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Do Your Best and Allah Will Take Care of the Rest: Muslim Turks Negotiate Halal in Strasbourg

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Abstract: As the market for Islamically permissible (*halal*) products expands, so do critical discourses on the production and consumption of halal in Europe. In France, one of Europe's largest and fast growing halal markets, while some fear a halal takeover of the French foodscape, others question the authenticity of the products stamped with halal signs. This paper writes against both discourses by exploring the meaning halal takes beyond the sign. It examines how halal attains its meaning as a product of a complex relationship of trust. In describing this relationship, it draws on accounts provided by members of the Turkish community in Strasbourg, France and examines the decision-making process through which Muslim Turks navigate the European foodscape and access halal products. Rather than being driven by alarmist calls, the paper urges to revisit and learn from the ways Muslims negotiate halal in a field long shaped by uncertainty and doubt.

Keywords: Islam, halal, France, Turkish community, uncertainty, trust

The market for Islamically permissible (*halal*) products in Europe, which includes meat and poultry, non-alcoholic beverages, dairy, cereal and confectionary, fish and seafood, processed food items, food supplements, and beauty and medicinal products, is a fast growing one. Each year, more companies in Europe prioritize the production of items that address Muslims' consumption habits. Recent examples from the food industry include Subway and KFC in the U.K., which, since 2007 have been offering halal-approved meat in their restaurants, and Quick Burger, France's second largest hamburger chain, which, in 2010, opened restaurants where all food served is certified halal.

While the rapid growth of the halal market provides new and innovative business opportunities, it also opens up spaces of critical discussion. Some argue that as more businesses offer halal products, halal will take over the European food market, thereby discriminating against non-halal consumers. Others assert that most of the items bearing the halal sign are "faux halal", or fake halal. What these alarmist calls obscure is the voice of the main actor of these discussions: the Muslim consumers. In this paper, I explore how Muslims representative of both the consumer and supplier side of the story position themselves *vis-à-vis* these alarmist calls in one of Europe's fastest growing halal markets: France.¹ I show how the search for halal extends beyond the halal sign, and how halal is defined through personal relationships which are built on (and in return, help to build) trust. I argue that it is this relationship, and not the sign, that makes a product halal.

In describing what a relationship-based understanding of halal looks like, I draw on diverse accounts provided by members of the Turkish community in Strasbourg, France, and examine the decision making process through which my informants assess the halal quality of a product. While there are studies on halal (Bergeaud-Blaeckler, 2007; Id Yassine, 2014; Lever and Miele, 2012), the focus is either on the halal industry, where scholars highlight problems in institutionalization—such as lack of certification and monitoring—or on the intellectual production of knowledge of halal, where scholars problematize the competing interpretations of halal (Hoffman, 1995; Riaz and Chaudry, 2004). The literature could also benefit from elucidating the consumer side of the story (Brisbarre 1993; Bergeaud-Blaeckler, 2004; Bowen, 2010: 169-173). This paper addresses that call by drawing on ethnographic material collected in Summer 2013 from participant observation in Turkish mosque associations,

¹ When halal was the central issue during the French Presidential debates of 2012, the market share of halal was estimated at approximately 5.5 billion Euros, with an annual growth rate of 10 percent (Heneghan, 2012).

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supermarkets, butchers, restaurants and döner shops, and semi-structured interviews with people in charge of these venues, imams, and Turkish consumers, as well as my ongoing (2016) dissertation fieldwork in Strasbourg.² However, prior to delving into this discussion, I find it necessary to first describe two competing discourses on halal in France that I write against in this paper—that halal is everywhere, and that it is actually nowhere.

An Overview of Public Discussions on Halal

In France, a number of discourses shape the public perception of Islam. Two of them are particularly relevant for halal. The first, which, drawing on Zemmour's (2014) terminology I call "halalization", builds on the principle of *laïcité* and perceives the increasing prevalence of halal in the French public sphere as a threat to French values. The second, which, drawing on al-Kanz I call "halalgate", is skeptical of the increasing prevalence of halal in France and questions its authenticity. While these discourses shape public discussion, I argue that they come short in explaining how most Muslims perceive halal.

"Halalization"

In France, one of the scandals of 2012 was whether the French were eating halal without knowing it. Taking *laïcité* not just as a founding principle that determines the boundaries of the French public sphere but also a principle through which the state guarantees each and every individual's freedom of conscience (Baubeřrot, 2004; Asad, 2006; Bowen, 2007), the critics argued that the expansion of halal came at the expense of others, namely, the non-halal consumers. Accordingly, the Islamic practice of halal, in its institutionalized and organized form (i.e., halal-only restaurants) limited the freedom of non-Muslim individuals to access non-halal items.

Is there any legitimate basis for the argument that halal asserts itself into the everyday lives of French citizens in ways that constitute a threat to French Republican values and lifestyles? A 2012 survey conducted by journalists and aired in the French public channel, *France2*, provided

some answers to this question. Building on a 2008 Court of Audits report, where the investigators found that 41 percent of slaughterhouses in France did not conform to regulations, and were not properly inspected, the journalists wanted to see if the lack of inspection on meat production persisted to date. This constituted the first part of the survey. The second part, which became a go-to piece for critics of halal, such as the leader of Front National, Marine Le Pen, focused on religious slaughter. In her interview with the head of the livestock division in Ile-de-France, a journalist found out that *all* slaughterhouses in the region conformed by ritual slaughter practices—thereby producing halal meat. Adding further to the worries, the meat produced in these slaughterhouses and sold to supermarket did not necessarily carry the halal stamp. After all, the sellers were not obliged by law to do so.

In a later interview, one of the editors clarified that meat consumed in Paris came from slaughterhouses not only in Ile-de-France, but also—and for the most part—from other regions. This meant that not all Parisians ate halal. In fact, only two percent of the meat sold in Paris was halal (Hasan, 2012a). This was a point that halal critics ignored. For example, when Le Pen took the stage, she argued that all the meat consumed by Parisians was halal. And what was further worrisome was that Parisians consumed it without knowing it: a clear example of Islam breaching individual lifestyles, and violation of *laïcité*.

The reverberations of the 2012 debate resonate to date. Take the best-selling French non-fiction of 2014, *Le Suicide français* [The French Suicide]. For its author, Eric Zemmour, being limited to halal is more than a violation of one's culinary freedom. The increasing presence of halal in France is an infringement of one's right to exist as a French native in France. Perceiving it as an invasive foreign force, Zemmour considers halal as a major threat to French greatness. His encounters with halal in the public sphere, which Zemmour calls "halalisation", exacerbate the fall of France. For Zemmour, halalization of France remains central to France's existential angst. Like other critical French intellectuals, he sees in immigrants' existence a threat to Frenchness. The immigrants' lack of conformity to French ways of life, which includes the much celebrated French cuisine, is worrisome because over time, their habits start to transform French tastes, and never the other way around, thereby making "ethnic French" [*français de souche*] a minority in France.

For French intellectual critics, the measures taken by the French state come short of guarding Frenchness against an Islamic invasion. The state, they add, might have waged a successful war against other Islamic

² Fieldwork in Strasbourg was conducted thanks to generous funding received from Washington University, Department of Anthropology Summer Research Travel Grant (2013) and the Wenner-Gren Foundation, Dissertation Fieldwork Grant (2016). A prior version of this paper was presented to the Anthropology of Religion Group and Religion and Migration Group at the 2014 American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting in San Diego.

elements, such as the veil, but Islam's march forward "continues under halalization of various territories where the actions of populations, their nutrition, friends, sexual relations, marriage, clothes, and sociability are gradually subjected to religious law, leading to the birth of an infant, yet strong and redoubtable French dar al-Islam" (Zemmour, 2014: 493. Translation mine).

"Halalgate"

"Halalgate" is a portmanteau that combines halal with the Watergate scandal, and describes the unearthing of a scandal in France. It provides a counter-narrative to alarmist calls for "eating halal without knowing it". According to the proponents of halalgate, most ritually slaughtered meat lacks even the basic regulations to make it halal. The problem is not having too much halal in France, but too little.

This point was made in an episode aired by *Canal+* in 2010 where journalists equipped with hidden cameras visited slaughterhouses. They found that most slaughterhouses lacked the necessary sanitary conditions to operate and were not inspected regularly. Due to lack of controllers, slaughterhouses and meat production facilities were not inspected regularly, and animals were not slaughtered in a halal manner. In some cases, slaughter was conducted in a torturous manner, rather than the swift knife cut to the throat, which proponents of halal argue leave the animal unconscious within seconds. Some slaughterhouses slaughtered sick animals, and halal stamps were stamped haphazardly.

The journalists further documented how faux halal meat made its way into mass-produced food items distributed by some of France's largest names in the food industry, such as the French poultry giant Doux, which is the main supplier of KFC. The items carried a halal stamp which was provided by the AFCAI, a halal certification agency functioning since 1988. Yet no one knew how the AFCAI worked, how many employees it had or how often it inspected slaughterhouses and meat factories. AFCAI chose not to respond to questions.

An interview with an independent halal arbiter, who runs the web site, al-Kanz, reaffirmed these findings. al-Kanz has been raising awareness on this issue online since 1996. A day after the *Canal+* episode was aired, al-Kanz wrote:

The meat sold in the Rungis [the central international market in Paris], or many other Muslim butchers, comes from faux halal suppliers. The Doux scandal, where non-halal chicken is sold under the label halal... the chicken sold in KFC...all come from

Doux. When you eat KFC, you eat non-halal. Spread the word... Flunch [a French fast food chain], Domino's Pizza and Quick pretend to be halal. Yes, they pretend. And it seems that many Muslims eat in these places, like they did so in KFC for a long time. Perhaps [they will do so] until the next investigative piece? (al-Kanz, 2011a. Translation mine)

The *Canal+* episode was not the first of its kind to raise suspicion over halal. A 2009 video by the journalist Jean-Charles Doria had also taken a stab at KFC and Doux. The video showed that contrary to what officials from the grand mosques in France (Lyon, Paris, Évry) concurred—that poultry was slaughtered by hand—the officials from Doux argued that slaughter in their factory was mechanized. Doux produced 380,000 chickens each day using this method. To investigate this contradiction, Doria visited the facilities of the AFCAI—two secretariat staff in a small office—who told him that they permitted mechanical slaughter. He then visited KFC, and asked an official whether KFC was absolutely certain that the chicken offered in their restaurants was halal. The official's answer: "Absolutely certain". Doria's video was to be aired in the show *Zone Interdit* by Channel M6 in September 2009. However, it was tabled due to legal worries.

A year later, the *Canal+* episode built on Doria's findings. This time, it was televised. It augmented the already existing suspicion over halal products amongst consumers. In the following months, consumer protection agencies casted doubt on more halal producers, such as Herta Halal, one of France's largest *charcuterie* producers, which removed halal signs from its products after the discovery that its halal sausages contained pork (Delvallée 2012). Supermarkets selling Herta Halal products, such as Casino had to make public declarations that they withdrew Herta Halal products from their inventory (al-Kanz 2011b).

Surprisingly, the three major mosques in France that are responsible for issuing halal certificates to major food producers and handing out licenses (*carte d'habilitation de sacrificateur*) to individuals who undertake the ritual-slaughter were hit the hardest by "halalgate". Unlike other agencies, Muslims trusted the mosques of Paris, Lyon and Évry as institutions that would take the utmost care in monitoring halal. Instead, the *Canal+* episode made it clear that many of these mosques did not even have inspectors on payroll. This was a point made in a 2009 ASIDCOM survey too, where the Muslim consumer protection association compiled a list of halal certifying agencies around Europe, including the three French mosques. The findings indicated that in addition to not having regular inspectors on payroll, these mosques also tolerated methods of slaughter that many Muslims find doubtful, such as electro-narcose. Whereas some firms (e.g. AVS)

administered post-cut stunning, the three mosques were comfortable with pre-cut stunning—so long that the animal was not dead before its throat was cut. Following the *Canal+* episode, ASIDCOM issued a boycott against halal products inspected by the mosques. In response, the Lyon Mosque issued a statement condemning ASIDCOM's call for boycott.

The food industry, in France as elsewhere, is part of the free market economy. While this means greater mobility for food items and helps to meet rising demand, it also makes items harder to track. Today, meat produced in slaughterhouses across Europe gets sold to intermediaries located in other European countries, which then sell it to meat processing factories located in yet another set of European countries. The processed meat is distributed to supermarket chains all over the world. To tackle fears of meat imported to France from other European countries, some businesses in Strasbourg highlight in their menus that their meat is French, *viande française*, in addition to being halal.

One could argue that the way the halal industry works lies beyond the reach of individual Muslims. Yet, Muslims are also urged to be conscious consumers. For consumer protection agencies, one way of doing this is by getting informed. But how does one get informed? The Internet provides one platform, but how does one know whom to trust? The same goes for journalistic accounts. To what extent do these alarmist accounts reflect the reality? How is it possible to remain calm and confident in a market inundated with uncertainty?

Plurality of Discourses on Halal

Similar to *salat* (prayer) (Asad, 1993), thinking and doing halal is a way to tame the *nefs* (ego), to evaluate one's thoughts and practices, and to perfect the self by becoming a virtuous and moral Muslim (Siddiqui, 2012). Muslims are required by law (*shari'a*) to pursue halal and avoid haram, which are described in major texts that Muslims must follow. Yet these texts are open to interpretation. Often, Islamic scholars are in charge of providing an authoritative interpretation. Yet, they may also vary in their interpretation (Lambek, 1990; Werbner, 1996). Furthermore, Islamic knowledge takes new forms in local contexts (Eickelman, 1982; Bowen, 1998), engendering multiple discourses on halal, which then get disseminated through online and print publications.

Various *suras* in the Qur'an outline what constitutes halal and haram and numerous *hadith* collections reflect on the Sunna by describing in detail how Prophet Muhammad spoke of halal, and practiced it in his daily

life.³ These texts guide Muslims' decision-making process (Bowen, 2012). For example, in Strasbourg, in times of doubt, some of my informants returned to these texts or visited the imam of a local mosque, who, using these texts, offered them religious advice.

In Sunni Islam, which is the school that most of my informants in Strasbourg adhere to, most hadiths come from ninth century collections compiled by six Sunni scholars. For Muslims who are associated with different *cemaats* (congregations) following different schools of thought—such as the Menzil, Suleymanlı, Mevlevi or Nur branches of the Naqshibandi *tariqa* which are active in Strasbourg—additional booklets written by the founding leaders complement the hadiths. While these texts serve as the main reference points for Muslims, they nonetheless come short in explaining the everyday reasoning that Muslims employ. For one, not all Muslims are strict in keeping halal. Some self-identified Muslims consume alcohol or eat pork while acknowledging that it is haram. For others who try to keep halal, the modern world provides many puzzles. Rather than abide by the scripture, Muslims learn to adapt. As Bowen aptly argues, “much of what everyday Muslims take from religion is not about grand questions of theology or jurisprudence, but about much more proximate matters... Muslims living in particular places have adapted Islamic traditions to local values and constraints, and these adaptations have given rise to vigorous debates among Muslims over what is or is not correctly Islamic” (2012: 5).

After spending a day with a Muslim, one acknowledges that much of everyday life falls in-between halal and haram, and lies in an ambiguous zone. The problem, however, is not unique to the modern world for the issue of moral doubt also lies very central to the works of earlier Islamic scholars. For example, for the 11th century Islamic scholar al-Ghazzali, “the doubtful” was a central area of study (al-Ghazzali 2003). There are certain practices whose unlawfulness is harder to doubt, such as the consumption of alcohol and pork, gambling or pre/extramarital sex. Some of these practices are pointed out in the Qur'an as the work of the devil while others are listed as major sins in the hadiths. Others, however, are left to the discretion of Muslims—such as the oft-cited discussion on eating food prepared by a non-Muslim or socializing at a venue where alcohol is served.

My informants were also divided over these issues. Similar to O'Connor's (2012) interviews with Muslims in

³ See, for example, the following *suras* in the Qur'an: al-Baqara (The Cow); al-Maa'idah (the Table); and al-An'am (the Cattle), and hadiths from al-Bukhari and Muslim.

a non-Muslim context (Hong-Kong), there were different schemes of approaching halal. For some, it meant that everything else but pork was edible. For others, the preparation—e.g., the kind of oil used, presence of other additives, the use of skillet and knives that may have previously been used to cut and/or cook pork—was important. Going to McDonald's or Quick burger chains was an issue for some and not for others. Second-generation Turks often preferred to go to fast food restaurants either because these were spaces of socialization, or they simply liked the food. There were those who ate only vegetarian dishes, only “fish-o-fillets” as well as those who ate nothing at all for they feared that even the bread was contaminated with additives. On the contrary, a first-generation father who came to France in the early 1990s mentioned that not only did he not visit fast food chains in France, but he also avoided them in Turkey in order to serve a good example to his children. Finally, alcohol was a big issue and my informants had differing views whether even the mere presence of alcohol in a restaurant would make the food haram.

While halal refers to more than consumption, and encompasses other deeds as well as thoughts (al Qaradawi, 1999), it finds one of its most visual forms—halal signs—in items of consumption. Although the sign conveys a certain authority by performing a speech act that pronounces a product permissible for consumption, there is growing skepticism over its authenticity. Uncertainty, however, also ensues from different textual interpretations, which lead to contradictory definitions of

halal. The interpretation of Islamic jurisprudence varies among Islamic scholars who study canonical texts and shape public discourse on Islamic practices through their publications that contain contemporary interpretations.

Scholarly discussions over the ritual slaughter provide a case in point. The following diagram shared online by A Votre Service (AVS), France's largest halal certification agent, shows the differences in interpretation of ritual slaughter among consulting councils. Whereas Saudi, Pakistani and Egyptian councils all agree that stunning an animal before slaughter (through shooting, gassing or administering electro-narcose) violates the halal code, three other councils (International, European and American) permit these methods of stunning for ovine and calves with certain reservations.

The core of the argument in stunning is whether stunning kills an animal or renders it unconscious. That Islamic scholars are divided over this issue is not surprising considering that meat production is one of the numerous other issues that divide them. National policies further complicate this issue. Members of the European Union follow the directive, “Convention for the Protection of Animals for Slaughter”, which requires stunning before killing, while also giving individual countries the final say on keeping certain populations exempt from this practice. As the link between stunning and halal remains open to interpretation, some meat stamped with halal is stunned, and others are not. Moreover, there is no label that indicates whether the animal was killed with or without stunning, which itself was a topic of major discussion

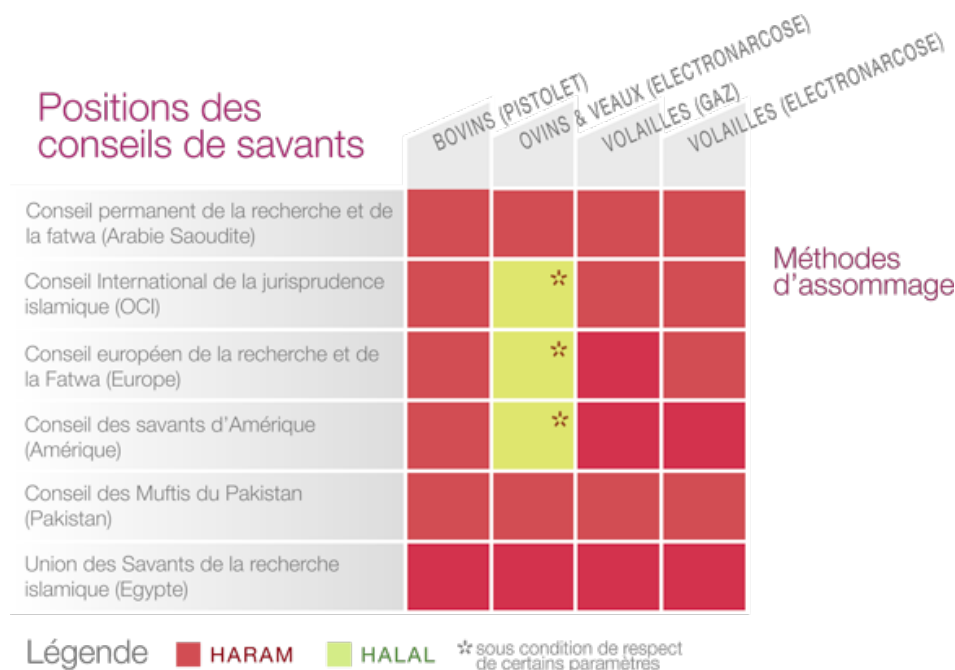


Figure 1: Scholars' Councils' Views on Stunning and Halal

among members of the U.K. House of Commons in 2012 (Hasan, 2012b). Similar to the French, the British feared that they were eating meat that came from non-stunned slaughtered animals without their knowledge.

The problems emanating from lack of harmony over the conceptual boundaries of halal permeate into everyday life. A brief visit to any supermarket in France reveals that halal comes in many visual forms. Items exported from non-EU countries carry national certifying agencies' stamps, such as the Turkish Standards Institute (TSE) or Indonesian council of scholars (Majlis Ulama). Many other private or local agencies, however, work in Europe. Under the Arabic letters (حلال) or surrounding it, one finds a small strip containing the information about the certifying agency. The problem with this practice is two-fold. First, there is little monitoring done by halal agencies to ensure that the stamps are genuine. Second, even though certifying agencies argue to employ controllers to pay visits to slaughterhouses and food packaging facilities, their reach is often limited. Hence, in a supermarket, choosing the "real halal" among a dozen others can become a real burden especially for a consumer who is alarmed by the state of the halal market.

The question then comes down to how one navigates in a land of many halals? A Muslim consumer in a halal aisle has some sources of knowledge that shape his/her decision. In addition to religious training, which almost all Muslim Turks acquire through attending a local mosque, the on-the-spot decision-making process is shaped largely by word of mouth. This could be something seen on TV, heard on the radio, in a Friday sermon, or through discussions with friends and family. Television programs, and online streams, serve an important role in the dissemination of discussions over halal. When I first approached my informants with questions on halal, they mentioned the *Canal+* episode. Some told me that after watching the episode, they stopped trusting products that carried halal stamps issued by major mosques. Others mentioned that they avoided certain brands for other reasons, e.g. they heard from a friend that it contained gelatin, as was the case with one of Germany's largest halal dairy producer; the producer supported Israel, as was the case with Coca Cola; or that it supported Kurdish separatists, as was the case with one of Europe's largest döner producers. Some, especially the young and the tech-savvy, also utilize their cell phones and use smartphone application to spot halal among many halals. A good example is *justhalal*, one of the hundreds of free smart phone applications that I was advised to use. With a database that includes over 50,000 food items, the application provides detailed information about the different additives found in the food, cosmetic

and medicinal items, and reaches a verdict after scanning the barcode: Halal, haram, not sure.

These forms of obtaining information still fall short of clearing doubt. Word of mouth cannot always be trusted. Neither can the results that a smart phone provides. Scanning a barcode may tell that an item is halal. But do we really know who compiled the database? And what about the hundreds of other items that are placed in the "not sure" category? How could Muslim consumers maintain their calm amidst uncertainty? My interviews left me with the following answer: personal relations and the heart. For when a Muslim had a pure heart, and did all that s/he could to seek halal, the rest was left to Allah.

Negotiating Halal

While public and mediatized debate over halal presents consumers as agents who have little power over what comes to their table, consumers also take an active role in negotiating halal. Examining the human relations side of halal may help us explore this process.

In France, the concept of *communautarisme* has a negative connotation (Roy, 1991). In early 2000s, as the French were discussing the headscarf, the fear of a communalist closing in (*repli communautaire*) came to prominence. Muslims were blamed for isolating themselves from others, which was taken as a sign of their lack of willingness to integrate (Bowen et al 2013: 106-109). Affiliated with disobedience and disorder, communautarism was considered an "unacceptable form of communalism" (Fernando 2010). Yet, when formal institutions fail to address needs, such as accessing halal in a better-regulated market, community ties gain importance. Sticking together and making halal the banner of cooperation can be an act of resistance (Rouse and Hoskins, 2014). Nonetheless, many Muslims form close ties also because there are no other accessible support mechanisms in play. If a Muslim cannot trust the halal products sold at a French supermarket, s/he will seek the same product at a venue owned by his/her "brothers" or "sisters" even if that means paying extra. While food can be a tool for resistance, and even conflict (Appadurai 1981) it also is a tool to maintain social order (Douglas 1984), to retain communal ties (Counihan 2000), as well as an intermediary for identity building and boundary making (Feeley-Harnik, 1995; Mintz and Dubois, 2002).

Halal Consumers' Perspective

During my stay in Strasbourg, I was often invited by my informants to dine out which provided a great opportunity

to take a closer look at how Muslim Turkish dwellers of Strasbourg navigated the foodscape. One such dine-out was in a Turkish restaurant that specialized in meat dishes. It had its own market/butchershop (which are known as “exports”) across the street, which supplied the meat. Three gentlemen between the ages of 24 and 28, and born in Strasbourg, accompanied me. We ordered different types of kebabs served with *bulghur* rice, coke and yogurt drink. After the meal, I asked my hosts how—the halal sign on display aside—they were assured that the food that we ate was halal. One said that the restaurant was owned by an acquaintance: “This place is owned by my dad’s pilgrimage friend. They went to the *hajj* together, we knew them before then. My dad mentioned this place to me. He said, ‘go there, you can trust him, and when you go, send him my greetings.’”

As a “family-friendly” institution, alcohol was not served in this restaurant. However, I knew many other Turkish restaurants in Strasbourg, which claimed to offer halal food while also serving alcohol. This was a problem for some who did not believe that a restaurant that served alcohol could serve halal. I asked my hosts whether that would constitute a problem for them. They all agreed that they would rather choose not to go to a place that served alcohol. “But,” one of my host intervened, “...It is 2 AM. There is no other place, and if we know that there is halal meat served, we would go even though [the owner] serves alcohol.” “Yes” added his friend, “for example [name of the kebab shop]”.

Imams shape the discourse on what constitutes halal or haram. Yet, they are also consumers, and when it comes to buying halal, they also battle uncertainties. I asked imams of all major mosques in Strasbourg whether they considered halal to be a major issue in the city. They all admitted that there were problems, yet none of them saw these problems as impossible to overcome. Some reflected on the past, mentioning that access to halal has ameliorated thanks to the city’s efforts to be more accommodative of Muslims’ requests and to private Turkish entrepreneurs who opened bigger supermarkets. I wanted them to reflect on their own challenges with finding halal products. Trust came up as an important element that shaped the imams’ narratives. Like other Muslim consumers, imams had numerous ways of building trust. One imam who served at one of Strasbourg’s largest Turkish mosques for over 20 years, argued that he only trusted the mosque’s restaurant. He used to go out to eat in other restaurants, “but then, this halal thing got out of hand [referring to the faux-halal scandal] and I stopped. I do not eat döner outside. I eat it in the mosque because he is my friend, and I personally see how he prepares it.”

The imam’s emphasis on trust resonates with that of the members of one of Strasbourg’s Turkish Naqshbandi congregations. The *tekke* [lodge] serving the congregation, similar to the mosque association, had its own store where they sold meat and other products. Most members of the congregation were keen to buy only from the *tekke*. By keeping money circulating within the boundaries of a given community, they hoped to contribute to its subsistence. Furthermore, with regards to processed meat, such as *sucuk* and *merguez* [sausages], and poultry, the *tekke*, along with another mosque owned by another Turkish congregation, was one of the two go-to places. The reason, I was told, was that the standards for the halal slaughter of chicken in Europe were generally low. Additionally, the process of dipping chicken into boiling water (to ease the de-feathering process) was considered Islamically inappropriate since animals were dipped in water that contained their innards. To address this problem, the leader of the congregation asked a representative to inspect the ritual slaughter process in the abattoirs. While this sounded like a lot of hard work, the members of the congregation thought that it was the only way they could ensure halal consumption. Others, not necessarily affiliated with the congregation but heard of its attentiveness to halal, also came to the *tekke* to buy poultry. Rather than going to a supermarket and finalizing shopping in one round, some of my informants visited different shops to buy different items: clothing, gas, and cigarettes from shopping centers in Kehl/Germany (costs less), household items and salad from supermarkets in Strasbourg (fresher and tastes better), meat from a Turkish butcher that they know, poultry from the *tekke*, etc. Thus, each week, following the Friday prayer, Muslims seeking halal meat would visit the *tekke*’s store.

Buying poultry was an issue for members of other congregations in Strasbourg too. Other Turkish butchers also offered “halal” chicken, which were slaughtered and de-feathered by hand. However their prices were much higher than their mechanically-slaughtered counterparts. And who could assure that the 10 Euro per piece chickens were not slaughtered, de-feathered and packaged the same way as the three Euro per piece chickens? For the imam of another mosque, who has previously served in another region in France, the answer was rather simple: “Nowadays, we have to trust certain things because halal and haram have gotten so intertwined that you can talk about it for years and still not come to a conclusion... What we do in slaughterhouses is to inspect if the person slaughtering an animal says ‘Bismillah’ prior to slaughter, and whether the place is inspected for hygiene. To us, that makes it halal.”

While some imams inspect slaughterhouses, most ordinary Muslims do not. Instead, they go to their butchers and markets, which are run by their fellow Muslim brothers whom they trust with only selling halal. For the imam, there needed to be an end point to questioning: “to be overly suspicious on this issue, that is, to claim what we eat is haram... that itself is not a religiously proper thing. There may be certain acts of negligence, but it is not right to generalize them.” This was not the answer that a curious and somewhat skeptical researcher such as myself was looking for. For him, questions lead only to more questions, and if one continued on questioning every little detail, one could never be certain about anything in life. One certainly needed to be aware of the dangers around, and find ways of overcoming them as much as possible. And the rest... Allah would take care of it. Better explained by an elderly sitting at the courtyard of a Turkish mosque: “What Allah wants from you is not to judge, or to *sneak your nose* into other people’s business”. One only wonders what the discipline of anthropology would look like were anthropologists to follow his advice.

Halal Suppliers’ Perspective

At a time when halal suppliers face growing criticism for halalizing France, and supplying faux halal products, maintaining a clean reputation is not an easy task. Having a halal stamp or certification is one way of telling the customers that the products sold or the dishes served are halal. However, like halal stamps in supermarkets, halal signs on windows too convey a range of messages, making halal a polysemous or multivocal symbol (Turner 1975). One of my first interviews on the supply side was at a döner shop. Like all other döner shops, the owner of this one—a Turkish man in his mid-30s who came from a Western Anatolian town—also had a halal sign in French and Arabic on its window front and inside. He identified himself as Muslim, though he added that he did not pray five times a day or attend the communal Friday prayer. Moreover, he ate pork and consumed alcohol. Nonetheless, he claimed to sell halal. Alcohol—bottled beer in the fridge and draught beer over the counter—was visible in the store. Two other Turks aided him at the shop. One of them identified himself as an Alevi—a branch of Shia Islam that most Sunni Muslims consider heretical (Dressler 2013).

In Strasbourg, being an Alevi does not make one an outsider as there is a strong Alevi presence. Nonetheless, some of my Sunni-Muslim Turkish informants told me that they would prefer not to eat at an Alevi restaurant, recalling a Turkish saying: One should not to eat meat

cooked by the hands of an Alevi. Obviously, most, out of courtesy, would refrain from asking the proprietor whether s/he is Alevi. Instead, such information would be gathered in advance through word of mouth or by paying attention to other details. Since being Kurdish is often affiliated with being an Alevi, places run by migrants from Kurdish populated towns in Turkey (e.g. Maraş), or places where one could encounter pamphlets and community newspapers that promote events organized by the Kurdish community were often stigmatized as places to avoid. Selling alcohol was also an identifier ascribed to non-Muslims and Alevis.

As this was my very first encounter with a Turkish halal döner shop that offered alcohol, I wanted to know whether the proprietor saw any contradiction in his practice. He was aware of the contradiction, but did not seem to care much about it as he “did not believe that anything here [France] is halal.” That made him not only skeptical over the idea of retaining one’s Muslim identity in a place like France, but also skeptical over being a hardliner. To affirm his point, he recounted the following anecdote:

One day, an Arab walked in. He asked me whether the meat is halal. I said yes. He ordered a sandwich. Then he ordered beer. Halal or haram, that is up to him. I brought him the beer, and I said, in our store even the beer is halal. He turned around and said, really? I responded, really... you know, to teach him a lesson.

The proprietor of this shop was not the only skeptical individual in Strasbourg. Another döner shopkeeper who served alcohol in his store which had a halal sign on its front door argued that if he stopped serving alcohol, he would go out of business: “Some see me selling liquor and do not buy [the kebab]. If I do not sell liquor, I would go bankrupt. Some say halal and liquor do not fit. That is an excuse. They should stop going to big stores too, then.” According to his logic, if selling alcohol contaminated other products, one should avoid shopping from most supermarkets in France. There was some truth to his cynicism as most Turks did shop from French supermarkets in Strasbourg. In them, one could find halal on display next to pork items or the alcohol aisle located only a few meters away. While most of my informants did not buy meat from these supermarkets, they bought other products.

If one conceptualizes halal at the level of intentions (i.e., making money from haram makes one a bad person who cannot be trusted with matters pertaining to halal) then one should also detest any kind of transaction with these large supermarkets. Practice, however, deviated from rhetoric, which caused discomfort. For example,

an informant mentioned that by buying from French supermarkets, he was possibly contributing to “the Zionist cause”, which he explained as something that would displease Allah. Another, who previously worked in a döner kebab production facility, and wanted to provide an insider’s point of view, argued that most döners served in France were haram. He added: “You buy the bread from the hands of French, people who are *abdestsiz* [not pure because they do not cleanse through the Islamic ritual of *wudu*].” The discomfort stemming from self-critique was something that both gentlemen had to live with.

The first two suppliers provide a skeptical view. However, there were also those who took necessary measures to ensure that what they offered to their customers was halal. That meant inspecting slaughterhouses or avoiding processed food from certain brands. Although butcher shop owners are not allowed to slaughter animals (the slaughterer must have a license that is renewed annually), they can visit slaughterhouses and request permission to inspect the process. By building closer ties with slaughterhouses and buying from them in larger quantities, or having insiders, such as a friend who works in a slaughterhouse, the butchers can then ask for special requests, like asking for a specific day of the week or certain corner within the slaughterhouse to be dedicated only to halal slaughter.

Greater control over the slaughter process helped to ensure that the meat bought was ritually slaughtered. Moreover, when the customers asked where the meat came from, the butcher was able to do more than give a name, but also provide a snapshot of how he inspected the scene. Trust was established at the level of the supplier as well as the consumer. The following excerpt from my interview with a butcher provides insight into how he instills trust in his customers:

OA: Do people ask you why this meat is halal?

Butcher: Of course they do. They ask me who I work with, where the meat comes from, which slaughterhouse...

OA: How do they trust you?

Butcher: First, you can understand it by *looking* at the person selling it. Second, they ask for certification. Those that come do so because of recommendation, s/he knows you, have heard of you, or saw the halal label outside. They come in, ask if the meat is halal. You say, here it says it on the receipts [provided by the slaughterhouse, also displayed behind the glass where meat is on display], there [a certification on the wall] it writes halal. But these are things that a French butcher can also do!

OA: Yes, grab a pen and write it down...

Butcher: Yes, as a French I could, for example, grab the pen like you said, go to Metro [a supermarket chain], grab that frame [pointing to a frame on the wall with halal certification] that says halal, buy those labels [stamps] that say halal. But the consumer also looks around to see what else this guy sells...are there other non-halal products?

This excerpt highlights various cues that shape how the customer interacts with the supplier. First, the customer *looks* at the person—the face and stature of the person—selling halal. The face does not reveal measurable emotions only (Rosenberg and Ekman, 1993) but also conveys politics, which define the relations in a given interaction (Benson, 2008). My informants have often mentioned that when they visited a new store, the first thing they looked for was the face of the person behind the counter. Reading the face, they were somehow able to tell whether s/he was Kurdish or Alevi, and if s/he was a sympathizer of the Kurdish separatist movement in Turkey. Some also tested the shopkeeper’s sympathy for Islam by greeting the shopkeeper with “As-salamu alaykum” [Peace be upon you] rather than a French “Bonjour/Salut” or a secular Turkish “Selam/Merhaba”. The failure to respond with an “Alaykum Salam” by the shopkeeper was taken as a sign of the shopkeeper’s lack of interest in Islam, which, for the customer, corresponded to his Alevism and/or sympathy for the Kurdish separatist cause.

For the proprietors, such as the butcher quoted above, maintaining a clear face required constant investment in and awareness of one’s physicality (how clean one appears, how dark is the skin color?) and morality (is he part of a mosque community? how often does he give back to the community? how are his family affairs?). The butcher required some social capital to open up his shop, which he was able to obtain by working for a reputable Turkish market for many years. His customers knew his past. And I assume, by asking others or seeing him at the mosque, they also knew that he was a practicing Muslim. However, one’s honesty cannot be read by only looking at one’s face and/or his command of Islamic greeting. Later in the interview, the butcher explained that the face could also be misleading. Those who shaped their appearance according to the *sunnah* (e.g. keeping a longer beard, wearing loose pants) were not always trustworthy. He had previously been fooled by suppliers (whom he referred to as “those with long beards”) who used Islam to scam him.

Second, the consumer’s shopping experience is holistic. The aim of entering a store may be to buy a certain type of product. Yet, there are other products on display

(which could include community newspapers, pamphlets/flyers), each of which has a face of its own, and conveys different values to the customer about the venue as well as its owner. Like alcohol, selling stigmatized products in a store that claims to keep halal was not preferable. With alcohol, the stigma was evident. With other products, such as frozen foods, prepackaged meat, poultry and relevant side products, as well as sweets, which are sold along with meat and poultry, the stigma was harder to ascertain. This required the butcher to be a good observer by keeping track of public discussions on halal, and having a sense of people's reaction to a range of products. It also required him to take positions for and against certain products. Hence, when he went to the wholesaler, he did not just look for good bargains. He searched for items that were safe to sell.

Conclusion

This paper explored how Muslim Turks in Strasbourg retain a sense of halal at a time when the meaning of halal is under spotlight. I began with an evaluation of public discourses on halal where I showed how polemical accounts in televised investigations by reporters, public intellectuals, politicians and Muslim inspectors have scandalized halal. I then asked what sense Muslims made of this scandal. Doubt, as I argued, is part of Muslim's everyday lives, and continues to be so as Muslim scholars fail to resolve their differences in interpretation. Hence, for my informants, "faux halal", though alarming, was not something new or shocking. It was part of being Muslim.

I showed that to overcome doubt pertaining to halal consumption, most of my informants avoided buying meat from French supermarkets. The availability of Turkish markets, butchers and restaurants offered an alternative. However, consumers were also aware that being Turkish or Muslim did not necessarily mean that the owner would refrain from supplying faux halal. Not all venues were trustworthy. The information on whom to trust was based partially on word of mouth. The task of finding out trustworthy people and places brought in existing schisms between Sunnis and Alevis, Turks and Kurds, as well as good and bad Muslims. The task also entailed the consumer obtaining information about the supplier and doing a mini-ethnography of his store. Facing cognizant consumers, the supplier had to maintain a clean face by being engaged with halal, by personally inspecting slaughter, building rapport with a slaughterhouse, keeping track of the rumors and discussions about tainted products, and removing them from his inventory.

The images that appear in one's mind after being surrounded by scandalous discourses on halal are shocking. Yet, for Muslims in Strasbourg these debates were nothing new. "Most Muslim religious leaders and French experts agree that no more than 5 to 10 percent of the meat sold as halal in France is really halal. 'Between 90 and 95 percent of the meat sold in Muslim butchershops is not halal' said a spokesman from the Ministry of Agriculture," wrote a journalist following his investigation on halal in France (Kutchera, 1996). These words appeared in an article written in 1996. What this means is that while traceability, monitoring and certification of halal still constitute a major problem that the French state and Islamic institutions must address, Muslims in France have been living with this problem for decades. Perhaps there is something to be learned by looking at how they make do in a field shaped by doubt before getting caught in alarmist calls.

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