



Book Review: Halal Matters; Islam, Politics, and Markets in Global Perspective

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The halal phenomenon now transcends the Islamic legal boundaries of food and drink, becoming part of the global economy involving political, social, and cultural dimensions. The book *Halal Matters: Islam, Politics and Markets in Global Perspective* (Bergeaud-Blackler, Fischer, & Lever, 2016) examines how the concept of halal is constructed and practiced globally in the context of modernity and capitalism. This article systematically summarizes and analyzes the book's content, focusing on the politics of halal certification, the role of the state in standardization, and the global market dynamics that shape contemporary Muslim identity. Through an anthropological approach and social practice theory, it is found that halal has become an instrument of power, economy, and spirituality in an ever-changing global landscape.

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INTRODUCTION

In the last two decades, the term *halal* has undergone an extraordinary expansion of meaning—from a normative Islamic legal concept to a global economic system worth trillions of dollars. According to data from [Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada \(2011\)](#), the global *halal* food market value reached approximately USD 632 billion per year and continues to rise with the growth of the world's Muslim population, which is estimated to reach 2.2 billion by 2030. This figure positions *halal* not merely as a religious issue, but as a global market category that influences the food, cosmetics, pharmaceutical, tourism, and financial industries.

The book *Halal Matters: Islam, Politics and Markets in Global Perspective* ([Bergeaud-Blackler, Fischer, & Lever, 2016](#)) was born from an awareness of this phenomenon of *halal* globalization. The book not only describes the development of the *halal* industry but also dissects the political, social, and epistemological dimensions behind it. *Halal* is treated as a complex social phenomenon, where power, knowledge, and the market intertwine in shaping the norms and consumption practices of modern Muslims.

The book's editors—Florence Bergeaud-Blackler, Johan Fischer, and John Lever—begin with a fundamental question: how is the modern *halal* market constituted, by whom, for whom, and for what purpose? This question is important because, until now, studies on *halal* have focused more on the dimension of Islamic law (*fiqh*), while the socio-political and economic contexts that shape it are often overlooked. This book attempts to transcend these limits by integrating anthropological, sociological, and political science studies in viewing *halal* as "a meeting point between Islam, the state, and the market".

Furthermore, *Halal Matters* examines the dynamics in various countries and contexts: from Malaysia, which makes *halal* certification part of a national strategy of "halal diplomacy," to the UK and Belgium, which present the discourse of "Green Halal" as an ethical and ecological movement amidst Muslim minority communities. Meanwhile, in China and Turkey, *halal* has become an arena of negotiation between religious tradition and the state's modernization projects. This variation shows that "halal" is not a singular entity, but a result of social construction influenced by local politics and the global economy.

The book's approach is distinctive: it uses social practice theory from [Pierre Bourdieu \(1990\)](#) and [Allan Reckwitz \(2002\)](#), which sees *halal* not just as a rule, but as a practice carried out in everyday life—from the way of slaughtering, choosing products, to understanding purity and blessings. Thus, *halal* is understood as an action that shapes and is shaped by the social habitus of Muslims.

Additionally, the book adopts the concept of global assemblage from [Ong and Collier \(2005\)](#), which is a way of seeing *halal* as a "global assembly" consisting of diverse elements: state regulations, industrial technology, clerical fatwas, international certifications, and consumer preferences. All these elements do not unite harmoniously but rather produce tensions and negotiations that reflect the dynamics of power in the modern world.

The book's introduction asserts that the study of *halal* cannot be separated from the context of modernity and the globalization of Islam. Modernity presents new standards in production and distribution, while globalization enables cross-cultural and legal encounters between Muslim and non-Muslim societies. In this context, *halal* becomes a symbol of piety in the market—a form of piety manifested through consumption and production that aligns with Islamic values while adapting to the logic of global capitalism.

By combining social theory and empirical studies, *Halal Matters* provides a new understanding that *halal* is not just a religious label, but an ideological arena where values, power, and economics interact. *Halal* becomes a bridge between spirituality and modernity—between faith and commerce—that shapes the new face of the global Muslim community.

The book's introduction also highlights the emergence of a phenomenon called the audit culture within the *halal* industry: the rise of verification, certification, and oversight practices that mimic the systems of global capitalism. In this audit culture, piety is tested not only by faith but also by documents, quality standards, and *halal* logos. This phenomenon reveals a paradox between spirituality and the bureaucratization of religion—where the aspect of faith, which should be internal, is now monitored by certification bodies and market mechanisms.

Thus, the introductory part of this book provides a solid conceptual framework for understanding *halal* as a multidimensional global phenomenon—simultaneously religious, political, and

economic. It prepares the reader to see how each subsequent chapter reveals different faces of halal: from identity politics in Malaysia and Turkey, the halal economy in Europe, to ethical spirituality in Iran and Morocco. Through this interdisciplinary approach, *Halal Matters* invites us to understand that halal is not just about what is "permissible to eat," but also about how modern Muslims negotiate faith, identity, and power in an increasingly global and secular world and environment.

DISCUSSION

The book is structured based on interdisciplinary research with the following approaches: (1) Economic anthropology – to see halal practices in people's daily lives and the relationship between consumption, religion, and identity; (2) Sociology of global markets – to examine how states and corporations shape the halal certification system; and (3) Discourse and social practice analysis – referring to the practice theory of [Pierre Bourdieu \(1990\)](#) and [Reckwitz \(2002\)](#), as well as the concept of global assemblages from [Ong and Collier \(2005\)](#).

Data was obtained through participant observation, in-depth interviews with halal industry players, certification officials, and consumers in various countries. The analysis was conducted by tracing the interaction between religion, politics, and the economy in the process of halal standardization.

The book asserts that halal is not only a religious category but also a cultural code and market value. Halal products now cover the food, cosmetics, pharmaceutical, tourism, and even financial sectors. In this context, halal becomes a symbol of "modern piety"—combining spirituality and business professionalism. However, this expansion of meaning also creates ambiguity: who has the authority to determine "halal-ness"? Is it state institutions, religious authorities, or the global market?

Countries like Malaysia and Singapore have become pioneers in making halal an instrument of public policy. Through institutions like JAKIM and MUIS, both countries developed an audit culture—a standardized and internationally recognized system of halal supervision and certification. However, this process gives rise to what the authors call a "postliberal halal strategy"—an effort by the state to use the halal discourse to expand economic and political influence across borders, as seen in Malaysia's halal diplomacy in European and Middle Eastern markets.

Conversely, in Europe and North America, halal certification is managed by private institutions and Muslim minority communities. As a result, a plurality of halal labels and a struggle for legitimacy among institutions emerge—from IFANCA in the US to the Halal Food Authority in the UK. This diversity shows that "halal" is contextual and political.

The chapter on "Green Halal" by Manon Istasse shows the emergence of a new generation of Muslims who interpret halal ecologically—linking halal with animal welfare, health, and the environment. This phenomenon illustrates the transformation of halal into a form of ethical consumerism among European Muslims, in line with the global trend of sustainable consumption.

In Muslim-minority countries like China and the UK, halal consumption functions as a symbol of resistance against secularization and cultural homogenization. For the Hui community in China, the term *qingzhen* is not just "halal," but also a marker of ethnic and cultural identity. Meanwhile, in the UK, halal consumption becomes a political expression of Muslims in the secular public space.

The editors view halal as a global assemblage—a dynamic construction involving various actors: states, clerics, corporations, and consumers. In this context, halal reflects the operation of power/knowledge sourced from the interaction between regulation, technology, and religious authority. Thus, halal is not a fixed category, but the result of continuous negotiation and mediation between spiritual values and economic interests.

CONCLUSION

The book *Halal Matters: Islam, Politics and Markets in Global Perspective* makes an important contribution to broadening the horizon of understanding about halal in the modern world. Through an interdisciplinary approach—anthropology, sociology, political economy, and religious studies—this book shows that halal is not merely a normative category in Islamic law, but a global socio-economic phenomenon that shapes new relationships between religion, the state, and the market.

One of the main conclusions emerging from the book's discussion is that halal now functions as an "arena of power". On one hand, it becomes a tool for the state and religious institutions to regulate and control the social practices of Muslims; on the other, it becomes an economic instrument that opens opportunities for global industries. Malaysia, for

example, has successfully combined religious and economic dimensions through halal diplomacy—making halal certification a geopolitical and soft power strategy that expands its influence internationally. Here, halal becomes a means to assert national and religious identity as well as an instrument of global economic integration.

Second, Halal Matters shows that the halal industry represents a new form of Islamic modernity. The modernity offered is not merely the adoption of Western technology and market systems, but a reinterpretation of Islamic values in the context of global capitalism. Phenomena such as Green Halal in Europe or state-based halal certification in Southeast Asia show that Muslims are striving to balance spirituality and economic rationality. In this context, halal becomes a symbol of piety in the market—piety mediated by ethical consumption and production practices.

Third, this book highlights that the process of halal standardization has given birth to a new form of religious bureaucratization. With the emergence of certification bodies, halal audits, and technical verification procedures, the piety of Muslims is increasingly measured and administered by modern institutions. This phenomenon marks a shift from faith-based authority to institutionalized piety, where religious authority shifts from traditional clerics to state and market institutions. In other words, halal is not only regulated by fatwas, but also by the logic of regulation, certification, and licensing.

Fourth, the book shows that halal is a product of transnational negotiation. In various parts of the world, the meaning of halal is strongly influenced by the local socio-political context. In Europe, halal becomes part of the struggle of Muslim minorities to maintain their identity amidst state secularism. In China, halal (or qingzhen) becomes an ethno-religious symbol for the Hui community living under state policies that are ambivalent towards religion. In Turkey and Iran, halal reflects the tug-of-war between industrial modernization and Islamic spirituality. Thus, the concept of halal is always contextual and dynamic, reflecting the power relations between religion, state, and society.

Fifth, from an epistemological perspective, Halal Matters challenges the reductionist view that sees halal only within a theological framework. Through the theory of global assemblages (Ong & Collier, 2005), this book reveals that halal is the result of an "assemblage" of various elements: technology,

bureaucracy, fatwas, consumers, and global capital. Each element brings its own logic and interests, and it is precisely in the tension between these elements that halal finds its social meaning. This means that halal cannot be reduced to Islamic legal rules alone, but must be understood as a plural and layered social arena.

Sixth, this book also affirms the ethical and ecological dimensions of halal. The concept of Green Halal discussed in the book expands the meaning of halal towards environmental responsibility, animal welfare, and social justice. This shows that halal is not just about "what is eaten," but also about "how and from where something is produced". Thus, halal offers an alternative to exploitative modern consumption—presenting a consumption ethic based on spiritual values and sustainability.

From these various findings, it can be concluded that halal is a reflection of the way Muslims negotiate identity, ethics, and power in the modern world. It becomes a bridge between spirituality and rationality, between shariah and science, between faith and commodity. But at the same time, halal also raises new dilemmas: when piety becomes administratively measurable, and religion is commodified into a global brand.

Conceptually, Halal Matters reminds us that understanding halal means understanding globalization itself—that is, the process by which local values (religion) are transformed within the logic of the global market and politics. Through cross-national studies, this book shows that "halal matters" not just because it is about food, but because it touches the heart of the problem of Islamic modernity: how to be a Muslim in a world that is increasingly integrated, standardized, and commodified.

Finally, this book opens a space for reflection for scholars, policymakers, and industry players to see that the future of the halal industry is not solely determined by technical regulations, but by the success of restoring ethical and spiritual values in the global economy. If halal continues to be understood as a combination of faith, ethics, and market rationality, then it has the potential to become an alternative economic model that balances profit and blessings, profit and morality.

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