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Halal meat and religious slaughter: from spatial concealment to social controversy – breaching the boundaries of the permissible?

John Lever

Abstract: Across the secular West, the slaughter of animals for food has become an almost clandestine activity. Very occasionally however, when slaughter comes into view, social and political controversy emerges. In this paper, I examine two such episodes in England and the controversies subsequently engendered: the controversy over kosher meat and the Jewish method of slaughter (*shechita*) in the 19th century, and the contemporary controversy over halal meat and the Muslim method of slaughter (*dhabihah*). These controversies are complex and double-edged in that, not only do they involve food, which often invokes anxieties about what is being ingested and what moral boundaries are being crossed, they also involve religion. Both episodes are also linked to periods of rapid migration into the UK, and to concerns about integration and the threats posed to British values and national identity by the food practices of *outsiders*. However, while concern over kosher meat production and Jewish migrants in the 19th century was largely concealed within the spatial boundaries of Jewish communities, from the late 20th century onwards halal meat has become increasingly visible in line with the demographic expansion of the Muslim population out of racialized community spaces. It is in this context, I contend, in line with a new and emerging geography of religious food practice, that halal meat has breached the boundaries of the permissible to challenge the ‘civilized’ values underpinning the hegemonic food discourse.

Keywords: Animal welfare; animal slaughter and stunning; civilizing process; halal and kosher meat; hegemonic food discourse.

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Introduction

Given the prior sacrificial significance of animal slaughter in near eastern culture (Fischler, 2011) it has been widely accepted since Moses that to be fit for human consumption meat must come from slaughtered animals. Over time however, differences have emerged within Christianity, Judaism, and Islam over the particularities of meat production and consumption, with adherents distinguishing themselves from the practice of *Others* in very specific ways (Freidenreich, 2011). One explicit controversy revolves around the issue of stunning animals before slaughter.¹ While stunning is widely accepted as a way of addressing animal welfare concerns at the time of killing across the Western world (Gilman, 2011; HSA, 2011) it is opposed by Jews and contested by many Muslims (Lever and Miele, 2012). Interestingly, while slaughter is now widely debated across the secular West, the killing involved is something we prefer to know little about (Vialles, 1994). Indeed, as Elias (2012 [1939]) demonstrates, the confinement of animal slaughter to a concealed space hidden from public view illustrates a central feature of the European civilizing process – the gradual expulsion of violence and morally repugnant practices from the sanitised realm of everyday life.

Well into the 18th century, livestock was an everyday sight on urban streets and the slaughter of animals in public space was still commonplace. Over the next two centuries however, as the rising urban classes sought to refine their newfound manners and maintain their growing social status and prestige, slaughterhouses became increasingly offensive to the civilized eye. Over time, they were pushed out to the backstreets, then to the suburbs, and finally out to the outskirts of small rural towns where they could no longer offend ‘*civilized sensibilities*’ (Elias 2012[1939]; Vialles, 1991; Corbin, 1986; Fitzgerald, 2010; Lever and Milbourne, 2015). Today, as Vialles (1994: 5) confirms, ‘*slaughtering has become an invisible, exiled, almost clandestine activity.*’

In line with this wider process of quarantine and concealment, any unpleasant memories associated with animal slaughter remain deeply anchored but hidden within the human unconscious (Elias, 2012 [1939]; Pachirat, 2011). Very occasionally, when the slaughter of animals comes into view, these memories come out into the open to facilitate social and political controversy (Gilman, 2006). In this paper, I examine two such episodes in England and the controversies subsequently engendered: the controversy over *kosher* meat and Jewish (*shechita*) slaughter practice in the 19th century, and the contemporary controversy over halal meat and Muslim (*dhabiha*) slaughter practice. These controversies are complex and double-edged in that, not only do they involve food, which often invokes anxieties about what is being ingested and what moral boundaries are being crossed, they also involve religion (Grumett, 2015). But in the case of halal in particular, religion is not seen as a declining and oppressive moral force, as is often the case (Brown, 2009), but as an indicator of the growing power of Islam and the presence of what are seen to be barbaric Muslim practices (Grumett, 2015).

As with *shechita* in the 19th century, public debate and political controversy provoked by the increasing visibility of halal meat revolves around the issue of stunning animals before slaughter. From an animal welfare perspective, the provision of meat from pre-stunned animals is preferable to meat from non-stunned animals on the grounds that former suffer less at the time of killing than the latter (Lever and Miele, 2012).² Primitive types of stunning were used and discussed from the early modern period onwards, yet it was not until the 19th century that things began to move forward more quickly. As livestock production intensified during the early 20th century (D’Silva and Webster, 2017) the Human Slaughter Association (HSA) became more influential and going forward they were to play a key role in the development of

the Slaughter of Animals Act 1933, which – with the exception of kosher and halal meat production – made stunning mandatory for red meat animals (HSA, 2011).³

Today stunning is compulsory under both UK and EU legislation for all ‘farmed’ animals, yet derogation is still granted from the pre-stun requirement in line with the rights of minorities to practice religion (Lever and Miele, 2012). As the halal market has expanded in recent decades, it has thus often been assumed that all halal meat produced and sold in the UK comes from non-stunned animals, when around 80% actually comes from pre-stunned animals (FSA, 2015; Lever and Fischer, 2018). To a large extent, it is this lack of understanding that underpins the *halal meat controversy*. There are however wider complexities involved. Evidence suggests that as well as animal welfare considerations, public concern about the availability of halal meat and concerns about *dhabiha* slaughter practice are linked to wider anxieties about immigration and integration disseminated through right-wing media discourses (Bradley et al., 2015; Allen, 2014). In this context, as Gilman (2011) notes, the slaughter practice of *outsiders* is often seen as cruel, barbaric and inhumane, as very often, are the *outsiders* themselves.

In a globalizing food culture, Warde (2016) argues that twenty-first century media court controversy and dispute in Western countries to strengthen bias towards hegemonic food preferences and the suppression of unpalatable alternatives. In this paper, I argue that the increasing visibility of Muslim immigrants in recent decades, and the subsequent release of traditional cultural practices from their concealment within ‘*racialized*’ community spaces (Philips, 2006), has enhanced controversy around slaughter practice to such an extent that it has facilitated a partial dislocation of the slaughter preferences underpinning the ‘*hegemonic food discourse*’ (Roslyng, 2011). The media has played a central role in the *halal meat controversy* in this sense, I contend, by instrumentalizing animal welfare and halal meat for political purposes to maintain the boundaries of the permissible.

Research context and methods

The paper emerges from a culminative body of qualitative and mixed methods research on the production and consumption of kosher/halal meat and the development of Jewish/ Muslim communities in a number of European countries (Lever and Miele, 2012; Lever, 2013; Bergeaud-Blackler, et al., 2015; Lever and Fischer, 2018). Over the last decade, this work has involved interviews with kosher and halal consumers, religious organisations, businesses, key community actors and stakeholders, as well as participant observation and the use of historical sources and documentary methods. Although some insights from community participant observation are evident, in this paper I draw mainly on the historical sources and documentary methods used to explore the development of Jewish and Muslim communities in 19th century Manchester and 20th century Bradford. I also draw briefly on recent exploratory work on UK media sources and social media posts to explore the impact of the contemporary halal meat controversy on public understanding. This latter material presented ethical challenges. As with social media technology, ethical considerations change quickly in online environments, where getting informed consent can be challenging, all the more so when researching potentially sensitive topics. In this instance, this challenge was by-passed on the grounds that anonymity would protect the researcher and not indirectly hinder data collection. As suggested by Townsend and Wallace (2016), the social media quotes were also paraphrased to lessen the potential for traceability and secure the anonymity of those involved.

The paper starts off by tracing the emergence and growth of the Jewish community in 19th century Manchester, exploring how anxieties about the growth of Jewish immigration from

Russia and eastern Europe were entangled with concerns about *shechita* and animal welfare by the RSPCA and their right-wing supporters. This is followed by an exploration of the growth of the Muslim community in 20th century Bradford, where contemporary concerns about the social and political impact of halal meat production and *dhabiha* slaughter practice first emerged in the 1980s. I next explore how a lack of transparency in the UK meat industry in recent decades has, combined with negative media representations of Muslims, contributed to increasing public concern over halal meat production alongside wider debates about immigration, integration and perceived threats to British values and national identity. In conclusion, I argue that animal welfare and halal have been instrumentalized for political purposes to maintain the boundaries of the permissible and the ‘civilized’ values underpinning the *hegemonic food discourse*.

The Jewish community in 19th century Manchester

The history of Jews in England can be traced back to the reign of William the Conqueror (Roth, 1978), yet it was not until Manchester became the centre of the global cotton industry in the late 18th century that a settled Jewish community began to emerge in the city (Williams, 1976). Itinerant Jewish pedlars of German origin first reached Manchester around 1740, staying in a spatially confined network of lodging houses, shops and warehouses that provided meeting places for worship and facilities for the preparation of kosher food. By the 1780s, a small group of Jewish traders had settled permanently. Congregating in the Old Town area, where they would open Manchester’s first synagogue and kosher eatery, this small group of families formed an embryonic Jewish community (Williams, 1976). The earliest legal dispute over *shechita* slaughter was heard in London in 1788, when the Lord Chief Justice gave local rabbis sole authority over such matters (Wise, 2006). Local congregations subsequently founded the London Board of Shechita in 1804, and when a synagogue opened in Manchester in 1825 the congregational *shochet*⁴ slaughtered animals and supervised the sale of kosher meat at butchers licensed by the Chief Rabbi and a London based Beth Din⁵ (Williams, 2008).

The commercial success of these early settlers encouraged more Jewish traders to settle in Manchester. Many of the original members of the community thus started to move out of the backstreets and alleys around the Old Town into the new and increasingly prosperous shopping areas in the city centre, where they opened businesses targeting a new clientele of middle-class customers. Merchants such as Nathan Rothschild had great success in the cotton during the 1830s, which in turn attracted more Sephardi merchants from the Mediterranean and Ashkenazi traders from Germany and Holland to the city (Williams, 1976; Halliday, 1992). As the economic and professional standing of this new Jewish middle class continued to improve over the coming decades, they started to move out of the disease ridden and increasingly polluted city centre (Engels 2009[1845]) towards the then rural suburbs of Broughton and Cheetham Hill to the north. It was here, over the next century, that Manchester’s expanding Jewish population would create a number of ‘*sacred spaces*’ to protect the community from outside hostility (Shilhav, 1989; Blumen, 2007).

Over time, the growing dominance of Manchester’s Jewish middle class became unacceptable to the orthodox working poor. Dissent was amplified in the 1840s by the first wave of Jewish migrants from eastern Europe, and divisions subsequently emerged between those who wanted to retain traditional Jewish customs and those who wanted to modernise; the Orthodox Great Synagogue and British Reform Synagogue subsequently emerged within half a mile of each other in Cheetham Hill in 1858 (Williams, 2008). Jewish migrants continued to arrive in Manchester from Eastern Europe and Russia on their way to the US. Seen by many as a threat

to established Jewish community interests in the city, their 'backward' customs and foreign dress were thought likely to undermine the status and success many middle-class Jews had already achieved. While they received no encouragement from their fellow Jews to remain in the city, many did indeed stay on, working in low paid jobs in the textile industry for established Jewish businessmen and merchants who understood their religious observance and kosher dietary requirements (Williams, 1976).

As the influx of migrants continued, a '*voluntary ghetto*' made up of cheap, overcrowded accommodation began to emerge (Williams, 1976; 2006). It was in this geographically bounded community on the outskirts of the city that small religious societies (*chevroth*) flourished, as it was here that the orthodox, working poor could find the religious services they could not afford in a synagogue for only a few pennies a week, including slaughter facilities and the provision of kosher meat (Williams, 1976; 2008; Wise, 2009; 2010). Over time, however, the ghetto served not only to reinforce the Christian majority's perception of migrants as inferior, it also reminded the established Jewish community of the threat posed to them by negative stereotyping that portrayed all Jews as *outsiders* (Elias and Scotson, 2008; Russell, 1996; Gilman, 2011). The rise of the ghetto, and all that it symbolised, also illustrates how the development of a '*sacred*' community 'space' is not a completely effective defence against the threats and demands of the outside world; people go outside the community and geographical defences are permeable (Shilhav, 1989). Indeed, it was in this context, as we observe in more detail below, that the increasing presence of orthodox Jewish migrants from central and eastern Europe was seen as a direct threat to the interests of the established political order (Elias and Scotson, 2008).

The 'Alien' question

Immigration from the Russian Empire continued to increase after the assassination of Tsar Alexandra in 1881, when Jews fled persecution because of connections with Jewish anarchists. Tensions thus continued to increase in Manchester between the old German, Dutch and Sephardi Jewish community, smaller in number but still more powerful, and the new and expanding community of eastern European Jews. To complicate matters still further, these developments were accompanied by rising Christian hostility to an increasingly visible 'alien' population that was beginning to breach the spatial boundaries of the ghetto (Alderman, 1983; Williams, 2008). Negative stereotypes of Jews first started to appear in magazines such as *Punch* at the national level during this period, while the RSPCA⁶ began to intensify campaigning against *shechita* (Wise, 2006; 2009).

The late 19th century was a time of rising anti-Semitism across Europe and racial representations of Jews were evident in literature and across society (Cheyette, 1993; Renton and Gidley, 2017). Criticism of *shechita*, notably its inhumane element, was thus closely linked with other forms of Jewish brutality to reinforce the spiral of anti-Semitism (Gilman, 2011). As in the east end of London (Philips 1988), anti-Semitic discourse led to local anxieties in Manchester. Jewish immigrants were thought to be responsible for industrial ills such as unemployment, housing shortages, and the increasing cost of poverty, and they soon became convenient scapegoats for such problems (Williams, 1976). Sections of the media argued that they were carriers of disease, had un-English customs, wore strange clothes, and worked for lower wages than indigenous workers. A new monthly journal called *Spy* emerged in Manchester in 1891 and until the local journalist publishing it was prosecuted for libel, it promoted '*crude anti-Semitism and fierce xenophobia*' (Williams, 2008: 46).

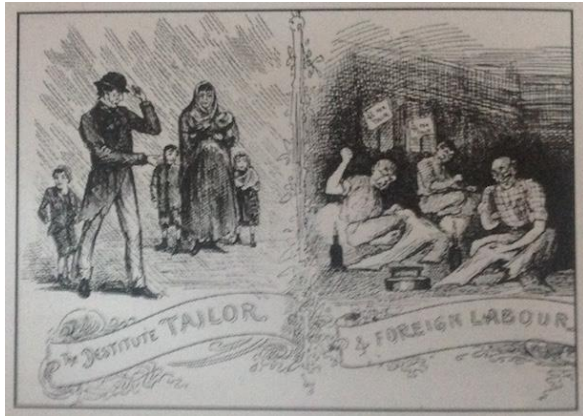


Figure 1: Cartoon from the Manchester anti-alien monthly *Spy*, outlining the supposed threat to native workers from Jewish immigrants (Williams 1976)

To regulate the flow of Russian and Polish Jews, the UK Government passed the first piece of legislation aimed solely at restricting immigration. While poor Jewish refugees kept arriving until the outbreak of war in 1914, the 1905 Aliens Act was an important development that set a precedent for future legislation limiting entry into the UK. In the short term, this furthered tension between established Jewish interests and the orthodox working poor. Indeed, with the possibility emerging that the supply of migrant labour would soon dry up, the poor were forced into longer and more extreme working practices that undermined religious observance. While this situation could in theory have strengthened their hand in the workplace, the wider pressures to resist assimilation and work for Jewish employers that understood their religious and dietary requirements meant that the orthodox poor were prepared to acquiesce to such pressures, and working on the Sabbath, for example, thus became more commonplace (Wise, 2010).

Throughout this period, *chevroth* appointed rabbis and argued for the right to conduct *shechita* independently and become fully recognized synagogues; many raised finance by controlling the production and sale of kosher meat (Williams, 1976). The London Board of *Shechita* – endorsed by the Chief Rabbi – was first given authority to grant licenses to immigrant Jewish slaughterers (*shochetim*) from outside the UK in 1868, and over the coming century this was to facilitate an at times ferocious dispute over *shechita* and the provision of kosher meat (Alderman, 1995; Lever and Miele, 2012). When the Manchester Shechita Board (MSB) was formed in 1892 to coordinate *shechita* across the city it quickly found itself defending religious slaughter from wealthy merchants and patrons of the local RSPCA (Wise, 2006). The MSB initially proposed (and occasionally adopted) a number of concessions to their Christian neighbours in order to protect the image of the Jewish community, including the adoption of post-mortem stunning (stunning animals after slaughter), but these options were strongly opposed by the more orthodox members of the community on the grounds that it would then be difficult to ascertain the exact cause of death, thus rendering the carcass unfit (*triefa*) under Jewish law (Wise, 2006).

Community tension in the 20th century

By the turn of the century, there were profound differences between middle class Jews and the orthodox working poor in cities such as Manchester and London, and dispute between the strictly orthodox view of *shechita* and the mainstream view of animal welfare intensified (Wise 2006). The MSB was stuck between the opposing camps and some argued for a Chief Rabbi to be appointed in Manchester to unite Jewish interests and ‘counter the arguments of the RSPCA

and its wealthy and anti-alien right wing supporters' (Wise 2006: 116). Subsequently, in 1902, the MSB formed an official Manchester Beth Din to provide full-time rabbinical advice and religious supervision for its slaughterers and licensed retailers (Wise, 2006).

As the Jewish community continued to spread out into Manchester's northern and southern suburbs throughout the 20th century, the degree to which Jewish customs were adhered to varied widely amongst different groups (Williams, 1976; Wise, 2006). Those who strayed too far from orthodoxy felt the wrath of the more strictly observant members of the community, most notably from the businessmen and textile dealers who arrived in the city from central and eastern Europe during the 19th century. Ultraorthodox Jewry had emerged in eastern Europe as a counter modernist movement during this period (Shilhav 1989), and in 1925 this group of businessmen signalled their opposition to the erosion of traditional Jewish practices by forming the Manchester Machzikei Hadass Society. From this point onwards, the society became the centre of strict orthodoxy to the north of the city through community activism and repeated demands for higher *kashrus*⁷ standards (Wise, 2010). To a large extent, these developments illustrate the concerns of ultraorthodox Jews during the 19th century about the threat posed to the traditional Jewish way of life; over the coming century, Jews who moved to the city's southern suburbs were slowly assimilated into modern culture, while those who moved in the opposite direction became part of the orthodox and increasingly ultra-orthodox community that emerged in the northern suburbs.⁸

If we see the geographically bound Jewish community that emerged to the north of the city as a '*sacred space*' (Shilhav, 1989; Blumen, 2007) that came into being to protect the Jewish way of life from outside influence, we can see how, in the case of *shechita*, the boundaries of the community were occasionally breached by the pressure to acquiesce to the demands of the establishment, notably the RSPCA and their anti-alien supporters (Wise 2006). This pressure intensified during the 20th century in line with legislation that served to split the Jewish community over who could legitimately conduct *shechita*. An exemption from the legal requirement to stun animals before slaughter has existed since the 1933 Slaughter of Animals Act (Kaye, 1993), yet the Act also set up a Rabbinical Commission that allowed the chief rabbi to license religious slaughterers to kill red meat animals without pre-stunning. However, political tension within the Jewish community meant that it was not until 1965 that the chief rabbi licensed an independent MH *shochet* to conduct *shechita*, thus unintentionally contributing, Wise (2006) argues, to the growth of strictly observant Jewish communities demanding higher standards of *shechita*. Contra Wise, however, it is my argument that the provisions of the Act initiated a process of divide and rule that served not only to increase tension within Jewish community, but also kept the wider issue of animal slaughter concealed within the community throughout much of the 20th century.



Figure 2: The ultra-orthodox ‘MH Meats’ shop in Salford, Manchester.⁹

Growing Nazi propaganda and anti-Semitism during the 1930s meant that political interest in religious slaughter waned considerably during the mid-20th century. In the post war period, attention also began to turn towards the UK's growing Muslim population and their culturally preferred method of slaughter (*dhabiha*). After the Holocaust, debate about religious slaughter in Europe also began to shift away from anti-Semitism towards animal rights, though Gilman (2011) suggests the two views remain linked. Moreover, in an emerging pluralistic and multicultural cultural context, the media would arguably come to play a much greater role encouraging dispute to strengthen bias towards the hegemonic (pre-stun) preferences and unpalatable (non-stun) alternatives unpinning the ‘*hegemonic food discourse*’ (Roslyng, 2011). It is to these issues and the ensuing debate over halal meat and *dhabiha* slaughter practice that I now turn.

The Muslim community in 20th century Bradford

As Bradford gained a reputation as a global leader for worsted wool during the industrial revolution, much like Manchester it attracted itinerant traders of German origin, some of whom were Jewish. Today, however, it is Little Pakistan rather than the city’s Little Germany that dominates the city’s public image (McLoughlin, 2014).

The presence of Muslims in the UK can be traced back at least three centuries to the activities of the East India Company, who recruited young men from the Indian subcontinent to work in the merchant navy. Muslim sailors known as *lascars* first started settling in greater numbers in port towns and cities such as London, Cardiff, Liverpool and Manchester during the mid-19th century (Ansari, 2009; McLoughlin, 2014). The first Muslims in Bradford were also seaman who jumped ship in the late 1930s to live a life of precarity as peddlers and doorknockers. During the Second World War, as labour shortages intensified, increasing numbers of Muslim seamen from Liverpool, Middleborough and Hull were directed to Leeds and Bradford to work in essential wartime industries (Lewis, 1994). The first arrivals lived in squalid conditions in multi occupancy houses, where those without work paid no rent. Under these conditions, religious food practice was difficult to maintain. While spices could be bought in local Jewish and eastern European shops, there was nowhere to buy halal meat. Early Pakistani settlers in Bradford thus often bought chicken and sheep from local farms, slaughtering them on the spot or at home later, a practice could be the source of tension with their English neighbours (McLoughlin, 2009). However, in the immediate post war period, despite campaigns by the Humane Slaughter Association and the RSPCA, successive UK Governments consistently opposed the abolition of *slaughter without stunning* (Charlton and Kaye, 1993). Although the

RSPCA mounted a low-key campaign that appealed to Muslims to recognise the desirability of pre-stun slaughter in 1961, campaigning remained muted overall.

Prior to the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962, citizens of Commonwealth countries could migrate to the UK unopposed. During the post-war period, migrants from Britain's former colonies thus helped to resolve labour shortages in the steel and textile industries, while Doctors were recruited to work in the National Health Service (Ansari, 2009). But as immigration increased, so too did anti-migration rhetoric. As the sitting Conservative Government started to look for ways to restrict commonwealth immigration during the early 1960s, media driven, anti-immigration rhetoric began to surface more regularly. Much as the right-wing press targeted poor Jewish migrants in late 19th century Manchester, so Pakistanis – who had arrived in Bradford to help drive economic development – were now accused by the right wing, Leeds based *Yorkshire Post* of spreading disease (McLoughlin, 2014). This stereotyping served to enhance wider negative perceptions of Muslims, and they were increasingly viewed, much like Jews in the 19th century, as *outsiders* by the established majority (Elias and Scotson, 2008).

Changing political and cultural dynamics

Until this point, Muslims from diverse cultural and religious background interacted with each other openly across the UK. But as the number of colonial migrants continued to increase, many anticipated stricter immigration controls, and they thus began to cluster along more distinct ethnic lines. Many saw themselves as settlers rather than temporary economic migrants and they began looking to tribal, kinship, ethnic and sectarian affiliations to secure their status and position in the UK (Ansari, 2009). In the coming period, mosques and religious schools took on greater significance and Muslims were reminded of their traditional values and practices more regularly. Muslim organisation increased significantly, and specific cultural norms and religious practices were more widely adhered to: *'What emerged at the end of the 1970s was a patchwork of communities, each impressing its particular national, ethnic, linguistic doctrinal character on the organisations it had created'* (Ansari, 2009: 343).

When the UK joined the European Economic Community in 1973 the consolidation of slaughter legislation across Europe was raised, but as with earlier UK policy making there was recognition of the need to respect the rights of minorities to practice religion. In the coming decades, the process of divide and rule arguably wrapped up in EU policy would, I contend, alongside growing public concern for animal welfare, split the UK Muslim community – much as the Jewish community had been split half a century earlier – thus directly contributing to growing social controversy over halal meat at the national level (Lever and Miele, 2012). We can trace these developments back to the early 1980s (Charlton and Kaye, 1993) when Muslims began to agitate for greater clarification of their rights as British citizens (Ansari, 2009). This was most evident in campaigns for better provision for Muslim education in schools, for example, which grew in intensity throughout the 1980s and 1990s. When Bradford Metropolitan District Council started providing halal meat for Muslim children in schools across the city in the early 1980s, widespread political debate emerged at the national level for the first time, significantly enhancing and reinforcing, in the process, greater consciousness and self-awareness amongst UK Muslims (Charlton and Kaye, 1985; Kaye, 1993).

This was also the start of a period of rapid demographic change within the national Muslim population. In 1951 there were around 10,000 Pakistanis resident in the UK, yet half a century later in 2011 this figure had reached 1.1 million, with increasing numbers residing in

'*racialized spaces*' in the central neighbourhoods of Bradford around Little Horton, Bradford Moor and Manningham (Philips, 2006). This clustering underscores many of the arguments made about the lack of Muslim integration in UK political discourse in recent decades, as well as the threat posed to British values by Muslim cultural practices (Poole, 2002). However, census data from 1981 and 1991 indicates that Bradford's growing Muslim middle class was also starting to move out of the inner city into other areas during this period, thus undermining the self-segregation argument to a large extent (Philips, 2006). This was a significant moment, for as the UK's Muslim population continued to expand and move out of inner-city areas in the coming decades, halal meat became more widely available. It was these developments, as we observe in more detail below, that began to drive media-driven cultural sensitivity towards Islam and the food practices of British Muslims more generally (Lever and Fischer, 2018).

The wider impact of the Honeyford Affair

The controversy over halal meat first came to the fore in 1984 when the headmaster of a Bradford school, Ray Honeyford, wrote an article on education and race for the right-wing journal *The Salisbury Review* (Honeyford, 1984). In the article, which was subsequently summarised in *The Yorkshire Post* (McLoughlin, 2014), Honeyford came out strongly against the development of British multiculturalism, anti-racist policies and their wider impact on education and society. Highlighting the provision of halal food in schools and extended holidays taken by migrant families overseas, Honeyford's attack on Bradford's education policy had far-reaching consequences. While a multi-ethnic alliance formed to have Honeyford removed from his post, the affair also reignited strong opposition to religious slaughter, bringing an alliance of radical animal rights and far-right groups together to unleash a high level of racist rhetoric and xenophobic discourse (Charlton and Kaye, 1985; Kaye, 1993; Lewis, 1994; Ansari, 2009). Throughout the 1980s, as Klug (1989) notes, the National Front and other associated groups raised the national flag for animals on a regular basis.

When the Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC, 1985) petitioned for the abolition of religious slaughter in 1985, Muslims mounted a concerted response at the national level through organisations such as the Muslim Council of Britain (Lewis, 1994; McLoughlin, 2014). As the fallout from the Honeyford Affair continued, a national body of halal butchers was put forward as a way of protecting Muslim interests (Charlton and Kaye, 1993), and with encouragement from the Muslim Parliament the Halal Food Authority (HFA) eventually emerged in 1994 (Ansari, 2009). The initial remit of the HFA was to oversee a network of approved slaughterhouses and shops that could provide the Muslim community with independently certified halal meat and poultry. They were the first UK halal certification body to grant licenses to businesses in line with inspections and audits that assessed compliance to Islamic principles in line with UK and EU regulation. Initially the HFA certified non-stunned meat as halal, but as they established themselves as the major halal certification body in the UK they began to accept pre-stunning, not least because this aligned them more closely with mainstream science and the animal welfare considerations emanating from EU policy discourses (Lever and Miele, 2012).

For almost a decade the HFA operated unchallenged. In 2003 however, the more orthodox Halal Monitoring Committee (HMC) emerged. Much like the emergence of strictly orthodox *kashrut* and *shechita* bodies a century earlier, the HMC emerged as a result of rapid social change and attempts to bolster Muslim identity in line with war in the Middle East and wider developments in global politics (Marranci, 2009; Vertigans, 2010; Lever and Miele, 2012). Until this point, most Muslims in the UK considered the meat sold in supermarkets and

restaurants to be slaughtered by people of ‘the Book’ (i.e. by Jews and Christians as well as by Muslims) and therefore to be suitable for Muslim consumption (Lever and Miele, 2012). From the outset however, the HMC made the processes behind the ‘*qualification*’ (Callon et al., 2002) of halal meat an explicit concern of a direct marketing strategy that attempted to establish non-stunned halal meat products as more trustworthy and ‘authentic’ halal than pre-stunned halal products certified by the HFA (Lever and Miele, 2012; Lever and Fischer, 2018).

This was the start of a period of strong competition between the HFA and the HMC, a period in which the HMC positioned themselves as the high street certifier of local butcher’s and restaurants as opposed to the established and increasingly mainstream HFA. Much like Machzikei Hadass in Manchester 50 years earlier, the HMC opposed what they saw as the encroachment of modern secular culture onto traditional religious food practices (Lever and Fischer 2018). From this point onwards, the HFA has been widely criticised for its support of mechanical slaughter practices, which are seen by the HMC to pose significant risks to the authenticity of halal meat (Lever and Miele, 2012).¹⁰

Market transparency, media hysteria and public understanding

In the decade to 2011, the UK Muslim population increased from 1.55 million to 2.71 million (ONS, 2015). Although 76% of UK Muslims still lived in the inner-city neighbourhoods of London, Birmingham, Manchester, Yorkshire and Humber, it was also clear that the movement out of the inner city into new areas had intensified. Muslim communities were also changing fast. There were less Muslims (4%) over the age of 65 than there in the rest of the population (16%) and many communities had a younger and increasingly educated population (MCB, 2015). Unsurprisingly, it was during this period that halal meat became more widely available in shops, restaurants and public institutions across many parts of the UK (Lever and Miele, 2012).

The UK supermarkets ASDA and Tesco first started selling halal meat from pre-stunned animals around the turn of the millennium, and from 2007 and 2010 they both started selling halal meat from non-stunned animals. In 2009, the HFA launched a halal trial at a small number of Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) restaurants in areas of London with a high Muslim population, which was subsequently extended in similar areas across the UK (Lever and Miele, 2012); supermarkets, burger bars, pizza and pasta chains, and discounting restaurants have since entered the halal market in increasing numbers. While the UK Government retracted their initial support for a FAWC (2003) report calling for a ban on slaughter without stunning in 2003, the last 15 years have also witnessed repeated and intensifying calls for a ban (Lever and Fischer, 2018).¹¹ Moreover, as halal food has become increasingly visible, right-wing media has started to report on its availability and provision in shops, restaurants and public institutions more frequently.

In the aftermath of the economic crisis in the late 2000s, as anti-immigration rhetoric began to intensify, halal food began to attract attention from the right-wing press on a regular basis alongside condemnation from the British National Party and English Defence League. In 2010-11, it was widely reported that ‘halal-only’ meat options were being provided by British Airways, Wembley Stadium, and the Whitbread hotel and restaurant chain, as well as in state primary schools and NHS hospitals (Brooke, 2010; Clarke, 2010; Fagge, 2011). The wider discursive understanding put forward revolved around the notion that all halal meat comes from non-stunned animals, thus directly contravening the UK public’s interest in animal welfare. As Fagge (2011) reported in *The Daily Mail*:

Halal meat is being routinely served at some of Britain's most popular sporting venues, pubs, schools and hospitals without the public's knowledge... All beef, chicken and lamb sold to fans at Wembley Stadium has been secretly prepared... And hundreds of pubs and restaurants in Britain, as well as top racecourses, schools and hospitals, now only serve chicken that has been ritually slaughtered according to Sharia Law (Fagge, 2011).

Although the figure has recently started to increase slightly – particularly for sheep and goats – evidence suggests that at no time during this period did the amount of non-stunned halal meat produced in the UK rise beyond 20% of the overall total (FSA, 2011; 2015).

At the same time, however, two observable trends in the meat industry began to influence public understanding. On the one hand, as the HMC built a close partnership with the branding agency National Halal to provide fresh halal meat from non-stunned animals in major supermarket chains, the visibility of halal meat from non-stunned animals increased significantly. On the other hand, as the availability and provision of halal meat increased more generally, halal meat from pre-stunned animals became increasingly invisible and harder to identify (Lever and Fischer, 2018).

When the HFA was formed in 1994, the production of halal meat and poultry (mostly chicken) was segregated from non-halal meat production in slaughter plants and processing facilities (Lever and Miele, 2012). As the market continued to expand this practice became more expensive and difficult to maintain, and both '*non-halal stunned meat*' and '*stunned halal meat*' was subsequently produced in an almost identical way at the same slaughter facilities and processing factories to reduce costs. As media driven sensitivities around halal meat continued to intensify in the coming years, supermarkets, restaurants and public institutions in turn became more discreet in obtaining and displaying the halal logos of their certification partners (Fazira, 2015). In many such instances, it appears that halal meat is not labelled as such, or the slaughter method is hidden from view, because of business fears that a hostile political climate, negative media reporting and growing public hostility may impact business reputation (Lever and Fischer, 2018). This lack of transparency in the UK meat industry has, aided by negative media and newspaper reporting, arguably undermined public understanding of halal meat and *dhabiha* slaughter practice considerably.



Figure 3: A National Halal Centre for fresh non-stunned halal meat in Tesco

Poole (2002) argues that negative public attitudes and media representations of UK Muslims can be traced back to the *halal meat controversy* in Bradford in the 1980s, which she contends had two important consequences. Not only did it help to politically mobilize UK Muslims, it also raised concerns that they were unable to integrate peacefully and that they were therefore a threat to national identity and British values; Muslims ‘*thus entered the frame*’, Poole argues, ‘*as the central radicalised Other*’ in British society (2002: 22). Until 2008, the increasing volume of Muslim related stories in the UK media largely focussed on terrorism, international threats and crises. From this point onwards, however, cultural and religious difference began to emerge alongside terrorism as a major focus of media reporting (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010). This was also a period, as Jaspal and Cinnirella (2010) confirm, in which the negative ‘*hypervisibility*’ of Muslims in media representations was arguably translated into dominant social representations.

From spatial concealment to social controversy

What was subsequently termed ‘*halal hysteria*’ came to a head in May 2014 (Allen, 2014; Sommers, 2014). During a heightened period of UK media reporting, restaurant chains such as Pizza Express and Subway were accused of sourcing halal ‘only’ chicken without informing their customers, the implication being that millions of UK citizens were eating halal meat without knowing it. At the same time, supermarkets such as Waitrose, Marks & Spencer, Tesco, and Morrisons were accused of selling halal meat imported from New Zealand without labelling it such. Although it was subsequently reported that all such meat came from pre-stunned animals, this did little to alleviate growing public anxiety; this situation was reflected in local press reports, with high street butchers in small UK towns reporting increased public anxiety about how their meat was produced (see *The Shropshire Star*, 2014). At the height of this media driven frenzy, Brummer (2014) argued in *The Jewish Chronicle* that the UK media is driven by an increasing ‘*fear of the alien*’, much as it had been a century earlier. Research suggests similarly that in a number of European countries, notably the UK, media generated political discourse links the availability of halal meat and methods of slaughter to wider concerns about migration and integration (Bradley et al., 2015).



Figure 4: Halal hysteria headlines from *The Daily Mail* and *The Sun*, May 2014

Exploratory research conducted on social media posts confirms the growing social controversy and lack of public understanding revolving around these issues. Drawing upon one illustrative example, we see how a female public-sector worker’s complex views on the provision and availability of halal meat in a sports centre facilitated a controversial online debate. Although

the women worked with Muslims on a regular basis, she questioned why a sports centre where she took her children at weekends only sold meat that was acceptable for Muslims:

I took my children to a sports centre today and they were only serving 'halal meat'. I work with Muslims every day and I don't mind what they eat when there is a choice. But only serving halal presents me with choice at all.

Some participants in the discussion came out in defence of the women, making similar statements:

For people like me it is really disconcerting to have religious norms and dogma pushed on me in a supermarket, I just don't like it. We're not a religious country, they're Muslims, so in your face with it, and it makes me feel uneasy.

Many others, however, accused the women of being a bigot and a racist, though some respondents also questioned this assertion: *'It's not racist to say that you don't like how a particular animal is killed'*. The assumption in this reply at least, it appears, is that the halal meat in question came from animals that had not been pre-stunned before slaughter. As we have seen already, this is a key issue in the wider controversy being discussed, for as the Muslim population has grown, and halal meat become more visible and hence controversial, so it has become more difficult to identify stunned halal meat.

Unsurprisingly the issue of stunning and the likelihood of the meat being from pre-stunned animals soon appeared in the thread: *'When 80% of halal meat in the UK is stunned before animals are slaughtered what is the point you trying to make?'* But there was more confusion, with some participants again asserting that all halal meat is produced in a way that contravenes animal welfare considerations: *'Halal meat was recently banned in Denmark, primarily because the way it's produced is barbaric and inhumane, and I agree.'* However, replies also focussed on animal cruelty and animal welfare within the meat industry more generally, and it was argued that by focusing specifically on halal meat production respondents were again expressing overtly racist sentiment; *'Criticising halal when animal welfare is poor in the meat industry overall is just wrong, isn't all meat production cruel and barbaric?'* What is clear from these brief insights is that public understanding about the production, provision and availability of halal meat in the UK is complex and ill informed.

Maintaining the boundaries of the permissible?

It is extremely difficult to assess the direct role of the media instrumentalizing animal welfare and halal for political purposes. Nevertheless, Allen (2010) argues that the media plays a fundamental role formulating popular views of Muslims, and that its role in the rise of Islamophobia cannot be easily dismissed. Discrimination against Muslims, in this sense, he argues, is based on a political programme or ideology that generates a set of opinions, attitudes, prejudices and exclusionary practices amongst individuals, groups, and society across different economic spheres.

As we have seen, during the late 19th century, concern over *shechita* was furthered in cities such as Manchester by the RSPCA and their right-wing, anti-alien supporters (Wise, 2006). While the increasing presence of Jewish immigrants meant that these concerns occasionally breached the confines of 'sacred' community spaces where the Jewish population had clustered (Shilhav 1989; Philips, 2006), controversy over *shechita* was, I have argued, largely confined

within the spatial boundaries of Jewish communities over the coming century. Today, however, the UK Muslim population is much larger than the 19th century Jewish population, while the media is perhaps more intrusive and controversial than at any time previously. Controversy, as Warde (2016: 153) confirms, is a central *feature of twenty-first century media culture*, a culture through which, I have argued, bias is cultivated towards hegemonic food preferences and the suppression of unpalatable alternatives to maintain the civilized values underpinning the hegemonic food discourse.

The social controversy engendered has emerged at a time of great social and political change, with negative representations of Muslims emerging in a similar way to negative representations of Jews in the late 19th century; it is clear that Jews and Muslims thus share a common history of persecution and discrimination (Renton and Gidley, 2017). The Muslim population in the UK has grown rapidly in this period, expanding demographically out of *'racialized'*, inner city community spaces (Philips 2006). In this context, social controversy about the production and availability of halal meat in supermarkets, restaurants and public institutions has thus become much more widespread at the national level than concerns about *shechita* and kosher meat in the 19th century. Public understanding of halal has been greatly influenced during this period, I conclude, by contradictory media driven discourses that fuse animal welfare considerations with the food practices of *outsiders* to maintain the boundaries of the permissible in line with a new and expanding geography of religious food practice.

Conclusion

Throughout his work on the European civilizing processes, Elias reminds us not only of long-term debates and understandings about what it means to be civilized, but also about the deep seated and largely unconscious fears about what it means to be uncivilized. As the frontiers of repugnance expanded from the early modern period onwards in line with the growth of experiences that provoked physical and moral disgust, Elias demonstrates how human activities that offend *'civilized sensibilities'* have been slowly hidden from view through a wider process of quarantine and concealment. My argument is that the food practices of *outsiders* have occasionally breached the boundaries of this confinement over the last 150 years to bring long held fears about the slaughter of animals for food into the open. The growth of the halal meat market in particular has thus brought about, I contend, a partial dislocation of the *hegemonic food discourse* to open up a space within which animal slaughter is now debated more openly than at any time during the last two centuries.

In this context, critical debate about non-stun slaughter has attempted to maintain the boundaries of the permissible in food production by focusing on the threats posed to *established* values by the increasing presence of *outsiders*. The media has arguably played a central role in the *halal meat controversy* in this sense by instrumentalizing animal welfare and halal meat for political purposes. This has been problematic for all members of society, irrespective of religious belief. At the height of *halal hysteria* in 2014, Muslim, Christian, and Jewish leaders all called for better labelling of non-stunned meat to enhance public understanding, yet the UK Government rejected the appeal, arguing that this was a matter for retailers, customers and faith groups.

As it stands, there is a distinct lack of regulation in the UK meat industry, with the production of both 'pre-' and 'non-stunned' halal meat only being regulated at the time of slaughter, thus maintaining, and arguably enhancing, the role of the media as an 'independent' and 'critical' watch dog in UK food politics. This is not to deny the importance of growing public concern

for animal welfare in relation to animal, human and environmental health, or the impact of right-wing, media discourses on Jewish and Muslim communities. Indeed, as we have witnessed throughout this paper, in the current phase of the civilizing process, the production, sale and marketing of halal meat is hidden from view by the meat industry and questioned by the mass media simultaneously, thus raising new questions about what it means to be civilized in the early 21st century.

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End notes

¹ Stunning is the process by which animals are rendered unconscious or immobile prior to slaughter during meat production; the methods used and accepted vary by species, geography and religion.

² There is no overall scientific consensus about what constitutes the most 'humane' way of slaughtering animals; as well as being scientific, the issue is also ethical and subject to interpretation (Bergeaud-Blackler, 2007).

³ Pre-stunning for poultry became mandatory as a result of The Slaughter of Poultry Act 1967.

⁴ A *shochet* is a qualified Jewish slaughterer: plural *shochetim*

⁵ Found in many Jewish communities, a 'Beth Din' is a rabbinical court of law that oversees *kashrut* and *shechita* services.

⁶ Originally founded in the 1820s as the Society for The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the RSPCA (The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) is a UK based charity that promotes animal welfare.

⁷ Kashrus/ kashrut: Jewish dietary laws.

⁸ Manchester has the largest Jewish community outside London and the fastest growing in Europe with a population of 30-40,000 (Wise 2009; Glancy 2015).

⁹ 'MH Meats' is a licensee of Machzikei Hadass Manchester Kashrut Board, which remains at the centre of strict orthodox food provision in the spatially bounded northern community.

¹⁰ The HMC argues that stunning animals before slaughter risks death, thus increasing the chances of the meat in question being *haram* (forbidden): see: <https://halalhmc.org/resources/issues-of-mechanical-slaughter-and-stunning/> (consulted on 5th June 2018).

¹¹ Shechita UK (www.shechitauk.org), set up to represent the views of all UK *kashrut* and *shechita* authorities in 2003, now works closely with Muslim organizations.