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**RELIGIOUS INDUSTRY IN HALAL FOOD CONSUMPTION
(DISTRUBITION OF KNOWLEDGE)**

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Abstract

Religion has been considered as important reflection of social order throughout the ages. As primary social facts, religion and religious rituals have a great impact for those who choose to follow their faiths' dietary restrictions. The structure and the practices of these religious eating rules are almost same in all religions but their labeling or naming it differs from one religion to another. The appropriate 'clean' food is named halal in Islam and Kosher in Jewish laws. Parallel to creation of social fact with the concept of religion, this paper is mainly about the distribution and consumption of halal food in Turkey as one of the predominantly Muslim countries. By the help of comparison with kosher food and consumption and certification of halal food world widely, the paper aims to reach the conclusion that religious requirements has turned into industry and became a institutionalized power for the recent decades. With the help of sociology, the theory part of the topic will be discussed by exemplifying from sociologists arguments. And the practice of its theory in Turkish example

will be stated with observed instances. Concentrating on the religious industrialization generally, I will talk about the function of halal concept as a sample. This topic is recent for Turkey and has the characteristics of a detailed thesis with more supportive scientific data in further researches.

Key Words: halal industry, halal and kosher, religious power, halal food.

Öz

Din çağlar boyunca sosyal düzenin önemli bir yansıması olarak kabul edilmiştir. Akla ilk gelen sosyal olgulardan biri olarak, din ve dinsel törenler, inançlarında yer alan beslenme kurallarını uygulamayı tercih etmiş kişilerde oldukça büyük bir etkiye sahip olmaktadır. Bahsi geçen dini yeme kurallarının yapısı ve bu kuralların günlük yaşamda uygulanışı tüm dinlerde hemen hemen aynı olsa da, damgalanmaları veya adlandırılmaları yönünden bir dinden diğerine farklılık gösterebilir. Uygunluk olarak ifade edilen “temiz” gıda İslamiyet’te helal olarak adlandırılırken, Yahudi kanunlarına göre koşer olarak adlandırılır. Din kavramını kullanarak sosyal bir olgu yaratma çabasına paralel olarak, bu çalışma temel olarak Müslüman nüfusun çoğunlukta olduğu ülkelerden birisi olan Türkiye’de helal gıda dağıtımı ve tüketimi hakkındadır. Dünya çapında koşer gıdanın ve helal gıdanın tüketimi ve sertifikalandırılma süreçlerini kıyaslama sayesinde, çalışma dini gereksinimlerin sanayiye dönüştüğünü ve son yıllarda kurumsallaşmış bir güç haline gelmekte olduğu sonucuna varmayı amaçlar. Sosyoloji kuramları sayesinde, konunun teoriye dayanan kısmı sosyologların fikirleriyle örneklendirilerek açıklanacaktır ve desteklenecektir. Diğer yandan, teorinin Türkiye örneğinde uygulanmış hali gözlemlenen örnekler ile birlikte belirtilecektir. Genel olarak dinin sanayileştirilmesine yoğunlaşıp, örnek olarak helal kavramının işlevini irdeleyeceğim. Sözü edilen konu, Türkiye için yeni bir konudur ve konusu itibari ile de ileriki araştırmalarda, destekleyici bilimsel verilerle sunulabilecek detaylı bir tez olma niteliğine sahiptir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: helal sanayi, helal ve koşer, dini güç, helal gıda.

Industrializing and nationalizing religion inside the borders of society demands high amount of political games and discourse. In this point, it is impossible to ignore Foucault’s ideas on power and knowledge relations as mentioned before. According to him, power first creates knowledge itself. New kind of knowledge comes from social service and social production. It then turns into discipline and becomes ideology after all(Foucault, 1975). In a religious term, a special attempt to buy halal food on your shopping definitely puts you on a different classification from

a man whose basket is full of alcohol. Ideologies have a great influence on the behaviors. Living in the way of halal principles is most likely very effective on the thoughts and ideas that the commercialization could appear on the food shelves.

Legitimate Way of Obeying Orders: 'Halal'

The term halal in this article mostly stands for the appropriate food that symbolizes ritual cleanness. It is different from being clean at concrete sense. In my understanding and representing the word, cleanness for health is one of the requirements of halal food. It does not mean that all washed, cooked or cleaned food is clean. Rather, religious cleanness should come to the minds when the term is used.

In social context, halal is a general term used for following the order of Allah. It includes many areas that has role inside everyday life like the way of clothing, speaking, eating or drinking, acting in society etc. It can be observed that even social relations are designed according to these principles. When you are married to a man/woman, he/she is your halal, which means you have the right to have physical relationship. When you work and earn money without and cheating, that money and the things you buy with it are halal to you. The standards are mentioned in religious resources as a guide to practice theory. More specifically, the standards on food and drinks have a crucial place on the practice of halal way of living.

First, it will be more objective enough when we evaluate the information of universal institutions like WHO in order to be aware from the exact definition of the topic. Basing on the "General Guidelines for Use of the Term Halal" (CAC/GL 24-1997) issued by the Secretariat of the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standard Programme in 1999, halal food is defined as the food permitted under the Islamic Law, which is supposed to fulfill following conditions.

1. does not consist of or contain anything, which is considered to be unlawful according to Islamic Law

2. has not been prepared, processed, transported or stored using any appliance or facility that was not free from anything unlawful according to Islamic Law and

3. has not in the course of preparation, processing, transportation or storage been in direct contact with any food that fails to satisfy 1 and 2 above (1999).

As additional information, the Guideline provides us how a food should be prepared so that we can call it as halal. There is no universal standard that is applied by entire Muslim countries but there are some requirements that a Muslim should follow as stated above. Halal food can be prepared, processed or stored in different sections or lines within the same premises where non-halal foods are produced in case necessary measures are taken to prevent any contact between halal and non-halal foods. Halal foods can also be prepared, processed, transported or stored using

facilities, which have been previously used for non-halal foods if proper cleaning procedures, according to Islamic requirements, have been observed (Endang and Anton, 2001:14-15).

Both the references from Quran and vast inclinations of Muslim community to follow the life of Prophet Mohammad bring the practice of consuming standard types of food. In Quran, some direct references make the situation more convincing as in the following:

“And when he turns his back then wanders spreading mischief in the land and destroys the crops and lives and Allah agrees not with the mischief.” (Sura 2; Ayat 205)

“I swear, I will certainly lead them astray and certainly I will excite in them desires and will certainly say to them that they would cut the ears of cattle and will certainly bid to them that they would alter the creation of Allah. And he, who takes Satan for a friend beside Allah, has suffered a manifest loss.” (Sura 4; Ayat 119)

The effective way of controlling and distributing knowledge is performed by giving strong references from the Holy Book. Muslim believes Allah has written the Book, so rejecting the order is almost impossible for a pure follower. Things may seem normal until here. Nevertheless, when the practice based on these Surahs in modern way of livings, following the rituals of religion interfere with obeying the rules of religion-controllers. Today, 33 years old a housewife in Florya, (considering she is a pure follower), says she is paying great attention on the food for her children especially from big shopping centers. However, she does not state the reason as being halal but rather she cares about the prizes and health value of them. She most likely does not remember exact number of Surah about food avoidance but somehow, in somewhere he is aware from ‘the knowledge’ that she is supposed to buy certain types of food. She is just sure about that he ‘should not’ eat some certain foods. So unknowing approach of a consumer on shopping makes the things work easier and create a business sector on halal food. Surely, it does not stem from automatic habitual consuming preferences only, instead its people’s demand indirectly of the existence of halal industry. Because if there is a consumer part, there must be production phase at first. The more you consume, the more you demand and the more the power is expected to provide you. In this circulation, it is obvious that someone will get profit of it while the rest will be in the position of consumer or customer.

For the special requirements of Halal food, a company is supposed to get a certification to prove that its products fit into the rules of Islam. There are some Islamic Food Research Centers over the world such as IFANCA, which are mostly influential in Muslim countries. As well as International companies, some focuses on their local country and has the authority for certification (like GIMDES Halal

Productions Research Institute in Turkey). Some like KAS CERT has a wider range of certification and accreditation in the field of automobile, manufacture, additional to food industry. Internet provides easy accessibility to these business firms as interviews attempts in order to get detailed information are mostly fail. Online applications to these aforementioned companies are easy but it seem there is a long process of procedures and regular visits from the certification company to the candidate company with the purpose of providing sufficient supervision.

Halal and Kosher Go Together

Similar situation is available for kosher food that is known as the allowed food of Jews. There is a remarkable increase on the tendency of kosher food. According to data of Global Kosher Certification Services (Ironically enough, the exact title of the company is UNIGLOBE Business and Marketing Solutions).

- 40% of all products sold in the US are kosher certified.
- 75% of all food ingredients manufactured are kosher certified.
- There are currently more than 150,000 different Kosher consumer food products.
- US supermarkets carry approximately 25,000 Kosher products lines on their shelves.
- Over 75,000 companies worldwide currently produce products for the Kosher market
- Each year 7,500 new products are introduced into the Kosher market globally (UNIGLOBE, 2005).

Even the differences on strict rules of each religion, the requirements of halal and kosher food are quite similar strangely as if there is a one way of cleanness in each religious group. For example, pork is forbidden in both religions. For non- Muslim countries then, as well as the mixture of halal food consumers, kosher food has mix of consumer as the following diagram shows:

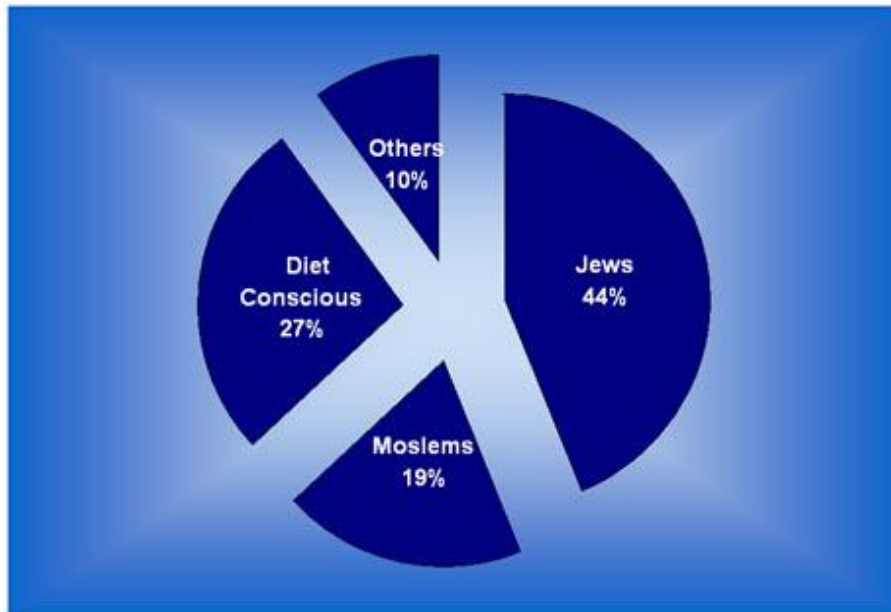


Table 1: The percentage of consumed Kosher food provided from the website of UNIGLOBE, in USA in 2007.

The diagram shows the data of 2007 USA's kosher consuming population depending on the announcements of UNIGLOBE. Despite the fact that it has religious meaning, people from other categories like diet conscious, prefer it in a great extend. More interestingly, in western countries or USA, except from Muslims, people prefer kosher not because they are Jews but for the belief that it is safer and cleaner. Again, we remember Mary Douglas idea on what is considered clean or dirty as opposite concepts and its reflection on social daily life. After having the idea of cleanness, it is less challenging to be controlled. For those halal and kosher food sounds fresh, never frozen and tastes good, new mass of consumers emerge that supports the sector in parallel term(Balla, 2009). Besides, a certification for kosher does not stand for halal food.

An Example on Practice

The aforementioned Certification Center GIMDES is a good example on analyzing into what level religion is marketed. By concentrating on its logic as an establishment of a business sector but not as a religion supporter, it will be clear enough how knowledge of halal in Turkey spreads the communities widely. GIMDES is an association for the inspection and certification of food and supplies for the 30 years at average. It has legal rights to certificate on the production, slaughtering and supervision. As an institution, it claims to follow the steps of Islamic laws while determining the criteria for being halal or not. As in the theory of sociology, their criteria or their stability of obedience on the criteria is not questioned, as they constitute some sort of power themselves. GIMDES is checking the standards of

candidate companies but who is checking the standards of GIMDERS? On the website, there is the list of halal certificated companies from meat industry to bakery products, from honey companies to cheese sellers.

From financial perspective as a seller, having a halal certification does not increase the prices of your products immediately in Turkey. However, it increases appeal of buying it for consumers. It influences the minds that, that production is 'eatable', 'suitable' for religious beliefs. GIMDES is taking 10 Lira for an ordinary membership. For a consultancy services, it depends the size of the work and your production capacity. As Durkheim says, religious rituals are performative. First, you practice it and then you start to take it as an idea. Today in Turkey, there are hundreds of people that rely on the foods they consume just because Turkey is an Islamic country. Man on the street does not care much about the ingredients of a food on market shelf, as he knows there are companies as GIMDES to avoid him from non-halal food. Therefore, as a level of power from society to authority, knowledge producer, distributor, gate-keeper and consumer have different faces of objective reality. It is wrong to say GIMDES is controlling people by using religious terms but it is better to say that it helps power to restrict society into certain dietary habits and gaining the dominance on labeling the companies, which gives him different type of power. For instance, among the society of conservatives, the brand Ulker is known to have conservative owners, which forms him great range of consumer group while Eti, a rival brand is accused to use non-halal producing techniques. Formally, both have legal rights on production in food sector but the inner idea that is imposed to society impacts on the preferences while buying even a chocolate. Interestingly, there is an anonymous list in the internet, which is spread by e-mails, about boycott list against Israel. For most of the Muslim people, all of the brands in boycott list are like Cacaocola, Nestle or Danone not halal and the list is thought to be followed by a pure believer.

Turkish Government Approach with Conflicting Benefits

When it comes to the benefits of governing power of the states, the measurements are supposed to be taken in the favor of government, as there should not be falsification of what Turkish Republic and GIMDES claims. As a current event, having lack of domestic reconstructions on meat sector, Turkey is planning to import red meat. There was a tender a few months before in order to balance the prices of cattle meat. Not strangely enough, the awarded party was a Turkish businessperson from abroad with his company named HacilarTürkişHelalGıda (Pilgrims Turkish Halal Food) with 1.299.950 €. AKP, current governmental party in power has considerably improvements on religious issues like headscarf, recognition of holy places or significance of halal way of living. While practicing each of these examples, there was a trace of politics unavoidably. In headscarf issue, the demand is only

limited with the universities, holy places are turned into trade centers where even toilets are not free of charge. Similarly, the halal and halal food sector specifically, living a Muslim way of life has become a trendy one with full of capitalist impacts.

With the rise of economic crisis or with the fear of local rebelling, government has been in the search of economical progress. This reflects the food industry as mentioned before. Importing red meat sounds more logical but in the country, there are some conflicts occurred whether halal would be more expensive. On the other hand, frankly speaking, would the government really care about importing halal food or is it enough for them to announce it as halal to society? As it is enough to convince people by religious laws, which is turned to be a part of culture in Turkey, there is no reliable open data in from government about the transfer of new kinds of food from abroad. The only available public report on industry about Turkish food and beverage by Investment Support and Promotion Agency of Turkey on July 2010, it is stated, "being a Muslim country, Turkey also has potential to sustain growth from the "halal food" industry. According to the World Halal Forum, the global halal food industry is expected to reach USD 650 billion in 2010". Therefore, it can be indicated that instead of being a special situation, halal food industry is expected to have profits. While having the profits, it is most likely that power owners (government) and applicers (companies, institutions, associations that supply halal certification) should act together but not separately.

Marketing Religion

As stated before, religion is practiced in a trendy way in recent years in Turkey. Requirements of Islam and necessities of modern life jumbled together as in the mixture of knowledge and power. In Turkey, if you are a woman wearing headscarf, and if you prefer to follow up recent trends on headscarf, the cheapest scarf starts from 80 Liras. On the other hand, Islam orders its believers to be humble and thankful to the Allah. Therefore, clothing is materialized, as there is huge sector on hijab gaining thousand dollars each day in Turkish brandy shopping centers. The process is similar in food industry. Many sites supply halal food online like www.alibaba.com (Hong Kong Limited, 1999). This show how religious needs are integrated in modern life and how some people tries to make profit from the situation as it is quite sure that when you give extra money to certification company, your productions under halal label will remain still without any control from objective power.

Richard Roscher, a German food expert has explained that halal food industry is open to exploitation because of the fact that there is no certain standard to make a food halal. In different countries, this category is changing upon their own criteria (Karadag, 2010). Even this is very dangerous news that it is up to an institution to change or redefine the standards of halal food and converts its standard for his own benefits. In his further explanation, Roscher stresses on the importance of

preventing this abusing as many of the food that are labeled as halal today is very harmful for human health. How ironic that, until now, this case could not be realized and the man saying this is not from a Muslim country!

Prof. Dr. YasarNuriOzturk, Turkish theologian, mentions about how religion of Islam is misused in trade(Ozturk, 2008). He exemplifies cologne without liquor is dramatized highly that even there is no exact ban about using liquor in smelling, Turkish advertisements on new brand of Islamic side has created a consumer mass. For him, the balance of trade by cheating with Allah is highly increased in Turkey, in food industry as well. People on the power who are effective enough to persuade society is has claims unrelated with Islam and selling their products much more expensive than the normal product that is still halal but is believed to be forbidden by Allah. This is materialized totally.

Again to turn back the idea of Durkheim on social facts; it is society that creates his own facts. For a citizen in Turkey, there is no written rule that one should consume halal food but inner automatically, a religious requirement standardizes him into certain limited food. As in the argument of Marx, economy is the basic structure of social order. Today if a halal meat of food generally is much more expensive, it is not because that during the process the value of halal food is rising up but rather it is only because of the reason halal food is preferred to be industrialized.

Conclusion

Religious commercialism of halal food in Turkey has been increasing due to the demand of it. The situation is closely related with the concept of cleanness verse dirt and the power of religious social facts. This practice is a good example of social construction of knowledge in society and its distribution phases from top power to average person. Government is acting in the behalf of certification institutions, which are progressing without any objective supervision at all. Therefore, it is hard to reveal this fact while legal documents are providing only positive statistics on halal food consumption and while associations are rejecting the offer of even a small interview.

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