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Halal as more than a market benchmark: from certification issues to 'Eco-Islam' up to Vegan Muslims

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Summary

1. 1. Introductory overview – 2. Understanding *halal* – 3. Eco-Islam as Islamically motivated environmental responsibility – 4. To be or not to be (vegan Muslim), that is the question: the rise of Muslim vegans and the *halal-tayyib* rationale – 5. A new *ijtihad* for sustainable *halal*? Some closing remarks

Abstract

Etymologically, the Arabic term halal means (legally) 'permissible' – in the sense of what is permitted under sharia, the sacred law of Islam – and is manly associated with Islamic dietary standards. However, it encompasses all aspects of Muslims' life. Halal refers to a comprehensive coherence/consistency of human behavior with the divine revelation and the Prophet's traditions. Going more into detail, "religiously, it corresponds to what many Muslims consider as the good performance of their beliefs. Economically, it creates new opportunities for business. Politically, it corresponds to times in which identity issues became paramount. Socially, it relates to the need to cope with new realities without losing one's right to define the norms of the community. Legally, it is linked to the framing of 'traditional' norms in modern terms and categories".

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1. Introductory overview

Etymologically, the Arabic term *halal* means (legally) 'permissible' – in the sense of what is permitted under *sharia*, the sacred law of Islam – and is manly associated with Islamic dietary standards. However, it encompasses all aspects of Muslims' life. *Halal* refers to a comprehensive coherence/consistency of human behaviour with the divine revelation and the Prophet's traditions. Going more into detail, "religiously, it corresponds to what many Muslims consider as the good performance of their beliefs. Economically, it creates new opportunities for business. Politically, it corresponds to times in which identity issues became paramount. Socially, it relates to the need to cope with new realities without losing one's right to define the norms of the community. Legally, it is linked to the framing of 'traditional' norms in modern terms and categories".[1]

In recent years, in conjunction with the global growth of Muslim populations, the demand for *halal* food and non-food goods and service has been steadily and rapidly increasing. Dedicated markets for *halal* products have been set up in both Muslim and non-Muslim countries. This trend has encouraged the emergence of a variety of *halal* certification bodies, which, through different procedures and understandings of what authentic *halal* is, compete for the issuing of *halal*-certified product/service in order to protect consumers from abuses.

The development of the *halal* referent poses challenges which go beyond consumer protection, however. Alongside *halal* certification-related issues, the present paper casts a glance at the existing (re)interpretations of the concept of '*halal*', as a result of the growing attention shown by Muslims for environmental issues as well as for ethical aspects involved in the slaughter of animals.

From the 'Eco-Islam' movement to the growing number of Muslims who practice veganism, some Muslims seem to have already begun to read Islamic teachings through new lenses, by seeking to redefine what *halal* is supposed to be in current societies.

2. Understanding halal

The word '*halal*', which refers to permissibility under Islamic sacred law, is generally used as opposed to '*haram*', which means legally 'forbidden' or 'unlawful'. Both terms are mainly associated with the Islamic religious context, within which they generally refer to any act or object respectively sanctioned and prohibited under Islamic law. However, they do not enjoy a unique understanding when it comes to their literal and practical meanings.

[1] A. U. YAKIN, L. L. CHRISTIANS, B. DUPRET, *Rethinking Halal: Critical Perspective on Halal Markets and Certification*, in A. U. YAKIN, L. L. CHRISTIANS (eds), *Rethinking Halal: Genealogy, Current Trends, and New Interpretations*, Muslim Minorities, 37, Brill, 2021, p. 1.

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Halal is both a religious concept and "a socially living, constructed, invented, and reproduced concept, undergoing a long process during which the word, the idea, the meaning, and understanding are continually reshaped and adjusted".[2]
Under Islam, the word *halal* is most commonly associated with dietary requirements.[3] And yet the concept of *halal* is currently applied to many facets of modern life. It is no longer limited to food indeed, but, through a semantic extension process, it has come to include *sharia*-compliant activities ranging from banking and financing sectors to cosmetics, from fashion industry to pharmaceutical commodities, from transports to tourism and hospitality up to behaviour to keep in situation such as marriage.
Most recently, the *halal* referent has further expanded to include environmental and animal ethics. It follows that *halal* currently incorporates elements of moral responsibility towards the Earth and its inhabitants, which implies that *halal* lifestyle should be non-exploitative to the ecosystem.
The widening of the concept '*halal*' is only partially attributable to the influence of Salafi-Wahhabi doctrine or Islamic neo-fundamentalism.[4] "*Halal* reflects an anthropological evolution, that of the scientising, standardising, and normalising of social life".[5] These transformations have required Muslim scholars to link Islamic teachings to emerging needs and sensibilities, which did not even exist in classical *fiqh* discussions.
The question of *halal* came up between the late 1970s and the early 1980s, although it is only in the past 20 years that it has conquered a wide space, especially in Europe and Asian non-Muslim countries, mostly for business and other economic purposes.[6] The further development can be explained in the light of cultural evolution and scientific advancement, especially in the domain of food production.
Halal food basically describes the food permitted under Islamic law, namely the kind of food that must not encompass any constituent of food and beverages – as well as derivatives – that Muslims are not allowed to consume. However, *halal* is not restricted to raw materials and ingredients, but involves the entire process of handling products. Furthermore, in the context of food, the concept of *halal* is coupled with the concept of *tayyib*, which literally means pure, good, clean, wholesome.

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[2] A. U. YAKIN, L. L. CHRISTIANS, B. DUPRET, *Rethinking Halal*, cit., p. 3.
[3] F. ARMANIOS and B. ERGENE, *Halal Food: A History*, Oxford University Press, 2018.
[4] F. BERGEAUD-BLACKLER, *Le Marché Halal ou l'invention d'une tradition*, 2017, Paris, Seuil.
[5] A. U. YAKIN, L. L. CHRISTIANS, B. DUPRET, *Rethinking Halal*, cit., p. 3, where the authors specify: "Scientising in the sense that religious truth has become a scientific issue, as exemplified by creationist theories. Standardising, meaning that technical standards based on the consensus of certain groups are developed to maximise quality and thus commodification. Normalising, as the development of such technical norms and standards proves to be not only a coordination issue but also that of stating a norm that *has to be* followed".
[6] A. U. YAKIN, L. L. CHRISTIANS, B. DUPRET, *Rethinking Halal*, cit., p. 2.

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The guidelines that regulate both the preparation and consumption of *halal* food require that "the foods that are permissible under the Islamic dietary laws must meet the conditions of being clean, pure, safe and wholesome to consume under specific protocols outlined in the Quran and explained in the Hadith".[7] Forbidden foods include pork and pork derived-products, alcohol, meat from certain dead animals (such as dogs, horses) and blood of any animal.[8] Furthermore, all lawful animals should be slaughtered in conformity with strict religious guidelines. In this respect, two sets of guidelines for *halal* slaughter emerge from the primary sources of Islamic law, giving rise to a debate about the authenticity of *halal* products.[9]

The first position emphasises that 'people of the Book' share common slaughter practices and that Muslims are allowed to consume meat from animals slaughtered by Jews and Christians as well as by Muslims.[10] This position, which requires all animals to be made unconscious by stunning prior to slaughter, is interpreted and implemented in different ways by *halal* certification bodies across Europe.

In contrast, adherents of the second position claim that the status of *halal* meat is linked more directly to Islam and traditional *halal* practices. This has resulted in a derogation of the EU regulation in some member states, which grant slaughterhouses where Muslim and Jewish communities can slaughter animals without previous stunning.[11]

European countries have chosen to adopt different legal approaches when it comes to religious slaughter, with the majority of countries permitting religious slaughter without previous stunning under certain conditions.[12]

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[7] A. HALAWA, *Acculturation of Halal Food to the American Food Culture through Immigration and Globalisation: A Literature Review*, in *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 2018, p. 54.

[8] C. COUNIHAN, P. VAN ESTERIK, *Food and Culture: A Reader 3rd Edition*, Oxford, Routledge, 2012.

[9] J. LEVER, M. MIELE, *The growth of halal meat markets in Europe: An exploration of the supply side theory of religion*, in *Journal of Rural Studies*, 28, 2012, p. 529.

[10] Id. On the 'people of the Book' see F. CASTRO, *Il modello islamico*, (a cura di G.M. PICCINELLI), Seconda edizione, Torino, G. Giappichelli Editore, 2007, pp. 28-29.

[11] Article 13 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union recognises animals as sentient beings and stipulates that "in formulating and implementing the Union's agriculture, fisheries, transport, internal market, research and technological development and space policies", full regard must be paid to the welfare requirements of animals, "while respecting the legislative or administrative provisions and customs of the Member States relating in particular to religious rites, cultural traditions and regional heritage". On this point See https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A12016E013 (last accessed 28 December 2022). Furthermore, while in 2012 the Commission adopted the *European Union Strategy for the Protection and Welfare of Animals (2012-2015)*, *Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 of 24 September 2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing* provides for the killing of an animal only after it has been stunned, whilst permitting religious slaughter, *halal* slaughter included, provided that the slaughter takes place in a slaughterhouse. See respectively https://food.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2016-10/aw_brochure_strategy_en.pdf and https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A32009R1099 (last accessed 28 December 2022)

[12] S. FERRARI and R. BOTTONI, *The Institutionalization of Islam in Europe: an overview*, in J. CESARI (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of European Islam*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 619-655.

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Recently, the global growth and significant emigration flows of Muslim population has made the demand for *halal* food and non-food products increase exponentially. In the last three decades, the *halal* food specific industry has become one of the fastest growing global consumer markets in the world.[13] *Halal* food sector currently accounts for more than 57% of global *halal* expenditure, attracting investments for more than USD 5.5 (52% of total amounts invested).[14]

Statistics on the Muslim population future growth suggest that this trend seems to be destined to increase.[15] Furthermore, "considering young generations as 'healthy carriers' of inspiration and being more open to change, the increase in Halal food consumption could help in reaching sustainable development goals, its products being based on biologic agriculture, fair trade, green animal breeding and environmental economics".[16] To younger Muslims, *halal* is much more than basic rules of conduct followed by their immigrated parents. It includes a wide set of lifestyles.

The growth of the production, trade volume, and consumption of *halal* products involves both Muslims and non-Muslim consumers.[17] There is an increasing interest in *halal* products by several non-Muslims countries, either for Muslim or non-Muslim consumers. *Halal* products are expected to further increase in popularity among non-Muslim consumers, since it seems that "one of the first opportunities for companies, in the light of Muslims migration and expected increased spending capacity, is related to the chance to penetrate lucrative markets outside Muslim home countries. The underutilized global market (i.e., the opportunity of producing Halal products by non-Muslims companies) is still growing at a higher pace".[18]

Such a phenomenon is favoured by the fact that non-Muslim consumers often associate *halal* with a positive brand representation, especially when it comes to food.[19] *Halal* products are represented as being natural, pure, ethical, healthy and hygienic.

Halal trade has been able to break through well beyond religious, cultural, and geographic parameters. It is interesting to note that the greatest share of *halal* food

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[13] A. HALAWA, *Acculturation of Halal Food*, cit., p. 56.

[14] C. BUX, E. VARESE, V. AMICARELLI, M. LOMBARDI, *Halal Food Sustainability between Certification and Blockchain: A Review.* in *Sustainability*, 14, 2022, 2152, https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/14/4/2152 (last accessed 28 December 2022).

[15] M. LIPKA and C. HACKETT, *Why Muslims are the world's fastest-growing religious group*, *Pew Research Center*, 6 April 2017, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/06/why-muslims-are-the-worlds-fastest-growing-religious-group/ (last accessed 29 December 2022)

[16] C. BUX, E. VARESE, V. AMICARELLI, M. LOMBARDI, *Halal Food Sustainability between Certification and Blockchain*, cit., https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/14/4/2152.

[17] A. HALAWA, *Acculturation of Halal Food*, cit., p. 60.

[18] C. BUX, E. VARESE, V. AMICARELLI, M. LOMBARDI, *Halal Food Sustainability between Certification and Blockchain*, cit., https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/14/4/2152.

[19] Id.

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production and distribution is dominated by non-Muslim countries with small Muslim minorities.[20] Brazil is the largest producer and exporter of *halal* meat products, followed by India and Australia. In contrast, the major *halal* meat, both beef and poultry, importers are Muslim-majority countries such as Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Algeria, and Egypt.

There seems to be a strong connection between the stable value of cultural identity and consumers' behaviour that relocates with the consumer from one place to another.[21] This perspective may explain Muslim consumers' behaviour in terms of habitual *halal* food consumption as a cultural identity value that relocates with them from one country to another even if it is a non-Muslim country.

Precisely because it is linked to cultural identity, when Muslims have started striving to reassert their identity as a response to global concerns about Islam, the authenticity of *halal* products has progressively acquired importance, particularly amongst Muslims living in non-Muslim countries.[22] The more the authenticity of *halal* products in supermarkets and restaurants is questioned by some Muslims, the more *halal*-certified foods are solicited and *halal* food gains international market shares.

Currently, *halal* certification, as a food certification rooted in the principles of safety, hygiene, and wholesomeness,[23] but also as the business and trade field and the global symbol that guarantees quality assurance and lifestyle choices,[24] constitutes the main entrance door to the global *halal* markets.

Historically, *halal* certification date back to the mid-1960s, when American Muslim food and specialists decided to provide Muslims in non-Muslim countries with goods capable of protecting their spiritual beliefs and preserve their religious identity.[25] Shortly after, a large number of *halal* certification bodies as well as standards and regulations were established, especially with regard to meat and meat-based products, taking into account differences between Muslims (The Sunni-Shia divide and the existence of different legal schools). Later, a variety of *halal* logos and certificates became widespread in the *halal* market, increasing the heterogeneity of the certification procedure.

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[20] A. HALAWA, *Acculturation of Halal Food*, cit., p. 58.

[21] G. McCRACKEN, *Culture and Consumption: A Theoretical Account of the Structure and Movement of the Cultural Meaning of Consumer Goods. Journal of Consumer clean*, 1, 1986, pp. 71-84.

[22] J. LEVER, M. MIELE, *The growth of halal meat markets in Europe*, cit., pp. 528-530.

[23] M.S.A. TALIB, A.B.A. HAMID; M.H., ZULFAKAR, *Halal supply chain critical success factors: A literature review*, in *Journal of Islamic Marketing*, 6, 2015, pp. 44-71; M. S. A. TALIB, A.B.A. HAMID, T. AI CHIN, *Motivations and limitations in implementing halal food certification: A Pareto analysis,* in *British Food Journal*, 117, 2015, pp. 2664-2705.

[24] NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL, *Certifiably Sustainable? The Role of Third-Party Certification Systems*, The National Academies Press, Washington, DC, 2010, cited in C. BUX, E. VARESE, V. AMICARELLI, M. LOMBARDI, *Halal Food Sustainability between Certification and Blockchain*, cit., https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/14/4/2152.

[25] C. BUX, E. VARESE, V. AMICARELLI, M. LOMBARDI, *Halal Food Sustainability between Certification and Blockchain*, cit., https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/14/4/2152.

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At present, there are no unified global standards which regulate the production and the sale of *halal* products. The existing global and national *halal* food certification bodies adopt different levels of *halal* standards and regulations. Currently, single states could accept specific certification authorities without a central coordination. The list of authorized certification bodies, for its part, is rich and constantly changing. This is also due to differences between Islamic schools of thought in the interpretation and use of the term *halal*.

In 1997, the Codex Alimentarious Commission (CAC), in their general guidelines for the use of the term *halal*, recognised that "'there may be minor differences in opinion in the interpretation of lawful and unlawful animals and in the slaughter act, according to the different Islamic Schools of Thought.' As such the 'guidelines are subjected to the interpretation of the appropriate authorities of the importing countries', which means that 'the certificates granted by the religious authorities of the exporting country should be accepted in principle by the importing country, except when the latter provides justification for other specific requirements'".[26] This justification was considered as being consistent with WTO 'conformity assessments', according to which WTO members are called to give the same priority to imported products as to domestic products in order to protect commercial interests.[27]

In both Muslim and non-Muslim countries, *halal* food certification agencies and bodies govern, safeguard, enforce and issue certificates to *halal* food businesses in accordance with *halal* standard dietary laws and guidelines.[28] In 2018, there were about "122 global and national halal food certification organizations".[29] They encompassed "a decentralized and fragmented network of halal governance agencies at the international, national, and local levels with different certification standards and requirements".[30] Among these agencies were "government-administered, locally-governed, non- profit non-governmental organization (NGO), and private for-profit agencies and business that operate independently to standardize and issue halal certificates in countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, France, The Netherlands and the Philippines".[31]

Malaysia and Indonesia are the main authorities in *halal* food industry standards, especially *halal* meat, with the most advanced *halal* certification systems in the world, while in the West, countries such as the U.S. do have agencies such as the Islamic

[26] CAC (Codex Alimentarius Commission), General Guidelines for the Use of the Term Halal (CAC/GL 24-1997), 1997, cited in J. LEVER, M. MIELE, *The growth of halal meat markets in Europe*, cit., p. 534.

[27] A. LOCONTO, L. BUSCH, *Standards, techo-economic networks, and playing fields: performing the global market economy*, in *Review of International Political Economy*, 17 (3), 2010, pp. 507-536.

[28] M.N. RIAZ, *Fundamentals of Halal Foods and Certification*, in *Prepared Foods*, 179(1), 2010, 71-76.

[29] A. HALAWA, *Acculturation of Halal Food*, cit., p. 55.

[30] Id.

[31] Id.

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Food and Nutrition Council of America, the Halal Advisory Group, and the Islamic Society of the Washington Area.[32]

Driven by the competition between certification bodies, *halal* meat market is experiencing a period of unprecedented growth and development also across Europe, even though its intensity varies depending on the single country.[33]

The increasing number of religious and secular and actors, who compete by proposing different *halal* standards, is complicated and undermined by two factors: the global influence of WTO guidelines, which prioritize commercial interests, on the one hand; and the derogation of the current EU legislation on the protection of animals at the time of killing, which allows for religious slaughter to be carried out without stunning, on the other hand.

The development of *halal* meat markets in the European legal space is further being driven by production side initiatives that reflect a wide range of *halal* practices and marketing strategies supported by actors interested in expanding a 'religious marketplace', as an expression of the inevitable interdependence of religion and marketing in modern consumer culture.[34] This situation enables further actors to promote different tradition-based positions within and across national boundaries, giving rise to 'hybrid' forms of governance and third party certification schemes.[35]

Such tensions are likely to continue in the future, given the expected growth of the Muslim populations and the EU's attempt to protect animal welfare at time of killing without threatening the economic competitiveness of Europe's animal farming industry.

Meanwhile, the lack of standardized safety, hygiene and healthiness certification for *halal* products may affect consumers, who may be victim of fraud and mislabelling of *halal* products and reduce their demand. The new technology seems to come to rescue the consumer.

The blockchain technology, in particular, is represented as one of the main instrument to assure the reliability, traceability and safety to *halal* consumers.[36] The benefits associated with this digitally distributed, decentralized, public ledger secured by cryptography, include a greater efficiency of *halal* certification systems, by increasing *halal* consumers' trust through the digitalization of *halal* certificates, which become traceable and reliable, but also a greater environmental and social sustainability, considering that it is argued that the need to guarantee food safety,

[32] Id.
[33] J. LEVER, M. MIELE, *The growth of halal meat markets in Europe*, cit., p. 528.
[34] M. EINSTEIN, *Brands of Faith: Marketing Religion in a Secular Age*, Routledge EU 1993, 2008.
[35] J. LEVER, M. MIELE, *The growth of halal meat markets in Europe*, cit., p. 536.
[36] C. BUX, E. VARESE, V. AMICARELLI, M. LOMBARDI, *Halal Food Sustainability between Certification and Blockchain*, cit., https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/14/4/2152.

hygiene, fair trade and animal welfare implies that sustainable practices are incorporated in the *halal* food supply chain.[37]

The impact stemming from the growth and diversification of the *halal* market goes beyond certification issues, however. In particular, the promotion of authentic *halal* affects the relationship between the right to cultural identity and the protection of the environment and its inhabitants.

Halal lifestyle seems to increasingly converge with mainstream beliefs about the environment consciousness. This is reflected in the emergence of Eco-Islam, as a movement that explores the link between Islamic ethics and environmental stewardship.

3. Eco-Islam as Islamically motivated environmental responsibility

"Given the powerful and persuasive role that religion can play on the values, attitudes, and behaviour of individuals, in recent years the term 'Eco-Islam' has become the label used to define the Islamic ecological ethics that interpret the Qur'an and the body of Hadiths in a contemporary ecological way of life, as an inherent Muslim necessity/obligation".[38]

The origin of the Eco-Islam thinking dates back to1960s, and specifically to the work of the Iranian-born intellectual Seyyed Hossein Nasr, who is considered as being the father of the early Islamic environmentalism movement.[39] In his book titled '*Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crises of Modern Man*', Nars emphasised that religions may provide humanity with a way out from the ecological crisis, and called for a rediscovery of, and reconnection with, religious teachings about the natural world, which have been lost with advent of modernity.[40] His work was a response to the controversial theory of the historian Lynn White Junior, according to whom the monotheistic religions are at the root of the ecological crisis. Although White focused primarily on Christianity and Judaism, such an allegation as well as the perception of an ecological crisis led Muslim scholars to drew attention to the position of Islam on the environment. This has resulted in the Islamic eco-theology movement, which

[37] J. ALZEER, U. RIEDER, K. A. HADEED, *Good Agricoltural Practices and Its Compatibility with Halal Standards*, in *Trends in Food & Science Technology*, 102, 2020 and L. AL HALASEH, B. SUNDARAKANI, *Study on quality attributes of halal food supply chain*, in *International Journal of Logistics Economics and Globalisation*, 4 (1-2), pp. 20-34.

[38] D. M. ABDELZAHER, A. KOTB, A. HELFAYA, *Eco-Islam: Beyond the Principles of Why and What, and Into the Principles of How*, in *Journal of Business Ethics*, 155, 2019, p. 626.

[39] A. SCHWENCKE, *Globalized Eco-Islam: A survey of global Islamic environmentalism*, LIRS, Leiden University, 2012; M. ZBIDI, *The call to Eco-Jihad*, Islamic Environmentalism, in *Qantara.de*, 2013, https://en.qantara.de/content/islamic-environmentalism-the-call-to-eco-jihad (last accessed 29 December 2022)

[40] D. M. ABDELZAHER, A. KOTB, A. HELFAYA, *Eco-Islam*, cit., p. 626.

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encompasses Islamic ecological philosophy, *sharia*-based environmental law and Islamic environmental activism.[41]

Islamic environmental ethics are rooted in the primary sources of Islam. "Corruption of the earth, including destruction of the environment is forbidden in the Qur'an, as are wasteful overconsumption and extravagance".[42] Under Islam, the environment is a gift made by God to humankind, is a sign of God to human beings, is itself in a state of worship of God, witness for/against human actions.[43] Human beings are called upon to conserve God's creation. The purpose of all creation is to praise God, and any human intersection with the universe is to obey to God's laws.[44]

Eco-Islam emerges as a young movement which brings together different types and levels of activism among Muslim groups and worldwide organisations, whose common goal is to protect God's creation through environment-friendly behaviours.[45]

Eco-Islam encompasses behavioural rules aimed at reducing human impact on the environment. As such, it could be *somehow* compared to Western environmental law, which is understood as a complex field of practices that has evolved into a wide set of statutes, regulations, guidelines, requirements, policies, regulatory strategies, judicial cases and administrative interpretations shaped by environmental concerns understood as collective problems that require collective responses.[46]

The first phase of Eco-Islam went from the 1970s to the beginning of the 2000s, and was marked by a theoretical work on the relationship between Islam and the environment, before evolving into a global ecological movement which shifted the focus on practical questions and activism in the 21st century.[47]

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[41] M. ZBIDI, *The call to Eco-Jihad*, cit., https://en.qantara.de/content/islamic-environmentalism-the-call-to-eco-jihad.

[42] O. LLEWELLYN, *The Basis for a Discipline of Islamic Environmental Law*, in R.C. FOLTZ, F.M. DENNY, & A. H. BAHARUDDIN (eds), *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2003, p. 199.

[43] D. ABDELZAHER & A. ABDELZAHER, *Beyond environmental regulations: Exploring the potential of ''Eco-Islam'' in boosting environmental ethics within SMEs in Arab market*s, in *Journal of Business Ethics*, 2015, pp. 1-15.

[44] A. ANSARI & P. JAMAL, *Towards an Islamic jurisprudence of environment: An expository study*, in *Religion and Law Review*, X–XI (11–12), 2001-2002, pp. 80-103; F. KHALID, *Islam and the environment*, in P. TIMMERMAN (ed.), *Social and economic dimensions of global environmental change*, in *Encyclopedia of global environmental change*, 1, 2002, Wiley, Chichester, pp. 332-339.; S. NAQVI, *The dimensions of an Islamic economic model*, in *Islamic Economic Studies*, 4(2), 1997, pp. 1-23.

[45] "'The 'Green Khutba Campaign', 'The Green Guide to Hajj', 'The Muslim Green Guide to Reducing Climate Change', 'Greening Ramadan', 'The Clean Medina Campaign' ... are only some of the contemporary initiatives focused on the link between Islam and nature and labelled 'Green Islam' or 'Eco-Islam'.

[46] On environmental law See: T.S. AAGAARD, *Environmental Law as a Legal Field: An Enquiry in Legal Taxonomy*, in *Villanova University Charles Widger School of Law Digital Repository*, Working Paper Series, 2009, pp. 38-42; E. FISHER, *Environmental Law: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 2017.

[47] SCHWENCKE, *Globalized Eco-Islam*, cit., p. 9.

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The pillars of Eco-Islam are three foundational Islamic principles revealed in the Quran and the *sunna* (Muhammad's traditions based on his words and deeds):[48] (1) the unity of all creatures under the one God (*tawhid*), (2) humankind's role as viceregency (*khalifa*), and (3) humankind's pursuit of public interest (*maslaha*).

From an environmental perspective, the principle of *tawhid* "is interpreted as God creating humankind within the pattern of the natural world, in the state of being able to distinguish between good, bad, and neither good nor bad".[49] It is a doctrine that expresses the unity of God with all His creatures. God prohibits abuse of the natural world and expects humans to live ethically and to achieve social equilibrium.[50]

Humans assume the role of vicegerent, stewards or representatives of God on Earth (*khalifa*). God has entrusted humankind with authority on earth, and humans are supposed to practice authority to serve God's will, by governing and looking after themselves and other creations.[51]

The role of humankind as a guardian of God's creation has two elements: free will (*ikhtiyar*) and responsibility (*fard*).[52] Free will means that humans have the ability to make choices in situations where there may be conflict of interests. Since free will is voluntary and unrestricted, humans can make wrong decisions. It follows that human beings maintain their free will from greed by exercising their responsibility.

Responsibility, in turn, has two wings: the humankind' s trustee status on earth and the voluntaristic aspect.[53] The doctrine of responsibility is conceived to prevent God's agents from abusing the earth for material benefits. It is a restriction of the stewardship and a moral burden. The superior position of humankind is not rooted in its greater power and authority over other creations indeed, but much more in the responsibility that humankind has towards God.

From a legal perspective, humans' rights on earth have been understood as ''usufructuary', where usufruct refers to the right of humankind to a temporary possession and enjoyment of the environment that belongs God, without causing damage or changing its substance. [54] However, within the context of Islamic usufruct,

[48] For more information on sunna See F. CASTRO, *Il modello islamico*, cit., pp. 15-17.

[49] D. M. ABDELZAHER, A. KOTB, A. HELFAYA, *Eco-Islam*, cit., p. 627.

[50] Y. AL-QARADAWI, *Safeguarding the environment in Islamic Sharia*, UAE, Dar Al Khaleej, 2000.

[51] H. ABDEL HALEEM, *Introduction*, in H. ABDEL HALEEM (ed.), *Islam and the environment*, London, Ta-Ha, 1998, pp. 5-10.

[52] S. NAQVI, *Ethics and economics: An Islamic synthesis*, in *Islamic economic series 2*, Leicester, The Islamic Foundation, 1981. See also S. NAQVI, *The dimensions of an Islamic economic model*, cit., pp. 1-23.

[53] U. CHAPRA, *Objectives of the Islamic economic order*, Leicester, The Islamic Foundation, 1979; S. NAQVI, *Perspectives on morality and human well-being: A contribution to Islamic economics*, Leicester, The Islamic Foundation, 2003.

[54] G. ROUGHTON, *The ancient and the modern: Environmental law and governance in Islam*, in *Columbia Journal of Environmental Law*, 32, 2007, pp. 99-139.

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Muslims not only have to act as users or protectors of the earth, but they have also to make it prosper for future generations.[55]

Finally, the concept of public good (*maslaha*) aims to achieve a sustainable welfare, benefits and advantages for all creatures, alongside the prohibition of any evil and corruption.[56] This principle, which gives the state the right to intervene in case of need for the sake of public interest, is defined as "the preservation of the religion, life, mind, offspring and wealth'' (known as Maqasid al-Shari'ah)".[57]

Once understood *what* the environment is and *why* human beings should care about it, scholars have raised the question of *how* environmental care should be implemented.[58] One of the application principles is known as *qadr*, namely seeking balance and maintaining equilibrium.[59] This principle calls for the conservation/restoration of balance on Earth, both in terms of harmony within Nature and human justice and morality in day-to-day dealings. God created the Earth with a sense of balance/proportion that makes it perfect, and it is the responsibility of humans not to alter natural order and preserve this balance between all creations. Corruptions on earth in the form of global warming, pollution, overconsumption, wastefulness, earthquakes and sea level rise are evidence that the Earth is no longer in a state of divine balance. This suggests that humankind's relationship with God and His creations should be one of ''sustainable utilisation''.[60]

Another main theme is the moderation in the use of resources: *wasatiyya*.[61] The Quran states the importance of not overspending (*israf*) or indulging in careless overconsumption (*tabzir*) when managing the resources given by God to human beings.

Being accountable (*muhasaba*) for all actions on earth and in the hereafter to God and preserving justice (*adl*) is also emphasised in the Quran.[62] Humans are accountable before God for how they dealt with His creations as long as they live, and will either receive rewards or punishments for their actions.

The final principle is referred to as *tawadu'*, which requires a state of modesty and servitude.[63] In their role as servants of God, Muslims have to treat His creation with

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[55] R. KAMLA, S. GALLHOFER & J. HASLAM, *Islam, nature and accounting: Islamic principles and the notion of accounting for the environment*, in *Accounting Forum*, 30(2), 2006, pp. 245-265.

[56] A. JALIL, *The significances of Maslahah concept and doctrine of Maqasid (objectives) Al-Shari'ah in project evaluation*, in *The Journal of Muamalat and Islamic Finance Research*, 3(1), 2006, pp. 171-202.

[57] D. M. ABDELZAHER, A. KOTB, A. HELFAYA, *Eco-Islam*, cit., p. 628.

[58] Id., pp. 631-636.

[59] Id., pp. 631-633.

[60] G. ROUGHTON, *The ancient and the modern*, cit., p. 105.

[61] D. M. ABDELZAHER, A. KOTB, A. HELFAYA, *Eco-Islam*, cit., p. 633.

[62] Id., pp. 633-634.

[63] Id., pp. 634-636.

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respect, by avoiding arrogance, taking care of nature and dealing properly with its resources.

In the light of the above, Eco-Islam, with its core principles, has been defined as a suitable field to gain respect, but also as a renewed reading and understanding of Islamic tradition and an opportunity to transgress national and religious boundaries.[64]

Islamic eco-activism emphasises Muslims' moral, spiritual and religious individual responsibility which connects humans with God. Under Islam, the whole creation is subject to God's laws, and humans must implement God's laws through the principles of *tawhid*, *khalifa* and *maslahah*.

The anthropocentric worldview, rooted in the Kantian and Cartesian Enlightenment philosophy in the case of secular Western ethics, and on the anthropocentric readings of the Quran and other Islamic sources, has led scholars, Muslims and non-Muslims, to frame human actions toward the environment within a set of rules. Likewise, the increasing awareness of human responsibility towards the Earth and all its creatures has brought with it the emergence and the spread of new movements and belongings. This is the case with veganism, which has become a trend across the world.

A body of Muslim scholarly workings suggests that veganism is the position most consistent with the Prophet's lifestyle, prompting scholars and Muslims to investigate the relationship between Islam and this specific affiliation.

4. To be or not to be (vegan Muslim), that is the question: the rise of vegan Muslims and the halal-tayyib rationale

"Veganism is a philosophy and way of living which seeks to exclude – as far as possible as is possible and practicable – all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing and any other purpose; and by extension, promotes the development and use of animal-free alternatives for the benefit of animals, humans and the environment. In dietary terms it denotes the practice of dispensing with all products derived wholly or partly from animals".[65]

Veganism is spreading in multiple countries.[66] This is evidenced by the worldwide growth of vegans, by the rising number of people who choose food and non-food

[64] C. WILLMS, A cultural analysis of eco-Islam: How young German Muslims live religion through environmental activism', in HTS Theological Studies 77(2), 2021, https://hts.org.za/index.php/HTS/article/view/6734 (last access 13 December 2022).

[65] THE VEGAN SOCIETY, *Definition of veganism*, https://www.vegansociety.com/go-vegan/definition-veganism (last accessed 22 December 2022)

[66] THE VEGAN SOCIETY, *Worldwide growth of veganism*, https://www.vegansociety.com/news/media/statistics/worldwide (last accessed 2 January 2023). On the European case, See THE SMART PROTEIN PROJECT, *What do consumers want: a survey on European consumer attitudes*

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vegan alternatives, by the increasing sign-ups for Veganuary – the vegan month of January – and by the spread of vegan products and business.[67] Furthermore, the European Parliament's interventions on the use of meat-related/dairy-like names for plant-based substitutes,[68] and the progressive openness of judges towards this kind of cultural affiliation, as shown by the recent British case-law, [69] confirm that national and international actors are determined to face up to the challenges posed by vegan lifestyle, which is practiced by more and more people around the world.

Veganism has influenced Muslims, too. Although there are no exact statistics on the spread of veganism among Muslims, one can observe several social platforms such as facebook pages and groups which are are organised according to different criteria: The Vegan Muslim Initiative, Vegan Muslim Community, Muslim Vegans, Muslim Vegans for Healthy World, Muslim Vegans of Singapore, The Black Muslim Vegan, Moroccan Vegans, Pakistan Initiative for Veganism, and Saudi Vegan. These platforms provide Muslims with the opportunity to ask questions, express their doubts and get info about the relationship between Islam and veganism. Muslims can also share their personal stories and have access to vegan recipes and material about all the aspects linked to veganism. Websites such as Animals in Islam, in particular, deal with questions about Islam and animals, including veganism, through a *fatwa* service.

In the context of Islamic veganism, personalities such as Saudi Prince Khaled bin Alwaleed bin Talal should also be mentioned, given his commitment to promoting veganism in Saudi Arabia and throughout the Arab world by opening vegan restaurants in the Middle East.[70]

The growth of Muslim vegans, as part of the global spread of veganism, raises the question if and to what extent Islamic teachings allows for this affiliation. As previously highlighted, although Islam prohibits cruelty, promotes compassion and

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towards plant-based foods, 2021, https://smartproteinproject.eu/pan-european-survey-meat-consumption-down/ (last accessed 3 January 2023).

[67] THE VEGAN SOCIETY, *Worldwide growth of veganism*, https://www.vegansociety.com/news/media/statistics/worldwide.

[68] The European Parliament has rejected the proposal to ban the use of words like 'burger' to describe vegan and vegetarian products, but prohibits dairy-like names such as 'milk' or 'bitter', for vegan products. See S. MARZIALETTI, *L'hamburger vegano resiste al Parlamento Ue. Il mercato vale 4,6 miliardi*, in *Il Sole 24 ore*, 23 October 2020, https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/hamburger-vegano-attesa-il-voto-ue-denominazione-un-mercato-che-vale-46-miliardi-dollari-ADpRfPx (last accessed 3 January 2023); M. CAPPELLINI, *Il latte vegetale? Non si chiamerà più latte*, in *Il Sole 24 ore*, 29 October 2020, https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/il-latte-vegetale-non-si-chiamera-piu-latte-ADtbqzy (last accessed 3 January 2023)

[69] *Mr G Conisbee v Crossley Farms Ltd & Ors* [2019] ET 3335357/2018; *Mr J Casamitjana Costa v The League Against Cruel Sports* [2020] ET 3331129/2018.

[70] T. KAVALER, *Veganism in the Arab world: while not widespread, the dieti s gaining in popularity*, in *The Jerusalem Post*, 14 May 2019 (last accessed 2 January 2023).

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mercy and accepts that animals have emotions of their own, it permits the killing of animals for human consumption.

There are different schools of thought when it comes to the consumption of animals, however. According to one of the existing interpretations, "Muslims are not only prohibited from eating certain food, but also may not choose to prohibit themselves from consuming food that is allowed by Islam".[71] From this perspective, veganism is prohibited accordingly.

It should be said that veganism is a recent topic among Muslim scholars. The concept of veganism is not set out in Islamic tradition. In contrast, a much more discussed theme is vegetarianism. Some scholars, focusing on meat consumption, argue that the choice not to consume any kind of meat is permissible only on a personal level but it is unreasonable, since the Quran allows man to consume meat and plants feel pain because they are alive, too.[72]

Other scholars appear to be more concerned about meat overconsumption, emphasising that the Prophet Muhammad himself did not consume many portions of meat.[73] Specifically, several Muslims have practiced vegetarianism throughout the history, such as South Asian Sufis, the Suhrawardi saint Hamid al-din Nagori and others.[74] In the Muslim tradition, Muslims who were vegetarians were often called *zanadiqa*.[75]

Faced with assumptions that the refuse to consume meat might be understood as an act of ingratitude or even disobedience to God, some scholars reply arguing that meat-eating culture in Muslim communities is allowed for historical reasons: the nomadic Arabs would have faced starvation in extreme conditions if they had solely practiced a vegetarian diet.[76] As such, meat consumption is not a compulsory practice, is only tolerated and is against two core themes of the Quran, which are compassion and social justice.[77]

According to another current of thought, Islam contains grounds on which not only eating animals is difficult, if not impossible, to justify from an Islamic perspective,

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[71] Z. MUHAMMAD NASRULLAH MOHD, J. MUHAMMAD AIZAT, N. NUR SURIYA MOHD, *Veganism Sentiments and Preferences among Muslims,* in *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities*, 2021, 29 (2), p. 1441.

[72] D. MCLEOD, *A path of justice and compassion: About Vegan Muslims and Islamic veganism*, University of Otago, 2018.

[73] S. H. YUSUF, *Sharing success: Fair trade commerce for a better world, Finance and Economics, RIS CA 2011* [Video], Youtube video, 2011, https://youtu.be/seEpf-bmnIQ (last accessed 2 January 2023).

[74] R.C. FOLTZ, *Is vegetarianism un-Islamic?*, in *Studies in Contemporary Islam*, *3*(1), 2001, pp. 39-54.

[75] Z. SHAIKH, *Towards an Islamic Basis for Veganism*, in *Astrolabe: A CIS Student Research Journal*, 2020, p. 2, https://www.hbku.edu.qa/sites/default/files/towardsanislamicbasisforveganism.pdf (last accessed 2 January 2023).

[76] R.C. FOLTZ, *Is vegetarianism un-Islamic?*, in *Studies in Contemporary Islam*, cit., pp. 39-54.

[77] R. C. FOLTZ, *Animals in Islamic Tradition and Muslim Cultures*, Oxford, 2006.

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but veganism can be seen as a recommended practice.[78] At the heart of this approach is a renewed engagement with the Islamic sources through the use of *ijtihad* – which is the interpretative effort to understand the divine law – having *maqasid al-sharia* – the objectives of *sharia* – in mind, since "the ultimate objective of the Shari'a is the welfare of all of God's creation, *māṣāliḥ al khalq*, not just humans".[79]

Since Islam gives individuals the choice either to be vegan or omnivore, 'being vegan is halal'. As pointed out by scholar Khaled Abou El Fadl, '*If someone wishes to claim that being vegan is haram, they must produce evidence to that effect. There is nothing in the Qur'an or Sunna says that […] an individual Muslim, must consume meat.*[80]

Although veganism is a topic inherited by Western culture, it should be noted that in the Islamic tradition "*many scholars and prominent figures in Islamic history were vegan. Most of them did not consume meat because they believed that consuming meat was a luxury that they did not wish to indulge. Some believed that consuming meat is unhealthy or that it leads to laziness. These people became known as the nabatiyya. No one has ever accused the nabatiyya of being heretical or sinful".*[81]

Some of these reasons remain unchanged. Currently, the reasons behind the Muslim vegan choice include human health, animal rights (ethics),[82] and environmental concern.[83]

A separate question, from the perspective of vegan Muslims, is the *halal* configuration of food and non-food products deriving from the treatment of animals.

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[78] Z. SHAIKH, *Towards an Islamic Basis for Veganism*, cit., p. 5, https://www.hbku.edu.qa/sites/default/files/towardsanislamicbasisforveganism.pdf (last accessed 2 January 2023).

[79] Id.

[80] For a complete reading of the present *fatwa* See THE USULI INSTITUTE [facebook page], 29 June 2020, https://www.facebook.com/1630950696963207/posts/fatwa-on-being-vegan-by-dr-khaled-abou-el-fadlquestion-im-15-years-old-and-i-alw/3171668246224770/ (last accessed 3 January 2023). On veganism in Islam See also THE USULI INSTITUTE, *On eating Halal in non-Muslim countries, veganism and environmental implications*, [Excerpt from Q&Asession – youtube] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b16ZVGY3efw (last accessed 3 January 2023).

[81] Id.

[82] Animals in Islam are important creatures of Allah. According to some scholars, Islam anticipates the West in acknowledging animals' rights. See S. TLILI, *Animal ethics in Islam: A review article*, in *Religions*, 9, 269, 2018, p. 3, https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/9/9/269 (last accessed 2 January 2023). The importance afforded to animals is also demonstrated by the fact that several chapters in the Quran are named with animals. However, it is not possible to identify a prevailing position when it comes to the rights of animals, the protection of which is mainly left to human conscience and government. While some Muslim scholars argue that only humans do have rights, since they are linked to the capacity to reason; others depict humans as the apex of creation and, as such, they are endowed with dominion over animals, whilst acknowledging that animals do have a right to a share in the nature resources. These viewpoints are challenged by those who state that no verse in the Quran directly gives man dominion over other creatures, and scholars who point out that the definition of right should include the rights of animals. See Z. MUHAMMAD NASRULLAH MOHD, J. MUHAMMAD AIZAT, N. NUR SURIYA MOHD, *Veganism Sentiments and Preferences among Muslims,* cit., pp. 1438-1441.

[83] C. RADNITZ, B. BEEZHOLD, & J. DI MATTEO, *Investigation of lifestyle choices of individuals following a vegan diet for health and ethical reasons*, in *Appetite*, 90, 31-36, 2015, https://doi. org/10.1016/j.appet.2015.02.026 (last accessed 2 January 2023).

Despite the characteristics of slaughter practices and the specifics of current factory farming, most scholars continue to support the idea that the resulting products are *halal*. "'Halal' meat may not be all that it is claimed to be", as suggested by Animals in Islam website, where reflection extents to personal care products, with respect to which one can read: "even if the product does not not contain animal ingredients, if it has been tested on animals, it is in violation of Islamic teachings of kindness and respect for animals".[84]

The Vegan Muslim Initiative emphasises that the literal reading and understanding of the Islamic sources on *halal* food issues, is a gross oversimplification, since the Quran is not limited to allow the consumption of *halal* food, but it specifies that Muslims are required to eat what is both permissible *and tayyib*.[85] The question therefore becomes: "What is 'good and pure' about animal abuse?", since it entails shipping thousands of animals into packed ships to concentration camp trucks where they are tightly huddled, and many die from suffocation before they arrive, or transporting such quantities of animals where they can clearly see, hear and smell what is about to happen to them and therefore secrete enormous amounts of stress hormones.[86]

The Vegan Muslim Initiatives also points out that current communities are riddled with several types of diseases: heart disease, cancer, diabetes, which are all directly tied to what people eat, and "there is nothing 'halal' or 'tayyib' about that".[87]

The *halal-tayyib* argument is shared by other scholars in order to emphasise that Muslims have a moral responsibility to abstain from consuming animal products, because this choice can no longer be justified from an Islamic perspective.[88]

It is emphasised that the Quran gives Muslims foundations and principles to go, not necessarily exact models to replicate due to the significant changes societies undergo.[89] Muslims are, therefore, encouraged to contextualise decisions about what to eat, without comparing the current world with the 7th century A.D., when the Prophet and his Companions lived in a materially different time.[90] Cultural and

[84] ANIMALS IN ISLAM, *Halal Products*, https://www.animalsinislam.com/halal-living/halal-products/ (last accessed 3 January 2023).

[85] THE VEGAN MUSLIM INITIATIVE, *The Halal Meat Saga*, https://veganmuslims.com/the-halal-meat-saga (last accessed 22 December 2022).

[86] Id.

[87] THE VEGAN MUSLIM INITIATIVE, *Muslims Should Stop Eating Animals*, https://veganmuslims.com/muslims-should-stop-eating-animals (last accessed 3 January 2023).

[88] Z. SHAIKH, *Towards an Islamic Basis for Veganism*, cit., pp. 7-8, https://www.hbku.edu.qa/sites/default/files/towardsanislamicbasisforveganism.pdf (last accessed 2 January 2023).

[89] THE VEGAN MUSLIM INITIATIVE, *We Need To End Eid Slaughter*, https://veganmuslims.com/we-need-to-end-eid-slaughter (last accessed 3 January 2023).

[90] THE VEGAN MUSLIM INITIATIVE, *Why Did God Allow Killing Animals?*, https://veganmuslims.com/why-did-god-allow-killing-animals (last accessed 3 January 2023).

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technological advancements have given humans many cruelty-free alternatives to meat and dairy products.

Islamic traditional practices have been replaced by vegan revisitations. Vegan Muslims have given rise to initiatives such as *Veganadan*, that is Ramadan for vegans, in which they adopt a plant-based *iftar*, the meal with which they break their day-long fast.[91] Likewise, they choose not to practice animal sacrifice on *Eid al-Adha*, inviting to sacrifice addiction to meat.[92] In this respect, there are authors who suggest that Abraham's story can be read symbolically and that ritual slaughter can be implemented metaphorically, offering fruits and vegetables as sacrifice.[93]

Through a compassionate approach in their day-to-day choices, vegan Muslims put into practice their moral responsibility towards God's creation as His representatives on earth. Does the rest of Muslims need a new *halal*-related *ijtihad* to avoid the destruction of God's creation?

5. A new ijtihad for sustainable halal? Some closing remarks

For a long time, the term *halal* has been exclusively associated with food permitted under Islam. However, *halal* has progressively ended up involving all aspects of human life in the past 20 years, filling with wider contents which reflect the values of a changing world.

The *hahal* phenomenon has had more than one effect. On the one hand, *halal* products have found their place in dedicated markets in both Muslim and non-Muslim countries. Market expansion has been characterised by the emergence of new institutions: *halal* certificate bodies which compete for the authenticity of *halal* products.

On the other hand, the increasing awareness of environmental and health crisis, alongside animal ethics, has widened the meaning of *halal*, so that it is currently used as a referent in movements such as Eco-Islam and veganism.

The transformations of the global society have made *halal* a reflexive ethical moment that is grounded in the richness and plurality of the lived traditions of Islam. At the same time, the current understanding of what *halal* is raises many issues. These religious, cultural, legal, economic, political and social issues demand a response in Muslim and non-Muslim world.

On the Islamic side, there seems to be need for a new *ijtihad* of Islamic prescriptions in matters of *halal*, so as to give Muslims, as stewards of God, greater opportunities to contribute to the preservation of God's creation.

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[91] R. ALY, *You are whayt you Eid: Ramadan for vegans*, in *The Guardian*, 30 May 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/food/2019/may/30/you-are-what-you-eid-ramadan-for-vegans (last accessed 3 January 2023).

[92] The Vegan Muslim Initiative, *Don't Kill An Animal This Eid*, (last accessed 3 January 2023).

[93] J. BENTHALL, *The Greening of Islam?*, in Anthropology Today, 2003, 19 (6), pp. 10-12.

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