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Imagining Global Halal Markets

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"Forging New Malay networks"
Imagining global halal markets

Johan Fischer

Abstract: This article explores Malaysia's bid to become the world leader in rapidly expanding halal (literally, "lawful" or "permitted") markets on a global scale through the embedding of a particular global Islamic imagination. The Malaysian state has become central to the certification, standardization, and bureaucratization of Malaysian halal production, trade, and consumption. The vision is now to export this model, and for that purpose the network as a strategic metaphor is being evoked to signify connectedness and prescriptions of organization vis-à-vis more deep-rooted networks. I argue that an imagined global halal network conditions the halal commodity form. This imagination is at least as important as halal commodities themselves for the emergence of a novel form of globalized halal capitalism.

Keywords: halal, Malaysia, Malays, markets, networks

The quotation that forms part of this article's title is from a young Malay(sian) Muslim woman, Jeti, who is currently involved in promoting halal commodities in the United Kingdom 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, which 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 and at similar events in Malaysia and the United Kingdom over the years. She held UK degrees in accounting and business studies 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 and which figures so prominently in the Malaysian state's halal vision. She also reflects the ways in which networking

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is involved in proliferating halal and embedding the economy in a particular Malaysian imagination related to Islam. Since we first met at what I shall call halal network 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.

This article argues that an imagined global halal network conditions the halal commodity form. This imagination is at least as important as halal commodities themselves for the emergence of a novel form of globalized halal capitalism. A central question in this article relates to 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. There is a body of literature on the relationship between Islam, modernity, networking, and entrepreneurship among the Malays in Malaysia (Sloane 1999), but how such relationships in a diaspora context are embedded in a particular global Islamic imagination is not well understood. It is this issue this article explores.

In the global halal market, Malaysia plays an essential role in "embedding" halal in network fantasies and imaginations, as well as discourses about piety and proper practices among Muslims. Only recently have these markets become global in scope, and states, manufacturers, restaurants, shops, certifiers, and consumers around the world are faced with ever stricter and more complex requirements within a framework of moral economies. Global halal markets are examples of modern religious or moral economies that are embedded in social action, for example, production, trade, consumption, and regulation in organizations and networks.

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 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.

This article is divided into nine sections. Following this introduction, I will conceptualize capitalism, embeddedness, and networks in global halal markets. Then I discuss globalized halal markets before moving on to how halal networks and entrepreneurs play an essential role in this market. The next section explores halal embeddedness in Malaysia and beyond, and these themes are closely linked to the next two sections on halal network events in Malaysia and on the global stage. The section on entrepreneurs at work in London looks at how networks and networking have become essential in the diaspora. The conclusion ties the findings of the article together and reflects on how networks are given new expression in the interfaces between Islam, state, and market.

Conceptualizing capitalism, embeddedness, and networks in global halal markets

In this article, I draw on two understandings of capitalism. First, I am inspired by Laura Bear and colleagues' (2015) argument that global capitalism is formed through relational performances of productive powers that exceed formal economic models, practices, boundaries, and market devices. The authors explore how capitalism's social relations are generated out of divergent life projects as well as the contingent, fragile, and intimate networks of capitalism. Second, I understand modern halal capitalism as "millennial capitalism," that is, capitalism in

its messianic, salvific, and magical manifestations (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000: 293). In many ways, my ethnography fits well with central points discussed in that article. The religious aspects of millennial capitalism are central. Occult economies are economies with a material aspect based on the effort to conjure wealth or to account for its accumulation by appealing to techniques that defy practical reason and ethical aspects transmitted in moral discourses generated by production of value through magical means. This is also the case concerning the way in which such economies have become a major focus of popular attention with respect to the place of the arcane in the everyday production of value (2000: 310). I think these understandings of capitalism capture well the way in which the halal network is imagined.

I explore "embeddedness," that is, the notion that all economic activity is situated within the context of broader social, cultural, and political relations, with a specific empirical focus on global flows and capitalist networks of halal commodities and practices. Modern and global halal production, trade, regulation, and consumption are examples of a particular embeddedness—specific and observable forms of economic actions that take place in the interfaces between broader social, cultural, and political relations. Karl Polanyi (1944) found "market society" to be disembedded from sociocultural networks. I explore halal commodities as "things with a particular type of social potential" (Appadurai 1999: 6); that is, halal commodities live social lives among the people who produce, sell, and consume them, and this conditions halal networks and, ultimately, specific forms of embeddedness.

Manuel Castells (2000: 469) argues that 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. That is, networks and networking are essential tools for embedding individuals, social groups, organizations, states, and nations in particular global imaginations. 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" (2000: 443). However, I focus more on how halal networks can contribute to and move beyond such broader theoretical and conceptual debates on globalization and capitalism. Understandings of "network society" is important for the way in which Malaysia envisions the halal network and not so much as an analytical tool of my own.

A critical influence on my work is Annelise Riles's (2000) study of the participation of Fijian women in the United Nations' fourth global forum. One of Riles's 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" (2000: 172). A similar observation can be made about the halal network in Malaysia and beyond. The network is an example of "institutionalized utopianism" (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 and through this are embedding a particular global Islamic imagination. 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). As we shall see, halal certification and logos on products are essential to the halal network. Julie Guthman (2007) shows how food labels are operationalized, arguing that these are expressions of neoliberalization; these labels signify the creation of markets, value, and regulation. Food labels are political forms of economic protection that excludes the noncertified/standardized (2007: 461). Moreover, labels are governed by nontransparent public-private partnerships leading to radical governance mechanisms and property rights (473). In sum, I combine theories about capitalism, embeddedness, and net-

Question: Should/could this perhaps be "my own", "the author's" or the like?

works to explore how the halal commodity form is given shape in global markets.

Globalized halal markets

The global halal trade annually amounts to $632 billion and is rapidly growing (AAFC 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 by 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 that is haram in any quantity or substance (Denny 2006: 279). In the modern food industry, several 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). 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 Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM) or the Islamic Development Department of Malaysia. In the end, however, the underlying principle behind the prohibitions remains "divine order" (2004: 12).

For some Muslims, halal sensibilities necessitate that only Muslims produce halal commodities, and that this type of production is kept strictly separate from nonhalal production. In Malaysia, foreign companies are legally required to set up a Muslim Committee in order to handle halal properly. Jeti, for example, does consultancy work for such foreign companies in Malaysia on how to set up the Muslim Committee.

de or so, a large body of literature has explore[illegible]e globalized halal market—for example, Johan Fischer's (2008, 2011, 2016) work on halal production, trade, regulation, and consumption. The edited volume *Halal Matters* (Bergeaud-Blackler et al. 2015) shows that China is emerging as a powerful player in the globalizing halal market/network. As we shall see, Chinese networks play an important role in imagined Malaysian halal networks. An important study is on urban Muslims in China, the Hui. Halal food and eating stood out as the most important identity marker in contradistinction to the surrounding Han majority. Besides nutritional and economic functions, food and eating practices expressed values and traits that they regarded as fundamentally Hui (Gillette 2000: 114). Thus, halal networks also condition and are themselves conditioned by identity formation and geopolitical imaginations.

In the rapidly expanding global market for halal products, Malaysia holds a special position: it is one of the few countries in which state bodies certify halal products, spaces (shops, factories, and restaurants), and work processes. In shops around the world, consumers can find state halal-certified products from Malaysia that carry distinctive halal logos. Globally, companies are affected by the proliferation of halal that to a large extent is evoked by Southeast Asian nations such as Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Brunei, and Thailand.

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 reevaluations of requirements and prohibitions are prominent, first, in postcolonial Islamic cultures such as Malaysia, and second, among dias-

poric groups for whom halal can serve as a focal point for Islamic movements and identities (Esposito 1995: 376).

Why halal networks and entrepreneurs?

On 16 August 2004, Malaysian prime minister Abdullah bin 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" (Badawi 2004). 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. 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 2008, 2011).

The concept of the network prescribes a specific way of engaging with the embeddedness of economic activity within the context of broader social, cultural, and political relations. For example, 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; 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 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.

The halal vision of the Malaysian state is infused with such ideas about network society and hubs embedding a particular global Islamic imagination. For example, in the Ninth Malaysia Plan 2006–2010, *Together towards Excellence, Glory and Distinction* (EPU 2006), which outlines the country's development strategy, the strategic uses of the terms "network" and "networking" seem to be inspired by Castells's 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."

At MIHAS 2004, Badawi proudly announced, "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.

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; it is an idealized form of networking and 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 et al. 2005: 807).

Patricia 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 (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 (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 (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 (71). Similar to what I shall show in connection with halal network events, it is often at social events that networking takes on its greatest power (124). Contacts and access to powerful UMNO-connected executives and their capital in many cases determine success among select groups of Malay entrepreneurs (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 Jeti play particular roles in the halal network. The Malaysian proliferation of halal gives rise to aspirations of Malay Muslim networks and capitalism to signify the connectedness and prescriptions of organizations 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 and how it is entangled with the halal economy has become a social imperative as well as strategic model of identification and emulation that in my case from Malaysia is embedding a particular global Islamic imagination.

Halal embeddedness in Malaysia and beyond

The proliferation of modern halal in Malaysia and beyond is entangled in ever-more 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 percent 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 and how this economy is embedding a particular global Islamic imagination. A number of divergent *dakwah* (literally, salvation) groups in the wider resurgence of Islam emerged in Malaysia. *Dakwah* is also supported by Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS), the Islamic Party of Malaysia. In order to preempt 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 preempt *dakwah* was a powerful UMNO-driven ethnic state nationalism. Moreover, the channeling of privileges and funds through ethnic UMNO corporatism has been systematically institutionalized in Malaysia, and this has led to a form of party political (millennial) 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 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 several 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, or "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 and 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 the 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 maybe even in a positive sense invent a "Malay diaspora," embedding a particular global Islamic imagination. The particularity of this "diaspora envy" vis-à-vis the Chinese in particular signifies modern Malay diaspora aspirations toward 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 center of global reach (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 or negative stereotypes related to the post-9/11 consolidation of the country's position as a moderate Islamic state. Hence, post-9/11, the powerful state and corporate halal discourse in Malaysia identified this "moderate" Muslim country promoting a global halal network embedding a particular global Islamic imagination.

Halal network events in Malaysia

This section explores how the Malaysian halal network has been promoted at two major halal events in Malaysia, namely, the Malaysia International Halal Showcase (MIHAS) and the 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 embedding a particular global Islamic imagination. 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 center is dubbed).

MIHAS consisted of three main activities. First, seminars were held by companies such as Tesco and Malaysian state organizations such as MATRADE and JAKIM. Participation in these seminars provided me with insight into the halal vision in the interfaces or gray 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 MATRADE[1] 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. Second, 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 (*Star* 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. Third, MIHAS included many product demonstrations and samples. These product demonstrations testified to the fact that, in Malaysia, halal has also proliferated into a wide range of nonfood products such as care products and medication.

As one would expect, MIHAS was an essential arena for networking and embedding different kind of activities, in particular with respect to exchanging business cards and connecting people/organizations, and I was soon to receive e-mails advertising new products and announc-

ing new halal trade fairs around the world. The entrepreneurs I met at MIHAS, including Jeti, reflected the ways in which networking is involved in 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, which 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 United States 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. 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 toward 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 who 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 who 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 the World Islamic Economic Forum, WHF, World Halal Research (an event with the heading "Inspiring Innovation through Research"), MIHAS (now mainly a halal trade fair), and 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, embedding a particular global Islamic imagination. After having done fieldwork at these network events since 2006, I have become part of the way—that is, deeply embedded in the activities—halal networking takes place. An example of this is how 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 eight hundred 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, embedding a particular global Islamic imagination. In the WHF program booklet, breaks were designated for "networking and refreshments" as well as *salat* (prayer). Jeti, together with other participants, explained to me that Najib's "political goodwill" toward supporting halal was considered lower than that of his predecessors, and his speech at WHF 2010 was anxiously an-

ticipated. 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 "master plan" and "leadership" applicable to all stakeholders in the industry to address the inability of government agencies to work together. At the end of WHF, delegates were given a questionnaire and asked to evaluate the networking performance of WHF.

The halal network is intimately tied to Malaysian network events. The Malaysian halal network is largely 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 embedding a particular global Islamic imagination, and it is to this point I will now turn.

Halal networks on the global stage

I now explore the Malaysian halal network and how it is embedding a particular global Islamic imagination 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 the halal economy specifically identifies London as a center 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 embedding a particular global Islamic imagination 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 center in the Docklands, an area in the southeastern 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. Many 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.

Despite 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 center outside London. Each UMNO branch oversaw a food stall selling (halal) food to a large number of guests. In his opening speech, the high commissioner of Malaysia to the United Kingdom 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 was an event that strength-

ened the bond of friendship and "networking" among Malaysians in the United Kingdom, providing an opportunity for the Malaysian High Commission, Malaysian private sector, and various UK organizations 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 11 November 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 toward 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 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 embedding a particular global Islamic imagination. 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 how the state in Malaysia has effectively certified, standardized, and bureaucratized Malaysian halal production, trade, and consumption since the early 1980s, a whole range of competing Muslim diaspora groups characterizes the fragmented and complex halal market in the United Kingdom. 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. 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 embedding a particular global Islamic imagination.

Jeti runs several consultancy firms that help Malaysian companies with the process of halal certification and regulation in Malaysia and globally, especially in the United Kingdom, where she lives for extended periods of time. She explained 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 this fact is also fueling 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 United Kingdom in particular, inquiring about whether Muslims are properly involved in the production, trade, and handling of halal can be "sensitive" and "offensive."

From my research, I know that many companies in Europe and elsewhere have been baffled, to say the least, about JAKIM inquiries about how Muslims are or should be involved in halal in order to ensure the halalness of production, trade, and consumption. Jeti explained 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." So in order for these Malay-produced goods to enter European supermarkets and hypermarkets they must be certified, and as a consultant Jeti helps UK companies 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.

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. These processes and procedures are all part of the everyday regulation of halal commodities, but they also help promote a global Islamic imagination in which the *ummah* is understood as a network of embedded ethical Muslim producers, traders, and consumers. In sum, the halal economy and the networks sustaining it is to a large extent a question of state or political backing.

Conclusion

Polanyi (1944) found "market society" to be disembedded from sociocultural networks. However, my ethnographic material shows how a form of Polanyian embeddedness through imaginations of halal networks in Castells's understanding comes into existence. The imagined global halal network conditions the halal commodity form and the emergence of a novel form of globalized halal capitalism. An important theme is economics in relation to Islam and Malaysia's role in the global market for religious commodities, and this point demonstrates how embeddedness plays out in the global halal market. Halal commodities and practices are not only deeply embedded in broader social, cultural, and political relations. Indeed, embeddedness is part of promoting and marketing halal products through networks, national aspi-

rations, and by entrepreneurs: halal is branded and marketed as modern and pious commodities in the interfaces between broader social, cultural, and political relations embedding a particular global Islamic imagination. 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 has 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 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 fueled 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 the global halal network. The halal network is intimately tied to Malaysian and global network events, that is, the Malaysian halal network is largely 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 embedding a particular global Islamic imagination and the active networking that sustain them 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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Notes

1. Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (MATRADE) is Malaysia's national trade promotion agency.
2. The Halal Industry Development Corporation (HDC) was established in 2006. Its main purpose was to take over JAKIM's responsibilities and coordinate the overall development of the industry (www.hdcglobal.com).
3. The British national census carried out in 2001 showed that 49,883 Malaysians were recorded residing in the United Kingdom.

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