

## Article

# Halal Food Production and Self-Restrictions in Uzbekistan: Diversity in Interpretation of Halal

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## 1. Introduction

Muslims make up a majority of the population in the former Central Asian republics of the late Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), including Uzbekistan. However, until perestroika at the end of the 1980s and the fall of the USSR in 1991, Muslims were not allowed to freely explore Islamic teaching. Nowadays, after more than 25 years have passed since the republics gained independence, various media have introduced there—although with limitations and restrictions—Islamic ideas and religious practices that are essentially different from those of the Soviet era, and among former Soviet Muslims there have appeared people who are beginning to reconsider their previous habits and religious practices. Among such habits and practices are those related to the concepts of '*halal*: lawful in Islam' and '*haram*: prohibited in Islam'. In this paper, I would like to examine changes in the attitudes toward halalness in Uzbekistan.

Since the 2000s, with the beginning of the recovery from the economic shock caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union, the halal industry has emerged and developed in the former Soviet republics; such halal industrialization led to Halal Expos being held all over the region since 2010. The first 'Moscow International Halal Expo' was organized in the Russian capital in 2010<sup>1</sup>; since then, the exhibition has been held annually, each year

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on an even larger scale. The following year, 'Kazakhstan International Halal Expo. (KZ Halal Expo.) 2011' was conducted in the Central Asian republic of Kazakhstan; this exhibition also continues to attract increasing numbers of participants and visitors each year. The 'KZ Halal Expo. 2014' comprised 14 dedicated pavilions presenting not only meat, fish, dairy products and other foodstuffs, but also halal products in a variety of categories, such as feed additives, containers and packages, food equipment, fashion, finance, etc.<sup>2</sup>. In addition, halal exhibitions have also been held in the Russian Federation regions with large Muslim populations, such as Tatarstan<sup>3</sup> and Dagestan<sup>4</sup>.

On the other hand, not all Central Asian countries encourage development of the halal industry. Uzbekistan presents rather a contrasting case. In Uzbekistan, the widespread misuse of halal marks was interpreted as a 'violation of consumers' rights', which led to imposing self-restrictions on such labelling in March 2011<sup>5</sup>. Although there has been speculation regarding the true reasons behind this decision, before trying to predict the future of the halal industry in Central Asia, it is necessary first to understand how the Uzbek manufacturers perceived the concept of 'halalness' and reflected it in their products before the self-restrictions were introduced. I conducted interview-based socio-anthropological research at nine companies manufacturing halal-labelled products in Uzbekistan (all of them located in the Uzbek capital, Tashkent) in 2009 and 2010, just before the self-restrictions on labelling with halal marks were imposed (as will be described later, in Uzbekistan, each company labelled its products with a halal logo according to its own original standards, and therefore, the products were labelled as halal using non-certified logos, which is different from labelling with the halal certification mark)<sup>6</sup>. This paper is based on the results of this research. After indicating the generally accepted meaning of the halal concept and the diversity in understanding this concept in Uzbekistan, I will describe the background and history of the expansion of halal-labelled food products (hereinafter 'halal foods'), as well as the

characteristic peculiarities of such labelling, in Uzbekistan, and examine the relationships between the diversity in interpretation of halalness among Uzbeks and the imposed self-restrictions on using halal labels.

## 2. The concept of halal and diversity in its interpretation

### 2.1. Halal and Haram

First, I would like to outline the meanings of *halal* and *haram*. As was already mentioned above, '*halal*' literally means 'lawful' or 'permissible' in Arabic. The prominent Islamic theologian Al-Qaradawi (1994), who has been discussing *halal* and *haram* since the 1960s and has a great influence today, argues that halalness should be observed not only for religious reasons, but also for maintaining human health. While citing the following verse from the Qur'an, 'O mankind! Eat of what is permissible and good on earth'<sup>7</sup> (2:168), he explains that, in contrast to Jews, Christians and pre-Islamic Arabs who prohibited eating specific animals that were regarded as 'sacred' or 'unclean' and, on the contrary, allowed the 'impure' ones, 'Islam permits what is wholesome' (i.e., good for health) (Al-Qaradawi 1994, 41). However, he also points out that it is only up to Allah to decide what is halal ('lawful') (Al-Qaradawi 1994, 18); Muslims must not eat even hygienically clean food kept in good sanitary conditions if Allah forbids it.

The antonymous concept to *halal* is *haram*. Islamic law stipulates five categories<sup>8</sup> of attitudes Muslims must take towards specific things and situations, and '*haram*' is used to refer to any act or thing that is forbidden in the provisions of Islamic law. Although the opinions regarding the scope of haram vary between different schools of Islamic jurisprudence or individual theologians, things or acts referred to in the Qur'an and Hadith as '*najis* (unclean)' are generally considered to be haram. The concept of '*najis*' is defined in chapter 6, verse 145 of the Qur'an.

Say: I do not find in what is revealed to me anything prohibited to an eater in his food unless it be (the flesh of) that which is dead, or flowing blood, or the flesh of swine, for that is indeed foul, or the abomination [quoter's note: *najis*] which has been dedicated to anyone other than Allah. But if one is compelled by necessity, neither craving (it) nor transgressing, then, indeed, they Lord is Forgiving, Merciful. (Q6:145)

This verse determines carrion, flowing blood and pork as *najis*. However, it is not sufficient for a Muslim to merely avoid consuming these *najis* things in order to maintain halalness. In the opinion of Abdul Rahman, the Director of Halal JAKIM, any substance that comes in contact with pork, dead flesh, blood or other *najis* things and is not properly cleaned also becomes *najis*<sup>9</sup>. In other words, even a product made from meat other than pork is regarded as being haram if it is contaminated with *najis* things, such as pork or blood. Consequently, it is not easy for an ordinary Muslim consumer to distinguish whether a particular foodstuff is halal or not. Moreover, depending on the method of slaughter, even meat other than pork may be regarded as haram. The method of slaughter is defined in detail in chapter 5, verse 3 of the Qur'an.

Forbidden to you are the flesh of dead animals and blood and the flesh of swine, and that which has been dedicated to any other than Allah, and that which has been killed by strangling or by beating or by falling or by being gored, and that which has been (partly) eaten by a wild beast except that which you make lawful by slaughtering (before its death), and that which has been sacrificed to idols... (Q5:3).

This verse of the Qur'an defines the forbidden techniques of slaughtering for even allowed meats, such as beef, mutton, goat meat, etc. Hence, the halal meats are interpreted as the meat of allowed animals slaughtered by a regulated method in accordance with Islamic law (the

animal must be killed in Allah's name by making a fatal incision across the throat and its blood must be drained out). Moreover, haram is a comprehensive concept that also covers a wide range of actions forbidden by Islamic law, such as unlawful killing, theft, prostitution, adultery, cheating, insulting, infringement of rights, bribery, collection of interest payments, etc.

The concepts of halal and haram defined in the above verse of the Qur'an have been referred to and revered in Islamic jurisprudence throughout the ages since the revelation of the Qur'an. But what meaning do ordinary Muslims attach to halalness in the real world, and in what situations do they apply this concept in their everyday lives? Interpretations of the halal concept vary not only depending on the school of Islamic jurisprudence. Each individual Muslim may also understand the word halal quite flexibly. The next section presents diverse interpretations of halal in Uzbekistan.

## 2-2. Diversity in interpretation of halal in Uzbekistan

To the majority of Uzbeks who live in Uzbekistan, the word 'halal' (*halol* in Uzbek) would, in the first place, mean 'lawful under Islamic law'. However, they interpret this word very flexibly. Not all of them share the understanding characteristic of the modern halal industry, which tends to regard the concept of halal strictly as the conditions or things allowed to Muslims under Islamic law (or, conversely, complete elimination of the forbidden states).

For example, the anthropologist M. Louw highlights an interview with an Uzbek woman who was influenced by Naqshbandi about reverence of saints (*avliyo*) among Uzbeks in which she used the words 'halal' and 'haram' (Louw 2007, 132.). The woman explained that the *avliyo* were *avliyo* because 'These *avliyo* only ate things that were halal. And because they were very clean, evil light did not come to them.', whereas nowadays 'we do

not know whether our food is halal or haram. [...] Even if spirits come and warn us, “Do not eat this!” we do not sense it, because our hearts are not open to this kind of knowledge.’ In the woman’s opinion, only saints had the knowledge about halal and haram; their sainthood was determined by the fact that they consumed only halal things, dealt with only halal matters and avoided contact with anything haram. In other words, she interpreted halal as knowledge that is open to saints but cannot be felt or conceived by an ordinary Muslim, which appears to be an understanding that diverts from the original meaning of ‘being lawful under Islamic law’, though has apparently developed based on it.

The same flexibility in interpretation of halal can be observed in the Uzbek encyclopaedia O’zME (2005, 289). O’zME, in addition to the abovementioned general usage of halal/haram, also provides another definition with a slightly different meaning. This second definition presents an interpretation of halal/haram from a moral/ethical standpoint. While any action based on the goodwill or meeting the demands of society is considered halal, haram, conversely, refers to any action that harms the welfare or interests of individuals or communities. Indeed, in Uzbekistan, the terms halal and haram are not necessarily always used in the context of Islamic law. For example, in the Presidential Decree issued each year before the Day of Independence celebrated in September to honour accomplishments in various fields<sup>10</sup>, the expression *halol xizmati* is used in the meaning of ‘meritorious service’, which is apparently an instance of abstract usage not related to Islamic law.

Thus, in Uzbekistan, the term halal is flexibly interpreted in a wide range of connotations deriving from its primary meaning of ‘being lawful under Islamic law’. However, within the framework of contemporary industrialization aiming to establish halal standards and manufacturing standardized products, such a wide range of varied interpretations rather becomes a factor of confusion. It is clear that halal standardization and unification are undoubtedly important for the development of the halal

industry. However, in reality, there still exist multiple different halal standards developed by countries and organizations that have been pioneers in halal standardization, such as Malaysia, Indonesia, UAE, IHI Alliance, WHO (World Health Organization), etc., and no unified international halal standard accepted by all Muslims has yet been established. This reflects just how varied the interpretations of the halal concept in different regions are.

Japanese anthropologist Tomizawa, who carried out research on the halal industry in Southeast Asia, explains that, nevertheless, establishment of halal standards and the certification system is required because, although the concept of halal itself is old, the halal industry is adapting to conditions specific to today's world (Tomizawa 2007, 321-325). He further points out that it is such factors as the contemporary development of advanced food processing technologies<sup>11</sup>, complicated distribution channels making the face of the producer invisible to the consumer and increased contacts between Muslims and non-Muslims that create the background for the expansion of the halal industry. Then, what were the factors that stimulated the brisk, though short, boom of halal foods in Uzbekistan?

The next section summarizes the events that led to expansion of halal foods in Uzbekistan and characteristic features of such products, based on the data obtained during field research on halal foods conducted in Tashkent. As is shown below, the 'halal foods' in Uzbekistan do not sufficiently meet halal standards advocated by Al-Qaradawi and that are increasingly emphasized within the recent halal industry. For this reason, the expression 'halal foods' may cause some confusion, but, because this paper is aimed at clarifying the comprehension and interpretation of the 'halal' concept by the Uzbeks of that time, the term 'halal foods' in this paper is used in reference to all food products that were considered by Uzbeks to be halal. Moreover, the concept of 'halal' originally is not limited to food; however, as in Uzbekistan, the advance of 'halalization' began with food

products and ended with imposing self-restrictions before it could spread to other fields, only food products (particularly, with regard to the presence of pork in processed meat products) are discussed here.

### 3. Uzbekistan and expansion of halal foods

#### 3-1. Background to the expansion of halal foods

During my first field research in Uzbekistan between 2002 and 2004, not only could halal foods not be seen in the shops, but also few Uzbeks were conscious of halal/haram in their everyday lives. This might be explained by the fact that for people who live in a region with a predominantly Muslim population, avoiding consumption of pork is a self-evident rule that doesn't suggest a big problem<sup>12</sup>. At the same time, there were a good few people who did not interpret consumption of pork or its avoidance in connection with Islamic doctrines. In 2002, I had a most astonishing experience when I was treated to a pork dish by an Uzbek woman travelling in the same compartment on the train.

'But isn't this pork?' I asked in surprise. 'Well, if you cannot eat pork, then so be it...' the woman was about to put the dish away. 'But, yes, I can eat it...' I said with mixed feelings, and we shared the pork dish. While being a Muslim, the woman did not show any reservations about letting the fact that she ate pork be known to a complete stranger, let alone a foreigner.

Moreover, vodka, wine and other alcoholic beverages are more than common customary features at Uzbek wedding celebrations and parties. In addition, I also confirmed that some Uzbeks are—while being Muslims—involved in the cycle from breeding pigs to distribution and consumption of the pork on the domestic market (Imahori 2016). However, the above episode probably cannot be reduced to being explained simply by the religious shallowness of the Uzbek Muslims. It must be considered in the context of the political environment and education based on the policy of



secularization that had lasted for more than 70 years of the Soviet regime<sup>13</sup>.

For example, after World War II, Uzbek men began to be called up for military service where they faced problems with food. In the military, even Muslim soldiers were served with meals containing pork, and their refusal to eat the served food was regarded as a violation of military discipline<sup>14</sup>. Indeed, during the Soviet era when atheism was the official basic doctrine, it must have been difficult to maintain the dietary restrictions in accordance with Islamic law while serving in the military together with non-Muslim Russians. As a result, Muslims were forced to prioritize their military duties and consume pork. In the situation where religion was placed under strict regulations, Muslims maintained their identity through conducting Islamic passage rites and revering saints, rather than through dietary restrictions related to avoidance of pork (Sadomskaya, 1990; Rasanayagam, 2011). The common understanding among Uzbek Muslims is that 'eating pork without realizing it does not constitute a sin; the sin is rather on those who knowingly make Muslims eat pork'<sup>15</sup>, which well demonstrates how the Muslims adapted to the situation where it was not possible to strictly observe avoidance of pork in their lives.

However, such understanding, which had been commonly shared by the Uzbeks throughout the Soviet Socialist era, has significantly changed due to increased openness of information during perestroika from the late 1980s and the government's repudiation of atheism after independence<sup>16</sup>, when it became possible for the people—though with some limitations—to explore their faith. Mosques and madrassas have been built and various books and Uzbek translations of Islamic texts have been published. In the field of foreign exchanges, people, commodities and information now began to arrive not only from the countries of the former socialist camp, but also from other parts of Europe, North America and East Asia, as well as from Middle Eastern and North African countries with which relations had previously been rather limited. In addition, after 2000, with the rapid spread of the Internet, mobile phones and social media, many young people got access to

a variety of new and previously unavailable information. For example, there have appeared websites like 'islom.uz'<sup>17</sup> aimed at introducing Islamic doctrines in Uzbek, which opens up new opportunities for Internet users to familiarize themselves with Islamic teaching in Uzbek. The affiliate website 'halol.org' provides information in Uzbek on halal and haram and offers advice on dietary life and economic activities in accordance with Islamic values.

Thus, the more the opportunities for receiving new information related to Islam become available to Uzbek Muslims, the bigger number of them strive to lead a life based on the newly learned Islamic values. Such people begin to avoid foodstuffs, particularly processed meat products, for which halalness seems dubious to them, or to ask shop assistants questions regarding halalness of the products they are about to buy.

### 3-2. Advent of halal foods in Uzbekistan

Uzbeks living in Tashkent deal with several kinds of processed meat products in their everyday lives. The most popular assortment includes *kolbasa* (a type of big sausage), *kopchyonye*, *kolbasa kopchenaya vysshego sorta* (a type of salami), *sosiska* (small sausage), *sardel'ka* (poultry sausage), and smoked poultry products.<sup>18</sup> They are usually served as hors d'oeuvres or snacks eaten with alcoholic beverages for guests at birthday parties or weddings, and comprise standard items on the menu at restaurants or hotels where they are usually served with salads or vegetable garnish. *Sosiska* is often served for breakfast.

In the Soviet times, none of these processed meat foodstuffs, particularly *kolbasa*, was produced in Uzbekistan. Their supply in Uzbekistan was limited, making them hard-to-get items available only to a few senior government officials. Therefore, those who experienced the Soviet era still regard *kolbasa* as a simple and yet high-class hors d'oeuvre. Although since the Soviet times, the main ingredient in *kolbasa* has been

mainly pork, back then this never presented a serious problem, because, in the first place, most Uzbeks had little opportunity to eat *kolbasa*; besides, any religious activities in public, including abstention from pork, were regarded negatively. After independence, with the growth of a free market economy, the development of the private sector and the national policy of promoting individual enterprises, many manufacturers became engaged in producing *kolbasa* in Uzbekistan. However, because the time when *kolbasa* was produced in such volumes that it became available to common people coincided with the spread of 'orthodox' Islam, the ingredients of *kolbasa* began drawing attention.

The first time I encountered locally manufactured processed meat products with halal labels in Uzbekistan was in 2006, which was the time of the pre-Lehman boom in the global economy, and Russia—a usual destination for migrant workers from Uzbekistan—experienced particularly remarkable growth. With the increased influx of foreign currency earned by the migrant workers, the cityscape of Tashkent rapidly improved and the number of Uzbeks shopping in expensive up-scale supermarkets significantly increased. In addition, as I have already mentioned, it was also the time when halal standardization had already begun in neighbouring Kazakhstan under the leadership of the Spiritual Directorate of the Muslims; so, it isn't hard to imagine that demand for halal products among Uzbeks increased as well.

In 2009, when I had just begun my research on halal foods, in Yunusobod market (hereinafter referred to as 'Y market') located in north Tashkent, there were approximately 10 shops specializing in processed meat products (*qassob*) including sausages, smoked meat, and cheese; and most of them were dealing with halal-labelled items. However, these shops, besides halal foods, were also dealing with pork-containing products, and both halal and non-halal items were displayed on the same shelves next to each other<sup>19</sup>.

Ikram (note: all personal names in this paper are fictional), a male

Uzbek shop worker, born in 1972, when asked about the circumstances behind the start of selling halal foods, explained that his shop began dealing in halal products in 2006. The reason for this was that the number of customers who had recently asked questions to confirm if a factory-made product was halal or not had increased. He claimed that he himself now eats exclusively halal foods, while his Muslim parents eat only *kolbasa* that contains pork. He stressed that it is only factory-made products that drew concern regarding their halalness, whereas customers do not ask questions about halalness with regard to home-made items. Indeed, unlike factory-made products, home-made *kolbasa* was sold in a simpler package without a halal label. Nevertheless, customers purchase home-made *kolbasa* without any doubts regarding its halalness. Hence, it can be concluded that halal concerns are mainly rooted in the distrust towards the manufacturing process at factories that is not visible to common consumers.

In order to dispel Uzbek consumers' distrust towards factory-made processed meat foodstuff, the manufacturers took on a new strategy of emphasizing the halalness of their products. At small processed meat retail shops and direct manufacturer's shops of that time, there could be seen many advertising posters and billboards



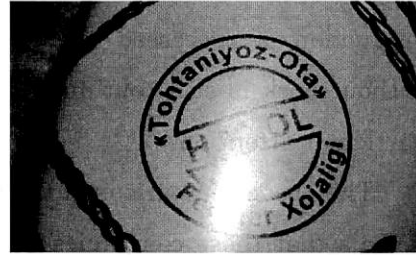
Pic.1 Halal Billboard (photo by  
Emi Imahori: 2010)

[Pic. 1]. The advertisement in Pic. 1 features a photo of a couple dressed in national clothes at a table with processed meat products lined up next to traditional Uzbek dishes; the inscription in Uzbek states, 'We guarantee halalness.' This clearly indicates that manufacturers are trying to respond to the Uzbek consumers' concerns regarding processed meat foods by emphasizing the halalness of their products.

### 3-3. Peculiarities of halal food packaging in Uzbekistan

This section summarizes the main peculiarities of halal labels on food products. Characteristic features of halal labels can be outlined by comparing two packages of popular halal foods that I bought at a marketplace and a supermarket in Tashkent in 2010 with a package of a product bought in 2013.

The first example presents a label on a product made by 'A' company, a major manufacturer of processed meat foods in Tashkent. On the package of halal *kolbasa* produced by 'A' company, below the company logo featuring a cow in its design, there is the inscription 'Pokiza' (meaning 'Pure'), and the word 'Halol' is typed on the vinyl part [Pic. 2].



Pic.2 Halal label by A company  
(photo by Emi Imahori: 2010)

Beef, poultry and all other ingredients are clearly and fully indicated so that consumers can easily identify them. In this point, this package greatly differs from the majority of factory-made product packages of the 1990s or the beginning of the 2000s, which did not provide any such information. According to the 'A' company owner, the word 'pokiza' ('pure') is used as an Uzbek equivalent of the Arabic-rooted word 'halal' to make it easier for Uzbeks to understand its meaning. Using a noun that also means 'cleanness' or 'purity' in the sanitary sense as a translation of 'halal' can be regarded as a message appealing to consumers, in addition to the religious lawfulness of the product, and the thorough sanitary control over its production. The fact that these indications on the 'A' company product are provided in Uzbek in the Latin script implies that it is intended for Uzbek customers.

The next example for comparison here presents a package of same company 'A' product obtained in 2013 [Pic. 3]. It is exactly the same design as the previous examples in Pic. 2; only the space where the 'halal' inscriptions used to be placed is now blank. The fact that even after the disappearance of halal labels, the production of processed meat products without pork is still continued deserves particular attention.



Pic.3 Halal label by A company  
(photo by Emi Imahori: 2013)

The above comparison of the halal-labelled packages gathered in 2010 reveals that these companies used different, non-unified logos and halal labels originally developed by each company. Other packages of processed foodstuffs in my possession also feature halal indications and logos that vary from manufacturer to manufacturer. This attests to the fact that the halal labelling was not based on any unified standard or certification system. Furthermore, below, I will show that even the criteria of halalness were left to the discretion of each company.

#### 3-4. Comparison of halal food companies

Then, how did food manufacturers understand the criteria of halalness? The following highlights the features of nine halal food companies located in Tashkent based on the interviews conducted with their owners and managers.

Table 1. Comparison of Halal Food Companies in Tashkent

Company	Product Types	Established	Halal Manufacture Started	Halal Business Cooperation	Manager's Ethnicity	Technical Cooperation (Capital Tie-up) Partner Countries	Own Slaughterhouse
A	Processed meat foodstuffs, eggs, macaroni, cheese	1993	1997	Only halal	Uzbek	Austria, Germany, Italia	Yes
B	Processed meat foodstuffs	1997	1997	Only halal	Uzbek	None (manufacturing equipment made in Germany)	Yes (outside)
C	Processed meat foodstuffs, cheese	1997	?	Yes (only capital tie-up)	Korean (Uzbek*)	None	No
D	Processed meat foodstuffs, canned meat, eggs, cheese	2002	2005?	Yes	Uzbek	Russia, Germany, Austria, Ukraine	No
E	Processed meat foodstuffs, eggs, cheese	2004	2004	Only halal	Uzbek	None	No
F	Processed meat foodstuffs, cheese	2000	2009	Only halal	Uzbek	Austria	No
G	Wheat flour products	2005	2005	Only dough is indicated as halal.	Uzbek	Turkey (supplier of imported margarine)	No
H	Pelmeni and other frozen foodstuffs	2004	2006	All frozen food products are halal. Affiliated restaurants	Korean	Turkey	No
I	Pelmeni and other frozen foodstuffs	2000	2007	Only halal	Jewish	None	No

Source: Based on the data collected during my field work in Tashkent in 2010.

\* The halal manufacture is overseen by an Uzbek associate business partner.

Table 1 presents the following data on nine companies gathered during interviews conducted in 2010: the main types of products, the year of foundation, the year halal food production began, the ethnicity of the manager, the technical cooperation partner, and the existence of private slaughterhouses. Table 1 and the interviews reveal the following six points characterizing halal food production in the nine companies presented here.

- (1) **Ethnicity and religion of the managers and employees.** Most of the companies (seven out of nine companies) were run by Uzbek Muslim managers. Non-Muslim managers (e.g., of Korean or Jewish origin) were also involved in halal food production, though such cases were rather rare (two out of nine companies). The provided answers show that at all the companies the employees were not differentiated by their

ethnicity or religion. The common understanding was that manufacturing by a Muslim was not a mandatory condition of halal food production.

- (2) **Relationship between the religion of the manager and halal food production.** Even among companies run by Uzbek Muslim managers, only two of them, i.e., companies 'B' and 'E' (the latter will be introduced below) had never used pork since their foundation. The others used to manufacture processed foods with pork at the time of their foundation, and later began manufacturing halal processed meat products. In 2010, a majority (five out of nine) of the companies exclusively produced halal foods, but there was also a company (company 'D') run by an Uzbek Muslim manager that produced both halal and non-halal foods. The products were sold under different brand names with a clear indication to consumers.
- (3) **Criteria of halal labelling.** As for the prerequisites for labelling products as halal, most of the companies cited avoidance of using pork. In addition to avoiding pork as an ingredient, each company strictly maintained complete separation of all manufacturing facilities intended for halal foods from those where pork was used. For example, when company "D" began to manufacture halal products in 2005, it had to build a completely new meat processing factory dedicated to manufacturing halal products. All halal food companies considered such separating a main condition of halalness, and it was a point of major concern. On the other hand, none of the companies received halal certification from an official body, only the president of company 'B' turned for advice on the halal issue to an imam he was barely acquainted with. Thus, the manufacturing in the companies was based completely on personal comprehension of the halal concept by their owners.
- (4) **Time of launching halal food production.** The companies began full-scale manufacture of halal foods between 2004-2006<sup>20</sup>. Companies 'A'



and 'B', which began manufacturing halal foods in 1997, look to be exceptions, but their production volumes were low in the 1990s and full-scale production started only sometime after 2000.

- (5) **Foreign technical cooperation partners.** Many business owners had established cooperation with partners in European countries with advanced meat processing industries such as Austria and Germany. There was no manager who would have learned halal food production technology from a Muslim country (e.g., in Southeast Asia).
- (6) **Method of slaughter.** Only company 'A' had its own slaughterhouses (for slaughtering calves) within its premises; the others received deliveries of slaughtered meat from contracted farmers. None of the interviewed managers felt that it was necessary to extend the company's control as far as the method of slaughter; and the managers did not pay much attention to the method of slaughter being in accordance with Islamic law (i.e., pronouncing Allah's name at the time of slaughter, draining blood out of the carcass, etc.). Slaughtering by an Uzbek butcher was already considered as a guarantee of halalness ('because Uzbek slaughterhouse workers know the halal method of slaughter, it is better to leave it to them'). The president of company 'E' stressed that the slaughter particularly must be carried out exclusively by Uzbek Muslims.

### 3-5. Establishment of halal food companies and their manufacturers

Here, I would like to present the typical image of a halal food manufacturer by portraying the manager of company 'A', the pioneer of halal food production in Uzbekistan. Ashirbek, the president of company 'A', is an Uzbek, Muslim male, born in 1945. His company produces a variety of foods from processed meats, like *kolbasa* and sausages, to cheese, eggs and macaroni.

Back in the Soviet era, Ashirbek had a different occupation, but in 1993,

after the collapse of the Soviet Union, he founded a meat processing company. At that time, there were no companies producing *kolbasa* in Uzbekistan, and he thought that domestic manufacture of *kolbasa* could yield high-quality and yet low-cost produce. First, Ashirbek adopted the manufacturing methods utilized in Russia and used pork in his products because he thought that there was no other way to make *kolbasa*. But when Ashirbek went on the Hajj in 1997, he heard from Muslims in Mecca about pork-free processed meat products. After returning from the Hajj, he succeeded in producing 50-100 kg of pork-free *kolbasa* the same year. Then he concentrated on the production of halal foods, and by 2010, when the interview took place, the production volume had already increased up to about 3 tons a year.

Ashirbek's company uses only beef slaughtered in the slaughterhouse on the company's premises by an Uzbek male butcher, who supplies the meat on the spot right after slaughter. The slaughter method is left completely to the discretion of the butcher and neither the president nor anyone else interferes with it. When I visited the slaughterhouse, I observed the Uzbek butcher tie up a calf's front and rear legs, lay the animal down, slaughter it by cutting the carotid artery and then mutter the name of Allah. As for the poultry, the company uses already slaughtered poultry supplied by contracted farmers.

It is interesting that in pursuit of higher quality, Ashirbek's company had established technical cooperation with Austrian, German and Italian companies, but not with companies from Southeast Asia, the region with an advanced halal industry. This halal *kolbasa* was highly appraised and Ashirbek was awarded the "Best Farmer" prize at the all-Uzbekistan trade fair in 2006. Ashirbek's award is proof that pork-free halal meat products received positive state appraisal in Uzbekistan. Awarding of the prize in 2006 also raised awareness of halal foods throughout Uzbekistan and boosted demand for them among Uzbek consumers. By 2010, company 'A' had its commercials shown on TV and had the image of being an exemplary

manufacturer of halal meat products in Uzbekistan.

The case of Ashirbek indicates the following peculiarities. The experience of the Hajj became a direct stimulus to starting the manufacture of halal processed meat products. Halal products were highly appraised by being awarded the state prize. The slaughter method was left completely to the discretion of the Uzbek male butcher. It is noticeable that the production of halal meat products began in the process of getting acquainted with 'orthodox' Islamic learning in Mecca, the centre of Islam.

#### 4. Conclusion

In March 2010, when the field research was carried out, the halal foods business was booming in Uzbekistan; however, in 2011 self-restrictions on halal labelling were introduced. In Uzbekistan, even after the disappearance of halal labels on products, the demand for pork-free foodstuffs is still strong, and additional field research in February 2014 revealed an increased number of shops dealing in pork-free products in comparison to those selling foodstuffs containing pork. Then, a question arises: despite the fact that many people in Uzbekistan prefer to avoid eating pork, why did the industry move in the direction of eliminating halal indications and using simply 'pork-free' labelling instead, and didn't move in the direction of promoting halal standardization like in Russia or Kazakhstan? There might be some possibility of establishing halal standardization in Uzbekistan in the future as well, but the current situation indicates that this process is not as dynamic and the market participants are not as enthusiastic as in Kazakhstan and Russia.

To address this question, it is necessary to re-examine the reasons why halal standardization and a certification system were needed in the first place. They have been considered necessary for dispelling Muslim consumers' food-related concerns that are deepening with the growing complexity of the modern food industry. However, in recent years, with the

increasing attention of businessperson from the non-Muslim world drawn to the remarkable economic growth and large population scales of Malaysia, Indonesia and other Muslim countries in Southeast Asia, the export of goods oriented for Muslim countries is gaining popularity, which is well expressed in the slogan of 'Creating a Global Islamic Business' (Temporal 2011)<sup>21</sup>. To companies from non-Muslim developed countries that are suffering from substantial declines in individual consumption due to decreased birth-rates and aging populations, the market of the Muslim world, which comprises about 23% of the world's population and today still marks high population increase rates, must look very attractive. Halal standardization implies that the religious restrictions that previously prevented non-Muslims from entering the Muslim market must be clearly defined and expressed in a form comprehensible even to an outsider; and to a non-Muslim the issuance of the certificate has become just like getting a passport to the Muslim market. Indeed, in recent years, it is the companies from non-Muslim countries<sup>22</sup> and, taking it a bit further, large-scale manufacturers, which are able to pay the tremendous costs required for certification, that eagerly hurry to receive halal certification.

However, in reality, the diversity among Muslims living in different countries—take, for example, the diversity in interpretation of halalness in food alone—makes establishing unified standards a difficult task. The fact that there is no unified international halal standard accepted and numerous authoritative standards are applied in parallel is a striking illustration of this. Even in Malaysia with its advanced domestic standardization and certification system, consumption diversity among Malay Muslims may lead to boundlessly developing diverse halalization based on differences in individual understanding of halalness<sup>23</sup>. The cases of Uzbekistan introduced in this paper also reveal diversity in interpreting the concept of halal. Uzbeks referred to this concept in different ways, such as 'a knowledge not open to ordinary Muslims,' 'any action based on the goodwill or meeting the demands of society,' 'cleanness or purity in the

sanitary sense,' 'being pork-free,' 'complete separation of the manufacturing line from the one where pork is used,' etc. This is a result of flexible understanding of the basic idea of 'being lawful under Islamic law'. The diversity in interpretation of the concept of halal is caused by its direct connection with the diverse everyday lives of Muslims; this constitutes the main difference from other standards and certification systems aimed at achieving the homogenized quality of the products. Consequently, it is premature to consider that a halal certificate issued by a specific body could be evenly accepted throughout the whole Muslim world.

The field research introduced in this paper proved that halal-labelled food products in Uzbekistan featured non-unified logos and original halal indications of each company without official certification from any specific body. The research also clarified that most of the business owners were Uzbek Muslims, but they did not establish cooperation with Southeast Asian countries with well-developed halal certification systems; that control over the slaughter method was left completely to the Uzbek butchers; that the two conditions, namely 'not using pork' and 'separation of the manufacturing line from the one where pork is used', were regarded as the criteria for halal labelling. In this situation, by the criteria of the internationally authoritative halal standards, the halalness of such products is unclear and rather doubtful. Of course, introduction of a certification system might have placed a huge burden on the manufacturers. On the other hand, using a halal indication as a logo on the products must be backed up by a certain consensus; otherwise such usage may only confuse consumers. As a solution to such a situation, Uzbekistan has chosen to abandon the application of halal labels<sup>24</sup>. In conclusion, I would like to briefly touch on the positive effects of this decision.

As I have already pointed out, it is the big manufacturers from the non-Muslim world trying to find a path into the Muslim market who express eager interest about the issuance of halal certificates; therefore, the introduction of a similar certification system would have exposed Uzbek

Muslim manufacturers to fierce competition with global companies. In addition, making products compliant with halal standards and receiving a certificate require huge investments and expenditures, require a lot of work and time, while not all manufacturers have enough resources to spend on certification. Halal certification is greatly influenced by the size of the corporate capital, and works to the advantage of big companies with enormous capital. With the standardization and certification system established, an individual Muslim manufacturer wouldn't be able to apply halal marking without receiving certification, even if his/her production is in perfect halal conditions. On the other hand, such dependence of the halal certification system on the size of capital potentially may also cause a loss of trust among Muslim consumers towards the certification system itself. Therefore, from the viewpoint of protecting domestic individual consumers, refraining from halal labelling and appealing to consumers with products being pork-free, produced on dedicated manufacturing lines and made from meat slaughtered by a specifically indicated slaughter method may also be considered as another rational direction to address the problem<sup>25</sup>.

Of course, there are many Muslims to whom halal standardization and an authoritative certification system would bring peace of mind through a visible guarantee of halalness. However, it seems important also to understand that, because the halal concept constitutes a part of the religious faith that is directly connected with diverse lives of Muslims, there definitely must exist a certain limit to establishing a single unified standard that would be acceptable for all Muslims.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Held on 7-9 June 2010, with the cooperation of the Indonesian Embassy in Moscow. Over 60 companies participated from Russia, Belarus, Indonesia, Germany, Turkey, UAE, Bahrain, etc.

<sup>2</sup> More details are available at: <http://expodamu.kz/expos.php?expoid=1&lang=en>

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(accessed 19 March 2015). In 2015, the exhibition is planned to take place on 10-12 June. Further details are available at: <http://www.exponet.ru/exhibitions/by-id/halalexpoas/halalexpoas2015/index.en.html>.

<sup>3</sup> The KAZANHALAL exhibition is included in the programme of the largest Russian International Trade Fair EURO-ASIA EXPO held in Kazan. In 2014, the event took place on 14-15 September. More details are available at: <http://euroasiarussia.ru/index.php/home> (accessed 16 March 2015).

<sup>4</sup> The first 'Caspian halal Expo.' was conducted in Makhachkala, the Republic of Dagestan, Russian Federation, in 2013. This, at present, small-scale halal exhibition has attracted not only domestic companies, but also participants from Malaysia, Turkey, and the USA. More details are available at: <http://caspiahalal.ru/ru/> (accessed 16 March 2015).

<sup>5</sup> More details are available at: <http://www.diapazon.kz/kazakhstan/37193-uzbekistane-zapretili-marku-khaljal-chto-na.html> (accessed: 30 January 2014). As described below, only the halal labels vanished, but the manufacture of pork-free food products continues.

<sup>6</sup> I have been conducting socio-anthropological fieldwork in Uzbekistan since 2002. In 2002-2004, I spent a total of 28 months in Uzbekistan: 15 months in Tashkent and 13 months in Bukhara Province. From January to March 2006 (2 months) and August to September 2007 (about 1 month), I conducted field studies mainly in the rural parts of Bukhara Province. Then, I again visited Uzbekistan, including Tashkent, for 2 months in September 2009 and March 2010, as well as in February 2013 and February 2014 for a week's stay each time, when I undertook intensive study into the situation regarding halal food. This research was made possible by the grants from 'Asian Studies Scholarship Program 2002 of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan', 'The Japan Foundation Fellowship Program for Intellectual Exchange', 'NIHU (National Institutes for the Humanities)'s Islam Area Studies Program". For the research report, see also Emi Imahori (2014).

<sup>7</sup> All citations from the Qur'an in this paper are given in the English translation by Al-Qaradawi (1994).

<sup>8</sup> According to 'Provisions of Law' in Kosugi (2009), in Islamic law, all matters of the life of a believer fall under one of the provisions usually referred to as the 'five Islamic commandments'. They are 'compulsory duty' (*fard*, *wajib*), 'recommended' (*sunna*, *mandub*), 'permitted' (*mubah*), 'avoided' (*makruh*), and 'forbidden' (*haram*). Among them *haram*, unlike *makruh*, prescribes that avoiding the action is the duty of the believer. Furthermore, *halal*, while being an antonym to *haram*, is not positioned as a duty like *fard*, but corresponds to *mubah* ('permitted').

<sup>9</sup> Quoted from: Muto (2005, 275).

<sup>10</sup> Quoted from the main text of the Decree issued on 24 August 2010 *O'zbekiston Respublikasi Mustaqilligining O'n To'qqiz Yilligi Munosabati Bilan Fan, Ta'lim, Sog'ligini Saqlash, Madaniyat, San'at, Ma'naviyat va Ma'rifat, Ommaviy Axborot Vositalari Hamda Ijtimoiy Sohalar Xodimlaridan Bir Guruhini Mukofotlash To'g'risida* ('On awarding a group of citizens for their remarkable contribution in science, technology, healthcare, education, art, spirituality, mass media and other social spheres in connection with the 19th anniversary of independence').

<sup>11</sup> For example in 2000, Japanese executives of Japan's Ajinomoto Co. were arrested in Indonesia after MUI decided that an umami seasoning produced by the company was *haram*, although the final product did not contain any pork-derived ingredients. For further details, refer to Kobayashi (2001).

<sup>12</sup> For example, according to anthropologist Okuno (2000), who conducted research on Egypt, Egyptian Muslims don't consume pork primarily because they have little opportunity to have contact with a real pig. It is also reported that for the same reason they do not feel there is too much of a problem seeing goods with pig characters on them that are sold on the streets.

<sup>13</sup> For details on the Islamic education environment during the Soviet period see: A. Muminov et al (2010). On secularization of Muslims on the territory of the former Soviet Union, see: Y. Ro'i (1995). On the indifference of the Muslims in the former socialist camp countries towards Islamic ways of consumption, see: G. Sosnowska, and Ł. Michał (2009).

<sup>14</sup> As the interviews showed, reaction of the Muslims to being forced to eat pork differed from person to person. Some were compelled to eat pork out of fear of the



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Soviet authorities; others covertly threw it away. There were also people who ate what they were served without knowing that the food contained pork in the first place.

<sup>15</sup> This interpretation was given by an *ulama* when I conducted an interview on halal at the Spiritual Directorate of the Muslims of Uzbekistan in March 2010. I also heard the same explanation from several other Uzbeks, besides the *ulama*.

<sup>16</sup> In Uzbekistan, which proclaims to be a secular state, there exist restrictions on Islamist movements. On the government's attitude toward Islamist movements, see: E. McGlinchey (2011).

<sup>17</sup> This web-site is operated by a Muslim group in memory of Muhammad Sodik Muhammad Yusuf, who was the last great mufti in the former Soviet Union, as a part of the volunteer activities aimed at disseminating Islamic knowledge. The group started its activities in 2003, and now operates 22 websites including halol.org. See also: <http://islom.uz/> and <http://halol.uz/> (accessed 18 March 2015)

<sup>18</sup> These processed meat products have been widely adopted by Uzbeks; their names originated from Russian words and are used in Uzbek. At the same time, there are also processed meat products that originated in Central Asia, such as *qazi* (smoked horse meat). I have found no halal-labeled *qazi*, because they are always supposed to be homemade by Muslims only from horse meat.

<sup>19</sup> At the time of the additional research in 2014, all but one out of the 10 shops stopped selling processed meat products containing pork.

<sup>20</sup> This does not mean that all Muslim owners of meat processing companies of that time switched to halal production. There were also companies run by Uzbek managers that produced foodstuffs containing pork; some Uzbek-owned companies not involved in the manufacture of halal products rejected my requests for an interview.

<sup>21</sup> See P. Temporal (2011).

<sup>22</sup> In Malaysia, Muslim manufacturers tend not to take the trouble to apply for certification because the foods prepared by Muslims are 'automatically' regarded as halal. See Tomizawa (2007, 336).

<sup>23</sup> See J. Fischer (2008, 74-149).

<sup>24</sup> As for other reasons why Uzbekistan does not establish halal standardization and a certification system, in addition to restrictions on activities of the public religious institutions and concerns against activation of Islamist movements, the following factors can also be pointed out: small—in comparison to Malaysia or Indonesia—volumes of import to Uzbekistan from the countries outside the former Soviet republics; smaller proportion of non-Muslim population in comparison to Kazakhstan or Russia; main purpose of halal food production being not export to other Islamic countries but domestic consumption by Uzbek Muslims.

<sup>25</sup> However, this observation is valid only as long as Uzbek Muslims do not excessively pursue the 'Proper Islamic Consumption' of Malays that was reported by Fischer (2008).

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