative to ensure holistic wellbeing for all the stakeholders.

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