Beyond Minority Identity Politics: Rethinking Progressive Islam through Food

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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I analyze the challenges of speaking about religion, ethics, and politics as a Muslim in America beyond the language of minority identity. I investigated the different ways Muslims negotiate the demands of Islamic dietary laws in their everyday lives by collecting primary data gathered through interviews with Muslims from different localities. The answers given by the participants in this study speak to more than the particular issue of how Muslims understand and carry out the demands of Islamic dietary laws given the reality of living in a country where Muslims are a minority group. They reflect a discourse on Islamic dietary laws that is framed primarily within the language of *exclusive privatized religious identity* and *individual consumerism*. In this dissertation, I seek to propose a different discourse on Islamic dietary laws, one that is characterized by greater inclusivity and challenges the language of exclusive privatized religious identity and individual consumerism.

Acknowledgments and Dedication

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I dedicate this dissertation to Reed Taylor, Djuana Tunggono, and T. A. Dahlan

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Introduction

In this dissertation, I analyze the challenges of speaking about religion, ethics, and politics as a Muslim in America beyond the language of minority identity. The starting point for this study is the many conversations I had with Muslims in different parts of this country over the past ten years concerning *halal* (permissible) food and Islamic dietary laws. Having come to America from Indonesia, I immediately noticed the contrast between the *halal* food discourses in the two countries. In Indonesia, the regulation of food with regards to Islamic dietary laws has been carried out since the early 1990s by the state-approved central agency (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (MUI) or Indonesian Council of *Ulama*), which has the monopoly on the *halal* certification of food items in that country (Riaz and Chaudry 2004, p. 169). In contrast, such centralization of the *halal* food regulation and certification does not exist in America. Although there are numerous organizations that provide inspection and certification to producers who seek to target Muslim consumers, the limited availability of food products with *halal* certification in this country has led to individual Muslims to decide what they consider to be *halal*.

For this study, I investigated the different ways Muslims negotiate the demands of Islamic dietary laws in their everyday lives by collecting primary data gathered through interviews with Muslims from different localities. I discovered that the answers given by the participants in this study speak to more than the particular issue of how Muslims understand and carry out the demands of Islamic dietary laws given the reality of living in a country where Muslims are a minority group. Instead, their answers also reflect the limitations of the "modern

idea of religious belief" (Asad 2011, p. 56 emphasis original). More specifically, I found that the

answers of the participants reflect a discourse on Islamic dietary laws that is framed primarily

within the language of *exclusive privatized religious identity* and *individual consumerism*. In this

dissertation, I seek to propose a different discourse on Islamic dietary laws, one that is

characterized by greater inclusivity, by drawing from works that problematize the modern idea

of religious belief.

Asad (2011) argues that the modern idea of religious belief is liberal insofar as it is built

upon the foundation of "autonomous individuality in which the subject is always encouraged to

make their own choices" (p. 55). Without arguing what the essence of *religion* is or what it

should be, Asad argues that the essential characterization of religion in terms of private *belief* is

historically specific; it specifically originated from seventeenth-century Europe (p. 37). This

historically specific conception or definition of religion has been used and adapted into

different but related "institutional disciplines" or forms of governance (p. 39). According to

Asad,

> In the past, colonial administration used definitions of religion to classify, control, and regulate the
> practices and identities of subjects. Today, liberal democracy is required to pronounce on the legal status
> of such definitions and thus spell out civil immunities and obligations. [...] liberal democracy (whether at
> home or abroad in its colonies) not only works through secularity, it requires that belief be taken as the
> essence of religiosity (Asad 2011 pp. 39 – 40).

It is the linkage between the conception of religion as private belief and the form of governance

of the liberal democracy *as a state system* that Asad problematizes. He argues that the

neutrality of the liberal state when it comes to protecting and affirming individual religious

belief comes from the "modern disjunction between belief and behavior" (p. 50). Furthermore,

it is this *modern disjunction* that allows for "Christians and non-Christians, believers and non-

believers, [to] live more or less the same life" in a modern society (p. 49). In other words, the modern form of religiosity is characterized by a disconnection between belief and behavior.

The problem, however, is not simply that belief does not correspond to behavior, but that the liberal form of government marked by *tolerance* of private belief is also "exceptionally receptive to corporate power because it [liberal democracy as a form of government] favors or at least permits the extension of *market rationality* into all social relations" (Asad 2011, p. 50, emphasis mine). That is to say that *the language of privacy* that makes possible state neutrality with regards to religious belief has also led to a radical redefinition of social relations as primarily defined in terms of economic relations. As a consequence, it is not unlikely for a liberal subject to see herself primarily as *homo economicus* who pursues her own *individual* narrowly defined self-interest. It is the primacy of the language of privacy as evident in the religious discourse on food that is the object of my investigation in this dissertation.

In her work, *Regulating Aversion*, Brown (2006) presents a similar argument to Asad's with regards to the way tolerance and market rationality operate on the liberal subject, i.e. through the language of privacy. Brown argues that that the language of tolerance employed by the state helps shape liberal subjectivity. According to her, in the liberal form of governance, "neither culture nor religion are [sic] permitted to govern publicly; both are tolerated on the condition that they are privately and individually enjoyed" (Brown 2006, p. 21). Furthermore, liberal subjectivity is affirmed by the increasing dominance of the neoliberal market rationality, where "every aspect of human relations, human endeavor, and human need is framed in terms of the rational entrepreneur or consumer" (p. 18). Similar to Asad's argument that the definition of religion as private belief is part of the formation of liberal subjectivity, Brown's

argument is that tolerance and market rationality shape human needs and experience in terms of fixed, *essentialized* interests or identities. Moreover, these fixed, essentialized interests and identities make it difficult for a liberal subject to see herself in terms other than those of exclusive privatized belief and individual consumerism.

The two forces that operate on the liberal subjects (i.e. tolerance and market rationality) are evident in many of the answers given by the participants that I interviewed. That is to say that the prevalent discourse on Islamic dietary laws that I encountered in this study is framed primarily within the language of *exclusive privatized religious belief* or *identity* (made possible by tolerance) and *individual consumerism* (made possible by market rationality). To illustrate this, I will use as an example the answer given by one of the participants. In response to my question of the participants' views on what he perceives to be problematic when it comes to observing Islamic dietary laws in this country and what he thinks the solution would be, the participant focuses on the lack of *recognition* for the need of Muslims to follow Islamic dietary laws. The participant contrasts the lack of recognition for Muslims with the recognition given to the Jewish dietary laws through the abundance of availability of *kosher* food in this society. He argues,

> When I first came to the US, I was so surprised that the Jewish community has special meal on the flight. So, if they are able to do that and the meat industry is able to profit from it, then we [Muslims] should be able to do that too. We are a growing population and the need [for recognition and market accommodation] is growing (Participant 9).

The answer demonstrates the participant's invocation of both toleration and market rationality. It illustrates the way the participant understands the religious demands regarding food in terms of the *right* to have his private religious belief or identity *recognized.* It also illustrates the importance of the *market* as the primary mechanism with which he negotiates the religious

demands as an *individual consumer.* Moreover, the participant himself emphasizes the value of the economic profitability that results from the market accommodation of religion as private belief. In short, the participant's understanding of Islamic dietary laws is framed primarily within the language of *tolerance* and *market rationality.*

In this dissertation, I aim to propose a different approach to thinking and speaking about Islamic dietary laws; one that challenges the language of exclusive privatized religious identity and individual consumerism. As such, I focus *not* on the *difference in belief* between believers and non-believers of a particular set of (i.e. Islamic) dietary laws. Instead, my focus is on the *lack of the difference in behavior* even in the presence of the difference in belief. More specifically, I focus on the way liberal subjects, Muslims or otherwise, are shaped by tolerance and market rationality. I do *not* focus on the particularity of Muslim subjectivity (or the way Muslims see themselves) as informed by the doctrines of specific religious belief. To be clear, given the modern definition of religion as private belief, my argument is *not* that Muslims should have different behavior than non-Muslims because they have different doctrinal belief. *Neither* do I argue that there is anything uniquely Islamic about problematizing the exclusive characteristic of liberal subjectivity. Therefore, this dissertation does *not* deal with the issue of whether one can find any doctrinal justification for Muslims to accept the authority of a liberal state, or to be a liberal citizen, without problematizing the exclusive characteristic of the liberal subjectivity. Instead, this dissertation draws from works that problematize the exclusive characteristic of the liberal subjectivity, including those works that do not necessarily focus on 'religion'.

To emphasize on the focus of this dissertation, I find valuable Asad's focus on exclusivity

vs. inclusivity in his distinction between "democratic sensibility as an ethos" and "democracy as

a state system" when he argues,

> The former [democratic sensibility as an ethos (whether "religious" or "secular")], after all, involves the desire for mutual care, distress at the infliction of pain and indignity, concern for the truth more than for immutable subjective rights, the ability to listen and not merely to tell, and the willingness to evaluate behavior without being judgmental toward others; it tends toward greater *inclusivity*. The latter – democracy as a state system – is jealous of its sovereignty, defines and protects the subjective rights of its citizens (including their right to "religious freedom"), infuses them with nationalist fervor, and invokes bureaucratic rationality in governing them justly; it is fundamentally *exclusive*" (Asad 2011, p. 56, emphasis original).

As this quote demonstrates, concerns for inclusivity do not require an opposition between

religious and secular. Instead, it challenges the separation between the religious and the

secular, insofar as the desire for inclusivity (and the exclusivity that it seeks to challenge) can

originate both from within and without religious doctrines.

In chapter 1, I analyze in depth the *exclusive characteristic of liberal subjectivity,* which

has made it difficult for Muslim individuals to see themselves and understand the demands of

Islamic dietary laws in terms of other than individual right for recognition and responsibility as a

consumer. I will begin by illustrating the difficulty by using the answers of the participants I

interviewed. To challenge the language of exclusive privatized religious identity and individual

consumerism that marks the prevalent discourse on Islamic dietary law, I analyze the different

concepts that have been employed by scholars to challenge liberal subjectivity. These concepts

include Brown's (1995) "postidentity", White's (2009) "negative solidarity", and Walker's (2007)

"expressive-collaborative" model of ethics. I will also briefly discuss how those concepts are

consistent with the postcolonial project of forging hybridity-based identity through negotiation

rather than false essentialism using the work of Bhabha (1994). Furthermore, I compare those

concepts with the concepts of employed by Muslim scholars, including "progressive Islam" (Safi 2003, Esack 2003 and 2006, and Majid 2000), "Islamic liberation theodicy" (Dabashi 2008), and "radical reform (Ramadan 2009). I argue that all of these concepts have in common the concerns for *greater inclusivity* that Asad outlines in the passage that I quoted above.

In chapter 2, I apply the argument for greater inclusivity that I analyze in chapter 1 to the issue of food by problematizing the different articulations and applications of Islamic dietary laws both from the existing literature on the topic and the answers of the participants that I interviewed. In order to propose a different approach to thinking and speaking about Islamic dietary laws (i.e. one that challenges the language of exclusive privatized religious belief or identity and individual consumerism), I categorize many of the articulations that I encountered into two categories: the literal and the liberal contextual approaches. In the category of the literal approach, I analyze the articulations that emphasize strict adherence to the letter of the Islamic dietary laws with particular regards to the requirements for animal slaughter (Riaz and Chaudry 2004, Nasir and Pererira 2008). I discuss the term *zabiha* (sometimes spelled *dhabiha*, indicating meat from animals or permissible species slaughtered by or in the presence of a Muslim who pronounces the name of God at the time of slaughter) that is used by many of the participants. I argue that for those that employ the literal approach, the two forces operating on the liberal subject (tolerance of private belief and market rationality) are evident. In other words, the literal approach to Islamic dietary laws articulates the religious demands concerning food in the language of exclusive privatized religious belief or identity and individual consumerism.

In contrast, the liberal contextual approach does not focus on strict adherence to the letter of the Islamic law. It challenges the language of exclusive privatized religious belief and identity (Foltz 2004, 2006). However, the contextual approach is still liberal insofar as it affirms autonomous individuality. Moreover, the articulations of the liberal contextual approach to Islamic dietary laws are still limited within the language of individual consumerism. At the end of the chapter, I suggest a third way by analyzing the importance of virtue cultivation in both literal and liberal contextual approach. I argue that the Muslims' adherence to the religious dietary laws itself, even when understood in terms of private identity and individual consumerism, can be understood as a challenge to *both* the modern definition of religion as religious belief *and* the narrowly defined economic rationality. More specifically, I argue that, regardless of the difference in individual Muslims' understanding of the content of the dietary laws, what they all have in common is the importance of following a dietary laws as a mechanism of cultivating virtues.

In chapter 3, I situate the importance of following Islamic dietary laws as a virtue cultivation mechanism in the broader context of alternative food movements in America by analyzing the concepts of organic and locavore (eating locally produced food). I begin by using the answers of the participants I interviewed to illustrate how they relate their understanding of Islamic dietary laws with non-Islamic food ethical practices. I argue that some (but not all) participants find ethical principles in organic and locavore to be compatible with the ethical principles of Islamic dietary laws as they understand them. That is why, given the context of the industrial food system, those participants view the organic or locavore ethical principles to be more important than the requirements for slaughter (*zabiha*). I then analyze the concepts of

organic and locavore by drawing from the works that problematize the concepts (Belasco 2007, Guthman 2004, Lavin 2009a and 2009b, McKibben 2007, and McWilliams 2009).

I demonstrate that, similar to the different interpretations of Islamic dietary laws that I analyze in chapter 2, the different ways the concepts of organic and locavore have been employed reflect the tension between (non-religious) food ethics as a virtue cultivation mechanism and the two forces of governance operating on liberal subjectivity (i.e. tolerance and market rationality). More specifically, I argue that the similarity lies in the articulations of the concepts organic and locavore in the language of exclusive privatized belief (although not ostensibly based on religious doctrine) and individual consumerism. At the end of the chapter, I connect the discourse used in the works that are critical to the exclusive individualistic articulations of non-religious food ethics to the concerns for *greater inclusivity* that I analyze in chapter 1. Here, I analyze the concept of a *political* approach to food ethics that challenges the limits of exclusive individualistic conception of ethics by challenging the language of privacy. Furthermore, I briefly discuss the concept of *moral economy.* I argue that the concept of moral economy is useful in understanding how a political approach to food ethics challenges market rationality as the prevalent force of defining social relations. In making my argument, I focus on the limits *to* market rationality that are either explicitly discussed or implicitly assumed by the authors of the works from which I draw in this chapter.

In chapter 4, I further my analysis of the concept of a political approach to food ethics by grounding it in the particularities of Islamic dietary laws. I begin with analyzing the concept of *taqwa* (God consciousness), with particular focus on the centrality of the connection between individual and collective responsibilities in that concept (Izutsu 1966, Rahman 2009). I

return to the argument that I present in chapter 2 with regards to the importance of understanding the adherence of the Muslims I interviewed to Islamic dietary laws in terms of virtue cultivation mechanism. Here, I argue that the concept of *taqwa* is important in understanding how the virtues cultivated at the individual level *may* translate into the communal level. Building on that argument, I analyze a possible articulation of a political approach to *Islamic* food ethics. I use the example of *Id al Adha* (the annual festival of sacrifice) to illustrate the centrality of collective responsibility in existing Islamic food tradition. The goal is to demonstrate that a political approach to Islamic food ethics challenges the limits of exclusive individualistic conception of both ethics and religious belief by challenging the language of privacy. Furthermore, I return to the concept of moral economy that I discussed in chapter 3 in order to argue that a political approach to Islamic food ethics also challenges market rationality as the prevalent force of defining social relations. To be clear, my argument is not concerned with whether Islam is compatible with capitalism. Instead, my argument focuses on the limits *to* market rationality set by the concept of *taqwa* as discussed by the authors of the works from which I draw in this chapter.

Finally, in chapter 5, I bring together the concerns for greater inclusivity that I address in chapter 1, the understanding of Islamic dietary laws as a mechanism to cultivate virtues addressed in chapter 2, the political approach to food ethics analyzed in chapter 3, and the collective aspect of Islamic food traditions discussed in chapter 4, by utilizing the concept of *interfaith activism* (Bretherton 2011). More specifically, I draw from Bretherton's argument that the value of interfaith activism lies in its potential to challenge not only *market commodification of religion*, but also the multicultural appropriation of religion as identity

politics. That is to say, interfaith activism may provide the language that allows for liberal

citizens (including Muslims) to think of food-related issues beyond the language of exclusive

privatized ethics, religious belief and identity, and the language of individual consumerism.

Methodology

In this dissertation, I used interviews conducted in 2009 - 2010 to gather primary data

from 23 participants in a number of Muslim communities in Virginia, namely in Blacksburg,

Roanoke, Richmond, and Herndon. Because the participants agreed to be interviewed under

the condition of confidentiality, references to their answers in this dissertation will be made

using a number assigned to each participant. Out of the 23 interviews, nineteen of them were

conducted in-person while four of them were conducted by phone. Four of the in-person

interviews were conducted in the participants' home, six of them in the participants' workplace,

and eight of them in public spaces including cafes and a public library. Out of the 23

participants, fifteen are women and eight are men. The participants in this study were not

randomly chosen. Instead, they were introduced to the study through a snow-ball technique of

nonprobability sampling (Babbie 2007, p. 183-185; Bogdan and Biklen 1998, p. 64) where I

asked the first few participants I interviewed to introduce and recommend other participants

for the study.

Each participant was given the opportunity to read the interview questions before

agreeing to participate in the interview as a way of building trust with the respondents. I

decided that it is important to have a high degree of *revealedness* (Marshall and Rossman 2006,

p. 73 and 79-82) with the participants, who are often wary of publicly discussing Islamic

traditions and practices with a potentially non-Muslim audience. By utilizing interviews instead of surveys, the respondents were provided the opportunity to express their understanding of Islamic dietary laws in their own words. In-depth interviewing involves using open-ended questions in a semi-structured format. It emphasizes the role of interpretation and is often audio-recorded in order to be transcribed later on for accuracy (Guion, Diehl, and McDonald 2011, p. 1; Marshall and Rossman 2006, p. 101). I transcribed all the interviews with the participants within the week after the interviews were conducted.

I had access to nine of the fifteen women who participated in the interviews through a Muslim women-only potluck group in Blacksburg. The significance of this potluck group extends beyond giving me access to the original participants for this study. It was the extensive conversations and discussions about different issues surrounding food that I had with the women in this group that had initially sparked my interest in pursuing the research topic. The nine participants from the potluck group in turn introduced and referred me to eleven people, six of which (five men and one woman) agreed to participate in Blacksburg and in Roanoke. I had known two of the participants from Richmond prior to the study. They in turn introduced and referred me to six other people out of whom two of them agreed to participate.

Finding participants from Herndon was considerably more difficult. I had chosen Herndon because it has a comparatively larger Muslim community. Initially, I had sent three e-mails over the course of one year to the leader of the community center (All-Dulles Area Muslim Society/ADAMS) explaining my study. My first email was replied to with a request for more information about my study, to which I responded by sending the IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval and the interview questions. The follow-up emails, however, were not

responded. In the end, through the Virginia Tech Muslim Student Association (MSA), I gained access to one of the participants in Herndon who then introduced and referred me to other participants. It is important to note that none of the participants who did not know me directly would have been willing to participate in the study had I not been referred to by someone they trust.

With regards to the data-collection method, I used semi-structured interviews as part of an in-depth interviewing methodology (Marshall and Rossman 2006, p. 101-107) with fourteen guiding questions. The complete list of the interview questions is available in the appendix. While I used these guiding questions to focus the interviews to the topic of the study, it was not my priority for the participants to answer all of the questions or only those questions. As a data-collection method, semi-structured interview has the advantage of balancing between more rigidly structured interviews and completely unstructured interviews (Bogdan and Biklen 1998; Marshall and Rossman 2006, p. 101-107). On the one hand, compared to unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews allow for "comparable data across subjects" (Bogdan and Biklen 1998, p. 95). This is important given one of the aims of the interviews is to compare how the different participants understand Islamic dietary laws. More specifically, my original research question sought to explore the different ways in which Muslims negotiate the demands of Islamic dietary laws as they understand them with the reality of living in a society where industrial farming is the norm. As I have discussed earlier in this introduction, I found that the answers of the participants reflect a discourse on Islamic dietary laws that is framed primarily within the language of *exclusive privatized religious identity* and *individual consumerism*. When asked specifically what they think about the possibility of translating the

demands of Islamic dietary laws into collaborative actions with non-Muslims, the majority of

the participants did not give an elaborate answer. They did, however, elaborate on the question

of the ethical principles that can serve as the foundation for shared common actions.

On the other hand, compared to structured interviews, semi-structured interviews allow

for a greater level of freedom for the participants to express their views. According to Bogdan

and Biklen (1998), "Even when an interview guide is employed, qualitative interviews offer the

interviewer considerable latitude to pursue a range of topics and offer the subject a chance to

shape the content of the interview" (p. 94). The considerably larger range of topics pursued by

the participants had given me the opportunity to rethink the research question. For example,

four of the participants had focused on the need for Muslims to facilitate a way for non-

Muslims to better understand Islamic dietary laws (Participants 6, 7, 8, and 9) and one of them

suggested that Muslims groups such as the Muslim Student Association (MSA) in universities

and colleges can organize public dining events such as neighborhood or campus cookout

(Participant 8). In contrast, other participants, had focused instead on the need for Muslims to

translate the importance of Islamic dietary laws to the language of ethical responsibility that

can be understood across nominal religious boundaries (Participants 1, 3, 4, 11, 14, 15, 16, 19,

20, and 22).

The richness of the data generated by the open-ended interview questions is also

beneficial because it allowed me to adapt and reframe the main questions of the study to gain

a more comprehensive understanding (Marshall and Rossman 2006, p. 155). I did not foresee

that religious leaders would have such a prominent role in the participants understanding of

Islamic dietary laws. I was able to adapt the scope of my analysis to the responses provided,

and I ended up writing an entire chapter on the significance of Imams as a result. It is unlikely that I would have been aware of the significance of local Imams if I had relied on closed-ended questions with a survey or questionnaire.

In compliance with Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol, I obtained from the participants prior to the interviews written or audio-recorded verbal consents for participating in the study under confidentiality agreement and having their answers audio-recorded. The experience of having to obtain formal consent and the responses I received from the participants had allowed me to reflect on the larger issue of conducting academic research in an institutional setting. For example, early in the study, I read the consent form out loud in its entirety together with the participants and asked them whether they had any questions about the study prior to the interview. Several participants responded by informing me that I did not need to read the form out loud with them because they trusted me. The act of reading aloud the consent form, although meant to foster trust between the researcher and the participants, has in fact had the opposite effect (Lincoln 2008, p. 228-239). Furthermore, one participant took an issue with the name of the primary investigator listed on the consent form. Since the IRB requires a faculty member to be the primary investigator for any research carried out by students, my name appeared only as a co-investigator on the consent form. The participant commented that the name of the primary investigator does not sound like the name of a Muslim and wanted me to confirm that in practice I am the primary researcher for this study. By questioning whether the primary investigator is a member of the Muslim community, the participant effectively raised the question of accountability. More specifically, the participant questions the accountability of the primary investigator not to the academic institution, but to

the Muslim community. Only after receiving the assurance that the listing of the primary and co-investigators was merely for bureaucratic purposes that the participant agreed to participate in and refer others to the study.

I found the work of Christians (2007) that is critical of the way IRB protocol influences researcher-participant relationship to be valuable in elucidating the responses of the participants. Christians (2007) argues that as part of the IRB protocol, the obtaining of formal consent of the participants is based on the assumption of value-free social science prevalent in academia (p. 52). More specifically, when social scientific academic research is assumed to be neutral, the researcher is assumed not only to be objective but also minimally connected ethically with the participants. He points out that the protocol of signing a consent form affirms individual autonomy as one of the principles of value-free or value-neutral research (p. 53). Furthermore, Christians argues that IRB protocol, including obtaining formal consent, "in reality protect their own institutions rather than subject population" (p. 55). That is to say, the trust that can be obtained through formal consent is only a minimalist sense of trust.

In contrast to the minimalist ethical connection assumed by the need for formal consents, the participants had challenged the assumption of individual subjectivity by expecting me to have a greater ethical connection with them as a Muslim. That is to say that they had not expected me to act as an autonomous individual who otherwise would have no other connections with the participants, and who could objectively observe and interact with the objects of my study, for the purpose of fulfilling the goal of research that I had objectively set for myself without much regard to the need of the community (Hartley 2006, p. 95-102). Instead, the participants' responses had made clear their expectation that I conduct myself as a

member of the Muslim community. Therefore, I am aware of the responsibility that the participants have placed on me to make available the benefit of this study by taking into account the importance of community transformation in the way I frame this study. Therefore, the questions that I focus on in this study have been directed to addressing the different ways in which Muslims in this country can think of the demands of Islamic dietary laws in a creative and inclusive manner. This is certainly in line with my main argument in this dissertation to be critical of the exclusive characteristic of liberal subjectivity and to promote the cultivation of sensibility directed toward greater inclusivity.

Chapter 1 Religious Belief and Politics

Introduction

At the beginning of this study, I set out to investigate the different ways Muslims living in America negotiate the demands of Islamic dietary laws in their everyday lives. More specifically, I wanted to know what factors that Muslims in general take into account in their interpretations of the demands of Islamic dietary laws. Based on previous conversations prior to this study with Muslims in different parts of this country over the past decade and existing literature on Islamic dietary laws, I had anticipated the discourse on Islamic dietary laws to include dealing with the challenge of not only the relatively lack of availability of *halal* (permissible) food otherwise abundant in countries where Muslims are the majority, but also the reality of industrial food system that requires Muslims to think critically about what it means to observe Islamic dietary laws. It was on the latter that I had wanted to focus, namely, how Muslims include ethical concerns that are not limited to Islamic doctrines, including but not limited to concern for treatment of animals, into their understanding of what Islam has to say about food.

I discovered, however, that the answers given by the participants in this study speak to more than the particular issue of how Muslims understand and carry out the demands of Islamic dietary laws given the reality of living in a country where Muslims are a minority group. Instead, and more fundamentally, their answers also reflect the limitations of the "modern *idea* of religious belief" (Asad 2011, p. 56 emphasis original). More specifically, I found that the answers of the participants reflect a discourse on Islamic dietary laws that is framed primarily

within the language of *exclusive privatized religious identity* and *individual consumerism*. In this chapter, I analyze in depth the *exclusive characteristic of liberal subjectivity* that has made it difficult for the participants that I interviewed to see themselves, and understand the demands of Islamic dietary laws, in terms of other than group identity and individual consumerism. I begin with demonstrating this difficulty using the answers of the participants I interviewed in the first section of this chapter.

In the second and third sections, I analyze the ongoing discourse on challenging the language of exclusive characteristic of liberal subjectivity. I discuss the different concepts that have been employed by different scholars, which include Brown's (1995) "postidentity" and Walker's (2007) "expressive-collaborative" model of ethics. Brown's postidentity involves *translating* the demands of a particular religious belief into *non-essentializing* norms that contribute to a vision about the common. The aim of postidentity positioning is to achieve a politics of diversity that values the situatedness of the subjects. Politics of diversity deconstruct identities by requiring us to put our own source for identity under scrutiny in order to argue from the vision about the common. Brown's concept of postidentity is consistent with Walker's concept of expressive-collaborative model of ethics, where ethics is defined and practiced in collaboration rather than in isolation. It challenges the privileging of the individual reason, agency, abstraction and generalization, at the cost of neglecting the communal aspect of ethics.

In the third section, I compare those concepts analyzed in the second section with the concepts of employed by Muslim scholars, including "progressive Islam" (Safi 2003, Esack 2003 and 2006, and Majid 2000), "Islamic liberation theodicy" (Dabashi 2008), and "radical reform

(Ramadan 2009). I begin by situating 'Islam' within the context of postcolonialism in order to argue that all of these concepts have in common the concerns for *greater inclusivity*.

1.1 "Believing" Muslims and Islamic Dietary Laws

The starting point of the interviews I had with the participant was the question of how important following Islamic dietary laws is to them. To all of the participants that I interviewed, they considered following Islamic dietary laws to be important. That is not to say, of course, that all Muslims consider following Islamic dietary laws to be important. The participants that I interviewed for this study do not represent a random sampling of Muslims in their localities, much less in this country. Instead, prior to the interviews, I had provided potential participants with ample information on the subject of the interview. In other words, the participants chose for themselves whether they wanted to participate given the subject of the interview.

In chapter 2, I will analyze in detail the various ways the participants understand the *contents* of Islamic dietary laws. I will also explain why, although Islamic dietary laws encompass more than regulation on meat and poultry, I had focused mainly on the issue of meat and poultry consumption and production in my interviews. More specifically, I began the interviews by asking the participants first about their views in *consuming* meat and poultry, then about their views on the industrial farming system involved in the *production* of meat and poultry. In this section, I focus on demonstrating how the answers of the participants that I interviewed reflect the *exclusive* characteristic of liberal subjectivity. That is to say that I found the answers of the participants to reflect the private nature of the articulations of what following Islamic dietary laws entails. Early in the interview, I asked the participants on to

explain *why* it is important for them to follow Islamic dietary laws. The centrality of *belief* or

faith is reflected in the following answers from three participants:

> It is important to me to do so [i.e. to follow Islamic dietary laws] because that's part of what I believe (Participant 8).
>
> It's really important [...] because of my faith. Nothing else, nothing more (Participant 19).
>
> It is very important, it is a very basic thing in my religion, and I will do anything that my religion asks me to do because I have faith and believe in that (Participant 20).

Furthermore, while all of the participants found it relatively unproblematic to speak about their

private consumption with regards to following Islamic dietary laws (including what they

understand to be the contents of the laws, and where they obtain the food product), many of

the participants I interviewed found it difficult to speak about following Islamic dietary laws

beyond the terms of private consumption.

In the interview, I used the following question to transition between the issues of

consumption and production: "What, if any, are your thoughts on the meat and poultry

industry in this country?" The answers of many of the participants reflect some awareness of

the conditions of industrial animal farming, particularly with regards to the issue of animal

welfare. Again, this is not to say that many Muslims share this awareness because the

participants I interviewed do not constitute a random sample. The answers of select

participants to the question on their thoughts on the meat and poultry industry in this country

are as follow:

> The way they treat the animals, the majority of the animals, they don't treat [them] well. Most of the times, I see the animals being carried in trucks, confined in small spaces, and driving in long distance. And also how they slaughter the animals, they just line them up into the machine. I don't know, to me it is a little bit inhumane (Participant 8).
>
> There isn't respect for animals, for what they eat and their place in the world, their purpose in the world. It is just really messed up, really mechanized. I mean, they are animals, they are not like clothes to be sewn and put through the wringer (Participant 17).

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> They are putting them [i.e. chickens] in crowded places, we can say they are humiliating the animals they are raising. I saw a movie about chicken farms […] when I saw that movie, it was, I stopped eating chicken for about one month, because I still have the images in my head (Participant 19).

In fact, the majority of the participants I interviewed discussed the importance of the treatment of animals beyond the concern of following the slaughter requirements of *zabiha* (which I will elaborate further in chapter 2).

Furthermore, I asked the participants how their answer to the previous question (i.e. their thoughts on the meat and poultry industry) relates to their being a Muslim. In other words, I wanted them to explain whether their concerns beyond the slaughter requirements are something that they view as originating from, or at least not contradictory to, their understanding of what it means to be a Muslim. For the purpose of consistency, I here are the answers of the same participants as the ones I quoted in the above paragraph,

> I think being a Muslim, my understanding is, being a Muslim [means] you have to treat anyone, anybody that is creation from Allah in a proper way. So even [when] you treat an animal for slaughtering, you have to treat them with respect. You provide nutritious food for them, you care for them when [they are] sick, not just pump [them] up with hormones and things like that, which is unnatural (Participant 8).
> I think they [i.e. her concerns for the way the animals are treated and her understanding of what it means to be a Muslim] go hand in hand, actually. [Because] in Islam, you respect animals, you respect their lives and their rights of clean food, good food, what they would naturally eat on their own […] you have to respect that [because] that is part of Allah's creation. So I think it goes hand in hand, it is not something against Islam (Participant 17).
>
> As Muslims, we should treat animals in a respective [sic.] way (Participant 19).

Similar explanations are given by many other participants with regards to this consistency. In addition to explaining their views in terms of concerns for God's creation (as evident in two of the answers above), other participants used the examples from the traditions of the Prophet in their explanations.

Finally, I asked the question of what they think would contribute to solve the problems with the production of meat and poultry, problems which they themselves have identified. More specifically, I asked whether they think collaborations with others beyond the nominal

religious boundaries (i.e. working with non-Muslims) are beneficial to solving those problems. I specifically had this question asked at the end of each interview to give the participants a chance to articulate their views in the terms with which they would ordinarily use. I have found that before I asked this particular question, the answers of the overwhelming majority of the participants were framed within the language of *exclusive privatized religious identity* and *individual consumerism*. That is to say, until this question was asked, the participants frame their answers largely within the terms of "what I should eat" given "my understanding of what it means to be a Muslim". The answers that they give in their explanations of how their concerns (for other than the requirement for *zabiha*) are translated into action are limited to individual consumption, for example by buying organic products or products from locally raised animals (I will further analyze the concepts of organic and local in chapter 3).

When specifically asked about collaboration, many of their answers reveal the limitation of the language of individual consumerism, as evident in the following:

> I don't see what the issue would be for people to work together. […] The best way really is to just stop buying the meat and the supply will go up and the demand will go down and they're going to produce less, when you make that switch then money talks […] So I think the best way would be to just stop buying stuff and change your buying habits (Participant 17).

Another participant shares the difficulty in connecting her understanding of the demands of Islamic dietary laws with collaborative actions beyond nominal religious boundaries when she explains,

> Ideally, it would be best for Muslims and non-Muslims to cooperate with each other but that's, to me, I feel like I can go to whole different topics with their, with how we go about that, um. The easiest, the simplest, concise way to explain this is that, well, Muslims shouldn't have to, they can, but they should not have to, like [say] "Ok, we are Muslims in this country and we are going to you, the remaining public, and [say] let's go revamp this whole meat industry". We don't have to take that [approach], but you can if you want to, but at this point I don't think that's very welcoming to the American public in general. Just be a private citizen, you don't have to declare your faith, you are just concerned for the meat industry […] I feel like if enough buyers are aware of what they are buying, you know it would slowly change the industry because what we purchase is the bloodline of the industry making the money, so if we don't

purchase low-quality meat, the law of supply and demand would make them make better-quality meat […] I don't go into politics because I wouldn't know how to begin to do that. I only know myself as a private citizen, what I would do individually and hopefully if everybody does what I do then it will be fine (Participant 7).

In the answers of both participants 7 and 17 above, the market rationality that marks the importance of one's role as an individual buyer or consumer is evident. It is primarily as an individual buyer that the participants have the power to exercise their private choice or preference. Furthermore, the answer of Participant 7 quoted above also reveal the anxiety about framing the demands of Islamic dietary laws in terms of collaboration with specific regards to the problem of declaring one's private faith or belief.

This anxiety expressed by the participant is best understood in terms of liberal subjectivity that is shaped by the language of privacy. In her work, *Regulating Aversion*, Brown (2006) elaborates on the way tolerance and market rationality specifically operate on the liberal subject through the language of privacy. She argues that that the language of tolerance employed by the state helps shape liberal subjectivity. According to her, in the liberal form of governance, "neither culture nor religion are [sic] permitted to govern publicly; both are tolerated on the condition that they are privately and individually enjoyed" (Brown 2006, p. 21). Similarly, liberal subjectivity is affirmed by the increasing dominance of the neoliberal market rationality, where "every aspect of human relations, human endeavor, and human need is framed in terms of the rational entrepreneur or consumer" (p. 18). Brown's argument is that tolerance and market rationality shape human needs and experience in terms of essentialized interests or identity. In short, they make it difficult for a liberal subject to see herself other than in terms of exclusive privatized belief and individual consumerism.

The claim of Participant 7 that as a Muslim one can only act as an individual is revealing of the essentialized interests and identity. It is consistent with the answer given by Participant 9 that I discussed in the introduction. While the answer of Participant 7 speaks to what a Muslim can do as an individual (i.e. having the choice with regards translating the demands of her private religious belief into individual consumption), the answer of Participant 9 speaks to what Muslims can do as a group (i.e. having the *right* to have the demands of his private religious belief or identity *recognized* by the *market*). What they both have in common is that their interests or identity (being a Muslim who follows Islamic dietary laws) are essentialized in terms of private belief, and that essential interests are primarily negotiated in the context of the market.

To be clear, I argue that the difficulty of the participants in framing Islamic dietary laws outside the language of exclusive privatized religious belief or identity and individual consumerism is not something that originates from within the Islamic doctrines. That is to say that Muslims are not unique in having this difficulty. Instead, this difficulty is something that liberal subjects share regardless of their religious belief (or unbelief). It is still instructive, however, to address the question of whether Muslims have a unique problem in negotiating between the demands of their religious doctrines with the demands of liberal citizenship. The work of March (2009) is valuable in delimiting this discussion.

In his work, March discusses the compatibility between Islam (as a set of doctrines that serve as the foundation for Muslims' religious belief) and liberal citizenship (the requirements to be a citizen of a liberal state). The issue of the participants' difficulty in framing the demands of Islamic dietary laws in terms of collaboration is related to the question addressed by March

of whether the argument that allows Muslims to contribute to the welfare of non-Muslims can

be found in the Islamic doctrine (March 2011, p. 237). He proposes three following positions

with regards to the relationship between the liberal citizen's conception of the good (ethics)

and her participation in contributing to the welfare of others (politics):

> 1. My conception of the good is based on the pursuit of purely private happiness. I have no objection to the political order around me – it provides me with all the security and freedom I need to be happy – but nor do I feel the need to be a part of it. Should this political order be threatened by forces which would replace it with one more hostile to my interest in security and freedom, I would have no objection to defending it through voting or speaking out, but otherwise I am happy to let others handle the administration of things.
> 2. My conception of the good is based on the pursuit of happiness. I have certain interests that I share with some citizens but not with all. Influencing politicians through various forms of political participation is an important way in which I advance those interests. Otherwise, where our group interest is not affected, I have very little interest in political participation.
> 3. My conception of the good is based on the pursuit of salvation, which I think can be best achieved through government on the basis of the divine law. I understand that in this society the majority of the population does not share my understanding of what divine law requires. This society gives me the security, freedom, and dignity to follow my most important religious practices and thus I would defend it against harm and destruction. I do not begrudge my unbelieving fellow citizens their worldly happiness, and I do not resent my contribution to their welfare. However, while I will obey all laws of this society which do not oppress me, I do not feel any need to contribute to the making of those laws (March 2011, pp. 255 – 256)

March argues that while citizenship in liberal democracies may take form in any one of the

positions above, the Islamic justification for Muslims' participation in contributing to the

welfare of others is still consistent with liberal citizenship when it takes form of the third

position (p. 256).

Furthermore, March argues that the limitation coming from the Islamic doctrines is that

Islamic justification for political participation should necessarily "advance *Muslim* communal

aims", which he explains can take the form of a combination of the second and the third

positions (p. 256, emphasis mine). That is to say, although the Islamic justification for political

participation challenges the purely individual conception of ethics (i.e. inconsistent with the

first position), it is still limited to the communal conception of ethics that is defined in terms of

essentialized religious *belief* (I will further discuss the latter in the next section). In other words, this communal conception of ethics is as *exclusive* (because it excludes those with different religious belief) as the individual conception of ethics. Furthermore, the exclusive characteristic of the liberal conception of ethics is directly related to the exclusive characteristic of liberal subjectivity. It is this exclusive characteristic of liberal subjectivity that I will analyze further in the next section.

1.2 Challenges to the Exclusive Language of Privacy

In seeking for an Islamic justification for liberal citizenship, March clarifies the starting point from which he began his quest. He defines the requirement for liberal citizenship in the following terms,

> Liberalism not only requires that the state not be used to impose a vision of the good life but also imposes constraints on what we can do individually or severally to coerce others privately toward acting in concert with a conception of the good. […] The defining feature of liberal democracy is its protection of certain basic freedoms, particularly those of religion, conscience, speech, and association (March 2011, p. 98)

From this starting point, he embarked on a journey down the path filled with questions that he himself identified as "negative" or "passive" in character; such as the question of "whether Muslims can *refrain* from migrating or betraying a state of residence" (p. 237, emphasis original). In fact, the question of whether Muslims can have solidarity with non-Muslim (which I discussed at the end of the last section) was the only question concerning positive duties that March discusses. This is because, as the passage quoted above indicates, the defining characteristic of a liberal subject is her basic freedoms, including the freedom of religious belief.

The works of Brown (1995, 2006) are valuable in challenging this emphasis on questions that are negative in character. She problematizes the concept of freedom that is assumed by

March. Brown argues that the freedom that the liberal state ensures is conceptualized as

freedom "against arbitrary state power on the one side and against anarchic civil society or

property theft on the other" (Brown 1995, p. 6). The desired political arrangement for

liberalism is therefore one in which the state ensures the freedom to pursue their private

objectives. In other words, the public sphere (the realm of state law) can be clearly separated

from the private sphere (the realm of private ethics and religious belief). This is evident from

March's formulation of the three positions quoted and discussed at the end of the previous

section, where the different conceptions of the good in positions 1 and 3 are correlated with

the similar public behavior. More specifically, the role of religious belief is limited to providing

group identity and fostering self-governing subjects by providing the ethical foundation that

promotes the liberal order, i.e. the political arrangement that ensures individual freedom. That

is why the individuals' conceptions of the good life and the demands of their religious beliefs

are tolerated insofar as they do not encroach on others (Brown 2006, p. 21). In short, the liberal

conception of freedom focuses on the freedom from encroachment of other people's

conceptions of the good life.

While freedom from illiberal encroachment is important, Brown is critical as to the

consequences that tend to materialize from such restrictive conception of freedom. More

specifically, she is critical of the way "liberal discourse converts political identity into

essentialized private interests" (Brown 1995, p. 59). She argues that liberal politics is often

limited to negotiating the *different* and *competing* conceptions of the good life as defined by

individuals with *fixed* and *essential* identities (and beliefs) who engage one another through an

ethos of defensiveness. In contrast to this engagement, she proposes "postidentity"

positioning, where individuals are "arguing from a vision about the common ('what I want for us') rather than from identity ('who I am')" (p. 51). With regards to religious belief, postidentity would involve *translating* the demands of a particular religious belief into *non-essentializing* norms that contribute to a vision about the common. That is not to say that identity does not play an important role in determining one's position. Rather, it means that one uses the awareness of one's own position as a valuable contribution to a vision about the common.

Furthermore, Brown argues that "postidentity public positioning and conversations potentially replace a politics of *difference* with a politics of *diversity*" (p. 51, emphasis mine). The distinction between the two lies in the valuation of the situatedness of the subjects. Politics of difference views differences as in need of *mediation* and in doing so affirms the differences as a fragmenting force. Politics of diversity, on the other hand, requires the subjects to *translate* their situatedness into a vision of the common by seeking connections. Brown argues that politics of diversity requires a greater accountability than politics of difference. This is because arguments made with regards to the vision of the common "may be interrogated to the ground by other", while identity-based arguments are "insulated from such inquiry by the mantle of 'truth' worn by identity-based speech" (51). In other words, it is much easier for Muslims to make identity-based claims with regards to Islamic dietary laws because such claims would be insulated from inquiry and scrutiny by others. Arguments made by translating the dietary laws into food ethics that is grounded on a vision of the common, however, can be interrogated by others and therefore is subject to greater accountability. Politics of diversity deconstruct identities by requiring us to put our own source for identity under scrutiny in order to argue from the vision about the common.

Brown's use of postidentity positioning is consistent with the view of ethics that Walker (2007) terms "expressive-collaborative model" of ethics (Walker 2007, p. 9). According to Walker, an expressive-collaborative model of ethics is characterized by its view of ethics as "a *socially embedded* medium of *mutual understanding* and *negotiation* between people over their responsibility for things open to human care and response" (p. 9, emphasis mine). The expressive-collaborative model is in contrast to what she terms "theoretical-juridical model" of ethics (p. 7), which is characterized by "the representation of morality as a compact, propositionally codifiable, impersonally action-guiding code within an agent, or as a compact set of law-like propositions that 'explain' the moral behavior of a well-formed moral agent" (p. 8). In other words, according to the expressive-collaborative understanding, ethics is not something that an individual can determine, pursue and practice in isolation; rather, ethics is collaborative – it "arises out of and is reproduced or modified in what goes on between or among people" (p. 10).

What would motivate a citizen to engage in this negotiation or political conversation that focuses on the vision of the common? White (2009) speaks of the "ethos" or "character spirit" of subjectivity that needs to be cultivated given the reality of the diversity of values in late-modern societies, which he argues presents certain challenges. The problem of the liberal concept of subjectivity, according to White, is assuming the primacy of reason and what reason is supposed to provide. More specifically, for liberal subjectivity, reason "promises to reveal a clear foundation of universally valid values and principles that can slacken the propensity to social conflict and rise above the discordant particular claims of different traditions, classes,

religions, and nationalities" (White 2011, p. 11). In other words, for a liberal subject, reason alone is supposed to provide sufficient ethical foundation.

White argues, however, that the overemphasis on reason as the foundation for the pursuit of freedom and happiness "betrays an unacknowledged will to dominate" that was aggravated as "religion was pushed toward the margin of modern life" (p. 12). He explains that the will to dominate can be understood as a mechanism for compensation for the "anxiety of finitude" brought about by "the loss of Christianity's promise of immortal life" (p. 12). In other words, with the separation of ethics and religion from politics, humans are left with agency, which in this case is understood primarily in term of "the power, or capacity, to frame and revise [our own] plan of life" (p. 56). With this view of agency, we approach each other with the primary obligation to "back away from the other and his project" (p. 56). Defined as the capacity of the individual to form one's own life plan, agency cannot provide the connectedness that is required in postidentity political engagement whose goal is shared rather than individual projects. To be clear, neither would privatized religion (or secular form of religiosity) be able to give this connectedness as long as the liberal subjectivity underlying the agency is presupposed. This is because privatized religion would also lead us to believe that our primary obligation is to back away from others and their projects.

White's critique of the overemphasis on reason may be better understood when compared to Walker's (2007) criticism against the theoretical-juridical model of ethics. The theoretical-juridical model views ethics as "a *codifiable* (and usually *compact*) set of moral *formulas* (or procedures for selecting formulas) that can be applied by *any* agent to a situation to yield a justified and determinate *action-guiding* judgment" (Walker 2007, pp. 58 - 59,

emphasis original). She argues that this view assumes that ethics is understood as theoretical knowledge that can be obtained through pure rational reflection (p. 59). Moreover, she argues that this view of ethics, "when applied by individuals in interpersonal situations looks evasive" because "unilateral decisions, formulaic responses, and repeatable categorical uniformities displace flexible appreciation and communicative interaction" (p. 59). In other words, by privileging the individual reason, agency, abstraction and generalization, the theoretical-juridical model of ethics neglects the communal aspect of ethics. What is rendered incomprehensible by the theoretical-juridical model of ethics is that "'We' are the members of some actual moral community, motivated by the aim of going on together, preserving or building self- and mutual understanding in moral terms" (p. 71). Unlike the theoretical-juridical model that views the aim of ethics as "only to harmonize our individual practices of moral judgment with the standing moral beliefs we each avow", the expressive-collaborative model aims to "harmonize judgment and actions among us" (p. 71). When we understand ethics in terms of expressive-collaborative, we can see that being ethical is not about achieving theoretical knowledge through pure rational reflection and applying such knowledge through generalization. In other words, the task is not framed in the context of being an ethical individual, but being part of an ethical community.

White (2009) proposes that the connectedness required to view ourselves in terms of the vision of the common can be cultivated though "the *experience of* common *subjection*, rather than a recognition that we *possess* the same *capacities or powers*" (White 2009, p. 75, emphasis original). He explains that, "we can find a more vivid basis of commonality in our institutions about harm or *in*justice against which we react, than is the case with articulation of

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a clear ideal toward which we ought to move" (p. 102). In other words, while coming up with a

positive view of the common may be problematic (i.e. what everyone can agree as good,

desirable or just), solidarity can be built to fight harm or injustice, or "negative solidarity" (p.

102). Moreover, focusing on the experience of common subjection would give negative or

harmful experiences an "initial primacy in how we negotiate ethical-political life" (p. 102).

Additionally, a commonality that starts with a negative starting point is less problematic in

bringing together the theistic and nontheistic views because a commonality based on negative

solidarity demands an agreement on a relatively minimalist notion of harm without requiring an

acceptance of a more comprehensive religious ethical ideal.

White's proposal for negative solidarity is consistent with what Walker terms an "ethics

of responsibility" (Walker 2007, p. 111). According to Walker, an ethics of responsibility is

predicated on the following assumptions: "specific moral claims on us arise from our contact or

relationship with others whose interests are vulnerable to our actions and choices. We are

obligated to respond to particular others when circumstances or ongoing relationship render

them especially, conspicuously, or peculiarly dependent on us" (p. 113, emphasis original). In

other words, both White and Walker shift the focus of ethical obligations from reason and

agency to subjection to harm or vulnerability. Walker's formulation of vulnerability and

dependency, however, is explicitly more expressive and collaborative than White's notion of

harm or injustice. Walker argues that "if actual dependency or vulnerability […] is the basis of

many moral claims, the specific nature, as well as the relative priority and stringency, of the

claims cannot generally be determined in the abstract" (p. 113). In other words, while White

proposes a cultivation of connectedness based on negative solidarity, Walker furthers the

proposal with her argument that such cultivation has to take form collaboratively.

The separation between the private and the public has made it difficult to see the

connection between religious belief, ethics, and politics. Without challenging this separation,

depoliticized religious and ethical concerns can prevent us from realizing the need for

collaborative actions. This difficulty can be seen in the answers of the overwhelming majority of

the participants I interviewed who view the question of Islamic dietary laws solely as a matter

of privatized interests. Only one participant made an explicit connection between the demands

of religious belief and ethics with the political obligations in his understanding on Islamic

dietary laws. His answer illustrates the difficulty of making the connection between religious

belief, ethics, and politics, when he claims,

> for a lay person, lay Muslim person [who] goes to the masjid, when you start talking about the need to lobby and the need to raise awareness, all of the sudden you are going to lose the religious tone, and they zone out, well, this is not for me. I am in the mosque and I need to only hear about religious [issues]. I think our leaders and the people who are in the Muslim organizations need to kind of blend the two and make that connection. And when [the religious leaders] tell you that you need to, for example, you need to vote, or you need to be an animal protection advocate […] [it needs to come from] religious background, not just the secular one that you hear in the news. And that connection isn't being made properly and that is why you see less participation from Muslims in these things. […] I'm not asking religious leaders to be politicians and play with words, no. It is just making those connections. The connection is already there, you just have to make it known and explicit (Participant 16)

My argument here is that without making the connection between religious belief, ethics, and

politics, Muslims tend to only approach the issue of food from a religious perspective in terms

of Islamic dietary laws that are understood as a matter of individualist obligation. In other

words, as long as the exclusive assumption of liberal subjectivity is not problematized, religious

dietary laws are approached as a matter of personal identity and privatized ethics ('who am I',

'what I can/cannot eat', and 'how can I get what I want') rather than collaborative ethics ('what

kind of food system should our society have' and 'how can we work together to achieve the

desired food system'). In chapter 4, I will return to the importance of making this connection with regards to the role of religious leaders and traditions.

1.3 Progressive Islam

Whereas the focus of the last section was to analyze challenges to the exclusive characteristic of liberal subjectivity using concepts that are not developed specifically with regards to Islam, the aim of this section is to make the connection between those concepts with ones that have been developed within an Islamic context. In order to do so, it is beneficial to situate 'Islam' within the context of postcolonialism. The goal is to avoid putting 'Islam' in a reactionary or defensive position, where 'Islam' is measured in terms of its compatibility or incompatibility with the 'West' without problematizing the legacy of colonial self/other relationship.

I begin by returning to Brown's conclusion of the need to create a political space that avoids essentializing and essentialized identities. With specific regards to colonial identities, Bhabha (1994) speaks of such political space as "a space of translation" or "a place for hybridity" (Bhabha 1994, p. 57). Comparably, Brown's strategy of postidentity public positioning can be understood as Bhabha's strategy of employing "the interstitial perspective" (p. 4). Bhabha's work, *The Location of Culture*, speaks directly to the problem of essentializing colonial identities that kept being perpetuated through the articulations of anti-colonial reaction that affirm rather than reject the essentializing identities. In order to break this cycle of perpetuation of essentializing identities, a postcolonial identity needs to be forged through hybridity. More specifically, hybridity breaks the oppositional nature of colonial identities. He defines the hybridity as "the revaluation of assumption of colonial identity through the

repetition of discriminatory identity effects" (p. 155). And therefore, a place for hybridity is a place of "the construction of a political object that is new, neither the one nor the other, properly alienates our political expectations, and changes, as it must, the very forms of our recognition of the moment of politics" (p. 37).

In other words, in accordance with Brown's argument on the importance of arguing from a vision of the common and finding potential common values, Bhabha (1994) argues that the source of political empowerment comes from "posing questions of solidarity and community from the interstitial perspective" rather than from affirming essential way of beings (Bhabha 1995, p. 4). Additionally, Brown's argument for the importance of situatedness is echoed in Bhabha's argument on the importance of *negotiation*. He argues that negotiation signifies "a temporality that makes it possible to conceive of the articulation of antagonistic or contradictory elements" (Bhabha 1994, p. 37). In other words, negotiation allows for political actors to avoid false essentialism because their situatedness is valued in the politics of diversity.

While the concept of hybridity is useful in describing the space and the process of constructing a political subject, Majid (2000) warns against the danger of glorifying hybridity that can come from the lack of acknowledgment of the "unequal global relations" or "unequal cultural exchange" surrounding the condition within which hybridization takes place (Majid 2000, p. 27and p. 35). He forms his argument following Spivak's (1994) argument with regards to the ability of the people of the non-dominant groups ("subaltern classes") to join the political conversation given the asymmetrical relationship between them and the people of the dominant groups. Spivak argues against theories of liberation that come from the First World that assume that "the oppressed, if given the chance [...] and on the way to solidarity through

alliance politics [...] *can speak and know their conditions*" (Spivak 1994, p. 78, emphasis

original). Focusing on the women in the subaltern classes whose economic exploitation is

compounded by patriarchy, Spivak argues that instead, given the asymmetrical relationship of

the postcolonial world, "the subject of exploitation cannot know and speak the text of female

exploitation even if the absurdity of the nonrepresenting intellectual making space for her to

speak is achieved" (p. 84). In other words, theories of liberation should take into account the

asymmetrical or unequal relation in order to create not only the space for solidarity but also

strategies that allows for the subjects to participate in that space. Spivak argues that the role of

the postcolonial intellectuals is "to learn to speak to (rather than listen to or speak for) the

historically muted subject", which involves a "systematic unlearning" of the intellectuals'

privilege (p. 91). In practice, this project of unlearning begins with questioning and investigating

the silences of the silenced subjects (p. 92).

Majid (2000) problematizes the comparable silences with regards to Islam and Muslim

scholars. He argues that "Islam and Islamic history [are] subject that have been made

insignificant in the postcolonial era or simply relegated to small, often secondary and less

rigorous sectors of public education" (Majid 2000, p. 29). On the one hand, without fully

comprehending this marginalization, it is not possible for Muslims, whom Majid refers to as

"anticolonialist reformers and moderates" (p. 29) to join the conversation. On the other hand,

Majid fears that Muslim scholars who are products of First World scholarship are unable or

unwilling to question their secular assumption. Majid's proposal for the scholars to

"(re)educate themselves in their own cultures and histories" (p. 29) echoes Spivak's (1994) call

for the systematic unlearning of the postcolonial intellectuals.

Majid argues that acknowledging the challenge of a "highly secularized intellectual world" that is "endemically suspicious of religion" is the first step to "break[ing] the theoretical impasse that seems to block the emergence of viable non-Western, indigenous alternatives" (Majid 2000, p. 12 and p. 21). In other words, the goal is to create a strategy that allows for non-Western cultures and traditions, including Islam, to contribute significantly to the postcolonial theories. Majid uses the term "cultural polycentricity" to describe the emergence of such alternatives (p. 135). Polycentricity is contrasted with "generic spirituality" or a "superficial universal spiritual alternative" that essentially denies the values of diverse cultural traditions. More specifically, he argues for "a viable multiconfessional world, where dialogic relations are maintained by actual practice, not by written laws or ideological purities" (p. 21). In other words, rather than merely allowing for differences that can only be mediated through generic or superficial spirituality such as often the case in a multicultural society, a polycentric society requires a genuine engagement with the traditions valued for their diversity.

In summary, while consistent with Brown's critique of secular, liberal subjectivity and her argument for postidentity positioning to challenge the marginalization of religion as essentializing and essentialized identity, the works of both Bhabha and Majid offer *additional dimensions* to the way we can use Brown's argument to challenge the secular form of Islamic religiosity. Bhabha's argument on postcolonial identities helps to situate a postcolonial challenge to the secular form of Islamic religiosity as a challenge that interrupts the perpetuation of the dynamics between colonial and anti-colonial identities. Majid further the argument by problematizing the secular intellectual world as the site where such postcolonial challenge to the secular form of Islamic religiosity takes place.

Majid (2000) argues that "a progressively defined Islam" offers an alternative that both genuinely engages with the religious traditions and provides a meaningful contribution to the political dialogue in the multiconfessional world (Majid 2000, p. 21). One of the characteristics of a progressively defined Islamic identity is postnationalism (which challenges both secular nationalism and Islamism) that provides a more appropriate foundation for solidarity given the global economic system (p. 72). Majid's argument for postnationalism echoes the argument made by Dabashi (2008) who terms progressive Islam in terms of "Islamic liberation theodicy" (Dabashi 2008, p. 22). According to Dabashi, "[t]he only liberation movement against the terror of globalizing empire that will be meaningful and mobilizing will have to be cross-cultural and global precisely in the same way that the empire it must oppose and the capital it must curtail are global" (p. 252). In other words, progressively defined Islam should speak to and motivate action that is based on solidarity that goes beyond the artificial national boundaries.

A more fundamental characteristic of progressively defined Islam that is implied in Dabashi's explanation is the focus on fighting oppression and injustice. Esack (2006) argues that although the existence of elements of progressive Islamic thought together with the actual use of the term "progressive Islam" dated back further, it was not until Irfani's work in 1983 that the term was used and discussed in a manner that distinguished it from "modernist" or "liberal" Islam (Esack 2006, p. 79). More specifically, according to Esack, Irfani defines progressive Islam as anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist (Esack 2006, p. 80). Esack explains that while "liberal Islam has functioned as an ideology of and for the bourgeois, struggling to secure freedom and ahistorical, progressive Islam focuses on the "non-subjects of history" (p. 84). Esack refers to the Qur'anic passages to legitimizes the progressive Islamic focus on those who are

"marginalized (*aradhil*, Q. 11:27; 26:70; 22:5) or downtrodden in the earth (*mustad'afun fi'l-ard*, Q. 4:97; 8:26)" (p. 81). What Esack and Dabashi are appealing to in their works is the negative solidarity that White (2009) proposes as the basis of the connectedness.

Methodologically, progressively defined Islam is characterized by its use of historical hermeneutics. The use of this method emphasizes the importance of the historical context within which the religious texts originated. In his earlier work, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, Esack (1997) argues that as a religious texts that was revealed over the period of a number of years, "the qur'anic revelation kept up with the changing [social] conditions and environment" (Esack 1997, p. 59). Therefore, the "principle of progressive revelation" can be used of a foundation for a contextual rather than a literal reading of the religious texts (p. 59). In other words, rather than treating the religious texts as fixed and unchanging, the texts of the religion are approached using a methodology that focuses on discovering the spirit or higher objectives (*maqasid*) of the religion in order for the religion to remain relevant to the changing social conditions. I argue that while historical hermeneutics is used in contrast to a literal approach to religious texts and traditions, it is not a method that is unique to progressive Islam because it also can be used to affirm rather than challenge liberal subjectivity. Therefore, as I will demonstrate using the issue of food in the next chapter, the progressive approach to religion is better understood as a challenge not only to the *literal* but also the *liberal* contextual approaches to religion.

Although Ramadan (2009) does not use the term "progressive Islam" in his work, *Radical Reform*, his crucial distinction between "adaptive reform" and "radical reform" (Ramadan 2009, p. 33) reflects the progressive elements that the other aforementioned

scholars have elaborated. For Ramadan, "adaptive reform" refers to the act of "observing the world, noting its changes then coming back to the texts to suggest new readings, *alleviations,* or *exemptions,* in their implementation" (p. 33, emphasis mine). Moreover, he explains that adaptive reform is the mechanism used for developing "minority *fiqh*" (Islamic jurisprudence) whose main purpose is "to answer the needs of Muslims living in a 'minority situation', particularly in the West" (p. 31). In other words, adaptive reform is predicated on the assumption that religion is a fixed, essential identity.

In contrast, radical reform is defined as a reform that "aims to change the order of things in the very name of the ethics it attempts to be faithful to [...] without ever accepting [the context's] shortcomings and injustices as matters of fate (to which one would simply have to adapt)" (Ramadan 2009, p. 33). It is radical because it questions the assumptions that "Islam and Muslims are expected to adapt and not contribute to their own answers" to the problem of the societies within which they live (p. 37). This call for a critical contribution is one aspect that characterizes Ramadan's radical reform as in line with the concept of progressive Islam. For Ramadan, failing to strive for such contribution by conceding to the strategy of adaptation is not a true reform because it accepts rather than questions the essence of secular liberalism it is supposed to reform. Because radical reform does not presuppose religious identity as fixed and essential, I argue that radical reform is best understood as challenging the depoliticization of religious belief and ethics. Furthermore, this challenge focuses on the situatedness of one's religious identity and the necessity to translate such situatedness into a vision of the common. Ramadan briefly mentions the issue of Islamic dietary laws in his work, drawing parallel between the obsession on slaughter mechanism in many Muslims' understanding of Islamic

dietary laws and their obsession on interest in Islamic banking. I will include his view on Islamic

dietary laws in a more detailed discussion of the different approaches to Islamic food ethics in

the next chapter.

Although Ramadan's concept of radical reform reflects much agreement with

progressive Islam, his (either intentional or unintentional) distancing his work from the

progressive Islam scholarship seems to be in effort to appeal to a more traditionalist audience.

He focuses on the traditional legal schools, makes only a passing remark on the interfaith

aspect of his radical reform, and is completely silent on the issue of liberal subjectivity although

his proposals are effectively a challenge to individualism. My argument is not that traditional

legal schools are not important. However, my argument is that Ramadan focuses mainly on the

essentialization of religious belief that allows for the disconnection between religious belief and

ethics, and therefore argues that the solution for reconnecting the two may be found within

the pre-modern Islamic traditions of legal schools. In contrast, I argue that it is the exclusive

characteristic of liberal subjectivity that makes it difficult for a liberal subject to see the

connection between religious belief, ethics and politics. The solution, therefore, cannot be

found solely within the pre-modern Islamic traditions without situating them within the context

of liberal modernity. Progressive Islamic scholars' call for religious reform is best understood as

a call to challenge the essentialization of religious belief that has been formed through the

language of privacy. It is a repoliticization of religious belief and ethics through postidentity

positioning, which requires a translation of one's religious situatedness into a vision of the

common based not on foundationalism but on negative solidarity that focuses on the

experience of our common subjection.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analyzed the *exclusive characteristic of liberal subjectivity* that has made it difficult for the participants that I interviewed to see themselves and understand the demands of Islamic dietary laws in terms of other than group identity and individual consumerism. I analyzed the ongoing discourse on challenging the language of exclusive characteristic of liberal subjectivity. In particular, I analyzed the different concepts that have been employed by different scholars, which include Brown's (1995) "postidentity and Walker's (2007) "expressive-collaborative" model of ethics, "progressive Islam" (Safi 2003, Esack 2003 and 2006, and Majid 2000) and "radical reform (Ramadan 2009). I argue that all of these concepts have in common the concerns for *greater inclusivity* in response to the problem of the exclusive characteristic of liberal subjectivity that makes it difficult to see the connection between religious belief, ethics and politics. They challenge the essentialization of religious belief and ethics that has been formed through the language of privacy and argue for a repoliticization of religious belief and ethics, which requires a translation of one's religious situatedness into a vision of the common. In the next chapter, I will demonstrate how these concerns for greater inclusivity can be applied to understanding Islamic dietary laws.

Chapter 2 Approaches to Islamic Dietary Laws

Introduction

In chapter 1, I analyzed in depth the exclusive characteristic of liberal subjectivity that

has made it difficult for individuals to see themselves and understand the demands of Islamic

dietary laws in terms of other than group identity and individual consumerism using examples

of the answers of the participants I interviewed as illustration. In this chapter, I apply the

argument for greater inclusivity that I analyze in chapter 1 to the issue of food by

problematizing the different articulations and applications of Islamic dietary laws both from the

existing literature on the topic and the answers of the participants that I interviewed. In order

to propose a different approach to thinking and speaking about Islamic dietary laws (i.e. one

that challenges the language of exclusive privatized religious belief or identity and individual

consumerism), I categorize many of the articulations that I encountered into two categories:

the literal and the liberal contextual approaches.

In the category of the literal approach I analyze the articulations that emphasize

adherence to the letter of the Islamic dietary laws. Based on the literature and the answers

given by the participants interviewed, I distinguish between Muslims who focus on the

permissibility of food of the people of the Book and those who focus on the requirements for

animal slaughter (Riaz and Chaudry 2004, Nasir and Pererira 2008). I discuss the term *zabiha*

(sometimes spelled *dhabiha*, indicating meat from animals or permissible species slaughtered

by or in the presence of a Muslim who pronounces the name of God at the time of slaughter)

that is used by many of the participants. I argue that for those that employ the literal approach,

the two forces operating on the liberal subject (tolerance of private belief and market rationality) are evident. In other words, the literal approach to Islamic dietary laws articulates the religious demands concerning food in the language of exclusive privatized religious belief or identity and individual consumerism.

In contrast, the liberal contextual approach does not focus on strict adherence to the letter of the Islamic law because it challenges the language of exclusive privatized religious belief and identity (Foltz 2004, 2006). That is to say that the liberal contextual approach challenges the essentialization of religious belief. However, the contextual approach is still liberal insofar as it affirms autonomous individuality. Moreover, the articulations of the liberal contextual approach to Islamic dietary laws are still limited within the language of individual consumerism. At the end of the chapter, I problematize the categorization by analyzing the importance of virtue cultivation in both literal and liberal contextual approach. I argue that the Muslims' adherence to the religious dietary laws itself, even when understood in terms of private identity and individual consumerism, can be understood as a challenge to *both* the modern definition of religion as religious belief *and* the narrowly defined economic rationality. More specifically, I argue that, regardless of the difference in individual Muslims' understanding of the *contents* of the dietary laws, it is important to view the observance of Islamic dietary laws as a possible mechanism of cultivating virtues.

2.1 Religious Food Ethics: Dietary Laws and Maintenance of Order

To situate the different approaches to religion with regards to food discussed in this chapter (namely the literal and the liberal contextual approaches), I begin with a discussion of

religious dietary laws as a taboo. My argument is that we can understand the different approaches to religious dietary laws as either maintaining a conservative taboo or as proposing for a radical taboo. The work of Douglas (2002) is useful in providing an explanation of the purpose of religious dietary laws from the social perspective. Douglas argues that religious dietary laws are best understood as contributing to the creation and maintenance of social order by their specification of ritual uncleanness (Douglas 2002, p. 67). According to her, religious dietary laws should be understood as a "metaphor for holiness", where holiness is defined as "keeping distinct the categories of creation" so that "different classes of things shall not be confused" (p. 67). In other words, holiness is a matter of order where things are put and kept in their appropriate place.

Douglas argues against distinguishing between the seemingly irrational rituals of what she calls "primitive" religions with the seemingly demystified and rational ideas of order and "cleanness" in secular modern society (pp. 40 - 43). What is considered clean and unclean varies from one society to another and nothing in itself is clean or unclean since cleanness is relative to the social ordering accepted by the society (p. 44). Therefore, Douglas argues, it misses the point to try to "rationally" explain cleanness rituals, including explaining the Islamic prohibition of pork in terms of "dangers of eating pig in a hot climate" (p. 36). Rather than approaching cleanness rituals through piecemeal interpretation, Douglas argues that the rituals are better understood as "a systematic ordering of ideas" (p. 91). According to her, religious dietary laws can be understood either as arbitrary rules with disciplinary aim or as ethical allegories that reflect a larger systematic ordering of vice and virtues (p. 54). Favoring the latter understanding (religious dietary laws as ethical allegories), Douglas argues that the

meaningfulness of following a set of religious dietary laws is anchored on the assumption of *a universe of order*, i.e. "a universe in which men prosper by conforming to holiness and perish when they deviate from it" (p. 63).

Furthermore, Douglas argues that the boundaries of the social order are *subject to change* by the people who are the observers of that particular order despite the belief of most of the observers that they are merely passive recipients of those boundaries (p. 6). In her preface to the 2002 edition of her classic work *Purity and Danger*, which was first published in 1966, Douglas specifies that although most of her original work was devoted to explaining ideas of cleanness and taboo in terms of their *conservative* effect in maintaining current social order, she later argues that her original work is equally applicable to produce a *radical* explanation; i.e. how ideas of ritual cleanness – including religious dietary laws – support "a vision of the good community … of sustained radical challenge" (p. xx). I argue that the language of Islamic dietary laws is available not only for Muslims who seek to maintain existing social order by maintaining existing vision of the good community, but also for those who seek to radically change them. More explicitly, I argue that the literal approach to Islamic dietary laws is best understood as maintaining existing social order, while the contextual approach to Islamic dietary laws that seeks to translate cleanness rituals into ethical practices is better understood not as attempt to eliminate the importance of religious texts, but as an attempt to redraw the boundaries of applicability of the dietary laws. Moreover, based on the interviews I conducted, I find those who use a contextual approach interpret and understand Islamic dietary laws as motivations for challenging, rather than maintaining, the *status quo* by proposing a different

vision of the good community are more reflexive of the link between dietary laws and social order.

I begin with the literal approach to Islamic dietary laws, which focuses on adherence to the letter of the Islamic dietary laws. The answers I gathered from all of the participants that I interviewed reveal the importance of the letter of the Islamic dietary laws. All of the participants made either direct or indirect reference to the Qur'anic verses that explicitly address the prohibition on certain food. The main distinction in the answers of the participants is whether the Qur'anic verse that they refer to is the one that speaks to the importance of *zabiha* (sometimes spelled *dhabiha*, referring to the requirement of slaughter), or the verse that speaks to the permissibility of the food of the People of the Book. The verse that speaks to the importance of *zabiha* is as follows: "Eat not of (meats) On which Allah's name Hath not been pronounced: That would be impiety …" (VI:121); whereas the verse that speaks to the permissibility of the food of the people of the Book is as follows: "This day are (all) things Good and pure made lawful Unto you. The food of the People of the Book is lawful unto you And yours is lawful Unto them …" (V:5). For many of the participants that I interviewed, the People of the Book are commonly understood to be Jews and Christians.

Sixteen of the 23 participants that I interviewed subscribed to the belief that the food of the People of the Book is permissible. The following answers from the participants represent this view:

> Halal, in our family, even if we get it from the grocery store, or McDonalds, it is still halal because it is slaughtered by the People of the Book (Participant 5).

> My understanding of [*halal* is that] you can eat meat that are not specifically cut that way [i.e. following *zabiha* requirement] as long as it is by the People of the Book, however they have done it. If they choose to call their own Lord it would still be halal to me (Participant 7).

In the Qur'an, it is written that the meat from the People of the Book is halal for us to eat, but not everyone agrees (Participant 14).

The answer I got from scholars I respect is that it is ok for Muslims who live in a predominantly non-Muslim country and the availability of non-halal meat – and what I mean by that is slaughtered meat in Islamic way [i.e. non-zabiha] – is not necessarily available, they can eat meat, especially that this country is pretty much Judeo-Christian, which means we can eat their food and therefore we can eat their meat … you can eat from the food of the People of the Book, the Christians and the Jews, so that is what I do (Participant 16).

There are certain conditions for the meat to be halal […] the man who's slaughtering the animal has to be a Muslim, or Christian or Jewish (Participant 19).

It is important to note that the permissibility of the food of the People of the Book to the participants I interviewed is limited to the meat products are of *halal* animal species. That is to say that, for example, pork products are still considered to be *haram* (prohibited). For all the participants I interviewed, there is no flexibility in interpretation with regards to pork products.

In practice, the permissibility of the food of the People of the Book with regards to *halal* animal species is often not determined in case-by-case basis, as to know exactly whether a certain product is produced by the People of the Book. Instead, my interviews suggest that what the participants would do is make a generalization with regards to the majority population of the society, unless another determining factor is known that can possibly override the generalization. For example, one of the participants quoted above clarified who she would exclude from the category of the People of the Book:

Halal, in our family, even if we get it from the grocery store, or McDonalds, it is still halal because it is slaughtered by the People of the Book. But I won't eat beef or chicken from the Chinese restaurant usually because [they are] Buddhist … the other religions are not the People of the Book (Participant 5).

That is to say that, one way to determine the permissibility of a certain food is to make generalization about the society (which in this case is that the country is considered to be a Judeo-Christian country where the majority of the population is assumed to fit into the category of the People of the Book) and exclude certain cases based on other known factor (for

example, a Chinese restaurant is believed to be owned or run by someone who is probably

neither Jewish nor Christian).

In contrast, seven of the 23 participants I interviewed subscribed to the belief that halal

meat products must meet the stricter slaughter requirement, i.e. they must come from animals

slaughtered by, or in the presence of, a Muslim. The following answers from the participants

represent this view:

> *Halal* [means] you slaughter the animal, either chicken, cow, whatever, you slaughter it according to the proper Muslim tradition, which is by saying the name of Allah (Participant 8).

> *Halal* meat is, the description would be how it has been, it has been slaughtered according to the directions given in the Qur'an and the hadith (Participant 9).

> For our family, a few years ago, we decided to just eating halal meat and I think some people they get confused about that. When we say halal we mean *zabiha*, because a lot of people think it is just non-pork (Participant 23).

For those participants, the requirement for slaughter is not superseded by the permissibility of

the food of the People of the Book. In practice, they purchase their meat and poultry products

either from Muslim-owned stores or non-Muslim-owned stores that sell products that are

certified as *halal*.

The answer of Participant 23 quoted above also reflects the changes in the view that

some of the participants interviewed have held over time. Whereas Participant 23 has changed

her interpretation of *halal* from considering the food of the People of the Book to considering

only *zabiha* as *halal*, another participant (Participant 11) has changed her interpretation in the

opposite direction. She used to consider only *zabiha* as *halal* and at the time of the interview,

she considered the *zabiha* requirement to be less important, as reflected in the way she

answered the question of how important following the slaughter requirement (*zabiha*) is for

her:

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> [Following zabiha requirement] is something I grew up with, so I think, from childhood [the importance] has probably decreased little by little, just because it has been tradition, I guess. I view things about it more and more consciously, it is not necessarily the most important thing. So over the years I have been willing to try others. [...] But I've certainly not been willing to venture into anything that is explicitly forbidden for Muslim, i.e. pork. But as far as the type of slaughter than happens for beef or for chicken, I have been willing to try, starting with kosher, then going into mainstream a bit, especially when halal meat was less available. I was more willing to try meat that was not traditionally halal for Muslims (Participant 11).

For this participant, the relaxation of the interpretation from a stricter understanding of *halal* as meeting the specific slaughter requirement to *halal* as including the food of the People of the Book (with the exception of the explicitly forbidden, such as pork) is specifically driven by the availability. In other words, she would prefer *zabiha* products when available, but accept the 'mainstream' or *non-zabiha* products as long as it is not explicitly forbidden. This view is shared by other participants who accepted the permissibility of the food of the People of the Book. That is to say that those who do not think that the slaughter requirement has to be observed here would consider it to be absolutely necessary when they go to places where the availability of *zabiha* food is not limited.

What these varieties of interpretations of the participants have in common, however, is the importance of the Qur'anic verses that draw the boundaries of the interpretations. All of the participants interviewed follow the letter of Islamic dietary laws as outlined in the verses of the Qur'an, the difference comes from emphasizing on which verse they perceive to be more relevant. As I mentioned previously, it is important to note that even those participants who accept the permissibility of the food of the People of the Book view the slaughter requirement to be important. In other words, many (although not all) of the participants view the more relaxed interpretation of the Islamic dietary laws to be less than ideal and it is only justified given the limited availability of the *zabiha* food. The acceptance of the more relaxed

interpretation of Islamic dietary laws (i.e. the permissibility of the food of the People of the Book) can be understood as an example of what Ramadan (2009) calls "adaptive strategy" (Ramadan 2009, p. 31). According to Ramadan, adaptive strategies are used by Muslims who live in societies where Muslims are not the majority. Adaptive strategy involves, "observing the world, noting its changes then coming back to the texts to suggest new readings, alleviations, or exemptions, in their implementation" (p. 33). That is to say, many of the participants who do not think that the slaughter requirement has to be observed here would consider it to be absolutely necessary when they go to places where the availability of *zabiha* food is not limited.

While the acceptance of the more relaxed interpretation of Islamic dietary laws is an example of an adaptive strategy for some Muslims, accepting *halal* standards set by halal-certification for industrial meat in another example of the adaptive strategy for others. More specifically, the process of halal-certification involves inspection to ensure that the halal products pass certain standards that have adapted for industrial mechanical slaughtering. In *Halal Food Production*, Riaz and Chaudry (2004) discuss in length and detail the adapted standards for industrial mechanical slaughter. It is important to note that one of the co-authors of *Halal Food Production*, Muhammad Chaudry is the president of Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America (IFANCA) at the time of this writing (www.ifanca.org). IFANCA is one of the halal-certifying institutions in the US. IFANCA's halal seal (with Crescent-M symbol) can be found in many pre-packaged meat products. According to their website, the not-for-profit organization is based in Chicago, Illinois and was established in 1982. It is recognized by the government-affiliated halal-certifying authorities in many Muslim-majority countries, including Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates.

According to Riaz and Chaudry (2004), the standards for industrial mechanical slaughter are adapted from the "typical halal slaughter procedures" (Riaz and Chaudry 2004, p. 67). What the authors mean by the *typical* halal slaughter procedures is the one that follows the letter of the dietary laws, which according to them involve the following primary requirements:

> Animal or bird must be of halal species and alive at the time of slaughter. Slaughtering must be done by a mature Muslim of sound mind, trained in slaughtering method for the type and size of animal to be slaughtered. The name of Allah (Bismillah Allahu Akbar) must be verbally invoked by the Muslim slaughter person while slaying the animal. Slaughtering must be carried out on the next from the front cutting the esophagus, wind pipe (trachea), jugular veins, and carotid arteries, without cutting the spinal cord beyond the neck muscle. Slaughtering must be carried out by a sharp knife in a swift sweep so that the animal does not feel the pain of a slaying. Blood, must be drained out thoroughly and the animal must die of bleeding rather than any other injury, inflicted or accidental (p. 67).

To adapt the *typical* halal slaughter for industrial procedure for mechanical slaughter, the authors specify the latter as follows:

> The birds must be of halal species: chicken, ducks, or turkey. The slaughter person while pronouncing Bismillahi Allahu Akbar starts the machine. The birds are hung onto the conveyor railing one at a time without agitating them. The birds are passed over electrified water, touching the beak to shock them unconscious. A Muslim slaughter person is positioned behind the machine and bleeds the birds missed by the machine while continuously invoking the name of God (Two Muslim workers might be required, depending on the line speed). Halal birds are completely segregated [from birds slaughtered non-zabiha way] throughout the process (p. 68).

The quotes demonstrate that the process of adaptation focuses on the technical modalities of the slaughter, which is taken to be the essence of the Islamic dietary law. The injunction of the pronouncement of the name of God and the particularities of the method of slaughter are what makes the given process of mechanical slaughter process "Islamic".

The use of adaptive strategy reflects the *exclusive* characteristic of the literal approach to understanding the religious demands, including demands concerning dietary laws. Using this approach, Islamic dietary laws are understood as an issue that differentiates Muslims from the rest of the society. Another example of the adaptive strategy that some Muslims have employed with regards to Islamic dietary laws is what Nasir and Pereira (2008) termed

"defensive dining" (Nasir and Pereira 2008, p. 66). Defensive dining involves Muslims making sure that the food they consume are halal even though the restaurants from which they obtained them are owned by non-Muslims, and establishing "a safe distance" between Muslims who eat halal and non-Muslims who eat non-halal food to avoid contamination (p. 69). Nasir and Pereira argue that this strategy allows Muslims in Singapore (a non-Muslim majority society) to participate in public dining together with non-Muslims, and therefore the strategy helps those Muslims avoid practicing self-exclusion. I argue, in contrary to Nasir and Pereira, that the defensive dining shares with other adaptive strategies the exclusive characteristic of the literal approach to Islamic dietary laws. That is to say that the practices of defensive dining assume the understanding of Islamic dietary laws that is limited to concerns that Muslims do not share with others.

In the next section, I will analyze a very different approach to Islamic dietary laws, which I term the liberal contextual approach. The liberal contextual approach interprets Islamic dietary laws as part of a larger system of food ethics and consequently views the concept of permissibility very differently. In contrast to the exclusivity of the literal approach, the liberal contextual approach that I will present in the next section does not start with the assumption that Islamic food ethics applies only to Muslims. Instead, it draws from values that are *shared* by Muslims and non-Muslims by seriously considering arguments that have been developed within the framework of secular food ethics. In particular, I will analyze the argument for Islamic vegetarianism as developed by Foltz (2004, 2006).

2.2 Liberal Contextual Approach to Islamic Dietary Laws

Foltz (2004, 2006) has written the most comprehensive discussion up to date on deriving an understanding of Islamic food ethics that challenges the literal understanding I analyzed in the last section. In short, he argues that Islamic vegetarianism is the conclusion that follows from the premises of ethical principles found in the teachings of Islam. Similar to Ramadan's (2009) argument against adaptive strategy whose purpose is to alleviate the burden of Muslims living as a minority, Foltz's (2004, 2006) objective is to address the more fundamental problem of injustice. Moreover, his argument is predicated on the assumption that similar ethical principles can be found in other religions and non-theistic ethical systems (Foltz 2006, p. 2). Therefore, Foltz's approach challenges the exclusive reading of Islamic dietary laws. Because his argument is predicated on the assumption of *similar ethical principles*, it is crucial to understand such similarity in order to analyze his argument. Therefore, I will present Foltz's argument for Islamic vegetarianism by comparing it directly with Kalechofsky's (2004) argument for Jewish vegetarianism. Later, I will compare Foltz's argument with the argument for non-religious ethical vegetarianism as developed by Singer (1975, 1997) and Singer and Mason (2006).

Unlike the literal understanding to Islamic food ethics that focuses on the letter of the Islamic dietary laws, Foltz's argument for Islamic vegetarianism – and Kalechofsky's argument for Jewish vegetarianism – focuses on the context of when the laws originated in order to find the appropriate application of the laws in the current context. Foltz and Kalechofsky use historical hermeneutics to argue that the original intention of the dietary laws is best fulfilled

through vegetarianism given the current context of modern industrial meat production.

Kalechofsky (2004) argues,

> the reason for the complexity of the laws of *kashrut* was to make the eating of meat difficult and to teach us refinement in our appetite and reverence for animal life. But the fact is that kashrut does not perform these functions for most modern Jews. The modern Western world, with its overabundance of meat eaten by urban people divorced from animal life, has severely changed the meaning of traditional *kashrut* (Kalechofsky 2004, p. 173).

Similarly, Foltz (2004) argues that the context of seventh-century Arabia, when the Islamic dietary laws were revealed, needs to be taken into consideration to properly understand the injunction on the permissibility of food for Muslims. He argues,

> Factory farms did not exist in seventh-century Arabia … Traditional Arab pastoralists needed animal products in order to survive, yet their practices did not result in the destruction of entire ecosystem. For the most part, the early community lacked the vast dietary alternatives available to most Muslims today (Foltz 2004, p. 219).

Therefore, both authors conclude, given the vast difference between the original contexts of the laws and the current modern context, there is a need to *redraw the boundaries* between the permissible and the forbidden in order to retain the intention or the purpose of the laws.

Both Kalechofsky and Foltz argue that the extensive rules regarding meat eating should not be understood as a *requirement* for meat eating. Rather, they should be understood as limiting or restricting the *permissibility* of meat eating. Kalechofsky writes,

> law of *kashrut* limited the meat Jews ate to those animals who were vegetarian animals, which reveals the continuing aversion to the problem of predation in the world … [and] there has never been a commandment in Judaism to eat meat (Kalechofsky 2004, pp. 170 – 171).

The lack of a commandment to eat meat, coupled with the view that dietary laws are meant to restrict what is permissible, leads to the conclusion that a historically progressive understanding of the religious dietary laws would be to eliminate meat eating altogether.

Similarly, Foltz argues,

> the Qur'an itself does not specifically require Muslims to sacrifice animals, for food or for any other reasons, it merely *permits* them to do so (Foltz 2006, p. 14, emphasis original).

More specifically, for both authors, the permissibility of meat eating, restricted by the religious

dietary laws, can be questioned given the unethical conditions in which meat is currently

produced in our food system, together with the lack of requirement for meat eating itself.

Following these premises, vegetarianism becomes the logical conclusion of the ethical

principles of the religions; a conclusion that is specifically made necessary by the modern

context.

Moreover, both authors argue that the preference for vegetarianism can be found

within the religions even without the consideration of the current context of industrial meat

production system. In other words, both authors view the limiting purpose of religious dietary

laws should be taken in progression to its logical conclusion of doing away with meat eating

entirely. This can be observed in Kalchofsky's remark,

> It is as vegetarians, without need of a temple in which to sacrifice animals for food, that Jews may become a nation of priests, as Moses wished them to be, for they do not then need a special priest class to preside over the sacrifice of animals (Kalechofsky 2004, p. 176).

Similarly, Foltz draws the same conclusion from the progression of the virtue of compassion

when he claims,

> The Qur'an and the *sunna* have been shown to enjoin Muslims to treat animals with compassion. This is clearly reflected in the established procedure for *halal* slaughter. It should be obvious, however, that not slaughtering the animals at all would be even more compassionate! (Foltz 2006, p. 123).

Therefore, for both authors, piety is characterized neither by following the letter of the laws

nor by merely adapting the laws to the current context.

In her attempt to argue for Jewish vegetarianism as the manifestation of the ethical

principles in Judaism, Kalechofsky specified five principles from which vegetarianism can be

derived. The principles are,

Pikuach nefesh (the commandment to guard your health and life); *tsa'ar ba'alei chaim* (avoid causing pain to any living creature); *bat tashchit* (the commandment not to waste or destroy anything of value; *tzedakah* (to help the needy and work for a more just society); and *klal Israel* (to work for the welfare of the community) (Kalechofsky 2004, pp. 173-4).

Comparably, Foltz lists the principles of "human health, social justice, ecological stewardship, and compassion toward nonhuman creation" to derive his argument for Islamic vegetarianism (Foltz 2004, p. 220).

It is important to note that both the literal and the contextual approaches share the assumption of the importance of following the dietary laws. The difference lies in how to interpret the dietary laws. The literal approach interprets Islamic dietary laws as limited to the exclusive concerns that pertain only to Muslims. In contrast, the contextual approach avoids exclusivism by finding a common ground or similarity in the ethical principles that Muslims share with others. That is to say that the liberal contextual approach challenges the essentialization of religious belief that is not problematized in the literal approach. However, the contextual approach outlined above is still liberal insofar as it affirms autonomous individuality. Moreover, the articulations of the liberal contextual approach to Islamic dietary laws are still limited within the language of individual consumerism. To be fair, this is not something that should be considered as a shortcoming of the contextual approach to religious dietary laws. Instead, the conformity of the liberal contextual approach to religious dietary laws to the non-religious discourse of food ethics reveals the prevalence of the liberal compartmentalization of ethics and politics. In the remainder of this section, I will demonstrate the conformity of the liberal contextual approach to the non-religious discourse of food ethics.

I begin with the striking similarity between the ethical principles that Foltz outlines and the five principles that secular vegetarians Singer and Mason (2006) propose, which are not

derived from any theistic system of ethics: transparency, fairness, humanity, social

responsibility, and needs (Singer and Mason 2006, pp. 270-1). Transparency refers to the right

of consumers to know how the food they buy is produced. Fairness means that food price

should not hide any inefficiencies or true costs of producing that food, such as the

environmental costs. Humanity refers to the principles of compassion to all sentient beings,

including animals. Social responsibility refers to the rights of workers involved in producing our

food, including the rights to fair wage and working conditions. Finally, the needs principle

means that our decision on which food we should consume should be guided by the need for

nourishment rather than habit or taste.

For Singer and Mason, ethical vegetarianism is a strong argument in response to the

problems of the current food system because the issue of industrial animal farming methods is

the most pressing issue of the current food system that cannot be justified ethically. Given the

complexity of the problems, the authors argue that vegetarianism and veganism are the

practical ethical solution to the problem of industrial food system (p. 278). This argument can

be traced back to the one that Singer has formulated decades ago. Singer's (1975, 1993)

argument rests on the premise that animal farming practices in industrial societies have caused

animals unnecessary pain, and that industrialized societies have developed a production system

that makes eating animals unnecessary. Based on those premises, Singer concludes that "we

should not eat chicken, pork, or veal, *unless we know* that the meat we are eating was not

produced by factory farmed methods" (Singer 1993, p. 63, emphasis mine). In the page that

follows that argument, Singer states, "the important question is not whether animal flesh *could*

be produced without suffering, but whether the flesh we are considering buying was produced

without suffering" (p. 64, emphasis original). Given the complexity of the food system and the unlikelihood that most people are able to know for certain whether the meat they are consuming has been produced ethically, Singer argues it is more practical to be on the safe side and doing away with consuming meat entirely.

I argue that Foltz's argument for Islamic vegetarianism is best understood as a response to the non-religious version of ethical vegetarianism. More specifically, it is a response to the secular approach to ethics that marginalizes the importance of religion by assuming that religion has nothing to contribute to the solution for the multitude of problems in the current food system. This marginalization is evident in the work of Singer and Mason, for example, where the authors equate "religious" with "fanatical" and by opposing it to the "ethical" when they claim that,

> Some religions, like Orthodox Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism, have strict rules against eating particular foods, and their adherents are supposed to follow these rules all the time. If they break them they may feel polluted, or disobedient to their god. But this rule-based view isn't the only possible approach to ethics, nor the best one, in our view. Ethical thinking can be sensitive to circumstances (Singer and Mason 2006, p. 281).

In other words, Singer and Mason are critical of the rigid, rule-based literal approach that is not sensitive to circumstances. It is this assumption that religious approach is necessarily rigid and insensitive to circumstances that Foltz rejects by using the ethical principles as the foundation for his argument.

To Singer and Mason, religious dietary laws that are followed thoughtlessly without regards to contexts or circumstances stand in opposition to ethical thinking that is informed by circumstances. When they write, "eating ethically doesn't have to be like keeping kosher" (Singer and Mason 2006, p. 282), we can hear Kalechofsky's response that, "Jewish vegetarianism restores kashrut to its original intentions and its original simplicity, where

purpose and practice have a relationship and harmony that can easily be grasped" (Kalechofsky

2004, p. 173). While Singer and Mason view *kashrut* or *halal* as irrelevant or even potentially

detrimental to ethical thinking, Kalechofsky and Foltz argue that *kashrut* and *halal* should be

defined – and continuously redefined – by the fundamental ethical principles, or the higher

objectives and intentions, of the respective religions.

Foltz's rejection of the marginalization of religion that has manifested in the literal

approach is apparent from his explicit appeal to Singer's argument for ethical vegetarianism as

part of the foundation for developing his own argument on the consistency of Islamic

vegetarianism (Foltz 2004, p. 215). Moreover, Foltz claims that,

> the modern West has produced the most egregious forms of institutionalized violence against animals the
> world has ever seen: factory farming, laboratory testing, habitat depletion – the list goes on. But the West
> has also, from Jeremy Bentham and Henry Salt up through Peter Singer and Carol Adams, generated the
> most sophisticated critiques of the kind of unexamined anthropocentrism that has made such crimes
> appear morally acceptable" (Foltz 2006, p. 7).

In other words, Foltz rejects the secular marginalization of religion by providing an alternative

for Muslims to think of Islamic dietary laws beyond the exclusive concerns of the literal

approach and proposing a solution that is not rigid or insensitive to circumstances.

Foltz's argument is beneficial insofar as it challenges the essentialization of religious

belief that is not problematized in the literal approach. However, the contextual approach

outlined above is still liberal insofar as it affirms autonomous individuality. Moreover, the

articulations of the liberal contextual approach to Islamic dietary laws are still limited within the

language of individual consumerism. It emphasizes the actions that individuals should do *as*

individuals, rather than act that can only be carried out collaboratively with others. As a result,

the articulations of the ethical demands are limited in terms of individual preferences that can

be *tolerated* as long as they do not encroach on others, or *commodified* as another niche

market (I will analyze this further in chapter 3). Furthermore, while important, individual action is insufficient to fulfill the demands of the religions that focus on the well-being of the community, as indicated by the principles of social justice or *tzedakah* (to help the needy and work for a more just society) and *klal Israel* (to work for the welfare of the community) that Foltz (2004) and Kalechofsky (2004) use to justify their arguments.

I argue that by reducing the discourse of religious food ethics to vegetarianism, Foltz marginalizes the political aspect of the discourse. By following the liberal ethical reasoning uncritically, the Islamic vegetarianism argument does not question the way depoliticized conception of ethics fit into and supports the liberal conception of subjectivity. The proposal of religious vegetarianism as a solution for individual piety does not necessarily motivate believers of the respective religions the ability to perceive themselves as part of their communities and to engage in the conversation and collaboration that is based on the vision of the common.

Out of the five principles that Kalechofsky uses to derive her conclusion of Jewish vegetarianism, we can see how individual piety is prominent in the first three of them, i.e. *Pikuach nefesh* (the commandment to guard your health and life); *tsa'ar ba'alei chaim* (avoid causing pain to any living creature); and *bat tashchit* (the commandment not to waste or destroy anything of value) (Kalecfhofsky 2004, pp. 173-4). Indeed, in her argument for Jewish vegetarianism, these are the principles that she focuses on. However, it is not clear how individual act of being a vegetarianism can lead to the realization of the other two principles, i.e. *tzedakah* (to help the needy and work for a more just society); and *klal Israel* (to work for the welfare of the community) (pp. 173-4). While it can be argued that a society where everyone is a vegetarian could be one with less animal suffering and environmental damages,

there is a huge gap between the personal act of being a vegetarian and the realization of such society. Clearly, to follow those principles, one needs to go beyond the matter of individual or personal act.

2.3 Dietary Laws as Mechanism of Cultivating Virtues

In the previous two sections, I have demonstrated that both the literal and the liberal contextual approaches to Islamic dietary laws can be seen as insufficient challenges to the exclusive language of privacy that limits the articulations of the dietary laws in terms of individual consumerism. In this section, I will problematize the categorization of these approaches by analyzing the importance of discipline cultivation in both literal and liberal contextual approach. I argue that the Muslims' adherence to the religious dietary laws itself, even when understood in terms of private identity and individual consumerism, can be understood as a challenge to *both* the modern definition of religion as religious belief *and* the narrowly defined economic rationality. More specifically, I argue that, regardless of the difference in individual Muslims' understanding of the content of the dietary laws, what they all have in common is the importance of following a dietary laws as a mechanism of cultivating discipline.

The work of Mahmood (2005) on piety movement in Egypt is valuable for understanding how the practice of adhering to religious dietary laws can be understood as a challenge to the modern definition of religion as religious belief. Mahmood argues that the piety movement that she studied is best understood as "critiquing a prevalent form of religiosity that treats Islam as a system of abstract values that is to be cherished but that, nonetheless, remains inessential to

the practical organization of day-to-day life" (Mahmood 2005, p. 45). The prevalent form of

religiosity is also characterized by what Mahmood calls "the folklorization of worship", where

"the ritual acts of worship in the popular imagination have increasingly acquired the status of

customs or conventions, a kind of 'Muslim folklore' undertaken as a form of entertainment or

as a means to display a religio-cultural identity" (p. 48). She argues that it is this folklorization of

worship that the piety movement seeks to challenge. That is to say, the goal of the piety

movement is to challenge the modern form of religiosity through "the cultivation of those

bodily aptitudes, virtues, habits, and desires that serve to ground Islamic principles within the

practices of everyday living" (p. 45). I understand the piety movement's critique of the

prevalent form of religiosity as a challenge to not only the modern redefinition of religion as

belief (Asad 2011, p. 56). To be clear, for the piety movement, religion as belief without

practices of ritual or worship is not considered as a sufficient form of religiosity. However,

neither is the form of religiosity whose practices of ritual or worship that do not serve as a way

to cultivate moral subjects.

Mahmood uses the example of fasting during the month of Ramadan to illustrate the

piety movement's critique of the folklorization of worship. She explains that for the members of

the piety movement, "the act of fasting is a necessary means to a virtuous life" (Mahmood

2005, p. 50). In her analysis of the answer of one of the participants that she interviewed in her

study, Mahmood explains,

> When I questioned Fatma further about what she meant by 'the real meaning and spirit of Ramadan'' she
> explains to me that this entailed a range of behaviors that a Muslim must undertake when fasting,
> behaviors that conveyed the fuller meaning of the fast, such as abstaining from anger and lying, avoiding
> looking at things that stir one's appetite (sexual or culinary), and being extra diligent in one's prayers. […]
> 'Fasting is not simply abstaining from food', she explained to me, 'but a condition through which a Muslim
> comes to train herself in the virtues (*fadail*) of patience (*sabr*), trust in God (*tawakkul*), asceticism from

worldly pleasures (*zuhd*), etc.' In Fatma's view, therefore an act of fasting that does not enable one to acquire these virtues transforms fasting from a religious act to a folkloric custom (Mahmood 2005, p. 50).

This explanation demonstrates the importance of the ritual acts of worship as mechanisms to cultivate virtues. Furthermore, for the members of the piety movement, it is important to distinguish those who perform the ritual acts of worship as markers of identity (i.e. this is what Muslims do) and those whose performance of the ritual acts of worship really is a part of cultivating virtues (p. 51).

The connection between Mahmood's reference to the cultivation of the virtue of piety and the practice of adhering to Islamic dietary restrictions lies in the Aristotelian principle of *habitus* (Mahmood 2005, p. 136). That is to say that what is important is not simply the belief in the necessity of the practices of ritual or worship, but it is also how the practices of ritual as a repeated practice would leave "a permanent mark on the character of that person" (p. 136). Adhering to religious dietary laws can be understood as having a similar aspect and function to the more traditionally accepted forms of ritual practice, such as prayer or fasting, in that the aim is striving to be "close to God" through diligently being observant of and abstaining from pollutants that can obscure the cleanliness or purity associated with God (p. 122). Furthermore, with regards to the practice of observing religious dietary laws, it is not the *belief* in the necessity to obey religious dietary laws that is significant to this discussion. Rather, it is the 'virtuous habitus' or embodied assiduous practice of adhering to religious dietary laws that results in the cultivation of the virtue of piety that is at stake.

To be clear, in my interviews with the participants, I did not ask specifically whether they perceived their observance of Islamic dietary laws as a way to cultivate virtues. As a result, the answers of the participants on the importance of following Islamic dietary laws do not

clearly show the connection between observing the dietary laws and virtue cultivation. A number of the participants did explain the importance of following Islamic dietary laws in terms of its requirement for Muslims to know and care about where their food comes from and the practices involved in the production of the food they consume, as the following answer reflects:

> There is no official Muslim saying as far as 'you are what you eat', but we do believe basic principle in terms of everything is related to each other. And it is better to avoid something if there's any question about it […] or any questions about practices that went into it (Participant 4).

Furthermore, several of the participants made the connection between knowing where one's food comes from specifically with the virtue of *sympathy* toward animals. Recall the following answers of the participants, which I discussed previously in chapter1, as they responded to the question of what they think about industrial animal farming:

> The way they treat the animals, the majority of the animals, they don't treat [them] well. Most of the times, I see the animals being carried in trucks, confined in small spaces, and driving in long distance. And also how they slaughter the animals, they just line them up into the machine. I don't know, to me it is a little bit inhumane (Participant 8).

> There isn't respect for animals, for what they eat and their place in the world, their purpose in the world. It is just really messed up, really mechanized. I mean, they are animals, they are not like clothes to be sewn and put through the wringer (Participant 17).

> They are putting them [i.e. chickens] in crowded places, we can say they are humiliating the animals they are raising. I saw a movie about chicken farms […] when I saw that movie, it was, I stopped eating chicken for about one month, because I still have the images in my head (Participant 19).

Several of the participants voice their view on the importance of sympathy toward animals as directly related to their understanding of Islamic dietary laws, for example as reflected in the following answers:

> It isn't just about the way the animal dies but about [the way] the animal lives too. A Muslim is supposed to be invested in the good quality of life of not just human beings [but] with the animals too. There are plenty of stories in Islamic history of the Prophet telling us that people that were either granted heaven despite a long time of sins for their kindness to an animal or sent to hell for punishment because of their cruelty to an animal (Participant 4).

> To me *zabiha* is not just a matter of slaughtering […] you're supposed to treat that animal with care even before they have a hint that they will be slaughtered. They are not supposed to be kept in cages, they're supposed to be fed with proper food (Participant 7).

The whole reason behind halal is to treat the animals, slaughter them in way that they are not, not in a cruel manner. So if the religion is thinking about the way they die, the way they live their lives is also very important. So I think it is very important to our religion that we treat the animals properly, when they are alive and when they are ready to be slaughtered (Participant 15).

Before I became a Muslim, it was never an issue to me […] we just accept the meat on the shelf and a lot of people don't think past: how do they get here and what happened to the animal up to the time that it got here? After I became a Muslim and I started understanding *halal* meat and what does it mean, other than the fact that it was slaughtered, what does it mean? […] Some people say they are animals so who cares, but I think being Muslim, it affects me in the way I think about that. It is not a good way to treat animals (Participant 23).

Those answers demonstrate that, for those participants, it is important to distinguish what it means to follow Islamic dietary laws as markers of identity and what it means to understand the dietary laws in light of fundamental ethical principles (e.g. sympathy toward animals). To be clear, the participants do not think that all Muslims who follow Islamic dietary laws (i.e. eating only halal meat) do so with this understanding in mind. Instead, the participants think that is what a Muslim *supposed to* do (e.g. "a Muslims is supposed to be invested in the good quality of life" or "supposed to treat animals with care" in the answers quoted above).

As I mentioned previously, I did not ask the participants specifically whether they perceived their observance of Islamic dietary laws as a way to cultivate virtues. Their answers regarding the importance of observing the dietary laws, however, can be understood in terms of striving to be "close to God" through diligently being observant of and abstaining from pollutants that can obscure the cleanliness or purity associated with God. This practice involves the virtues of obedience and self-restraint as part of maintaining purity. To be clear, I do not argue that this is necessarily the way the participants that I interview understand their observance of Islamic dietary laws, but simply that it is a possibility. What is clear from the answers of the participants that I quoted above is that they consider being a Muslim is not limited to what one believes and carrying out practices of customs. This can also be understood

as a challenge not only to the modern definition of religion as religious belief or custom-based

identity, but also to the narrowly defined economic rationality. In the answers of the

participants quoted above, it is clear that their considerations for concerns other than

economic ones play a significant part in the way they perceive themselves and their behaviors.

Even when the approaches to Islamic dietary laws that I discussed in this chapter are

understood as posing a challenge to the modern form of religiosity and market rationality,

however, I argue that they present insufficient challenge to the exclusive language of privacy

that limits the articulations of the dietary laws in terms of individual consumerism. Mahmood

explains that for members of the piety movement, the practices of cultivating virtues are

limited to the "private world of worship" (Mahmmod 2005, p. 53). In the rest of this

dissertation, I will analyze what it means to have an articulation of the demands of a particular

religion (i.e. Islamic dietary laws) that is not restricted to the exclusive language of privacy.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I applied the argument for greater inclusivity that I analyze in chapter 1

to the issue of food by problematizing the different articulations and applications of Islamic

dietary laws both from the existing literature on the topic and the answers of the participants

that I interviewed. In order to propose a different approach to thinking and speaking about

Islamic dietary laws (i.e. one that challenges the language of exclusive privatized religious belief

or identity and individual consumerism), I categorized many of the articulations that I

encountered into two categories: the literal and the liberal contextual approaches. In the

category of the literal approach, I analyze the articulations that emphasize adherence to the

letter of the Islamic dietary laws. In contrast, the liberal contextual approach does not focus on

strict adherence to the letter of the Islamic law because it challenges the language of exclusive

privatized religious belief and identity (Foltz 2004, 2006). That is to say that the liberal

contextual approach challenges the essentialization of religious belief. However, the contextual

approach is still liberal insofar as it affirms autonomous individuality. Moreover, the

articulations of the liberal contextual approach to Islamic dietary laws are still limited within the

language of individual consumerism. At the end of the chapter, I problematized the

categorization by analyzing the importance of virtue cultivation in both literal and liberal

contextual approach. I argued that the Muslims' adherence to the religious dietary laws itself,

even when understood in terms of private identity and individual consumerism, can be

understood as a challenge to *both* the modern definition of religion as religious belief *and* the

narrowly defined economic rationality. More specifically, I argued that, regardless of the

difference in individual Muslims' understanding of the *contents* of the dietary laws, it is

important to view the observance of Islamic dietary laws as a possible mechanism of cultivating

virtues. In the next chapter, I will further the analysis of Islamic dietary laws as a mechanism of

virtue cultivation by situating the dietary laws within the broader context of alternative food

movements in this country.

Chapter 3 The Organic and the Local

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I analyzed the different articulations of Islamic dietary laws in both the answers of the participants that I interviewed and the existing literature on the topic in order to propose a different approach to thinking and speaking about Islamic dietary laws (i.e. one that challenges the language of exclusive privatized religious belief or identity and individual consumerism). In this chapter, I situate the importance of following Islamic dietary laws as a virtue cultivation mechanism in the broader context of alternative food movements in America. I begin by using the answers of the participants I interviewed to illustrate how they relate their understanding of Islamic dietary laws with non-Islamic ethical food practices. More specifically, I analyze the answers of the participants who made the connection between their understandings of Islamic dietary laws and the non-religious concepts of *organic* and *local* food.

I argue that some (not all) participants find ethical principles in organic and local to be compatible with the ethical principles of Islamic dietary laws as they understand them. That is why, given the context of the industrial food system, those participants view the organic or local ethical principles to be as important as, if not more important than, the requirements for slaughter (*zabiha*). I then analyze the concepts of organic and locavore by drawing from the works that problematize the concepts (Belasco 2007, Guthman 2004, Lavin 2009a and 2009b, McKibben 2007, and McWilliams 2009). I demonstrate that, similar to the different interpretations of Islamic dietary laws that I analyze in chapter 2, the different ways the concepts of organic and locavore have been employed reflect the tension between (non-

religious) food ethics as a discipline cultivation mechanism and the two forces of governance

operating on liberal subjectivity (i.e. tolerance and market rationality). More specifically, I argue

that the similarity lies in the articulations of the concepts organic and local in the language of

exclusive privatized belief (although not ostensibly based on religious doctrine) and individual

consumerism.

At the end of the chapter, I connect the discourse used in the works that are critical to

the exclusive individualistic articulations of non-religious food ethics to the concerns for *greater*

inclusivity that I analyze in chapter 1. Here, I analyze the concept of a *political* approach to food

ethics that challenges the limits of exclusive individualistic conception of ethics by challenging

the language of privacy. Furthermore, I briefly discuss the concept of *moral economy.* I argue

that the concept of moral economy is useful in understanding how a political approach to food

ethics challenges market rationality as the prevalent force of defining social relations. In making

my argument, I focus on the limits *to* market rationality that are either explicitly discussed or

implicitly assumed by the authors of the works from which I draw in this chapter.

3.1 *Halal* as Organic and Local

In chapter 1, I discussed the way many of the participants articulate their understanding

of following Islamic dietary laws in relation to their awareness and views on the industrial

animal farming. More specifically, the answers that I quoted previously included concerns

about packed feedlot, the long distant transportation of live animals, the use of hormones, and

the mechanized slaughter process. Other participants' answers with regard to what they

considered to be other concerns that should be taken into account in understanding the

religious dietary laws included diseased animals, the burning of the beak of chicks, genetically

modified food, and the use of hormones. At the end of chapter 2, I analyzed these concerns

(other than the slaughter requirement) in terms of understanding Islamic dietary laws as a

mechanism to cultivate virtues, more specifically in terms of cultivating awareness of where

one's food comes from and the feeling of sympathy toward animals. In other words, the

answers of the participants demonstrate that they interpret Islamic dietary laws as

encompassing more than what is made explicit by the Qur'anic verses (i.e. the slaughter

requirement and permissibility of the food of the People of the Book.

In the interviews I conducted with the participants, I asked them to explain what *halal*

food means to them. Although almost all of the participants started with the slaughter

requirement, most of them spoke of other concerns as the interviews progressed. As previously

discussed, it is important to note that the selection of the participants was not random but self-

selected. Therefore, most participants who were willing to be interviewed did so partly because

it gives them an opportunity to voice those concerns. When asked to explain further about their

dissatisfaction with interpreting the dietary laws only in terms of the slaughter requirement,

one participant used the term 'true' *halal* to voice her dissatisfaction with the interpretation

that is limited to the concern of the slaughter requirement. She explains,

> I believe that true *halal* food is animals that are raised according to Islamic guidelines, and that is not
> happening [with] just any generic chicken or lamb or cow farm. And what we do buy as halal [i.e. with
> halal labeling] is just this strictly definition of halal, which is killed by Islamic standard, but not raised by
> Islamic standard. (Participant 1)

Similarly, another participant (Participant 3) used the term 'perfect' *halal* to indicate that her

understanding of the dietary laws is not limited to the slaughter requirement. Moreover, for

Participant 3, the consideration for humane treatment of the animals not only is as important as, but is *more important* as the slaughter requirement aspect of *halal*,

> The perfect *halal* for me would be a balance between both of those things [i.e. slaughtered according to the Islamic ritual and the animals having been raised humanely]. But if I only have the choice between one or the other, I choose the ones that are raised humanely. (Participant 3)

In other words, many of the participants considered those other concerns to be as important as following the slaughter requirement in their understanding of Islamic dietary laws.

Furthermore, several of the participants made specific reference to *organic* and *local* food when they were asked to elaborate on their response to the question of what *halal* food means to them. The answers of some of them are as follow:

> It was more important to me that it'd be relatively local and raised humanely than slaughtered in [zabiha] way […] If you have the choice between farmers market and Muslim-owned place [i.e. store] […] I would choose the farmers market (Participant 3).

> We have really excellent farms right here area for being such a small town, we have a really nice farmers market. If you wanted Muslim-specific halal meat, it's not difficult to get […] I would rather find it much more in line with Islam's demands to buy my meat from [a farmer] at the farmers market, who I know loves her cows and treats them with the best care and doesn't just slaughter them for profits (Participant 4).

> We try to get the meat or chicken that is a little bit healthier like organic chicken or something like that (Participant 8).

> The primary criteria that we use is [sic.] organic. Is it natural? Has it been raised properly? (Participant 16)

The answers demonstrate that those participants find the ethical principles in organic and local food to be compatible with the ethical principles of Islamic dietary laws as they understand them. The focus of the remainder of this chapter is to analyze more closely how those ethical principles are articulated and translated into practice.

I begin with the answers of the two participants I quoted above (Participants 3 and 4) who use the language of local food to explain their view on Islamic dietary laws. Not only that they both made the connection between Islamic dietary laws and eating local, they also

specifically mentioned Pollan's (2006) work, *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, as having influenced

their belief in the importance of knowing where their food comes from as part of the ethical

demand of the religion. Although both of them had struggled with the issue before, Pollan's

work has provided the information they needed to solidify their belief. The two participants

told me,

> I've thought about this before but after reading Michael Pollan, it was just like embedded in my consciousness … how can I not be concerned about these things … you always knew [that] some of the conventional practices are bad but then [the book describes] the extent to which they were bad (Participant 3)

> it's just a matter of Muslims asking questions and I think that more education there is in terms of where your food comes from [is important] … like Michael Pollan's book [that] completely changed the way people love how their eggs and vegetables … people completely open their eyes and it was just a well-written book (Participant 4)

In essence, the discourse that urges people to know where their food comes from, including the

work of Pollan, resonates with the way some Muslims understand Islamic dietary laws.

Therefore, it is necessary to take a closer look at this argument. To show that Pollan is not

unique in making this argument, I will compare his argument with the argument made by

Kingsolver (2007) in her work, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*. Moreover, Pollan and Kingsolver are

only two of the latest authors whose works are among many others that have discuss the

importance of local food system.

Both Pollan and Kingsolver share the argument for the need to know where our food

comes from, which is necessitated by the industrial food system that has put a distance

between consumers and the natural world and complicates the act of obtaining our food

(Pollan 2006, p. 10; Kingsolver 2007, p. 4). The lack of the knowledge of where our food comes

from, according to both authors, is the most fundamental problem of the current food system.

Therefore, knowing where one food's comes from is essential in challenging the current food system. Pollan argues that,

> Our food system depends on consumers' not knowing much beyond the price disclosed by the checkout scanner. Cheapness and ignorance are mutually reinforcing. And it's a short way from not knowing who's at the other end of your food chain to not caring – to the carelessness of both producers and consumers (Pollan 2006 p. 245).

That is to say that market rationality operates as a primary force on the way we make decisions regarding food, with price as the most important factor in the decision-making process. Kingsolver also speaks about our lack of knowledge defines our relationship with the food that we eat when she writes,

> Absence of that knowledge has rendered us a nation of wary labelreaders [sic], oddly uneasy in our obligate relationship with the thing we eat (Kingsolver 2007, p. 10).

Consequently, both authors' works focused on discovering that knowledge first-hand and sharing the knowledge with the readers. Pollan starts with exposing the evil of industrial food production then continues with an exploration of the organic alternatives that culminates in what he calls the "Perfect Meal", a "labor- and thought-intensive" meal made from ingredients he had hunted and gathered himself (Pollan 2006, p. 9). Kingsolver, meanwhile, opts for uprooting her family from Arizona to a farm in Virginia in order to live off what they had grown themselves in their farm, in what she calls a year-long "project of abstinence from industrial food" (Kingsolver 2007, p. 338).

Both Pollan and Kingsolver prescribe locavorism, which they define as buying food that had been locally produced, as the best way to know where one's food comes from. They argue that buying locally grown food is the best way to minimize the true cost of bringing the food to our table, given that much of the true cost of industrially produced food is obscured in the industrial food chain. Furthermore, both Pollan and Kingsolver situate their argument for eating

local food against eating food produced by what they call "big organic" or "corporate organics"

(Pollan 2006, 134; Kingsolver 2007, p. 122). Kingsolver writes,

> 'Certified organic' does not necessarily mean sustainably grown, worker-friendly, fuel-efficient, cruelty-free, or any other *virtue* a consumer might wish for (Kingsolver 2007, p. 121, emphasis mine).

This is because the organic certification that focuses on regulating the use of pesticides,

fertilizers, additives, and growth hormones is completely silent on the other *virtues* that the

authors argue consumers should care about, virtues such as environmental sustainability,

worker friendliness, fuel efficiency, and cruelty-free treatment of the animals. Therefore,

Kingsolver argues that while the term organic has largely been co-opted by profit-driven large

corporation, "'locally grown' is a denomination whose meaning is incorruptible" (Kingsolver

2007, p. 123). In other words, both authors consider locavorism as better than buying food with

organic label because buying locally produced food allows the customers to care about more

comprehensive virtues.

The view of buying locally produced food as better than buying food with organic label is

explicitly discussed by Participant 4, one of the two participants who made the reference to

Pollan's work in her answer:

> [the problem with] making 'organic' into a legal term [is that] lots of the local farms, because of how small they are they can't be labeled organic. Because they don't have, they can't buy, all the equipment that the Agricultural Board demands that you have, like you need to have a shed of this dimension, you need to have your fruit this way and vegetables this way in order to be labeled organic. And [these farms are] a small operation. Everything that they do is actually better than what the organic label demands (Participant 4).

This answer reveals that, like Pollan and Kingsolver, the participant considers local as a better

alternative than organic because the legalization of the concept of organic (through

standardization and codification) means that it no longer necessarily encompasses the ethical

principles of the former. I will return to this view when I further analyze the concept of organic

in the next section.

In contrast to Participant 4, another participant views the standardization and

codification of the organic as an advantage rather than a disadvantage compared to local. This

participant, Participant 15, shares the view of the importance of knowing where one's food

comes from. To her, the lack of this knowledge is the primary reason why she prefers to buy

organic meat rather than meat labeled as *halal* by the seller. She said,

> The reason why I don't buy *halal* meat is that I really don't know who is providing that *halal* meat. I don't know what they are feeding the animal, and so just because it says it is halal meat that does not give me reassurance, I just have to trust the seller, which I am [sic] not (Participant 15).

That is to say that the preference of the participant in choosing the organic product is because

the organic label provides her with the knowledge that she finds to be more reassuring (than

the seller's *halal* label) because the organic label is more regulated. This is more evident in her

response to the question of what she thinks about buying local food from the farmers' market,

where she said,

> I prefer stamps [i.e. organic label]. I prefer that someone tells me that this is certified, especially with meat. The local, the farmers market, unless you know the vendor and you trust them, it is hard to tell because they are local, ok, but do we really know what they are using? (Participant 15)

In short, while Participant 4 emphasizes the knowledge that comes from direct interaction

between the consumers and the producers, Participant 15 questions the practicality of

obtaining such information. For Participant 15, buying food from the local farmers' market does

not necessarily mean one really knows about one's food.

In this section, I have demonstrated how some of the participants I interviewed

negotiated the demands of Islamic dietary laws using the concepts of organic and local. Those

participants share in common in their understanding of Islamic dietary laws their view of the

importance of knowing where one's food comes from, although there are differences in their view of the best way to obtain such knowledge. While one participant values the standardized and codified labeling of organic as better and more practical, another perceives such standardization and codification to be a reduction of a more comprehensive ethical principle. In the next section, I will further analyze the standardization and codification of organic in order to develop further my argument for a different approach to Islamic dietary laws.

3.2 The Organic Ideals

For Participant 15, whose answer I quoted in the last section, the standardization and codification of organic is an advantage given the reality of the relationship between consumers and producers in the current food system. To those who are critical of the organic industry, however, it is the nature of this relationship that needs to be challenged. For example, according to Pollan,

> the organic label itself […] is really just an imperfect substitute for direct observation of how a food is produced, a concession to the reality that most people in an industrial society haven't the time or the inclination to follow their food back to the farm, a farm which today is apt to be, on average, fifteen hundred miles away. So to bridge that space we rely on certifiers and label writers and, to a considerable extent, our imagination of what the farms that are producing our food really look like. The organic label may conjure an image of a simpler agriculture, but its very existence is an industrial artifact (Pollan 2006, p. 137).

That is to say that the organic label allows the perpetuation of the relationship between the consumers and the producers that is based on minimal amount of knowledge on the consumer' part regarding where their food comes from.

To better understand the concept of organic, however, it is important to analyze the history of the organic movement. Among the different historical food movements Belasco (2007) analyzes in his work, *Appetite for Change,* it was the organic movement that he argues

to be the most ambitious and comprehensive movement. It is because the organic ideals "straddled so neatly the three strands of therapeutic self-enhancement, consumerist self-protection, and alternative production" (Belasco 2007, p. 69). Belasco explains how the original "organic paradigm" was more than just rejection of chemical fertilizer, additives and preservatives (or 'natural'), which is the consumerist self-protection aspect. It also encompassed the larger framework of "living organically", which was understood as holistic and un-alienated life style (therapeutic self-enhancement) that necessitates the *decentralization* of food system and consequently the larger social system (alternative production) (p. 69).

Belasco argues that the organic method of production that was predicated on smaller, labor-intensive and diversified farms challenged the assumption that large-scale, capital-intensive, monoculture farms are better because the latter leads to more efficiency and higher yield (p. 73). The decentralized production system would also mean a very different distribution system because each city would be self-supported by the smaller, diversified farms nearby (p. 74). Belasco writes of the organic ideal of un-alienated lifestyle with minimal dependence on "distant specialized producers" when more people are involved in the food production of their own community (p. 74). He explains, "labor-intensive methods could transform cities themselves into food producers; think of all the energy saved if city dwellers grew tomatoes in abandoned city lots, along expressways, in backyards" (p. 74). In this early ideal, organic seemed almost indistinguishable from locavorism as Pollan (2006) and Kingsolver (2007) describe. Organic movement was essentially a movement that promoted consuming locally-produced food.

The early ideals of organic that encompassed therapeutic self-enhancement, consumerist self-protection, and alternative production are in contrast to the later use of the term 'organic' that only captures the consumerist self-protection aspect of the original sense of the term. Furthermore, as Guthman (2004) argues in her work on organic farms in California, the term 'organic' is finally used to describe a "production standard for farmers (and later processors), not as a food safety standard for consumers and surely not as an alternative system of food provision" (Guthman 2004, p. 111). In other words, the current use of the term 'organic' has been essentially reduced and corrupted from its original meaning by the changes in the original intention of what it was meant to represent.

Guthman explains the shift of the meaning of the term 'organic' as a result of the "social movement institutionalization" that took place since the early 1970s (Guthman 2004, p. 111). Through legalization, 'organic' was reduced to a matter of technical terms, allowing it to be standardized and codified. The result of this shift is clear, the market for organic was created and subsequently expanded, transforming the previously "organic movement into an organic industry" (p. 111). More importantly, as Guthman explicates, the process of standardization and codification of organic produces certifying agencies, which act as "institutions of surveillance, competing over the ease and legitimacy of their own individual practices" (p. 111). In other words, the standardization and codification transform the previously radical concept of organic into part of the system it originally sought to challenge. Moreover, the legalization of organic is an evidence of the two forces that operate on the liberal subject, namely tolerance and market rationality. The legalization illustrates the way in which the ethical demands of the organic ideals are framed in the language of privacy, where private preferences of consumers

are tolerable insofar as they do not encroach on the public. Furthermore, the tolerance on the private ethical demands goes hand in hand with the economic profitability that results from the creation of a niche market for the privatized ethical demands.

Lavin (2009a) argues that buying locally produced food as a form of individual ethical consumerism is popular because it "speaks to an actual lack of opportunities for political action" (Lavin 2009a, p. 9 of 13). According to him, the current discourse on food politics is mainly characterized by understanding political action in terms of responsible consumerism rather than in terms of "mobilizing groups, organizing communities, running for office, or even voting" (p. 8 of 13). In the case of locavorism, political action often takes form of "backyard gardens, farmers markets, or, more ambitiously, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) in which individuals buy subscription to particular farms" (p. 8 of 13). This can be seen, for instance, in the following remark made by Pollan (2006) that shows his perception of the lack of power an individual has,

> [s]o much about life in a global economy feel as though it has passed beyond the individual's control – what happens to our jobs, to the prices at the gas station, to the vote in the legislature. But somehow food still feels a little different. We can still decide, every day, what we're going to put into our bodies, what sort of food chain we want to participate in (Pollan 2006, p. 257).

Therefore, Lavin concludes, locavorism is popular because it allows individuals to *feel empowered* in a system that actually deprives them of real power, where "it has become all but unthinkable that agricultural policy, environmental regulation, or the global trade in information will be subject to democratic control" (Lavin 2009a, p. 9 of 13). In other words, individual ethical consumerism is merely an adaptive strategy that alleviates the individuals' anxiety about their lack of power without actually enabling the individuals to radically the change the system. Those who propose locavorism as the solution tend to identify the big

corporations as the sources of all evils in the current food system while at the same time see

the market as the primary place where the system can be corrected without any need for the

state to play a role. For example, Pollan (2006) puts his faith on this market mechanism,

claiming that "[t]he marketplace [for local food] was built by consumers and farmers working

informally together outside the system, with exactly no help from the government" (Pollan

2006, p. 257).

As I have discussed in chapter 1, the focus on individual ethical consumerism and the

market self-correcting mechanism that results from the lack of opportunities for political

actions is evident in the answers of most of the participants I interviewed. The answer of the

following participant in particular clearly demonstrates the way she identifies ethical

consumerism as the only available avenue for change,

> The best way really is to just stop buying the meat and then the supply will go up and the demand will go
> down and they are going to produce less and when you make that switch then money talks, so that's one
> of the best ways of doing it (Participant 17).

Another participant not only demonstrates the logic of ethical consumerism, but she also

makes the explicit connection between ethical consumerism and the lack of available political

opportunities when she said,

> I feel like if enough buyers are aware of what they are buying, it would slowly change the industry
> because what we purchase is the bloodline of the industry making the money. So if we don't purchase
> their low-quality meats, the law of supply and demand would make them make better-quality meats
> again […] I don't go into politics because I wouldn't know how to begin to do that. I only know, myself as a
> private citizen, what I would do individually, and hopefully if everybody does what I do then it will be fine.
> But again, that's now how the world works … (Participant 7).

The answer shows that one the one hand, the participant could only think of affecting change in

terms of her role as a consumer because political action is unthinkable. However, one the other

hand, she is completely aware that her individual choice as a consumer alone will not result in

the necessary change.

Lavin (2009b) relates the postpolitical tendency with the conditions of *neoliberalism*, where "political agency is all but unthinkable except in the terms of consumerism and in which sovereignty is an embattled concept increasingly difficult to apply to the actions of citizens or state" (Lavin 2009b, p. 1 of 6). According to Harvey (2005) neoliberalism is "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (Harvey 2005, p. 2). The role of the state in a neoliberal society is limited to creating and protecting the market because the market is believed to be the center of the organization of the society. Harvey contrasted neoliberalism with "embedded liberalism" where in the latter the state plays a significant role in controlling and correcting the effects of the market through regulations and redistributive policies (p. 11).

By emphasizing buying locally produced food as the ethical solution, the locavore discourse makes it difficult to think and speak about political avenues leading to institutional changes. It assumes that the market, rather than the state, is the site from which corrective actions can originate. Furthermore, Lavin (2009a) argues that rather than taking food as one of the many issues in which we need to strive for more democratic control, the current dominant discourse of locavorism affirms the overall lack of democratic control by separating food from other issues. I argue that it is more beneficial for the proponents of locavorism to view their argument more of a restoration of the organic ideals of *living organically* (that encompass the therapeutic self-enhancement, consumerist self-protection, and alternative production) rather than distancing themselves from the earlier organic movement. To do so would necessarily

mean situating food system within the larger framework of political arrangement. In other words, instead of focusing on *consuming* locally produced food, it would address a more fundamental question of *living* in a local community.

Pollan himself recognizes the limitation of prescribing consuming locally produced food as a solution. More specifically, he recognizes the limitation of the framework of individual ethical consumerism, which limits the question to what consumers can do. In his later work, Pollan (2007) argues that,

> as powerful as the food consumer is […] voting with our forks can advance reform only so far. It can't, for example, change the fact that the system is rigged to make the most unhealthful calories in the marketplace the only ones the poor can afford. To change that, people will have to vote with their votes as well (Pollan 2007, pp. 138 - 139).

This statement indicates his belief that locavorism (understood simply as consuming locally produced food) needs to be supplanted by political activism. That is to say that individual ethical consumerism alone is not a sufficient mechanism to challenge the current food system.

3.3 Beyond Ethical Consumerism

McKibben's (2007) work discusses a different approach to locavorism using the concept of "deep economy" (McKibben 2007, p. 2). He uses the term deep economy to shift the focus of economic thinking from a more 'shallow' emphasis on efficiency and growth to include deeper concerns of "human satisfaction and social durability" (pp. 2-3). In his specific discussion on food system, he discusses not only the environmental damages caused by the industrial food system but also the damages to the community (McKibben 2007, pp. 54 – 58). More specifically, he discusses the danger of what he calls "hyper-individualism" (p. 96). Hyper-individualism causes individuals to see themselves as minimally related to others and their

interests as exclusive and narrowly defined. He explains that "our commitment to hyper-individualism allows us to tolerate, and even celebrate, inequality so gross that it's almost as much farce as tragedy" (McKibben 2007, p. 103).

By situating the food system as a part of a larger arrangement of the society, McKibben argues for a community-focused political arrangement. A local economy can contribute to the sense of a community only when it is conceived in the manner that directly addresses the problem of hyper-individualism (p. 105). More specifically, local economy needs to be more than the sum of hyper-individualist individuals living in the same neighborhood. Simply buying food from the farmers' market does not necessarily foster the feeling of community when the consumers and the producers see themselves as minimally related and do not share a vision about the common. In order to foster the feeling of the community that supports the local economy, it is necessary for individuals involved to know and take interest in "things that other people are interested in" (137). In other words, the creation of the sense of community is crucial to challenging the hyper-individualism that McWilliams takes for granted.

What has been glossed over in the locavore argument that focuses simply on buying locally produced food is that fostering the local economy can contribute to the creation or maintenance of the sense of community only when it is part of a specific political arrangement, i.e. one in which members of the community engage one another not in terms of individuals with competing interests, but in terms of a shared vision of the common. McKibben also discusses the importance of having the spaces and opportunities for political education and enactment such as regular town meeting (McKibben 2007, pp. 168 – 170) and having the mass media that fosters the feeling of community (pp. 127 – 137), which in turn supports the

community politics. In other words, fostering the local economy has the potential to contribute to our sense of being in a community only when the local economy is developed within a political arrangement that values the interests of the community as much as those of the individuals.

Without being critical of the exclusive tendency of individualistic subjectivity, it is difficult to see the value of fostering a local economy that includes a local food system. McWilliams (2009), for example, criticizes locavorism on the grounds the small scale of a local food system that the locavores propose would only exacerbate competition for a limited food supply by bringing the competing parties face-to-face as opposed to in an impersonal market (McWilliams 2009, pp. 34- 35). However, his argument takes for granted that individuals are primarily competitive and that competition cannot be solved but merely depersonalized through market mechanism. I argue that implicit in his argument is the assumption of the exclusive characteristic of liberal subjectivity.

McWilliams' work is valuable not only for elucidating the exclusive characteristic of liberal subjectivity, but also for illustrating the danger of 'shallow' economic thinking that McKibben (2007) criticizes. For example, one of the points that McWilliams uses to dismiss local food system is that it is unrealistic given the number of farmers in this country. He rhetorically asks, "How may college graduates are realistically going to go into farming, not as temporary hobby but for life?" (McWilliams 2009, p. 47) What he does not critically address is the reason being a farmer is not desirable in this society. McKibben, on the other hand, addresses this issue more fundamentally by linking it to the shallow economic thinking. He argues that the current economic thinking that is based on efficiency and growth has led us to believe that

energy-intensive, industrialized farms are more efficient than smaller-scale, labor-intensive

farms and therefore "the country is better off because people have been freed from working in

the fields to do something 'more productive'" (McKibben 2007, p. 57). Consequently, our

educational system is not geared towards preparing students to be farmers. After discussing

the important role that education plays in helping Cuba switched from industrial agriculture to

smaller-scale, organic agriculture after the collapse of the Soviet Union, McKibben remarks,

"Imagine, too, what happen if the agriculture departments of the land-grant colleges, which

function now as extensions of the big agrochemical companies that provide much of their

funding, instead worked on local marketing schemes and low-input farming" (McKibben 2007,

pp. 87 – 88). In other words, his explanation addresses the reason for and consequently the

possible remedy for the problem of the lack of desire to become farmers rather than taking it as

a given.

What both McKibben and Lavin (but not McWilliams) suggest is a political approach to

food ethics, which challenges the limits of exclusive individualistic conception of ethics by

challenging the language of privacy. I argue that, similar to the articulations of Islamic dietary

laws that I analyzed in chapter 2, the ways in which the concepts of organic and locavore have

been employed reflect the tension between the non-religious food ethics as a virtue-cultivation

mechanism and the two forces that operate on liberal subjectivity (i.e. tolerance and market

rationality). In some cases, the concepts of organic and locavore can be used to challenge the

individualist conception of ethics. However, the language of privacy can reduce those

challenges into individual consumerism. The history of the organic movement provides a

valuable lesson of a radical alternative that incorporates community-based alternative

production. The privatization and codification of the organic movement into the current organic industry with its narrow focus on consumerist self-protection illustrates the depoliticization of ethics through tolerance and market rationality.

The concept of the moral economy is useful in understanding how a political approach to food ethics challenges market rationality as the prevalent force in defining social relations. The moral economy refers to the way economic life is understood as existing within a particular ethical framework. With specific regards to food, Kloppenburg et. al. (1996) argues that,

> Adopting the perspective of the moral economy challenges us to view food as more than a commodity to be exchanged through a set of impersonal market relationships or a bundle of nutrients required to keep our bodies functioning. It permits us to see the centrality of food to human life as a powerful template around which to build nonmarket or extramarket relationships among persons, social groups, and institutions who have been distanced from one another (Kloppenburg et. al. 1996, p. 115).

It is the perspective of the moral economy that makes it possible for individuals to perceive themselves and their interests in terms of relationships with others. In other words, the perspective of the moral economy allows for a greater inclusivity. Insofar as the organic and locavore movements are understood as alternatives that seek to challenge the 'shallow' economic arrangement as the primary force that defines our relationships with one another, their challenge assumes the perspective of a moral economy.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I situated the importance of following Islamic dietary laws as a virtue cultivation mechanism in the broader context of alternative food movements in America. The answers of some the participants I interviewed illustrate how they relate their understanding of Islamic dietary laws with non-Islamic ethical food practices. More specifically, I analyzed the answers of the participants who made the connection between their understandings of Islamic

dietary laws and the non-religious concepts of *organic* and *local* food. I argued that those

participants find the ethical principles in organic and local to be compatible with the ethical

principles of Islamic dietary laws as they understand them. That is why, given the context of the

industrial food system, those participants view the organic or local ethical principles to be as

important as, if not more important than, the requirements for slaughter (*zabiha*).

I then analyzed the concepts of organic and locavore in order to demonstrate that,

similar to the different interpretations of Islamic dietary laws that I analyze in chapter 2, the

different ways the concepts of organic and locavore have been employed reflect the tension

between non-religious food ethics as a discipline cultivation mechanism and the two forces of

governance operating on liberal subjectivity (i.e. tolerance and market rationality). More

specifically, I argued that the similarity lies in the articulations of the concepts organic and local

in the language of exclusive privatized belief (although not ostensibly based on religious

doctrine) and individual consumerism. Finally, I introduced the concept of a *political* approach

to food ethics that challenges the limits of exclusive individualistic conception of ethics by

challenging the language of privacy. In the next chapter, I will further analyze the political

approach to food ethics by focusing on *Islamic* food ethics.

Chapter 4 Re-Imagining Islamic Food Tradition

Introduction

In chapter 2, I analyzed the practice of following the dietary laws in terms of the mechanism of cultivating virtuous or pious individual. I argued that the practice of virtue cultivation can also be understood as a challenge not only to the modern definition of religion as religious belief, but also to the narrowly defined economic rationality. Using examples from the answers of the participants, I demonstrated that their considerations for concerns other than economic ones play a significant part in the way they perceive themselves and their behaviors. However, although both the literal and the liberal contextual approaches to Islamic dietary laws can be understood as posing a challenge to the modern form of religiosity and market rationality through virtue cultivation, I argued that they present insufficient challenge to the exclusive language of privacy that limits the articulations of the dietary laws in terms of individual consumerism.

Furthermore, in the previous chapter, I demonstrated the similarities between interpretations of Islamic dietary laws that I analyze in chapter 2 and the ways the concepts of organic and locavore have been employed. More specifically, I argue that the similarity lies in the articulations of the concepts organic and locavore in the language of exclusive privatized belief (although not ostensibly based on religious doctrine) and individual consumerism. I introduced the concept of a *political* approach to food ethics that challenges the limits of exclusive individualistic conception of ethics by challenging the language of privacy.

In this chapter, I analyze what it means to have an articulation of the demands of a particular religion (i.e. Islamic dietary laws) that is not restricted to the exclusive language of privacy. More specifically, I will further analyze the concept of a political approach to food ethics by grounding it in the particularities of Islamic dietary laws. I begin with analyzing the concept of *taqwa* (God consciousness) in the first section, with particular focus on the centrality of the connection between individual and collective responsibilities in that concept (Izutsu 1966, Rahman 2009). I return to the argument that I present in chapter 2 with regards to the importance of understanding the adherence of the Muslims I interviewed to Islamic dietary laws in terms of virtue cultivation mechanism. Here, I argue that the concept of *taqwa* is important in understanding how the virtues cultivated at the individual level *can* translate into the communal level.

In the second section, I discuss the importance of the role that religious leaders play in making the connection between the two aspects of *taqwa*. I argue that a political approach to Islamic food ethics requires religious leaders and scholars to make the connection between religious belief, individual piety, and collaborative actions. This means that religious leaders are responsible not only for framing the issues beyond a matter of *individual* piety, but also beyond a matter of exclusive religious *group* identity. It requires replacing the language of religious exclusivity with the language of inclusivity by forging ties with others beyond the nominal religious boundaries. Building on that argument, I analyze a possible articulation of a political approach to *Islamic* food ethics in the third section. I use the example of *Id al Adha* (the annual festival of sacrifice) to illustrate the centrality of collective responsibility in existing Islamic food tradition. The goal is to demonstrate that a political approach to Islamic food ethics challenges

the limits of exclusive individualistic conception of both ethics and religious belief by

challenging the language of privacy.

4.1 *Taqwa*: Translating Individual Piety to Collective Responsibility

The term *taqwa* (from the root word *wqy*) has often been translated as "fear of God"

(Rahman 2009, pp. 28 – 29) or "pious fear of God" (Izutsu 1966, p. 37); and *muttaqun* (the

people who possess *taqwa)* has also been translated as "they who are godfearing" (Izutsu 1966,

p. 37), for example in Qur'an II: 177, which I will refer to its entirety below. However, Rahman

(2009) argues that the phrase "fear of God" may not capture the true meaning of the word,

where *wqy* means "to guard or protect against something" (Rahman 2009, p. 29). Therefore, he

proposes that the word *taqwa* is better understood as meaning "to protect oneself against the

harmful or evil consequences of one's conduct," which involves "the fear that comes from an

acute sense of responsibility" (p. 29). In other words, the fear in *taqwa* does not come

externally from a tyrannical God, but rather from one's inherent sense of responsibility.

Moreover, important to my argument is that Rahman argues that *taqwa* is not only an

individual but also a *collective* characteristic (Rahman 2009, p. 29). In other words, the ethical

teaching of the religion speaks not only of individual but also collective responsibility. The

connection between individual and collective responsibility is also evident in Izutsu's (1966)

analysis of the concept of *taqwa.* Izutsu refers to the Qur'anic verse (II:177) that speaks of *birr*,

which has been translated as righteousness or piety. He translated the verse as follow:

> The *birr* does not consist in your turning your faces towards the East or the West, but [true] *birr* is this,
> that one believes in God, and the Last Day, and the angels, and the Scripture, and the prophets; that one
> gives one's own wealth, howsoever cherished it may be, to kinsfolk, orphans, the needy, the wayfarer,
> and beggars, and also for the sake of [the liberation of] slaves: that one performs the ritual prayer, pays
> the alms [i.e. the poor-rate]. And those who keep their covenant when they have once covenanted and

are patient in distress and hardship: they are they who are sincere (*lladhina sadaqu*); these are they who are godfearing (*muttaqun*) (Qur'an II:177 as quoted in Izutsu 1966, p. 37, parentheses original).

In his explanation for the verse, Izutsu argues that,

> The passage declares most emphatically that *birr* – 'piety' we might roughly say – in the true sense does not consist in observing outwardly the rules of religious formalism, but is that kind of social righteousness that naturally arises from a deep monotheistic faith in God … in the last sentence of this verse, the concept of *birr* is explicitly put in a close relationship with the concept of *sidq* 'sincerity' in belief and that of *taqwa* 'pious fear of God' (Izutsu 1966, p. 37)

This argument demonstrates the importance of social righteousness and collective responsibility because individual piety makes sense only in relation to the larger context of social righteousness or collective responsibility. The importance of the two elements of *taqwa* (individual piety and collective responsibility) is also evident in the explanation of the translator of the verse that I quoted above. In his explanation of his translation of the verses concerning fasting, Ali (1989) writes the following,

> This verse [II:185] should be read with the following verses, [II] 185 – 188, in order that the incidents of the physical fast may be fully understood with reference to its spiritual meaning. The Muslim fast is not meant for self-torture. […] temporary restraint from all these [food, drink, and sex] enables the attention to be directed to higher things. This is necessary through prayer, contemplation and acts of charity, not of the showy kind, but by *seeking out those really in need* (Ali 1989, footnote no. 189, emphasis mine).

Furthermore, he explains that,

> Besides the three primal physical needs of man [food, drink, and sex], which are apt to make him greedy, there is *a fourth greed in society*, the greed of wealth and property. *The purpose of fasts in not complete until this fourth greed is also restraint*. […] A still more subtle form [of the fourth greed] is where we use our own property or property under our control – "among yourself" in the Text – for vain or frivolous uses. Under the Islamic standard this is also greed. Property carries with it its own responsibilities. If we fail to understand or fulfill them, we have not learnt the full lesson of self-denial by fasts (Ali 1989, footnote no. 201, emphasis mine).

In other words, the essence of the ritual of fasting includes an integral element of collective responsibility with the aim of the improvement of the community. Furthermore, the ritual of fasting is followed by the ritual of *zakat* (alms giving or charity) at the end of the month of Ramadan. The Qur'anic verse that I have previously quoted with regards to *taqwa* (i.e. II:177)

speaks to *zakat* as one of the elements of true piety. In his explanation his translation of this

verse, Ali (1989) writes the following about *zakat*, which he translates as charity,

> Charity and piety in individual cases do not complete our duties. In prayer and in charity we must also look to our organized effort (Ali 1989, footnote no. 180).

In other words, similar to fasting, the essence of the ritual of zakat is the improvement of the

condition of equality in the community.

With regards specifically to food ethics, I argue that the shortcoming of the approaches

to Islamic dietary laws I discussed previously in chapter 2 is their apparent disconnection

between the individual piety of the participants and the collective responsibility. To be clear,

this connection goes *beyond* the connection between following the rules of Islamic dietary laws

with the virtues that are supposed to be cultivated. At the end of chapter 2, I discussed the way

several of the participants made the connection between following Islamic dietary laws with

cultivating the virtue of sympathy or compassion toward animals, for example as reflected in

the following answers that I have quoted previously:

> It isn't just about the way the animal dies but about [the way] the animal lives too. A Muslim is supposed to be invested in the good quality of life of not just human beings [but] with the animals too. There are plenty of stories in Islamic history of the Prophet telling us that people that were either granted heaven despite a long time of sins for their kindness to an animal or sent to hell for punishment because of their cruelty to an animal (Participant 4).

> To me *zabiha* is not just a matter of slaughtering [...] you're supposed to treat that animal with care even before they have a hint that they will be slaughtered. They are not supposed to be kept in cages, they're supposed to be fed with proper food (Participant 7).

> The whole reason behind halal is to treat the animals, slaughter them in way that they are not ... not in a cruel manner. So if the religion is thinking about the way they die, the way they live their lives is also very important. So I think it is very important to our religion that we treat the animals properly, when they are alive and when they are ready to be slaughtered (Participant 15).

> Before I became a Muslim, it was never an issue to me [...] we just accept the meat on the shelf and a lot of people don't think past: how do they get here and what happened to the animal up to the time that it got here? After I became a Muslim and I started understanding *halal* meat and what does it mean, other than the fact that it was slaughtered, what does it mean? [...] Some people say they are animals so who cares, but I think being Muslim, it affects me in the way I think about that. It is not a good way to treat animals (Participant 23).

Those answers demonstrate the participants' belief that what a Muslim *supposed to* do or the virtues they *should* be cultivating by following Islamic dietary laws (e.g. "a Muslims is supposed to be invested in the good quality of life" or "supposed to treat animals with care" in the answers quoted above).

In addition to making the connection between following the rules of Islamic dietary laws with the virtues that are supposed to be cultivated, a political approach to Islamic dietary laws makes the connection between the cultivation of private virtues and the collective responsibility in the concept of *taqwa*. The focus of the political approach to Islamic dietary laws is how the virtues cultivated at the individual level *can* translate into more inclusive and collaborative articulations the communal level. The question that can be formulated using a political approach to Islamic dietary laws is not simply what one can do as a consumer (even a pious one), but what we can do together to bring about institutional changes. For example, given the importance of cultivating the virtue of sympathy or compassion toward animals that many of the participants themselves voiced in the interviews, the issue is not only choosing the ethical products for one's own consumption (e.g. by choosing organic, free-range, humanely raised animals). That is not to say that these private ethical actions are not important. A political approach to Islamic dietary laws, however, would further the issue by addressing collaborative actions that Muslims can do together with others to bring about institutional changes, which correspond to the virtues cultivated at the individual level. For example, with regards to the virtue of sympathy or compassion toward animals, the question becomes how to reform the current food system so that concerns for animal welfare are no longer merely tolerated through niche markets.

In chapter 1, I discussed the difficulty in translating the private virtues to collective

responsibility other than through the means of market mechanism. The prevalence of market

rationality is evident in the following answers that I have also previously quoted:

> I don't see what the issue would be for people to work together. […] The best way really is to just stop buying the meat and the supply will go up and the demand will go down and they're going to produce less, when you make that switch then money talks […] So I think the best way would be to just stop buying stuff and change your buying habits (Participant 17).

> Ideally, it would be best for Muslims and non-Muslims to cooperate with each other but that's, to me, I feel like I can go to whole different topics with their, with how we go about that, um. The easiest, the simplest, concise way to explain this is that, well, Muslims shouldn't have to, they can, but they should not have to, like [say] "Ok, we are Muslims in this country and we are going to you, the remaining public, and [say] let's go revamp this whole meat industry". We don't have to take that [approach], but you can if you want to, but at this point I don't think that's very welcoming to the American public in general. Just be a private citizen, you don't have to declare your faith, you are just concerned for the meat industry […] I feel like if enough buyers are aware of what they are buying, you know it would slowly change the industry because what we purchase is the bloodline of the industry making the money, so if we don't purchase low-quality meat, the law of supply and demand would make them make better-quality meat […] I don't go into politics because I wouldn't know how to begin to do that. I only know myself as a private citizen, what I would do individually and hopefully if everybody does what I do then it will be fine (Participant 7).

The answers of both participants above demonstrate the participants see themselves primarily

as individuals whose exercise of power is limited to their private consumer choice or

preference.

In chapter 1, I have also begun to discuss the importance of the role that religious

leaders play in making the connection between the individual and the communal aspects of

taqwa, when I analyzed the answer of the following participant:

> for a lay person, lay Muslim person [who] goes to the masjid, when you start talking about the need to lobby and the need to raise awareness, all of the sudden you are going to lose the religious tone, and they zone out, well, this is not for me. I am in the mosque and I need to only hear about religious [issues]. I think our leaders and the people who are in the Muslim organizations need to kind of blend the two and make that connection. And when [the religious leaders] tell you that you need to, for example, you need to vote, or you need to be an animal protection advocate […] [it needs to come from] religious background, not just the secular one that you hear in the news. And that connection isn't being made properly and that is why you see less participation from Muslims in these things. […] I'm not asking religious leaders to be politicians and play with words, no. It is just making those connections. The connection is already there, you just have to make it known and explicit (Participant 16).

Previously, I argued that the participant's answer reveals the problem of limiting what is considered to be "religious" issue to that of private belief, which makes it difficult for "lay Muslim person" to consider other issues as religious (i.e. "when you start talking about the need to lobby and the need to raise awareness, all of the sudden you are going to lose the religious tone" in the answer above). Instead those issues are seen as "secular" and separated from the "religious". In short, I argued that without making the connection between religious belief, ethics, and politics, Muslims tend to only approach the issue of food from a religious perspective in terms of Islamic dietary laws that are understood as a matter of individualist obligation. In the next section, I will analyze the role of religious leaders and scholars in making this connection.

4.2 The Role of Religious Leaders and Scholars

The answer of Participant 16 that I quoted and discussed in the previous section also reveals the importance of the role of the religious leaders. More specifically, the participant argues that it is the role of the religious leaders to reformulate the religious discourse in terms of politics. For example, using the same issue of animal welfare that many of the other participants identify with, Participant 16 articulated the issue in terms of "voting" and "being an animal protection advocate". The challenge is to shift the discourse from seeing those actions (i.e. voting, being an animal protection advocate) as secular rather than religious in nature. This shift requires a serious engagement with Islamic textual sources, rituals, and traditions, which the participant believes contain the inspirations or motivations for those political actions (i.e. "The connection is already there, you just have to make it known and explicit" in the answer

quoted above). And it is the responsibility of religious leaders and scholars to make that connection.

To argue that religious leaders and scholars have the responsibility to make the connection between religious belief, individual piety, and collaborative actions is to challenge the definition of religion as privatized belief. It questions the role of religious leaders as being limited to providing the correct religious belief. One of the participants I interviewed explicitly spoke of the way the religious leader in her community has guided her to interpret Islamic dietary laws contextually by making explicit the connection between the textual sources and the practice that embodies the ethical virtue the dietary laws is meant to cultivate. According to the participant, an Imam in her local community center has repeatedly made an argument, as part of his weekly lectures, for the need to take into account the reality of industrial farming in deciding the ethical acceptability of food according to Islam. As a result, the participant acknowledged that the Imam's argument has led her to question her earlier definition interpretation of *halal* food (as limited to the slaughter requirement) and prompted her to interpret the dietary laws more critically. She explains,

> I have heard some strong statements by the likes of someone whom I respect greatly, my Imam, and I am sure there are others in leadership positions of religious nature who would say the same, […] because of the 'un-Islamic' practices that go into creating [some food products] […] [the Imam is] saying basically that chicken raised in so and so manner as so many do, like whatever chicken you pick up from the grocery store is *haram* [i.e. forbidden] because the way they were raised (Participant 11).

This answer shows that the religious leader's opinion regarding the permissibility of the food that is based not only the textual sources (i.e. whether it meets the slaughter requirement or it being the food of the People of the Book), but also the context of the industrial animal farming, has led the participant to interpret Islamic dietary laws as a mechanism to cultivate virtues.

The importance of the role of religious scholars is discussed by Foltz (2006) in his work

that argues for the importance of context in rethinking Islamic dietary laws. More specifically,

he argues that the disconnection between the text and the context when interpreting Islamic

dietary laws ultimately stems from the lack of discussions among the religious scholars

regarding the need for reinterpretation of Islamic food ethics. He argues that,

> whereas historically it is the *'ulama'* [religious scholars] class that have been known for engaging
> contentious issues in Muslim societies, at present the debate over appropriate human-animal relations
> seems to be most lively among Westernized lay-Muslims of the younger generation. The traditional forum
> of heated discussions of Islamic issues was the *madrasa*; today it is the internet (Foltz 2006, p. 145).

Furthermore, he argues that it is important for more religious scholars to catch on with the

"Westernized lay-Muslims" and showing leadership in the reformulation of the Islamic food

ethics (Foltz 2006, pp. 145 – 151). The answer of some of the participants I interviewed may be

evidence for the lack of guidance from religious leaders in the participants' attempt to

contextualize their interpretations of Islamic dietary laws. In addition to the two participants

that I have discussed previously in chapter 3 (Participants 3 and 4) who drew information and

inspiration directly from non-Islamic sources (i.e. Pollan's 2007 book), other participants have

cited the internet, movies (e.g. Food, Inc.), magazines (e.g. the New York Times), radio (e.g.

NPR) and television as the sources for the information that influences their interpretation of

Islamic dietary laws (Participants 7, 8, 15 16, 19, 22, and 23).

However, to argue that religious leaders have the responsibility to make the

connections between religious belief, individual piety, and collaborative actions is not only to

challenge the definition of religion as privatized belief, but also to conceptualize their role

beyond that of guiding the formation of pious individual. Like Foltz, Masri (2009) also discusses

the responsibility of religious scholars to make connection between text and context. In his

work that draws from Islamic teachings to discuss the issue of animal welfare, he argues that,

> *The least that the Muslim 'Ulama' [i.e. religious scholars] can do* is to inform the lay public how their food is being produced, so people can - with knowledge – decide what to do about it. Some may decide that the products of intensive factory farms are not suitable, both from religious and health point of view, and seek more naturally produced eggs and meat such as free-range or organic; or give up eating meat altogether (Masri 2009, p. 45, emphasis mine).

Here, Masri argues that while making the connection between the text of Islamic dietary laws

and the context of industrial animal farming is important, it is only "the least" that the religious

scholars should do. Although Masri does not elaborate what further responsibility the religious

scholars have, I argue that it is the responsibility of making the connections between religious

belief, individual piety, and collaborative actions.

The work of Gottlieb (2006) on religious environmentalism expounds on the

connections between religious belief, individual piety, and collaborative actions. He also

stresses the importance of the role of religious leaders in making the connections by reframing

the environmental issues in terms of "collective needs" rather than an interest of a particular

religious group (Gottlieb 2006, p. viii). This means that religious leaders are responsible not only

for framing the issues beyond a matter of *individual* piety, but also beyond a matter of exclusive

religious *group* identity. It requires replacing the language of religious exclusivity with the

language of inclusivity by forging ties with others beyond the nominal religious boundaries. It

focuses on the importance of examining "the morality (or immorality) of our *collective* conduct"

(p. 10, emphasis mine).

Gottlieb's argument on replacing the language of religious exclusivity with the language

of inclusivity by focusing on the morality of our collective conduct is similar to Brown's (1995)

argument that I have previously discussed in chapter 1. More specifically, it was Brown's

proposition for postidentity positioning and conversations where individuals are "arguing from the vision about the common ('what I want for us') rather than from identity ('who I am')" (Brown 1995, p. 51). As I have elaborated previously, postidentity conversations would involve translating the demands of a particular religious belief into non-essentializing norms that contribute to a vision about the common. Furthermore, the translated demands of a particular religious belief would be subject for interrogation by others from outside the religious boundaries and therefore are subject to greater accountability (p. 51).

The importance of including the voices and expertise of those from outside the religious boundaries in translating the demands of a particular religious belief into non-essentializing norms is discussed in length by Ramadan (2009). He grounds his argument for collaboration between Muslim and non-Muslims scholars on the need for cooperation between the texts scholars (*ulama' an-Nusus*) and context scholars (*ulama' al-Waqi'*) (Ramadan 2009, p. 130). Ramadan argues that it is important to acknowledge that "the world, its laws, and areas of specialized knowledge not only shed light on scriptural sources but also constitute a source of law of their own" (p. 83). In other words, Ramadan challenges the idea that the sources of Islamic law and jurisprudence as limited to the scriptural sources alone. To treat both the textual and contextual sources as legitimate sources of Islamic ethics and jurisprudence requires harmonization that is founded on the idea of complementarity (p. 109).

Ramadan is careful to claim that treating both the textual and the contextual sources as legitimate sources "does not mean confusing orders or imposing values and methodologies that do not actually belong to one or the other of the fields of knowledge involved" (p. 109). Rather, what is needed is a holistic approach that rejects the superficial categorization of certain

knowledge as "Islamic" (p. 110). Furthermore, Ramadan proposes that collaboration should take place not only between the Muslim text and context scholars, but also between them and non-Muslim context scholars who are driven by the same principles and are striving for the same goals as those prescribed by the fundamentals of Islamic ethics (p. 247).

I will further elaborate the connections between religious belief, individual piety, and collaborative actions in chapter 5 using the concept of interfaith activism. In the next section, I will discuss the role that religious food traditions can play in providing the framework within which a political approach to Islamic dietary laws can be developed. More specifically, I will use the example of *Id al Adha* (the annual festival of sacrifice) to illustrate the centrality of collective responsibility in the context of an Islamic food tradition. I will analyze the existing discourse on the need to contextualize the long-practiced tradition. Furthermore, I will connect the importance of context with the argument that I have developed so far in this chapter for reframing the traditions beyond a matter of exclusive religious *group* identity that requires replacing the language of religious exclusivity with the language of inclusivity.

4.3 Re-Imagining an Islamic Food Tradition

Gottlieb's (2006) work on religious environmentalism discusses the importance of re-imagining religious rituals in reframing the language of religious exclusivity with a more inclusive language. He argues that prayers, ceremonies, or activities already existing in the history of different religious traditions can be used to re-imagine a more timely prayers, ceremonies, or activities (Gottlieb 2006, p. 76). Furthermore, he argues that it is important to "retain the language and gestures" of the religious traditions while adapting them to the

context of a more timely "collective struggles" (p. 178). The importance of retaining the language and gestures of the prayers, ceremonies, or activities lies in the value of the "sense of timelessness" of those prayers, ceremonies, or activities (p. 183). The sense of timelessness is balanced by the timeliness demanded by the context.

In this section, I focus on *Id al Adha* as an example of an Islamic food tradition. *Id al-Adha* (sometimes spelled *Eid al-Adha* or also referred to as *Eid al-Qurban*) or the festival of sacrifice is one of the most important food rituals in Muslim societies and it specifically requires a social setting. *Id al-Adha* is carried out annually to honor Abraham's sacrifice and corresponds to the ritual of pilgrimage (Ramadan 2009, p. 238; Masri 2009, p. 113; Foltz 2006, p. 14). Traditionally, Muslims who can financially afford to sacrifice an animal (a sheep, a goat, a cow, or a camel) are socially obligated to do so. They either slaughter the animals themselves or witness the animals slaughtered on their behalf. The meat of the sacrificed animals is then distributed to the poor in the community (Foltz 2006, p. 121). In many Muslim countries, the sacrifice is carried out in many neighborhoods, usually near the local masjids where people from within the community work together to clean and distribute the meat within the same day.

A number of scholars have criticized the way the festival is carried out, including Foltz (2006), Masri (2009) and Ramadan (2009). All three scholars share the argument that in practice, the ritual has often led to the problem of waste. Ramadan argues that in many Muslim countries, the way the sacrifice has been carried out has betrayed the spirit or the higher goals of Islam when he wrote,

> [During the festival of sacrifice (*Id al Adha*)] Not only can one witness appealing scenes in terms of lack of respect for animals and their ill-treatment, but one is also shocked at the amount of waste, at both

national and international levels. Indeed, progress has been made regarding the distribution of meat, in particular to people in poorer countries, but chaos still rules. Mistreating animals, wasting food – is this being faithful to the higher goals of Islam's message? (Ramadan 2009, p. 238).

Foltz and Masri also argue that the spirit of the sacrifice needs to take precedence over the form of the tradition (Foltz 2006, p. 122; Masri 2009, p. 116). More specifically for Foltz (2006), however, the solution is not simply to address the practical issue of efficiency but to question the necessity of the tradition altogether. According to him, the spirit of the sacrifice is "one's *personal* willingness to submit to one's ego and *individual will* to Allah" (Foltz 2006 p. 122, emphasis mine). Furthermore, he argues that the ritual itself is not mentioned or regulated in the Qur'an and the importance of the principle of compassion towards animals exceeds the importance of the continuation of the actual tradition (pp. 121 – 123). In contrast to Foltz, Masri's (2009) interpretation of the spirit of the sacrifice emphasizes on its social aspect. I will elaborate Masri's argument in the context of the answers from my interview with two of the participants.

Although I did not specifically ask about *Id al-Adha*, two of the participants I interviewed brought it up as part of their explanation of what it means to follow Islamic dietary laws. Participant 9 explains that aside from having to make monthly long-distant trips to the nearest halal-meat store from where he and his family stock up on their regular supply, he found the difficulty in carrying out the obligation of sacrificing an animal for the *Id al-Adha* as part of the challenges that he is facing. According to the participant,

> when it comes to *Id al-Adha* and we have to slaughter animal, we try to find something which is *as close as possible* to how we do *Id al-Adha back home* (Participant 9).

Here, the participant refers to what I consider to be one of the adaptive measures that some Muslims have taken with regards to observing the ritual of the sacrifice, i.e. by arranging with

smaller-scale farm owners for the sacrifice to be carried out in the nearby farms. According to

some of the participants who have the experience with such arrangement, the meat is then

distributed only among the Muslim community. The category of the recipients of the sacrifice

also marks a departure from the way the festival is carried out in Muslim countries.

Traditionally, the recipients of the sacrifice are not limited to the Muslim poor. Instead, the

poor regardless of their religion receive the sacrifice.

Another participant, Participant 7, uses *Id al Adha* to illustrate the virtue of knowing

where one's food comes from, which she regarded as the value of observing Islamic dietary

laws. She explains how *Id al Adha* can be an avenue for increasing the awareness of the meat

industry among Muslims in this country in the following answer:

> The best opportunity [for raising awareness] that I see is doing *Id al Adha*, that is the holiday of the sacrifice. It is *sunnah* to perform your own slaughtering that day and thankfully here in our area, one Masjid have been doing this practice for the past, I would say, three or four years. It began three or four years ago in [a] farm. When I was a kid, I thought this was such a horrendous experience, watching animals being cut and seeing blood spread everywhere, and my aunt would cook the meat and then I would have to eat it. But as I grow up, more matured, I realized, who am I lying [to]? Am I lying to myself? Where did I think meat came from? You know, it didn't come in the supermarket, already boxed, nicely cut, but something had to die in order for you to eat. [It makes] you more thankful for the food that you do have. […] It's ashamed that here in America, unlike in our native countries [where] people come from, Egypt, Pakistan, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the sacrifice happens all the times. Not here, it's a very detached thing to do, send your money away and someone is going to do the slaughter for you half a country away and it's out of sight, out of mind. You don't have that connection. But when you show people […], "Ok this is where meat comes from; you need to be thankful, you need to be aware". That time is also a good time for saying, "Ok, if you think this is horrible to watch, [it would be an] awakening [of] how conventional meat is being grown and slaughtered in this country" (Participant 7).

The answer of Participant 7 reveals several points that I will discuss in the next few paragraphs.

The first point in the answer of Participant 7 is the two ways in which Muslims in this

country observe *Id al Adha*. Similar to Participant 9 (who lived in a different city from

Participant 7), one of the ways to offer the sacrifice is for Muslims to organize themselves and

arrange with smaller-scale farm owners for the sacrifice to be carried out in the nearby farms.

Another way is to send the money to have the sacrificed carried out in what they consider to be their home countries. Both ways of offering the sacrifice are discussed in Masri's (2009) work where he explains,

> Many Muslims living in Western countries practice sacrifice by proxy […] According to the laws in the West, no animal can be slaughtered for trade except under supervision and only under licensed abattoirs. When a Muslim in these countries offers a sacrifice, he or she arranges it with the help of a meat-shop. In the Welfare States of Europe there are hardly any 'poor' to be found. Even if there are some, they often cannot be reached easily. However, the sacrificial meat is consumed by members of the family, friends and neighbours. Muslims in the West are now more inclined either to donate an equivalent amount of cash to some charitable institution or have their sacrifices offered by proxy in their countries of origin (Masri 2009, p. 122).

This explanation demonstrates that one of the reasons why some Muslims choose to offer the sacrifice by proxy or replacing it by money donation to charitable institutions is because following the ritual in its traditional form no longer serves the purpose it is supposed to serve, i.e. to fulfill the social obligation of feeding the poor.

Masri argues that the aspect of the social obligation of the festival is more important than its traditional form. He argues,

> Sacrifice is meant to be an act of worship and thanksgiving […] it is meant to be an act of benevolence (*Ihsan*) to fulfill a social obligation (Masri 2009 p. 116).

Furthermore, he argues that the historical context of the animal sacrifice during the pilgrimage is crucial to understanding the *spirit* of the festival of the sacrifice in order to re-imagine a more appropriate translation of the spirit in the current context. He explains,

> The original purpose of offering gifts (*Hady*) at the sacred house (*Ka'bah*) was to succour the ancient Makkans who were the descendants of the Prophet Abraham in response to his prayer in verse 14:37 [in the Qur'an]. In those days the supply of provisions, such as meat, was their most essential need. The whole area was an arid desert. Under those circumstances it was a very sensible and practical proposition for Islam to ask pilgrims to offer girts in the form of sacrificial animals. Today the Makkans are in position to import their food without anybody's help, while there are millions of people in the rest of the Islamic world who are undernourished (Masri 2009, pp. 116 – 117).

Because the changing of the context, Masri argues that continuing with the actual tradition may not be the best way to keep the spirit of the tradition. He extends his argument by drawing

parallel between the animal sacrifice for the annual festival with the sacrifice for the purpose of celebrating the birth of a child (*Aqiqah*) and simple charity (*Sadaqah*). He argues that for the three purposes, the animal sacrifice has in common "the act of feeding the poor" (p. 125). The validity of the traditions only applies insofar as it serves the purpose of fulfilling social obligation of feeding the poor.

I argue, however, that rather than treating it as an outdated tradition, retaining *some* if the traditional form the festival of sacrifice can be an important source for Muslims to derive more comprehensive notion of the ethics and practices of everyday food. In the answer of Participant 7 that I quoted previously, the participant viewed the sacrifice by proxy to be less valuable when she said,

> It's a shame that here […] it's a very detached thing to do, send your money away and someone is going to do the slaughter for you half a country away and it's out of sight, out of mind. You don't have that connection. But when you show people […], "Ok this is where meat comes from; you need to be thankful, you need to be aware" (Participant 7).

This answer demonstrates that the participant finds to be valuable the knowledge (of where meat comes from) and experience (the connection and the feeling of thankfulness) to be as important as the social obligation. It shows that the requirement of the person who offers the sacrifice to personally be involved in the slaughtering of the animals and be a witness to the sacrifice is an inspiration for Muslims to have a more intimate and respectful relationship with their food. If the festival's requirement to be a witness to the ritual is understood as an ethical demand to observe a respectful relationship with one's food, it can be used to inspire a more critical approach to other practices of industrial animal farming and the way food is produced in general.

The challenge is to find a balance between continuing the tradition for its value of timelessness and finding new and timely articulations for the ethical spirit that underlies the tradition. For example, one aspect of the tradition of the festival from which Muslims can draw inspiration is the many regulations of the permissibility of the animal to be sacrificed. According to the Islamic traditions, the sacrificed animals "should not be: obviously diseased; raw-boned lean; blind in even one eye; or lame" (Masri 2009, p. 125). As I have demonstrated in chapter 2, the ethical demands for concern for the animals are not limited to the case of sacrificed animals. These ethical concerns can be a starting point for Muslims who seek to translate the particularities of this religious food tradition. The challenge of translation goes beyond contextualizing the tradition for Muslims alone. It also involves reframing the traditions beyond a matter of exclusive religious *group* identity that requires replacing the language of religious exclusivity with the language of inclusivity. For example, the ethical concerns for the animals can be translated into efforts to improve the conditions of animal welfare in general through regulation and promotion of alternative practices of humane animal farming.

To be clear, it is not my primary goal here to formulate what a fully-formed image of the reinterpretation of the ritual of sacrifice would look like. Rather, my goal is to illustrate how Muslims can approach a long-practiced, important Islamic food tradition by striking a balance between the spirit and the form of the tradition. Striking such balance would require flexibility in interpretation of the traditions. Therefore, in actuality, how the tradition is reinterpreted and reimagined would vary from one instance to another. For the re-imagination to be political, however, the variance that results from the timeliness of the reinterpretation would still be anchored in the relationship between individual piety and collective responsibility integral to

the timelessness of the higher objectives of the tradition. That is why, as I have argued

previously, a political approach to Islamic food ethics requires that religious leaders have a

prominent place to educate the rest of the community of what they consider to be an

appropriate reinterpretation of the religious laws and traditions, based on their reading and

application of the religious texts to a given context, and to empower members of community

and organize them for collective actions.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the concept of a political approach to Islamic dietary laws in

terms of translating the demands of a particular religion (i.e. Islamic dietary laws) that is not

restricted to the exclusive language of privacy. I argued that the centrality of the connection

between individual and collective responsibilities in the concept of *taqwa* (God consciousness)

is useful in grounding such effort of translation. More specifically, I argued that the concept of

taqwa is important in understanding how the virtues cultivated at the individual level *can*

translate into the communal level. I also discussed the importance of the role that religious

leaders play in making the connection between the two aspects of *taqwa*. I argued that a

political approach to Islamic dietary laws requires religious leaders and scholars to make the

connection between religious belief, individual piety, and collaborative actions. This means that

religious leaders are responsible not only for framing the issues beyond a matter of *individual*

piety, but also beyond a matter of exclusive religious *group* identity. It requires replacing the

language of religious exclusivity with the language of inclusivity by forging ties with others

beyond the nominal religious boundaries. I used the example of *Id al Adha* (the annual festival

of sacrifice) to illustrate the centrality of collective responsibility in existing Islamic food

tradition.

Chapter 5 Interfaith Food Activism

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I analyzed a political approach to Islamic dietary laws, which requires religious leaders and scholars to make the connection between religious belief, individual piety, and collaborative actions. This means that religious leaders are responsible not only for framing the issues beyond a matter of *individual* piety, but also beyond a matter of exclusive religious *group* identity. It requires replacing the language of religious exclusivity with the language of inclusivity by forging ties with others beyond the nominal religious boundaries. In this chapter, I will further elaborate the connections between religious belief, individual piety, and collaborative actions in the concept of interfaith activism by drawing from the work of Bretherton (2011). More specifically, the goal of this chapter is to use the concept of interfaith activism to develop an argument for interfaith food activism that brings together the concerns for greater inclusivity that I addressed in chapter 1, the understanding of Islamic dietary laws as a mechanism to cultivate virtues I addressed in chapter 2, the political approach to food ethics I analyzed in chapter 3, and the collective aspect of Islamic food traditions I discussed in chapter 4.

I begin by analyzing Bretherton's argument for a form of inter-faith relations that challenges not only state cooptation and market commodification of religion, but also the multicultural appropriation of religion as identity politics. That is to say that Bretherton's proposal for inter-faith relations that challenge the language of privacy is similar to the arguments made by Brown (1995) and McKibben (2007), which I have discussed in chapters 1

and 3 respectively. I will also compare Bretherton's argument of the value of religious practice as virtue cultivation with Mahmood's (2005) argument that I have discussed in chapter 2. Furthermore, Bretherton's argument of the value of religious traditions in framing religious issues in terms of common interests is consistent with Gottlieb's (2006) argument that I have analyzed in chapter 4.

In the second and third sections, will discuss practices of interfaith food activism that demonstrates the ways in which religious dietary laws can be translated into common actions. I will use the answers from the participants I interviewed to demonstrate the importance of dialogue to bring together different positions or perspectives, and how religious community centers can serve as institutions that facilitate the dialogue and cultivate the shared perceptions of common interests. In the second section, I focus on the role of interfaith food activism in challenging interpretations of Islamic dietary laws that are restricted to essentialized religious identity. I will analyze the concepts of *eco-kosher*, *eco-halal*, and the seal of justice used to reform *kosher* certification in this country. In the third section, I further the analysis by focusing on the role of interfaith food activism in challenging the language of individual consumerism. I use the examples of organizations such as Faith in Place and Interfaith Workers Justice to discuss existing practices of interfaith food activism that exemplify the principles that I discuss in the first section of this chapter. I argue interfaith food activism may provide the language that allows for liberal citizens (including Muslims) to think of food-related issues beyond the language of exclusive privatized ethics, religious belief, identity, and individual consumerism.

5.1 Interfaith Activism

In order to discuss interfaith activism with specific regards to food, I begin with an

analysis of interfaith activism by drawing from the work of Bretherton (2011). His work on inter-

faith relations seeks to address the role that religious groups can play in a politics. He begins

with the following question,

> how can we negotiate a common life between different religious traditions, with different and competing
> claims to truth, amid the pressures and structures brought to bear upon that common life by the state
> and the market on which all depend? (Bretherton 2011, p. 348).

He argues for religious groups to answer the question with a response that goes beyond three

tendencies, namely: state *cooption*, identity politics (or communalism), and market

commodification (p. 355). He explains that state cooption involves,

> letting religion be constructed as either just another interest group seeking a share of public money or
> just another constituency within civil society who can foster social cohesion and make up the deficiencies
> of welfare position (p. 355).

Identity politics or communalism involves,

> re-framing religious actions in terms of either multiculturalism – religious groups become just another
> minority identity group demanding recognition for their way of life as equally valid in relation to all others
> – or the rhetoric of rights –churches, mosques, etc. become a collective of individual rights bearers
> demanding their freedom of expression over and against other bearers of rights (p. 356).

And finally, commodification involves,

> let[ting] religion be constructed by the market as a product to be consumed or commodity to be bought
> and sold so that in the marketplace religion is simply another lifestyle choice, inter-changeable with or
> equivalent to another (p. 356).

Bretherton's explanation for the three responses that religious groups tend to have is

consistent with Brown's (2006) and Asad's (2011) explanations (which I have elaborated in

chapter 1) on the two forces that operate on the liberal subject, namely toleration and market

rationality. What is common in all of these explanations is the problem of the essentialization of

religion made possible by the exclusive language of privacy. Against cooption, communalism,

and commodification, Bretherton propose inter-faith relations as a civic practice. He

distinguishes inter-faith relations as a civic practice from interfaith dialogue and volunteerism,

which he argues tend to ignore "questions of political economy" (p. 357). That is not to say that

inter-faith dialogue and volunteerism are not important. But he argues that, "real encounter,

dialogue, and understanding are, at the popular level, best generated as by-products of shared

civic actions" (p. 358). More specifically, Bretherton argues that the inter-faith relations that go

beyond dialogue and volunteerism would be located specifically "within the context of […]

establishing limits to the market and the state" (p. 359).

Furthermore, Bretherton argues for the politics of the common good as one of the

forms of inter-faith relation as a civic practice (p. 364). Echoing Gottlieb's (2006) argument on

the importance of religious traditions in framing religious issues beyond the language of

identity, Bretherton argues that,

> beyond simply being a means by which to gather people together beyond the immediate ties of family,
> religions keep in play fundamental questions about what human life is for […] they open up a space for
> the political by making a demand for genuine deliberation about what constitutes the common good"
> (Bretherton 2011, p. 365).

Bretherton's argument that religions can play a role in creating a political space for ethical

deliberation is consistent with Brown's (1995) proposition for postidentity positioning and

conversations where individuals are "arguing from the vision about the common ('what I want

for us') rather than from identity ('who I am')" (Brown 1995, p. 51). As I have elaborated

previously in chapter 1, postidentity conversations would involve translating the demands of a

particular religious belief into non-essentializing norms that contribute to a vision about the

common. Furthermore, the translated demands of a particular religious belief would be subject

for interrogation by others from outside the religious boundaries and therefore are subject to

greater accountability (p. 51). In short, Bretherton's (2011) conception of the role that religion plays in creating a political space challenges the exclusive and individualist conception of religion and ethics.

Bretherton (2011) outlines three kinds of civic practices that can be cultivated from each religious tradition as a motivation for common actions; i.e. civic listening, commitment to a place, and building institutions (Bretherton 2011, p. 365). Civic listening refers to the "active listening to and forming relationships with those not like you and with whom you disagree" (p. 367). Bretherton argues that listening is a virtue that can be cultivated through religious practice because religion presupposes the act of listening to God. He explains,

> In listening to God, we listen for the word external to our immediate needs, the word beyond our finite horizon, the word that opens up our limited imagination. […] For religious groups, it is listening to God, primarily through their sacred texts, that furnishes them with the intellectual and moral resources beyond the popular consensus. And it is this external word that places limits on politics itself, remind each tradition that politics and economics do not have to bear the full weight of meaning and action (p. 367).

On the one hand, Bretherton's argument for the importance of cultivating the practice of listening to God is similar to how Mahmood's (2005) explanation for the piety movement that I have discussed in chapter 2. Mahmood argues that the practice of virtue cultivation can be understood as a challenge not only to the modern definition of religion as religious belief, but also to the narrowly defined economic rationality (Mahmood 2005, pp. 45 – 48).

Unlike the piety movement that Mahmood studied, however, the act of listening that Bretherton argues one can cultivate through religion is specifically political. More specifically, Bretherton's argues for the importance of cultivating the practice of listening to others with different needs and identities. Furthermore, he argues for civic listening that focuses particularly on setting a limit to economics, which is an argument that is similar to McKibben's (2007) argument for a "deeper" conception of the economy, which I have analyzed in chapter 3.

In short, McKibben argues that the "shallow" conception of the economy fosters hyper-

individuals who perceive themselves primarily in terms of having competing interests with

others.

Furthermore, Bretherton's argument for importance of a commitment to a place also

parallels McKibben's argument for building a community. Bretherton explains that,

> Listening requires active involvement and commitment to a particular place and formation of
> relationships in that place because building trusting and stable relationships takes time and personal
> presence. […] it is a shared commitment to a particular place that provides the ground of common action
> (Bretherton 2011, p. 368).

That is to say that by sharing a commitment to a particular place, people from different

religious traditions can translate the virtue of listening that they cultivate from each tradition to

a common action that is grounded on or embodied in their sharing of the place. Bretherton's

argument that a shared place can lead to the development of "shared perceptions of common

interests and the practice of solidarity" is consistent with McKibben's argument for the need to

have spaces and opportunities for political education and enactment (Bretherton 2011, p. 371;

McKibben 2007, p. 168 - 170). While McKibben's work demonstrates that one does not need

religion to have this shared commitment, Bretherton's work shows that not only religion does

not have to be an impediment, but also that it can contribute, to the cultivation of shared

commitment.

Moreover, Bretherton argues that the cultivation of the shared perceptions of common

interest is better facilitated through institutions rather than through immediate interactions

between individuals (p. 371). He argues that religious institutions can contribute to the

formations of "anchor institutions", where "a mobile population can be captured, however

temporarily" (p. 371). He points out that the value of religious institutions that serve as "places

constituted by gathered and mobilized people who do not come together for either commercial

or state-directed transactions, but who instead come together to worship and care for each

other" (p. 372). This argument is consistent with the argument that Gottlieb (2006) argument

on the importance of religious leaders and traditions in framing religious issues beyond the

language of privacy that I have discussed in chapter 4.

I will use the term "interfaith activism" to summarize the inter-faith relations that are

oriented toward cultivation of civic practices as Bretherton elaborates in his work. In the next

section, I will use the issue of food to illustrate the practices of interfaith activism. More

specifically, I will discuss practices of interfaith food activism that demonstrates the ways in

which religious dietary laws can be translated into common actions.

5.2 Interfaith Food Activism: Beyond Essentialized Religious Identity

The core of Bretherton's proposal for religious groups to provide responses that

establish limits to the market speaks directly to the role of religious groups in the prevalent

discourse on food ethics and politics. Interfaith food activism may provide the language that

allows for Muslims to think of food-related issues beyond the language of exclusive privatized

ethics, religious belief, identity, and individual consumerism. I have discussed in chapters 1 and

3 the difficulty in connecting the demands of Islamic dietary laws with collaborative actions

beyond nominal religious boundaries, as illustrated in the following answers from the

participants:

> Ideally, it would be best for Muslims and non-Muslims to cooperate with each other but that's, to me, I feel like I can go to whole different topics with their, with how we go about that, um. The easiest, the simplest, concise way to explain this is that, well, Muslims shouldn't have to, they can, but they should not have to, like [say] "Ok, we are Muslims in this country and we are going to you, the remaining public, and [say] let's go revamp this whole meat industry". We don't have to take that [approach], but you can if

you want to, but at this point I don't think that's very welcoming to the American public in general. Just be a private citizen, you don't have to declare your faith, you are just concerned for the meat industry […] I feel like if enough buyers are aware of what they are buying, you know it would slowly change the industry because what we purchase is the bloodline of the industry making the money, so if we don't purchase low-quality meat, the law of supply and demand would make them make better-quality meat […] I don't go into politics because I wouldn't know how to begin to do that. I only know myself as a private citizen, what I would do individually and hopefully if everybody does what I do then it will be fine (Participant 7).

I don't see what the issue would be for people to work together. […] The best way really is to just stop buying the meat and the supply will go up and the demand will go down and they're going to produce less, when you make that switch then money talks […] So I think the best way would be to just stop buying stuff and change your buying habits (Participant 17).

I have argued that the answers of both participants 7 and 17 above demonstrates the way the participants identified ethical consumerism as the only available avenue for change and the lack of available political opportunities.

There are other participants, however, who believe that it is possible and desirable to translate the demands of Islamic dietary laws into collaborative actions as demonstrated by the following answers from the participants,

I think the problem that we [i.e. Muslims] face is the same problem that the whole country faces […] I don't see how we can't work together. There [are] a lot of interfaith programs in the community, churches, and synagogues, and mosques; they work together so that may be a topic that they can bring up to their people [through] workshops, I think we can start with that […] we can organize workshops not just for the people in the mosques, but maybe schools [and for] the wider society (Participant 15).

To emphasize the way of slaughter […] but not care about how [the animal] was raised in the first place, I don't think this is the right approach – and I think that is the approach it is right now […] not only that we [Muslims] can partner with others and work on the larger issues, I think we have to be pioneers and now we are not, which is, I think, that is an admission of failure in emphasizing a more important part of our religion (Participant 16).

There are a lot of non-Muslim people who care about the environment, care about [the problems in] the meat industry […] I'm sure there are ways [Muslims and others] can, at least, have this discussion so everyone can talk about their perspective [and] figure out something together […] because the goals are going to be the same (Participant 20).

The answers illustrate the points that Bretherton (2011) made with regards to the role that interfaith relations can serve as an impetus for common action. Firstly, the answers demonstrate the importance of dialogue to bring together different positions or perspectives,

and finding common concerns or goals for grounding such dialogue. Secondly, the answers show how religious community centers can serve as institutions that facilitate the dialogue and cultivate the shared perceptions of common interests.

The answers of the participants I interviewed focus mainly on the importance of having activities oriented toward providing information and raising awareness of the problems of industrial animal farming. In addition to the issue of respect for the animals that many participants spoke about, several of the participants also mentioned the issue of environmental costs of industrial animal farming. Although none of the participants I interviewed had seen or participated in such interfaith activities, several of them spoke of learning from the responses by other religious groups, for example the Jewish responses to industrial animal farming.

In chapter 2, I compared Islamic and Jewish arguments for incorporating the ethical principles found in the teachings of both religions, which they argue to be important in understanding the religions' dietary laws (Kalechofsky 2004, Foltz 2004). The principles include the ethics of promoting health, social justice, compassion towards non-human beings, and avoidance of waste or destroying anything of value, including the environment (Kalechofsky 2004, pp. 173-4; Foltz 2004, p. 220). More specifically, as I have elaborated in chapter 2, both authors argue that the preference for vegetarianism can be found within both religions. In other words, both authors view the limiting purpose of religious dietary laws can be taken in progression to its logical conclusion of doing away with meat eating entirely. As a result, for these authors, the similar ethical principles in both religions are translated into similar content of the religious dietary laws.

I asked the participants about their views on Islamic vegetarianism. More specifically, I asked them if they think that Islamic dietary laws should be understood in terms of a progression that would necessitate vegetarianism. The answers of the participants I interviewed show a consensus that while a Muslim can choose to be a vegetarian as an individual, Islamic dietary laws cannot be interpreted as strictly advocating vegetarianism, as demonstrated in the following answers:

> In terms of not having any animal products altogether, I feel like that's too restrictive because […] God doesn't want you to live a very narrow and rigid life […] it's not the way He prescribes life for us […] but I think [it would be acceptable for Muslims] if you argue for a Prophetic diet in terms of [eating] meat once a week or once a month, and you show them [i.e. Muslims] that he [i.e. the Prophet] ate in terms of mostly grains and fruit and vegetables, and eating what's in the season (Participant 4).

> I am not a scholar, but I think, what my little knowledge goes, is that we have been advised to eat what is available to us and everything has been made available to us so keeping that directions under perspective we should eat everything and so being a pure vegetarian does not necessarily follow those directions […] Islam is all about moderation, so hopefully Allah will guide us (Participant 9).

> There is nothing [in Islamic dietary laws] that forces you to eat meat, [but] when you say [in] Islam you have to be a vegetarian, then you are restricting yourself. That's not the point of the religion. […] everything is *halal* [i.e. permissible] unless proven otherwise. Unless there is something that says it is *haram* [i.e. forbidden], then it is *halal* (Participant 15).

The participants' answers demonstrate the importance of understanding religious dietary laws as encompassing more than the ethical principles. Consequently, while interfaith food activism seeks to foster dialogue that bring together different perspectives leading to common actions beyond religious identity, it is not meant to eliminate identity altogether. Instead, the kind of dialogue that interfaith food activism seeks to foster is best understood in terms of postidentity. As I have elaborated in chapter 1, postidentity does not mean that identity does not play an important role in determining one's position. Rather, it means that one uses the awareness of one's own position as a valuable contribution to a vision about the common

(Brown 1995, p. 51). In other words, the goal is not to arrive at the same content of religious

dietary laws but to situate the content of those laws within shared ethical principles.

Another attempt by Jewish scholars to respond to the issue of industrial animal farming

is to reform kosher certification. While currently there is no similar attempt to reform halal

certification in this country, kosher certification reform can serve as a starting point for an

interfaith dialogue on different religious groups' responses. The Magen Tzedek organization

stands out from the rest of Kosher-certifying organizations in this country due to their use of

contextual approach to interpret Jewish dietary laws. In particular, Magen Tzedek responds to

the unethical conditions and practices in Kosher-meat processing plants, specifically with

regards to poor labor conditions and animal welfare violations. By developing the "seal of

justice" to include the ethical considerations previously ignored by other kosher-certification

organizations, Magen Tzedek seeks to reform the conventional notion and practices of Kosher

certification (Neroulias 2010). In his explanations on the premise behind the seal of justice that

the movement introduced, Rabbi Allen, the project director of the Magen Tzedek program

asserts that the Jewish scholars who support the Magen Tzedek movement treat the "labor

conditions, animal welfare, consumer rights, corporate integrity and environmental impact" as

"religious issues, no less than certifying the ritual nature of the product. It's our responsibility to

see that in the production of kosher food, the ethical demands of the Jewish people are also

being met (Allen in Neroulias 2010, p. 3 of 3). That is to say that the concept of *tzedek* (justice

or righteousness) is used as an attempt to capture not only the letter of the *kashrut* laws but

also the other Jewish principles that Kalechofsky (2004) discussed, including the ethics of

promoting health, social justice, compassion towards non-human beings, and avoidance of

waste or destroying anything of value, including the environment, and more specifically the principle of *tzedakah* (to help the needy and work for a more just society) (Kalechofsky 2004, 173 - 174).

The Magen Tzedek organization is best understood as one of the manifestations of the concept of ethical kosher. In her work, *Kosher Nation*, Fishkoff (2010) analyzes the development of ethical kosher, including the use of the term "eco-kosher" that was coined by Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi in the 1970s (Fishkoff 2010, pp. 239 – 240). According to Fishkoff, as a reformed approach to food ethics, eco-kosher is part of the larger concept of eco-Judaism, which is characterized by its focus on its belief of "living harmoniously with the earth as a Jewish commandment, and supports such things as organic and sustainable agriculture, recycling, and healthy work environment" (p. 240). Here, the parallel can be observed between the encompassing ideal of eco-Judaism and the ideal of the earlier organic movement that I discussed in chapter 3.

Specifically among the Reform Jewish community, Fishkoff writes that historically there has been reluctance in employing kosher discourse, including using the term eco-kosher, as part of Reform Judaism's opposition to the Orthodox religious authority (Fishkoff 2010, p. 240). However, she argues that a growing number of Reform rabbis and activists have begun to embrace the Jewish dietary laws and traditions in their attempt to develop a more holistic approach to food ethics. By appealing to the literal definition of kosher as "proper and appropriate", Reform rabbis have begun advising their congregation to,

> Eat less red meat […] Plant synagogue gardens. Join Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs, where members pre-buy a season's worth of produce from a local farmer. Pay attention to how meat animals are raised and how food workers are treated. Host Shabbat and holiday meals at synagogue to build community (Fishkoff 2010, p. 242).

Here, a close parallel can be drawn between interpreting kosher as proper or appropriate and interpreting halal as permissible. Although both terms have commonly been reduced to a very limited interpretation, religious scholars can challenge this limited interpretation.

The practices encouraged by the Reform rabbis (i.e. eating less red meat, planting synagogue gardens, joining CSAs, and paying attention to how meat animals are raised and how food workers are treated) make it possible to think of Jewish dietary laws beyond a matter of essentialized religious identity. The practices can potentially be expanded to include others outside the religious group because the ethical principles that ground the practices can be shared with others. For example, one of the practices proposed is to have a more direct relationship between consumers and producers by participating in community-supported agriculture (CSA). This attempt has also been present among the Muslims. In her article about what she called the "eco-halal revolution", Arumugam (2009) wrote about Norwich Meadows farm, a Muslim-owned organic farm in Norwich, New York that works with local community-supported agriculture network to connect people with their local farmers. The cooperative connects Muslim consumers with non-Muslim local farmers who are willing to work with the Muslim community to accommodate the halal slaughter requirements. According to Arumugam (2009), those who are involved in this type of movement utilize the concept of *tayyib* (wholesome or pure) to distinguish the meat they produce from conventional halal meat (Arumugam 2009, p. 1 of 5). This is similar to the way Reform Jewish rabbis utilize the literal meaning of kosher as proper or appropriate that I have discussed in the last section. Additionally, the use of the term *eco-halal* reflects a parallel to the ethical kosher movement's use of the term *eco-kosher*.

5.3 Interfaith Food Activism: Beyond Consumerism

While community-supported agriculture and other practices outlined above make it possible to think of religious dietary laws beyond essentialized religious identity, those practices are still framed within the language of consumerism. Furthermore, the more common type of community-supported agriculture that takes form of consumers buying a subscription to purchase a share of a farm's yield is often accessible and affordable only to the higher-income part of a community and therefore only reinforces rather than alleviates the problem of social inequality in the community. The work of Winne (2008) that focuses on the gap between the rich and the poor with regards to the food system speaks to the problem of the typical response to food gap from religious groups. Winne argues that religious or faith-based institutions are among the contributors of short-term approach to the problem of food gap by limiting their response to providing a safety net for the poor (e.g. through food banks) (Winne 2008, p. 29). He argues against such short-term approach, explaining that "there was an opportunity cost associated with choosing to collect and distribute other people's leftovers rather than fight the public policy battles that should have been fought more vigorously" (p. 29). That is to say that, while the short-term approach can provide immediate assistance to those in need, it can also lead to the lack of urgency of the need for a long-term political solution and inadvertently contributes to the perpetuation of the food system that creates the food gap to begin with. Although Winne specifically uses church-based food banks as examples, there are many food banks organized by Muslim community centers that operate using the same short-term approach. A better alternative to the short-term approach, according to Winne, is to connect the services that alleviate immediate needs with other longer-term

solutions. It is within that context of long-term solutions that other practices of interfaith food

activism can be developed, through which the ethical demands of particular religious dietary

laws can be translated into common actions.

The concept of food sovereignty is useful in grounding practices of interfaith food

activism that focus on long-term solutions. Schanbacher's (2010) work delves in detail into the

concept of food sovereignty (which he contrasts with the concept of food security), specifically

with regards to the context of globalization. His argument that the difference between the

paradigm of food security and that of food sovereignty ultimately lies in their underlying

assumption with regards to subjectivity is relevant to translating the demands of religious

dietary laws to common actions beyond consumerism. Schanbacher points to the definition of

food security as provided by the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) as

follows:

> Food security has been defined as the access for all people at all times to enough food for an active,
> healthy life. The three key ideas underlying this definition are: the adequacy of food availability (effective
> supply); the adequacy of food access, i.e. the ability of the individual to acquire sufficient food (effective
> demand); and the reliability of both. Food insecurity can, therefore, be a failure of availability, access,
> reliability or some combination of these factors. Inherent in this modern concept of food security is an
> understanding of food producers and consumers as economic agents (Food security 1996, quoted in
> Schanbacher 2010, p. 29).

Schanbacher (2010) argues that the definition of food security is built on the assumption that,

> humans are autonomous, rational beings who interact through competition rather than cooperation, self-
> interest rather than community, and consumerism rather than culturally sustainable relations
> (Schanbacher 2010, p. 29)

In contrast, food sovereignty is an alternative paradigm within which food production and

consumption are organized based on the assumption that individuals are inseparable from the

community. According to Schanbacher,

Food sovereignty's primary emphasis on local production for local consumption is underscored by a notion of *interdependence*. A focus on local, community development in which the interests of family, friends, and neighbors is extremely different than a neoliberal vision of a globally integrated world composed of *rational, autonomous, self-interested individuals* (Schanbacher 2010, p. 55, emphasis mine).

In other words, while the focus of food security is the individual's ability to access enough food, the focus of food sovereignty is the community's ability not only to produce enough food for everyone in that community but also to ensure that such production is part of "culturally sustainable relations" (Schanbacher 2010, p. 29). The emphasis of food sovereignty on community interdependence is useful in grounding practices of interfaith food activism.

Winne (2008) speaks to the importance of interdependence by drawing a direct connection between the concepts of organic and local food and antipoverty movement (Winne 2008, pp. 132 - 134). More specifically, the concepts of organic and local can be interpreted to the problem of poverty by shifting the focus from individuals to the community. This interpretation would be consistent with the early organic ideals and the local community that McKibben (2007) proposes, which I have discussed in chapter 3. Winne proposes community-supported agriculture as one of the potential solutions to the creation of an alternative food system (p. 137). He argues that as a part of antipoverty movement, community-supported agriculture should challenge the conventional form of subscription that excludes those who cannot afford the premium. According to Winne,

Working in partnership with nonprofit organizations and government agencies, some CSAs have been able to use grants and donations to reduce or eliminate the usual share cost for low-income families. Other CSAs have come up with a market basket creative subsidy mechanisms, from offering 'working shares' to lower-income members, to holding fundraising events at their farms, to simply asking their higher-income members to contribute a little extra money. These approaches and a respectable tendency toward inclusivity have reduced the perception that CSAs, as well as organic and locally produced food, are the special province of a moneyed elite (Winne 2008, 138).

This passage demonstrates that Winne's argument challenges the separation between the private and the public in their conceptions of organic and local food. In passages like the one

quoted above that are found throughout Winne's work, the author speaks of the food system

not with regards to individual-as-individual but individual as a member of the community. Only

by doing so he is able to speak of alternative economic arrangements that include working

shares, fundraising events, and other means of wealth redistribution within the community.

One example of existing interfaith food activism that translate the demands of religious

dietary laws beyond the language of both essentialized religious identity and individual

consumerism is the practices organized by Faith in Place. Based in Illinois, Faith in Place is a

place-based organization formed in 1999 that connects congregations of different religions. As

part of their larger religious environmentalism project, Faith in Place has created an extensive

sustainable food program that includes workshops on food education, connecting people to

their local farmers, assisting with creating gardens in religious spaces, and organizing advocacy

activities for agricultural and land use policy at the regional, state, and federal levels

(Sustainable food n.d.). Those practices of interfaith food activism are political in nature

because they do not assume that religious food ethics are a matter of privatized identity or

individual preferences. Instead, the practices are the results of the attempts to translate

religious food ethics into a vision of the common.

While it can be beneficial to have an interfaith organization that addresses the issue of

food through different aspects as illustrated by Faith in Place, interfaith food activism can be

conducted through other forms of interfaith activism that does not necessarily focus on the

issue of food or through those that addresses any one aspect related to the issue of food. For

example, interfaith food activism can also take the form of activism that focuses on the issue of

farm workers is the work carried out by Interfaith Worker Justice, an organization that draws

from the teachings of different religions in order to "educate, organize, and mobilize the religious community in the United States on issues and campaigns that will improve wages, benefits, and conditions for workers, and give voice to workers, especially workers in low-wage jobs" (Mission and values n.d.). In *A Worker Justice Reader* (2010) published by the organization, the work of Interfaith Worker Justice has included supporting farm workers to "form unions to reduce exposure to pesticides", "to get drinking water and access to bathrooms in the field", and supporting poultry workers to "form unions to address the repetitive motion injuries that plague the industry" (Heine 2010, p. 13). That is to say, similar to Faith in Place, Interfaith Worker Justice is an example of an avenue for interfaith food activism because it situates the issue of food within a more holistic framework of religious activism.

To be clear, my primary goal here is not to present a comprehensive catalogue of the different forms of interfaith food activism. Rather, my goal is to illustrate how Muslims can begin to think about Islamic dietary laws beyond the language of essentialized religious identity and individual consumerism. In chapter 4, I argued that a political approach to Islamic food ethics requires that religious leaders have a prominent place to educate the rest of the community of what they consider to be an appropriate reinterpretation of the religious laws and traditions, based on their reading and application of the religious texts to a given context, and to empower members of community and organize them for collective actions. Actual forms of interfaith activism would require not only flexibility in Muslims' interpretation of Islamic dietary laws, but also an in-depth analysis of the ethical principles, such as the principle of justice, that would underlie the proposed interfaith dialogue. Such analysis is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I used the concept of interfaith activism to develop an argument for interfaith food activism that brings together the concerns for greater inclusivity that I addressed in chapter 1, the understanding of Islamic dietary laws as a mechanism to cultivate virtues I addressed in chapter 2, the political approach to food ethics I analyzed in chapter 3, and the collective aspect of Islamic food traditions I discussed in chapter 4. I have drawn from Bretherton's argument on the value of inter-faith relations that challenges market commodification of religion and multicultural appropriation of religion as identity politics. I have demonstrated that Bretherton's proposal for inter-faith relations that challenge the language of privacy is similar to the arguments made by Brown (1995) and McKibben (2007), which I have analyzed in previous chapters. I have also connected Bretherton's argument of the value of religious practice as virtue cultivation with Mahmood's (2005) argument and Bretherton's argument of the value of religious traditions in framing religious issues in terms of common interests with Gottlieb's (2006) argument that I have previously analyzed in chapters 2 and 4 respectively.

Building on the concept of interfaith relation that I outlined in the first section, I discussed practices of interfaith food activism that demonstrate the ways in which religious dietary laws can be translated into common actions. I used the answers from the participants I interviewed to demonstrate the importance of dialogue to bring together different positions or perspectives, and how religious community centers can serve as institutions that facilitate the dialogue and cultivate the shared perceptions of common interests. I discuss in the second and third sections, the role of interfaith food activism in challenging interpretations of Islamic

dietary laws that are restricted to essentialized religious identity and individual consumerism. I

argue interfaith food activism may provide the language that allows for liberal citizens

(including Muslims) to think of food-related issues beyond the language of exclusive privatized

ethics, religious belief, identity, and individual consumerism.

Conclusion

The title of this dissertation is, "Beyond Minority Identity Politics: Rethinking Progressive Islam through Food". I wanted to write this dissertation as a way to think and speak differently about politics as a Muslim in America. More specifically, I wanted to write about politics from a particular religious perspective or experience that is not limited by an exclusivistic conception of being Muslim as a minority identity. However, I am *not* writing about the particularities of a Muslim subjectivity (the way Muslims see themselves) as informed by the doctrines of specific religious beliefs. To be clear, given the modern definition of religion as private belief, my argument is *not* that Muslims should have different behaviors than non-Muslims because they hold a different doctrinal belief. *Neither* am I arguing that there is anything uniquely Islamic about problematizing the exclusivistic character of liberal subjectivity. Therefore, this dissertation does *not* deal with the issue of whether one can find a doctrinal justification for Muslims to accept the authority of a liberal state, or to be a liberal citizen, without problematizing the exclusive characteristic of a liberal subjectivity. Instead, this dissertation focuses on how the orthopraxy of *halal* food by Muslims in America has the potential to challenge what has become the paradox of embodying a political and a Muslim identity in America.

The question of what it means to be a political Muslim is difficult to answer partly because the common discourse on Islam and politics is saturated with conversations on violence, terror, jihad, or national security. To be a political Muslim is reduced to an overly simplistic dichotomy: a violent or fundamentalist Islamist that takes religion too seriously at the

expense of others; or a moderate Muslims who leaves religion behind when entering the public sphere (and arguably does not take religion seriously enough). My main interest in this dissertation is *not* to 'defend' Islam or to show that Muslims are not violent, or at least not any more than non-Muslims. I chose the topic of food because I sensed, through the many conversations I have had with other Muslims over the years, that the way Islamic dietary laws shape a Muslim's experience of what it means to be a Muslim speaks to something fundamental that Muslims share with others. Food is a topic that allows for way to think and speak differently about what it means to be a political Muslim in America.

The question of what it means to be a Muslim is narrowed in this dissertation into the more concrete question of what it means for Muslims to take seriously the demands of Islamic dietary laws. In other words, I wanted to understand why the Muslims I spoke with think about and practice their observance of Islamic dietary laws the way they do. I took this question to those Muslims who were willing to participate and I discovered that the answers of many of them resonated with the conversations that had sparked my interest at the beginning of this study. They speak of common concerns that Muslims share with others and what Muslims can offer or bring to the table. More specifically, they use the language of Islamic dietary laws and practices of Islamic food traditions in a way that challenges the identity-based exclusive conception of being a Muslim. The complexity and dynamics of the way Muslims understand and practice Islamic dietary laws is important because it provides a different way to think about what it means to take religion seriously in political conversations. More specifically, it provides a way to think about how religion can be approached in a non-exclusive manner, both at the

individual and group levels. However, I found only a small number of participants consciously made the connection between ethics and politics in their daily lives.

In my attempt to describe what this study is about to those whom I asked to participate in the interviews, I tried several different answers that I had hoped would capture the essence of what this research project is about succinctly and sufficiently. On some of those occasions, I simply described it as a study of *food, religion, and politics* as they pertain to Muslims in America. I remember the comment that one participant gave me *in relief* after I completed the interview with him. He was glad to have participated in the study, he said, because he believed the topic is timely and relevant, that the issue of *halal* food (or food and religion) has increasingly become more and more important to the growing Muslim population in America. The relief, however, come from his belief that what we had discussed during the interview is *not really* about politics. I understand his relief. Over the past ten years, Muslims in America can be forgiven for increasingly becoming frustrated with having to endure being subjects of studies, explanations, and judgments when it comes to the topic of religion and politics. In that sense, I am glad that my study is *not really* about politics.

But this study is *really* about politics.

I do not take the participant's comment as an indication that he had misunderstood the purpose of my study. Rather, it is a sign that we are living in a time when there is a particular coalescence of assumptions as to not only how religion and politics intersect (especially in the case of Islam); but more fundamentally as to what constitutes politics. And it is those very assumptions that I questioned in this dissertation. More specifically, by clearing the fields with regards to the image of what the words "political" and "Islam" bring to mind, I have

demonstrated a different discourse of what it means for Muslims to be political using food as an issue that provides an immediately accessible opening to politics. In doing so, I am also appealing to a different way of thinking about religion, ethics, and politics.

The answers I gathered from the participants in this study speak to more than the particular issue of how Muslims understand and carry out the demands of Islamic dietary laws given the reality of living in a country where Muslims are a minority group. The answers reflect a discourse on Islamic dietary laws that is framed primarily within the language of *exclusive privatized religious identity* and *individual consumerism*. This dissertation has then investigated the different ways Muslims negotiate the demands of Islamic dietary laws in their everyday lives in order to propose a different way to think about what it means to follow the demands of Islamic dietary laws in particular and what it means to be a Muslim in general. More specifically, I proposed an approach that is characterized by greater *inclusivity*. In contrast to an exclusivistic approach, I proposed a political approach to Islamic dietary laws through practices of interfaith food activism.

I argued that a political approach to Islamic food ethics would require religious leaders to frame the issues concerning food in terms of a collective need. It means that one would view the ethical demands concerning food not only as an individualist obligation to ensure that one's own food is ethical, but as part of a more comprehensive system of Islamic food ethics that also includes a social obligation to strive for creating a just food system for the society. A political approach to Islamic food ethics is possible only by making explicit that those who pursue an individualist ethical understanding of the dietary laws may still be unable to escape or even contribute to the perpetuation of the unjust food system marked by marketing niches and

elitist consumerism. Furthermore, I argued that as an example of Islamic food traditions, the

festival of sacrifice *(Id al Adha)* can be an important source for Muslims to derive a more

comprehensive notion of the ethics and practices of everyday food. The challenge is to find a

balance between continuing the tradition for its value of timelessness and finding new timely

articulations for the ethical spirit that underlies the tradition.

The study of a political approach to Islamic food ethics that I undertook for this

dissertation has the potential to contribute to other studies. For instance, through its

preliminary analysis of interfaith food activism, this dissertation contributes to studies that are

critical of the conception of interfaith dialogue as articulated within the language of liberal

tolerance of religious identities. Insofar as tolerance limits the conception of religion to

exclusive privatized belief or identity, political engagement of Muslims are limited to that of

recognition for their religious group identity. Practices of interfaith activism challenge the

exclusive interpretation of religious demands exactly because they challenge the language of

privacy by recasting the demands of religion in terms of interfaith engagement and deliberation

about the common good. Practices of interfaith food activism are political in nature because

they do not assume that religious food ethics are a matter of privatized identity. Instead, these

practices are the results of the attempts to translate religious food ethics into shared

objectives.

I analyzed examples of existing attempts of such translation, namely a recent reform in

the kosher certification and the community-focused agriculture. I argued that both examples

contribute to the political approach to religious food ethics discourse because they make it

more likely to think of religious dietary laws beyond individual-based solutions. As such, this

dissertation contributes to discourses that seek to further the scope of interfaith studies from being limited to a theological dialogue to being inclusive of political activism.

Similarly, this dissertation also contributes to studies on political approaches to food ethics that are not necessarily religious in nature. As such, this dissertation contributes to other studies that seek to challenge the marginalization of religious teachings and traditions in ethical and political discourses, including the discourses on food. This study can potentially be expanded from its focus on Islam to include a comparative study with other religious practices and traditions with regards to food-related and other issues. Furthermore, although it is beyond the scope of its current form, this dissertation can potentially be expanded to include an investigation into the globalization of the industrialized food system by drawing from post-colonial theories. It can also draw from other studies that analyze the different ways in which religion has been conceptualized as contributing to the crisis of globalization. While this dissertation only touched upon the issues of poverty and labor justice, those issues can be analyzed in an in-depth study on its own, as well as in broader studies that analyze additional issues related to the globalization of the industrialized food system.

The framing of Islamic dietary law in terms of an exclusive privatized identity creates a moral disjunction that can be potentially addressed by embracing greater inclusivity and a moral economy through the cultivation of communal virtues. The alternative is to allow the political and ethical core of Islamic dietary law to become further marginalized and commodified as an individual's choice irrespective of an imagined or real community. What is at stake is no less than a richer way to think about religion; one that challenges the degradation of religion, in this case Islam, to an amoral psychologized impulse incapable of meaningfully

engaging in political discourse. As a Muslim, I want to contribute to the effort that would allow

for Muslims a way to think creatively about what it means to be a Muslim. But a better

alternative to the impoverished conception of religion would not only benefit those who

identify themselves as members of any particular religious group; it would also benefit the

society in general.

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Appendix A

Interview questions:

1. How important is eating halal meat for you? Do you eat only halal meat? Why or why not?

2. Do you have regular discussions with friends or family about halal food? If so, how often do you have them?

3. From where do you usually purchase/obtain halal meat?

4. Please describe how you define and apply halal in your life.

5. Are you familiar with the concept of alternative-halal? Have you ever heard of that term prior to this study? If so, from where did you hear that term? What is your understanding of it?

6. Have you heard of different terms that have similar meaning to alternative halal? How are they similar and how are they different from the one defined in the survey that you took?

7. What, if any, are you thoughts on the meat industry in this country?

8. How, if at all, is your answer to question 7 related to your being a Muslim?

9. If it is important to raise awareness of the Muslim community about the meat industry in this country, what are some of the ways to do so, in your opinion?

10. Do you think it is important to know where your food comes from? If so, what does that mean? Do we need to know the farmer, the butcher, the seller, visit the farm?

11. Do you regularly purchase food from a local farmer's market? If so, how many times a month?

12. What do you think of vegetarianism? Is vegetarianism consistent with Islamic dietary laws?

13. If alternative-halal meat is available in your community, would you be willing to pay more for it? If so, how much more? What should be accounted for the cost?

14. Do you think Muslims and non-Muslims can work together to find a solution for the current

problems of meat industry? If so, what are some of the ways to do so?