The postliberal politics of halal: new directions in the civilizing process?

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines the emergence of postliberal halal politics in European societies. Building on research undertaken during the EU funded Dialrel project, it examines how the Malaysian state is inserting hegemonic claims into transnational space in order to dominate the international halal market. Moving beyond the idea of horizontally aligned networks of transnational power as the dominant framework for understanding social and economic change, the paper explores the complex interweaving of the large-scale macro processes and everyday micro practices underpinning the rise of Malaysia's postliberal halal strategy. It is argued that the processes of social and economic differentiation emerging as a result of these processes have the potential to be an important step in the global civilizing process. In conclusion, the paper discusses the implication of these developments for figurational sociology.

KEYWORDS: civilizing process; halal; identification; knowledge; postliberal; transnational

> *'On this civilisational divide which has been used to justify the oil wars... forward-looking agents now seek to do away with the old hostilities and promote a pax economica by active participation in sharia compliant markets.'(Bergeaud-Blackler 2012: 61)*

Introduction

Over recent decades there has been a rapid growth in transnational Muslim identities (Cherribi 2008; Marranci 2009; Sutton and Vertigans 2005). Over the last decade in particular, as Islam has become entangled in complex webs of political and cultural significance at the global level, *halal* has emerged a central feature of the religious and cultural identity of many young Muslims across Europe (Lever and Miele 2012). During this period, halal has gone from being a minor concern of the devout to a mainstream food phenomenon attracting the attention of a diverse range of religious and commercial organizations. Muslims are now recognised as a distinct group of consumers in their own right and there are clearly defined markets for *'authentic'* halal meat products in a number of European countries (Fischer 2008; 2011; Lever and Miele 2012). With the Muslim population expected to increase from 1.6 billion to 2.2 billion by 2030 (Pew Forum 2011), the potential benefits to be accrued from the international market are vast. The halal food industry alone is estimated to be worth around $632 billion annually (AT Kearny 2010).

At the global level, there have been attempts to develop a common halal standard to bring some coherence to the rapid process of commodification that has ensued (Lever and Miele 2012). In Europe, however, states prefer to leave the certification of halal meat to commercial and religious organizations, with halal meat only being regulated at the point of slaughter. This has created a vacuum of regulation and control that has encouraged the ongoing process of *halalization* (Fischer 2011). It is my argument that these developments have created the opportunity for Malaysia to develop a postliberal halal strategy targeting fragments of economy and society in selected European locations. The social and economic antecedents of postliberalism can be traced back to the second half of the 20th century. As the modern nation state failed to deal with claims made of it by rising outsider groups (Papadopoulos et al. 2008), so it turned towards transnational forms of governance underpinned by neoliberal forms of regulation and control. The forces that had bound competing social groups together within the confines of the nation-state over many centuries (Elias 2000) thus began to unravel, as the processes of subjectification described so intimately by Foucauldians came to the fore (Barry et al. 1996;

Burchell et al. 1991; Rose 1996).

Papadopoulos et al. (2008) argue that a similar process is underway today. Much as transnational regimes of control emerged as a response to a crisis at the heart of the nation state, so postliberalism, they argue, is *now* emerging as a response to the crisis of multiculturalism at the heart of transnationalism. Much as the modern nation state mobilized the most intimate aspects of subjectivity escaping regulation from the 1960s onwards, it is my argument that Malaysia is *now* developing a *postliberal halal aggregate* to target the subjective experiences of European Muslims excluded under transnational conditions. Much like figurational sociology:

> Postliberal aggregates carry neither the modern fetish of wholeness, nor the postmodern obsession with partiality. It is not so much that the state disappears or that transnational processes and institutions take control. We know that states play much harder now than at many other times in history. And we also know that patriotisms, fundamentalisms, new nationalisms play a crucial role in the makeup of current geopolitics. The difference is that the state ceases to act as representing itself, it splits itself, and certain parts of the state participate in broader social aggregates. It participates by articulating interests, wills and political views and by linking with many different, selected segments of social classes, social groups, associations of civil society (such as trade unions, customers organisations, pressure groups), local business companies, transnational companies, non-governmental organisations, international governments, transnational organisations (Papadopoulos et al. 2008: 32).

We can see these processes at work in the international halal market. While 'halal is being acknowledged by multinational companies as a significant new market', it is also helping Malaysia to pinpoint 'different groups of people as aesthetic/moral communities' at 'the interfaces between the politics of and markets for modern Muslim identities' (Fischer 2011: 163).

Figurational sociology (Elias 2000) provides a useful way of examining the interdependence between the everyday micro practices and long-term macro processes underpinning the rise of postliberalism. The term figuration was introduced by Elias to illustrate how the complex interweaving of human actions, interests and intentions brings about something which is unplanned by any of the individuals and groups involved. The great strength of figurational sociology is that it allows us to understand the complex interweaving of human interdependencies more clearly whilst 'showing something of their structure' (Goudsblom 1977: 149). On this account, globalization is viewed as a very long-term process through which individuals, groups and societies become more or less interdependent as a result of changing figurational conditions (Mennell 1990; Goudsblom 1996; De Swaan 2001; Sutton and Vertigans 2005). This paper contributes to these debates by examining the *blind social processes* underpinning the rise of Malaysia's postliberal ambitions in the international halal market.

The paper proceeds as follows. In the first part of the paper, building on empirical material from the EU funded Dialrel project [1][#N1](Lever et al. 2010), I discuss the rapid emergence of markets for *'authentic'* halal meat products in Europe over the last decade (Lever and Miele 2012). This is followed by a brief discussion of the unplanned figurational tensions that have brought about these developments. The changing role of the state (Elias 2000) is discussed next in line with the rise of postliberalism (Papadopoulos et al. 2008). This lays the foundations for an analysis of the global proliferation of halal and the ongoing attempt of the Malaysian state to dominate the international halal market through the development of a *postliberal* halal strategy. Building on Yiftachel's (2006) work on *ethnocracy*, I argue that the Malaysian state elite is attempting to maintain authority by inserting new hegemonic claims into transnational space (Papadopoulos et al. 2008).

In the second half of the paper, I examine the emergence of halal in Malaysian policy and its centrality to the states postliberal ambitions. Moving beyond the Gramscian (1971) insights offered by Yiftachel (2006) and Papadopoulos et al. (2008), I then explore the processes of economic and social differentiation that are emerging in line with new Muslim consumption practices across Europe (Pink 2011). This process is in turn giving rise, I argue, to new forms of postliberal identification through which *halal* is becoming aligned with a range of environmental concerns (Haenni 2010; Hashim 2012) linked to the wider development of the

knowledge process (Elias 2007; Kilminster 2004). I conclude by assessing the implications of these developments for figurational sociology.

# Halal meat markets in Europe: new production and retail practices

As European Muslims have attempted to reinforce their identity in response to global pressures they have been recognized as a distinct group of consumers in their own right (Fischer, 2011). The concurrent expansion of halal meat markets has been underpinned by a rapid process of commodification through which a plethora of commercial and religious organisations now offer their own interpretation of what constitutes *'authentic'* halal meat (Lever and Miele 2012).

It is a requirement of European legislation for the protection of animals at the time of killing (EU 1993; 2013) that all animals are stunned *prior* to slaughter in line with the precepts of mainstream science and associated animal welfare claims (FAWC 2009). European Union member states are allowed to grant an exception to this legislation on religious grounds in line with the freedoms granted by Article 9 of the European convention on Human Rights (Ferrari and Bottoni 2010). This legislation is subject to interpretation by EU member states, but in general it provides legitimacy for the expansion of markets for halal meat from animals that are *not* stunned prior to slaughter. The tensions that emerge from these developments could be seen as a clash between established secular groups and Islamic outsider groups (Sutton and Vertigans 2005) in line with the *'clash of civilizations'* thesis (Huntington 1993). However, in this paper I want to focus more on the civilizing potential unleashed by the postliberal politics of halal in European societies.

Competing halal discourses

The distinction between the pre-stun and non-stun halal positions that permeate EU policy discourses is aligned directly with debates about the origins of Islam in the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*. The first position, which emerges directly from the *Qur'an,* is based on an understanding that all people of 'the Book' share common slaughter practices. The implication here is that Muslims can consume meat from animals reared and slaughtered by Jews and Christians as well as by Muslims: until relatively recently this position was accepted by most European Muslims (Bergeaud-Blackler 2004; 2007; Lever and Miele 2012).

The second position, common amongst Sunni Muslims, is linked more directly to Islam and to traditional halal practices. This position emerges in line with principles established in the *Qur'an* through the lived experiences of the prophet Mohammed, as recorded in the *Hadiths*. [2][#N2] On this account, Muslims are only permitted to consume the meat of an animal if the method of stunning used is reversible (i.e. animals are unconscious but still alive at the time of slaughter), the animal has been blessed by a Muslim prior to slaughter (the 'tasmiyyahh') and the blood is allowed to drain completely post-slaughter. The main area of concern for adherents of this position is with the perceived risk that instead of being made unconscious by stunning, animals will suffer or be killed. If this occurs, the meat produced is rendered *haram* (unlawful) rather than *halal* (permitted or lawful) (Bergeaud-Blackler 2004: 2007; Lever and Miele 2012).

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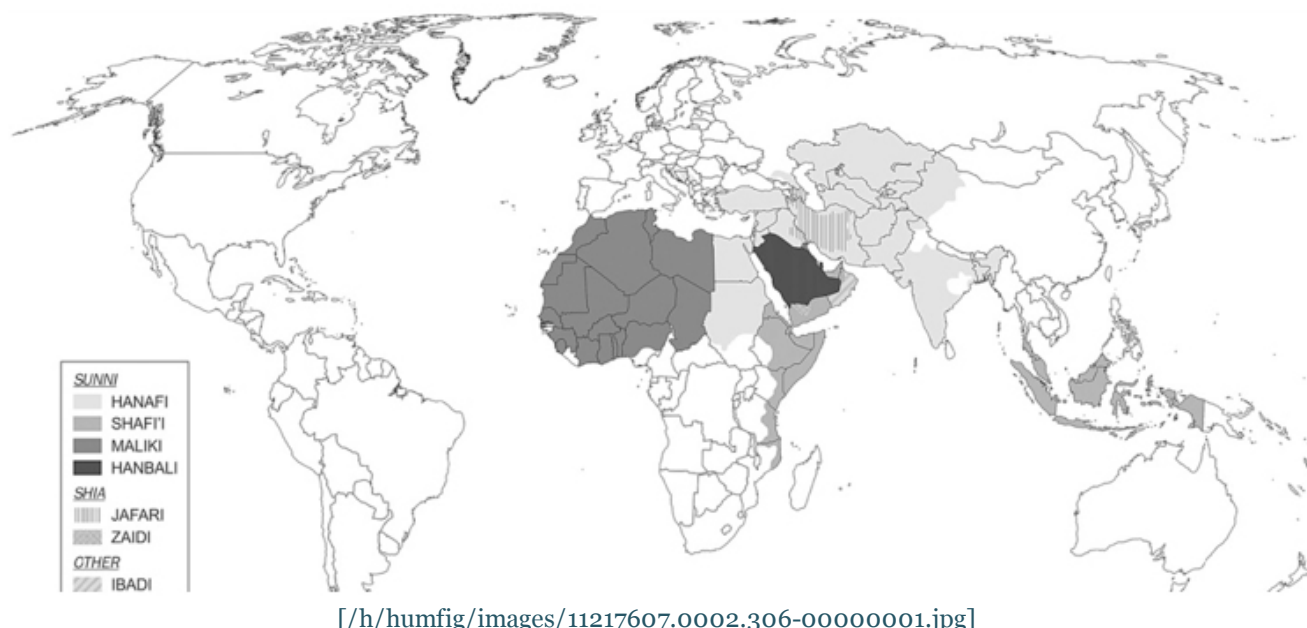
Islam by schools of thought/ jurisprudence: adapted from Hashim (2010)

Global trade

These complexities are further enhanced at the global level by guidelines issued by the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC 1997). Since the Uruguay round of the GATT trade negotiations in 1995, these guidelines have been increasingly aligned with the attempts of the World Trade Organisation to promote and enhance free trade (Veggeland and Borgen 2005). This means that equal weight is given to the diverse halal practices emerging from different regional traditions within Sunni Islam in order to protect commercial interests (Lever and Miele 2012). Although the theology of each of the four Sunni schools of *jurisprudence* (or *Madh'habs)* – the Hanafi, Hanbali, Maliki and Shafie – is accepted by each of the others, there are still differences of opinion on a number of issues, including halal practices. While the Malaysian state standard for halal meat, which is based on the Shafie School of thought, allows stunning for *all* bovine animals (cattle, bull, cow and ox), this practice is not allowed in Pakistan, Poland and Russia for example, where the Hanafi School is dominant (Lever and Miele 2012).

European halal markets

It soon became clear during a study of UK, French and German halal meat markets that Muslim scholars aligned with different certification bodies adhere to different halal practices (Lever et al. 2010). [3][#N3] Across Europe, mainstream supermarket and fast food chains target halal consumers in both the pre-stun and non-stun markets in partnership with a wide range of commercial and religious organisations linked to different schools of thought (Lever and Miele 2012).

The UK supermarket chains ASDA and Tesco first started selling halal meat from pre-stunned animals in 2000. From 2007 and 2010 respectively both have also sold halal meat from non-stunned animals in specialist world food stores and in-store halal butchers in selected locations (Interview at ASDA Head Office 2010). In 2009, the UKs largest certifier of halal meat from stunned animals – the Halal Food Authority (HFA) – launched a halal trial at small number of Kentucky Fried Chicken outlets in areas of London with a large Muslim population. This was a controversial move that attracted criticism from Muslims and non-Muslims alike, yet the trail was extended, it was argued, because of market demand (Interview with HFA President 2010). The dominance of the HFA across the UK is increasingly challenged by organisations such as the Halal Monitoring Committee (HMC) and the National Halal Food Group (NHFG), who certify meat as halal from non-stunned animals (Lever et al. 2010; Lever and Miele 2012).

France has the most complex halal market in Europe. Compared to the UK, where most halal meat is from animals stunned before slaughter, in France most halal meat is from non-stunned animals; there are also high numbers of independent halal producers practicing self-certification. Despite these differences, the problems that have emerged as the market has expanded are very similar. The fast food chains Quick and KFC opened *halal only* restaurants. As in the UK, this attracted the attention of far right political groups and KFC has been accused of discrimination against non-Muslims. French supermarket chains have also introduced dedicated halal lines. Casino introduced a brand named *Wassila*, they claimed, because of confusion in the French market. However, Casino's approach is itself symptomatic of this underlying complexity. They initially used seven certification schemes for *Wassila*, including the HMC's in the UK, which led the consumer blog Al Kanz (2009) to claim that Casino's approach lacked transparency, did not guarantee halal and was disrespectful to Muslims (Lever et al. 2010; Lever and Miele 2012).

In Germany, the expansion of dual halal meat markets has been considerably slower. German consumers appear less aware of the underlying debates. It is only recently that the supermarket chains Aldi and Lidl have been compelled by consumer concerns over animal welfare to think about the implications of selling halal meat (Schröder, 2009). Nevertheless, the market is starting to expand. The Federal Association of German Food Retailers has claimed that the halal market is increasingly significant, while the German Federation of Turkish Wholesalers and Retailers has advised German companies to embrace the halal market. The Malaysian National News Agency *Bernama* has also drawn attention to the potential the market offers Malaysian producers (Lever et al. 2010; Lever and Miele 2012).

Discussion

It seems clear that the new production and retail practices outlined above are linked to longer-term macro processes. Europeans have been intertwined in complex relationships with Muslims for centuries (Sutton and Vertigans 2005). As Islam has become entangled in complex webs of political and cultural significance at the global level, halal has become increasingly central to the identity of European Muslims (Lever and Miele 2012). In the UK and France, where longstanding colonial traditions with the Indian subcontinent and the Maghreb in North Africa have facilitated high levels of immigration, there appears to be more of a widespread questioning of the status of the commercialized forms of halal meat available in supermarkets and fast food restaurants. Dual markets for halal meat have thus expanded rapidly. In Germany, by contrast, where the underlying issues are less prominent, and the status of Turkish migrants is less clear (May 2004), the market has not expanded to the same extent.

These developments provide a clear example of Elias's (2000) argument about the complex interweaving of large-scale macro processes and everyday micro practices. Like the effects of an object dropped into a pool of water, the consequences of figurational change ripple outwards until they are lost from view: 'Their effects are felt, not at random but according to the structure of the figuration in which they are enmeshed' (Mennell 1992: 258). It is the underlying complexities generated by these figurational tensions that have laid the foundations on which Malaysia's postliberal halal strategy is now influencing halal consumption practices. Arguably, this process has direct implications for the future trajectory of the civilizing process. Before looking at these developments in more detail, I next examine my theoretical argument about the rise of postliberalism from a figurational perspective. This in turn lays the groundwork for an examination of the social and economic foundations on which Malaysia's postliberal halal strategy stands.

The changing role of the state under postliberal conditions

National government

It could be argued that the expansion of the European halal meat market into pre-and non-stun segments is based on an emergent 'governmentality' of halal based on private standards and 'third party' certification. However, the modern state is much more than a set of governmental practices and technologies in a Foucauldian sense (Foucault 1979). As Elias (2000) demonstrates clearly, the modern nation state grew as a response to the competing claims made of it by antagonistic social groups over the course of many centuries. On this account, Foucault's attempt to link power with the subject ignores how state formation in the West led to

the formation of balanced social conditions through long-term processes of deliberation and contestation. It ignores how the state emerged as a permanently unstable balance between competing 'subjects of power' (Poulantzas 1978) who participate in what Papadopoulos et al. (2008) call the 'national social compromise'.

Building on this argument, Papadopoulos et al. (2008, 12) claim that the modern nation state does not 'have the resolution of social conflicts as its ultimate aim', but that 'it attempts to regulate and ultimately control conflicts by developing multiple ways to include subaltern social groups and classes'. They argue that this process creates space for those excluded from this process to develop strategies of subversion that compel the state to transform itself beyond the limits set. These transformations are not seen as the *effects* of state control in a Foucauldian sense, but as *responses* to state control that trigger transformation. In *Escape Routes* (2008), Papadopoulos and colleagues argue that this conceptualization facilitates a move away from *panoptical fixation* with an expanding social order to an interrogation of the subjectivities that slip through social control mechanisms and push the state towards transformation.

Transnational governance

As the 20th century drew to a close and the modern nation state failed to deal effectively with the claims of rising outsider groups it turned towards a transnational mode of control. The move from national government to transnational governance included attempts to reconcile social conflict through ever more inclusive forms of regulation for a multitude of underrepresented social groups. This socio-political transformation, which facilitated the rise of neo-liberalism as a way of conceptualizing the changes that were undermining national sovereignty, was based on an 'unregulated, fluid governance of the population' (Papadopoulos et al. 2008: 17).

As rising outsider groups gained ground in their relations with established groups throughout the latter 20th century, the civilizing process advanced to an *informalizing* (Wouters 2007) *transnational* (De Swaan 1989) phase. This increased the pressures individuals face significantly (Elias 1991). While the nation state transformed individuals into civilized subjects of power within the confines of geographically defined territories over the course of many centuries, transnationalism collapses the demarcation lines between nation states. This increases the demands of self-governing subjects that they incorporate the state into their subjectivity in new and demanding ways. Whilst the pressures individuals face grow significantly, this process also excludes those who do not conform to the accepted cannons of civilized behavior in specific contexts. We only have to look at the position of Muslims in European society to understand the difficulties of aligning diverse social and cultural groups within transnational space.

Building on Elias's (1991) insights, the problems of moving towards transnational or postnational societies have been well discussed within figurational sociology. In the early 1990s De Swaan (1995) discussed the move towards transnational societies and the possibility of developing transnational social policies. By the end of the decade, however, neoliberalism had shaken this belief and he was talking about the receding prospects for transnational social policy (De Swaan 1997). Linklater (2011) suggests that the problem of moving towards postnational societies revolves around issues of natio-centric socialization, the role of double bind processes in established-outsider relations and anxieties about higher-level political authorities. All of these issues, he argues, prevent the levels of detachment needed to plan and coordinate solutions to existing problems more successfully.

Postliberalism: neither government nor governance

Much as it was impossible to achieve an effective compromise under conditions of national sovereignty, so Papadopoulos et al. (2008) argue that it is impossible *now* under transnational conditions to reach an effective compromise including outsider groups. Right *now*, at this very moment, they argue that a new phase of control is being articulated through attempts to capture the subjectivities *escaping* transnational governance. While the emancipatory moment identified by Wouters took us beyond a civilizing process confined within the bounds of the nation state, they argue that the postmodern identities and sensibilities that have emerged under transnationalism are *now* being drawn into vertical aggregates of postliberal power through the strategic rearrangement of transnational horizontal space.

Let me be clear at this juncture. The rise of postliberalism does not mean that the state disappears or that

transnational institutions stake complete control. As we observe in the case of Malaysia below, it is more that the state splits itself into competing aggregates as and when the opportunity arises. Postliberalism feeds on transnationalism. It inserts new hegemonic claims into transnational space in order to facilitate new solutions to existing problems – in this case, the exclusion and ongoing vilification of European Muslims over the last decade (Vertigans 2010). Under postliberal conditions, neither the centralized state apparatus of government nor the relational networks of neoliberal governance are effective ways of organizing economy and society. Postliberalism knows this. It sets out to develop new solutions to existing problems as and when the opportunity arises (Papadopoulos et al. 2008). In what follows, I examine the origins of Malaysia's postliberal halal strategy in more detail in order to lay the foundation for an analysis of its impact on the future trajectory of the civilizing process.

Malaysia and the global proliferation of halal

Halal has been regulated in Malaysia for almost four decades. In the mid-1970s, the Trade Description Act 1975 made it illegal to falsely label food as halal (Sadek 2006). On coming to power in 1981, the Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad furthered this process by institutionalising and regulating the certification of halal within the workings of the state bureaucracy (Fischer 2011). This positioned halal at the centre of trade, commerce and industry and initiated a process through which Malaysia became a major halal hub in South East Asia (Khalid 2009; Marketeer 2011). Arguably, Malaysia's plans to become a global halal hub are underpinned by a postliberal halal strategy that builds on these developments. Much as the Malay elite has inserted hegemonic claims into national space over the last 50 years in order to maintain the states *ethnocratic* foundations (Yiftachel 2006; Wade 2009), so Malaysia, I argue, is *now* attempting to dominate the international halal market by inserting hegemonic claims into transnational space (Papadopoulos et al. 2008)

Maintaining hegemony through halal

Since independence in 1957 individuals can only be considered Malay if they are also Muslim. While Islam is Malaysia's official religion, adhered to by over 50% of the population, the country is also a secular state with substantial Chinese and Indian minorities. The United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) played a significant role setting up these constitutional arrangements at the time of independence. The underlying political controversies brought inter-ethnic rivalries to the fore and over the intervening decades there have been intermittent outbreaks of communal violence, the most significant occurring in 1969 (Hilley 2001; Wade 2009).

It was in this context that the New Economic Policy (NEP) was introduced by UMNO to address the concerns of the Malay majority (Fischer 2011). Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the number of Malays employed in the state bureaucracy increased significantly through the use of ethnic quotas in education (Bunnell 2002; Courbage and Todd 2007; Wade 2009). The overall ideological aim was to produce an educated, entrepreneurial and consuming Malay middle class in line with the emergence of a dominant Western economic model (Fischer 2011; Hilley 2001). The electoral success of UMNO during this period was underpinned by a migration strategy that consistently increased the population ratio of ethnic Malays vis-à-vis Chinese and Indian minorities (Wade 2009). Bunnell (2002) argues the state turned a blind eye to illegal migration from Indonesia and the Philippines during the 1970s and 1980s for this sole purpose. In 1957, around 47% of the population was ethnic Chinese: by 2009 this figure had dropped to 26%. The state has also attempted to maintain authority by regulating 'deviant Islam'. Building on reformist ideas that reached the Malaysia from the Middle East during the late 19th century, the state consistently idealized Islam as rational, of-this-world and compatible with modern society (Fischer 2011).

As an educated and entrepreneurial Malay middle class emerged on the back of NEP, debate about what constituted a fit and proper Islamic way of life intensified (Fischer 2008; 2011). It was in this context that the institutionalisation of halal within the workings of the state bureaucracy became increasingly significant. Throughput this period, nationalism and notions of *other* were selectively mobilized as and when the need arose. This process is evident in the development of eating practices over an extended period of time. While for previous generations eating was an aspect of sociality that brought ethnic Malays, Indians and Chinese closer together, from this point onwards eating was used to indicate the essential difference between halal consuming

Malays and the omnivore *other* (Peletz 1997). The social invitations of non-Malay Muslims are thus often rejected by Malay Muslims because of the threat they pose to their religious piety (McKinley, 2003).

As the consequences of the Asian economic crisis intensified during the late 1990s, the class relations that had driven economic growth and prosperity throughout the 1980s came under threat. As international capital fled and political uncertainty grew, tension between an economy underpinned by neoliberal principles and the practices of Islam continued to increase (Hilley 2001; Bunnell 2002). From the early 1990s, UMNO had been compelled by global pressures to develop a less exclusive form of nationalism than that propagated by NEP. In the aftermath of the economic crisis the Malaysian state looked to develop a new economic agenda to further redefine nationalism and repel the counter hegemonic forces revolving around *Parti Islam Se-Malaysia* (PAS) (Hilley 2001; Bunnell 2002; Fischer 2011). It was in this context that halal came to play an increasingly significant role in Malaysian state policy at the global level.

Malaysia's postliberal halal strategy

Over the last decade, Malaysia has developed a dual economic strategy to position itself centrally within the international halal market. On the one hand, they have developed plans to turn the country into a global halal hub through the expansion of their state led standards and certification regime. On the other hand, they have been involved in a project to develop a global halal standard in line with the diverse concerns and practices of all 57 members of Organisation of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC). [4][#N4] It is the prioritization of the former over the later, I argue, that underpins Malaysia's postliberal ambitions.

Malaysia's strategy to position itself as a global hub for halal trade has been emphasised through consecutive Industrial Master Plans. These long-term state strategies have consistently laid out objectives to achieve global competitiveness through the transformation of Malaysia's manufacturing and services sectors (see Badawi 2006; Muhammad et al., 2009; Noordin et al., 2009; Marketeer, 2011). In August 2004, the first Malaysian International Halal Showcase (MIHAS) took place in Kuala Lumpur. The event was significant for the unveiling of the Malaysian state halal food standard alongside renewed plans for Malaysia to become a global halal hub (Fischer 2011). The Swiss food giant Nestlé played a significant role in the development of Malaysia's state halal standard in partnership with the Malaysian state Department of Islamic Development (JAKIM).

In 2006, to strengthen their position and push forward the notion of a global halal hub, Malaysia established the Halal Industry Development Corporation (www.hdcglobal.com [http://www.hdcglobal.com/]) to oversee market expansion. At the same time, they launched a Halal Knowledge Centre (knowledge.hdcglobal.com [http://knowledge.hdcglobal.com/]) as a reference point for all things halal. They also promoted the halal food industry internally at the local level through an on-line portal (www.Halal.gov.my [http://www.halal.gov.my/]) to encourage small and medium enterprises to enter the halal market (Seong 2011). Partnerships between public and private sector organisations are therefore a crucial part of these developments (Khalid 2009). Throughout this period, a number of Nestle-Malaysia advertisements for halal *tayyabon* [5][#N5] targeted environmental qualities in a similar way to corporate discourses in Western economies. This was significant in that it helped Malaysia to bridge the gap between Islamic traditions and the demands of international markets (Bergeaud-Blackler 2012).

A global halal standard?

As halal markets expanded in Europe, the demand for a global halal standard also intensified (Lever and Miele 2012). A number of standards setting organisations have been implicated in this process. These include the International Organisation for Standardization (ISO), the Codex Alimentarius Commission and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation's (OIC) Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation (COMCEC) (Hashim 2010; 2012).

From 2008, the OIC and Malaysia came together in partnership through the International Halal Integrity Alliance (IHI Alliance) in an attempt to develop a global halal standard (Lever and Miele 2012). The OIC has been working through COMCEC to develop halal standards and for over three decades and for most of this period they were against stunning animals before slaughter. In 2010, however, scholars from the OIC's Islamic Fiqh Academy in Jeddah made a landmark announcement that stunning could be used in the slaughter of

poultry (Nazar 2010). Similar developments emerged in Malaysia. When the state standard and certification regime was launched in 2004 it came with a qualification that stunning was 'not recommended'. However, in 2009 the standard was revisited with a commitment to accommodate pre-slaughter stunning under certain conditions.

This appears to suggest a coming together of the positions of the two major players in the global standards project. However, concerns over Malaysia's influence on the economic aspects of standardization hindered the project from the outset (Lever and Miele 2012). Throughout the period of joint working, Malaysia continued to prioritise its standards and certification regime in its own terms and collaboration became increasingly problematic (Observations made at World Halal Forum 2010). These problems were not unexpected and it could be argued that Malaysia became involved in the global halal standards project as part of a policy of *selected openness* (Yiftachel 2006) to generate legitimacy for their postliberal halal ambitions.
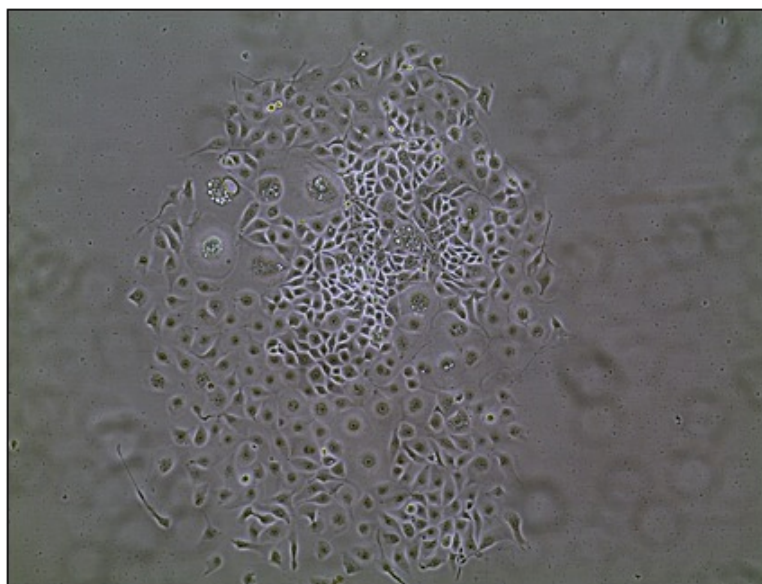
From diaspora to postliberalism

Arguably, Malaysia's postliberal strategy allows them to move past the barriers they face in the international halal market by inserting new hegemonic claims into transnational space. Plans to develop links between the halal designated Malaysian Port Klang, a free trade zone, and the Port of Rotterdam in the Netherlands, another designated halal zone, have been widely promoted over recent years to bolster Malaysia's influence in Europe (Khalid 2009; Marketeer 2011). Malaysia's national trade promotion agency Matrade (www.matrade.gov.my [http://www.matrade.gov.my/]) has been working to influence European markets for almost a decade (Fischer 2011). In the UK, they have worked with some of the UK's major supermarket chains and halal certification organisations (Fischer, 2011). In April 2009, the National Halal Food Group (NHFG) received an award from the Malaysian Chamber of Commerce in Kuala Lumpur for introducing certified halal products into mainstream supermarkets in the UK (www.nationalhalal.com [http://www.nationalhalal.com/]). In 2010, Tesco started selling halal meat from non-stunned animals certified by NHFG in a number of specialist UK stores (Lever et al. 2010). Similar developments are evident in France (Bergeaud-Blackler 2012) and Germany (Mehta 2009).

Fischer's (2011) work on halal within the Malaysian diaspora in London is illustrative of the influence of these developments on the identity claims of Muslim consumers across Europe. Examining how, as halal meat markets expand and new cultures of consumption exert themselves, debates over what Islam *is or ought to be* intensify, he argues that the lack of regulation and control by the UK state provides a space for the rise of new halal sensibilities and communities. Although Malaysia is unable to export halal meat into the EU because of trade restrictions, Fischer (2011 87) argues that the 'consumption of Malaysian state-certified halal products' by Malay's in the UK is 'a form of state sovereignty in the diaspora' that attempts to control Islamic expression. It is in this sense that Malaysia's vision to become a global halal hub is intimately linked to the development of halal across urban spaces within the Islamic diaspora (Bergeaud-Blackler 2012).

Postliberal vertical aggregates

Just as Malaysia attempts to maintain adherence to *proper Islamic consumption,* both internally and within the Malaysian diaspora*,* arguably they now draw on state nationalist discourses to further their postliberal ambitions. Papadopoulos et al. (2008) argue that postliberalism uses nationalism arbitrarily, not because it refers to a nationalist ideology, but because it helps to maintain the coherence of the aggregate in question. If the unbounded network is paradigmatic for understandings of transnational governance, they argue that 'cultures or assemblages of stem cells serve as a paradigmatic figure of how artificial postliberal aggregates arise to be able to respond to the ad hoc needs. of a certain situation' (2008: 33) The 'promise of the vertical aggregate lies in its becoming and holding together a series of different actors, akin to the pluripotence of stem cells which might develop into a valued body part or into a cancerous growth' (2008: 32). As the micrograph of a stem cell colony at different stages of differentiation below illustrates, it is at the centre of a colony where something new comes into being.

Micrograph of a heterogeneous stem cell colony isolated from human corneal cells at different stages of differentiation. The cell is likely to be at the centre of the colony where new cells reside. Further from the centre, the cells are older and larger and will eventually die as something new comes into being. Image reproduced with the permission of Dr Nick Di Girolamo, School of Medical Sciences, University of New South Wales, Sydney.

I argue below that by targeting diverse groups of Muslim consumers in selected locations across Europe, Malaysia's postliberal halal strategy is starting to increase social and economic differentiation in some urban spaces. This is a significant development, I argue, that has the potential to bring diverse cultural and religious groups together around emergent global issues.

Everyday halal consumption practices

Over recent years, the IHI Alliance has made great efforts to highlight connections between halal and other ethically produced foods, including organic, fair-trade and free-range (Hashim 2012; Bernama 2012). As a result of this strategy, links between halal and alternative food ethics, corporate social responsibility and sustainability are starting to emerge. In some urban spaces in the UK, particularly in London, halal is now aligned with global halal branding and scientific discourses related to health and hygiene: and for some Muslim consumers, halal is now as much about these extrinsic global attitudes as it is about religious piety (Haenni 2010; Fischer 2011; Hashim 2012). Bergeaud-Blackler (2012) makes a similar point in relation to France, where many young Muslims are being seduced, she argues, by the culture of halal consumption emerging around Malaysia's wider halal project.

From a figurational perspective, this reflexive and democratizing process is indicative of a higher level of mutual identification (Wouters 2007). These *'widening circles of identification'* (De Swaan 1995) are significant in that they have the potential to bring about a situation through which individuals from diverse cultural and religious groups recognize that they have similar problems and concerns. In relation to food in particular, Haenni (2010: 335) argues that the emergence of these 'inclusive qualities reflect a new, more mobile, global philosophy'. It is important to note, however, at this juncture, that we are not talking about a unified social subject at this point, but about 'a multiplicity of actors who question the symbolic and material order of control by creating a new life within' it (Papadopoulos et al. 2008, 257). These emergent forms of *subjectivity* – which emerge in a vacuum of control within the existing system of production – entail something that is 'inappropriate/d' (Trinh T. Minh-ha 1987) or 'dislocated from the available maps specifying kinds of actors and kinds of narratives' (Haraway 1992: 299).

New forms of identification and knowledge

Arguably, these new forms of postliberal identification have the potential to directly impact the evolution of the

knowledge process and the future trajectory of the civilizing process (Elias 2007; Kilminster 2004). For Elias, the development of human knowledge is directly linked to social development and to the stage of development achieved by a society. This can be measured, he argues, by the human capacity for control over non-human forces/ events – i.e. nature; the extent of its ability for control over interpersonal relationships, and; the extent of individual self-control.

This *triad of basic controls* functions and develops interdependently (Elias 2007). The first generally corresponds to technological development. Although there have been setbacks (and reversals), Elias argues that over the long term this type of control has tended to increase in line with the long-term development of human societies. The second type of control has tended to increase in a similar way. However, the relationship between the two is far from straightforward. As human interdependencies have increased and individuals have gained more control over natural forces, Elias argues they have gradually taken a more detached view of natural processes – as evidenced by the development of natural science. In relation to social processes, however, this has not been possible. While the growth of human interdependencies has diminished human fears and insecurities about natural processes, Elias argues that this process has simultaneously increased fears about the increasingly complex social forces humans have less control over.

The significance of these insights becomes clear when the relevance of the third control is understood. When people experience fear and insecurity, Elias (2007) argues that it is difficult for them to control their feelings about the events affecting their lives, and to approach them in a detached way. People in general thus feel that they have little control over such events, and it is therefore very difficult for them to extend their understanding and gain greater self-control.

Much contemporary media reporting positions debate about Islamic issues, including halal, in almost structuralist terms, in relation to a fixed code or deep unchanging structure (see Mennell, 1996). Figurational sociology demonstrates how any such understanding, and the fears and insecurities generated, is the result of a 'double bind process' that hinders human understanding and the development of knowledge (Elias 1970; 2007). As the case presented in this paper demonstrates, the stock of human 'knowledge' and 'ideas' are inherently social: they develop and change over time as a result of wider figurational conditions (Elias 2000; 2007). The fusion of halal with alternative global ethics is therefore illustrative, I would argue, of a process with distinct epistemological and ontological significance. Indeed, if we view contemporary understandings of halal in line with fluctuating interdependencies between large-scale macro processes and everyday micro practices, we start to understand that halal should not simply be linked with a fixed code or deep unchanging structure, but with ongoing processes of social and economic differentiation and with the evolution of the knowledge process (Elias 2007; Kilminster 2004).

New directions in the civilizing process?

Across Europe, concerns over animal welfare and stunning continue to create social, economic and political problems. However, while it would be easy to characterise the clash between adherents of the pre-stun and non-stun halal discourses as a clash between secular established groups and Islamic outsiders (Sutton and Vertigans 2005), we should heed Salvatore's (2011) warning against situating non-Western modernities asymmetrically on the grounds that this may undermine any global civilizing impetus. While not so long ago debate about animal slaughter was pushed behind the scenes of everyday life in European societies because it offended *'civilized sensibilities'* (Corbin 1995; see also Vialles 1994), today it is discussed and debated more openly; over the long term this cannot be a bad thing.

As well as halal food standards, Malaysia now has internationally recognized halal standards for pharmaceuticals, vitamins, toiletries, minerals, nutrients and oils, amongst other things. This creates further opportunities to foster links that cut across the secular-religious divide and bring halal in line with powerful global discourses. In his observations of Dutch Islam, Cherribi (2010) argued any new civilizing process must foster an inclusive 'we-identity' amongst competing social groups. It is the potential to facilitate such a scenario, I conclude, that the postliberal politics of halal brings to the fore.

Conclusion

Each stage of the civilizing process has been characterised by the vertical diffusion and adoption of standards by excluded, outsider groups. The postliberal phase I have discussed is no different. Much as earlier phases of integration gave rise to new forms of identification between competing social groups, so the diffusion of halal norms is *now* giving rise to processes of social and economic differentiation amongst competing social groups in some urban spaces across Europe.

From the middle ages onwards, as people came together in progressively larger groups and geographical spaces, they have become increasingly aware of their mutual concerns and similarities. In the national phase of the civilizing process, as interdependencies within the modern nation state increased in line with the growing density of institutions, the growth of similarities between people within nations went in hand in hand with the growth of differences between people across nations. These processes reached their highpoint in the second half of the twentieth century and there have since been greater variations within nations and growing similarities across nations. As Kuipers (2012) notes: 'While previously, this led to national integration – from town to region to nation – this now leads to more connections and dependencies beyond the borders of the nation state.' However, as I have also demonstrated, this process has created the conditions for a reverse movement through which those excluded under transnational conditions are *now* identifying with halal standards that cut across horizontal space on the vertical plane within European nation states. The state thus continues to have a significant role under postliberal conditions. However, these developments should not simply been seen as example of the (Malaysian) state acting in its own best interests in response to wider global pressures (Stephenson 2010). As Sassen (2008: 70-1) notes, they should be seen as an example of a nation state acting as 'one of the strategic institutional domains where critical work for developing [...] foundational transformations in the relation between the private and the public domains' in different locations take place.

The developments present sociological as well as political challenges. At a time when national identity is ever more widely discussed and debated across Europe, the processes discussed in this paper illustrate the subtleties and sensitivities of wider integration processes and identity formation. Arguably, it is no longer beneficial to study the breakdown of similarities across nation states and growth of similarities across transnational space in isolation from postnational processes. As the stem cell metaphor outlined above demonstrates, figurational sociologists must study how the processes of social and economic differentiation emerging through postliberal politics are negotiated and taken up in specific urban contexts. As I have argued, the trends identified have the potential to bring diverse cultural and religious groups closer together around common global issues, thus directly influencing the future trajectory of the civilizing process.

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Notes

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Food Quality and Safety. The Commission was not involved in the study design, data collection, analysis and
interpretation of the material collected; they will not be held responsible for the use made of such
information by the author. [#N1-ptr1]
2. A *hadith* is a saying of the prophet Muhammad, or a report about something he did. [#N2-ptr1]
3. John Lever, Marc Higgin and Mara Miele of Cardiff University conducted the UK research. Florence
Bergeaud-Blackler of UniMed in Marseilles and Maria Puig of Cardiff University conducted the French
research. Research on the halal market in Germany was carried out by researchers at Bsi-Schwarzenbek
(www.bsi-schwarzenbek.de) and by John Lever, who also conducted documentary research on developments
in the international halal market. Haluk Anil of Bristol University conducted observations at the World
Halal Forum in Malaysia. [#N3-ptr1]
4. The OIC is an international NGO that attempts to provide a collective voice for the interests of all Muslim
states worldwide. [#N4-ptr1]
5. This *sharia* principle aims to protect the decency of human life and promote good dietary habits (Yunus et al
2010). [#N5-ptr1]