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THE GOOD, THE JUNK AND THE PROFITABLE: THE NEW-*HALAL* FOOD IN BUDAPEST AND LONDON

Abstract: This research examines the emerging role of new-*halal* in two different European contexts: the Hungarian context in which the *halal* economy is embryonic, and the British context in which *halal* industry has reached its present peak of expansion in Europe. Drawing on interviews (with Hungarian Muslim actors of *halal*) and observant participation in the London Muslim Lifestyle Show 2017, this study attempts to show that *halal* promoters think of it, beyond its religious dimension, as an economic product, and especially as an ethical-ecological one, designed for non-Muslims as well.
Keywords: *halal*, Islam in Hungary, Islam in the UK, Islamic moral economy

Introduction

From time immemorial, religions have advocated special food practices and restrained from others, providing at the same time a rationale for prescribed food behaviour, and rules of good diet. While the category of sacred and profane could be useful in terms of framing a comprehensive understanding of religious perspectives on food, it does not do justice to the many and complex aspects of the relationship between religion and food, particularly to its economic aspect. That is to say, religions restrict certain foods and promote others also because, or as a consequence of major economic interests that religious cultures, laws or norms generate. Pamela V. Michaels captures well the link between religion and economy through the example of the sacred brew:

> "After the Roman Empire fell in the fifth century AD, brewing technologies were preserved in the west in Christian monasteries. Monks had originally started making their own sacramental wine and

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> brewed beer as a nutritional alternative to meals. This was important during their many fasts because drinking liquid was not considered to break the fast. The excess was sold to raise money for the monastery. Some religious houses, in fact, made brewing a big business: eleven out of twelve monastic houses in medieval Yorkshire, for example, had brew houses on their premises. It is not only likely that monks discovered the advantages of adding hops to beer, but medieval monasteries such as those in St. Gall in Switzerland also added secret proprietary mixtures of herbs to their brews to widen their public appeal."[1]

In the footsteps of Judaism and Christianity, Islam has also developed an economic ethics of food. For example, dates, which constituted the first product of Arabia (and after energy, are still the major product of the region) are highly praised in Muslim scripture. It is recommended by the Prophet Muhammad, according to Muslim traditions, to break fasting during Ramadan by eating dates, to use them to recover from certain illnesses in the so-called Prophetic medicine, to protect oneself from Satan and to make healthier children. Finally, dates are offered in marriage feasts, and to guests, as blessing foods.

The perspective of Islamic law on food is developed around the notions of *halal*, lawful and *haram*, forbidden. This seems to be close to Judaism (although a Quranic verse takes a Christian stance, namely 16:116 which says

> "And do not say, as to what your tongues falsely describe, 'This is lawful; and this is forbidden', so that you may forge against God falsehood; surely those who forge against God falsehood shall not prosper".[2]

The *haram* category is defined by Islamic law through the Quran and hadith as being blood, carrion, pork and alcohol, meat offered to another divinity than Allah, and ferocious animals. In addition, any food that is dirty or harms the body or the mind, is forbidden by extension, in the Islamic schools of law. *Halal* on the other hand is either what was slaughtered in the Islamic way (or "authentic" Jewish and Christian ways), or non-meat food, which does not contain any of the forbidden substances. The word *halal* defines what is lawful by virtue of Islamic law, that is, what is allowed by God or the Prophet (and imams for the Shiites). The word *halal* is used in European languages to mean Islamically authorized meat, but in Arabic its use is much wider: *ibn halal* is a lawful son (*ibn al-halal* being a good husband), *bint al-halal*, a good wife, and *mal halal* legitimately acquired money.

In recent years, *halal* food has become the meeting point of religion, food business and identity claims in Europe. A much debated issue is whether religion

1 Michaels 2011. 682.
2 Arberry 1996. 120.

and economy could operate in a secular society in the same way as they do in a non-secular society. While it is common in Muslim societies to find a ministry of Islamic affairs and endowments which combines religious and economic activities, it is central to European societies to distinguish between the two activities. However, as Islamism has infiltrated the Muslim migrant communities since the 1970s in Europe, a third component, that of identity came to problematise further the relation of Islam to economy. Food-for-identity is now a reality in the Muslim communities to such an extent that 70% of Muslims in France, according to a survey by Montaigne Institute in 2016, report that they "always" buy *halal* meat, 22% buy it "sometimes" and only 6% "never" do.[3] Taken together, these results suggest that there is a connection between *halal* food and Muslim identity.

This research examines the emerging role of new-*halal* in two different European contexts: the Hungarian context in which the *halal* economy is embryonic, and the British context in which *halal* industry has reached its present peak of expansion in Europe. Drawing on interviews (with Hungarian Muslim actors of *halal*[4]) and active participation in the London Muslim Lifestyle Show 2017, this study attempts to show that *halal* promoters think of it, beyond its religious dimension, as an economic product, and especially as an ethical-ecological one, designed for non-Muslims as well. The main aim of this study is, therefore, to investigate the religious-economic redefinition of *halal*, the process of certification and marketing of *halal*, the social embodiment and the intersection of this new-*halal*[5] with claims of identity among Muslims in Europe, and integration of *sharia* into the European legal systems. Due to practical constraints, it is beyond the scope of this study to engage with the ethnography of *halal* food in Budapest or London.

One of our interviewees (a Hungarian Muslim woman) relativises the identity effect of food, stating that "you do not have to change your eating habits when you convert to Islam. It is enough if you are considering eating *halal* food". In reply to the question where we can find restaurants that serve *halal* food, she stated: "There are only very few that obtain certificates but you can find many that serve no pork." This approach showed a compromise definition of what can be labelled as *halal* with much more emphasis on the end result of the process than on the process of production itself. The theme of compatibility between European life and *halal* food recurred throughout our field work, and is the starting point of our study.

3 Un islam français est possible http://www.institutmontaigne.org/fr/publications/un-islam-francais-est-possible (Accessed on 19. 05. 2017)

4 In Hungary, we interviewed Balázs Mihálffy a charismatic founder of the first Muslim organization in Hungary, and a key figure of *halal* in Central Europe (moving between Hungary and Austria), who shared with us his experience and views of the new-*halal*. We are very grateful for his openness and availability.

5 We stick to this "label" rather than green *halal* as Manon Istasse calls it or green *din* as Ibrahim Abdul-Matin names it, or even bio-halal (of Tariq Ramadan) because it is less controversial than the other expressions. See: Istasse 2016. 127–142; Abdul-Matin 2012; Ramadan 2009. 236–238.

Redefining *halal*

As Wilson claims,

> "when Halal is progressively being restricted to represent a term which is concerned with the slaughter of the animals, that this has to be undertaken by Muslims, and this practice has to be overseen and certified by religious clergy, as in Judaism… this overlooks the full spirit of spirituality and kinship intended to be encouraged amongst monotheists."[6]

The approach of the al-Azhar graduate sheikh, the Hungarian Balázs Mihálffy who defines *halal* as the good, *tayyib*, seems to offer new perspectives that can link value-based production with the criteria of being progressive. He quotes the Quranic verse 2:168 which states "O men, eat of what is in the earth lawful and good; and follow not the steps of Satan; he is a manifest foe to you".[7] In this verse, lawful and good translate *halalan tayyiban*, *tayyiban* being inseparable from *halal*. He emphasizes the notion of *tayyib* as beneficiary, blessed and sacred. To complete our discussion with him on this notion he provided us with his 2400-page Quran commentary in Hungarian and English in which Mihálffy puts it as follows:

> "Most of the Quranic verses on food recommend *tayyib*, that is, the good food which makes it *halal*. *Tayyib* is the noun in this case and the adjective is *halal*. Therefore, from an Islamic point of view we have to meet the criteria of *tayyib*, that is, to check that a food is good for health and comes from Allah's source. Due to the contaminated environment and accumulation, chemical substances can be introduced into plants, vegetables and fruits. Indirectly this also causes contamination in cosmetics and medicines. After that, it is ridiculous that we Muslims focus only on slaughter, while the animal we slaughter is practically a poison. According to Islam, this animal is not *tayyib*, regardless of whether it meets the legal requirements of *sharia*... It is time to treat halal under the control of the *tayyib* as a comprehensive system that starts from water and soil and goes to the table. First, we need to measure the region's relationship with the production of a given product as it happens. Here, the soil and water risk factors must be tested. Then the whole process, starting with raw materials, feed, additives, should be tested. We should avoid genetically manipulated organisms which may pose a threat to man. We have to detect anything that has a swine DNA. Particular importance should

6 Wilson 2014. 260.
7 Arberry 1996. 160.

> be given to traceability. Warehousing and delivery must be checked until this food reaches the table…[8]

It is rare that a Muslim scholar who acts in the field of *halal* undertakes the task of redefining so radically the notion of *halal*. Usually, the actors of *halal* are managers or conservative jurists. Balázs Mihálffy is of course a manager and a jurist. He worked as commercial representative for different companies in the Arab world and Africa and studied Islamic religion at al-Azhar University in Cairo, where he became a follower in 1983. Sheikh Gad al-Haq Ali Gad al-Haq (d. 1996), grand imam of al-Azhar named him a sheikh in 1986, and he became the first Hungarian Muslim jurist. However, these aspects of his action are combined with other aspects that explain as well this reformist stance. First, as he puts it, he is not tied to any Muslim country, which gives him autonomy. Second, Balázs Mihálffy is by profession an agricultural engineer (he received his diploma in 1979 in Gödöllő), and earned his doctoral title on the agriculture of dry regions.

It is therefore a combination of three types of legitimacy together that justify his authority to redefine *halal*: a technical legitimacy of being an agricultural engineer who knows the tricks of junk food production, a juristic legitimacy of a Muslim scholar accredited by al-Azhar, and a manager who can supervise and provide such *halal-tayyib* products. In his perception *halal* is not only a matter of state and process (what one eats and how it was processed), but it is also about the aim of the given food product from which the consumer should benefit.

Furthermore, we asked him whether his notion of *halal tayyib* meets the notion of organic or bio food, and whether *halal* could be organic or not. He answered as follows:

> "Bio is broader, it examines the soil to 5 years back, etc… In the Prophet's time the process did not need a check, it was pure. Today it is not pure, if He lived today He would regulate the process as well. We check what is important from the point of view of *halal*. All that is bio in its content can be *halal* if the end of the procedure is *halal*. The problem with swine is antibiotics in the fodder – it is left in the meat but with the fertilizer it goes into the vegetables too."[9]

This reformist redefining of *halal* is usually confronted by the traditionalist view which sticks to the Prophet's sayings and practices in the matter. This attitude is judged by our interviewee as formalistic, failing to address the spirit of the law. As for the Prophet, Mihálffy claims that in his time

> "all was natural and organic … nothing polluted the soil and the waters. There was little chance of contamination being found in the animal feed, which only happened later, and it was not risky for human

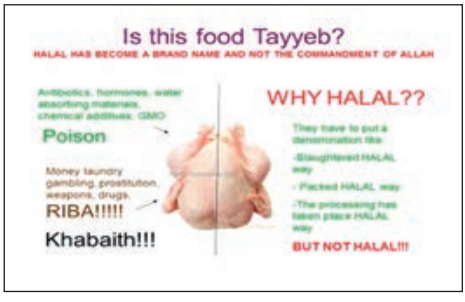
8 Mihálffy 2017. 379.
9 Interview with Balázs Mihálffy.

> consumption. The *halal* standards were therefore very simple: the cutting of the animal may be done with a sharp knife in addition to mentioning the name of Allah and then make sure the animal bleeds out."[10]

Mihálffy's new-*halal* is in line with other reformist European Muslim thinkers; Tariq Ramadan[11] also challenges the authority of traditionalist jurists on *halal*, stating that

> "Let us ask an interesting question: which is ethically more "Islamic," more "halâl"? A chicken that has been mistreated when alive, that may never have seen the light of day and that has been force-fed before being slaughtered according to Islamic norms with the ritual formula, or an animal that has been kept in a healthy environment respecting its development according to "organic food" label norms, but for which no ritual formula has been declaimed? Many fuqahâ', single-mindedly focusing on technical norm implementation, would not even understand such a question's being asked…"[12]

The new-*halal* further supports the idea of a conflict of authority and interpretation between traditionalists and reformists in European Islam. However, new-*halal* should not be understood as less *halal*, but a competing *halal* label, which all things considered, still means a presence of *sharia* diet in European societies.



A document distributed by the European Fatwa Council for Halal Transactions (source: Balázs Mihálffy) about products that are *formally halal and others which should be tayyeb-halal.*

A document distributed by the European Fatwa Council for Halal Transactions (source: Balázs Mihálffy) on the *centrality of tayyib to halal.*

10 Interview with Balázs Mihálffy.
11 T. Ramadan is a Swiss Muslim intellectual of Egyptian background, close to the Muslim Brotherhood and a major thinker of Islamic ethics, society and politics in Europe today.
12 Ramadan 2009. 251.

Redefinition of *halal* as organic *halal* allows new elites, converts to Islam with backgrounds in Christianity, ecology or science, as well as European-born second generation Westernized Muslims, to claim a new type of authority and to compete with dominating elites, trained in a traditionalistic way, and who represent particular interests of Muslim countries or organizations. The new-*halal* is not a mere legal or semantic matter, but a social position of local European Muslims, who aim to redefine the social organization of Islam in Europe.

In April 2017, we participated at the panel *Halal Ad: Marketing Done Right for Muslims by Muslims*, an active forum in which British Muslims, entrepreneurs and various actors of *halal* industry, engaged in a discussion on offering "advice on how to market your brand to the Muslim consumer". One speaker suggested that *halal* business should be about "intention, not to make money, but to have a purpose, and ethical business, aiming to make the world better".

Another speaker suggests that starters in *halal* business should create two labels: one which is a label of the personal company (to target non-Muslims selling them *halal* without labelling it), and the other should have a *halal* label (to target Muslim customers). Another speaker suggests focusing on the quality of the *halal* product in the hope that non-Muslims are attracted to it.

Another speaker advises the *halal* entrepreneurs to think about the reason a *halal* business exists in the market, that is the benefit this business could bring to the market, and that the Muslim entrepreneur should try to solve a very clear problem in the market, so that people [non-Muslims] can see and understand [that Islamic products are better]. It was clearly formulated in the panel that the new-*halal* is not only about being unique, but also about being excellent, or "an affordable luxury".[13]

Certifying *halal*

Arguably, the most crucial matter in the *halal* field is the process of certification. Certification connects religion and economy, increasing, by the same token, the authority of religious clerics beyond religious matters. A certification organism itself, before it issues a certificate for a market (producer), asks the authorization of a Muslim cleric, or a juristic collective body, which in the Muslim world, is trained in a specific juridical school, to obtain credibility. Thus, certification is a process of three actors: the religious cleric, the certifier organism and the certified label. Both the religious cleric and the certifier benefit from a share in the profit of the product which the certified label gives to the certifying organism, and which pays the religious cleric. By the nature of things, the religious clerics have every interest in encouraging *halal* consumption as this would mean more

13 Wilson – Liu 2011. 32.

taxes on *halal*, in which they are major beneficiaries. The certifying organisms are private and religious, with no state control in Europe to date.

As in any field, competition and rivalry exist between certifiers. In order to declare a meat *halal*, some certifiers advocate slaughter without electro narcosis while others advocate it (taking the risk of legalizing dead meat). Mihálffy pointed out that sectarian and juristic differences affect the standards of certification. Mihálffy told us that some *halal* certifiers "have a lobby in Europe which pushes to do audition according to their own standards. This is all business". According to his estimations, there are in Europe 50-70 certifying bodies – scattered all over Europe, which strive to get authorization for auditing from as many authorities as possible – to cover a bigger market. About his own organism, *European Fatwa Council for Halal Transactions*, he said that he is not

> "a *Shii*, not a Sunni not a Sufi, I take Muhammad's approach and attitude as a standard. For me Islam is the Prophet's lifetime and the rest is Islamic history. I do audit according to the Iranian standards. I went there in the 1990s to catch the last wave of theocracy. When some producer comes to me and asks for audit my first question is: for which market. I can do audit for the Iranian market but this gets refused by e.g. the Saudis. There are about 50-60 auditors. My company is called *European Fatwa Council for Halal Transactions* because I merge the strictest EU regulations with the halal criteria. This allows me to reach out to the wider public. Science can cross divisions; I work with a food security lab called *Werklig*, it is their experts who guarantee the quality of my certificates. My approach is unique, so far there are no enterprises that merge EU and Islamic regulations."[14]

The *European Fatwa Council for Halal Transactions* (its principal place of business is Vienna) established a memorandum of understanding with the Islamic Chamber Research and Information Center (ICRIC), Tehran, which states that it certifies according to the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation standards, recognized by ICRIC. According to the memorandum, the latter is entitled to delegate one of its Iranian members to control the *halal* activities of *The European Fatwa Council for Halal Transactions* while ICRIC represents the former at the OCI. The two organisms cooperate in training the employees, and share the benefit of audits. The agreement also states that all persons involved in this cooperation should be Muslims.[15] A certifying body acts as a service company which follows an organisational structure similar to that of any other service company: monitoring, raw material control, then going to the production process, and finally storage, shipping, marking, registration issues. The rules reflect the *halal standards* established in the certification documents. The certification company assesses the viability of the label and decides whether it meets the standards or not.

14 Interview with Balázs Mihálffy.

15 From the memorandum of understanding kindly handed to us by Balázs Mihálffy.


Checking List
MEAT AND MEAT PRODUCTS
EU HALAL FATWA
Details of the factory

The first page (out of nine) of a checking list for a label that applies for a *halal certification.*

Marketing *halal*

In our field work on *halal* actors in Budapest and London, the logic of the market did not seem to be foreign to that of *halal*. In Budapest, Mihálffy told us that "the market decides what *halal* is. The criteria vary according to the countries / regions. It is all about protecting the *market*". Also, it takes us to the problematic of the competition among the source countries and also with the host countries about gaining control over Muslims in Europe. A possible explanation for this perception could be attributed to the importance economy has acquired over religion in *halal* food (as it has in many other areas). Also, as a relatively new actor in the field who started his enterprise in 2012, he has to realise that competition is fierce and actors of *halal* care about obtaining contracts and eliminating competitors. *Halal* in Europe is a market that has existed for 30 years, with actors from different countries and legal schools. His statement is also indicative of the harmony Muslim thinkers establish between God and the market. In particular, the Sunni interpretation considers the market as a creation of God, and prices are defined therefore by God, nothing should intervene in defining the prices. In this regard, a speaker at the panel *Modanisa: Monetizing creativity* (*The Muslim Lifestyle Show*, April, 2017, London) said that prayer is essential to success in *halal* business). She said that whenever she faces a difficulty, she would ask God to help her.

What makes the idea of market all the more interesting for *halal* is that the market is global, which opens immense opportunities for Islam. Mihálffy *puts is* as follows:

> "Islam is the religion of globalisation, it is a globalising religion. Muhammad said to the Jews and Christians of his time that they are Muslims, but your sharia is Judaism etc... So Islam can offer ideas, solutions and even products that can reach out to non-Muslims. Through modest fashion, organic halal diet Islam can reach out to the wider public. Theology fails to create a common platform but common interest, business can do so. There is a kind of secularisation going on in Islam although it is different from the philosophical and ideological secularisation of the West. It is practical, generational and business oriented. Shia and Sunni divisions do not matter, they belong to the realms of regional power politics. People don't care about them."[16]

The invisible hand of the market, now global, seems to meet the message of Islam, which Muslims claim to be universal.[17] As Wilson et al. point out, *offering halal* products and services "is viewed by Muslims as a legitimate form of Islamic proselytization – which will encourage a climate of Islamic acceptance."[18] Mihálffy's argument is slightly different from that of reformism and traditionalism. Reformism and traditionalism considered the universality of Islam as truth-based (by virtue of the final revelation to Muhammad). Mihálffy's argument for the universality of Islam is interest-based. Interest can be given a twofold interpretation; one is the economic advantage of the exporter, producer and certifier while the other refers to the wellbeing of the consumer.

Selling a product to non-Muslims seems to put Islamic ethics of *halal* at stake. On the one hand, secularized Europeans are interested only in the biological benefits and at the same time suspicious of any religiously-embedded product to avoid financing the organisations behind them. On the other, European believers of different denominations either separate what they eat from what they believe, or defend competing religious perceptions of lawful food. The current controversy on selling *halal* as non-*halal* illustrates all the previously mentioned problems. Data about meat in the UK shows that "more than 70% of all New Zealand lamb in supermarkets is *halal*" and that "supermarkets and restaurant chains face being forced to label food containing *halal* meat as a row grew over millions of

16 Interview with Balázs Mihálffy.

17 As suggested, for example, by the title of an article by the renowned halal marketing expert Jonathan A. J. Wilson: "Konnichiwa Halal – As Japan opens its arms to Muslims".
See: http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/jonathan-aj-wilson/konnichiwa-halal-as-japan_b_9168942.html (Accessed on 19. 05. 2017)

18 Wilson – Liu 2011. 112.

customers being left in the dark about what they are eating".[19] It is also estimated that 55% of Brussels butcher shops are *halal*[20] (which started a similar controversy in Belgium). Likewise, in France it has been reported "that 32% of animals in France were slaughtered according to the *halal* rite"[21]. Labelling could be a solution to trace the origin of meat, but this could undermine the marketability of *halal*.

Being in the market requires *the European Fatwa Council for Halal Transactions* to expand its activities and controls. So far, it has standards developed for the meat industry, but it also has a standard for 10 other sectors: 1. Oils and fats 2. Pharmaceuticals 3. Drinks and waters 4. Cosmetics 5. Garden products 6. Bakery and confectionery products 7. Transportation 8. Hotel and tourism 9. Dried, Spices, soup powders, seasonings, etc. and 10. Milk products. In addition, *the European Fatwa Council for Halal Transactions* is constantly adjusting to local needs. Every two years it issues new certification lists because as Mihálffy told us "we want to adapt to the reality".

Similarly, the British Muslim speakers at the panel *Halal Ad: Marketing Done Right for Muslims by Muslims*, all sustain the idea that *halal* products should not be focused on religion, but about branding Islam through the best criteria of business and networking (a reference to Faegheh Shirazi's book *Brand Islam: The Marketing and Commodification of Piety*).[22] The message was that *halal business* is a new brand, and Muslim entrepreneurs should learn and adapt quickly to the market. They also maintained that Islam is good for business because it intervenes in everyday life through licit-illicit norms, *halal-haram* that need to be adapted and this adaptation stimulates the spirit of enterprise. However, the speakers faced several dilemmas and could not solve any of them: Should they stay Islamic or join the mainstream economy? What is the purpose of the brand *halal*? Should the actors of Islamic economy be capitalist apprentices in competition with big global companies with the brand *halal* or not*?*

Thus, although marketing *halal* seems to be the easiest step in the process of *halal* branding, it actually reveals its limits in a non-Islamic context. Many speakers expressed the dilemma that when Muslim entrepreneurs come to the market, they set making money as their goal, and then develop a strategy of appeal to Islam to sell, creating a moral dilemma. The appeal to interest could be understood by business-minded people in the West, but with secularization, many

19 Big brand shops and restaurants face being forced *to label halal food* as row grows over ritually slaughtered meat on sale in UK
http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2622830/Millions-eating-halal-food-without-knowing-How-big-brand-shops-restaurants-sell-ritually-slaughtered-meat-dont-label-it.html (Accessed on 19. 05. 2017.)

20 55% des boucheries bruxelloises sont halal.
www.lesoir.be/.../bruxelles/2015.../55-des-boucheries-bruxelloises-sont-halal (last accessed: 19. 05. 2017)

21 Halal: coups tordus et idées fausses
http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/societe/20120229.OBS2574/halal-coups-tordus-et-idees-fausses.html (Accessed on 19. 05. 2017.)

22 Shirazi 2016.

people believe spirituality should be free of business, and separated from it. However, some speakers were aware of the limits of Islamification, and hope to see the *halal* business evolve into a sort of Caribbean food label, where eating it does not depend on the origin of the public. The speakers and participants at *Halal Ad* sounded, in many respects, trapped by *halal*. Several speakers said that the reason a *halal* business exists is that it appeals to Muslim identity, exploiting that "ingredient branding plays a central role in the Muslim psyche"[23] in order to secure a share in the market.

Being in the market brings the temptations of powerful global companies who *see opportunities in halal food.* One speaker said he had an opportunity to be paid 100,000 pounds by a company that asked him to sell its products to the Muslim community as *halal*. To take the case of Nestlé, in 2007 according to data from Forbes, it "has become the biggest food manufacturer in the *halal* sector, with more than $3 billion in annual sales in Islamic countries and with 75 of its 481 factories worldwide producing *halal* food".[24] In 2017, Bloomberg reported that "Nestlé has 151 halal factories, from Malaysia to Pakistan, and distributes hundreds of certified products across the world".[25]

Such globalization of *halal* has at least two consequences for the Muslim young entrepreneurs in London; first, it means that bigger companies are able to pay certification fees for certifying bodies or religious clerics, thus influencing the standards and the costs of certification, which could be difficult for young entrepreneurs to keep up with. Second, bigger companies have industrial facilities and structures which allow them to squeeze out small competitors.

This anxiety was expressed at *Halal Ad* where some speakers suggested that it is not even sure that being a Muslim entrepreneur can be a sufficient reason to secure a share in the *halal* market and eliminate competitors. As one speaker said, there is a lot of Muslim negative publicity about *halal*: what one believes to be *halal*, another thinks is fake *halal*, etc. Another speaker replied that any *halal* product one puts in the market will always get a percentage of people who hate it, while another group will love it. Polarization is thus inevitable. As he said, some *halal* products were for example destined to support migrants coming to Europe, so those who wish to support them bought the products while others stopped buying the company's products.

These findings raise intriguing questions regarding the nature and extent of *halal* industry and may help us to understand the social logic of Islamic economics, of which *halal* is only one aspect. The dilemmas faced by young Muslim entrepreneurs seem to pose threats to their social advancement. As *halal* seemed to be a label of ethnic trade able to offer a ladder to a rising social class (Muslims in the West), this capital was fragmented by the many actors in the market and by

23 Wilson – Liu 2011. 28.
24 Meeting the Halal Test https://www.forbes.com/forbes/2007/0416/082.html (Accessed on 19. 05. 2017.)
25 How Halal Food Became a $20 Billion Hit in America
https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-09-14/america-loves-muslim-food-so-much-for-a-clash-of-civilizations (Accessed on 19. 05. 2017.)

globalisation. Naturally, some young Muslim entrepreneurs would welcome the idea of the global *umma* in the hope of a larger market for their products, but it is also a field in which better equipped economic actors, the neo-liberal big companies, have better chances to dominate.

Integrating *halal* and *sharia*

The problematic of the ethical aspect of *halal* is a recurrent one on the website of the European Council for Fatwa and Research. One request deals with the alleged alcohol content of Coca Cola. The answer first refers to a *hadith* stating that anything that makes one drunk in big quantities is *haram* in small amounts, however, the suggested interpretation is that if much of it does not make one drunk then a little of it is *halal*.[26] Another fatwa rules against buying meat from Christians and Jews in order to preserve religious and cultural identity, urges western countries to make slaughter possible according to Islamic Law, and Islamic countries to export meat.[27] But the obligations regarding halal food extend to issues of work, business and social life as well. This is well illustrated by the following two fatwas. In the first the question is whether it is possible to work in McDonald's since it sells food made of pork. The answer is that the Muslim person should look for another job, if he has done his best but did not succeed, then the next option is to ask a non-Muslim colleague to serve pork products, if there is no opportunity for that either then it is *halal*.[28] Besides the fact that religious dietary rules can affect one's employment and even seclusion in a given environment, the argumentation shows how *haram* can transform into *halal* under certain circumstances, when a condition of higher importance – in this case the necessity of making a living – justifies it. Wilson at al. label this phenomenon as "situation specific adaptation"[29]. They also raise the issue of the various degrees of *halal*, and in particular mark Cobra Zero beer as *halal* "but not Islamic in the classical sense".[30] This approach leads us back to one of the key points of the present article, namely the role of value transmission in the *halal* certification process.

The last fatwa referred to here is even more revealing on this. A restaurant owned by a Muslim is rarely frequented because they do not sell alcohol.[31] The question consists of three parts. First, is it possible to boost the business by selling drinks that contain alcohol? The answer is a plain "no". However, to the second

26 الشراب أو الطعام يحتوي على نسبة قليلة من الكحول https://www.e-cfr.org/fatwa/ (Accessed on 19. 05. 2017.)
27 ما حكم أكل لحوم الأنعام والدواجن المعروضة في الأسواق والمطاعم الأوروبية؟ https://www.e-cfr.org/fatwa/ (Accessed on 19. 05. 2017.)
28 العمل في مطاعم تبيع لحوم الخنزير https://www.e-cfr.org/fatwa/ (Accessed on 19. 05. 2017.)
29 Wilson – Liu 2011. 34.
30 Wilson – Liu 2011. 33.
31 بيع الخمر ولحم الخنزير في المطاعم
https://www.e-cfr.org/fatwa/ (Accessed on 19. 05. 2017.)

question that inquires about whether they can rent it for events where alcoholic drinks are sold, the answer is yes, since as long as the owner is not present on the premises, he is not responsible for what others do there when they hire them. To the third question, whether beer that contains no alcohol can be sold, the answer is again, permissive, because it is not the name that matters but the substance. The logic applied here is very similar to the previous one. In both cases the prohibition of selling *haram* food and beverages is overstepped with religious legitimisation. This prevents economic marginalisation while maintaining social self-segregation.

Sharia is concomitant to *halal* food, and may be linked as well to the social advancement of young Muslims in the West, who hope through the application of *sharia*, to obtain a social advantage. Although in our questions we avoided raising the issue of *sharia*, focusing on ethics and economy, our interviewees insisted on referring to *sharia* every time and then, putting *sharia* at the centre of the prospects for a better *halal*, and a better integration of Muslim communities in Europe. Again, food seems to imply debates about identity and social cohesion. Mihálffy told us that

> "Dogmas cannot be negotiated, rules can. This is the way forward. For Muslims freedom of religion means freedom to practice *sharia*. *But sharia is rich and flexible.* It is the responsibility of European (host) authorities to enforce the harmonisation of *sharia* with western legal systems. I believe it can be done, it is a matter of will and interpretation. Authority will not emerge by itself in the Muslim communities, an actor which is ready to make compromises and work out solutions must be singled out and backed by European politicians. Any law must be Islamic to get accepted by the Muslims but there is a wide pool from which decisions that allow for a *modus vivendi* can be distilled. It needs skill, creativity and commitment to modernity. Such experts do exist and in Islamic law solutions can be worked out. I want to train auditors like me in how to apply the same approach. This can be a good start. Law harmonisation is easier in tangible issues but compromises can be reached or enforced in family law as well. What matters is interpretation, reasoning and to make the Muslims interested in that of course, to set it as a condition without which their interests cannot be realised."[32]

Mihálffy's engagement with *sharia* adheres to the reformist paradigm. It is based on the assumption that Muslims only fully respect Islamic law. Such belief and argument from authenticity have been widely used since the 19th century to justify a return to Islam, and "Islamic solutions", and to reject the West.

32 Interview with Balázs Mihálffy.

For example, Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr's starting point in his *Our Economy* which was published in Arabic in 1960, was to declare the failure of capitalism and communism in the Muslim world, and to prove that Islamic economy is the third way, the only one that leads to salvation. Al-Sadr asserts that the most important factor in the development programme is the respect which people have for it, while Muslims have no respect either for capitalism or for communism, because they are foreign ideologies. He reminds the reader of the sensitivity resulting from the era of colonialism which cannot construct a new renaissance that offers salvation to Islam.[33]

The success of any development, al-Sadr argues, depends on an integrated, united movement of the *umma*. This conception of economy directs man towards heaven while the Western economies, whether capitalist or communist are world oriented. Still, Islamic economy can Clothe the world in the framework of heaven. Thus, he takes the argument toward the ethical dimension. Freedom, he said, is a materialistic aberration, and Muslims have better moral motives. He admits, however, that Muslims suffer from asceticism and laziness. Al-Sadr believes that communism is worse in terms of morality because it justifies social struggle while in Islamic economy there is no struggle, just harmony in the community.[34]

Al-Sadr's argument is largely based on social psychology: the ability of a community to morally justify an economic activity and engage in it. However, this argument hides the fact that Muslims display different economic interests and activities. Another recurrent element in his work is the use of the *Ad hominem* argument (capitalism or communism are no good because they come from the European man) seems to weaken the probity of his ideas. It is a fact that European economies succeed in Asia and Latin America while Islamic economies failed almost with few exceptions (namely of rentier states) in the post-independence era. Finally, his argument from authenticity, that only an authentic Islamic economy is viable, is questioned by the fact that one cannot know whether Sunnism or Shiism provides the most authentic interpretation of Islamic economy. For example, what would be an authentic *zakat*? The Sunni zakat which is 2.5% percent of the income or the Shiite *khums zakat* which is 20% of the income.

While this argument from authenticity had some validity in the colonized Muslim countries, it seems out of place in Europe to suggest that because someone believes in a religious law, therefore we must modify law to include religious law. There are thousands of religions, and no modern society can afford conceding to religious communities, the right to modify the law according to some religious law. Mihálffy made it clear that

> "Before the fall of the caliphate *ibadat* (the worship of God) and *muamalaat* (social interactions) were treated as separate. Since 1924 when the caliphate was abolished, the two got channelled into one single realm in which no secular legal system can substitute *sharia.*

33 Al-Sadr 1982. Vol. I. Part I. XXII–XXV.
34 Al-Sadr 1982. Vol. II. Part I. XXVIII–XXXIV.

> Religious freedom in Europe means also that we can adapt *sharia*. But we can influence and change *sharia*, it can be harmonized with the EU legal system. The only place where it is harmonized is Israel. The EU should work it out with legal experts, mosques must be deprived of *shari'a* and deal only with *aqeeda* (dogma and ritual). I suggest three steps of legalizing *sharia*: 1. Divide what is for *sharia* courts and what is for secular courts. 2. The definition of sin must be the same – terrorists must be condemned by both secular and *sharia* court. 3. Arbitration is for *sharia* court about matters concerning only the community. European values should be included into *sharia."*[35]

Indeed, *sharia* seems to be central to both traditionalist and reformist claims in Europe. 29 percent of the respondents in a survey by Le Soir-RTBF in Belgium believe that Islamic law is above Belgian law, 11 percent are uncertain, 60 percent think that Belgian laws are above Islamic law. Likewise, 34 percent favour a political system based on the Qur'an, 26 percent are uncertain, and 40 percent oppose such a system. This is in line with other studies and surveys that show that for at least one third of Muslims in Europe Islamic law is important and decisive. In their case, there is a natural aspiration to live according to Islamic law and it is logical to give it priority if Islam is taken as a whole. A *Pew Research Center* survey found that 39 percent of Muslims who live in different countries want *sharia* to be the official legal system.[36] There is a very high proportion in the Muslim majority countries claiming *sharia*: 99 percent in Afghanistan, 84 percent in Pakistan, 83 percent in Morocco, 74 percent in Egypt, 56 percent in Tunisia, 86 percent in Malaysia and 42 percent in the Muslim regions in Russia. The corresponding proportion – though not comparable with the above – is surprisingly high among Muslims living in the West. According to a poll published in a British Channel 4 documentary, in Britain, 23 per cent of Muslims want to live according to *sharia* law.[37] A survey conducted by the WZB Berlin Social Science Center among European Muslims shows less favourable proportions: 66% of them *think that sharia* is more important than the law of the country in which they live.[38]

Nevertheless, interpretations of *sharia* are plural (although all interpretations agree that the source of *sharia* is divine and therefore its principles are also divine). Many Muslims understand *sharia* to be a code of ethics and a set of flexible principles. Mihálffy embraces this ethical interpretation of *sharia*. He reproaches the current Muslim interpretations in Europe, including the *fiqh al-aqalliyyat*, jurisprudence of minorities (the pioneer of which is the European Council for Fatwa and Research in Dublin), for being school (madhhab) -directed. Most jurists follow

35 Interview with Balázs Mihálffy.

36 http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/07/22/muslims-and-islam-key-findings-in-the-u-s-and-around-the-world/ (Accessed on 19. 05. 2017.)

37 http://www.channel4.com/info/press/news/c4-survey-and-documentary-reveals-what-british-muslims-really-think (Accessed on 19. 05. 2017.)

38 https://www.wzb.eu/en/press-release/islamic-fundamentalism-is-widely-spread (Accessed on 19. 05. 2017.)

specific schools, although they do not admit it. Mihálffy links the predominance of *madhhabs* in the *fatwas* and juristic work to the original backgrounds of the jurists and the financial interests at stake in keeping up with a specific juristic school. He deplores the fact that a spirit of sects rules over jurists, the lack of flexibility and compromises they display, and that "everyone believes he is right".

This stance on the interpretation of *sharia* is consistent with his redefinition of *halal*, previously discussed. Both attempt to question the authority of dominating jurists of traditionalist tendencies. These jurists tend to promote their schools because they benefit from traditions, posing as their guardians and transmitters. A non-*madhhab*-based *sharia* could undermine their authority, and give rise to new juristic elites, such as Mihálffy. The latter, being a convert, could not make his voice heard by traditionalistic jurists.

What is surprising in this statement, however, is that he addresses, and expects his voice to be heard by the European non-Muslim law-makers. He does not seem wholeheartedly interested in convincing the Muslim jurists to work *together* for the future of Islam in Europe. He hopes European law-makers would integrate *sharia* into the legal process, allowing Muslim jurists such as himself to contribute to this process (admitting on the other hand that most Muslim jurists today either cannot be convinced about this perspective or oppose such integration). One of his proposals consists in establishing two kinds of courts: one secular and one for *sharia*, a double legal system that used to exist in Muslim countries as modernity made its way to these societies. For an external observer, this sounds like a parallel law that could threaten social cohesion. In case of opposition between *sharia* and European laws, some people would consider that they wish to be judged according to *sharia* courts (because it could give them a way out).

Likewise, in the Muslim Lifestyle Show 2017 in London, a strategy to integrate *halal* in Europe consists in adopting the Western food culture. There were eight stations: Halal Hot Dog Station, Hirata Bun Station, Pizza Station, Pulled Beef bun station, Chinese Cuisine station, Thai Cuisine station, Milkshake station and Crepes & Waffles station. Thus, the *halal* brand does not want to change the food, but to Islamize it or to "purify" it, to transform junk food into good food. To take an example, the description of Pizza Sation says: "Halal Pizzas including Americano, Tropicale, Pollo Fiamma and Classic Margarita Pizza served by Levy Restaurants – Olympia London".[39]

39 https://www.muslimlifestyleshow.com/lmls2017#whats-on (Accessed on 19. 05. 2017.)

Conclusion

A British Muslim entrepreneur said that the best advice he can give to Muslim businessmen, and the best strategy that made his success, is that he regularly buys flowers from a shop and goes to his mother and asks for her invocation to God in favour of the business of her son (the invocation of the mother is blessed in Islam), and her invocations so far have always proved to be powerful.

Young Muslim entrepreneurs and reformists suggest a new-*halal* label based on ethics of business and respect of organic standards, in order to obtain a share in the market. Nevertheless, the processes of certification and marketing of *halal* leave few opportunities for smaller entrepreneurs, embedded in their Muslim identity, and limited to identity claims of the *halal* label; they are being squeezed out by bigger companies and networks of major Muslim countries. Moreover, Muslim clerics who faithfully stick to standards established by juridical schools in their respective countries of origin, stand as a hurdle to rising new elites in the *halal* field, and this reopens wide the debate about Muslim authority in Europe.

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