forensic sciences

MDPI

Review

Has the Lack of a Unified Halal Standard Led to a Rise in Organised Crime in the Halal Certification Sector?

Ali Abdallah

Independent Scientist, Via Principe Amedeo 86, 70121 Bari, Italy; ali8.abdallah@gmail.com

Abstract: In recent years, halal certification has become an area of significant interest due to the high level of Muslim awareness about halal products, with the development of halal hubs and investments in Muslim countries. Unfortunately, the halal market is negatively affected by various factors, like the multiplicity of halal standards, disagreements between halal certification bodies and halal accreditation bodies, an increase in halal food crime in some countries, weakness of the authorities in ensuring the integrity of halal certification, and involvement with politics and religion, which have caused some anxiety among Muslim consumers. Therefore, the aim of this work is to inform lawmakers and animal welfare organisations in the EU regarding halal food. It shows data from literature regarding animal welfare in the EU and Islam, provides a critical consideration on the aim of a religious diet and its correlation with public health and food safety, and describes the state of the art of halal accreditation bodies (HAB) and halal certification bodies (HCB), in addition to providing information about gaps in the halal market, and a description of the unethical behaviour of some HCBs. The integrity of these bodies is necessary to make halal standards more comprehensive and efficient, and this can be achieved through the activation of a harmonised monitoring system for halal accreditation bodies in Muslim countries and national EU accreditation bodies.

Keywords: halal standards; forensic science; halal certification; religious ethics; organised crime; mafia; political Islam; food fraud: food policy

Citation: Abdallah, A. Has the Lack of a Unified Halal Standard Led to a Rise in Organised Crime in the Halal Certification Sector?. *Forensic. Sci.* **2021**, *1*, 181–193. https://doi.org/10.3390/forensicsci1030016

Academic Editor: Marcello Locatelli

Received: 14 August 2021
Accepted: 10 November 2021
Published: 13 November 2021

1. Introduction

Halal in Arabic means that which is lawful, permissible, approved, and legal; the opposite of halal is *haram*, which means prohibited or forbidden, as defined in different verses of the Holy Quran:

> "*O mankind, eat from whatever is on earth [that is] lawful and good and do not follow the footsteps of Satan. Indeed, he is to you a clear enemy.*" (Quran 2:168)

> "*O you who have believed, eat from the good things which We have provided for you and be grateful to Allah if it is [indeed] Him that you worship.*" (Quran 2: 172)

> "*He has only forbidden to you dead animals, blood, the flesh of swine, and that which has been dedicated to other than Allah. But whoever is forced [by necessity], neither desiring [it] nor transgressing [its limit], there is no sin upon him. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.*" (Quran 2: 173)

In the past, the term halal, when used in a food context, always referred to meat. However, from the 1990s the term has been used much more widely, and now extends to include other food categories and other sectors, such as cosmetics, medicines, financial products, and even tourism, as reported by the State of the Global Islamic Economy [1].

Muslims who follow Islamic dietary requirements should not eat pork or drink alcohol, and religious food certification has attracted the interest of many social scientists [2–4] and anthropologists [5] due to the increase in the demands of worldwide consumers. However, there are contradictions between different halal certifiers.

Factors that have complicated and delayed the integration of halal certification in EU and in national legislation in European countries include the rise of Islamophobia, and fraudulent behaviour by some halal certifiers, in addition to the rapid growth of Muslim communities in Europe, the absence of stable and widely representative organisational structures, the large number of Muslims (much higher than any other non-Christian religion), and the multiplicity of halal standards [6]. However, the legal systems of the EU countries actually contain all the instruments required to resolve most of these problems.

Therefore, the first section of this paper contains a short introduction, and the second section provides data from literature regarding lawmakers and animal welfare in the EU in relation to halal food and animal welfare in Islam (Quran and Sunnah). The third section explores the purpose of a religious diet, and the fourth section presents the state of the art of halal accreditation bodies (HABs) and halal certification bodies (HCBs). The fifth section discusses the gaps in the halal market and the unethical behaviour of some HCBs, together with the latest updates on the halal market in Italy, and the sixth section contains the author's conclusions.

2. Lawmakers, Islam, and Animal Welfare

2.1. European Lawmakers and Animal Welfare

Jewish communities performed dietary and slaughtering rituals for centuries in Europe long before followers of Islam. The first recorded conflict with State authorities over food and slaughtering rituals dates to 1893, when Switzerland banned Jewish ritual slaughtering. By the 1930s, this ban was extended to other European countries, but it was again allowed soon after the Second World War [7]. Increased importance was given to animal welfare in Europe in 1974, with European Council Directive 74/577/EEC [8] setting out the first measures for animal protection at the time of slaughtering or killing. Many improvements were made to these measures by Directive 88/306/EEC [9], and the framework was completed in 1993 by Directive 93/119/EC [10].

The first measure introduced in 1974 was to ensure that animal death be as rapid as possible after stunning in order to avoid all cruelty to animals. Stunning renders animals unconscious, and this should last until they are slaughtered; hence, all or any unnecessary suffering is avoided. The Directive also established that the equipment used should be suitable for the animal species concerned and should be operated effectively by a qualified person, and that animal restraint is necessary and must be performed immediately before stunning. The same Directive had no effect on national provisions for the slaughtering methods required by religious groups. EC Directive 93/119 [10] addressed in detail all aspects of animal protection during stunning, movement, and restraint. The religious authorities in Member States for whom ritual slaughter was performed were declared competent for the application and monitoring of the special provisions under the responsibility of an official veterinarian; animals slaughtered according to religious rites were exempted from the regulation requiring stunning.

EC Directive 93/119 regulating the protection of animals at the time of slaughtering [10] or killing was replaced in 2012 by Council Regulation (EC) 1099/2009 [11]. This contains some modifications regarding animal slaughter without prior stunning, where such methods are prescribed by religious beliefs (parag. 18) and take place in a slaughterhouse, stating that Member States may choose not to apply this derogation. A list of stunning methods was added, together with a detailed description of the technical specifications related to stunning tools. Some countries prohibit any ritual slaughtering without stunning, such as Luxembourg, Sweden, and some non-EU countries, but most EU countries do allow this [12–15].

Conflict regarding the halal diet started in 1990, when France attempted to satisfy some Muslim demands for halal slaughtering in temporary structures outside the slaughterhouses during *Eid al Kebir*, but breaches of this rule were reported and the EU Veterinary Office issued a warning to France [15].

The growth of the Muslim population during the same period played an important role in increasing the level of tension, due to the presence of different ethnic and cultural groups, differences in Islamic doctrines, and the lack of unified leadership. All these aspects meant that little attention was paid to the control measures of each EU government regarding ritual slaughtering. In 1995, the German Federal Administrative Court (*Bundesverwaltungsgericht*, 3 C 31/93) prohibited the consumption of meat from animals slaughtered according to Islamic practice, i.e., without prior stunning. Therefore, Muslims could not benefit from the derogations of EC Directive 93/119 (1993). In 2002, however, the German Federal Constitutional Court (*Bundesverfassungsgericht*, 1 BvR 1783/99) reversed the previous judgment of the Federal Administrative Court [7]. It ruled that the slaughtering of animals with prior stunning is not an essential requirement for all Islamic religious authorities [16], and in view of the differing religious opinions within Islam itself, the Court deemed that it was not competent to venture into this debate, given the principle of its neutrality in religious matters [7,17].

In 1997, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) produced General Guidelines for Use of the Term Halal. This was the first time that such influential global organisations had ever defined halal food in a wider sense than halal meat [18]; without this wider definition, ignorance of some prohibited food items in the halal diet can create problems for public canteens and catering facilities (e.g., in schools, hospitals, prisons, the armed forces, etc.). To date in the EU, no particular regulations have been enforced regarding halal food in general.

2.2. Animal Welfare in the Holy Quran

According to the Quran, animals were created for many purposes and not only for human food purposes. They are creatures like humans, and share many things with humans; they have feelings and the right to live and to be protected from suffering and pain. Not only does God mention animals in many verses of the Holy Quran, but some chapter names are also animal names, such as *Bees*, *Ants*, *Elephant*, and *Livestock.* Moreover, the Quran states that animals worship and pray to God as do humans, but that humans cannot understand their prayers. To show humans the importance of animals in human life, certain of God's teachings contain examples of humans learning from animals. For example, in the story of the son of Adam in Quran 05.31, God sends a raven to show him how to cover the body of his dead brother. Although humans have great intellectual capacities and intelligence, they can often learn a great deal from animals.

Animal Welfare in Traditions about the Prophet (Sunnah)

Many teachings of Prophet Mohammed (*pbuh*) regard the welfare of wild or domesticated animals and how Muslims should treat them, and these are mentioned in the Hadith and Sunna. For example:

> *"The Prophet passed by a man who was dragging a sheep by its ear. He said: "Leave its ear alone and hold it by the sides of its neck."*
>
> *Sunan Ibn Majah*
>
> *"The Prophet forbade (animals to be beaten) on the face or branded on the face. "*
>
> *Sahih Muslim*
>
> *"It is reported that it is disliked animals being made to fight each other."*
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari*
>
> *"The Prophet forbade killing any animal when it is tied up (for use as a target)."*
>
> *Sunan Ibn Majah*

2.3. Regarding Animal Treatment during Slaughtering

Prophet Muhammed set out the basic principles and practices to observe during animal slaughtering, also to avoid inflicting unnecessary pain on animals, as reported in Table 1. The following *hadith* states the slaughtering procedure:

> *The Prophet said: "Allah has decreed that everything should be done in a good way, so when you kill, use a good method."*
>
> *Sunan Abi Dawud*
>
> *"Another hadith in which the Messenger of Allah forbade the devil's sacrifice (cruel slaughter). This refers to the slaughtered animal whose skin is cut off, and is then left to die without its jugular veins being severed."*
>
> *Sunan Abi Dawud*

Table 1. Animal protection during slaughter.

Protection of Animals at the Time of Slaughter in Islam from 610 CE	Protection of Animals at the Time of Slaughter in Directive 93/119/EC
1. An animal must not be slaughtered in front of another animal [19].	1. Animals must be unloaded as soon as possible after arrival. If delay is unavoidable they must be protected from extremes of weather and provided with adequate ventilation.
2. The knife must not be sharpened in front of the animal to be slaughtered [19].	2. Animals must be protected from adverse weather conditions. If they have been subjected to high temperatures in humid weather they must be cooled by appropriate means.
3. When animals have travelled long distances, they shall be given a rest before slaughtering [19].	3. For animals that have been stunned, blood-letting must be started as soon as possible after stunning and be carried out in such a way as to bring about rapid, profuse, and complete blood-letting. In any event, the blood-letting must be carried out before the animal regains consciousness.
4. Slaughtering shall be done by the right hand and cutting shall be done quickly [19].	4. Animals must be restrained in an appropriate manner in such a way as to spare them any avoidable pain, suffering, agitation, injury, or contusions.
5. It is prohibited to disfigure animals [19].	5. Animals' legs must not be tied, and animals must not be suspended before stunning or killing. However, poultry and rabbits may be suspended for slaughter provided that appropriate measures are taken to ensure that, on the point of being stunned, they are in a sufficiently relaxed state for stunning to be carried out effectively and without undue delay.
6. Provide drinking water to animals before slaughtering [19].	6. Animals that are not taken directly upon arrival to the place of slaughter must have drinking water available to them from appropriate facilities at all times.
7. The slaughtered animal shall be treated mercifully. It must not be tortured or slaughtered improperly and the slaughtering tool must not be moved in many directions [19].	7. Animals that are kept for 12 h or more at a slaughterhouse must be lairaged and, where appropriate, tethered in such a way that they can lie down without difficulty. Where animals are not tethered, food must be provided in a way that will permit the animals to feed undisturbed.

2.4. Regarding Punishment and Reward for Dealing with Animals

Prophet Muhammed also warned Muslims about certain behaviour with animals and promised them rewards for kind treatment of animals:

> *"A person was suffering from intense thirst while on a journey, when he found a well. He climbed down into it and drank (water), and then came out and saw a dog with its tongue hanging out due to thirst and eating the moistened earth. The person said: "This dog has suffered from thirst as I suffered from it." He climbed down into the well, filled his shoe with water, then held it in his mouth until he climbed up and made the dog drink it. So Allah appreciated this act of his and pardoned him. Then (the companions around*

him) said: "Allah's Messenger, is there a reward for us even for (serving) such animals?" He said: "Yes, there is a reward for service to every living animal."

Sahih Muslam

"The Prophet said: "A woman entered the (Hell) Fire because of a cat which she had tied, neither giving it food nor setting it free to eat from the vermin of the earth."

Sahih al-Bukhari

"The Prophet said: "It is a great sin for man to imprison those animals which are in his power."

Sahih Muslim

2.5. About Cutting a Body Part from a Live Animal

"The Prophet said: "Cursed is the one who did muthla to an animal (i e. cut its limbs or some other part of its body while still alive)."

Sahih al-Bukhari

"The Prophet said: "Whatever is cut from an animal when it is still alive, what is cut from it is maitah (dead meat)."

Sunan Ibn Majah

Islamic teaching clearly provided protection for wild and domesticated animals and during slaughter in 610 CE, and there are also European laws introduced in more recent years, as reported in Table 1.

3. Halal Food from a Religious Perspective

It is unacceptable that any beneficiary halal or kosher certification body should promote halal food or any other religious diet by claiming that it has certain benefits for human health. In reality, a food item or category classified as halal or kosher can actually trigger chronic disease; for example, overconsumption of sugar can lead to obesity and diabetes [20].

Some people will question the existence of certain animals if they are prohibited according to their religion. However, these animals play certain roles in the ecosystem, some of which are understood, whereas others have not yet been explained. For example, many people are repelled by insects, but 90% of insects are pollinators that assist in the production of fruit and vegetable crops. In addition, insects are now increasingly seen as an alternative source of food protein to animal meat, since insect production uses less water than the vast and unsustainable quantities consumed by conventional livestock [21]. Microorganisms are another example, since some can be used in bio-control against other pests, such as economically damaging insects, and some toxins produced by microorganisms are already used as insecticides [22].

One purpose of religious dietary rules is to ensure safety through the elimination or reduction of any hazard or risk, as is already the aim of the food Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP) used as a standard procedure worldwide. This means that religious dietary precepts and HACCP have the same goals in terms of food hygiene, because HACCP defines each possible microbiological, chemical, or physical risk in order to eliminate or reduce it and thus ensure consumer safety. In the surat known as Al-Maeda (The Table), God explains to the faithful everything about their daily food and diet, such as species that are allowed and not allowed as food, animal conditions, and hunting animals, and it is quite clear that these verses are aimed at preserving human life via food and medication/public health: Allah said:

"Forbidden to you (as food) are: Al-Maitah (dead animals), blood, the flesh of swine, and that on which Allah's Name has not been mentioned while slaughtering, (that which has been slaughtered as a sacrifice for others than Allah, or has been slaughtered for idols), and the strangled, and the (Mawqouza) dead through beating, and the dead through falling

from a height, and that which has been killed by (the goring of) horns, and devoured by wild beasts, unless you are able to slaughter" (05.03).

4. Halal Certification Bodies (HCBs)

A halal certification body (HCB) is an authority that issues a halal certificate after an audit has been conducted to assess and verify that a product meets the required halal standards. There are many HCBs worldwide and even within the same country, and this causes great confusion for exporters and/manufacturers as to how the halal quality system should operate [23].

Most HCBs are connected with religious associations, although some are independent, but the most important ones are accredited by an international halal accreditation body (HAB) like the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) [24], the Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) [25]), or the Malaysian Department of Islamic Development (JAKIM) [26], and the importance of obtaining accreditation is that the HCB is then considered to be trustworthy. The lack of a government monitoring body, especially in non-Muslim countries like the EU Member States, means that literally anyone can create an HCB, even a person without sufficient technical expertise regarding food, as reported in a research work [27] referring to a halal training course held by an HCB in Italy. Hence, many HCBs share the halal market, and there are many doubts regarding their ownership and practices, and even the authenticity of the items they certify as halal. This situation reflects the urgent need for specific EU legislation to defend and regulate the halal market. One of the best halal market models for consideration could be the British system, where the Food Standards Agency (FSA), an independent government agency, is advised by the Muslim Organisations Working Group regarding halal practices and policies. Muslim slaughterers are licenced by the FSA, and not by independent halal authentication and certification bodies [28].

Halal Accreditation Bodies (HABs)

To date, not all halal certifications are recognised by all Islamic countries around the world, and this depends on whether the HCB is recognised or not by the importing country. Recognition is obtained through an accreditation process carried out by the national HAB in the specific importing state. This is due to the lack of a unified worldwide halal standard similar to other food certification schemes, such as organic or GLOBALG.A.P., and this in turn is due to the existence of many different Islamic doctrines that vary from one country to another. The national HAB grants its accreditation to an HCB according to certain criteria, but the only fixed criteria common to all countries is a halal standard that is set by each single country. Therefore, each country has its own halal standard, and these countries work together through mutual recognition between HABs, and consequently HCBs also work in the same way. The best-known HABs are the Malaysian Department of Islamic Development (JAKIM) [26], the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Accreditation Center [24,29], and the Indonesian Ulama Council, also known as Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI) [25]. This situation generates confusion for producers who need to obtain a halal certificate in order to export their products to Islamic countries. Instead of attempting to obtain one halal certificate that is valid in all Islamic countries, producers must first select an HCB that is recognised in the largest Islamic countries. Secondly, they must also inform the HCB about the Islamic countries to which they aim to export their certified products; each HCB will issue different halal certificates, depending on the destination of the product, because halal standard requirements differ between countries. This lack of standardisation between different countries can lead to unethical benefits for some HCBs, because each certificate has a different price.

Some HABs do not perform accreditation outside their home country for more than one foreign HCB in the same country due to monitoring difficulties, and other reasons that may be insufficiently clear. This policy gives the HCB a monopoly over its competitors, which impacts on the fairness of market competition and on halal producers. It increases the cost of halal certification, thus driving halal producers to increase the price of their

halal products, which impacts the final link in the chain—the Muslim consumer. It seems that this aspect of the halal accreditation process has not yet attracted the attention of HABs, although the application of other international food standards has had a positive impact on trade between countries [30], and the consequent protection of consumers, the environment, and public health brings economic advantages and market competition.

The international halal standard involving the greatest number of Muslim countries is OIC/SMIIC 1:2011, containing the General Guidelines on Halal Food. The Standards and Metrology Institute for the Islamic Countries (SMIIC) is a regional standardisation organisation, whereas the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has 57 member countries (with a total population of 1.6 billion) spread over four continents, and is the second largest inter-governmental organisation after the United Nations. The General Guidelines aim to achieve uniformity in metrology, harmonizing standards and laboratory testing, and establishing accreditation schemes for the purpose of expediting the exchange of materials, manufactured goods, and products in the Muslim world under the umbrella of the OIC. However, the Guidelines are not intended for countries that have already adopted a halal food standard. In May 2011, this standard defined the basic requirements at any stage of the food chain, such as receiving, preparation, labelling, processing, packaging control, transport, distribution, storage, and service of halal food and its products based on Islamic rules [31].

Another attempt to harmonise the halal market was made by the World Halal Food Council (WHFC) [32], founded in 1999 to regulate the halal standard in the slaughtering, food processing, and flavour industries (WHFC).

The most recent attempt to achieve standardisation was made by the International Halal Accreditation Forum (IHAF) [33], a non-governmental independent network of accreditation bodies working to harmonise accreditation practices in the halal sector worldwide and construct a solid foundation for the global industry. The IHAF was established by 10 constituent members, who met in Dubai (UAE) on 4 May 2016:

American Association for Laboratory Accreditation (A2LA)
International Emirates Accreditation Center (EIAC)
National Council for Accreditation Egypt (EGAC).
Entidad Nacional de Acreditación—Spain (ENAC)
Emirates National Accreditation System (ENAS)
GCC Accreditation Center (GAC)
Joint Accreditation System of Australia and New Zealand (JAS-ANZ),
Pakistan National Accreditation Council (PNAC)
Saudi Accreditation Committee (SAC)
United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS)

The IHAF now involves over 27 international accreditation bodies operating in the OIC member countries, and accreditation bodies operating in non-Islamic countries. They work together in accordance with the framework established by the Forum to ensure homogeneous application of the requirements and criteria for accreditation and assessment of halal conformity, and in accordance with unified mechanisms that ensure the efficiency of those bodies and the accredited HCBs (International Halal Accreditation Forum) [33]. One useful system of HCB recognition by a non-Muslim government is the Australian system, which has an approved arrangement with the Department of Agriculture, Water, and the Environment for the certification of red halal meat and red meat products for export (List of Recognised Islamic Bodies for Halal Certification of Red Meat—Department of Agriculture) [34].

5. The Dark Side of Halal Certification

Many HCBs benefit from the incapacity of the HABs to monitor them. Therefore, they do not respect the ethical code of certification and carry out consultancy for their certified client, or they may have a partnership with consulting companies that bring them clients interested in obtaining certification. They may also certify products that do not

need to be certified as halal, such as gas cookers or nappies, which cannot be consumed by Muslims as food products, thus taking advantage of non-Muslim producers in Western countries who wish to begin exporting their products to Muslim countries but have little awareness of what halal actually means. For example, another product that does not require halal certification is olive oil [6]; not only is it a vegetable oil, but one of its unique quality characteristics is that it should not include any preservatives or processing aids. This means that there is no risk of its being *haram*; nevertheless, it is still certified as halal on the Italian market. This is constitutes ethical/moral (and not legal) fraud through false representation, because the certifier uses the credibility of accreditation to encourage its clients to believe that they are certifying products that require halal certification. This is another aspect of the lack of transparency among some halal food certifiers; this can arouse the hostility of lawmakers and politicians to halal industries, and can impact the recognition of halal standards by Western countries. For example, European far-right groups called for a boycott of a famous chocolate brand after learning that it was halal certified, with some extremists pointing to chocolate as an example of how Islam has infiltrated Europe [35]. In another example from Australia in 2018, a senator described halal certifiers as cockroaches [36].

According to Clause 4.2 of ISO/IEC 17065:2012, the certification body and any part of the same legal entity that is accredited by an International Accreditation Body shall not provide consultancy, quality system consultancy, or any management system consultancy. In contrast, some HCBs carry out consultancy and training activities [37]. These multiple roles give rise to conflicts of interest and compromise the impartiality of HCBs.

Some HCBs practise political Islam or other political activities in EU countries, such as the creation of chains of mosques and prayer rooms, sponsoring local media who help them to market their activity and increase their visibility. This increases their credibility with customers, and supporting policymakers gives them access to benefits from public funds. The dishonest tactics (Figure 1) used by some HCBs to expand their business has raised concerns that this could be a new basis for Mafia-type organised crime, similar to the Sicilian mafia's complex relationship with the Church and religion in Italy [38].

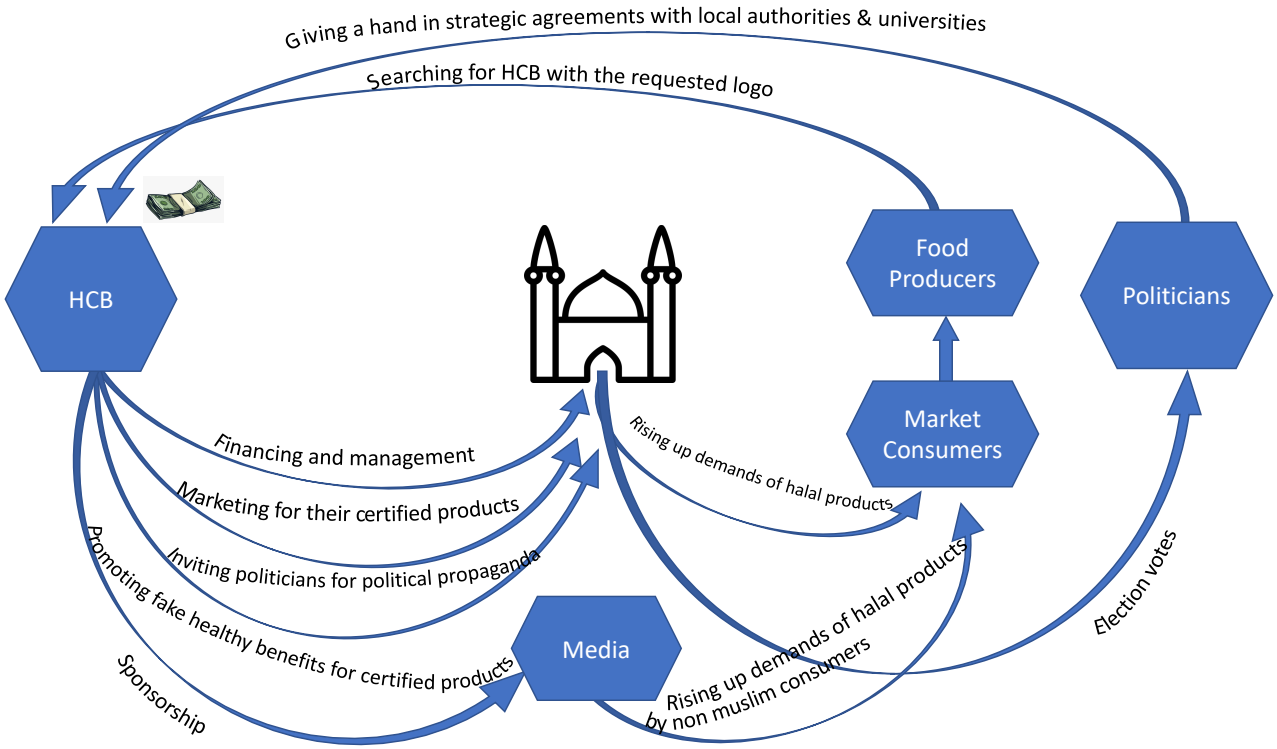

Figure 1. Diagram of dishonest tactics used by some HCBs.

This phenomenon requires further studies by anthropologists, sociologists, and criminologists, and especially by Islamic theologians, since the role of religious authorities can be very important in preventing this kind of crime; for example, Pope Francis took an extremely firm stance when he excommunicated all *mafiosi* from the Roman Catholic Church in 2014 [38].

Unfortunately, the authorities whose task is to contrast dishonest HCB activity are often too weak. For example, Malaysian authorities seized 1500 tons of imported meat with fake halal labelling in 2020, but this criminal activity had been taking place in Malaysia for many years [39]. The competent authority in Malaysia for monitoring and approval of foreign HCBs is the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), which Malaysians criticised in the aftermath of the fake halal scandal, especially since in the year before this JAKIM had barred halal-certified businesses from displaying cakes with "Merry Christmas" greetings on them [40]. JAKIM has often found itself at the centre of controversies regarding the certification process, which suggests that the halal certification chain in Malaysia requires improvements.

Many researchers have described common HCB practices that are probably profit-driven and that put the halal market at risk:

(a) Many HCBs do not meet governmental halal standards or even the food safety standard ISO 22000 [28] (p. 243–246).
(b) Some HCBs do not have an internal halal system or guidelines for halal requirements [28] (p. 243–246).
(c) Some HCBs do not work according to halal procedures [28] (p. 243–246).
(d) Some HCBs have agreed to follow a set of halal processes or standards, but in practice may often do not follow them [28] (p. 243–246).
(e) Many HCBs do not possess the professional skills of halal requirements; hence, many have been disqualified on religious grounds from carrying out the duties [28] (p. 243–246).
(f) Most HCBs do not disclose information about their procedures in order to avoid criticism from competing HCBs [28] (p. 243–246).
(g) Many HCBs do not employ professional figures with the various competences relevant to food and halal standards (personal communication, Ali Abdallah 2018).
(h) Some HCBs approve meat as halal without an on-site halal audit/supervision of the meat [28] (p. 243–246).
(i) An HAB can demand high fees from an HCB in order to grant halal accreditation, and this can affect the credibility of accredited HCBs, which may need to bribe the halal accreditor to obtain a place in the halal market [28] (p. 243–246).
(j) Sometimes a halal auditor has more than one role inside the HCB, in quality control or on the technical committee, as well as in the certification committee, meaning that the auditor's impartiality cannot be guaranteed (personal communication, Ali Abdallah 2018).
(k) Members of the certification committee are owners, relatives of owners, or even spouses of HCB members, meaning that their impartiality cannot be guaranteed (personal communication, Ali Abdallah 2018).
(l) Some HCBs manage Islamic associations or mosques, due to a requirement by the international HAB that the HCBs should be committed contributors to Muslim communities in their countries. This is connected to the principle of responsibility and *dakwah*, i.e., contribution, to mosques, schools, and other forms of Islamic development [37] (p. 6); this encourages those interested in obtaining accreditation to exploit a Muslim community or mosque in their own region.
(m) Halal certifiers in Italy claim that halal certification is above all a religious certification, behaving as if it were the best-made in the world and using marketing and standardising narratives to position themselves as authorities on local foodways [27].

The Halal Market in Italy

In recent decades, large numbers of immigrants from different religious, social, and cultural backgrounds have arrived in Italy, many of whom are Muslim. However, Italy lacks a legal framework regarding halal certification, and given that there is no single religious authority universally recognised by all Muslim communities, there is no unified halal standard either. Therefore, each religious authority may give each Muslim community different instructions, based on what amounts to a personal interpretation of Islamic law and personal opinion. Some have taken advantage of this situation to start working on halal certification, and a "Made in Italy" label adds to the prestige value of a certified halal product. This has complicated the current halal market by creating more confusion among food producers and consumers, and researchers [5,27,39] studying this market have revealed a number of frauds by halal certifiers, which have featured in Italian newspapers and TV programmes in 2018 and 2021 [41,42].

On 20 October 2015 at the UAE Pavilion of the Milan Expo, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Italian accreditation body (Accredia) and the UAE Authority for Standardisation and Metrology (ESMA), providing for the accreditation of bodies to certify Italian products in compliance with Islamic rules with the recognition of the UAE authorities [43]. This means that Italian products with halal certifications of compliance to UAE halal standard 2055-2 and issued by certification bodies with Accredia accreditation can be more easily exported to the UAE, and to Muslim countries or to Western countries with Muslim communities. Accredia has also made a specific agreement with the GAC Accreditation Center (GAC, a body established by the Arab Gulf countries). In 2014, trade between Italy and the UAE was worth EUR 5.9 billion, with exports worth EUR 5.3 billion and imports equal to EUR 628 million; the trade balance was clearly favourable for Italy, with a positive balance of EUR 4.7 billion [44].

Up until 2020, Accredia received no requests from any certification body to obtain halal accreditation/registration. However, there were already three HCBs in Italy with halal registration in the UAE—two from the GAC and one from the Emirate International Accreditation Center (EIAC) [45]—without passing via Accredia, which raises doubts about the choices to obtain accreditation from outside Italy for these HCBs.

Several halal certification organisations operate in Italy, but Italian government regulation applies only to providers that certify meat for export. Although much of this meat may end up on the domestic market [46], with each working according to their own procedures, the halal market in Italy suffers from a lack of transparency. This is especially the case in regard to certification fees, as there are no fixed fees for a certain food category or number of certified products, unlike other food certification schemes, for example, GLOBALG.A.P. or organic, whose certification fees are fixed and publicly accessible on the website of the certifying body.

The Italian halal market also suffers from disorganisation, in addition to a general lack of transparency and competences. For example, some founders of HCBs conduct halal audits on site by themselves, which violates the impartiality prerequisite in ISO/IEC 17065:2012, and each certification body interprets regulations in their own way [27]. Another negative aspect of the halal market in Western countries surfaced in Italy in 2016, when the president of an HCB called Halal International Authority (HIA) and Imam of Bari, Sharif Lorenzini, promoted halal food in the media and in public, claiming that *"Halal food prevents some widespread clinical diseases such as cholesterol"* [47,48], although this is untrue and in contrast with the Codex CAC/GL 24-1997 General Guidelines: *"claims on halal should not be used in ways which could give rise to doubt about the safety of similar food or claims that halal foods are nutritionally superior to, or healthier than, other foods."* This affects the credibility of the certification, and a halal certificate is a religious certificate. Most seriously, although major international halal accreditation bodies were informed about this case in 2017, none took any action against this HCB (personal communication, Ali Abdallah, 7 January 2017). In 2018, Lorenzini was arrested on charges of misappropriation and illicit influence over the shareholders' assembly, falsification and deception, and slander and

defamation against his brother, his partner in the HCB [42]. In 2018, Lorenzini returned to working with the same brother who had brought the accusations against him, opening a halal consultancy company and creating a partnership with HIA, the same HCB of which his brother is the CEO.

6. Conclusions

Halal food is produced according to Islamic law and should meet certain standards of HACCP and good manufacturing practice (GMP). In recent years, there has been increased demand for halal products around the world. International halal standards motivate various parties to adopt them with a view to potential benefits. Furthermore, the increase in demand for halal food products can be a driving force for development of the food industry.

The 57 countries belonging to the OIC imported around USD 184 billion worth of halal food and beverages, with intra-OIC trade amounting to USD 34 billion in 2020 [1], and the worldwide growth of this sector has led social, economic, political, and food scientists to take an increased interest in halal certifications.

Although social scientists [2–4] have studied religious food certificates, little attention has been paid to how ethical behaviours, profitable ventures, organised crime, and political issues influence these certifications.

Since food hygiene standards are still low today in some areas of the world, this work focuses on the correlation between food safety and the purpose of religious food laws, and the reality of the health benefits falsely claimed by some halal certifiers. This work also mentions the importance of insects in food production due to their contribution to agriculture, and as an alternative and sustainable protein source to animal protein. It contains critical considerations on animal stunning between tradition and modernity at the European level in the regulations governing animal welfare at slaughtering, which is also important from the economic point of view because stunning allows savings in time, effort, and money for the meat industry.

This article has set out a critical discussion of the problems related to the lack of proper guidelines and a unified halal standard, which affect the food industry, paying particular attention to the social, religious, economic, and political perspectives involved. HCB integrity makes halal standards more comprehensive and efficient and can be achieved by implementing a monitoring system that harmonises practice between HABs in Muslim countries and national EU accreditation bodies. The religious certification bodies must have the technical competence to truly ensure not only that halal requirements are followed, but also that food safety standards are guaranteed. The greater the support from EU Member governments, the more positively the halal food sectors will adopt halal standards and limit halal food crimes. More effort is required from standardisation organisations to resolve the difficulties now encountered in all halal food sectors outside Muslim countries.

Funding: Not applicable.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Acknowledgments: The Author thanks Dott.ssa Sarah Jane Christopher, at the University of Bari "Aldo Moro" in Italy, for her English revision.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest relevant to this article.

References

1. STATE of the GLOBAL ISLAMIC ECONOMY REPORT 2019/20. 2020. Dinarstandard: COMCEC COORDINATION OFFICE. Available online: https://cdn.salaamgateway.com/special-coverage/sgie19-20/full-report.pdf (accessed on 9 April 2021).
2. Ahmed, A. Marketing of halal meat in the United Kingdom. *Br. Food J.* **2008**, *110*, 655–670. [CrossRef]
3. Armanios, F.; Ergene, B.A. *Halal Food: A History*; Oxford University Press: New York, NY, USA, 2018.

4. Nizard, S. Florence Bergeaud-Blackler, Le marché halal ou l'invention d'une tradition. *Arch. Sci. Soc. Relig.* **2018**, *184*, 199–201. [CrossRef]
5. Cross-Land, L. Consuming Local, Thinking Global: Building a Halal Industry in a World of Made in Italy. Ph.D. Thesis, Washington University, St. Louis, MO, USA, 15 May 2020. [CrossRef]
6. Abdallah, A.; Rahem, M.A.; Pasqualone, A. The multiplicity of halal standards: A case study of application to slaughterhouses. *J. Ethn. Foods* **2021**, *8*, 1–15. [CrossRef]
7. Felice, D.; Silvio, F.; Brigitte, M. ISLAM in the EUROPEAN UNION:WHAT'S at STAKE in the FUTURE? Policy Department Structural and Cohesion Policies European Parliament. 2007. Available online: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2007/369031/IPOL-CULT_ET(2007)369031_EN.pdf (accessed on 9 April 2021).
8. European Council. *Council Directive 74/577/EC on Stunning of Animals before Slaughter*; L316:10–1; Official journal of the European Communities: Brussels, Belgium, 1974.
9. European Council. *Council Directive 88/306/EC on Conclusion of the European Convention for the Protection of Animals for Slaughter*; L137:25-26; Official journal of the European Communities: Brussels, Belgium, 1988.
10. European Council. *Council Directive 93/119/EC on the Protection of Animals at the Time of Slaughter or Killing*; L340:21–34; Official journal of the European Communities: Brussels, Belgium, 1993.
11. European Council. *Council Regulation (EC) 1099/2009 of 24 September 2009 on the Protection of Animals at the Time of Killing*; L303:1-30; Official journal of the European Union: Brussels, Belgium, 2012.
12. Alwall, J. Muslim Rights and Plights. The Religious Liberty Situation of a Minority in Sweden. Ph.D. Thesis, Lund University Press, Lund, Sweden, 1998.
13. Jonas, O. The Legal Status of Islamic Minorities in Sweden. In *The Legal Treatment of Islamic Minorities in Europe*; Aluffi, B.-P.R., Zincone, G., Eds.; Peeters: Leuven, Belgium, 2004; pp. 233–254.
14. Potz, R.; Schinkele, B.; Wolfgang, W. *Religionsfreiheit und Tierschutz*; Plöchl-Druck (24483): Freistadt, Austria, 2001; pp. 180–181.
15. Rossella, B. Legal Aspects of Halal Slaughter and Certification in the European Union and and Its Member States. In *The Halal Food Hand Book*; Al-Teinaz, Y.R., Spear, S., El-Rahim, I.H.A.A., Eds.; Chichester: West Sussex, UK; John Wily & Sons: Hoboken, NJ, USA, 2020; pp. 225–268.
16. Rohe, M. Application of shar'a rules in europe—Scope and limits. *Welt Islam.* **2004**, *44*, 323–350. [CrossRef]
17. Rohe, M. On the Recognition and Istitutionalisation of Islam in Germany. In Proceedings of the The Response of State Law to the Expression of Cultural Diversity, Brussels, Belgium, 27 September–1 October 2006.
18. General Guidelines for Use of the Term 'HALAL'. 1997. n.d. Available online: http://www.fao.org/3/y2770e/y2770e08.htm#fnB27 (accessed on 15 April 2021).
19. Al Gziri, A. *Al-Fiqh Alla Al-Mazaheb Al-Arabaa*; Dar Al Kotob Al Ilmiyah: Beirut, Lebanon, 2014.
20. Angelopoulos, T.J. Relationship between added sugars and obesity. *J. Obes. Eat. Disord.* **2018**, *4*. [CrossRef]
21. Kim, T.-K.; Yong, H.I.; Kim, Y.-B.; Kim, H.-W.; Choi, Y.-S. Edible Insects as a Protein Source: A Review of Public Perception, Processing Technology, and Research Trends. *Food Sci. Anim. Resour.* **2019**, *39*, 521–540. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
22. Chattopadhyay, A.; Bhatnagar, N.B.; Bhatnagar, R. Bacterial Insecticidal Toxins. *Crit. Rev. Microbiol.* **2004**, *30*, 33–54. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
23. Ratanamaneichat, C.; Rakkarn, S. Quality Assurance Development of Halal Food Products for Export to Indonesia. *Procedia-Soc. Behav. Sci.* **2013**, *88*, 134–141. [CrossRef]
24. GCC Standardization Organization. *Halal Products—Part 2: General Requirements for Halal Certification Bodies*; GSO 2055-2/2015(E); GCC Standardization Organization: Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 2015.
25. LPPOM MUI—Halal MUI Online Certification Service. Majelis Ulama Indonesia, Indonesia. Available online: https://e-lppommui.org/other/about_us.php (accessed on 18 July 2021).
26. Halal Hub Divison. *Procedures for Appointment of Foreign Halal Certification Bodies*; Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM): Putrajaya, Malaysia, 2011. Available online: http://www.Halal.gov.my/v4/images/pdf/cb28012014.pdf (accessed on 20 April 2021).
27. Cross-Land Lauren. The Process of Eating Ethically: A Comparison of Religious and National Food Certifications in Italy. In *Rethinking Halal*; Yakin, A.U., Christians, L.-L., Eds.; BRILL: Leiden, The Netherlands, 2021; pp. 221–240.
28. Al-Teinaz, Y.R.; Al-Mazeedi, H.M.M. Halal certification and international Halal standards. In *The Halal Food Hand Book*; Al-Teinaz, Y.R., Spear, S., El-Rahim, I.H.A.A., Eds.; Chichester: West Sussex, UK; John Wily & Sons: Hoboken, NJ, USA, 2020; pp. 227–248.
29. GCC Accreditation Center. Available online: https://www.gac.org.sa/en/ (accessed on 18 July 2021).
30. Ortiz-Ospina, Esteban, and Diana Beltekian. 2018. Trade and Globalization. Our World in Data. October 2018. Available online: https://ourworldindata.org/trade-and-globalization (accessed on 15 April 2021).
31. Dug, H. SMIIC and Halal Food Standards Saudi Food and Drug Authority. In Proceedings of the First International Conference and Exhibition on Halal Food Control, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 12–15 February 2012.
32. World Halal Food Council. Available online: https://www.whfc-halal.com/about-us/history (accessed on 18 July 2021).
33. International Halal Accreditation Forum (IHAF). IHAF Establishment—IHAF. Available online: https://www.ihaf.org.ae/en/establishment-of-ihaf/ (accessed on 20 April 2021).
34. List of Recognised Islamic Bodies for Halal Certification of Red Meat—Department of Agriculture. 2020. Available online: https://www.agriculture.gov.au/export/controlled-goods/meat/elmer-3/list-islamic-Halal-certification (accessed on 15 April 2021).

35. Zlati, M. Mondelēz's Toblerone Boycotted by European Far-Right Because of Halal Certification. 2018. Available online: https://eu.usatoday.com/story/money/2018/12/24/toblerone-halal-controversy-chocolate-bar-boycotted-far-right/2405914002/ (accessed on 18 June 2021).
36. Johnson, S. Cory Bernardi Describes Halal Certifiers as Cockroaches Running Scam. Mail Online, 10 April 2018. Available online: https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5597235/Senator-Cory-Bernardi-describes-Muslim-Halal-certifiers-cockroaches-running-extortion-racket.html (accessed on 20 June 2021).
37. Latif, M.A. Halal international standards and certification. In *The Halal Food Hand Book*; Al-Teinaz, Y.R., Spear, S., El-Rahim, I.H.A.A., Eds.; Chichester: West Sussex, UK; John Wily & Sons: Hoboken, NJ, USA, 2020; pp. 205–226.
38. Merlino, R. Sicilian Mafia, Patron Saints, and Religious Processions: The Consistent Face of an Ever-Changing Criminal Organization. *Calif. Ital. Stud.* **2014**, *5*. Available online: https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8sz659dn (accessed on 20 July 2021).
39. Ariffin, M.F.M.; Riza, N.S.M.; Hamid, M.F.A.; Awae, F.; Nasir, B.M. Halal Food Crime in Malaysia: An Analysis On Illegal Meat Cartel Issues. *J. Contemp. Issues Bus. Gov.* **2021**, *27*, 1407–1412. [CrossRef]
40. Hassan, H. Halal Meat Scandal: Malaysian Authorities Slammed for Perceived Inaction. *The Straits Times*. 2 January 2021. Available online: https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/halal-meat-scandal-malaysian-authorities-slammed-for-perceived-inaction (accessed on 11 April 2021).
41. Galici, F. "Finiti in Ospedale". L'imam di Bari Aggredisce la Troupe di Striscia. 2021. Available online: https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/cronache/insultata-e-aggredita-finisce-male-linviata-striscia-notizia-1981382.html (accessed on 23 October 2021).
42. Longo, G. Arrestato Imam Lorenzini "Spariti" Soldi Da Conto Sequestrato. Lagazzetta Del Mezzogiorno. 2018. Available online: https://www.lagazzettadelmezzogiorno.it/news/home/978880/bari-arrestato-imam-lorenzini-spariti-soldi-da-conto-sequestrato.html (accessed on 15 April 2021).
43. Accredia. Firma del Protocollo d'Intesa ACCREDIA ESMA per la Certificazione *Halal*. 2015. Available online: https://www.accredia.it/pubblicazione/20-10-2015-firma-del-protocollo-d%C2%92intesa-accredia-esma-per-la-certificazione-Halal/ (accessed on 4 April 2021).
44. Accredia. Al Via le Certificazioni dei Prodotti *Halal*. 2016. Available online: https://www.accredia.it/2016/03/25/25-03-2016-al-via-le-certificazioni-dei-prodotti-Halal/ (accessed on 9 April 2021).
45. ESMA. (n.d.) List of *Halal* Certification Bodies with ESMA. Available online: http://Halal.ae/OpenData/HalalCertificationBodieswithESMA (accessed on 10 April 2021).
46. .Goga, B.C. Halal Food in Italy. In *The Halal Food Hand Book*; Al-Teinaz, Y.R., Spear, S., El-Rahim, I.H.A.A., Eds.; Chichester: West Sussex, UK; John Wily & Sons: Hoboken, NJ, USA, 2020; pp. 413–435.
47. Giammaria, A. L'alimentazione Halal, Tra Religione E Benessere: Dibattito a Casamassima. Borderline24. 2016. Available online: https://www.borderline24.com/2016/11/24/lalimentazione-halal-religione-benessere-dibattito-casamassima/ (accessed on 15 April 2021).
48. Parstoday. Consumare Cibo Halal Fa Bene Alla Salute. 2016. Available online: https://parstoday.com/it/news/italia-i60559-consumare_cibo_halal_fa_bene_alla_salute (accessed on 15 April 2021).