



Review

Stunning and animal welfare from Islamic and scientific perspectives



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ABSTRACT

The transformation of an animal into pieces fit for human consumption is a very important operation. Rather than argue about halal slaughter without stunning being inhumane or stunning being controversial from the Islamic point of view, we discuss slaughter, stunning and animal welfare considering both Islamic and animal welfare legislation requirements. With the world Muslim population close to two billion, the provision of halal meat for the Muslim community is important both ethically and economically. However, from the animal welfare standard point of view, a number of issues have been raised about halal slaughter without stunning, particularly, about stressful methods of restraint and the latency of the onset of unconsciousness. This paper sets out to, discuss the methods of stunning that are acceptable by Islamic authorities, highlight the requirements for stunning to be acceptable in Islam and suggest practical ways to improve the humanness of slaughter.

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1. Introduction

Debate about proper treatment of animals first emerged as early as the beginning of the sixth century BC, but perhaps it was in the late twentieth century that science was called upon to clarify the issues and guide the resulting reforms (Fraser, 2008). Religious slaughter has been one controversial issue at the heart of these debates. The study of animal welfare developed in response to certain kinds of ethical problems and historical or cultural context characterized by certain historically and culturally conditioned beliefs and values (Fraser, 2008).

Slaughter is probably the most important operation in the transformation of an animal into pieces fit for human consumption. This crucial moment of killing is governed by strict regulations related to food hygiene and safety, working conditions and animal welfare (Bergeaud-Blackler, 2007).

Being humane is an attitude of heart and mind, empathy and understanding, and not simply a legal or moral injunction (Fox & Mickley, 1984). According to the Universal Declaration of Animal Rights that was proclaimed in Paris, France in 1978, all animal life has the right to be respected and if it is necessary to kill an animal, it must be instantaneous, painless and cause no apprehension (Chapouthier & Nouët, 1998). Humane slaughtering concerns being sympathetic for the animals being killed for meat production through minimizing animal suffering and respect for animals' intrinsic worth. This is probably what Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) preached when he said: "Allah calls for mercy in everything, so be merciful when you kill and when you slaughter; sharpen your blade to relieve its pain." (Al-Qaradawi, 1994). Islam places great emphasis on humane treatment of animals, especially before and during slaughter. Some of the conditions include giving the animal proper rest and water, avoiding conditions that create stress, not slaughtering an animal in front of others of its kind, not sharpening the knife in front of the animals, using a very sharp knife to slit the throat, to mention but a few. It is important to acknowledge that Islam respects the intrinsic worth of animals and teaches animal welfare. Allah mentions in the holy Quran;

"And there is no creature on [or within] the earth or bird that flies with its wings except [that they are] communities like you" Al-An'am, 6:38.

In a hadith narrated by Abdallah bin Amru, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said;

"Whoever is kind to the creatures of God, is kind to himself." (Masri, 1989).

It is reported by Ibn Sirin that Hazrat 'Omar once saw a man denying a sheep, which he was going to slaughter, a satiating measure of water to drink. He gave the man a beating with his lash and told him: "Go, water it properly at the time of its death, you knave!" (Masri, 1989).

Head only electrical stunning, non-penetrative captive bolt stunning and water bath stunning of poultry have been approved by many Islamic authorities, as long as the method is reversible. Appropriate procedures and related minimum requirements are recommended for different species such that slaughter can be done without causing avoidable pain, suffering and distress. The stun to neck cut time is a critical point for the Shariah requirement of the animal being alive at the time of slaughter and the welfare requirement of the animal being bled while still unconscious. A number of issues have been raised about halal slaughter without stunning, particularly, about stressful methods of restraint and the slow rate at which animals lose consciousness as this lengthens the time the animal could experience pain or distress

following the cut. The main objective of this paper is to describe the main slaughtering and stunning methods under commercial slaughter conditions that meet both Islamic and other legal requirements.

2. Why do Muslims practice halal slaughtering?

According to the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) (2011), halal slaughtering process of an animal involves restraining, stunning (if used) and severing of trachea, esophagus and both the carotid arteries and jugular veins. In Shariah law, slaughtering is not a normal matter in which humans act independently as they wish, but it is rather a matter of worship which Muslims must abide by in its provisions. The holy Quran has stipulated specific requirements for the slaughter of religiously acceptable animals. In surat Al-Baqarah, Allah mentions what is forbidden for consumption by the believers.

"He has forbidden you only the Maytatah (dead animals), and blood, and the flesh of swine, and that which is slaughtered as a sacrifice for others than Allah (or has been slaughtered for idols, etc., on which Allah's name has not been mentioned while slaughtering)" (Al-Baqarah 2:173).

In surat Al-Maidah, Allah mentions what is lawful for consumption by the believers.

"They ask you (O Muhammad S.A.W) what is lawful for them (as food). Say: "Lawful unto you are At-Tayibat [all kind of Halal (lawful-good) foods which Allah has made lawful (meat of slaughtered eatable animals...]" (Al-Maidah 5:4).

In a number of verses, Allah reminds the believers to mention His name at the time of slaughtering.

- *"And mention the Name of Allah ... over the beast of cattle that He has provided for them (for sacrifice), at the time of their slaughtering by saying: (Bismillah, Wallâhu-Akbar...)" (Al-hajj 22:28).*
- *"And for every nation We have appointed religious ceremonies, that they mention the Name of Allah over the beast of cattle that He has given them for food..." (Al-hajj 22: 34).*
- *"And the Budn (cows, oxen, or camels driven to be offered as sacrifices by the pilgrims at the sanctuary of Makkah) We have made for you as among symbols of Allah, there in you have much good. So mention the Name of Allah over them when are they are drawn up in lines (for sacrifice)" (Al-hajj 22:36).*

Believers are also reminded not to eat that over which Allah's name has not been mentioned.

"And why should you not eat of that meat on which Allah's Name has been pronounced (at the time of slaughtering the animal), while He has explained to you in detail what is forbidden to you..." (Al-An'âm 6:119).

It is important for scientists to understand that the main reason for the observance of the Islamic faith is to follow the Divine Orders. Allah reminds the believers in the Holy Quran in the following verse;

"O ye who believe! Eat of the lawful things that We have provided you with, and be grateful to Allah, if it is indeed He whom you worship." (Al-Baqarah 2:172).

A number of Muslims may not have accepted stunning at first glance because of the fear to fall in the doubtful things. In a hadith narrated by Bukhari and Muslim, Prophet Muhammad (peace be

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