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**‘Forging New Malay Networks’:
Economy and Aspirations in the Malaysian Diaspora**

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‘Forging New Malay Networks’: Economy and Aspirations in the Malaysian Diaspora

A central issue in this paper is the Malaysian state’s efforts to develop and dominate a global market in halal (literally, ‘lawful or ‘permitted) commodities through networking entrepreneurs. In so doing, the paper examines how these entrepreneurs in London respond to and are affected by this effort. Another important question is how the state promotes halal commodities in the interface between nationalism, patriotism and diaspora aspirations. Among the political elite, and, thus, the state, in Malaysia, there exists a fascination with discovering or even inventing a ‘Malay diaspora’. The particularity of this ‘diaspora-envy’ is a sign of modern Malay aspirations towards cosmopolitanism and ‘global reach’. This paper is based on ethnographic material from fieldwork among Malay Muslim migrants and organizations in Kuala Lumpur and London, that is, participant observation and interviewing, as well as powerful Malaysian sentiments on diaspora found in political discourses.

INTRODUCTION

The quotation that forms part of this paper’s title is from a young Malay(sian) Muslim woman, Jeti, who is currently involved in promoting halal commodities in the UK for the Malaysian state through her private consultancy company. She is an example of a Malay middle-class entrepreneur with a global orientation, and represents a modern type of Malay diasporic group privileged by the Malaysian state. Jeti’s quotation also signals the ways in which networking takes place between the state, entrepreneurs and markets involved in promoting Malaysian halal commodities. I first met Jeti at Malaysia International Halal Showcase (MIHAS) 2006 that was held at the massive Malaysian International Exhibition & Convention Centre located outside Malaysia’s capital city, Kuala Lumpur. MIHAS 2006 was ‘themed’ as *Networking, Consolidating and Energising*. I also had the opportunity to meet Jeti at the Halal Exhibition at the World Food Market (WFM) held in London in November 2006. She held degrees in accounting and business studies from the UK and was currently involved in promoting halal for the Malaysian state by organizing trade promotions, as well as with her private company. Of particular interest to Jeti was the promising UK market, which she knew from her studies here and which figures so prominently in the Malaysian state’s halal vision. She also reflects the ways in which networking between state, entrepreneurs and markets is involved in proliferating Malaysian halal. Since we first met at what I shall call halal networks events, the globalization of the market for halal products and services has intensified. MIHAS and WFM are significant examples of such halal network events, that is, major public events or ‘stages’ where the corporate sector and entrepreneurs, academia, NGOs, Islamic organizations, halal certifiers, and governments from around the world come together to promote and spread the sale of halal commodities globally.

A central question in this paper is the Malaysian state’s efforts to develop and dominate a global market in halal commodities through networking entrepreneurs and how these entrepreneurs in London respond to and are affected by this effort. Current studies on the entanglements of capitalism, Islam, and the state in Southeast Asia explore, for example, how moderate Islamic ‘spiritual reform’ movements in Indonesia combine business management principles and techniques from popular life-coaching seminars with Muslim practice. This form of ‘market Islam’ and ‘spiritual economies’ merge Muslim religious practice and capitalist ethics and effective self-management by attempting to make people ‘better from the inside’ (Rudnyckyj 2009; 2010). While there is a body of literature on the relationship between Islam, modernity, networking and entrepreneurship among the Malays in Malaysia (Sloane 1999) this is not really the case in a diaspora context and it is this aspect this paper explores.

The fieldwork for this study has produced a multisited ethnography involving Kuala Lumpur and London. Participant observation and interviewing were carried out among producers, traders, Islamic organizations, companies, food and Islamic authorities, restaurant owners, halal entrepreneurs, *imams* (Muslim men who lead the prayers in a mosque), and Malay Muslim middle-class consumers. I also draw on material from another and ongoing research project that explores how global halal production, trade and regulation are taking place in the interfaces between Islam, states and markets in Malaysia and Singapore, but also globally. More specifically, I examine global halal between the halal state certification bodies of Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia or the Islamic Development Department of Malaysia (JAKIM) and Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura or the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS) on the one hand and companies on the other.

WHY HALAL NETWORKS?

On 16 August 2004, Malaysia's Prime Minister, Abdullah Haji Ahmad Badawi, officially launched the first Malaysia International Halal Showcase (MIHAS) in Kuala Lumpur. The title of the Prime Minister's speech was *Window to the Global Halal Network* (<http://mymall.netbuilder.com.my/index.php?doit=showclass&cid=36&domain=ehalal>). He argued that establishing Malaysia as a 'global halal hub' was a major priority for the government, and that MIHAS was the largest halal trade fair to be held anywhere in the world. Badawi asserted that halal products are increasingly being recognized globally as clean and safe in an era of diseases and 'health disasters' due to 'unhealthy practices.' Britain in particular was presented as being a highly lucrative market for halal. The global halal trade annually amounts to \$150 billion, and it is growing among the world's approximately 1.3 billion Muslims (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada 2006).

In Badawi's speech he stressed that the vast majority of the population in Malaysia consumes halal on a daily basis. The self-assuredness of this statement can be ascribed to the fact that the state in Malaysia has systematically regulated halal production, trade, and consumption since the early 1980s. Malaysian state bodies such as JAKIM regulate halal in the interfaces between Islamic revivalism, the state, and consumer culture (Fischer 2009; 2011).

Halal literally means 'lawful' or 'permitted'. The Koran and the Sunna (the life, actions and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad) exhort Muslims to eat the good and lawful that God has provided for them, but a number of conditions and prohibitions are in existence. Muslims are expressly forbidden from consuming carrion, spurting blood, pork, or foods that have been consecrated to any being other than God himself. These substances are haram and thus forbidden. Ritual slaughtering entails that the animal be 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 intoxicating drink or substance that is haram in any quantity or substance (Denny 2006: 279).

In the modern food industry, a number of requirements have taken effect, for example to avoid any substances that may be contaminated with porcine residues or alcohol such as gelatine, glycerine, emulsifiers, enzymes, flavours, and flavourings (Riaz and Chaudry 2004: 22–25). The problem in certifying food and other products with regard to these substances is that they are extremely difficult to discover. Trust in the modern halal market is essential, and networks in this market imply that ethnic and religious groups share proper halal understanding.

Aspects of context and handling are involved in determining the halalness of a product. The interpretation of these questionable areas is left open to Islamic specialists and state institutions such as JAKIM. In the end, however, the underlying principle behind the prohibitions remains 'divine

order' (Riaz and Chaudry 2004: 12).

For some Muslims halal sensibilities necessitate that halal commodities are produced by Muslims only, and that this type of production is kept strictly separate from non-halal production. In Malaysia and Singapore for example foreign companies have to set up a Muslim Committee in order to handle halal properly. Jeti does consultancy work for such foreign companies in Malaysia on how to set up the Muslim committee. This work is especially important for large companies that does not have Muslim ownership: if a company is 'fully owned by a non-Muslim entity how can you be sure they understand what halal requirements are if they don't have this committee?', she asks.

Halal is no longer an expression of esoteric forms of production, trade, regulation and consumption but part of a huge and expanding globalized market. The halal network and networking also evoke the point that in Malaysia capitalism, Islam, and the state are entangled (Fischer 2011).

HALAL NETWORKS AND ENTREPRENEURS

Before explaining how I use the concepts of network and entrepreneurship in this paper I will briefly review two important studies of Malay diaspora. The lives of Malay seafarers in Liverpool are examples of transnational connections in existence before the global era. This group of Malays were part of extensive maritime networks shaped by the movements of ships and commodities that brought these seafarers to Liverpool. Moreover, from the 1970s onward, Malay students were sent on scholarships to study in the United Kingdom. These groups have become central to state conceptions of national identity in Malaysia, that is, this sort of 'diaspora' is idealized in journalism, the movement called the 'Malay World', as well as in academic research, with varying degrees of political patronage. A significant theme relates to the possibility of retaining key traits of Malay culture and identity outside Malaysia while at the same time maintaining links with the homeland. One example of such cultural and religious continuities is newspaper reports about the necessity of the availability of halal meat used in the preparation of Malay food (Bunnell 2007).

Another and more historical study challenges the narrative of Malay identity devised by Malay nationals, writers and filmmakers in the late colonial period. This narrative associated Malayness with static and ethnically homogenous village life. This study shows that this narrative ignores the immigration of Malays from outside the peninsula to participate in trade and commercial agriculture, the substantial Malay population in towns and cities as well as the reformist Muslims who argued for a common bond in Islam, that is, cosmopolitan narratives of Malayness (Kahn 2006). However, to my knowledge no study explores the Malaysian state's efforts to develop and dominate a global market in halal commodities through networking entrepreneurs in the diaspora.

My understanding of halal networks in Malaysia is informed by academic theories of network, especially as articulated by Manuel Castells. Castells sets out to show how the new information technology paradigm provides the material basis for the expansion of the networking form in the entire social structure locally, nationally and globally (Castells 2000: 469). That is, networks and networking are essential tools for individuals, social groups, organizations, states, and nations. The importance of 'hubs' is to produce the strategic functions of the network – 'communication hubs' are 'exchangers' that play 'a role of coordination for the smooth interaction of all the elements integrated into the network.' (Castells 2000: 443).

In business, connections and networks frame social interaction, that is, these connections form networks that extend into all kinds of different organizations and institutions that make up society (Moeran 2005: 99).

The halal vision of the Malaysian state is infused with such ideas about network society and hubs. For example, in the Ninth Malaysia Plan 2006–2010, *Together Towards Excellence, Glory and Distinction* (Economic Planning Unit 2006), which outlines the country's development strategy, the strategic uses of the terms network and networking seem to be inspired by Castells' idea that networking expands in the entire social structure. Strategically, these terms are employed as part of an effort to target specific priority areas such as communications and internationalization of the government led by the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), the dominant political party in Malaysia since independence from Britain in 1957. They are also invoked in the context of Malaysia as an emerging 'global halal hub.'

Another critical influence on my work is Riles' (2000) study of the participation of Fijian women in the United Nations' fourth global forum. One of Riles' central insights is that 'the effectiveness of the Network is generated by the Network's self-description ... the naming of a Network is the existence of a Network, and the existence of a Network is synonymous with Action on its behalf.' (Riles 2000: 172). A similar observation can be made about the halal network in Malaysia and beyond. The network is an example of 'institutionalized utopianism' (Riles 2000: 3) rather than an actually existing or complete social form. As we shall see, halal network events are important because they are signs of how organizations and institutions actively play roles in and thus comprise a global halal network.

At MIHAS 2004, Badawi proudly announced that 'Today we will mark the unveiling of a new standard for Malaysia – a Muslim standard for the world'. The Prime Minister was referring to the launch by the Malaysian Institute of Industrial Research and Standards (SIRIM) of a Malaysian Standard MS 1500, *General Guidelines on the Production, Preparation, Handling, and Storage of Halal Foods*. Ideally, this new standard should further strengthen Malaysian state halal certification in its efforts to cooperate with multinational companies (www.pmo.gov.my).

On SIRIM's website (www.sirim.my), 'our networking' is illustrated as a grouping or cluster of Malaysian state institutions: the Malaysian Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, the Malaysian Technical Cooperation Programme and JAKIM. In the figure, this 'networking' also involves the World Association of Industrial and Technological Research Organizations (WAITRO), the Global Research Alliance (GRA) and International Standards Worldwide (ASTM). Most of all, this 'networking' assumes the form of an arbitrarily shaped cluster. It appears that the model or illustration of 'networking' on SIRIM's website is incomplete, that is, it is an idealized form of networking and it does not generate any kind of dimensionality. The specific institutions are not visually linked or connected, which creates a 'cluster' structure rather than generating a sense of dimensionality as network effect or shape. While there is plenty of outside space in which this network could expand, the commercial linkages are lacking. In other words, this is exclusively a vision of future 'institutional networking'. Networks cannot be free from the ties that imagined them (Green, Harvey and Knox 2005: 807).

Sloane's work on the relationship between Islam, modernity, entrepreneurship and networking moves beyond universal images of entrepreneurship and explores this as an urban Malay middle-class or elite phenomenon in Malaysia (Sloane 1999: 12). These groups of Malay entrepreneurs in Kuala Lumpur (comparable to the entrepreneurs involved in halal) are actively engaged in strategic 'brainstorming' sessions about who they could access in their networks for support and to form alliances and business ventures (Sloane 1999: 122). These entrepreneurs used the English words for network and networking found in scholarly studies such as that of Castells, on the Internet and in popular business magazines that are in abundance in urban Malaysia (Sloane 1999: 121).

Malay entrepreneurs negotiate between their newly acquired wealth and Islam, that is, the pursuit of wealth in Islamically approved ways is central to modern Islamic identity formation (Sloane 1999: 71). Similar to what I shall show in connection with halal network events, it is often at social events networking takes on its greatest power (Sloane 1999: 124). Contacts and access to powerful UMNO-connected businessmen and their capital in many cases determine success among select groups of Malay entrepreneurs (Sloane 1999: 200).

To sum up, the Malaysian state idealizes the halal network as a metaphor through which technical systems and institutions (hubs) and bodily processes (proper halal handling by Muslims) are imagined and made to stand for each other (Otis 2001). At the same time, the state in Malaysia actively tries to make politicians, company representatives and entrepreneurs such as Jati play particular roles in the halal network. I explore how the Malaysian proliferation of halal gives rise to aspirations of Malay Muslim networks to signify the connectedness and prescriptions of organisations *vis-à-vis* more deep-rooted networks such as historical Islamic trade networks or Chinese networks. Undoubtedly, networks such as business or production networks are more pervasive today in terms of advertising, production and consumption than ever before in history. Most of all, perhaps, the network metaphor has become a social imperative or strategic model of identification and emulation.

HALAL ENTANGLEMENTS IN MALAYSIA AND BEYOND

The proliferation of modern halal in Malaysia and beyond is entangled in evermore-complex webs of religious, political, economic, ethnic, and class significance. Economically, Malaysia has sustained rapid development within the past three decades, and the meaning of Islam has become ever more contested in that period. Malaysia is not an Islamic state, but Islam is Malaysia's official religion and is professed by more than 50 per cent of the population, that is, ethnic Malay Muslims. The Chinese are the second largest ethnic group in Malaysia.

The rise of revivalist Islam in Malaysia from the 1970s has had a powerful bearing on the regulation of Malaysian halal. A number of divergent *dakwah* (lit. salvation) groups in the wider resurgence of Islam emerged in Malaysia. *Dakwah* is also supported by Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) or the Islamic Party of Malaysia.

In order to pre-empt these confrontations, the state aggressively engages in an amalgamation of Malay ethnicity, modernity, and Islam. After coming to power in 1981, the charismatic and outspoken Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad, set off the wave of institutionalizing and regulating halal, thus actively nationalizing the proliferation of halal and concentrating its certification in the realm of the state, where it has remained.

The outcome of attempting to pre-empt *dakwah* was a powerful UMNO-driven ethnic state nationalism. Moreover, the channelling of privileges and funds through ethnic UMNO corporatism has been systematically institutionalized in Malaysia and this has led to a form of party political capitalism controlled by the Malay elite (Gomez 1994). This type of capitalism is effectively promoted as a capitalism that adheres to Islamic standards. The economy thus fused with a politics of ethnicity that in itself was defined in terms of religion (Shamsul 1999: 43).

These points are important in order to understand how the UMNO-led state presents the halal network to be pure and proper in public while the halal industry in Malaysia is inseparable from UMNO links and elite networks. Companies controlled by the government, Government-Linked

Companies (GLCs), figure prominently in the Malaysian halal business and these GLCs are entangled in a web of UMNO and personal linkages.

Jeti works closely with JAKIM through Persatuan Pengguna Islam Malaysia or in English the Muslim Consumers Association of Malaysia (PPIM), which is an organization that protects the interests of Muslim consumers and entrepreneurs. PPIM also runs a Café in Kuala Lumpur that provides shelf space for PPIM members' (halal) products and PPIM and its café is an essential space for Malay Muslim entrepreneurial networking. The networking and activities of PPIM and its members that take place in the Café do not directly involve the state, but PPIM's role is essential in order to understand the proliferation of halal in Malaysia: ways in which Malay Muslim interest groups network and protect Malay Muslim privileges through promoting Muslim products and businesses and halal in particular. In other words, groups such as PPIM and its network constantly push for increased Muslim consumer protection and privileges the state is seen to be unable or unwilling to deliver.

In the 1970s, the state launched the New Economic Policy (NEP) to improve the economic and social situation of the Malays vis-à-vis the Chinese in particular. The NEP entailed a number of benefits for the Malays and other indigenous groups, such as increased ownership of production and preferential quotas in the educational system. Ideologically, the overall objective was to produce an educated, entrepreneurial, mobile, networking, and shareholding Malay middle class 'New Malays'. Jeti is an example of such a New Malay entrepreneur.

Historically, Malaysia has played a central role in arguing for an indigenous origin of the Southeast Asian idea. This self-conscious centrality is based on communications, Islamic trade networks and the Malacca Straits area has always been a meeting place of ports and portages making Malaysia a booster of Southeast Asian unity (Reid 1999: 7). Moreover, the networked nature of Islam and the impact of Muslim networks on world history are central (Cooke and Lawrence 2005: 1). Similarly, powerful Chinese networks divided into linguistic tribes organized the trade of commodities across Southeast Asia (Reid 1999: 11). Malaysian leaders have been very interested in building regional organizations such as Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Today, there is strong cooperation and competition on halal among many of the ASEAN countries.

Among the political elite in Malaysia, there is a powerful desire to discover or invent a 'Malay diaspora'. The particularity of this 'diaspora-envy' signifies modern Malay diaspora aspirations towards cosmopolitanism and global reach (Kessler 1999: 23). In all of this, there is a strong echo of national recollections of a classic Malay golden age of the fifteenth-century Malacca sultanate and trade centre of global reach (Kessler 1999: 31).

Malaysian halal networks give rise to aspirations of Malay Muslim networks to signify the connectedness and prescriptions of organizations vis-à-vis more deep-rooted networks such as historical Islamic trade networks or Chinese networks.

9/11 became a global concern reconfiguring domestic politics in Malaysia and consolidated the country's position as a moderate Islamic state. As a sign of this, the article *The Halal Way to Free Trade* in *New Straits Times* (May 11, 2006), one of the most popular national papers in English in Malaysia, asserted that post-9/11 'the halal market has grown from a tributary concern of the devout to the mainstream of the multitudes. Politics has combined with demographics to manufacture an economic demand of global proportions'. Hence, post-9/11, the powerful state and corporate halal discourse in Malaysia identified this 'moderate' Muslim country as a key player in the proliferation of global halal. These events reinvigorated focus on Malaysia's rightful role in promoting a global halal network.

NETWORKING, CONSOLIDATING AND ENERGISING: HALAL NETWORK EVENTS IN MALAYSIA

This section explores how the Malaysian halal network has been promoted at two major halal events in Malaysia, namely Malaysia International Halal Showcase (MIHAS) and World Halal Forum (WHF), a gathering of Islamic, political and commercial notables in Kuala Lumpur. These network events are products of concerted efforts by Malaysian state institutions to include organizations from around the world.

Since its start in 2004, MIHAS has developed into an annual halal network event. In the eyes of the Malaysian state, halal producers and traders, and a plethora of Islamic organizations, the increase in network events indicates the emergence of a global halal network. MIHAS 2006, 'themed' as *Networking, Consolidating and Energising*, was held at the massive Malaysian International Exhibition & Convention Centre ('the Jewel at the Southern Metropolitan Hub', as this convention centre is dubbed).

MIHAS consisted of three main activities, first, seminars held by companies such as Tesco and Malaysian state organizations such as MATRADE and JAKIM. Participation in these seminars provided me with an insight into the halal vision in the interfaces or grey zones between the state, business, and religious revivalism. We learned that Malaysia should be alert to competition from skilled 'networking nations' such as Brunei, Singapore, Thailand, and Indonesia. Consequently, the government has established 32 MATRADE¹ offices worldwide, an 'overseas network', including an office in London. When I discussed Malaysian challenges with 'networking nations' with MATRADE's Trade Commissioner in London he explained that the dominance of Thai ethnic cuisine was a particular concern.

Secondly, MIHAS included 'trade-matching programmes' and 'networking sessions' in which producers, traders, and buyers could come together. The day before MIHAS started, in one of Malaysia's largest newspapers in English (*The Star*, 11 May 2006) Badawi declared that governments and companies should use MIHAS to help establish Malaysia as a halal hub. Many other articles and newscasts stressed the power of halal networking.

Thirdly, MIHAS included a large number of product demonstrations and samples. These product demonstrations testified to the fact that, in Malaysia, halal has also proliferated into a wide range of non-food products such as care products and medication.

As one would expect, MIHAS was an essential arena for networking, in particular with respect to exchanging business cards, and I was soon to receive e-mails advertising new products and announcing new halal trade fairs around the world. The entrepreneurs I met at MIHAS, including Jeti, reflected the ways in which networking is involved Malaysian halal. I also had the opportunity to meet Jeti at the Halal Exhibition at the World Food Market held in London in November 2006 that had developed into a significant network event in which a MATRADE delegation also participated.

At the Halal Exhibition, Jeti envisaged halal as giving Malaysia an edge and a 'niche trade network', whereas Europe and the US otherwise dominate global trade. The news that Nestlé had entered into a halal business deal with Malaysia was proof to her that it was only in cooperating with multinationals and using their existing trade networks that a country such as Malaysia could succeed.

¹ Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (MATRADE) is Malaysia's national trade promotion agency.

Jeti was confident that the emerging halal trade was ‘forging New Malay networks’ on a global scale. Unlike the Chinese, Malays were traditionally ‘confined’ to Malaysia. Now there was the political will to promote Malaysia in terms of halal internationally, and this was indicative of a major shift towards a more global attitude. In essence, these last points reflect the materialization of an entrepreneurial New Malay mentality that to a large extent is a product of the NEP as a sort of ethnic network policy of the Malaysian state. In many ways, Jeti is the quintessential Malaysian performer of the halal network: she is a young socially and physically mobile Malay woman that networks between state institutions, Islamic organizations and companies; she possesses extensive knowledge of proper halal production, trade, regulation and consumption and uses products and communication technologies such as social networks and mobile phones as network tools. Interestingly, Jeti was not herself very particular about halal in her everyday life and she was not wearing the *tudung* (long headscarf) on any of the occasions I met her. Like many of the other entrepreneurs involved in the halal network she is not a *dakwah* activist, but rather a modern entrepreneur that tries to optimize Malaysian halal on the global scale.

In 2006 the World Halal Forum (WHF) was held for the first time in Kuala Lumpur. The establishment of this network event signifies the diversification and multiplication of halal network events in Malaysia. In 2010, Halal Malaysia Week included World Islamic Economic Forum, WHF, World Halal Research (an event with the heading ‘Inspiring Innovation through Research’), MIHAS (now mainly a halal trade fair) as well as a Workshop on the Halal Awareness Programme (training on halal production and logistics). At each of these events the corporate sector including entrepreneurs, academia, NGOs, Islamic organizations, and governments from around the world actively enact the existence of a halal network. After having done fieldwork at these network events since 2006 I have become part of the way that halal networking takes place. An example of this is the way in which Malaysian state representatives and companies are interested in my research results on halal while as a researcher I am considering access to interesting data that these actors can provide.

I was at WHF 2010 held at the luxurious Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre in central Kuala Lumpur. This network event is now the major event for the halal industry globally. In his opening speech at WHF Malaysia’s Prime Minister Mohammad Najib, who succeeded Badawi in 2009, explained to the more than 800 delegates that the gathering of halal industry stakeholders provided the best ‘platform for networking among those interested in the halal industry.’ We learned from organizers that WHF was established to be an arena for discussion, networking and collaboration to stimulate the growth and development of the halal market. In the WHF programme booklet breaks were designated to ‘networking and refreshments’ as well as *salat* (prayer). Jeti together with other participants explained to me that Najib’s ‘political goodwill’ towards supporting halal was considered lower than that of his predecessors and his speech at WHF 2010 was anxiously anticipated.

At WHF one of the organizers specifically addressed the confusion caused among companies and certifying bodies by the friction between JAKIM and Halal Industry Development Corporation (HDC)² calling for a strong ‘masterplan’ and ‘leadership’ applicable to all stakeholders in the industry to address the inability of government agencies to work together.

² The Halal Industry Development Corporation (HDC) was established in 2006. Its main purpose was to take over JAKIM’s responsibilities and co-ordinate the overall development of the industry (www.hdcglobal.com). This strategic move had major consequences for halal regulation within the state in Malaysia and also for companies globally. Due to power struggles between JAKIM as the traditional Islamic authority versus HDC’s more management oriented style JAKIM in 2009 regained its role as the principle state body involved in halal regulation.

At the end of WHF delegates were given a questionnaire and were asked to evaluate the networking performance of WHF. In 2010 WHF Europe was held in Earl's Court Conference Centre in London for the first time.

The halal network is intimately tied to Malaysian network events. The Malaysian halal network is to a large extent enacted through and at these halal network events since 2004. Today, there are halal network events every week globally. In Malaysia, imagined halal networks always involve some form of location and are thus both political and moral constructions of space and place that are never free from the political, commercial and religious ties that imagined them. MIHAS, WHF and other national halal events are part of a more global halal network and it is to this point I will now turn.

HALAL NETWORKS ON THE GLOBAL STAGE

I now explore the Malaysian halal network on the global stage with particular reference to London as my main fieldwork site. The reasons for focusing on Malays in multiethnic London are, first, that the Malaysian state's vision of and commitment to promoting halal specifically identifies London as a centre for halal production, trade, and consumption; and, second, that London is home to a substantial number of Malays and Malaysian organizations such as UMNO and MATRADE. The Malaysian state's vision to export its national model of halal is a bid to cultivate and civilize London as a "wilderness" in which halal production, trade, certification, and consumption are seen as chaotic, disorderly, and undeveloped. Cultivating the wilderness signifies a new era for the *ummah* (the community of Muslims), now reconceptualized as ethical Muslim producers, traders, and consumers, as well as the revival of the golden past of Islamic trade networks.

In November 2005, the first Halal Exhibition at the major World Food Market (WFM) was held. The venue was ExCeL London, a major exhibition and conference centre in Docklands, an area in the south-eastern part of the city that has been redeveloped principally for commercial and residential use. In 2006, a delegation from MATRADE had a booth at the Halal Exhibition for the first time.

A large number of booths sold a wide variety of fresh, chilled, and frozen halal food products such as meat/poultry, sausages, samosas, kebabs, bread, fast food, baby food, nuts, candy and dry fruits. Some of these products were certified with logos displaying and identifying the certifier, but many were not. A large number of companies and Islamic organizations were represented at the Halal Exhibition, including Jeti's company.

In spite of the fact that Malays in London are outside the direct gaze of the Malaysian state, Malay groups seemed to some extent to be united or linked through forms of UMNO organization in London. A particular event that took place early in my fieldwork was significant. This event reflects forms of Malay(sian) social, political, and economic organization in a diasporic context. In August 2006, the Malaysian High Commission arranged a Malaysia Day Carnival and UMNO branches from all over the United Kingdom gathered at a Malaysian research centre outside London. Each UMNO branch is in charge of a food stall selling (halal) food to a large number of guests.

In his opening speech, the high commissioner of Malaysia to the UK declared that to achieve Vision 2020, imagining Malaysia as a fully developed nation by the year 2020, exchanges between the United Kingdom and Malaysia are essential. In the foreword to the *Programme Book* of this event, the high commissioner argues that Malaysia Day Carnival has been an event that strengthens the bond of friendship and 'networking' among Malaysians in the United Kingdom providing an opportunity for the High Commission, Malaysian private sector and various organizations in the UK to promote Malaysia. This network event also involved the Malaysian Business Forum, as well as the

Overseas Malaysian Executive Council and several producers of Malaysian halal products.

On November 11, 2006, I was at Malaysia Hall in Bayswater, an area of west London that is one of the city's most cosmopolitan areas, for a talk by the managing director of Khazanah Nasional, the Malaysian government's strategic investor in new industries and markets. Its main objective is to promote economic growth and make strategic investments on behalf of the government, which would contribute towards nation building.

The scene on which this was played out was a highly formal and 'national' conference room with pictures of the Malaysian king, queen, and the present and former UMNO prime ministers as well as the Malaysian national flag. My informants explained to me that the speaker was a very important person who 'controls' a lot of funds in the interfaces between the Malaysian state and GLCs worldwide. When the speaker entered the room, the organizers humbly bowed, and as the talk was about to start, a few of the participants returned from praying in the prayer room next door.

Convincingly, the managing director discussed visions and initiatives the Malaysian state together with the government-linked companies were, and still are, putting in place to make the best of globalized markets and business opportunities. 'Inshallah' (God willing), is added when hopes for a bright economic future for Malaysian national capitalism are expressed. The speaker explained to the audience about how foreign direct investment, human capital, networking, sustainability, and transparency are all essential in the global world of business today. Most of all, it is important to locate strategic 'niches in value chains' for Malay(sian) entrepreneurs to exploit, and this is particularly so within Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), tourism and Islamic finance, and halal. After this talk, Malaysian halal food was served in the adjoining canteen.

The above network events testify to the way in which the Malaysian state in the local context of London enacts the global halal network. A plethora of halal commodities and discourses meets in London and filters into the everyday understandings, practices, and contestations of halal among Malay entrepreneurs in the diaspora.³

ENTREPRENEURS AT WORK IN LONDON

In contrast to the way in which the state in Malaysia has effectively certified, standardized and bureaucratized Malaysian halal production, trade, and consumption since the early 1980s, the fragmented and complex halal market in the United Kingdom is characterized by a whole range of competing Muslim diaspora groups. While the 'secular' state is largely absent in halal in the United Kingdom, the Malaysian state is very much present in the everyday lives of Malay Muslims in Malaysia. This section explores the work and role of entrepreneurs such as Jeti in London. In London the Malaysian proliferation of halal gives rise to aspirations of Malay Muslim networks through the work of Malay entrepreneurs, and the network metaphor has become a social imperative or strategic model of identification and emulation.

Jeti runs several consultancy firms that help Malaysian companies with the process of halal certification and regulation in Malaysia and globally, especially in the UK where she lives for extended periods of time. She explains that the global market for halal really took off when supermarkets and hypermarkets such as Carrefour, Giant and Tesco started to focus on halal. Multinational companies now recognize halal as an important and profitable new market, and it is

³ The British national census carried out in 2001 showed that 49,883 Malaysians were recorded residing in the UK.

this fact that is also fuelling the halal vision of the ethnicized state in Malaysia and of entrepreneurs linked directly or indirectly to it.

During one of our discussions of the global halal market, Jeti indicated that she wanted to learn more about how to deal with 'sensitive' issues such as religion and ethnicity in the market for halal in Europe. In Malaysia, it is not a problem or 'offensive' to do surveys on halal, religion and ethnicity because halal here is inseparable from the support of the ethnicized state. Conversely, in Europe and the UK in particular enquiring about whether Muslims are properly involved in the production, trade and handling of halal can be 'sensitive' and 'offensive' as it were.

From my research I know that many companies in Europe and elsewhere have been baffled to say the least about JAKIM enquiries about how Muslims are or should be involved in halal in order to ensure the halalness of production, trade and consumption. Jeti explains to me that exploring the market for halal in London has nothing to do with 'segregating or categorizing Muslims and Christians', but merely is market research that focuses on a particular segment of religious consumers in order to 'give them what they need, satisfy their needs – what's wrong with that? It's ridiculous that as a manufacturer you can't target a certain segment in the market.'

Jeti works with companies that produce sauces, pastes, herbal products, baby food and dried fruit among other things. She takes on clients and products to 'tap into the global halal market' and 'pushes' them to become 'fully certified'. As a consultant 'I determine when a company is ready for certification. It's business development with a focus on getting the product ready for the world market.'

In the local market in Malaysia certification does not hold the same importance, that is, as long as products are produced by Malays certification is not essential, Jeti explains. For example, Ramadan cookies (cookies sold for the feast marking the end of the fast of Ramadan) do not really need certification because people know that they are produced by Malays. However, if these cookies are exported to the UK 'That's where I come in', she explains. This difference between the local and the global market with different standards is essential and also somewhat ambivalent: Malaysia is one of if not the strictest country when it comes to halal globally, but at the same time because of the way in which halal is linked to Malay ethnicity, privilege and political dominance certification of Malay produced commodities is often seen to be unnecessary. However, outside Malaysia these products following the global proliferation and regulation of halal do need certification. So in order for these Malay produced goods to enter European supermarkets and hypermarkets they must be certified and as a consultant Jeti helps companies in the UK with this process.

When considering the advantages of Malaysian companies in the global market for halal Jeti argues that these 'Really understand what halal is and they can answer any question to ensure the halalness throughout the supply chain and this is a comfort to consumers.' However, these companies need the global marketing, investments, and distribution networks of multinationals such as Tesco in order to export their products.

A recent study of halal food and non-food products in the UK by MATRADE maps the potential of this market. Owing to EU regulations, Malaysia is not allowed to export meat products to the European Union. Hence, the Malaysian bid to enter the EU market targets halal products such as ready-made sauces (without meat contents), confectionery, nutrients, vitamins, minerals, toiletries, cosmetics, extracts, flavouring, emulsifiers, colouring, fats, edible oils, and lipids for foods and the pharmaceutical industries as well as E467, E471, E472a, E472e, E481, and E482. The study states that 'Malaysia's international image is that of a modern, progressive Muslim nation' and that the Malaysian halal logo and certification system is recognized in the UK as no single body in this market

officially acts as a halal certifier ([http://edms.matrade.gov.my/domdoc/Reports.nsf/svReport/86763F1A9777C47A482571010012E74B/\\$File/PMS-%20Halal_1.doc?OpenElement](http://edms.matrade.gov.my/domdoc/Reports.nsf/svReport/86763F1A9777C47A482571010012E74B/$File/PMS-%20Halal_1.doc?OpenElement)).

Because of these regulations Jeti advises companies on which allowed halal products that can be exported into the EU. These products can now be found in stores in London and elsewhere. Because these products are 'all plant-based' it is relatively easy to have them halal certified by JAKIM.

Another part of Jeti's consultancy work is to assist companies in the proper placement of JAKIM halal logos. 'Most of the time', JAKIM is flexible about the placement of the logos and Jeti, JAKIM and the company in question 'sit down and discuss' this issue. The placement of the logo 'also depends on the market: in Europe and the UK we normally put the logo at the back to make it less prominent whereas in Malaysia we make it prominent because people don't feel threatened.' Jeti is also involved in halal product innovation with companies, that is, replacing questionable animal ingredients with vegetable halal ones, for example.

GETTING HALAL CERTIFIED IN THE UK

Another aspect of her work focuses on assisting Malaysian companies to ensure halal certification by local halal certifiers in the UK such as the Halal Food Authority (HFA)(www.halalfoodauthority.co.uk) and the Halal Monitoring Committee (HMC) Halal Monitoring Committee (HMC) (www.halalmc.co.uk). These two organizations are competitors with overlapping interests and claims for authority in the halal market in the UK.⁴ For example, Jeti put a Malaysian company in contact with HMC and also a Malay-owned restaurant in London that specializes in Malaysian halal food. These local halal certification bodies play an important role in the halal network as they are leading halal organizations in the UK where JAKIM has no authority. Hence, networking between these certifiers and Malay entrepreneurs is important for the Malaysian state in order to establish and expand the halal network.

A large part of my fieldwork took place in halal restaurants, particularly Malaysian ones. It was in these restaurants I ate halal food and discussed halal with Malay entrepreneurs and restaurant owners. Several of the most popular Malaysian restaurants in London advertise themselves as 'Malaysian (halal) cuisine' on signs. These restaurants are also important networking locations where business and entrepreneurship are discussed and practised.

The forging of a Malaysian national cuisine has fused with aspirations for Malaysia to become a world leader in halal. In fact, on November 4, 2006, the BBC (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/6116878.stm>), under the heading 'Malaysia Dishes Out to Raise Profile,' announced that the Malaysian government is trying to 'raise the country's international profile' and offer businessmen and entrepreneurs cash incentives to open 'thousands' of Malaysian restaurants worldwide.

Compared to HFA that Jeti considers 'faster, easier', HMC is 'very strict' and the certification process took six months to complete. In detail HMC wanted to know about the source of the chicken and beef and requested proof from the local halal butcher that supplied the meat. However, when Jeti compares HFA as well as HMC certification to JAKIM state halal certification the latter is seen to be trustworthier and this is also the case among Malay middle-class consumers in London more generally (Fischer 2011). Similarly, Jeti also helped another company getting halal certified and first ensured 'easy' certification by Islamic Food Council of Europe (IFCE) and International and Food and Nutritional Council of America (IFANCA) – two major certification bodies. As we saw it above,

⁴ For a more extensive discussion of these organizations see Fischer 2011 Chap 3: 69-88.

compared to JAKIM certification these types of certification she considers 'much easier, but also more doubtful because you just register online and they scan in the certificate and email it to the company.' JAKIM is also far more particular about lists over approved ingredients compared to the non-state certifying bodies. Certificates are renewable on a yearly basis and ingredient lists can be changed on a weekly or even daily basis and Jeti argues that this is due to 'current knowledge' and the increasing role of scientific research that often uncovers questionable or haram ingredients.

An essential part of Jeti's work consists of cooperating with PPIM, JAKIM and MATRADE. She advises these and 'give them feedback on what's happening out there' building on her extensive experience with halal in the European market and the UK in particular – for example the workings of the non-state certifiers discussed above. Even if some of these non-state certifiers are recognized by JAKIM an entrepreneur such as Jeti is more in touch with the everyday working of these organizations.

BETWEEN STATE AND ACTIVISM

Jeti was working closely with HDC when halal authority reverted to JAKIM and she lost contact with HDC. It was a good idea to form HDC she contends, but JAKIM possesses more authority, responsibility, accountability and resources compared to HDC that seems overly commercial. The Halal Act (a piece of legislation that was passed in Malaysian Parliament in 2011) would ensure that halal certification was not abused and that sanctions against halal offences were far more heavily enforced. This strengthens JAKIM's legal status and thus the regulation of halal and would also have a positive effect on Jeti's work: a stronger emphasis on enforcing certification as a 'point of reference that stresses that you are accountable. Logos are not just something you print out. Soon we will have a halal barcode to avoid forgery.'

In the eyes of Jeti there is one major difference between halal and its certification in particular comparing Malaysia and the UK: the state is not really involved in regulating halal in the UK and this leaves this market open to a plethora of irregularities and competing local certifiers. Even if resources are limited in regulating the UK market for halal, the Muslim consumer movement, local mosques and volunteer inspectors/auditors evoke an activist spirit in the urban setting of London that is long gone in Malaysia since the state centralized halal regulation in the 1980s. In contemporary Malaysia, Jeti argues, halal has become a career for paid employees rather than a calling. She is involved in volunteer work with HMC that is quite different from the working with JAKIM.

When I discussed the Malaysian state's vision to 'globalize' halal and a Malaysian (halal) cuisine with Jeti she complained that the current Malaysian political leadership was not 'capitalistic' enough for this vision to be fulfilled. The point here is that halal is to a large extent a question of state or political backing, that is, as an entrepreneur that is promoted as playing an important role in the Malaysian state's vision of a halal network she is not sufficiently backed by this state.

CONCLUSION

An important theme was economics in relation to Islam and Malaysia's role in the global market for religious/ethnic commodities. Now capitalism is adjusting to the recent requirements of a growing number of Muslims, and the Islamic market is expanding rapidly. Consequently, halal also signifies a type of globalized religious market that covers new types of commodities and services. Several of these new commodities, for example the products Jeti helped companies produce and certify, were present at the WFM in London. The proliferation of halal in London sits uneasily between an

economic dimension linked to investment and trade: the Malaysian vision to become a world leader in halal and the globalization of a Malaysian national halal cuisine and a future aspect to a large extent nourished by political and Islamic diasporic aspirations. Simultaneously, global capitalism is making peace with cultural diversity.

I have shown how the Malaysian state promotes its vision of a halal network enabling Malaysia to sell halal commodities through the business of ethnic Malay Muslim entrepreneurs globally. Today, modern halal is part of a huge and expanding globalized market in which capitalism, Islam, and the state are entangled leading to a combination of business management principles and Muslim practice. The existence of a halal network is fuelled by the revival and expansion of ancient Islamic trade networks vis-à-vis powerful networks of the other. Moreover, 9/11 boosted the state and corporate halal discourse in Malaysia identifying Malaysia as a 'moderate' Muslim country and key player in global halal network.

The halal network is intimately tied to Malaysian and global network events, that is, the Malaysian halal network is to a large extent enacted through and at these halal network events. The emergence of more and more different types of halal network events signifies the diversification and globalization of these events. Imagined halal networks always involve some form of location and are thus both political and moral constructions of space and place that are never free from the political, commercial and religious ties that imagined them.

Halal in Malaysia cannot be divorced from economic growth, the emergence of large groups of Malay Muslim middle-class entrepreneurs and consumers, and centralized state incentives to strengthen halal production, trade, and consumption. Bureaucratically certified halal by the ethnicized state fuels visions and efforts to develop and control the halal market as an economic, religious, and political network. In other words, halal networks and networking play important roles in the Malaysian vision to become a world leader in halal that is also nourished by political and Islamic diasporic aspirations.

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