A Clean Kill: Tracking the Socio-technological Aspects of Slaughtering Animals in Iran

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ABSTRACT The slaughterhouse, whether it is seen as an institution, as an industry, or as a unique technological system, is arguably right at the heart of modernism. Human–animal relationships and more generally human–nature relationships bring about issues of rationalization, alienation, and commodity fetishism, while raising philosophical concerns of the human worldview. Current practices of animal slaughter in Iran challenge the core values of Islamic teachings. Slaughterhouses are hidden from the public, segregated into various sections, and follow the exact same models of industrial production as in other parts of the world. Since they must abide by Islamic ways of slaughter and therefore become Halal, these slaughterhouses are slightly modified accordingly. When meat, or what is recently referred to as protein, shows up in the market, it conceals any sign of its true origin—it is neatly packaged with layers of plastic and modern colorful labels showing animals happily grazing on open, green pasture. The findings of this research point to the subtle imbalance and alienation created between humans and animals in Iran.

Keywords: Halal, Islam, philosophy, slaughter

The Iranian, 10-year-old, primary-school, fifth-graders read about the benefits of industrialized farming and animal husbandry in social-studies textbooks. They are told that modern technology is efficient, reliable, quick, and it is what modern societies cannot live without. The following three statements are made boldly with old pictures of farms, machinery, and cattle:

a) They produce more crop/product compared with traditional systems;

b) They are much quicker than traditional systems;

c) They are much easier to use and are better than traditional systems.
School children in metropolitan cities such as Tehran rarely have the chance to meet animals “in person,” other than stray cats searching in large garbage cans, black crows scavenging for dead animals, and if they are very lucky, it may be possible to spot sparrows and pigeons that are looking through bits and pieces of leftover food in balconies or on the streets. Reducing social-studies school facts to three basic points, along with the obvious alienation of children from nature that is embedded in traditional systems, seems to imply a kind of learning and understanding that modern technology is to be trusted and respected. This is while the invisible complexities of the latter and even more modern formations such as genetically modified food (Farsnews, 2016) are welcomed with minimal resistance. One example of these booming technologies that are necessary to ensure the daily supply of fresh, clean, and hygienic meat lies within the slaughterhouse system.

Slaughterhouses/abattoirs or koshtargah (area of killing), as they call them in Iran, are as challenging as their names imply. Every day, carcasses of mostly sheep, cows, and poultry are stamped with the blue signature of the veterinary office that operates under the Ministry of Agricultural Jihad, and then stacked inside large refrigerated trucks and sent to distant places where they are sold. To ensure the freshness of the meat, the veterinary office has, in the last four years, endorsed the use of paper tapes that are attached to the hind leg of the sheep carcass which show the date of slaughter and the name and area of the slaughterhouse.

Iran, with a population of over 75 million, is home to 98% Muslims, and Islam allows the slaughter of specific animal species if it is “properly” done. This is while some religions advocate vegetarianism; some such as Jainism even go further and advocate harmlessness and renunciation and therefore abstain from eating root vegetables, believing that a bulb or tuber’s ability to sprout is a characteristic of a living being. And animal-rights advocates find it inappropriate to kill animals for food. A food nutritionist, one of the major interlocutors in our study, heavily stressed that “there is never a humane way of killing an animal” (J. Afghani, personal communication, July 2, 2013). It had been a year in which she had converted to a strict vegetarian, and later to a vegan, diet and she felt that her recent chickenpox at the age of 50 years might have been due to this transition. She believed that it is part of the characteristics of men—who usually undertake the act of slaughter—not to really feel how dreadful slaughtering an animal is. Many animal-rights activists share the same belief. This does not necessarily mean that the activists themselves believe in the act of slaughter; some hope that at least practical changes in the slaughterhouse system will lead to the more humane treatment of animals before they are “brutally” killed (B. Tarahi, personal communication, April 24, 2014).

Slaughterhouses, and more generally, modern meat production, have environmental consequences. The United Nations (UN) regularly releases reports of malnutrition around the world, while most of what is under cultivation on earth is designated for livestock production (Owen, 2005). Industrial animals or animals raised for their meat through industrial means of production do not solve the global hunger crisis, but rather extremely aggravate it (Singer, 2009, p. 171). This issue is not only limited to industrialized nations. In fact, “industrializing” nations such as Iran have followed in the exact footsteps of industrialized nations in terms of their livestock production and forms of agriculture. One of the largest movements in the last few years is happening in the Amazon, where tropical forests are being cleared in order to create grazing land for cattle (Wadia, 2001). The slaughtered and then frozen cattle are sent across the world to countries such as Iran in order to supply low-cost meat and to “balance” the market price of meat. In terms of environmental hazards, researchers from the John Hopkins panel show their concern regarding factory farms that are increasingly polluting water reserves and creating what is called...
“dead zones” (Aljazeera, 2013). Also, the widespread use of antibiotics among animals, approximately 80% of all antibiotics used in the world, has led to various forms of antibiotic resistances among the very people who consume them (Sapkota et al., 2008).

When it comes to calculating the costs of production, according to Lawrence (2013), it takes approximately 700 kg of grain to produce 100 kg of beef; 260 kg of grain to produce 100 kg of poultry; 1,000 kg of water to produce 1 kg of grain. The global meat consumption has increased by 82% since 1961. Meat production accounts for almost 70% of all agricultural land worldwide, 30% of the planet’s land surface. Forty percent of the world’s grain is grown for livestock feed, and in poultry production, the birds are raised using arsenic-based medicine (FDA, 2015). The size of chickens has almost doubled since 1967, mainly due to the economic benefits of producing large breasts and relatively smaller drumsticks (Ollinger, 2000). This is of course entangled with the fact that Iranians have gradually moved from a desire for minimal amounts of meat, and mostly vegetables and legumes, to a diet indulged with meat.

Excessive use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers has eroded the soil and has caused extreme pollution (Matson, Parton, Power, & Swift, 1997). The standards of industrial farming which are abided by on a global scale prescribe the following: Cattle should be fed with low doses of antibiotics every day; corn and soya have replaced a diet that used to be dominated by grass. Only 20% of all antibiotics used worldwide are for humans, while the remaining 80% are used on animals (Bowers, 2013). Chickens have become a popular, affordable, and convenient part of the global diet and are raised in even more devastating conditions. They are kept awake, their beaks are trimmed, thousands are kept in very condensed areas with little space to move, and are fed with antibiotics and medicines which include lead and arsenic (FDA, 2015). Chicken beaks are trimmed for two reasons; one is to prevent them from injuring each other while they are kept in close proximity, and second it is to make them eat more food. The beak is designed to pick one grain at a time. With the tip of the beak cut off, the powdered food that is given to them on a daily basis can be gulped instead of naturally pecked. As part of the life cycle of these industrial animals, waste products from the slaughterhouses, or what is commonly known as “blood meal,” are fed back to the chicken with hopes of supplying calcium and speeding up their growth. In the short life of five to seven weeks, chickens not only walk in their own manure, but due to the high quantity of ammonia in the air, they also suffer from burns to their eyes and skin (Aziz, 2010).

Within such a context, the aim of our research was to ethnographically explore the relationship between technology (the slaughterhouse) and religion, in this case Islam. It is, however, important to note that since Iran has the largest population of Shias in the world, the references and discussions mainly focus on Shia Islam and do not necessarily abide by other sects of the religion. Two distinct but interrelated stages of analysis are presented. One is about what happens on the field and through our encounters with a variety of people. Our interlocutors included over 115 related people, including slaughterhouse employees, managers and veterinarians, meat packaging and distributing managers and employees, butcheries and employees at the meat market, ordinary consumers of everyday meat, nutritionists and physicians, and religious experts and officials overseeing meat production in Tehran. Our results are from over two years of interviews and intense full-time participation in slaughterhouses and affiliated spaces such as packaging industries, farms, veterinary offices, universities engaged with religiously authorizing slaughter or policy-making projects, grocery stores, and butcheries. The other stage of analysis is to attempt to link behaviors and interactions within deeper social issues such as modernity and technological development. With
the use of concepts such as rationality, alienation, and commodity fetishism, through content analysis of the transcribed data, media, and library resources, we further illustrate how technology weaves itself into matters that are within the strict domain of religion.

The slaughterhouse is analyzed from a philosophy of technology perspective. How has this technology affected human beings and how has it changed modern perspectives of nature? How has religion—in this case Islam—handled this ever-growing practice of excessive farming and disproportionate slaughter? What roles do alienation and rationalism play in this change of practice/perception?

Our fieldwork included visiting slaughterhouses that supply the daily meat of the people of Tehran. These slaughterhouses, depending on their size and capacity, are usually designated either to livestock or to poultry. The main slaughterhouses are located on the outskirts of Tehran, usually in the south, east, or the west. The north of the city is bound by a chain of mountains and home to the Tehran elite and therefore unsuitable for a slaughterhouse. Because we had difficulty finding the slaughterhouses around Tehran, even with the directions that were given by the veterinary office, we used the strategy of following meat trucks from far away, leading us to the hidden slaughterhouses. In search of the history of the slaughterhouse in Iran, we came across different news bulletins. The earliest document showing an example of a slaughterhouse that we found was on the first page of “Iran” (the government’s newspaper) on the 25th of May 1921. It discussed the illegal transfer of a slaughterhouse to another district in Tehran: Farah Abad.

**Ethical Note**

This research was conducted as part of a PhD study at the University of Malaya, Malaysia. Formal ethical clearance for the research was not required.

**Fetishizing Meat**

“We would tell my little sister that the chicken that you are eating grows on trees. If we would tell her otherwise she would never accept eating it.” This is what Kashi (E, Kashi, personal communication, March 3, 2012), one of our interlocutors, told us while we were discussing how meat production has become concealed and hidden. A brief review through children’s books available in libraries and book stores (such as the “Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults” and “Book City”) and cartoons illustrate how animals are shown as happy creatures freely grazing on green pasture. The pictures printed on milk packets or on meat products or even on butcheries, such as the newly opened “Meat Land” butchery west of Tehran, illustrate smiling cows. In response to questions of whether they know if cows are happy to be milked, happy to be turned into meat, whether sheep are happy to be turned into lamb, or whether poultry are even happier to be turned into meat and to lay eggs in an industrialized way, some of the consumers, who were purchasing such products, mentioned how they only paid attention to the colorful cover illustrations of meat and dairy products, and how they had almost never related the packaging to the reality of the industry.

In the dairy farms and slaughterhouses that we visited, the cows did not have smiling faces and were standing in their own feces; there were absolutely no signs of grass. Cows were milked three times a day, and after the milking process, their hanging breasts and bulging veins made it difficult for them to walk. In a similar way, chickens are kept in areas full of stench. They are stacked so closely that if they get a chance to walk, they will injure one another. Flies are extremely common. Sheep that are specifically raised for meat experience...
similar conditions. They rarely have the option to graze outside, to inhale fresh air. But how has fetishism successfully planted its seeds in the meat market?

Michael Taussig (1992, p. 138) explains how commodity fetishism wipes away the origin of things:

> the fetish, deeply invests in death, the death of the consciousness of the signifying function. The fetish absorbs into itself that which it represents, erasing all traces of the represented. A clean job.

Not only does fetishism hide the origin of the meat which is basically cattle, sheep, or poultry, it hides the real producers of products. Because of the complex systems of production, as seen in the slaughterhouse, people can no longer even trace where their purchased product (meat) comes from. It can be from any cow, which has come from any part of the country, or it can be even imported from countries such as Brazil, Australia, or New Zealand. If you process the meat, the complexity will increase.

Leiss (1986, p. 324) describes this process well. The producers, the product, and the methods of production are all covered by a veil that does not necessarily represent the original product:

> Commodities are … a unity of what is revealed and what is concealed in the process of production and consumption. Goods reveal or “show” to our senses their capacities to be satisfiers or stimulators of particular wants and communicators of behavioral codes. At the same time, they draw a veil across their own origins; products appear and disappear before consumers’ eyes as if by spontaneous generation, and it is an astute shopper indeed who has much idea about what most things are composed of and what kinds of people made them.

### Ritual Slaughter and the Slaughterhouse

Ritual slaughter is either referred to as Jewish ritual slaughter (shechita) or to Muslim ritual slaughter (halal). Although there are some differences between the two methods, their principle aim, to cut the throat and the main arteries with a razor-sharp knife, remains the same.

As observed in the Islamic Republic of Iran and in accordance with Shia Fiqh, Muslim ritual slaughter necessitates six steps: a) the person performing the slaughter should be a Muslim; b) the tool used for cutting the animal’s throat should be made of sharp iron, unless an iron knife is nowhere to be found; c) the respiratory tract, esophagus, and jugular veins should be severed at the time of slaughter; d) the front part of the animal’s body should face the Qiblah (the direction of the Kaabah in the city, Mecca); e) the person slaughtering the animal recites Allah’s name while slaughtering—the recitation may be in the form of Besmillaah (In the name of Allah), Sobhan-Allah (Praise to Allah), or La-elah- ila-Allah (There is no God but Allah); and finally, f) the animal must be alive at the time of slaughter.

Jewish ritual slaughter is defined as cutting the throat down to the area close to the spine. The animal is not stunned under any condition and the cutting causes quick exsanguination. Similar to how slaughtermen are trained in the teachings of Islam, Jewish ritual slaughter is performed by a trained shochet (approved ritual slaughterman). The shochet uses a chalaf, a knife with a straight blade about 18 inches long with a squared-off, blunt end. Similar to Halal slaughter, both carotid arteries and the windpipe are severed in a single, swift, continuous cut without any downward pressure and without tearing or gouging the tissues, within a prescribed area of the throat below the larynx. Failure to fulfill any of these requirements makes
the flesh treifah (literally, torn) and unfit for observant Jews to consume as food. According to Islam, the same wrong doing renders the meat as Haram and not fit for Muslims to consume. In shechita, consciousness of the animals lasts for about 20 seconds, but without any obvious pain response. Jewish and Muslim methods of slaughter are usually compared to the pain of an accidental cut of one’s hand with a sharp knife. Through experience, the cut does not become painful at the beginning and if not noticed later through bleeding, it will take some time for the person to feel its consequences. There are those who believe that animals become unconscious within three to five seconds after the blood supply is cut off and blood does not reach their brain.

Muslims, Animals and Islam
In the Islamic faith, all animals are believers and they continuously laud Allah (24:41). Six of Quran’s 114 suras are named after animals: the Cow (sura 2), Cattle (sura 6), the Bee (sura 16), the Ant (sura 28), the Spider (sura 29) and the Elephant (sura 105). The names of animals mentioned in the Quran include camels, cattle, horses, mules, donkeys, sheep, monkeys, dogs, pigs, snakes, worms, ants, bees, spiders, mosquitoes, and flies. Nevertheless, the most striking verse in the Quran is:

And there is no creature on [or within] the earth or bird that flies with its wings except [that they are] communities like you. We have not neglected in the Register a thing. Then unto their Lord they will be gathered. (6:38)

Allameh Tabatabaei, in his interpretation of the Quran “Tafsir Almizan” (Tabatabaei, 2012)—that is used as the reading of the Quran throughout this research—states that “animals are communities like you.” This refers to the point that they are all gathered around one objective and that is to return toward Allah. Similar to human beings, animals enjoy social and personal beliefs and opinions. These beliefs lead them toward benefiting from life and avoiding harms. Allah in the Quran asks human beings to carefully analyze the activities of animals and to learn from them. Similar to human beings, animal societies have good, bad, cruelty, and justice (ibid). Why are the same species of animals different from one another? In terms of anger, softness, love, kindness, tameness, and brutality, goats or cows or any other animal species act differently among themselves. These differences prove that animals also have judgments; they can identify good from bad and can therefore discern justice from cruelty (ibid). Based on the Quran and Hadith, not only will animals be held responsible for their actions and assembled on the day of Judgment; the skies and the earth, the sun, moon, and stars, the jinn and stones and idols and other objects that have been worshiped instead of God will also be assembled on the day of Judgment.

Allameh Tabatabaei believes that when it is mentioned that animals will be assembled and questioned for their actions, it does not mean that they, like human beings will have to go through the same stages in order to reach perfection. The same way that humans are judged based on their capacity and capability, animals will also be judged based on their competence. Animal actions show that they possess the power of will and that they make decisions; however, this “will” might be weaker than that of humans (ibid).

One can even point out that the stories that are told about animals in the Quran show that intellectually they are not less than a moderately intelligent human being. For example, the story of the ant and Solomon, where the ant states that humans are careless, and in some interpretations, they are believed to be negligent, and will not understand that the ants are moving under their feet and they will crush them.
Until, when they came upon the valley of the ants, an ant said, “O ants, enter your dwellings that you not be crushed by Solomon and his soldiers while they perceive not.” (27:18)

Also, the story of the Hoopoe, where the animal makes religio-philosophical interpretations on how a group of people have been deceived by Satan and how they have forgotten the true creator:

But the hoopoe stayed not long and said, “I have encompassed [in knowledge] that which you have not encompassed, and I have come to you from Sheba with certain news.” (27:22)

Indeed, I found [there] a woman ruling them, and she has been given of all things, and she has a great throne. (27:23) I found her and her people prostrating to the sun instead of Allah, and Satan has made their deeds pleasing to them and averted them from [His] way, so they are not guided. (27:24)

In the Quran, it is mentioned that humans own animals. However, this right to ownership of animals has been bestowed upon human beings for a purpose:

Do they not see that We have created for them from what Our hands have made, grazing livestock, and [then] they are their owners? (36:71)

In return, animals have several rights in respect to humans:

a) Humans and animals possess equal rights for using nature:
And it is He who sends the winds as good tidings before His mercy, and We send down from the sky pure water. (25:48) That We may bring to life thereby a dead land and give it as drink to those We created of numerous livestock and men. (25:49)

b) Humans and animals have similar rights in using good and fresh food:
Have they not seen that We drive the water [in clouds] to barren land and bring forth thereby crops from which their livestock eat and [they] themselves? Then do they not see? (32:27)

c) Like human beings, animals understand, are conscious, and live in communities that are comparable to human communities, and therefore have the right to live (6:38).

Imam Ali (as) in the 25th letter of the Nahjul Balagha outlines the characteristics of a person who is going to be handling animals (Ar-Radi, 2009):

Do not entrust the animals (for custody) except to one whom you trust to take care of Muslims’ property till he hands it over to their chief who will distribute it. Do not entrust it to anyone except he who is a well-wisher, God-fearing, trustworthy and watchful, and who is not harsh on Muslims’ property, nor makes them run too much, nor tires them, nor labors them. Then send to us all that you have collected and we shall deal with it as Allah has ordered. When your trustee takes over (the animal) tell him that he should not separate the she-camel from its young and should not milk all its milk because that would affect its young, and also that he should not exert it in riding. In this matter, he should behave justly between it and all its companions. He should allow rest to camels (who are tired), and drive with ease those whose hoofs have been rubbed off. When you pass a water spring keep the camels there for drinking and do not take them away from vegetated land to barren paths. He should allow them rest now and then, and give them time near water and grass. (Imam Ali (as), 2010, p. 308)
In another Hadith, Imam Ali (as) states that Allah will curse whoever curses an animal. Swearing, cursing, and slapping the face of an animal is prohibited. The Messenger of Allah (saw) is reported to have said that whoever kills a sparrow without any reason, the sparrow will complain in the afterlife that my God! Your servant (the human being) killed me without reaching any benefits (Majlesi, 2007). Imam Kazem (the seventh Imam of Shias) states that if ants do not harm you, do not kill them (Amoli, 2010). Imam Sadegh (the sixth Imam of Shias) asserts that a woman who had tied up a cat and kept it that way until it died from thirst, deserves punishment from Allah because of her misconduct (Sadoogh, 2011). Sheikh Toosi, a prominent Muslim scholar of the tenth century mentions that the reason for the obligation to pay alimony to animals is “because animals have respect and dignity” (Toosi, 1999). Also, Allameh Helli, another prominent scholar of the thirteenth century, specifies that “this is because animals naturally and inherently have dignity and respect” (Helli, 1999). Shahid Thani, a leading Shia scholar of the sixteenth century, indicates that it is essential for an owner of an animal to provide a proper and suitable location for the animal such as a barn and stable, even if he has not used the animal or that the animal is dying (Thani, 2010). It has been stressed that one should not sit on an animal’s back for a long period of time, unless it is for Allah (Majlesi, 2007), and that one should not turn the animal's back into a chair or a minbar (pulpit) (Sadoogh, 2004). Imam Sadegh, in response to a question about a person who excessively strains an animal to increase its speed and quickly reach his destination, states that the Salat (obligatory prayers) of such a person is not accepted (ibid). Also, his Hajj is not accepted (Majlesi, 2007). In another Hadith, it is mentioned that Muslims are obliged (wajeb) to clean the nose of livestock if it is blocked and to allow the animal to breath freely.

Shahid Avval, a prominent scholar of the fourteenth century, declares that paralyzing an animal that is going to be slaughtered is Makrooh (detestable). Imam Sajjad (the fourth Imam of Shias), on his way to Hajj, was riding a camel that moved slowly. He raised his stick and showed it to the animal and said Oh! If I was not afraid of punishment I would hit you. Then he brought down his stick and took it away from the animal’s eyes. In another Hadith, the Messenger of Allah (saw) is reported to have expressed that one should not slap the face of beasts and whatever has a spirit because they praise Allah. And that the Messenger of Allah (saw) ordered that for slaughter, sharpen the knife properly and be far from the eyes of other animals (Ata, 1971). In al-Kafi (6:230) it is written that the Messenger of Allah (saw) had seen a man sharpening his knife in front of an animal; he asked “do you wish to slaughter this animal twice, once by sharpening your blade in front of it and another time by cutting its throat?” Muslims have, in the past among other cultures, been renowned for their respectful treatment of animals. French Essayist Michel de Montaigne noted that “The Turks have alms and hospitals for animals” and these institutions were funded through religious endowments (waqfs) and would have appeared to most Europeans of the time as a frivolous waste of public resources (Foltz, 2006, p. 4).

The only aspect of dhabah (slaughter) mentioned in the Quran is the saying of Allah’s name at the time of sacrifice; the remainder comes from hadith and the Islamic legal tradition. Thus, the Quran does not specifically require Muslims to sacrifice animals for food or for any other reason; it only permits them to do so. And even then, the Quran reminds Muslims that if they do sacrifice animals, “neither their flesh nor their blood reaches Allah; it is only your righteousness that reaches Him” (22:37) (ibid).

A study on animals and Islam would undoubtedly be incomplete if “The Case of the Animals versus Man before the King of the Jinn” from the Epistles of the Brethren of Purity (2009) by
Ikhwan al-Safa, written in the tenth century, is not mentioned. This piece of writing artistically explains the existing dichotomy prevailing human–animal relationships. In this remarkable representation, animals complain upon receiving severe ill treatment from human beings. In this court, humans claim that the animals (whom they perceive as their slaves) have escaped and some are disobeying their orders:

these cattle, beasts of prey, and wild creatures—all animals in fact—are our slaves. We are their masters. Some have rebelled and escaped. Others obey grudgingly and scorn our service. (Safa, 2009, p. 6)

The representative from the animals in response counts the torturous accounts of human treatment:

Humans encroached on our ancestral lands. They captured sheep, cows, horses, mules, and asses from among us and enslaved them, subjecting them to the exhausting toil and drudgery of hauling, ploughing, drawing water, turning mills, and being ridden. They forced us to these tasks with beatings, bludgeonings, and every kind of duress, torture, and chastisement throughout our lives. Some of us fled to deserts, wastes, or mountain-tops, but the Adamites pursued us, hunting us with every kind of wile and device. Whoever fell into their hands was yoked, haltered, caged, and fettered. They slaughtered and flayed him, ripped open his belly, cut off his limbs and broke his bones, tore out his sinews, plucked his feathers or sheared his hair or fleece, and set him on the fire to cook, or to roast on a spit, or put him to even harsher tortures, torments ultimately beyond description. Even so, the sons of Adam are not through with us. Now they claim this is their inviolable right, that they are our masters and we their slaves. They treat any of us who escapes as a fugitive, rebel, and shirker—all with no proof or reason beyond main force. (Safa, 2009, p. 10)

When humans explain that, compared with animals, they are inherently higher in rank, they use verses of the Quran as their justification:

Praised be God who formed man from water and formed his mate from him. He broadcast their seed, men and women, bore them over land and sea, favored them with dominion, and sustained them with all manner of delights, saying, Cattle did He create for you, whence you have warmth and many uses. You eat of them and find them fair when you bring them home to rest or drive them out to pasture. They carry your heavy burdens for you to lands you might reach only with great trouble to your souls. He also said, You are borne upon them and on ships and, Of the cattle some are for burden and some for meat. And again, horses, mules, and asses for riding and for splendor, and much that you know not and Praised be God who said: that ye may be seated on their backs and consider your Lord's favor as you ride. (Safa, 2009, p. 7)

And the mule (the representative of animals) in response depicts a view that includes humans, animals, and the whole of nature with an overarching purpose:

These verses point only to the kindness and blessings God bestowed on mankind. God said He subjected them to you just as He subjected the sun and moon the wind and clouds. Are we to think, Majesty, that these heavenly bodies too are their slaves and chattels, and men their masters? Hardly! God made all His creatures in heaven and earth. He set some in service to others, for their
good or to preclude some evil. He subjected animals to man only to help hu-
mans and keep them from harm, not, as they deludedly suppose and slander-
ously claim, to make them our masters and us their slaves. (Safa, 2009, p. 9)

Although it was written centuries ago, the writings of Ikhwan al-Safa point to current chal-
lenges. What would this change of worldview mean in modern relationships with nature? How
is it different from current practices?

Modern Muslim–Animal Relationships
To many non-Muslims, Eid Alqurban (Al-Adha)—a wide-scale sacrificing ritual of thousands of
domestic animals every year—is representative of how Muslims and Islam view animals. It is
also known that Muslims consider dogs and pigs as Najes (impure), and when it comes to Iran,
a police initiative to make illegal the keeping of dogs as pets is usually highlighted. Similar to
the laws and morals of any society, Islamic norms are often flouted, distorted, or simply ignored
(Foltz, 2006). It is even more confusing when local traditions and local behaviors are seen as
Islamic while not having any relationship with the teachings of the Quran or the Hadith. This is,
for example, the case of sacrificing animals in Iran. It is very common to sacrifice an animal—
usually a sheep—for a significant event; for example, a pilgrim who has just arrived from Hajj
or from Karbala (the city of the shrine of the grandson of the Messenger of Allah (saw), Imam
Hossein), to celebrate the achievement of a sports person at a tournament, for a marriage, or
even for the opening ceremony of a highway. This is not related, however, to any of the teach-
ings of Islam (Khorasannews, 2009). Animal abuse cases in Indonesian and Egyptian slaugh-
terhouses, revealed in leaked video-recordings, led to an excuse for Australia to stop exporting
live animals to these countries, at least temporarily (BBC, 2011). While the temporary sus-
pension was mostly aimed at cooling down the tension that was created by animal-rights
groups, the changing diet of Indonesians has made them consume far more beef than ever
before through Australia's huge export of livestock (ibid).

In addition to how animals are treated, the definition of animals has also changed in mod-
ean dictionaries (Tlili, 2012). The two words hayavan and dhabba used to include humans as
well as angels and jinns. Now dictionaries do not include humans in the animal world. This is
while medieval literature does consider human beings to be in the same group as animals.
Muslims are allowed to kill animals because Allah has allowed humans to do so and not be-
cause humans are ranked higher than animals and therefore permitted to kill in the hierarchy
of creation (Tabatabaei, 2012).

Virtually all of the world’s 1.2 billion Muslims eat meat, in most cases as often as they can
possibly afford to. Distributing meat is also one of the most commonly practiced forms of char-
ity, and a hungry guest is likely to feel cheated and insulted if meat is not offered. Muslims, like
most people, take the practice of meat-eating to be a given, a fact of nature that need not be
questioned (Foltz, 2006). The Iranian diet has shifted from aash (pottage), that is usually meat-
less, and aab goosht (broth), that usually contains a small piece of meat, a small piece of an-
imal fat (usually lamb), and a piece of bone added with chickpeas and beans and water, to
foods that are loaded with meat. In the past, Iranians cooked traditional stews and added a
small amount of meat as seasoning. These significant changes in the ordinary Iranian diet have
led to various responses. Those who can afford paying for lamb meat purchase and consume
it regularly; those who cannot afford the high prices of lamb meat have moved toward beef and
chicken consumption. This is while through current Iranian TV programs, recipes that include
non-Iranian foods, such as spaghetti and pizza, have become increasingly popular among children with working mothers: “It is easy to make and the child loves it!” (A, Hooshangi, personal communication, April 11, 2013).

Slaughterhouse Industry and the Iranian Capital
Philosophers, sociologists, historians, and ethicists have analyzed the modern meat industry from a range of different perspectives. Philosophers have explored meat-eating practices and whether humans are essentially meat eaters or vegetarians. Sociologists have studied how the meat industry abuses workers. For example, in the United States, most people working in the meat industry are Hispanic and they have very limited rights and receive very low wages. When we visited one of the poultry slaughterhouses south of Tehran, that was presumably one of the most technologically advanced in the country, every single worker was from Afghanistan.

The slaughterhouse, whether it is seen as an institution, as an industry, or as a unique technological system, is arguably right at the heart of modernism. It has been created mainly for better centralized control over slaughter practices. It has established an environment where health officers conveniently monitor the hygiene quality of the meat, and when it was being propagated as the sole location for slaughter, around 90 years ago in Iran, it was part and parcel of a more exact taxation system where the government benefited from the taxes through each and every slaughter. On other rather more popular accounts, the slaughterhouse has been associated with population growth and the need for better and faster systems that would make meat available in the least amount of time and at the least cost.

When looking at the slaughterhouse as a technology that has changed how people perceive nature, one can understand that the human–animal relationship has changed radically through the introduction of the modern meat industry. Animals that are consumed for food in Iran, mainly cattle, sheep, and poultry, are no longer perceived as animals. They are perceived as meat—as products that are neatly packaged and arranged in supermarket refrigerators and cannot be tracked to their origins—a spectacular example of commodity fetishism. In the last decade, and in most recent efforts, shops selling meat are no longer called butcheries or meat shops, they are called “Protein Shops.” This is an example of how a subtle form of alienation could be further distancing humans from animals. By identifying animals as protein, animals are transformed into biological molecules or macromolecules. Traditionally, animals were a part of the life of ordinary people such as farmers, providing milk, fertilizers, and wool. Animals were slaughtered mostly when they were too old to work or as Jalal Al Ahmad (1989) the Iranian author writes, they were slaughtered when they fell down and broke a leg and could no longer walk. The modern animal, however, is created to be killed; poultry are kept in dim-lit conditions to eat as much food as they can, walk the least, grow faster, and therefore die quicker for faster profit.

Slaughterhouses, similar to other rational industrial systems, work on the basis of efficiency, productivity, reduced cost, and most importantly, speed. For example, the slaughterhouse follows exactly the same production process adopted by Henry Ford’s 1908 Model-T motor vehicle (Lee, 2008, p. 3). Meat has become a product that is consumed for utility. Humans not only enjoy having different types of meat on each and every dish, they believe that they are developing a strong and healthy body at the same time.

Slaughterhouses in Iran have gradually moved out of the city. In the past, it was common for people to witness slaughter either at homes or on the streets and butcheries. Today, the modern human can no longer tolerate the brutal scenes anticipated with open slaughter.
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(A, Talai, personal communication, November 5, 2012). Slaughterhouses have not only moved outside the city, they do not have any signage so that they cannot be identified by people passing by. The strong stench of their waste products, however, is easily traceable.

Slaughterhouses in Tehran are located south of the city and where socio-economically lower-class people live. They have now moved even more toward the south and close to cities such as Varamin and Shahriar. When entering Tehran from the south and from cities such as Esfahan and Qom, the industrialized south, slaughterhouses and recycling centers can be easily seen. These centers also neighbor Tehran’s huge cemetery. The south is generally much more polluted than the north, which is closer to the Alborz mountains and home to the most lavish types of living and huge shopping centers. This separation and alienation has easily created an environment where killing animals is separated from consumption. Residents of Tehran rarely, if ever, witness the death of an animal whose flesh they will consume. In modern gatherings and family dinners it is inconceivable how at least five sheep are slaughtered to provide the meal. A very simple calculation shows that for the preparation of a popular Iranian meal containing lamb leg muscles and herb rice, more than one sheep has to be slaughtered if the number of muscles increases to five.

Inspection is an important stage of the process of meat production. According to Iranian standards and under the Ministry of Agricultural Jihad that manages the veterinary office, it is not only important for meat to be healthy and disease free, it should also be religiously acceptable (Halal) and should follow strict religious regulations. Historically, meat inspection was the responsibility of priests and religious officials in Egypt and Rome, but in the West, it later became the duty of market overseers and the police (Lee, 2008). In Iran, health inspection officers are from the veterinary department, and religious inspection takes place through trained religious experts who are mostly Rohanis (students who undergo religious education). Mr Liaghati, the representative of the Supreme Leader in the veterinary department states that currently 500 Islamic Zebh (slaughter) supervisors who are mostly Rohanis are working at 610 slaughterhouses across the country. This means that 110 of the slaughterhouses in the country are left without supervision. Our slaughterhouse observations showed that Halal supervision was limited and those responsible were not always present at the site of slaughter, which was a small distance away from their office.

Meat consumption and production in Iran, similar to other parts of the world, are on the rise. When eating Iranian food in restaurants, excluding fast food, the choice is mostly between a variety of meat kebabs that are 100% meat (beef, lamb or chicken) and rice. The deputy head of cattle production of the Agricultural Jihad Ministry stated that the per capita consumption of red meat in Iran is 14.6 kg per person per year, and this is while the desirable consumption of red meat is 17 kg per person per year. Statistics show that Iranians do not have a very long way to reach the desired standard. Amir Kashani, Assistant Deputy of meat production from the Ministry of Agricultural Jihad, stated that “we have in the past year produced 960 thousand tons of red meat, and this amount will increase to more than one million tons in the following year.” He proudly made a point that, based on the announcement made by the FAO, Iran is the 18th largest producer of red meat in the world, and the largest in the Middle East (Liaghati, 2014). Unfortunately, in the “who is more developed” competition among modern states, instead of questioning how much meat do Iranians really need, the issue gets lost in fulfilling the graphs of world standard statistics. Currently, Iranians consume one million tons of red meat per year and from this amount 200,000 tons are imported. Iranian nomads contribute 400,000 tons of meat production in the country (ibid).
In order to produce such large amounts of meat efficiently and with the least amount of cost, Iran asked for technological solutions, and the answer was the slaughterhouse. The country imported slaughterhouse technology from the West. Our interlocutors pointed out that while we are currently developing our own slaughterhouse technology, the system follows the same model that was initially imported from countries such as Holland. Minimal adjustments have been made in order to make it religiously suitable and therefore Halal (A, Daami, personal communication, October 12, 2013).

An important point that is emphasized in Islamic teachings is that the animal should be dead prior to skinning. The speed of the slaughterhouse does not allow one to fully know whether the animal is completely dead or not. Most obvious is the case of sheep slaughter. They are lined one after another in front of a professional butcher who slits their throat within seconds, and they are then hanged from the rails. The next step is skinning the animals. It is questionable whether the workers of the slaughterhouse examine the animal for being dead or not. There are counter arguments to this: workers of the meat industry state that it is easier and faster to skin an animal when it is dead than when it is still alive; and if the cutting is done while the animal is still alive, it might cause bruising and therefore loss of meat.

Recent efforts aimed at improving the conditions of animals in modern slaughterhouses seek to create a more humane environment for the animals. The workers are trained properly and each undertake a specific duty which would make the training easier and more effective. Newly engineered slaughterhouses also have pathways for animals to calmly walk to their slaughter area and not feel any distress. Unfortunately, the complexity of the modern meat industry has overwhelmed good faith for creating a humane slaughterhouse, and the lack of proper supervision, lack of interest in animal wellbeing, along with old and outdated slaughter regulations, has created chaos in the industry.

This study shows how rationality, alienation, and commodity fetishism, along with many other aspects, work hand in hand in changing a society's worldview. The Islamic Republic of Iran has a strong history of Islam. However, the way in which the people view the world—as explicated in this case study—shows that modern values have gradually replaced strongly held Islamic values. It appears that within the influence of commodity fetishism as a neutralizing agent, modern values as forms of inspiration, the human–animal, or more generally the human–nature, relationship has become increasingly fragmented.

Conflicts of Interest
The authors state there are no conflicts of interest.

Notes
1. Islamic Republic of Iran, Board of Education, Social Studies Textbook, 2013.
2. *Nahjul Balagha* (The Peak of Eloquence) is the most famous collection of sermons, letters, interpretations, and narrations attributed to Imam Ali (as), the first Imam of Shias. Known for its eloquent content, it is considered a masterpiece of literature among Shias.

References
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