Roskilde University

Halal, Haram or What?

Creating Muslim Space in London

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Muslim Societies in the Age of Mass Consumption

Muslim Societies in the Age of Mass Consumption: Politics, Culture and Identity between the Local and the Global

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Johanna Pink

**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

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INTRODUCTION

JOHANNA PINK

Muslim Societies and Mass Consumption

> I returned to Cairo in 1998 after a long absence [...]. The flow of cash had increased among certain classes, and along with it conspicuous consumption. [...] Today Cairenes can order local fast food to be home delivered [...]. With increasing consumer appetites, shopping malls [...] had proliferated in various areas of Cairo. I was fascinated by how youngsters, both poor and rich, had conquered these spaces of consumption and how these are turning into specifically gendered spaces at specific times of the day. New forms of leisure socialization are in the making among middle class Cairenes. [...] If we take into account phenomena such as the spread of McDonald's, ATMs, mobile phones, condominiums, email usage, and gated communities, then Egypt has indeed entered the age of globalization. But to jump from that premise to the conclusion that these types of phenomena are leading to a homogenization in lifestyle is too simplistic.[1]

In the course of the 20th century, mass consumption—characterized by the availability and affordability of a broad spectrum of differentiated and ever-changing commodities far exceeding the consumers' basic needs both in substance and in variety—has spread across the world. The global triumph of consumerism is affecting not only the availability and variety of consumer goods, but also the presentation, promotion and advertising of goods and the spaces in which consumption takes place. From Coca-Cola to shopping malls, consumerism is everywhere—in the Muslim world and beyond.

However, it would be too easy to assume that we are confronted with a one-directional force of homogenization, a process in which a hegemonial

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[1] Mona Abaza, *Changing Consumer Cultures of Modern Egypt. Cairo's Urban Reshaping* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 2–3.

Western culture of consumerism is taking over and sweeping away local structures and traditions of consumption. Although global brands and practices of consumption do have a homogenizing effect, local consumers are not merely passive victims of global consumerism. Local agents can be observed as they actively appropriate global developments, adapt commodities and spaces of consumption to their own needs and integrate them into their culture; but simultaneously, this culture is reshaped, reinvented and often folklorized in order to comply with the mechanisms of conspicuous consumption.

Most aptly, the spread of consumerism can thus be described in the framework of "glocalization"—the complex interaction between globalizing and localizing processes.

Consuming the same global products might mean very different things to people in different local circumstances. A drink of Coca-Cola might be no more than a quick and cheap refreshment to some, but might serve as a status symbol to others who offer one, and only one, glass of it as an aperitif before dinner,[2] while still others denounce it as a symbol of imperialism and call for a boycott of the soda. Similarly, the motives for visiting or not visiting a shopping mall, and the ways to spend one's time there, might differ vastly between consumers in different local contexts.

Consumption can fulfill a broad spectrum of purposes, among them the fulfillment of basic needs or of refined desires, the acquisition of status and identity formation; it can serve to express one's individuality or an association with a group or social class, and it can even function as a political statement. All these motivations have to be taken into account by producers in the way they design, sell and advertise their consumer products if they want to be successful in the global market.

This process works in two ways: On one hand, many global companies such as Coca-Cola, McDonald's or Unilever—which are, at first glance, at the forefront of the homogenizing forces of globalization—flexibly and creatively adapt their brands, products and advertising to specific target markets, taking into account the local consumers' lifestyle and expectations. On the other hand, local producers invent products that fit seamlessly into a globalized consumer culture while maintaining an impression of cultural and/or religious authenticity—modern Islamic fashion and anti-American soft drinks, headscarf-wearing Barbies and halal fast food chains, glossy magazines for the Muslim woman and shopping malls decorated with Ramses statues or displays of whirling Dervishes are all evidence of this trend,

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[2] As experienced by the author during her stay in Jordan 1995/96 among Jordanian-Palestinian middle-class families.

and they are arguably most successful where global brands fail to meet the expectations of local consumers.

In the past decade or two, Muslim societies[3] have undergone tremendous transformations. Internet cafés and shopping malls, the increased presence of global consumer goods, new media and satellite TV have made an enormous impact on urban spaces, consumption practices and advertising. The fundamental changes caused by globalization affect not only the flow of money, but also transform social stratification, lifestyles, processes of identity formation, cultural expression, and gender roles. Consumption moreover increasingly serves as a venue of political expression.

Consumption, Identity, and Islam

Mass consumption results in differentiation. Today's consumers can choose between countless brands and varieties of products, and their decisions define their lifestyle—and not only their lifestyle but also their identity: "I am what I buy." Companies try to capitalize on this by offering products with an added cultural, ethical or religious value. This added value sometimes becomes a product's most important feature, the most compelling reason to buy this specific product over others that are supposedly less ethical, culturally authentic or religiously virtuous.

In recent years, news reports of Islamic dolls, Islamic soft drinks and Islamic garments like the *burqini* have been abundant, encouraging the impression that Muslims increasingly seek to define and express their distinct identity through the consumption of "Islamic" commodities.

As fascinating as these products are at first glance, only careful study can reveal their significance and meaning: Are they more successful, on the long run, than their 'un-Islamic' counterparts? Who consumes them and for what reasons? Are they tokens of religiousness or of cultural authenticity—or mere status symbols?

All of these hybrid products elude easy categorization. The closer one looks at them, the more questions arise.

– Is *Mecca Cola* really a soft drink geared towards a religious public, or is it rather a product that intends to make a political statement, as the success of competing products such as *Cola Turka* might indicate?

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[3] The term "Muslim societies" here refers to countries in which the majority of the population is Muslim, without implying that all of these societies or nation states define themselves primarily in a religious sense. In the broader sense in which it is used in the title of this book, it also includes diasporic Muslim communities in Western countries.

- Is *Fulla* popular because it is an Islamic doll, or is it popular because it is closer to the lifestyle and looks that Arab girls are familiar with?

- Is the *burqini*, while arguably making a statement against "Western" decadence, in reality a distinctly Western item, geared toward a diasporic target group and completely unknown to women in Muslim majority societies—most of all in Afghanistan, the country where the much less fancy *burqa* is worn by most women? What is the exact relationship between traditional forms of clothing and new "Islamic" fashion?

How popular are these products among Muslims, anyway? Do they sell to the public as well as they do sell the media? And if they do, who buys them? Close analysis reveals that most "Islamic" products, in reality, do not appeal to Muslims everywhere, but are actually geared to a specific segment of the Muslim population in a specific environment. There is *Fulla* in the Middle East and *Razanne* in the U.S.; modern Islamic fashions compete with traditional forms of dress that are bought and sold in different outlets.

Especially when analyzing the relationship between Islamic religion and consumption, one should be careful not to define Muslims predominantly or exclusively by their "Muslim-ness;" like anywhere else, consumer behavior in Muslim societies is influenced by a large number of factors, including gender, social and economic status, ethnicit, and nationality. Muslims have always made fashion decisions that go beyond the choice for or against wearing a veil; and buying a wall picture with the Dome of the Rock is more likely to be a political than a religious statement.

The Islamization of consumer goods, as evidenced in the above-mentioned examples, does exist, but it is a phenomenon of a certain class and tied to specific local circumstances. It is particularly successful among Muslims who sympathize with what Patrick Haenni labels "Salafi Islam."[4] Diasporic communities play an important role in it; but as the case of *Fulla* shows, it is not merely a diasporic phenomenon, and as the case of the Polish Tatars shows,[5] many subgroups within "the" Muslim diaspora show no interest in it. Thus, the phenomenon is too complex to allow for a summary appraisal; rather, it merits in-depth case studies in order to elucidate the conditions under which brands and commodities are Islamized—i.e., provided with an added value that turns a consumption decision into a pious act.

However, products and brands that are framed in Islamic references can only be properly understood if the adverse tendency is also taken into ac-

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[4] See p. 328 of this volume.

[5] See chapter 8 of this volume.

count: While banal products, like dolls or soft drinks, are loaded with re-
ligious value, Islamic products are arguably de-sacralized by turning them
into commodities: the marketing of Alevi music, which is stripped of its
spiritual meaning by gearing it to a non-Alevi mass market, is a good exam-
ple.[6]

This Volume

The issues raised above can best be approached from a multidisciplinary
perspective. Economy, sociology, political science, anthropology, geogra-
phy, communication sciences, and religious studies all can contribute to a
better understanding of the recent changes in the global consumption land-
scape. So far, however, such studies have been few and far between with
respect to Muslim majority and minority societies.

   While the impact of global commodities in East and South-East Asia
has attracted some scholarly attention,[7] the situation in the Middle East has
scarcely been the subject of extensive research; the single country that has
probably been studied the most is Turkey.[8]

   The relation between (Islamic) religion and consumption has mostly been
discussed with a focus on veiling and modern headscarf fashions.[9] The ma-
jority of contributions have concentrated on the ideological and political
context of the headscarf debate, whereas, for example, economic aspects
have been understudied. "Traditional" forms of veiling have been just as
marginalized as other aspects of dress, be they religiously framed or other-
wise.

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[6] See chapter 9 of this volume.

[7] See, e.g., James L. Watson, ed., *Golden Arches East: McDonald's in East Asia* (Stanford
University Press, 1997); Robert Robison and David S. G. Goodman, *The New Rich in Asia:
Mobile Phones, McDonald's and Middle-Class Revolution* (London: Routledge, 1996); Beng-
Huat Chua, *Life is Not Complete without shopping. Consumption Culture in Singapore* (Sin-
gapore: Singapore University Press, 2003); Johan Fischer, *Proper Islamic Consumption: Shop-
ping among the Malays in Modern Malaysia* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2008).

[8] Among the few larger contributions are Abaza, *Changing Consumer Cultures of Modern
Egypt. Cairo's Urban Reshaping*; Roni Zirinski, *Ad hoc Arabism: Advertising, Culture and
Technology in Saudi Arabia* (New York: P. Lang, 2005); Çağlar Keyder, ed., *Istanbul between
the Global and the Local* (Lanham: Rowman / Littlefield, 1999).

[9] See, e.g., Barış Kılıçbay and Mutlu Binark, "Consumer Culture, Islam and the Politics of
Lifestyle: Fashion for Veiling in Contemporary Turkey," *European Journal of Communica-
tion* 17 (2002): 495–511; Jenny White, "Islamic Chic," in *Istanbul between the Global and
the Local*, ed. Çağlar Keyder (Lanham: Rowman / Littlefield, 1999), 77–91; Anna Secor, "The
Veil and Urban Space in Istanbul: Women's Dress, Mobility and Islamic Knowledge," *Gender,
Place and Culture* 9 (2002): 5–22; Banu Gökarıksel and Katharyne Mitchell, "Veiling, Sec-
ularism and the Neoliberal Subject: National Narratives and Supranational Desires in Turkey
and France," *Global Networks* 5 (2005): 147–165.

Although Islamic brands and products have evoked some scholarly inter-est,[10] few in-depth studies of consumer behavior, advertising strategies or the cultural places of these new products are available as yet.

This volume seeks to further the study of the impact of mass consumption on Muslim societies through a broad spectrum of contributions from a variety of academic disciplines. It presents case studies from different regions of the Muslim world as well as diasporic communities, seeking to deepen the understanding of the recent changes in consumer landscapes and of the ways in which consumers and producers adapt to them. This includes, but is not limited to, a process that might be called the "Islamization of consumption," as evidenced by Islamic dolls, shampoos, and video games. However, we do not presume to identify such a phenomenon as *the* Muslim consumer. Religion and culture are important influences on consumption habits; but their significance can only be understood when specific local circumstances are taken into account. Similar products or structures might have very different meanings in Poland or Turkey, in Saudi-Arabia or Malaysia, in London or New York. It is these concrete adaptations and appropriations of aspects of global consumerism that the authors of this volume, who come from a variety of disciplines, seek to describe in their case studies.

Spaces of Consumption in a Globalized World

The first part explores transformations of the spaces in which consumption takes place—a fundamental theme that repeatedly is taken up again in later parts of the volume.

One of the most important aspects of globalization is an increased mobility, which leads to the existence of diasporic Muslim communities nearly everywhere on the globe. In this context, **Johan Fischer** reviews the ways in which Malay immigrants create spaces for halal consumption in London, thereby elucidating the complex social, economic, cultural, and political interrelation between Malay individuals, their host country, and their country of origin.

Moving to a predominantly Muslim society, **Banu Gökarıksel** and **Anna Secor** situate the veiling-fashion industry in a geopolitical, religious, and

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[10] See, e.g., Patrick Haenni, *L'islam de marché. L'autre révolution conservatrice* (Paris: Seuil, 2005); Ragnar K. Willer, "Dispelling the Myth of a Global Consumer: Indonesian Consumer Behavior Researched by Means of an Analytical Diagram for Intercultural Marketing. With a Case Study of Sunsilk Shampoo for the Veiled Woman" (Dissertation, Humboldt Universität, 2006), http://edoc.hu-berlin.de/dissertationen/willer-ragnar-karl-2006-07-19/HTML; Amina Yaqin, "Islamic Barbie: The Politics of Gender and Performativity," *Fashion Theory* 11, no. 2/3 (2007): 173–188.

economic context and analyze its role in subject formation, thereby transcending the usual depiction of the veil as a *topos* of ideological discourse.

Finally, **Aksu Akçaoğlu** and **Tanfer Emin Tunç** approach, from different perspectives, the single institution that is perhaps most powerfully changing the urban consumption landscape in Middle Eastern societies—i.e., the shopping mall. Both concentrate on the case of Turkey. While Akçaoğlu offers a sociological analysis of the function of shopping malls for the residents of modern Turkish cities, based on a case study of the visitors to one particular mall in Ankara, Tunç's contribution focuses on the cultural impact of the large-scale adaptation of malls from America.

Facetted Consumer Identities: Politics and Strategies of Consumption

The second part focuses on the social and political implications of consumption within various Muslim societies and minority communities, exploring the opportunities that globalization processes have created for consumers and the strategies they use to maintain a balance between continuity and change.

Relli Shechter analyzes the way in which consumerism was embedded into the already existing socio-political system of Saudi Arabia, where consumption—when linked with the notion of religious virtue—may function as a venue of political expression at times, but nevertheless contributes to the stability of the monarchical system.

In Turkey—a country that defines itself as secular but where the political role of Islam is continuously under debate—more direct ways to express political or religious preferences through consumption are available. **Dilek Kaya Mutlu** discusses the instructive case of Cola Turka, a soft drink that, unlike the more widely noticed (and arguably less successful) Mecca Cola, outwardly drew on nationalist rather than religious symbolism, thereby raising the question of the motives behind individual consumers' decisions to buy it. To answer this question, Mutlu examines the ways in which Cola Turka was marketed and the controversial debates it triggered.

Ulrike Stohrer takes us to Yemen, a country where mass consumption is only starting to gain ground, but which has a long history of participation in global trade. Yemenite fashion thus proves to be particularly interesting with respect to the local appropriation of global commodities and fashion trends. Stohrer shows that, far beyond the issue of veiling, gender roles are an important factor for consumer decisions and the transformations of urban space. While cultural norms are crucial for her findings, religious rules are much less so, despite the common perception of Yemen as a traditional Muslim society.

Similarly, **Katarzyna Górak-Sosnowska** and **Michał Łyszczarz**, in their case study of the Tatar minority in Poland, raise fundamental questions regarding the Muslim-ness of Muslim consumers and the cultural context in which certain groups of Muslim consumers identify themselves, at least partly, through their religion, while others do not. The "clash of Islams" they describe is a strong point in favor of the hypothesis that "Islamic" products are not actually targeted at Muslims but rather at specific groups of Muslims with very particular priorities.

Ayhan Erol draws our attention to an important segment of the Muslim Turkish population that does not follow the priorities of orthodox Sunni Muslims—namely the Alevis, who, throughout the emergence of mass consumption, have developed their own ways to express and market their cultural identity, especially in the field of music. His contribution raises the question of how far religious rituals or symbols are de-sacralized through their conversion into a commodity, a question that is further examined in the third part.

Islamized Products, Islamic Brands and Muslim Target Groups

The last part deals with the emergence of products, brands and advertising campaigns that are specifically geared toward Muslim target groups and are at the same time very much a part of contemporary global consumerism. There is hardly a better symbol for this than *Fulla*, the "Islamic doll," and her sisters, which **Petra Kuppinger** discusses in her contribution. These dolls, which cater to different Muslim markets and segments, position themselves as pious and culturally authentic "counter-Barbies," but are nevertheless firmly rooted in Barbie's existence.

Fulla accessories are an important part of the Syrian landscape of Islamic consumption that **Alina Kokoschka** describes in her paper, which analyzes advertisements that appeal to religious sentiments yet simultaneously convey an image of modernity, and Islamized products that are geared toward a young Muslim target group.

The convergence between religious virtue and up-to-date global products or forms of expression is even more striking in **Vít Šisler**'s paper on new media. There is an increasing number of educational media, video games and video blogs that communicate religious values or try to appeal to "Muslim identity." Šisler shows that more and more of them are just as professional and technologically up-to-date as their non-religious counterparts, which is a *conditio sine qua non* for their success among adolescent and adult audiences. They try to differentiate themselves from mainstream productions

by promoting "positive values" as opposed to the perceived depravity and violence of their "Western" counterparts.

Moving to South-East Asia, **Firly Annisa** takes a critical look at *Paras*, an Indonesian glossy magazine for middle- to upper-class Muslim women that portrays Islam as a fashion trend not at all incompatible with female beauty and seductiveness. In the same vein, Unilever introduced a shampoo in Indonesia that is aimed exclusively at headscarf-wearing women. **Ragnar Willer** analyzes the branding and advertising of *Sunsilk Clean and Fresh* and the social and economic context in which the product could become a huge success.

Finally, **Michael Hastings-Black** offers a contribution from a professional perspective, discussing the significance of diasporic Muslim groups to the American advertising and media industry. In this context, he also analyzes the important role of new media in opening a space for self-representation of ethnic, religious, and cultural minorities.

The Economic Politics of Muslim Consumption

Taking up the findings of previous contributions, **Patrick Haenni**, in his conclusion, analyzes the way in which the commercialization of religion—or the Islamization of commerce—goes together with the emergence of a cosmopolitan conservative leisure class and the predominance of a Salafi discourse with its emphasis on outward piousness. He considers consumption "a prism through which we can analyze the meaning of what we call re-Islamization."[11]

In this sense, all the papers in this volume use consumption as a prism through which specific aspects of the enormous transformations that Muslim societies have undergone in the past decades can be studied and better understood.

Acknowledgments

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[11]

this endeavor. Tonice Sgrignoli deserves my gratitude for the painstaking work of copyediting the papers. Last, but not least, I would like to thank the authors of this volume. It has been a pleasure to work with them.

Berlin, August 2009   Johanna Pink

Part I

Spaces of Consumption in a Globalized World

CHAPTER ONE

HALAL, HARAM, OR WHAT? CREATING MUSLIM SPACE IN LONDON

JOHAN FISCHER

Introduction

The 2003 book *Halal Food: A Guide to Good Eating—London*, by the Malaysian publisher KasehDia, reviews more than a hundred restaurants, take-away counters, and cafés in London. Much more than strictly traditional halal requirements are involved in guiding Muslim consumers: the spatial context (atmosphere, feel, and ambience) of food consumption as practice might be just as significant as the intrinsic qualities of the food and its ingredients. The various establishments are classified according to their halalness, e.g., whether alcohol is sold and whether food is produced and served by Muslims or non-Muslims. During my fieldwork on halal understanding and practice among Malay Muslims in London from 2005 to 2007, "spatial trajectories"[1]—i.e., stories that traverse and organize places and link them together—were prominent in halal narratives. I shall explore how my informants understand and practice these often ambiguous and confusing halal spaces (such as restaurants, butcher shops, grocery and convenience stores, supermarkets, and hypermarkets) in London. I will also discuss articulations of difference between "eating out" and "eating in" in the lives of my informants. By "eating in" I mean shopping for halal meat and other types of food in London, which would be cooked in the homes of my informants.

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[1] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 115.

Thus far, scholarly attention to halal in Britain has, for the most part, focused on conflicts over the provision of halal in schools,[2] the politics of religious slaughter,[3] and the marketing of halal meat.[4] In many parts of London, such as Finsbury Park, Edgware Road, and Whitechapel Road, halal is a distinctive presence on signs and in butcher shops and restaurants. Lately, more and more types of halal-certified products are appearing in supermarkets such as Tesco and ASDA. In contemporary London halal is no longer an expression of esoteric forms of production, trade, and consumption; it is part of a huge and expanding globalized market. A Canadian government study reveals that the global halal trade annually amounts to $150 billion, and it is growing among the world's approximately 1.3 billion Muslims.[5] Based on ethnographic evidence from halal spaces in London this paper argues that the proliferation of modern halal is a particular form of urban space making.

Muslim space making is the production of "the 'social space' of networks and identities created as individuals interact in new contexts, as well as the 'cultural space' that emerges in a wide variety of ways as Muslims interact with one another and with the larger community."[6] I explore the proliferation of halal as contributing to social and cultural space making in London. Often it is certain activities that contribute to the creation of "Muslim space."[7] A central theme in this paper is the display and transmission of the Arabic word halal and its involvement in the production, recognition, and contestation of space in London. Turkish migrants in Germany take great care to prevent the moral contamination from haram (unlawful or forbidden) meat that can seem threatening to them in Germany. These concerns have

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[2] Tahir Abbas, *Muslim Britain: Communities under Pressure* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2005).

[3] Florence Bergeaud-Blackler, "New Challenges for Islamic Ritual Slaughter: A European Perspective," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33, no. 6 (2007): 965–980; Roger Charlton and Ronald Kaye, "The Politics of Religious Slaughter: An Ethno-Religious Case Study," *New Community* 12, no. 3 (1985): 490–502; Ronald Kaye, "The Politics of Religious Slaughter of Animals: Strategies for Ethno-Religious Political Action," *New Community* 19 (1993): 235–250.

[4] Allam Ahmed, "Marketing of Halal Meat in the United Kingdom," *British Food Journal* 110, no. 7 (2008): 655–670.

[5] Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, *Halal Food Products Market Report* (Ottawa: Agriculture / Agri-Food Canada, 2006).

[6] Barbara Daly Metcalf, "Introduction: Sacred Words, Sanctioned Practice, New Communities," in *Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe*, ed. Barbara Daly Metcalf (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1996), 2.

[7] Ibid., 6.

moved to the forefront in diaspora, whereas these dietary laws are "nearly unconscious" in Turkey.[8]

Conversely, Malaysia holds a special position in the global halal market, and it will be clear why the focus in this paper is on Malays. Unlike in Turkey, dietary laws among Malay Muslims in Malaysia are both highly conscious and halal is ubiquitous as a signifier in public as well as in private spaces or domains in Malaysia. From previous periods of fieldwork in Malaysia I learned that many middle-class Malays see themselves as being quite fastidious about halal.

The methodology for this study was ethnographic—i.e., I spent an extended period of time on research in London's halal spaces, and I committed to adapt to this environment and to develop a sensitivity to the people I was learning from. At the same time, the fieldwork for this study can be said to be a multi-sited ethnography involving Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia, and London. Thus, my methodology rests on an intention to "follow the people."[9] It leads me to focus on descriptions of Malays who migrated from Kuala Lumpur to London and their migration narratives, with special emphasis on understandings and practices of halal space in these two locations. Before starting my extended period of fieldwork in London, I conducted fieldwork for one month in Kuala Lumpur. The aim of this fieldwork was to capture powerful discourses of halal in urban Malaysia. In addition, since 1996 I have also conducted fieldwork in Malaysia for a period of two years.

My exploration of the Malay Muslim diaspora in London elaborates and continues a study of what I have called Proper Islamic Consumption in Malaysia.[10] I shall discuss this study in greater detail below. The main motive for focusing on Malays in multiethnic London is that Malays hold a special position with regard to halal. In Malaysia the state has standardized, certified, and institutionalized halal since the 1980s. Thus, state institutions regulate the proliferation of halal and concentrate certification in the realm of the state. The proliferation of halal in Malaysia cannot be divorced from developments in the country over the past three decades, including its steady economic growth, the emergence of large groups of Malay Muslim middle-class consumers, and centralized state incentives that attempt to strengthen

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[8] Ruth Mandel, "A Place of Their Own: Contesting Spaces and Defining Places in Berlin's Migrant Community," in *Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe*, ed. Barbara Daly Metcalf (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1996), 151.

[9] George Marcus, "Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 106.

[10] Johan Fischer, *Proper Islamic Consumption: Shopping among the Malays in Modern Malaysia* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2008).

halal production, trade, and consumption. As mentioned above, halal spaces are ubiquitous in urban Malaysia. In order for local and foreign producers and traders to enter the halal market it is necessary to obtain state halal certification and a particular halal logo issued by the state. This logo signifies that factories or shops comply with state guidelines on halal. The majority of Malay Muslims in urban Malaysia frequent certified restaurants or stores in which this logo is fully visible. Halal is increasingly subject to requirements that are not only directly related to the intrinsic qualities of products but to their handling and storage. Hence, traceability is becoming important to convince consumers that producers, certifiers, and carriers are aware of the increasing requirements in "halal spaces" or domains. This trend is also apparent in London.

London is home to a substantial number of Malays and Malaysian political and religious organizations. The focus on Malay halal consumption in London allows me to offer comparisons to previous research on halal and consumption among Malays in Malaysia—especially with regard to the understanding and practice of what I call halal spaces.

Starting in 2005, I visited London on several occasions. The extended period of fieldwork in London took place from July to December 2006, with one shorter stay in the spring of 2007. The initial stage of the research in London was quantitative in method and outlook. Informants were selected on the basis of a survey that covered 100 mainly Malay respondents. The design of the survey primarily served to map migration trajectories, broader halal consumption patterns, as well as the informants' understanding and practice of divergent types of halal certification in London. On the basis of the survey, 14 Malay informants were selected for interviewing and participant observation. Moreover, a number of background interviews and participant observations were carried out with halal producers and traders, Islamic organizations, and food authorities.

Halal Transformed

Halal literally means "lawful" or "permitted." The Koran and the Sunna exhort Muslims to eat the good and lawful food God has provided for them, but a number of conditions and prohibitions obtain. Muslims are expressly forbidden from consuming carrion, spurting blood, pork, and foods that have been consecrated to any being other than God himself. These substances are haram and thus forbidden.

The lawfulness of meat depends on how it is obtained. Ritual slaughtering entails that the animal is killed in God's name by making a fatal incision across the throat. In this process, blood should be drained as fully

as possible. Another significant Islamic prohibition relates to wine and any other alcoholic drink or substance; all such are haram in any quantity or substance.[11]

In addition to halal and haram, doubtful things should be avoided, i.e., there is a gray area between clearly lawful and unlawful.[12] The doubtful or questionable is expressed in the word *mashbūh*, which can be evoked by divergences in religious scholars' opinions or the suspicion of undetermined or prohibited ingredients in a commodity.[13] Hence, far more abstract, individual, and fuzzy aspects of context and handling are involved in determining the halalness of a product. To determine whether foodstuff is halal or haram "depends on its nature, how it is processed, and how it is obtained."[14]

Muslim dietary rules have assumed new significance in the 20th century as some Muslims strive to demonstrate how such rules conform to modern reason and the findings of scientific research.[15] Another common theme in the revival and renewal of these dietary rules seems to be the search for alternatives to what is seen to be Western values, ideologies, and lifestyles. These reevaluations of requirements and prohibitions are prominent, firstly, in postcolonial Islamic cultures such as Malaysia, and, secondly, among diaspora groups for whom halal can serve as a focal point for Islamic movements and identities.[16]

My exploration of the Malay Muslim diaspora in London elaborates and continues a study of what I have called Proper Islamic Consumption in Malaysia.[17] Building on 10 months of anthropological fieldwork in suburban Malaysia from 2001 to 2002, in this study I argued that the more cultures of consumption assert themselves, the more controversies over what Islam is, or ought to be, are intensifying. As new consumer practices emerge, they give rise to new discursive fields within which the meaning of Islam and Islamic practice are being debated. One key effect of these transformations is the deepening and widening concern for halal commodities among Malay

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[11] Frederick Mathewson Denny, *An Introduction to Islam*, 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2006), 279.

[12] Mian Riaz and Muhammad Chaudry, *Halal Food Production* (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2004), 6–7.

[13] Ibid., 7.

[14] Ibid., 14.

[15] Johan Fischer, "Religion, Science and Markets: Modern Halal Production, Trade and Consumption," *EMBO Reports* 9, no. 9 (2008): 1–4.

[16] John Louis Esposito, "Halal," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, ed. John Louis Esposito (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 376.

[17] Fischer, *Proper Islamic Consumption: Shopping among the Malays in Modern Malaysia*; Johan Fischer, "Nationalizing Rituals? The Ritual Economy in Malaysia," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 22, no. 2 (2008).

Muslims that I label *halalization*. Halalization signifies a major preoccupation with the proliferation of the concept of halal in a multitude of commodified forms. Out of halalization have emerged new forms of Malay aesthetic communities based on different taste preferences in various middle-class fractions. This proliferation of halalization has incited a range of elaborate ideas of the boundaries and authenticity of halal purity versus haram impurity.

Similarly, in contemporary London halal is no longer an expression of esoteric forms of production, trade, and consumption, but part of a huge and expanding globalized market. In the modern food industry, a number of Muslim requirements have taken effect—e.g., an injunction to avoid any substances that might be contaminated with porcine residues or alcohol, such as gelatin, glycerine, emulsifiers, enzymes, flavors, and flavorings.[18] As an example of this, the heading of an article in the *Guardian* (26 October 2006) read "Something Fishy in Your Pasta?" The article demonstrated that in some cases gelatin, among other ingredients, is "sneaked" into a variety of foods. The problem in certifying food and other products with regard to these substances is that they are extremely difficult to discover.

Apparently, a growing number of Muslim consumers are concerned with not only traditional halal food requirements but also contamination from haram sources in products such as toiletries and medication. Moreover, for some Muslims halal sensibilities necessitate that halal products be produced by Muslims only, and this type of production must be kept strictly separate from non-halal.

The halalness of products is not easily verifiable: smell, texture, and taste cannot determine whether or not a product is halal. Consequently, understandings of halal commodities tend to hinge on the context of their everyday handling, rather than their intrinsic properties. The main point is that the effects of commodities on people and contexts depend on how the tension between its imputed properties and its handling (either mitigating or amplifying these) are played out. In this respect, ideas and practices of halal and haram are essential. In other words, the nature (intrinsic qualities), processing (production method and context), and manner of acquisition (the morality or immorality of handling and origin) of commodities all determine whether they are classified as halal, haram, or indeterminable.

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[18] Riaz and Chaudry, *Halal Food Production*, 22–25.

A Malaysian Halal Cuisine

A large part of my fieldwork took place in halal restaurants and Malaysian halal restaurants in particular. In these restaurants I ate halal food and discussed halal with informants, restaurant owners, and halal traders. One of the most popular Malaysian restaurants in London advertised itself as "Malaysian (halal) cuisine" on a sign outside the restaurant. I was a regular guest in this restaurant during fieldwork. In this section, I show that halal as a signifier is involved in the forging of a Malaysian national halal cuisine in diaspora.

In my conversations with Hamza, the owner of this Malaysian halal restaurant, many of the central themes of this chapter came out. He stressed that halal was also about lifestyle and ethos, and not just a question about a religious injunction pertaining to food and its intrinsic qualities. Hamza explained to me that one of the main motives for starting a restaurant specializing in "authentic" Malaysian halal food was that this food was well known in the Islamic community in London. Even more importantly, alcohol was not sold in the restaurant. As a guest you were allowed to bring your own alcoholic drink, but I never noticed any guest doing so. In the eyes of Hamza, his restaurant was "100 percent halal," meaning that alcohol was not sold in this establishment and income would never be used for any haram activities, such as gambling.

Hamza employed only Malays, and one of his motivations for running the restaurant was to demonstrate to non-Muslims that Malay waitresses, all of whom wore a *tudung* (a long headscarf), were accommodating, modern, and efficient women. Hamza's vision was to serve Malaysian halal cuisine for Muslims as well as non-Muslims in a cosmopolitan atmosphere. During my fieldwork in London in 2006, several Labour ministers criticized and questioned the right of Muslim women to wear the *niqāb*, a veil that covers the face. These claims emerged in a society where powerful political discourses identify the veiling of Muslim women as an undesirable Islamic practice in public space, whereas halal is undergoing a revolution in a discursive vacuum.

Hamza put in plain words that trust was essential in the halal market in London. In Malaysia, halal spaces—restaurants, shops, and factories—are certified by the state, whereas in Britain the state is largely absent in halal. Thus, Hamza relies only on what he considers trustworthy (but also more expensive) suppliers of halal meat.

According to Hamza and my other informants, distinctions between halal, *mashbūh*, and haram are to a large extent premised on context and practices. Hamza, for example, repeated the rumor that some Malaysian ministers,

and even the Prime Minister, visit a certain Malaysian restaurant in London even though it is run by a non-Muslim Chinese Malaysian. Of the Malaysian population of around 25 million in 2004, about 61 per cent are indigenous Malays (virtually all Muslims) and tribal groups, also labeled *bumiputera* (literally, "sons of the soil"), 24 per cent are Chinese, and 7 per cent are Indians.[19] Many Malay Muslims consider non-Muslims unable to prepare and handle halal food. That Malaysia's political elite would visit such a restaurant in London seemed odd to Hamza, especially when the Malaysian state is simultaneously trying to promote halal on a global scale. That particular restaurant also has a bar and serves alcohol.

The forging of a Malaysian national cuisine has fused with Malaysia's aspirations to become a world leader in halal. In fact, on November 4, 2006, BBC announced under the heading *Malaysia dishes out to raise profile* that the Malaysian government is trying to "raise the country's international profile" and offer businessmen cash incentives to open "thousands" of Malaysian restaurants worldwide:

> According to the Malaysian government, which clearly keeps a close eye on such things, there are just 376 Malaysian restaurants to feed the six billion people who live outside the country. So its government has set a target of raising that number to 8.000 by 2015.[20]

Ideally, Malaysia's "name will be more renowned globally." This ideal is inseparable from the wider halal vision, as halal has become a form of national cuisine for Muslims as well as non-Muslims in Malaysia. However, in a discussion about the Malaysian state's vision to "globalize" a Malaysian (halal) cuisine, a woman Malay trader complained that the current Malaysian political leadership was not "capitalistic" enough for this vision to be fulfilled. The point here is that these restaurants are also political spaces or contexts for halal.

The menu in Hamza's restaurant tried to represent the wealth of food in multiethnic Malaysia. The basic ingredients were imported from Malaysia in order to achieve an "authentic" Malaysian taste. Typical dishes were *nasi lemak* (rice soaked in coconut cream), *nasi goreng* (fried rice), and *rendang daging* (rich coconut beef). My informants, who often frequented Malaysian restaurants in London, considered these dishes quintessentially "national."

In Hamza's restaurant there were several tourist posters from Malaysia but no visible Islamic paraphernalia, such as plaques with Islamic calligra-

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[19] Cf. http://www.indexmundi.com/malaysia/demographics_profile.html

[20] http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/6116878.stm.

phy. The atmosphere clearly indicated that this was a Malaysian restaurant. This restaurant also hosted a *Hari Raya* celebration (signifying the end of the fasting season of Ramadan) and throughout the day a large number of mainly Malays enjoyed the free food and hospitality of the restaurant.

Another Malaysian restaurant in North London likewise advertised itself as offering "Halal Malaysian Cuisine." This restaurant was part of a food court located in the Oriental City Shopping Mall. Adjacent to the food court was an Asian supermarket that also sold fresh halal meat and a whole range of other halal products, including Malaysian ones. The owner of this restaurant, Siti, argued that during the last 15 years, due to Islamic revivalism and increased political awareness of the commercial aspects of halal in Malaysia, the political leadership had equated Malaysian "national" food with halal. This transformation was significant not just for Malays but also for Chinese and Indians. This point was substantiated during fieldwork in Malaysian restaurants in London since quite a number of Indians and Chinese, in particular, frequented these restaurants. In this restaurant in North London, a plaque with Islamic calligraphy was visible behind the counter. In another Malaysian halal restaurant in Bayswater, in West London, plaques with Islamic calligraphy as well as the Malaysian national flag called attention to the focus on a Malaysian halal cuisine.

Another popular halal eatery among Malays in London was Malaysia Hall, which I visited as part of this research. This facility provides accommodation for Malaysian students who have just arrived in London and there is also a canteen where Malaysian halal dishes are served. In addition to introducing students to living in Britain, Malaysia Hall also offers guidance on proper halal food practice. One of my Malay informants mentioned that he considered Malaysia Hall a very "political" space, in which the presence of the Malaysian state and Malaysian Islamic doctrine was excessive.

In these eateries most Malay women would be wearing the *tudung*, but by no means all wore it. Based on my previous fieldwork in urban Malaysia, it was clear that comparatively more women wore the *tudung* in this Malaysian setting. This point indicates that claims for piety and Islamic identities through Islamic dress for women in particular are not necessarily stronger in a diasporic context.

To sum up, the vision to forge a Malaysian halal cuisine has fused with the way in which the state has institutionalized and regulated halal in Malaysia. The dual focus on halal and a Malaysian national cuisine seems to come together in the spaces of the Malaysian halal restaurants discussed above. In a broader perspective, there has been an increasing articulation of regional and

ethnic cuisines[21] and Malaysia is an example of how halal can add to this
trend. Appadurai writes that the critical features of national cuisines "are
the twin processes of regional and ethnic specialization, on the one hand,
and the development of overarching, crosscutting national cuisines on the
other."[22] What is more, the emergence and consolidation of national food is
tightly linked to diasporic culture among migrant groups.[23] My informants
were regular guests in these restaurants and they enjoyed this kind of na-
tional halal food and the spaces in which it was prepared and served. My
next topic is how Malays in London more generally understand and practice
"eating out."

Eating Out: Halal Understanding and Practice

A Malay Imam, who had worked at Malaysia Hall since 2002, complained
that it was unconvincing when restaurants in London advertised themselves
as halal, when in fact only the chicken, for example, probably was halal cer-
tified. He did not recognize a restaurant as halal if it sold liquor, much in
the same way that a pizzeria could not claim to be halal if it used and stored
ham together with halal meat, or allowed the same utensils to be used for
all types of food. In the eyes of the Imam, a restaurant that did not display
a halal sign could not be considered halal. Only if a restaurant was clearly
marked as halal in Arabic was it a suitable halal space. He mentioned that a
Bangladeshi member of his congregation once invited him to his restaurant.
This restaurant did not display a proper halal sign since it catered to non-
Muslims by selling alcohol. According to the Imam, this restaurant did not
qualify as halal because income was coming from a haram source. Conse-
quently, his favorite restaurant in London was an Afghan restaurant in which
alcohol was not allowed under any circumstances. This Imam can be seen
to represent an authoritative Malaysian state discourse on halal.

In this section I discuss how my Malay informants in London understand
and practice eating out, with particular reference to the spatial context or
domains of halal.

Izura was a woman in her 20s, who moved to London in 2005 to complete
her postgraduate studies in international marketing. At the same time, she
worked part-time with an insurance company. In the eyes of Izura, Malay

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[21] Arjun Appadurai, "How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India,"
Comparative Studies in Society and History 30, no. 1 (1988): 3–24.

[22] Ibid., 22.

[23] Richard Wilk, "Food and Nationalism: The Origins of 'Belizian Food,'" in *Food Nations:
Selling Taste in Consumer Societies*, ed. Warren Belasco and Philip Scranton (New York and
London: Routledge, 2002), 80.