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## **Halal Activism**

Networking between Islam, the State and Market

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## **Halal Activism: Networking between Islam, State, and Market**

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this article is to further our understanding of contemporary Muslim consumer activism in Malaysia with a particular focus on halal (in Arabic, literally “permissible” or “lawful”) products and services. Muslim activists and organizations promote halal on a big scale in the interface zones between new forms of Islamic revivalism, the ethnicized state, and Muslim consumer culture. Organizations such as Muslim Consumers Association of Malaysia play an important role in pushing and protecting halal in Malaysia, that is, halal activists constantly call on the state to tighten halal regulation and they also at times call for boycotting products that are associated with haram (literally, “prohibited”) impurity and unwanted foreign influences. I argue that insufficient attention has been paid to the micro-social logics of modern forms of religious consumer activism and networking in particular historical/national settings and that these issues should be explored in the interfaces between Islam, state, and market. More specifically, this article examines the above issues building on ethnography from fieldwork with three Muslim organizations in Malaysia.

### **Keywords**

Islam, Malaysia, halal, state, activism, networks

I am in the SembangSembang Café<sup>1</sup> in The Mall in central Kuala Lumpur. The Mall is comparable to the multitude of other shopping malls in Kuala Lumpur, but it also stands out by housing the SembangSembang Café. The café is run by Persatuan Pengguna Islam Malaysia or in English the Muslim Consumers Association of Malaysia (PPIM) that is an organization protecting the interests of (Malay) Muslim consumers and entrepreneurs. The Café provides shelf space for PPIM members’ (halal) products and PPIM and its café is an essential space for Malay Muslim entrepreneurial networking. I am discussing halal with PPIMs Executive Secretary and a friend of mine, a Malay entrepreneur Altaf I have known from halal events such as Malaysia International Halal Showcase (MIHAS) since 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. It is through this entrepreneur that I have come into contact with PPIM. Both Altaf and the PPIM Executive Secretary are part of what I shall call the halal network and the Café plays an important role in the way in which this activist and entrepreneurial networking is practiced. The networking and activities of PPIM and its

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<sup>1</sup> In Bahasa Malaysia sembang-sembarang means “casual conversation” or “chatting”.

members that take place in the Café do not directly involve the state, but PPIMs role is essential in order to understand the proliferation of halal in Malaysia and beyond: ways in which Malay Muslim interest groups network and protect Malay Muslim privileges through promoting Muslim products and businesses, and halal in particular. In the eyes of these groups, the state dominated by the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), the dominant political party in Malaysia since independence from Britain in 1957, is unable or reluctant to deliver enough support for these demands.

Malaysia holds a special position in the rapidly expanding global market for halal products, that is, it is one of the only countries in which a state body (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia or the Islamic Development Department of Malaysia (JAKIM)) regulates halal products, spaces (shops, factories and restaurants) as well as work processes. Over the past three decades, Malaysia has become a world leader in the global expansion of halal markets. This has come about in large part because the state and government of Malaysia have taken on the role of halal-certifying authority within the country. In effect, it has certified, standardized, and bureaucratized halal production, trade and consumption in a way that made it possible to extend these standards abroad. In shops around the world, consumers can find state halal-certified products from Malaysia that carry distinctive halal logos.

This article examines how halal activists in Malaysia try to expand halal requirements to cover more and more products and processes and lobby for the state to incorporate these requirements into halal production, trade, consumption, and regulation. An important question here is how these activists work in the interface zones between new forms of Islamic revivalism, the ethnicized state, and Muslim consumer culture and protection in markets. Halal activism has a long history in Malaysia and it is a driving force behind the way in which halal has developed, but empirically this is not well understood. This article asks and answers this research question: *how is modern Malay Muslim consumer activism between Islam, state and market affecting the promotion of halal in Malaysia?* This article forms part of a larger research project with the title *Islam, Standards, and Technoscience: In Global Halal Zones* (Fischer 2015). The central topic of this book is on “the bigger institutional picture” that frames everyday halal consumption, the contact zones or interface zones between Islam and markets through techniques like production, trade, and standards. Focusing on Malaysia and Singapore, I provide a multisited ethnography of the overlapping technologies and techniques of production, trade, and standards that together warrant a product as “halal” and thereby help to format the market. Below I shall explore three organizations that promote halal in Malaysia. Even if these organizations have the same aim I will explore them independently and not systematically focus on their connections. However, in the conclusion I do reflect on how two of these organizations together cooperate with JAKIM.

The methodology of this study is based on participant observation and interviews undertaken between 2009–2012 with state bureaucracies, Islamic consumer activists and manufacturers in Malaysia, but also

periods of fieldwork in Malaysia undertaken since the 1990s. This paper is divided into nine sections. Following this introduction, I discuss how this article speaks to some broader conceptual and theoretical issues such as state, networks, and consumption/anti-consumption. Then follows an examination of why and how the Malaysian national context is of special significance. Subsequently, I discuss modern and globalized halal before moving on to explore three organizations that each in their way promote and protect halal. The conclusion ties the findings of the article together and reflects on how Muslim consumption/anti-consumption and networking are given new expression in the interfaces between Islam, state, and market.

### **Muslim Consumer Activism between State, Networking and Standards**

Under the heading *Cadbury chocolate has been found not to contain pork DNA by Islamic authorities in Malaysia* (<http://www.bbc.com/news/business-27663857>) BBC on 2 June 2014 reported that tests on two Cadbury products had suggested they might not have been suitable for Muslims, but that new tests by JAKIM found no traces of pork in a range of Cadbury products. Still, PPIM would maintain its call for a boycott of Cadbury chocolate. The boycott would only be lifted should the earlier tests be acknowledged as wrong, PPIM said. Eventually, all Cadbury products were cleared of suspicion and products now lived up to halal standards by the Malaysian state and carried its halal logo.

To my mind, the power concentrated with the state in the form of symbolic capital to bureaucratize, standardize, and certify ideas and practices of halal in Malaysia qualifies as a state effect: the modern state is materializing out of “the powerful, apparently, metaphysical effect of practices” (Mitchell, 1999: 89). In this understanding the state is an effect of different kinds of practices and disciplinary power while state, society, and economy cannot be clearly separated. Following Mitchell, in order to explore the elusiveness of the state-society boundary, I examine complex political processes surrounding Muslim consumer activism and the promotion of halal from a historical and ethnographic perspective. Conceptually, this exploration entails networks and forms of Muslim consumer activism.

An important point here is that the state in Malaysia, which is often understood to be secular in nature, is itself at the “forefront of the Islamization process rejecting the logics of secularism” (Liow, 2009: 192). Thus, the state in Malaysia is subjected to Islamization by a wide range of Muslim groups and political parties on the one hand and from within by political elites and bureaucrats. Halal has not been systematically explored from the perspective of legal anthropology and this article explores broader questions such as the spectacle of attempts at intentional control and planning, and publicly rationalized imperative decision-making (Moore, 1978: 8) as well as emphasis on legal transactions, disputes, and rules seen in the dimension of time (Moore, 1978: 256). An example of this is the hype surrounding the passing of a new Halal Act in Malaysia in 2010 that severely tightened halal regulation and enforcement.

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). Networks and networking are essential tools, technologies, or techniques for individuals, social groups, organizations, states, and nations. The importance of “hubs” is to produce the strategic functions of the network. Hence, “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).

The Malaysian state’s vision to become the world leader in halal 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 of the UMNO-led government, such as communications and internationalization. They are also evoked in the context of Malaysia as an emerging “global halal hub.”

Annelise Riles book, *The Network Inside Out*, examines the participation of Fijian women in the United Nations’ fourth global forum. One of Riles’ central insights is that the effectiveness of networks is generated by its self-description (Riles 2000, 172). A similar observation can be made about the halal network in Malaysia. This article also builds on theories of network sociality as cultural forms that increasingly are important components of economic, social, and cultural relations (Mische and Harrison, 1998; Otis, 2001). These types of studies regard networks as forms of activities, discourses, stories, and performances in certain times and places.

Groups of Malay entrepreneurs in Kuala Lumpur and beyond are actively engaged in strategic brainstorming sessions about who they could access in their multiplex networks for support (Sloane, 1999: 22) and in many cases connections to important people in the network went through UMNO contacts. These entrepreneurs used the English words for network and networking. In the mother tongue of the Malays, *Bahasa Malaysia*, “network” is translated into *rangkaian* (cluster). Government ministers use this term to establish a Malay language for business and also to encourage Malays to create Chinese-like business societies (Sloane, 1999: 21). Now the state encourages these Malay entrepreneurs to network in global halal zones, that is, strategically promote halal in the global market with state backing.

Of particular relevance here is the emergence of Malay Muslim consumer activism: why people choose or reject a product or brand. Even if anti-consumption research focuses on reasons against consumption rather than pro-social movements, I show that the distinction between the two is not always

easy to maintain (Michael et al., 2009: 145). Existing scholarship on politically motivated brand rejection among Muslim consumers (Sandikci and Ekici, 2009) explores this as an emergent form of anti-consumption behavior. Three sets of political ideologies can lead to consumer rejection of certain brands, that is, predatory globalization, chauvinistic nationalism, and religious fundamentalism and I shall discuss how these issues are understood and practiced in the Malaysian context. In a broader perspective political consumption relies on market actions and consumer choice as political tools (Micheletti, 2003; Micheletti et al., 2003) that potentially can change existing institutional or market relations.

Boycotts urge consumers to withdraw selectively from participating in the marketplace (Friedman, 1999: 5) as we saw it in the case of Cadburys above. In Friedman's taxonomy of boycotts, the case of boycotting suspected haram products in Malaysia qualifies as a media-oriented and action-requested boycott, that is, announcing that the boycott is being called, and that appropriate action is necessary (Friedman, 1999: 10). The relatively limited literature on boycotting in theory and practice falls into two broad categories. The first explores boycotting from a macro-historical, geo-political, and political economy perspective with emphasis on economic behavior as a particular form of resistance. An example of such conceptualizations of boycotting is Feiler's (1998) study of the evolution of the Arab economic boycott of Israel, the longest-lasting example of economic sanctions in the 20th century. The second interpretation, mostly emerging within market research and cultural studies, examines boycotting from a micro-cultural perspective stressing the need to understand boycotting as an expression of distinction, taste, individuality, ideology, or resistance to globalization seen as cultural imperialism (Littler, 2005; Klein, Smith, and Andrew, 2002, 2004; Sen, Gürhan-Canli, and Morwitz, 2001).

I suggest that our understanding of boycotting theory and practice could benefit from further elaboration in a number of respects. Firstly, in an era where globalization and anti-globalization have become everyday catchphrases, a study that considers local, national and global effects of boycotting seems to be overdue. Secondly, the complex relationship, or tension, between consumer culture, boycotting, politics, and halal has not been systematically explored. Finally, I place these issues in the context of networking between Islam, state, and market by Muslim consumer activists. As we shall see, promoting and protecting halal can signify what Friedman (1999: 11) conceptualized as a buycott, being a type of positive boycott with a twist where the focus is on what to buy. Typically, a buycott will encourage consumers to buy locally manufactured products or may work as efforts by consumer activists to induce shoppers to buy products or services of selected companies (Friedman 1996: 440). I have explored the political and cultural effects of the Malaysian Islamic opposition's call to boycott US goods in Malaysia in the wake of 9/11 (Fischer 2007). This issue evokes a wide range of contestations and paradoxes in the everyday lives of Malay Muslim middle-class families. Most of all, the boycott confronts divergent Malay middle-class groups with the problem of how to translate intentionality into practice.

However, parallel to these calls for boycotts are calls to buycotts that encourage Muslim consumers to buy locally manufactured and state-certified halal products for example.

To sum up, a particular form of Muslim consumer culture and activism between Islam, state, and market has emerged in Malaysia. As we shall see, Muslim consumer groups and activists constantly call on and network for the state to widen and deepen its halal engagement in a Muslim consumer culture context.

### **Between Islam, State, and Market in Malaysia**

I shall now consider the relationship between Islam, state, and market in Malaysia. Economically, Malaysia has sustained rapid development within the past three decades and the meaning of Islam has become evermore contested in that period. Even though virtually all Malays are Muslim and speak the Malay language, the contestation of Islam produces a range of diverse lifestyles. Islam, or more accurately, the social and moral meaning of what is properly Islamic, is contested and there are competing attempts to incorporate it into both state institutions and a multitude of everyday practices. Of the Malaysian population of around 28 million in 2010, about 67 percent are indigenous Malays (virtually all Muslims) and tribal groups that together are labeled *bumiputera* (literally, sons of the soil); 25 percent are Chinese; and 7 percent are Indians (<http://www.statistics.gov.my>).

Darul Arqam or the House of Arqam was an Islamic group whose believers sought to follow the behavior of the Prophet Muhammad in everyday life. Arqam cultivated and marketed an Islamic vision of Malay independence and prosperity through the production of a wide range of halal food products. Ideally, this vision was to ensure the group full independence from any kind of non-Muslim control. Arqam successfully promoted this vision of communal self-sufficiency, and their halal goods were traded throughout peninsular Malaysia. However, the state effectively curbed Arqam as the vanguard of global halal proliferation and regulation and concentrated its certification in the realm of the state where it has remained. However, there are still many alternative halal logos in existence in Malaysia. As we shall see below, many of these can be found in the SembangSembang Café and ironically they are a product of halal activism that pushes for the support of and legal protection of national halal in Malaysia and beyond (Fischer, 2008; 2011).

To preempt *dakwah* groups such as Darul Arqam, but also Parti SeIslam Malaysia (PAS), the Islamic opposition party enjoying widespread popularity, the state started to “nationalize” Islam and Malaysian Islam may be the most monolithic and most state regulated in the Muslim world. Darul Arqam was an influential example of *dakwah*, but several other organizations have played significant roles (Ackerman and Lee, 1997; Jomo and Cheek, 1992; Nagata, 1984; Zainah, 1987). It is by no means clear how this Islamic way of life is put into practice, and *dakwah* devotion has undergone relatively unnoticed

processes of individualization and domestication. *Dakwah* is both an ethnic and a political phenomenon, which has transformed Malaysia for Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

Ever since UMNO's foundation, the party has insisted on the inescapable bonds between nation, state, Islam, and Malayness on the one hand, and an ideology built on Malay privileges and domination on the other. These tendencies are reinforced by Malay Muslim interest groups that push for Malay rights and privileges and the promotion as well as tighter regulation of halal.

In the 1970s, the state launched the NEP (New Economic Policy) 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. The number and proportion of Malays engaged in the modern sector of the economy rose significantly as a product of these policies. Ideologically, the overall objective was to produce an educated, entrepreneurial, and shareholding New Malay middle class, which the state elite views as a necessary prerequisite for economic, national and social cohesion. NEP has brought about a marked propensity of the Bumiputera electorate to lean heavily towards the state for solutions to their problems (Gomez, 1994: 290).

After coming to power in 1981, Malaysia's charismatic and outspoken Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad, set off a wave of institutionalizing and regulating halal. In this way Mahathir actively nationalized the proliferation of halal and concentrated its bureaucratization and certification in the realm of the state where it has since remained. According to Mahathir (1995: 1), the New Malay embodies an aggressive, entrepreneurial and global "we can" mentality that abandons feudalistic values of traditionalism, excess, luxury and privilege. These official ideas of a New Malay work ethic were to set new standards for the realization of national modernity. In other words, in a developing economy such as Malaysia, the emergent middle class has become an almost mythical national signifier of mental and material development – New Malays are also a driving force as consumers and in Muslim consumer activism.

Islamic consumption in Malaysia has been subjected to state and business intervention in the form of extensive market research and the political institutionalization of consumption, for example the setting up of the Ministry of Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs in 1990. Clearly, this is a sign of the state's bid to protect the entitlements of Malay(sian) consumers against what the state and consumers increasingly see as confusing, globalized, and excessive consumer culture. Consumers' trust in and dependence on the state as an honest broker in consumption legitimates state intervention regarding the right ways to shop as well as guidance in terms of public debates about value. However, in multiethnic Malaysia the state cannot solely promote and protect Malay Muslim consumer interests and this is why Muslim consumer organizations such as PPIM and others play a major role in safeguarding the rights and privileges of

Malays.

### **Halal Resignified**

The global halal trade annually amounts to \$632 billion and it is rapidly growing (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada 2011). 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 there are a number of conditions and prohibitions. Muslims are expressly forbidden to consume 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. Another significant Islamic prohibition relates to wine and any other intoxicating drink or substance (Denny, 2006: 279).

In the modern food industry, a number of requirements have been made in relation to halal food, for example to avoid any substances that may be contaminated with porcine residues or alcohol such as gelatin, glycerin, emulsifiers, enzymes, flavors and flavorings (Riaz and Chaudry, 2004: 22–25). Moreover, 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. Halal commodities and markets are no longer expressions of esoteric forms of production, trade, regulation and consumption but part of a huge and expanding globalized market. Muslim dietary rules assumed new significance in the twentieth century, as some Muslims began striving to demonstrate how such rules conform to modern reason and the findings of scientific research. Another common theme in the revival and renewal of these dietary rules seems to be the search for alternatives to what are seen to be Western values, ideologies, and lifestyles. These tendencies took on special importance from 2001 onwards.

The article *The Halal Way to Free Trade* (*New Straits Times* May 11, 2006) asserted that

In the years since Sept 11 terror attacks, 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 while supply, still highly localised and inward looking, struggles to catch up.

However, it was far from only 9/11 that shaped to Malaysian halal sentiments. A major food scandal in

Indonesia in 2001 triggered a new phase of halal proliferation on a global scale. The Majelis Ulama Indonesia or Indonesian Ulemas Council (in English), set up by the Indonesian state in 1975, accused a Japanese company of using pork products in the production of the flavor enhancer monosodium glutamate and demanded that the Indonesian government take appropriate action. It was a serious accusation: if true, the company would have violated halal rules, which forbid Muslims from eating any pork or pork-derived products.

As a consequence of the scandal, several of the company's employees were arrested, and a public apology was issued. It is most likely that the flavor enhancer did not contain any pork products; instead, the company conceded to having replaced a beef derivative with the pork derivative bactosoytone in the production process, for economic reasons. Bactosoytone was used as a medium to cultivate bacteria that produce the enzymes necessary to make monosodium glutamate. As the products of the company had previously been certified as halal by the Majelis Ulama Indonesia, the scandal seemed to undermine or question the legitimacy of these religious scholars in the eyes of millions of Muslim consumers. The scandal also made it clear that even multinational companies can come into conflict with the rising number of Muslim consumers and organizations if they overlook or disregard religiously inspired customs. To sum up, 9/11 and the food scandal in Indonesia had a marked impact on the way in which halal was produced, consumed, promoted, and regulated in Malaysia. I now turn to a discussion of three activist organizations, namely KasehDia, Yayasan Ekonomi Sejagat (Foundation for Global Economics), and PPIM that all each in their own way promote and protect halal between Islam, state and market.

### **KasehDia: Commercial Activism**

KasehDia was formed in 1999 as a communication and consulting company stressing Islamic values. The company engages in publication, events, branding, and consultancy. Arguably, it is the world's first company of its kind in the halal industry: KasehDia is the creator and organizer of the World Halal Forum (WHF) (a leading global halal event that brings together Islamic organizations, certifiers and companies) and MIHAS discussed above. Being the organizer of WHF KasehDia is central to the way in which the Malaysian halal network is practiced at major halal events or stages where the corporate sector, academia, NGOs, Islamic organizations, halal certifiers, and governments from around the world convene.

At WHF 2010 KasehDia's founder, Jumaatun Azmi, specifically addressed the confusion caused among companies and certifying bodies by the friction between JAKIM and HDC.<sup>2</sup> She called for a

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<sup>2</sup> The Halal Industry Development Corporation (HDC) was established on September 18, 2006. Its main purpose was to take over JAKIM's responsibilities and co-ordinate the overall development of the industry with its main focus being the

strong “masterplan” and “leadership” applicable to all stakeholders in the industry to address the inability of government agencies to work together. More specifically, she took comfort in the move to corporatize HDC as an agency under the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) to prepare and implement an action plan for the development of the Halal Act. During my fieldwork in 2010 the Halal Act was yet to be passed. At the time everyone was waiting for a proposed Halal Act, that is, a piece of legislation that once passed in Parliament would ensure that halal certification was not abused and that sanctions against halal offenses were far more heavily enforced.<sup>3</sup> Hence, the Halal Act would empower JAKIM to not only manage and issue halal certification, but also stronger enforcement on misuse. JAKIM was drafting the law together with the Prime Minister’s Department and the Attorney-General’s Chambers.<sup>4</sup> The Halal Act came into being on November 1, 2011 and it contained amendments to the Trade Description Act 1972 and provided stiffer penalties for those using fake halal certificates or logos.<sup>5</sup> This move would hopefully ensure “proper coordination” when all the “key” agencies under MITI could be “streamlined”, the KasehDia founder argued.

The company publishes the book series *Guide to Good Eating* by Jumaatun Azmi that is handbooks to halal food in Kuala Lumpur, Thailand, Australia, and London. The multiplicity and ambiguity involved in the processes of halal production, certification, marketing, and consumption is addressed in the handbook *Halal Food: A Guide to Good Eating—Kuala Lumpur* (Azmi 2003). In the book, over a hundred restaurants, takeaway counters, and cafés in Kuala Lumpur are listed and reviewed. Much more than strictly traditional halal requirements are involved in guiding Muslim consumers: the spatial context (atmosphere/feel/ambience) of food consumption as practice may be just as significant as the intrinsic qualities of the food and its ingredients. The various establishments are classified according to their halalness, for example, whether alcohol is sold or food is produced and served by Muslims or non-Muslims. In the introduction the authors explicitly state that they are referring to and relying on the official channels of Malaysian halal certification and not on their personal preferences (Azmi, 2003: IX). All of this is expressive of new formations of meta-industries that are beyond the strictly religious focus on halal/haram dichotomies and halal certification, but instead target the marketing, pluralization, and promotion of halal as a brand or logo of the Malaysian state.

KasehDia also publishes *The Halal Journal: Business, Lifestyle, Trends*. In May 2006, I met the Director of KasehDia at the luxurious Palace of the Golden Horses outside Kuala Lumpur, where he was

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development of halal standards, audit, certification, capacity building for halal products and services, as well as to promote and facilitate growth and participation of Malaysian companies in the global halal market. ([www.hdcglobal.com](http://www.hdcglobal.com)).

<sup>3</sup> *New Straits Times* February 27, 2010: Standard halal cert, symbol to beat fakes.

<sup>4</sup> *New Straits Times* February 17, 2010: JAKIM: Law on halal logo by year-end.

<sup>5</sup> *New Straits Times* May 7, 2010: Stiffer penalties for using fake halal logos.

giving a talk on the activities of KasehDia. The Director argues that the Malaysian state's focus on halal is finally being acknowledged by "industry giants" confirming their positions in the halal market, with Nestlé, Tesco (a U.K.-based international grocery and merchandising retail chain). He explained that halal in Malaysia was not only about state certification, but also that halal was now understood as a "business" and had become "Value-Added Marketing" on products. Now, producers suddenly saw themselves as an industry or network in their own right that could realize the global potential of halal. Malaysia is set apart, as the Director explained, by the "political goodwill" behind the promotion of Malaysia's "tradition" of halal on a global scale, that is, a type of network in which the state and companies have come together.

During my research I have been in contact with KasehDia many times, for example KasehDia representatives have attended a talk I gave at University Kebangsaan Malaysia or in English the Malaysian National University in 2010. That same year during fieldwork in Malaysia I visited KasehDia in Kuala Lumpur. The first of the two representatives I met with came from Australia. He has a technical background and holds a BA in environmental management with as specialization in technology foresighting. Previously, he worked with marketing for research and development companies and also Malaysian Institute of Industrial Research and Standards (SIRIM). The other representative present is a Malay man that is educated in international business at Nottingham University, Malaysia Campus. He worked for a transnational accountancy firm with special emphasis on advisory corporate governance.

In 2010 KasehDia had grown to have more than 30 employees since its founding by Jumaatun Azmi in 1999. Her main motivation for starting KasehDia was dissatisfaction with the availability of halal in Australia and elsewhere and a more general wish to expand the market for Islamic products. Thus, what started as a kind of consumer activism transformed into entrepreneurship and close cooperation with the state. In 2004, KasehDia started MIHAS and subsequently *The Halal Journal*, the *Guide to Good Eating* book series, as well as a more general focus on communication, products, values, events, and research based on an Islamic perspective.

The majority of the staff is Muslim while two senior members are not. Even if this is not central to the organization, the representatives call this a "sensitivity issue". The main philosophy is that activities have to be based on "good Islamic values" and it is often an advantage that Muslim employees deal with Muslim customers. Similarly, the representatives find that hiring Muslim employees with "Syariah knowledge" (Syariah is the local spelling of "Shari'a" in Malaysia) is an advantage in the everyday working life of KasehDia. The company also does consultancies in Singapore, Thailand, and in Indonesia in connection with the palm oil industry, for example. KasehDia is not financially supported by the Malaysian state, but it carries out a variety of services for state institutions, that is, the company is not formally government-linked.

An important question stood out during my discussions with the KasehDia representatives, namely

that “If you’re Muslim you don’t really need halal certification”, that is, as long as halal is handled by Muslims it is seen to be proper in itself. However, in a globalized market non-Muslims will always be involved somehow and this is where halal regulation comes in, and especially the tightening of regulation in the form of the Halal Act. The dilemma is that in Malaysia Muslims are conventionally seen to embody proper halal handling, skills, or qualifications. This, however, is changing as halal increasingly is regulated and legally enforced. Thus, individualized Malay Muslim classifications of halal are being subjected to more formally and legally backed forms of standardization.

One of the KasehDia representatives wrote an article in *The Halal Journal* on the need for tightened legislation that was to become the Halal Act. This piece of legislation would centralize certification procedures with the Malaysian state to avoid a mix of all kinds of certifications. Hopefully, the Halal Act would remove the confusion caused by the struggle over authority between JAKIM and HDC. In the eyes of the KasehDia representatives, JAKIM is the traditional authority in halal regulation in Malaysia that embodies the Islamic ethos whereas HDC was supposed to be the modern coordination body that unfortunately “tried to do too much and not lived up to what they claimed they would do.” In any case, HDC would function as a “reference center” in the future halal market in Malaysia.

KasehDia representatives speculated about the exact contents of the Act and how this would affect the relationship between halal markets and regulatory institutions and KasehDia’s role in this. Representatives agree that the Halal Act was long overdue and that “it could only be a good thing” when considering the state of confusion of the global and local markets for halal. They hoped for increased halal “accreditation” by the Malaysian state so that more halal certification bodies, based on Malaysian International Standards Organization (ISO) halal standards, would be recognized by the Malaysian state. However, there was concern that with such tightened legislation in the future form it would take, JAKIM would be “overloaded”, which would cause confusion. For example, many restaurants run by Muslims were not halal certified and if they were to be so as part of the Halal Act this would necessitate that a lot of resources were put into regulating this. One of the critiques of JAKIM coming from companies KasehDia works with was that the certification procedure was too long and subsequently this was cut down from three months to one month. In the wake of tightened legislation and regulation the representatives feared that it would be difficult to maintain such efficiency in the future. Hence, one thing is the need for tightened legislation and regulation and quite another matter is allocating sufficient resources for enforcing this.

KasehDia is a good example of a halal organization that is both a company and an interest group simultaneously. The organization cooperates with the state while pushing this same state to proliferate and regulate halal stringently. Simultaneously, the company offers consultancy services in Malaysia and elsewhere. KasehDia has been instrumental in establishing not only a platform for commercial Muslim

consumer activism in Malaysia, but also a halal network.

### **YES:<sup>6</sup> State Activism**

YES is a non-profit organization established in 2006 under the Companies Act of 1965 that regulates the behavior of companies in Malaysia. According to YES (YES n.d) the organization is entrusted with implementing Economic Development programs based on Halalan-Toyyiban Principles, that is, halal and pure principles. However, these principles are not enough. The Halalan-Toyyiban Program serves as a platform for the socio-economic development of the community and it uses Halal-Toyyiban standards as the base to enhance the capacity and capability of participants in the food production and product handling areas. Enhanced capacity and capability are translated into local and global “trade facilitation” as a network for producers, buyers, consumers, and other related parties in the halal food industry. YES facilitates the collaboration and self-reliance of the Ummah to “stimulate, inculcate, promote, motivate and coordinate social economic and economic development.”

The Koran and Hadith (traditions concerning the life and works of the Prophet Muhammad) “provide the main source of reference and enabler to achieve synergy and consistency”. Compared to KasehDia, YES shares more of the traditional aims of *dakwah*, that is, the aim on fusing Islamic, political, social, and economic issues to ensure Malay Muslim privileges. Another difference is that while KasehDia also employs non-Muslims YES is overwhelmingly a Malay Muslim organization. While YES formally is set up by the state, it has the status of a company and this multiplicity allows it to articulate strong Malay Muslim views that are not directly coming from the state. Partners and sponsors of YES are the Malaysian state, Malaysian Islamic Chamber of Commerce, The Muslim Consumers Association of Malaysia, Research Institute of Standards in Islam as well as various NGOs, Government-Linked Companies (GLCs), and financial institutions.

The woman entrepreneur, Altaf, put me in contact with YES. I first met with a leading representative of YES at the organization’s headquarters in the lush greenery of Bukit Persekutuan<sup>7</sup> at the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur. The taxi driver jokingly told me that Bukit Persekutuan is also called Bukit Tunku because Malaysia’s first PM Tunku Abdul Rahman’s house was located here and more generally this is an elite residential area. The YES representative knew about my work on halal and was most accommodating during my extended period of fieldwork. He was educated as an architectural engineer in the US in the 1980s and now worked with project management for companies such as YES. At the same time, he sat on several JAKIM committees and other committees, for example working on certification

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<sup>6</sup> Yayasan Ekonomi Sejahtera (YES) or in English Foundation for Global Economics.

<sup>7</sup> Literally, Bukit Persekutuan means “Federal Hill” and it has its name because Kuala Lumpur has the status of Wilayah Persekutuan or Federal Territory.

authority and “who gets halal certified and not”. The YES representative was also involved in the work of PPIM and vice versa. He has been involved in Muslim consumer activism since the 1980s and has “pushed” for standards in that same period.

In the eyes of YES, the formulation and passing of the Halal Act had been an essential issue for a long time and he was confident that it would be passed. The purpose of the Halal Act was to “position” Malaysia in the global halal trade. Historically, the Malaysian background for this was distrust by Muslim consumers and this prompted the state to regulate halal from the 1980s onwards. However, to the YES representative Malaysia was still caught in the trap of excessive focus on individual and group consumer sensitivities that blocked Malaysian halal for “going global”. Lobbying for the Halal Act had been going on for decades and now everyone realized that the Trade Description Act was no longer enough to regulate halal national and globally. “More law and standards”, the YES representative explained to me, were needed in order to move Malaysian halal to a “mandatory” level. In practice, all Islamic councils in Malaysian states had made a federal agreement that involved to “synchronize, standardize a uniform logo”. This process was based on MS 1500 (General Guidelines on the Production, Preparation, Handling, and Storage of Halal Foods) as well as other types of standards that had been launched recently.

To YES, halal had yet to “deliver the desired result for Muslims and Muslim entrepreneurs” such as Altaf. In order to do so legal backing, focused branding, and “moving beyond products towards larger issues of sustainability and environment” in not only Malaysia, but also globally were crucial. Moreover, halal is much more than a religious injunction it also has to do with dietary requirements, the environment, hygiene, organic production, and animal welfare in the modern world, the YES representative asserted. This is an important issue because one of YESs aims is to expand halal into larger global issues and away from the narrow interests of individual Malay Muslim interests.

The novel and much more ambitious approach to halal would take halal “beyond Syariah standards” and this approach was shared by PPIM, as we shall see. In all this the passing of the Halal Act was essential and the legal backing for setting up a Muslim committee in non-Muslim companies would ensure adherence to new standards in halal production and handling. In sum, the new initiatives underway would “move the halal paradigm to be as broad as possible”. Right now, before the law was passed, there was no formal JAKIM requirement to display a halal logo in Malaysian restaurants and corporations, for example. Ideally, certification should be applied systematically “all along the supply chain beyond product certification.” The YES representative explained that even the Muftis in the many Malaysian states as well as the Islamic opposition party PAS supported the halal vision and in this way the whole Malaysian halal project had become a national one: “The whole country is now united in global halal trade backed by consolidated state authority”, the YES representative argued.

The political backing for halal in Malaysia had undergone a series of phases: Mahathir's preemption of *dakwah* through consumer protection often focused on individual states, Badawi's halal vision of Malaysia was that the country became a halal hub (even if this perspective was not clearly defined), and the current administration led by PM Najib continued these initiatives, but also focused on a strong local market in Malaysia in order for the country to participate in the global market for halal. Reforms under PM Badawi, who succeeded Mahathir and was in office from 2003–2009, focused on nurturing smaller bumiputera enterprises. This included encouragement of competitive advantage in Malaysian economy by developing niche markets for halal and Islamic products through a vendor system in which companies were tied to Government-Linked Companies (GLCs), companies controlled by the government, and multinationals such as Carrefour and Tesco.

Halal had become part of the New Economic Model – an economic plan Najib launched in March 2010 just as my fieldwork was starting. The New Economic Model aimed at doubling the per capita income in Malaysia by 2020 and to move away from affirmative action based on Malay Muslim ethnicity towards a more competitive and investor friendly market. The New Economic Model, thus, framed halal as more “global”, “standardized”, and “innovative” lifting it out of being limited to questions of local products and consumer protection. The current government had demonstrated its commitment to halal by allocating large sums for this purpose. PM Najib seemed to be focused on these initiatives and this was critical in order to realize the halal vision.

The controversy between HDC and JAKIM was an important question for YES. Now that JAKIM was the authority in charge the task at hand was to systematize the endorsement of halal certification bodies globally. “HDC did not deliver, flip-flop”, he explained. The uncertainty arising from this controversy undermined Malaysian halal authority and competitive performance among certifiers in Indonesia, Singapore, and Thailand. In short, the political project of promoting halal in Malaysia was “paralyzed”.

When we discussed if halal was “boundless”, that is, should crockery for example ideally be halal certified, YES's position was clear: there is no limit to halal and it could and should expand into all areas of business, but also a sustained environment and business in contradistinction to the immoral ways of the West that had generated the current economic crisis affecting the whole globe. Hence, it was only a matter of time before crockery required certification adhering to the defined Halalan-Toyyiban Principles of YES, that is, halal and pure principles in the “entire supply chain where standards mean a sustainable situation and certification is a way of life.” That would, for example, remove heavy metal from food products. Several production standards stipulate that Muslims must be involved in production, but of course in many cases halal cannot be produced by Muslims alone.

In sum, YES aims at promoting and expanding halal into as many products and services as possible, that is, taking halal to a “mandatory” and “global” level, as it were. During my fieldwork with YES I was introduced to the Executive Secretary of Muslim Consumer Association of Malaysia (PPIM) that runs the SembangSembang Cafe and it is to the work of PPIM I will now turn.

### **PPIM: Muslim Consumer Activism**

PPIM focuses on business development and social responsibility, but also works to assist small and medium sized Muslim enterprises that do not have the working capital required to have their products placed on shelves of supermarkets and hypermarkets. Moreover, the SembangSembang Café provides shelf space for PPIM members’ products free of charge. PPIM also consults with members on their goals and ways to actively promote products and business. The SembangSembang Café is used as a focal point “to encourage Muslim Consumers to support Muslim businesses as well as to actively promote products which are certified halal.” Secondly, the café offers “a range of business and personal enhancement classes and lectures” on themes such as Strategic Partnerships for women in particular that provide the resources for PPIM’s members to secure the finances they require to start businesses. An Event Coordinator is responsible for this training and several classes consisting of women are to graduate from this program. Thirdly, networking and business facilitation are essential for PPIM. The organization argues that many people come to the Café to meet friends, potential business partners, or “those who can nexus business with opportunities!” (<http://sembangcafeppim.blogspot.dk/p/aktiviti.html>).

Besides PPIM and its Executive Secretary’s involvement in halal, the organization has been active in calling for boycotts of Coca-Cola in 2002 among other similar calls to boycott. As we saw it above, it was PPIM’s Executive Secretary who called on authorities to conduct scientific tests on the food seasoning products from Ajinomoto to confirm products were actually halal. JAKIM confirmed that Ajinomoto products in Malaysia were halal after a team inspected the company’s factory. JAKIM advised Muslims to refer to its recommendations should they have any doubt over food products carrying the halal sign. Ajinomoto Malaysia’s GM assured Muslim consumers that its products were halal and that it did not use bactosoytone.<sup>8</sup> However, PPIM called on the authorities to conduct further scientific tests on Ajinomoto’s food seasoning products to confirm products were actually halal. Its Executive Secretary said claims made by the company and JAKIM that the products did not contain pig enzymes were not enough and called on The Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Ministry to conduct tests and make the findings public to instill confidence among consumers.<sup>9</sup> A couple of days later Ajinomoto Malaysia reassured

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<sup>8</sup> *New Straits Times* January 6, 2001: Malaysian Ajinomoto is halal, says JAKIM.

<sup>9</sup> *New Straits Times* January 9, 2001: “Conduct tests to confirm Ajinomoto is halal”.

Muslim consumers that its products were halal responding to the call from PPIM.<sup>10</sup> After having carried out tests on Ajinomoto flavoring powder JAKIM confirmed that it was halal.<sup>11</sup> The food scandal in Indonesia in 2001 triggered a new phase of halal proliferation and regulation on a global scale. The hype in Singapore was comparable to that of Malaysia and MUIS advised Muslims to be careful and inspectors checked supermarkets for Ajinomoto products.<sup>12</sup>

The call to boycott Coca-Cola post 9/11 under the heading “Our program will hurt Coca-Cola” was a protest against American interference in Muslim affairs. PPIMs Executive Secretary said that “The boycott is in response to Western interference in the internal affairs of Muslim countries in the guise of fighting terrorism” (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/2542517.stm>). In spite of these calls to boycott Coca-Cola and similar products, Coca-Cola is of course widely available in Malaysia (Figure 1).

#### INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

Figure 1. JAKIM halal certified Coca-Cola on the shelf in a supermarket in central Kuala Lumpur.

In Malaysia, Coca-Cola is fully halal certified by JAKIM. On Coca-Cola’s Malaysian website ([www.coke.com.my](http://www.coke.com.my)) the company deals with a plethora of rumors about its products – for example denying constant rumors that its beverages contain alcohol and “ingredients extracted from the stomachs of pigs. ... All our soft drinks are non-alcoholic and they don’t contain any ingredients from mammals and poultry.” As early as 1998, PPIM pushed for a halal standard because the organization was concerned with the religious principles in management practices. It was timely for such a standard to be developed, as Muslims worldwide had been dependent on standards set by the West, which might not necessarily comply with Islamic teachings, the Executive Secretary explains. The times I met with PPIMs Executive Secretary in the SembangSembang Café in the The Mall in central Kuala Lumpur we discussed many of the above issues. As we have seen, the Café provides shelf space for PPIM members’ (halal) products and PPIM and its café is an essential space for Malay Muslim entrepreneurial networking.

In May 2010 I discussed halal with Altaf and PPIMs Executive Secretary in the SembangSembang Café. Altaf explained to me that even if she was not very strict about halal in her personal life, halal was extremely important in contemporary Malaysia with respect to the state and companies and also in the eyes of consumer groups such as PPIM and this was the reason we were here today. The Mall is comparable to the multitude of other shopping malls in Kuala Lumpur, but it also stands out by housing the SembangSembang Café – an abundance of material on Islamic and current topics of interest to

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<sup>10</sup> *New Straits Times* January 11, 2001: Ajinomoto reassures Muslims its product is halal.

<sup>11</sup> *New Straits Times* April 12, 2001: Ajinomoto is “halal”.

<sup>12</sup> *ST* February 11 2001: Ajinomoto scandal.

Muslims, including courses and training, are on display and the products on the shelves are produced by Muslims and aimed at a Muslim audience. Two issues were central in our discussions: the need for and expectations to tightened halal laws and the way in which halal is inseparable from Malay rights and privileges in Malaysia.

Networking is ubiquitous in the café: the Executive Secretary's phone constantly rings and texts are received and many people ask his advice on issues related to the main functions of the café – the business interests of Malay Muslims. Small groups of members sit around the Café with mobile phones and laptops and use the free Wi-Fi connection. The Executive Secretary explains to me that he has been involved in the Muslim consumer movement for over 30 years. PPIM encouraged JAKIM to “withdraw” halal logos of Coca-Cola, Starbucks, and Colgate “because of support of the Zionist government, illegal money, oppression, but JAKIM will not do it.” This is an example of the way in which PPIM in the interface zones between Islam and regulation evokes halal to pressure the government to acknowledge that halal is also premised on global questions such as the oppression of Muslims. These points are symptomatic of the “bigger picture” these activist groups promote against a more reluctant and pragmatic state that considers diplomatic relations and “moderate Islam” essential.

An important PPIM critique of the state in Malaysia is that this is not sufficiently involved in acknowledging and supporting Muslim consumption and halal. Hence, because of lack of state support, Muslims are still “backward” in terms of entrepreneurial possibilities – in the eyes of PPIM it is unsatisfactory that so little of halal production, trade, and regulation on a global scale and in Malaysia is in “Muslim hands” and PPIMs work aims at addressing exactly this aspect.

The main objective is no longer to provide proper halal food to Muslims, this objective has to a large extent been met in Malaysia, but to make Muslims see that halal is an “asset” similar to kosher that should be on Muslim hands. PPIM works “actively and proactively” towards these aims, for instance by setting up the SembangSembang Café in which all products and activities contribute towards this aim. Ideally, 90 per cent of employees in the halal industry should be Muslim. Right now, big companies operating in Malaysia often would not even let their Muslim employees go for Friday prayer.

The SembangSembang Café is not directly financially supported by the Malaysian state, but through Muslim companies and individual members' support. Conversely, the products displayed support Muslims and Muslim interests in Malaysia, the Executive Secretary explained. He made clear that the organization has been “pushing” for the Halal Act for a long time and that it was long overdue. This law would also once and for all demonstrate that halal was being regulated by JAKIM as the central state institution in Malaysia erasing the confusion and uncertainty following in the wake of the JAKIM-HDC controversies.

During my fieldwork at SembangSembang I found a wide variety of halal and “Muslim” logos on products. I examined some of the products found on the shelves of SembangSembang and discussed with PPIMs Executive Secretary. One such product on the shelf in the Café is *Fortune Minuman Coco A+* (Figure 2).

INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE

Figure 2. Logos found on Fortune Minuman Coco A+.

It is a coco powder to be mixed with milk or water. The bag displays four logos. The first logo from the left is a “Muslim Product” and “Usahawan (literally, entrepreneur) Muslim” logo with no identifiable organization/certifier behind it. It is the first time the Executive Secretary notices this logo. The second from the left says UsahaOne (literally, “One effort”), but it is not clear what this logo signifies and the Executive Secretary guesses this has to do with “green” production, but it is difficult to guess when there is no identifiable certifier or organization shown. Next is a “Buatan Malaysia” or “Made in Malaysia” logo. Then there is an IMP (Islamic Manufacturing Practice) logo, but neither the Executive Secretary nor the researcher is sure what the logo or the organization behind it more specifically represents. The Executive Secretary argues that even when the Halal Act is passed these “Islamic” logos may be placed on products and elsewhere because most of them reflect Muslim entrepreneurial interests and “wholesomeness” more generally and they do not directly interfere with state halal regulation. Lastly, JAKIMs logo is on display. It is, however, an older version that includes “H-2”, a code that signifies that the product is certified in a particular Malaysian state, Kedah, by the Islamic Council of Kedah. In addition, there is a *Visit Kedah. Heritage, Nature, and Adventure* advertisement on the front of the pack that displays pictures of a traditional Malay house (heritage), a fishing village (nature), and rafting (adventure). This advertisement is part of the Visit Malaysia tourist campaign. Moreover, a “1 Malaysia best” logo showing a picture of the Petronas Towers and KLCC, once arguably the highest buildings in the world with Kuala Lumpur’s most luxurious mall below them, accompanies the Kedah advertisement on the front of the pack.

Then we looked at a glass of Halagel Extra Virgin Olive Oil capsules that is marketed as a health supplement. The outer shell of each Halagel Softgel is made from Halagel Gelatin certified as halal by JAKIM. Halagel is a company that since 1997 has imported and distributed halal food and pharmaceutical grade gelatin and empty hard gelatin capsules for Malaysia and the Southeast Asian markets. The company produces industrial products (Halagel® Pharmaceutical Gelatin), consumer products (many types of toothpaste and salts) as well as Nutraceuticals (different kinds of oils such as olive oil). Supported by the Malaysian state and research institutions, Halagel has “embarked on an extensive

research” in the production of halal gelatin, halal empty hard gelatin capsules, and halal soft gels by using only confirmed halal sources to fulfill the niche market in Southeast Asia and worldwide ([www.halagel.com](http://www.halagel.com)). The company also produces a toothbrush, but this cannot formally be certified and its production context audited under the current legislation, the Executive Secretary explained.

Now we look at *nasi briyani*, a rice-based dish made with spices, rice, and meat, fish, eggs, or vegetables. This products is described as “produk usahawan iksimbangan fama” meaning that it is a product manufactured by entrepreneurs that have been supervised by Federal Agricultural Marketing Authority (FAMA), a marketing agency under the Ministry of Agriculture and Agro-Based Industry set up to monitor, coordinate, control, and develop product marketing of Malaysian agriculture. The Executive Secretary is unsatisfied with these claims that are not backed by proper certification and logos. The fact that this product still carries an old halal logo that says Malaysia in Arabic and Roman characters in the middle and “Bahagian hal ehwal Islam, Jabatan Perdana Menteri” (Islamic Affair’s Division under the Prime Minister’s Department) add to his dissatisfaction. This product, he complains, is “not properly certified” carrying uncertified claims and a dated logo.

The products discussed above display and combine a wide range of information in formal logos or simply by putting bits of text on the surface of the packaging. These types of information can be formalized as in the case of the most recent JAKIM logos at one end of the spectrum to rather cryptic logos without text or messages that are not easily comprehensible at the other end. Thus, a wide range of institutions (state) and organizations (interest groups/companies) try to instill in consumers ideas about what proper Islamic consumption is or should be or an attempt to sacralize commodities in a religious market as it were. Many of the above products are located somewhere in the grey zone between formal certification, national sentiments (“Made in Malaysia”), and fuzzy forms of Muslim interests.

To my mind, a central point of tension is that an organization such as PPIM pushes for state or national formalization of the halal market in terms of certification and regulation in general while recognizing a product as halal as long as it is produced by Muslims – either members of PPIM or not. Thus, in this market, the trade relation is as much premised on proper Muslim or ethnic handling as a kind of uncertified standard as it is on the products *per se*.

## **Conclusion**

YES and PPIM encouraged me to make a research proposal and present this at a meeting with JAKIM. Both these organizations are closely linked to JAKIM and part of the halal network. Hence, I was invited

to present my proposal at a meeting with JAKIMs Head of Halal Certification in Cyberjaya.<sup>13</sup> Present at the meeting were the JAKIM Head of Halal Certification, a couple of company representatives, the representative from YES and PPIM as well as myself. Two things were on the agenda: firstly, a Malay woman from a company that manufactures Islamic food and health products similar to those mentioned above asked the JAKIM Head of Halal Certification for support and advice for improving her business. The JAKIM Head of certification is a woman who is also an *ustaz* (religious teacher). A Malay man had similar difficulties and sought the same kind of advice. The JAKIM representative agreed to look into these cases.

The last issue on the agenda was my presentation of a research proposal for JAKIM. At this point in time, I had progressed with my research in Malaysia and in companies, shops, and restaurants and it was this knowledge that I proposed JAKIM take into consideration when cooperating with multinationals in particular. Based on my ethnographic data with these companies I suggested that JAKIM would be interested in how these understood the benefits as well as challenges involved in JAKIM halal certification. I argued that existing consultancy studies mainly focused on how the Malaysian state and companies brand and market halal on a global scale while there were few empirically substantiated studies of modern forms of halal certification seen from the perspectives. In the car on our way back to KL, the YES representative explained to me that the issues presented by the two company representatives reflected the problems of “globalizing” Malaysian halal, that is, in his eyes Malaysian halal was often stuck in disputes about petty Malay Muslim issues blocking for the “bigger picture, visions”.

In this article I have shown halal activists or organizations promote halal on a big scale in the interface zones between new forms of Islamic revivalism, the ethnicized state, and Muslim consumer culture and protection. Even if the state in Malaysia has preempted earlier and competing forms of *dakwah* halal there are still many alternative halal logos in existence in Malaysia. While halal activists constantly call on the ethnicized state to tighten halal regulation, some of these organizations simultaneously promote a range of alternative halal logos that seems to challenge efforts to centralize and standardize national Malaysian halal. These alternative logos can work to personalize or ethnicize the otherwise impersonal trade relation, that is, they signify proper Muslim or ethnic handling of production and products, but they are not expressions of any kind of legally backed certification, which is a key objective of the state and activist organizations alike. Many of these products are subjected to entangled and crisscrossing classifications schemes of bureaucracies and interest organizations.

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<sup>13</sup> Cyberjaya is a town with a science park as the core that forms a key part of the Multimedia Super Corridor in Malaysia. This zone stretches southwards from Kuala Lumpur for “high tech” development to turn the nation’s main metropolitan area into a “nod” or “hub” in transnational social and economic networks.

Marking or tagging commodities with logos or other types of information is a technology or technique that help personalize halal exchange or transaction, that is, ideally the producer, trader, and consumer all share the symbolic content of the halal logo. Information on products as we have seen contains religious and totemic dimensions and evokes culturally potent forces such as religion and ethnicity. Advertising certified and uncertified halal products works by attaching political and moral messages to products.

Within the last decade or so JAKIM together with Muslim interest groups have “disciplined” companies as one company representative explained and all these companies are confronted with this fact. In other words, in Malaysia regulatory institutions are disciplining companies with regard to halal understanding and practice. One reason for this is that halal standardization in Malaysia is part of the particular history of the country with its Islamic revivalism, state regulation and secular sentiments.

In January 2013 McDonald’s and one of its franchise owners agreed to pay US\$700,000 to members of the Muslim community in Detroit to settle allegations about a restaurant that falsely advertised its food as being prepared according to Islamic dietary law. In the settlement notice, the Management said it had a carefully designed system for preparing and serving halal so that halal chicken products are labeled, stored, refrigerated, and cooked in halal-only areas. The company added that it trains its employees in preparing halal food and requires strict adherence to this process (<http://www.usatoday.com/story/money/business/2013/01/21/mcdonalds-islamic-diet-lawsuit/1852147/>). I think this recent example shows how halal has been lifted out of its Southeast Asian context. In other words, the particular relationship between regulatory institutions, interest groups, and markets in countries such as Malaysia is now reconfiguring halal in other contexts across the globe.

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