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The global assemblage of halal: proliferating understandings and tensions

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Introduction
Outline of talk
• We start off with a discussion of assemblage, rules, standards and certification
• We then briefly discuss the origins of halal, Islamic schools of thought/jurisprudence and the emergence of international halal standards
• This is followed by a brief case study of halal standards & certification in Turkey
• Methodologically we follow people, halal things and discourses, between Islam, states and markets across divergent settings – in this case Turkey!
• We contest the notion that rules/standards are immutable objects by examining the contested processes involved within the global halal assemblage, and by offering some theoretical insights to understand the territorialization of halal

Global Assemblage
• As a composite concept, the term “global assemblage” suggests inherent tensions (Ong and Collier 2005)
• Global implies broadly encompassing, seamless and mobile
• Assemblage implies heterogeneous, contingent, unstable, partial and situated
• We argue that the global halal assemblage is a product of multiple and emergent determinations not reducible to a single logic

Rules and standards
Assemblage & certification
• Rules and standards underpin assemblages of certifiers, producers, consumers and investors in many diverse contexts
• As Europe has expanded eastwards over recent decades, ISO rules in the meat industry have been used to improve food safety across the EU
• Dunne (2008) argues that standards for beef production were implemented to produce functionally comparable results across multiple sites, thus giving the EU the chance to sanction actors that did not conform
• She argues that rules/standards can therefore be viewed as ‘immutable mobiles’ – objects that have transformative effects without apparently being transformed themselves (Latour 1987)
On this account, rules have have enduring authority as apolitical scientific or technical artifacts (Busch 2000) – a surprising claim given Ong and Collier’s (2005) focus on multiple and emergent determinations!

We challenge this argument by examining how actors engage in rule making to redefine certification standards within the global halal assemblage (Bergeaud-Blackler, Fischer and Lever 2015)

As we demonstrate, the economic and social relations underpinning this assemblage are dynamic and unstable (Ong and Collier 2005)

Following on from this, we offer some theoretical insights to understand the complexity of halal in particular places!

Halal rules

“Allah makes good things lawful to them and bad things unlawful” (7, 157)

In Arabic, ‘halal’ literally means ‘permissible’ or ‘lawful’ – as opposed to ‘haram’, which indicates that something is ‘forbidden’ or ‘unlawful’

Traditionally this signifies ‘pure’ or ‘wholesome’ food – meat in particular – produced in accordance with proper Islamic practices, for example, ritual slaughter & pork avoidance.

Halal thus implies that meat is produced according to specific Islamic rules.

In reality these rules are few, but they vary with animal type, method of killing, regional schools of Islamic thought/jurisprudence (jurists and scholars), international halal standards, and market demands and opportunities

Islam by schools of thought/jurisprudence

Influence of Madhhab (Lever and Miele 2012)

More recently

International halal standards

Numerous new international halal standards, ostensibly to fight fraud, unofficially to get ahead of the game (Bergeaud-Blackler, Fischer and Lever 2015)

The pioneer of this approach was Malaysia

Committed to halal standardization as an internal policy mechanism since the early 1980s, Malaysia inspired the drafting of the very first global (Codex Alimentarius) halal guidelines

This approach remains a reference point for the WTO and has opened up new horizons for international standardization initiatives (Bergeaud-Blackler, Fischer and Lever 2015)
International halal standards Assemblage

1. The World Halal Food Council (WHFC): “the liberal option” – backed by Indonesian Ulama and the Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America (IFANCA)
2. The International Halal Integrity Alliance/World Halal Forum: “the experts” – initiated by Malaysia, focused on technical expertise and accreditation
3. The Gulf Organization for Standardization: “the landlord” – seen to have religious legitimacy, financial backing but little expertise
4. The Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries (SMIIC), “the Community” – led by Turkey but Turkey’s leadership opposed by Saudi Arabia
5. The Halal Standard of the European Committee for Standardization (CEN): “the legal option” – initiated by Austria, also led by Turkey, attempts to bring together a diverse range of European standards

Halal in Turkey

Initially Turkey was interested in halal certification standards for export
A number of new certification bodies focus now on the internal market
Some are of these are aligned with GIMDES, IHA, and are TSE accredited
Some are aligned with GIMDES and Malaysia but are not TSE accredited
Others are accredited only by SMIIC and/or TSE
Such collaborations depend on rules & targeted markets and consumer groups

New economic and social relations Global processes

• We can see in the case of Turkey how theology, politics and regulation diverge and overlap through new economic and social alliances.
• Rules and standards are not immutable objects – they are highly contested even in distinct geographical territories!
• How do we understand these processes within the global halal assemblage?
I have argued elsewhere that Malaysia targets and attempts to articulate the interests of competing social and economic actors in the global halal market through the ‘strategic rearrangement’ of transnational, horizontal space (Lever 2013; 2015).

Most of the halal standard setting bodies outlined in this talk operate in this way across diverse geographical settings – establishing strategies that cut across horizontal space on the vertical plane (Papadopoulos et al. 2008).

The following theoretical account of these developments has been offered (Papadopoulos et al. 2008: 32):

If the unbounded network is paradigmatic for understandings of transnational governance, ‘cultures or assemblages of stem cells’ serve as a paradigmatic figure of how ... a series of different actors, akin to the pluripotence of stem cells ... might develop into a valued body part or into a cancerous growth.'

The future of the global halal market

Conclusions

• I have argued that this situation underpins the postliberal politics of halal in European societies by bringing about change in urban spaces (Lever 2013; 2015)

• By 2030, the Muslim population is expected to increase from 1.6 billion to 2.2 billion – by 180% in Canada, 140% in the US and by more than 100% in a number of European countries (Miller 2009)

• This presents significant opportunities to target new segments of economy and society in these places

• Gulf Organisation for Standardization is starting to challenge Malaysia to increase the complexity of the global halal assemblage still further!

Thank you – any questions?