

THE HALAL CERTIFICATION CONTROVERSY

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Halal Certification is a controversial topic. Many non-Muslims oppose it for social, political, religious and economic reasons. They are not alone. Remarkably, some significant international Muslim scholars also resist the Halal Certification movement because they believe it contradicts basic Islamic principles. This article identifies ten reasons that are proposed by Muslim intellectuals for their opposition to Halal Certification.

The Qur'an's teaching on halal food is specific. Muslims are told they can eat food which is 'lawful' (halal) and good (Q.16:114; 5:91; 2:168, 172), and most foods fit into this category (Q.5:2). Pronouncing Allah's name over food before eating it is required (Q.5:5; 6:118, 121). Forbidden (haram) is the flesh of swine, or an animal that has died, or blood, or meat offered to a deity other than Allah (Q.2:173; 16:115), and Muslims are commanded not to make lawful food forbidden (Q.5:90). However, under necessity, even forbidden food becomes lawful (Q.2:173; 5:4; 6:119, 145; 16:115).

Over the centuries, Muslim legislators have added to these injunctions, creating an elaborate system of food laws. In the 1970's, some Islamic groups in Australia began issuing certificates to declare certain products as 'halal'. Halal certification in Australia today involves one of 21 Islamic bodies accepting a payment to certify that a certain product fulfils Islamic ritual requirements. Beginning with meat, to ensure that it would be accepted in Muslim markets of Asia and the Middle East, it rapidly spread to other products, including soft drinks, water and even cat food. Today Aussie icons such as Vegemite, Bega cheese, Kelloggs Cornflakes and Anzac biscuits bear the halal label.

Some Christians see no problem with halal certification. They compare it with Jewish kosher food or the (now-discontinued) Heart Foundation tick. They note that "the earth is the Lord's and everything in it" (Psalm 24:1), so all food falls under the rubric that God "richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment" (1 Timothy 6:17).

For other Christians, the fact that halal food has had the name of Allah pronounced over it is grounds enough for rejection. They recall the teaching of the first Jerusalem council, where the believers were told to abstain from food offered to idols (Acts.15:29; 21:25), and Jesus' rebuke to the churches at Pergamum and Thyatira (Revelation 2:14,20). In this view, the Allah of the Qur'an is deemed an idol, and inherently distinct from the God of the Bible. Christians differ about this – Yale University's Miroslav Volf emphasises the similarities, whereas Melbourne's Mark Durie notes the differences. Even food offered to idols can be eaten, according to the Apostle Paul, as long as no questions are asked about it (1 Corinthians 10:23-33) and it does not make another Christian stumble (1 Corinthians 8:1-13; Rom.14:1-23). Rev Gordon Moyes concludes that "you need not worry about Kosher labels, Halal labels, vegetarian labels or anything else. Christians are free in Christ to make their choices regardless of who the butcher was, or whether a rabbi, or an Imam, or a Seventh Day Adventist member certified it clean. Only remember, respect other people's customs and beliefs." Moreover, it is asserted, the prohibition against food offered to idols refers to participation in idol worship and the attendant feasts (1 Corinthians 10:6-22), not to eating meat which may have been offered in a pagan sacrifice and afterwards sold in the public market. So, this 'food offered to idols' objection is dismissed as invalid by some.

Other Christians claim that the fees paid to certifying organisations amount to a 'Muslim tax' on all consumers of halal goods. Although only 2% of Australians identify themselves as Muslim, every person who eats Vegemite contributes to the Islamic coffers. And these coffers are substantial. Commentators suggest that the international halal market could be worth more than

one trillion dollars. Large organisations like Cadburys, Nestle and Kraft have their foods certified for commercial reasons, although they maintain that the cost is never passed on to the customer.

Australian philanthropist Dick Smith refuses to pay for halal certification for his food products. He states that “while we have a choice ... we would prefer to avoid unnecessarily increasing the cost of our products in order to pay for Halal accreditation when this money would be better spent continuing to support important charitable causes where assistance is greatly needed... We have never been asked to put a Christian symbol ... on our food requiring that we send money to a Christian organisation for the right to do so.”

Detractors claim that halal certification is an attempt to foist Islamic food laws, and more, on all Australians, as a form of ‘creeping shari’a’. In 2011, the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC) lobbied the Federal government to permit elements of Sharia law, a move they called ‘legal pluralism’. They noted that halal food certification and Shari’a compliant financing were already legal in Australia, and it should be taken to the next level. As halal regulations are applied to more areas, including the grain fed to stock and the vehicles used to transport food, every part of the food chain potentially becomes involved. Mustafa Ceric, the grand mufti of Bosnia and a leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, urged a conference in Islamabad in 2010 “to conquer the world through the Halal movement.” This is dismissed as rhetorical overstatement by certification advocates, and any opposition to or questioning of their view is branded as anti-Muslim paranoia.

Others oppose the halal industry on cruelty grounds. Halal killing forbids the electrical pre-stunning before slaughter, a process required for RSPCA approval as ‘best practice’ in meatworks to minimise animal suffering. According to a government-commissioned report, un-stunned cows may remain alive for up to two minutes after their throats are cut. Opponents of halal certification claim that it contributes to higher levels of animal pain and distress. In 2009 Jordanian Princess Alia bint al-Hussein, a descendant of the prophet Muhammad, wrote to then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd asking Australia stop the Halal trade because of its cruelty to animals. She stated that killing without stunning is not necessary under Islamic principles.

To make the matter even more confusing, some Muslim scholars reject the idea of halal certification. Dr Taj Hargey, Director of the Muslim Educational Centre of Oxford (UK) calls it “covert religious extremism and creeping Islamic fundamentalism making its way into Britain by the back door”. Conservative Saudi Salafist scholar Sheikh Ibn Uthaymeen opposes it based on legal rulings, and Sheikh Habib Bewley of South Africa states that it “clearly runs counter to a number of essential governing principles of the Deen [Islamic religion]”.

Here are ten reasons based on the Qur’an and the Hadith, and corroborated by Islamic scholars, which demonstrate that halal certification is not necessary or is contrary to accepted Islamic beliefs.

Reason 1: In Islam, Allah is the supreme law-giver, whereas halal certification undertakes that role for itself. According to Sheikh Faraz Khan, “every Muslim affirms... that He Most High is the source of law for His creation. This reality is of course stated explicitly in the Qur’an, as Allah Most High states: “Surely, His alone is the creation and the command; blessed is Allah, Lord of the worlds.” (7:54), as well as “He has legislated for you that religion which He commanded unto Noah, and that which We inspire in you (Muhammad), and that which We commanded unto Abraham and Moses and Jesus, saying: Establish the religion, and be not divided therein.” (42:13) In the latter verse, Allah Most High actually uses the verb form [shari’a] in relation to Himself. So, He alone is the Lawgiver (Shari’), Glorious and Exalted.”ⁱⁱ

Reason 2: Halal certificates are unnecessary, since halal is the default setting for most food. Sheikh Habib Bewley cites the Qur’an (Q.2 29): “*It is He who created for you, everything that is on the*

earth". He states the foundational principle is that "everything on the earth is for us to make use of, is halal, except for what Allah and His Messenger tell us is haram [forbidden]... everything is halal until there is some definite proof that it is haram ... But halal certification works on the exact opposite principle, that everything is haram unless it is declared by them [i.e. those who issue the certificates] to be halal."ⁱⁱⁱ

Reason 3: Halal materials should not be declared haram. The Qur'an commands: "Do not make *haram* the good things that Allah had made *halal* for you" (Q.2:87) Sheikh Bewley notes the inconsistency in the behavior of some unscrupulous halal certifiers: "They are expressly forbidding businesses, shops and restaurants from purchasing goods from sources other than those approved by them. And, by extension, they have declared all non-approved goods forbidden, haram. They do exactly what Allah commands them not to do."^{iv}

Reason 4: Halal certificates are unnecessary because the food of Christians and Jews (called 'People of the Book' in the Qur'an) is halal for Muslims. In both Mecca and Medina, the prophet Muhammad (570-632 AD) was part of a multi-religious society, where Muslims lived alongside Jews, Christians and idol-worshippers. The Muslims did not slaughter all their own food. The Qur'an states that the food, including slaughtered animals, of the 'People of the Book' is lawful for Muslims: "This day [all] good foods have been made lawful, and the food of those who were given the Scripture is lawful for you and your food is lawful for them. (Qur'an 5:5)

The important commentator Ibn Kathir (1300-1373) stated about this verse: "(The food of the People of the Scripture is lawful to you.)" meaning, their slaughtered animals, as [previous Islamic scholars] Ibn `Abbas, Abu Umamah, Mujahid, Sa`id bin Jubayr, `Ikrimah, `Ata', Al-Hasan, Makhul, Ibrahim An-Nakha`i, As-Suddi and Muqatil bin Hayyan stated. This ruling, that the slaughtered animals of the People of the Book are permissible for Muslims, is agreed on by the scholars, because the People of the Book believe that slaughtering for other than Allah is prohibited. They mention Allah's Name upon slaughtering their animals, even though they have deviant beliefs about Allah that do not benefit His majesty."^v

Likewise, the key commentators al-Jalalayn note that "the food of those who were given the Scripture that is animals slaughtered by the Jews and Christians is permitted to you and permitted to them is your food."^{vi} Ibn Abbas agrees.^{vii}

Sheikh Ibn Uthaymeen, a conservative Salafist theologian from Saudi Arabia, issued a series of fatwas^{viii} in response to questions about eating food slaughtered by Christians and Jews even if the meat was from "a carcass slaughtered by unknown means (i.e. it was done by cutting off the head or electrocution or some such means.)" The sheikh ruled that "eating the poultry is permissible because that which is slaughtered by the *ahlul-kitaab* ["People of the Book"] today is just as what was slaughtered by *ahlul-kitaab* in the time of the Prophet." This was despite him referring to Jews and Christians as "of the *kuffaar* [disbelievers] whether they are in the time of the Prophet ... or now."^{ix}

Muhammad obeyed the command in Qur'an 5:5 when he ate meat from a sheep that had been prepared by a Jewish woman (Hadith al-Bukhari 3:786; 4.394).^x Ibn Kathir also records this event as proof that eating food slaughtered and prepared by non-Muslims was obviously acceptable to Muhammad.

Reason 5: The issuing of halal certificates is *bid'ah* (innovation), which is forbidden in Islam: such certificates are not legitimate under Islamic law. They are a recent phenomenon and have not existed throughout fourteen centuries anywhere in the Muslim world.

Allah in the Qur'an tells Muslims: "This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion." (Q.5:3) A perfect and complete religion would not need improvements and innovations.

Muhammad was quoted as saying: "The worst of things are those that are newly invented; every newly-invented thing is an innovation and every innovation is going astray, and every going astray is in the Fire [of Hell]."^{xi}

The Japanese Muslim scholar, Professor Hassan Ko Nakata, recognises halal certification as an unwarranted innovation. He says: "Halal certificate [sic. "certification"] is a *Bid'ah* (reproachable innovation), because no one [sic. "would"] have dared to innovate Halal certificate in Islamic history since the era of the Prophet Muhammad(ss) until the last day of the Ottoman Caliphate, neither great Caliphs nor Sultans, needless to say of Ulama` [scholars] of Sunni 4 schools, despite they [sic. "their"] have [sic. "having"] enough authority and legitimacy of making it."^{xii}

Reason 6: Halal certification opposes the Islamic principle of justice. According to the Qur'an, Muslims should act justly (49:9), command justice (3:21), stand firm for justice (4:127, 135; 5:8; 57:25), and establish the measure and scales with justice (6:152; 11:85; 55:9). They should stand up for justice even if it is against themselves, their parents or relatives, whether rich or poor. (4:135).

Halal certification is a form of economic injustice. Sheikh Habib Bewley states that "it is totally reprehensible that make (sic.) a profit from selective issuing of the rulings of the *deen*. And the fact that they [i.e. the halal certifiers] charge such exorbitant fees for their services puts the Muslim customer at a distinct financial disadvantage in the market place, for the price the companies have to pay is passed directly onto the customers. And so, food that has the halal certificate almost always tends to be more expensive than that without it. Halal certification has become a form of stealth tax, taking money from the pockets of the ordinary Muslims and putting it into the coffers of the Islamic organisations and *ulama*."^{xiii}

Professor Hassan Ko Nakata is less subtle. He states that "imposing Halal certificate on people is a *Zulm* (injustice), especially in case of being accompanied with demanding money for issuing it and preventing free trade of people banning them to declare their own things as Halal. Every Muslim can sell his own properties without need of getting permission from any person or organization as far as it is lawful. So preventing such sales or imposing permission is a *Zulm*, injustice."^{xiv}

British Imam Dr Taj Hargey sees halal certification as dishonest: "This is covert religious extremism and creeping Islamic fundamentalism making its way into Britain by the back door".^{xv}

Reason 7: Halal certification impedes economic development and diversity by concentrating capital in the hands of the wealthy few. Sheikh Habib Bewley notes that "it is not just the Muslim on the street who has suffered financially as a result of halal certification, but also many small Muslim businesses. Before the halal stamp became widespread, almost all Muslims used to purchase their meat from their local halal butcher. But, since the advent of the stamp, the supermarkets, most non-Muslim owned and run, have stolen the majority of those butchers' customers by setting up halal sections and undercutting them, thus cornering the market and driving them out of business."^{xvi}

Reason 8: Halal certification combats the Islamic ideal of brotherhood (Q.49:10; 3:103), for halal certification is destroying social cohesion in the Muslim community. Sheikh Bewley notes that "those few halal shops and restaurants that remain are greeted with suspicion because of their lack of certificates. No longer is a Muslim's word taken at face value that his food is halal. As a consequence of this industry, Muslims now trust a printed stamp more than the word of a fellow

believer.”^{xvii} Dr Taj Hargey states that “religious zealots and theological ideologues are deliberately promoting confusion about halal to sow discord and resentment.”^{xviii}

Reason 9: Halal certification denies the applicability of prophetic example. Muhammad ate meat from Jews and Christians without any such certificate. Sheikh Bewley notes that “we are even forbidden from asking Christians and Jews where the food they are serving comes from when they invite us to eat with them, let alone Muslims. When the Prophet was given the poisoned sheep to eat by the Jews of Khaybar after he had defeated them, he did not ask them about where the meat had come from and would have eaten it were it not for the fact that the meat itself told him that it was poisoned.”^{xix}

Reason 10: Halal certificates oppose the truth, for they may promote error and falsehood. Sheikh Habib Bewley notes that “the stamp is far being a foolproof determinant of whether something is halal, for it can, unbeknownst to us, be forged and transferred from one product to another. And that has been done on numerous occasions ... Indeed, it might be said that the existence of halal stamps has caused Muslims to consume a lot more haram food than they would otherwise have done... halal stamps have knowingly been granted to products later found to not be halal at all.”^{xx}

Dutch chicken meat imported into Britain and certified as Halal was found to be injected with beef or pork.^{xxi} In 2012, Indonesian beef meatballs were found to be laced with pork,^{xxii} which is cheaper. In 2014, Cadburys was forced recall some of its chocolates in Malaysia when they were found to contain traces of pig DNA.^{xxiii} A guide put out by Muslims in Canberra notes about some foods: “Products listed here and containing Gelatine are approved. Other products containing gelatine even if marked “Halal” are not approved.” It also marks some food additives, such as E627 with “Halal - Should be avoided in Australia.”^{xxiv}

Dr Taj Hargey identifies the source of the halal certification scam: “Three of the main fundamentalist Muslim sects — the Wahhabi fanatics in Saudi Arabia, the Salafi extremists of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and the Deobandi zealots from India-Pakistan — are foisting their fabricated notions about it down our collective throats.”^{xxv}

Halal certification raises a complex series of issues – religious, legal, social, economic and political – and it will continue to exercise the minds of intelligent Muslims.

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ⁱⁱ <http://seekershut.org/ans-blog/2012/07/16/is-it-valid-to-describe-allah-most-high-as-the-lawgiver-al-shari/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.jumuamosquect.com/khutbas/khutba/archive/2012/january/27/article/khutba-on-halal-certification-fiasco.html>. The video of this speech can be seen on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uGKHCKua7i4>

^{iv} <http://www.jumuamosquect.com/khutbas/khutba/archive/2012/january/27/article/khutba-on-halal-certification-fiasco.html>. The video of this speech can be seen on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uGKHCKua7i4>

^v http://www.qtafsir.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=818&Itemid=60

^{vi}

<http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=1&tTafsirNo=74&tSoraNo=5&tAyahNo=5&tDisplay=yes&UseProfile=0&LanguageId=2>

^{vii}

<http://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=2&tTafsirNo=73&tSoraNo=5&tAyahNo=5&tDisplay=yes&UseProfile=0&LanguageId=2>

^{viii} <https://www.troid.ca/media/pdf/ahlul-kitaab.pdf>

^{ix} <https://www.troid.ca/media/pdf/ahlul-kitaab.pdf>

^x http://www.qtafsir.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=818&Itemid=60

^{xi} Sunan al-Nasa’I, Vol. 2, Book 19, Hadith 1579

^{xii} <http://hassankonakata.blogspot.com/2011/02/20091013-fukuoka-alnour-islamic-culture.html>

^{xiii} <http://www.jumuamosquect.com/khutbas/khutba/archive/2012/january/27/article/khutba-on-halal-certification-fiasco.html>. The video of this speech can be seen on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uGKHCKua7i4>

^{xiv} <http://hassankonakata.blogspot.com/2011/02/20091013-fukuoka-alnour-islamic-culture.html>

^{xv} Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2623879/We-Muslims-appalled-sale-halal-meat-stealth.html#ixzz4WjxiAKpp>

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^{xvi} <http://www.jumuamosquect.com/khutbas/khutba/archive/2012/january/27/article/khutba-on-halal-certification-fiasco.html>. The video of this speech can be seen on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uGKHCKua7i4>

^{xvii} <http://www.jumuamosquect.com/khutbas/khutba/archive/2012/january/27/article/khutba-on-halal-certification-fiasco.html>. The video of this speech can be seen on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uGKHCKua7i4>

^{xviii} <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2623879/We-Muslims-appalled-sale-halal-meat-stealth.html#ixzz4Wk3ENUNl>

^{xix} <http://www.jumuamosquect.com/khutbas/khutba/archive/2012/january/27/article/khutba-on-halal-certification-fiasco.html>. The video of this speech can be seen on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uGKHCKua7i4>

^{xx} <http://www.jumuamosquect.com/khutbas/khutba/archive/2012/january/27/article/khutba-on-halal-certification-fiasco.html>. The video of this speech can be seen on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uGKHCKua7i4>

^{xxi} <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/panorama/3047159.stm>

^{xxii} <http://www.abc.net.au/site-archive/rural/news/content/201212/s3659232.htm>

^{xxiii} <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2014/may/28/pork-in-cadburys-malaysian-chocolate-recalled-after-dna-traces-found>

^{xxiv} http://www.halalrc.org/images/Research%20Material/Literature/halal_guide.pdf

^{xxv} <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2623879/We-Muslims-appalled-sale-halal-meat-stealth.html#ixzz4WkAFM1xQ>

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