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Signature:

Sean Dolan

Date

Halal Things: Ontology and Ethics in the Malaysian Halal Ecosystem

By

Sean Dolan
PhD

Anthropology

[Advisor's name, typed] [Advisor's signature]
Advisor

[Member's name, typed] [Member's signature]
Committee Member

[Member's name, typed] [Member's signature]
Committee Member

[Member's name, typed] [Member's signature]
Committee Member

Accepted:

Lisa A. Tedesco, Ph.D.
Dean of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies

Date

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By

Sean Dolan
MA, Emory University, 2013

Advisor: Michael G. Peletz, PhD

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Abstract

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By Sean Dolan

Malaysia is among the wealthiest Muslim-majority countries in the world. This affluence has resulted in shifts toward consumerism in Malaysian society and its increased entanglement in global commodity chains. The appearance of novel and unfamiliar products in Malaysian marketplaces, particularly industrially processed foods, has created conditions for transforming the category of *halal*—the category of things that according to Islamic law are permissible to use. Halal is especially salient for meat and other foods but is also applicable to a wide range of goods and behaviors. Based on seventeen months of ethnographic fieldwork in the Malaysian capital, Kuala Lumpur, this project examines the various state agencies, commercial ventures, and research institutes that are involved in repositioning halal to increase its responsiveness to international markets. In this dissertation I contend that the category of halal is best understood as an *assemblage*—a constellation of contingently networked materials, practices, and discourses. By examining the social processes of bureaucratization, corporatization, and techno-scientific interventions that produce this assemblage, I show that it constitutes a *social field* in which people pursue socially meaningful projects (everything from choosing or, in some cases, avoiding halal certified products to pursuing careers within the halal industry). Reflection on the category of halal, then, brings together issues of ontology (the ways in which the category is constituted) and ethics (how people interact with the category). Through it we see how aspects of religious life are forged in a time of market proliferation and consumerism.

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Acknowledgments

This project has given me the chance to revisit a fascination from earlier in my life. Sometime in the early 1990s, provoked by seeing Wes Craven's 1987 horror-movie embellishment, I read Wade Davis's (1985) monograph about the phenomenon of zombies in Haiti. At the time I was reading books on which horror movies were based, such as *Salem's Lot* and *The Exorcist*, but in Davis's book I found something else altogether: a realistic account of how it is possible to turn a person into a zombie—a body ritually reanimated to do the bidding of its master. I write that the account is realistic not merely in the sense that it is believable, but in that it is an account of how, through an *imbroglio* (Latour 1993) of botanically-derived neurotoxins, ritual performances, and social expectations and practices, zombies become real—how they get into the world or become manifest. This had deep appeal to me as someone who disliked the notion of a completely predictable and explicable world that seemed to come as a package with scientific physicalist views. Maybe part of my fascination with horror was its insistence that, above and beyond neutral material, the world was also infused with morality—granted, in these cases an evil, but morality none-the-less. Davis's anthropologist's narrative provided an account of how that morality got tangled up in the materiality of the world.

Later, in my first years at university, I was again attracted to anthropology because it seemed, with its doctrine of cultural relativism, to emphasize *possibility* over *actuality*. While reading philosophy has spoiled relativism for me, I am even more convinced of the promise of tracing out the sort of imbroglios identified by Davis; they bring to light the intricate weave of the material and the social that constitutes reality. And, I agree with Latour that anthropology is particularly well suited to undertake these projects.

In this dissertation, then, I follow such an imbroglio as an *ontological problem*—one that is constitutive of reality. While I don't anticipate a frenzy of inquiries from Wes Craven's protégés about the possibility of a film-adaptation of a dissertation about halal, the story of the production of, say, a package of halal labeled stir-fry seasoning is, at least in my view, a fascinating one. In many respects halal inverts the production of a zombie because of the ordinariness—the every-day givenness—of the consumer products it governs. Yet, that ordinariness belies the complexity of their production which brings together religious prescription, ritual, international branding efforts, state-based authority for creating standards, technologies of surveillance, consumer anxieties, and strategies of negotiating social otherness. Really, it is every bit as complicated and magical (however that term is to be interpreted) as creating a zombie.

While I am grateful to a great many people for their assistance, insights, and encouragement in writing this dissertation, my greatest debt is to my generous interlocutors in Malaysia, many of whom have become good friends over the years of this research. I hope that you will find your insights represented well in these pages and my conclusions satisfactory—there is no praise I desire more than this. I am grateful for the knowledge you have shared with me and your patience with my questions and intrusions.

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1

Introductions: Realist Ontology, Assemblages, and Ethics

Our interactions with *things*—with the material world—is the central concern of economics; that is, it is concerned with the ways in which we make, get, and use the things we need and want. Processes of trade, consumption, and production are, thus, among economics' most prominent preoccupations. The current epoch marked by the emergence of market-based economies in the mid-nineteenth century (Polyani 2001[1944]) is distinguishable from others in that the relationship between such economic processes have been reconfigured. Specifically, the direct relationship between production and consumption has been ruptured. Increasingly rare are the cases in which inhabitants of market societies produce what they consume; instead, *markets* mediate the relationship between consumption and production; workers are paid for their productive efforts and buy the things that they consume. This reconfiguration of production and consumption is a condition for the rise of the middle class and its attendant consumerist culture.

In this age of markets, *middle class* should not be understood as defined by some range of average or median incomes. Rather, it is a set of intertwining sensibilities, such as respectability, and lifestyles defined by having—or at least aspiring to have—the right sorts of things: televisions, cars, computers, education, and the like (Freeman 2012 and Schielke 2012). In this sense the middle class has become a cultural reference point. States hail the middle class as the core of society, creating the impression, often false, that the majority is middle class (Heiman, Lietchty, and Freeman 2012:17). For the lower classes, middle-classness functions as a rhetoric

of aspiration that prescribes individualistic discipline rather than class-based political action as a stratagem of achievement (Heiman, Lietchy, and Freeman 2012:20). Consumerism is among the most prominent characteristics of this middle classness. While all people (and, for that matter, living organisms) consume things, under the rubric of *consumerism* meaning and value are themselves constructed and achieved through the acquisition of goods. In short, as consumers we buy who we are. Consumerist middle classes are not new—they are traceable to the eighteenth-century Industrial Revolution—indeed consumerism was a driving force of that revolution. However, the later part of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries are marked by their advance across world regions as well as the proliferation of markets that enable this expansion.

The research project described in this dissertation examines market intensification and its consequences by exploring the religious category of halal. *Halal* is an Arabic term that designates the category of *the permissible* according to Islamic law. It is particularly salient to concerns about foods (especially meat and animal derivatives) but is also applied to other things that are consumed or applied to the body (medicines, toiletries, fragrances, and cosmetics, for example)—a detailed discussion of the meaning of halal follows in the second chapter. The category of halal is particularly intriguing locus of anthropological intervention because its prescriptions are meant to govern the ways in which people interact with the material world. So, if descriptive economics is about how we get things, halal provides normative guidance about what sort of things it is lawful to acquire. A central concern of this dissertation is to map the ways in which the category of halal has been reconfigured in recent decades under the sway of the proliferation of global markets and consumerist sensibilities.

The primary ethnographic site for this project is Malaysia's capital city, Kuala Lumpur, and its constellation of halal-related businesses, regulatory agencies, and research and

technology institutions.¹ These institutions make-up the business and regulatory infrastructure that undergirds the US\$ 9 billion Malaysian halal industry—a hub of what has become a US\$ 2.8 trillion industry globally (New Straits Times, 30 January 2019). Given Malaysia’s small size in both area (205,000 square miles) and population (32 million) (Department of Statistics Malaysia) as well as its geographic marginality at the southeastern edge of the Muslim world, its importance in regard to the global halal industry may seem surprising. However, Malaysia’s prominence within the Muslim world has long exceeded its size.

Both within and beyond the Muslim world, Malaysia serves as a model of moderate Islam—a form of Islam that is compatible with modernity. This reputation for moderation, established in the 1990s, is challenged in recent scholarship that tracks increasing regulation of Islam by the Malaysian government, courts, and bureaucracies (see for example, Osman Bakar 2008, Liow 2009, and Peletz 2015). These two aspects of Malaysian Islam—being moderate and heavily regulated—may not really be as much at odds as they first appear. In part, the reputation for moderation rests on comparison to other Muslim-majority countries in which religious militancy and threats of Islamist terrorism are common (by groups such as ISIS or al-Shabab) or in which religious restrictions are commonly enforced by extreme measures (such as beatings, acid attacks, or even killings). The rarity of these extreme forms of religious expression may, in fact, partly be a result of the state’s control of religious institutions, its opposition to politically radical religious movements—regarded by the state as deviant—and its willingness to go along with international anti-terrorism initiatives. “Moderate” does not mean that Malaysian Muslims are only casually committed to their religion or that Islam is absent from the public sphere.

¹ While Kuala Lumpur retains the distinction of being the national capital and center of economic activity in Malaysia, in 1995, the federal government’s administrative center was moved to Putrajaya, thirty miles south of central Kuala Lumpur.

Indeed, increased personal devotion among Malaysians (Frisk 2009 and Hoffstaedter 2011) and visibility of Islam (King 2008 and Tan Beng Hui 2012) are well documented.

The diversity of Malaysia's population may also contribute to its reputation for cultivating forms of moderate Islam.² A narrow majority, nearly 51%, of Malaysia's population is ethnically Malay. Chinese and Indians, at 23% and 7% respectively, round out Malaysia's three largest ethnic groups. Most of the remaining population is constituted by *orang asli* (aboriginal groups of the Malay Peninsula), the aboriginal people of the Bornean states of Sabah and Sarawak, and Eurasians. Malaysian state discourse uses another, uniquely Malaysian, demographic group as well: *Bumiputera*, literally "sons of the soil." This group includes Malays and *orang asli* (especially the non-Malay inhabitants of Malaysia's Bornean states, Sabah and Sarawak) and constitutes 67% of the population. While the expressed rationale for the *Bumiputera* category is moral—since these groups were original inhabitants, they deserve special privileges—political calculation appears to be a primary consideration for advancing and maintaining the category.³ In any case, the majority of *Bumiputera* are Malay (63%) and, in discourse, the term is often used as code for Malay interests.

All Malays in Malaysia are legally regarded as Muslim (Osman Bakar 2008:91 & 106n23). So strong in fact is the association between Malays and Islam that Michael Peletz notes that, in Malaysian contexts, both terms often denote the same population (2013:605n3).

² All demographic figures are from the Department of Statistics Malaysia Official Portal, Population and Demography page. There is reason to be cautious of these statistics as they may reflect political biases (see footnote 3 below and Chapter 2). The CIA's World Factbook, for example, estimates that Malaysia's *Bumiputera* population comprises only 62% of its population. However, because official Malaysian state statistics are used in references like Ooi Keat Gin's *Historical Dictionary of Malaysia* and often cited by scholars, I follow suit here.

³ The *Bumiputera* category became politicized during the 1950s independence movement and the formation of independent Malaysia in the 1960s, which included Chinese-majority Singapore from 1963 to 1965. During these decades, Malay anxiety about being outnumbered by non-Malays (specifically Chinese) and losing political dominance became acute; the formation of the composite *Bumiputera* demographic category, of which Malays were a clear majority (63%), was a strategy to bolster their numbers and retain dominance (Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid 2002:92-93 and Ooi Keat Gin 2018:101-102). Thus, "*Bumiputera*" is often treated as synonymous with "Malay."

Similarly, Shamsul A.B. notes that the Malay phrase *masuk Melayu* (literally, *entering Malayness*) is used to describe someone converting to Islam—independent of the convert’s ethnicity (1997:209). The Chinese population is associated with Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism; these religions make up 21% of the population. Indians are most strongly identified with Hinduism, which is professed by 6% of Malaysians. These identifications are, of course, far from fixed; there are Indian and Chinese Muslims, for example. And Christianity is the third largest religion in Malaysia, comprising mostly non-Malay Bumiputera, such as Iban and Kadazandusun living primarily in Malaysia’s Bornean states, but also includes a significant percentage of Chinese and Indian Malaysians (Ooi Keat Gin 2018:116-117). Such exceptions aside, the primary ethnic-religious identities in Malaysia are Malay-Muslim, Chinese-Buddhist (or other “traditional Chinese religions”), and Indian-Hindu. Islam is constitutionally recognized as Malaysia’s official religion; however, freedom of religion is also enshrined in the constitution. While under this arrangement non-Muslims are consigned minority status and must negotiate both political and social obstacles, Malaysia has avoided much of the widespread violence between Muslim and non-Muslim communities evident in other countries such as Indonesia, India, and China.

Besides being a model of moderate Islam and multiculturalism, Malaysia is also notable for its economic success. While the average GDP (adjusted for PPP, purchasing power parity) for Muslim-majority countries is US\$ 4000, making them among the poorest countries in the world (Pew Research Center 2011:55), Malaysia’s GDP (adjusted for PPP) is just over US\$ 29,000 (World Bank). This comparative economic strength is the result of Malaysia’s developmentalist outlook (explored in Chapter 2) and its successful navigation of international economic conditions. After the 1997-1998 Asian Financial Crisis, for example, Malaysia revived its

economy by pegging its currency to the US dollar achieving an average annual growth rate of 5.4% from 1998 to 2005 (Ooi Keat Gin 2018:142, see also Felker 2015). Since 2005, Malaysia has continued to average a 5% annual growth, despite suffering negative growth during the 2008 global economic downturn (World Bank). Similar growth rates are projected for 2018 and 2019 even with government-planned expenditure reductions (Focus Economics 2018).

This economic robustness is inscribed on the Malaysian landscape through examples of iconic architecture, epitomized by the Petronas Twin Towers, and massive development projects like the Islamic modernist administrative district, Putrajaya, and its technology-hub sibling city, Cyberjaya. Economic development shapes everyday life of Malaysians in part through the proliferation of commercial venues. Shopping malls, for example, are ubiquitous; indeed, at the base of the Twin Towers building itself is a luxury mall, Suria KLCC—though it must compete with Pavilion Mall in the nearby area of Bukit Bintang for the distinction as Malaysia’s most luxurious. Malaysian malls are giants on the landscape; the largest, 1Utama (just over 5 million square feet) ranks as the sixth largest mall in the world according to its own promotional material. Malls frequently host events and cultural performances, like dance troupes, fashion events, and competitions. They create elaborate holiday displays and feature specials for everything from Hari Raya (the feast following the fasting month of Ramadan), Chinese New Year, and Diwali (the Hindu festival of lights) to Valentine’s Day and Mother’s Day. Malls are also popular places for young people to hangout (*lepak*) with friends. All of this is to say that shopping malls are an increasingly common feature of Malaysian urban spaces—they are important centers for shopping, eating as well as socializing more generally.

Malaysia’s affluence has also transformed the ways in which people shop for food. While the majority, 56%, of food retailers are small, family-run, open-front establishments (*kedai*

runcit—described in more detail in Chapter 6), large supermarkets and hypermarkets are becoming increasingly common, representing 43% of retail food sales (USDA Foreign Agricultural Services 2017). Many of these are themselves incorporated into malls.

The proliferation of malls, supermarkets, and hypermarkets is an indicator of the increasing salience of consumerism in Malaysia and the centrality of middle-class ethos. That Malaysia has achieved low poverty and high employment rates (World Bank 2018) means that these venues, and the lifestyles they engender, are familiar and accessible to a significant number of Malaysians. The economic strength of Malaysia in comparison to other Muslim-majority countries, in tandem with its strong Islamic identity, diverse demographic make-up, and growing consumerist ambitions have contributed to the emergence of the halal ecosystem in Malaysia.

These factors help us understand why it is that halal initiatives, such as becoming the global hub for halal production and trade—one of the undertakings of Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's (r. 2003 to 2009) government (Abdullah Ahmad Badawi 2004)—are so often launched from Malaysia. This dissertation follows the steps Malaysia has taken in pursuit of realizing this ambition and their consequences.

Anthropology of Halal

When, in 2007 and 2008, I began thinking about halal as an anthropological research topic, there was little published research about the burgeoning commercial interest in halal. Anthropologist Johan Fischer has been at the forefront of exploring this terrain. Fischer's earlier projects, *Proper Islamic Consumption* (2008) and *The Halal Fronteir* (2011), examine the subject positions of Malay consumers. The earlier book focuses on the affluent township of Taman Tun Dr. Ismail (TTDI), located on the northwest periphery of Kuala Lumpur. Through ethnographic work with

TTDI residence, Fischer develops two significant analytic points. The first is the idea of *halalisation* (2008:29-32). In its most obvious manifestation, *halalisation* refers to the growing jurisdiction of halal evaluations; that is, the increasing range of products and services that are understood as being either halal or not. As mentioned above, meat is the paradigm example of something that is subject to halal determination—there are several Quranic passages (discussed in Chapter 2) that explicitly address what sorts of meat are permissible and which are impermissible. However, in Malaysia, halal labeling on non-meat products is increasingly common—noodles, chocolates, even bottled water. Services too are increasingly being marketed as halal; everything from warehousing and shipping to dating services and travel holiday packages may be marketed as halal (or near synonyms such as *syariah compliant* or *Muslim friendly*). Such a development is less surprising when it is recognized that *halal* is a general legal/ethical term—it can be applied to anything that is open to such adjudication. The lineage of *halal* as a legal concept is also discussed in Chapter 2. A more significant insight in Fischer’s *halalisation* notion is that this expansion is made possible through the emergence of new forms of governmentality facilitated through religious bureaucratic institutions like JAKIM (Department of Islamic Development Malaysia⁴) and various enforcement mechanisms.

Halalisation is entailed by the second analytical concept introduced by Fischer: *patriotic consumption* or *shopping for the state* (2008:10 & 34-35). In this regard, Fischer argues that shopping is not, ultimately, a private practice directed by the self-interest, but, at least in the context of Malaysian halal, an act of reverence and acknowledgment of Islam and, therefore, the Malay-dominated nation-state—it is a practice of nation building. *Proper* consumption becomes a normative duty through which the faithful Muslim is conflated with patriotic citizen.

⁴ The Malay names and terms on which acronyms are based are included in the list of acronyms in the appendix; in the interest of brevity, only the English translations are used in the body of the dissertation.

In *The Halal Fronteir* (2011), Fischer expands this analysis to consider how both halalisation and normative shopping affect the diasporic Malaysian Malay community living in London. Specifically, Fischer examines processes such as commercialization and regulation of halal (2011:21) as extractable, global forms that enable movement across national boundaries. On this account, London is envisioned by halal authorities in Kuala Lumpur as a frontier—a space in which halal has not yet been standardized and so lies open to the Malaysian government’s project of becoming a global halal hub (2011:31). This frontier-ness is maintained because, unlike in Malaysia, the secular British state has little interest in regulating religious markets and provides a space for well-organized Malaysian regulators to have considerable influence—particularly over consumers, many of whom are part of a Malay diaspora (2011:19).

In *Islam, Standards, and Technoscience* (Fischer 2016) and *Halal Matters* (Bergeaud-Blackler, Fischer & Lever 2016), Fischer turns his attention more directly to the infrastructural organization of the halal industry in Malaysia and elsewhere—organization that professionals in the industry refer to as the *halal ecosystem*. Both texts utilize the idea of *modern halal* (Fischer 2016:10-13 & Bergeaud-Blackler, Fischer & Lever 2016: 2-7), a slightly expanded concept of Fischer’s earlier notion of halalisation. At the center of *modern halal* is, like the idea of halalisation, the growing jurisdiction of halal and the accompanying new forms of governmentality. However, while halalisation is driven by consumer aspirations and nation-building normative demands of the state, in *modern halal*, Fischer recognizes that the complexity of the products themselves is transforming halal. For example, Fischer describes a case in which a Japanese company exporting to Indonesia was accused of “using pork products in the production of the flavor enhancer monosodium glutamate”; he goes on to explain that the company “had replaced a beef derivative with the pork derivative bactosoytone...[this] was used

as a medium to cultivate bacteria that produce the enzymes necessary to make monosodium glutamate” (Fischer 2016:28, also cited in Fischer 2011:15). So, the point of non-halal contamination for this product was twice removed from the product itself. The example underscores the complexity of manufactured food and raises challenges for religious scholars: is a porcine-based medium used to produce enzymes that, in turn, are used to produce a food additive prohibited by the Quranic injunction against consuming pig flesh? To contend with such issues, modern halal coordinates forms of expertise straddling science and religion. Furthermore, these forms of expertise open new lines of justification for halal rules based on scientific reasoning (Fischer 2016:13).

The above points to Fischer’s broader analytic framing that positions halal as arising from multiple overlapping *zones* (2016:6-10). Of these, Fischer writes, “I use ‘zones’ to explain how not only Malaysia and Singapore but also the global markets for halal are composed of divergent zones inside and between which regulatory institutions and markets interact” (2016:9). While this characterization of zones remains ambiguous, clearly Fischer takes both Malaysia and Singapore to be zones of halal that are recognized globally as such because of their developed halal-related ecosystems. However, these ecosystems themselves are composed of tectonics of technoscientific procedures, regulatory bureaucracies, business initiatives, consumer tastes, and religious institutions and sensibilities. Furthermore, these zones are not neatly bounded by national or administrative borders, but rather reach out to influence developments elsewhere—such as in the case of the American-based halal certifier, ISNA (the Islamic Society of North America), seeking accreditation by Malaysia’s JAKIM in order to ensure their certification has sufficient recognition to export products to Muslim-majority countries (many of whom readily recognize JAKIM’s expertise in relation to halal). Fischer does not explicitly coordinate this

notion of zones with another theoretical framings he borrows from Collier and Ong (2005), *global assemblages*: composite entities that are “heterogeneous, contingent, unstable, partial, and situated”; the product of multiple logics; as well as mobile—that is, abstractable from one context and deployable in others (Collier & Ong 2005:12 as cited in Fischer 2016:21). While not clearly delineated, there appears to be significant overlap between Fischer’s notions of zones and global assemblages; perhaps it is that zones are loci of global assemblages of halal. Whatever the case, they are so closely related that I regard them as interchangeable.

The edited volume, *Halal Matters*, begins from the same theoretical position. In their introduction Bergeaud-Blacker, Fischer, and Lever write that the purpose of the volume is to answer “the question *how are modern halal markets constituted?*” (2016:1; emphasis in original). Doing so involves, according to the editors, answering the specific questions: “*How and by whom, for whom, and for what reasons are objects, discourses and practices actually called ‘halal’ or ‘haram’ ...?*” (2016:1 emphasis in original). While providing detailed synopses of each of the volume’s twelve chapters would be of limited value, it is worth noting several of its themes that are also engaged in this dissertation. Three of the chapters (Graf 2016, Lever & Anil 2016, and Sai & Fischer 2016) specifically discuss how international notions of halal transform existing understandings of proper or Islamic food among Muslim communities becoming increasingly integrated into international markets. For Lever and Anil this involves a tension between explicit and implicit recognition of meats’ halal-ness; Sai and Fischer document the conflation of the Chinese term *qingzhen*—a term that referred to the cuisine of the historically Muslim-minority Hui community—with the neologistic and cosmopolitan *halal*; while the women Graf cooked with, rather than relying on labels and logos—practically absent in Moroccan marketplaces anyway—depend on their own embodied experience and knowledge

to select food that is proper and good for their families. Other chapters (Attar, Lohi & Lever 2016 and Istasse 2016) investigate alternative understandings of halal that align with values, particularly environmentalism and humane treatment of animals, that are not well-integrated with international halal initiatives—focused on standardization and certification. Finally, several chapters deal specifically with international standards, new forms of commercial governance and the institutions that facilitate them (both of Bergeaud-Blacker’s independently authored chapters, 2016a and 2016b, and Lever 2016). These chapters highlight competition between these institutions and how they coordinate of religious interests with economic and national interests.

So, Fischer’s work collectively addresses two interrelated topic area: consumers of halal, on the one hand, and the systems that govern production and marketing of halal goods on the other. While not ignoring halal consumers, this dissertation contributes more substantially to the second of these topics areas as an example of “critical anthropology of the cultural industries” (Mazzarella 2003:4). While Fischer makes prominent use of *zones*, in this dissertation I find the notion of halal as a *category* more useful. This focus on categories connects the analysis of halal to a long history of anthropological thinking: from Durkheim (1957 [1912]) and Douglas (2002 [1966]) to Lakoff (1987) and Valentine (2007) among others. In the following sections of this chapter, I develop the framework of categories as something that exceeds mere conceptualism; that is, I am particularly interested in the external reality of categories, how they exist outside the mind. I take as the central issue of the first part of this dissertation the question: *how does the category of halal become lodged in world? Or, more pointedly: how does halal become real?*

While I find concentrating on halal as a category more useful than Fischer’s *zones* framework, his use of *global assemblages* is exceedingly productive. It will be recalled from

above that one of the main attributes of global assemblages is that their components are extractable or modular—they can be transported from one context to another. This transportability is central to Fischer’s (2011) explanation of how JAKIM can have sway over trade of halal goods in London, for example. So, Fischer’s use of global assemblages leans heavily on the *global* component of the term, leaving unmined another dimension of the notion—the ontological. Here I turn to a precursor of Ong and Collier’s *global assemblages*,⁵ namely Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s (1987) notion of *assemblage* (without the “global” descriptor), which is most substantially developed in their *A Thousand Plateaus*.⁶ In this work, *assemblage* is proposed as the answer to the primary ontological question: *what is a thing?* As philosopher Brent Adkins explains, deployment of *assemblage* is a strategy for Deleuze and Guattari’s to contend with the fundamental contradiction of *things*: their dual tendency toward stability on the one hand and change on the other (2015:10-11). Following Plato’s example, there is an impulse to bifurcate things into the dynamic *sensible* and static *intelligible*; however, “assemblages are...concrete collections of heterogeneous material that display tendencies toward both stability and change” (2015:14). Thus, while Plato separates, for example, intelligible and unchangeable *beauty* from the sensible and changing *beautiful artwork*, Deleuze and Guattari refuse this gesture and keep the sensible and intelligible bound together in the continuity of the assemblage.

The specific relevance of this notion of assemblage for the category of halal is developed in the following sections of this chapter, the present abbreviated discussion is enough to see how assemblage, in combination with a realist ontology (an account of how certain things exist beyond being mere ideas), form a trenchant framework for analyzing categories such as halal.

⁵ Collier and Ong acknowledge this antecedent (2005:19n8).

⁶ DeLanda (2006:120n3).

Together, they point to a methodology that eschews searching for a central essence in favor of mapping the various modes in which halal is present in the world and investigating how these modes of being are interconnected. Significantly, this framework allows the category of halal to be evaluated as an object of anthropological analysis—rather than something more appropriately left to text-focused religious scholarship. Realist ontology in tandem with a theory of assemblage requires the researcher to “sketch out” the category of halal as an “*imbroglio* of science, politics, economy, law, religion, [and] technology”, to replay Bruno Latour’s idiom (Latour 1991:2 emphasis added). To say that the category of halal is an imbroglio is to claim that it persists as a knot of constituents that are bound together through social processes—that is, the category has social being. *Social being* here indicates that halal is a category that is created and sustained through dynamic interactions between a variety of domains such as those suggested by Latour above; *social being* is contrasted with the *being* of other sorts of artifacts that, while also the product of human activity, may be produced more or less privately and persist mainly through the conservation of their material form—a ceramic pot, for example. This social being of halal is the primary focus of this dissertation.

Mapping out the social being of halal is interesting in itself; however, we might still wonder what the consequences are of this novel configuration of consumerism, regulation, business ventures, and technoscientific practices. The second part of the dissertation, then, examines these consequences as the ethical outcomes. *Ethical* in this context is used in a broader sense than is often the case. It does not refer to adjudicating between good and bad acts such as in the normative ethics of analytic philosophy. Nor does it refer to the inculcation of virtues such as in Saba Mahmood’s (2005) interpretation of Aristotelian ethics that has become popular within anthropology. Rather, I consider undertakings to be ethical if they are the result of

deliberation, when an act's instigator considers what sort of outcome is preferable and what means are necessary to bring it about. Thus, the notion of *ethical* invoked here is closely related to *practical reason*, an ethics preoccupied with the connection between the capacity for reason and the determination of values. Deliberative acts, those which are the outcome of practical reasoning, maintain an ethical characteristic because they involve reflection on what *the good* is in a particular circumstance and how best it is to be pursued. These reflective acts need not be of enormous consequence; as inhabitants of thoroughly consumerist social orders, such decisions are exceedingly familiar to us: is it better to buy expensive cage-free eggs or cheaper conventional eggs, for example (E. Fischer 2014)? Are we to favor humaneness or thrift? The decision to elevate one of these values over the other and act in accordance is the outcome of practical reasoning. And, just as the proliferation of ethically inflected labels complicates this deliberative process generally, the emergence of halal labels adds another layer of complexity for observant Muslims.

Ethical reflection in the sphere of halal is bound up with the ontology of the category in that the latter constitutes the topography of the scene in which deliberation occurs. Though halal is a narrower domain than what Pierre Bourdieu (1993) calls a *field*, the concept is illustrative. A field is a social space that is structured in accordance with rules; actors interact within fields as both competitors (analogous to an athletic field) and confederates in social hierarchies (analogous to a science-fiction protective force-field) (Thomson 2008:68-71). In terms of the current project, mapping the field involves investigating the knot of logics, institutions, practices, and materialities that manifest the category of halal. Attention to ethics, then, reveals how people, as actors within the field of halal, contend with their positions. While Bourdieu highlights competition and formation of social orders—certainly not absent in the case of halal—

in chapters 6 and 7, I attend to actors' deliberations within the field. That is, the field appears as a puzzle space in which people must navigate their consumerist aims, religious obligations, and social commitments.

By treating ontology and ethics in separate parts of the dissertation, I am replicating the divide in Fischer's scholarship in which he examines halal consumers in earlier works (Fischer 2008 & 2011) and more directly contends with the industry in later works (Fischer 2016 & Bergeaud-Blackler, Lever & Fischer 2016). However, by employing the framework of ontology and ethics such as sketched above, the present work is more effective in bringing actors and industry together than Fischer's works. I am committed to investigating how the modes through which halal persists matter for the people involved.

While the above discussion highlights the significant theoretical differences between the project of this dissertation and the Fischer's work, there is also considerable difference between the ethnographic engagements of the two. The institutions that constitute Malaysia's halal *ecosystem*—the religious bureaucracies, science institutes, and businesses—are a primary focus of both Fischer's work and the research on which this dissertation is based. Fischer's primary interest in these institutions is comparative; in *Islam, Standards, and Technoscience* (Fischer 2016), for example, he draws out the common features of Malaysian and Singaporean regulatory bodies despite their quite different cultural settings. This comparative focus leads Fischer to represent institutions synchronically, emphasizing their intended functions. Drawing on the experiences of my interlocutors, I build on this synchronic understanding of institutions to consider how they have changed over time, often competing with one another and sometimes failing altogether. The resulting image is not one of a finely tuned and systematic ecosystem but a *mélange* of projects driving at diverse aims and based on a range of rationales and ambitions.

This project also brings into focus a set of actors that have received limited attention in Fischer's work: the professionals who work in the halal industry. My primary interlocutors are people who have formed their careers around halal; indeed, they include people who claim to have coined "halal industry" itself as business term. Attending to the experiences of these professionals opens onto another dimension of halal ethics. Many of these professionals understand halal not as a set of constrictive rules that must be adhered to in the pursuit of piety, but as a vista of business opportunities and an opportunity to bring the *ummah* (the universal community of Muslims) into step with a cosmopolitan world through diffusion of professionalism, industrial standards, consumerist lifestyles, and tastes: sophisticated Muslim consumers, for example, are as busy and as interested in convenience as anyone else in the modern world. Such aims foreground how halal industry professionals envision broader life projects within the halal ecosystem.

Finally, the ways in which halal functions as a boundary marker remain unanalyzed in Fischer's work. This absence is noteworthy because, as gestured at above and discussed in detail in chapter 2, both analysts and Malaysians themselves often understand social life in Malaysia as a competitive interplay—and at times open hostility—between ethnic-religious groups. The primary opposition is between Malay Muslim, dominant in the political sphere, and Chinese Buddhists, who excel in the business sphere.⁷ Indian Hindus constitute a third term in this idealized configuration, but more often are positioned as abject—poor, uncouth, and backwards—than as credible competitors (Willford 2006). Fredrik Barth famously pointed out that ethnic groups are defined by their boundaries, "not the cultural stuff that [they] enclose" (1969:15). Halal certainly sits at the boundary demarcating Muslims from non-Muslims; the

⁷ In his nuanced ethnography of working-class Chinese Malaysians, Donald Nonini (2015) challenges this typification of Chinese Malaysians as universally part of the business class.

Quran itself declares that each religious community has been given its own tradition of food prescriptions that should be followed (Quran 22:34).⁸ As is particularly evident in chapter 6, negotiating ethnic-religious boundaries is one of the main issues my interlocutors contend with in their ethical deliberations about halal. While foodways and consumer habits may not be the most dramatic indicator of social relations in Malaysia, it is a primary way in which people negotiate such relationships in their day-to-day lives.

So far in this chapter, I have presented certain features of Malaysia—the highly regulated character of Malaysian Islam, its multicultural demographics, and its economic development—and argued that these features explain, to at least some extent, the emergence of halal industries there. Thus, the capital, Kuala Lumpur, is an opportune site for the research on which this dissertation is based. In these early sections of this chapter, I have also introduced both the theoretical range and ethnographic domains of the dissertation by contrasting them with the work of Johan Fischer. In the following sections, I first provide an ethnographic description of how I entered the field—both how I encountered halal as an anthropological problem and how I discovered Kuala Lumpur was a hotbed of halal activity. The focus of the third section is on developing an ontologically realist account of the category of halal which recognizes the category as an assemblage. In the fourth section, I develop a notion of ethics that connects the structures of halal to people's experiences and aspirations. Finally, I provide an overview of my fieldwork in the Kuala Lumpur-based halal ecosystem.

⁸ Quranic citations are from *The Koran Interpreted*, translated by Arthur Arberry (1955). For a comparison of Quran translations for scholarly use, see Mohammed (2005).

The Chicago's Halal Scene and the Kuala Lumpur Halal Ecosystem

Chicago Scene

Anthropological writing conventionally opens with what Mary Louise Pratt (1986) calls “arrival scenes”. These scenes, epitomized by Bronislaw Malinowski’s (1961[1922]:4) image of the lone anthropologist on a shoreline watching a boat disappearing over the horizon, establish the anthropologist as “in the field” often by emphasizing distance (both spatially and culturally) through narration of some experience of dislocation. Cultural distance in these scenes is often expressed through the anthropologist’s experience of strangeness and confusion.

Though these scenes can be trite—they set-up a novel-like tension which is resolved through the revelations of the ethnographer—they are also useful and even necessary. Readers need to be introduced to the sites of ethnographic research and one of the most compelling ways to do so is to recount the ethnographer’s own early days in the field. Some arrival scenes even function metonymically, compressing the whole argument of the ethnography into a single scene (see, for example, Hirschkind 2006:1-2).

My own thinking about halal begins not in Muslim-majority Malaysia with its highly regulated forms of Islam, but in Chicago where just 2 percent of the population is Muslim (Pew Research Center) and state oversight of religion is minimal. My arrival scene is, thus, bifurcated: the Chicago scene and the Malaysian ecosystem. It is worth considering the earlier experiences in Chicago because they shaped my expectations and, in many respects, continue to influence my understanding of halal in Malaysia as a foil. My experience also foregrounds the importance of *gatekeepers* (Ervin 2005:170). These are people who, beyond merely facilitating the necessary introductions to people and institutions, are also expert informants who have helped me think through my observations and experiences. Thus, while I observe the convention of recounting an

arrival scene in the following section, I depart from some of its connotations. First, my initial research involving halal did not occur in some distant locale marked by extraordinary difference, but in an unassuming middle-class house in south Chicago. But even when I continued my research in Kuala Lumpur, admittedly far from my home bases in northern Illinois and, later, Atlanta, in many ways the Malaysian capital felt familiar: the cityscape was marked with familiar genres of shops and offices—including familiar global brands; technology, particularly mobile phones, are ubiquitous and a wide range of information and services is accessible through them; and, in general, the standard of living and infrastructure of the city is comparable or exceeds that of the US cities in which I have lived. This is not to claim that Kuala Lumpur is somehow a city without difference; any two cities—even in the same country—differ in significant ways, of course. Rather my experience of Kuala Lumpur is indicative of it being a global city; its patterns, appearances, and accoutrement are similar to other such cosmopolitan spaces. As such, the sort of cultural distance that is indexed in the conventional arrival scene is absent here. And second, because my arrival scenes are essentially about meeting key people who became gatekeepers enabling me to conduct this research, they emphasize the collaborative nature of my research experience rather than the image of the ethnographer as independent and unflappable.

It was in the kitchen of the south-Chicago home mentioned above that I first met Aileen, a thirtyish-year-old Muslim woman who had come to the US with her parents when she was twelve. She was serving coffee with raw milk to Tony, a farmer from northern Illinois, and me while explaining her opposition to a 2006 proposed Illinois-state law that would codify a standard for halal food: “We’re like a lazy society—put a label on it, let someone else tell you what to think and believe. If they say it is halal, it is halal. It’s finished.” Tony was there to

discuss the possibilities of partnering with a food co-op Aileen managed. The aim of the co-op was to produce food that met the members' religious-ethical standards. I was there to learn more about the co-op as well, but as a research assistant for a project that aimed at connecting food consumers directly with food producers. When, in 2006, Kendall Thu, the Northern Illinois University anthropologist leading the project, asked me, a beginning MA student, to conduct interviews with Chicago-area Muslims about halal, I was skeptical. As an undergraduate, I had spent two years in Egypt and after graduation another six months in Jordan; during that time, I had heard people talk about halal only a handful of times. I doubted there was much to say about it beyond citing a few Quranic verses and revisiting some earlier anthropological theories about taboos.

Aileen's commitment to halal as a means of pursuing issues of nutrition, social justice, and animal welfare, however, convinced me that halal could not be understood as an inflexible category already determined within the sacred literatures of Islam. Rather it required attention to a range of contingently-determined commitments having to do with the circulation of goods—that is to say, it is an anthropological problem. Aileen herself had similarly encountered halal not as something given, but as a thing in need of interpretation. This became clear in an interview in early 2007 in which she explained to me that her mother and father (from Jordan and Iran respectively) were non-practicing Muslims. They dismissed, for example, modest dress in the form of wearing hijab (a scarf covering women's hair) as backwards and the avoidance of pork—an exemplary Islamic food proscription—as the result of anxieties about trichinosis infection held-over from a time before modern cooking techniques. So, when Aileen, as a spiritually-oriented young person, became interested in seriously studying Islam—after flirtations with Hinduism, Taoism, and even Wicca—she had to formulate her own

interpretations. “While my parents didn’t discourage me from learning about Islam, they didn’t really have a knowledge base, so they couldn’t really help me [understand it],” she explained.

In Aileen’s view, this lack of guidance proved to be an advantage. For many Muslims, she explained, halal food is just the food that they are accustomed to eating—changes and anything unfamiliar are treated with suspicion. However, Aileen “noticed that the term halal never occurs in the Quran by itself—it is always accompanied by *thoyyib*.” She understood *thoyyib* as a further prescription that food must not only be halal (permissible in that it is free from forbidden ingredients) but must also be wholesome—good in every way. Aileen explained that the obligation of *thoyyib* means Muslims must seek-out food that is healthful and socially responsible. On her view, it precludes, for example, unhealthy processed foods, particularly if they are deceptively advertised as healthful; food production practices that damages the environment, such as monocropping; and food systems that damage local economies. Since these values were not included in the proposed halal standards, Aileen opposed the standard.

In 2002, Aileen and a small group of similarly concerned Muslims started a meat-buying co-operative with the aim of putting their shared ethical commitments into practice. Composed of roughly forty members, this enterprise contracted directly with farmers to raise chicken, sheep, and cattle according to their specific ethical guidelines. Members of the co-op were primarily concerned with issues like the treatment of animals, the avoidance of grain feeds, and use of hormones. However, the particulars of how the animals were slaughtered were less important. This is noteworthy because for many Muslims the procedure according to which animals are slaughtered is paramount; the sizable South Asian community in Chicago, for example, often uses the word “*zabiha*” (derived from an Arabic term meaning properly slaughtered) as a synonym for halal. Aileen justified this by explaining that she felt that Muslims

who put so much weight on slaughter methods had “a very narrow way of looking at halal”; their focus was myopically on the letter of the law. In her view, even more problematic was the growing influence of the kosher and halal industries reinforcing these narrow interpretations of sacred food rules; just as important as these legalistic intricacies, was the spirit of halal including environmental stewardship, caring for neighbors and community, and the treatment of animals.

When I met Aileen in 2006, despite being a devout Muslim—wearing hijab, strictly observing prayers, and dedicating a considerable portion of her time to the Chicago-area Muslim community—she was embroiled in a controversy in that very community. IFANCA (the Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America), one of the main US-based halal certifying bodies, along with its halal-industry business partners, began working toward a halal standard with the intention that it could be codified into state law. While establishing such standards would be a boon for IFANCA—being the first certifying body in the US to have a standard legally recognized would both ensure its prominence in the US and elevate its status in the crowded global marketplace of certifiers—the undertaking faced a number of obstacles. The standard would have to take into consideration state and federal meat and food production regulations, the formal Islamic legal opinions coming from different traditions of interpretation, and the preferences and biases of the various ethnic and national groups that make up the greater Chicago area Muslim community. Furthermore, the range of the standard would have to be determined. Would it attempt to regulate non-food items such as cosmetics or pharmaceuticals that often contain either alcohol or porcine-derived components? These two elements are universally recognized as haram (forbidden, the opposite of halal), but whether their proscription extends to non-food goods remains contested.

This touchy situation was further complicated by Aileen questioning the very legitimacy of establishing halal standards compatible with conventional industrial food manufacturers. During our conversations, Aileen said she doubted whether the Islamic scholars working on the standards even understood industrial food production sufficiently. She suggested that, more than likely, they imagined farms managed by farmers who nurture the animals to maturity rather than the corporate “grower houses” that domicile 200,000 or more chickens and run according to principles of efficiency: the meatiest animals possible in the least amount of time with the smallest possible expenditure of resources. Demands to maximize profit, Aileen insisted, result in situations in which animals are not properly cared for, workers are underpaid and their health and well-being are put at risk, and low quality products are foisted on consumers. Reflecting on cattle feed lots, Aileen posed a conundrum: “We know that eating beef is halal. But we also know that polluting the water is not halal and that ruining people’s livelihoods is also not halal. So, is factory farming halal?”

Aileen’s outspokenness earned her a positive reputation as a food activist, indeed that is why I was initially introduced to her. But among leaders of Muslim organizations and some businesspeople, she was seen as interfering with the development of the halal industry and the respectability of the broader Muslim community. In 2006, these negative sentiments lead a prominent local Muslim journalist to circulate an open letter reiterating concerns both about industrial food and the halal standards being proposed as well as defending Aileen’s reputation as a Muslim who was deeply dedicated to promoting the wellbeing of the Muslim community. To my knowledge, while there are fraud laws that criminalize falsely claiming products are halal, there are still no legal standards in the US about what constitutes a halal product; thus enforcing

the fraud laws is difficult (see Cullen & Mohammed (2016) for a description of the legal landscape of halal standardization in the US).

Kuala Lumpur's Halal Ecosystem

In April 2007, as part of a study-abroad history course about Islam in Southeast Asia, I made my first trip to Kuala Lumpur. When I explained my halal-related research in Chicago to the professor, he arranged for me to meet one of his friends, Sarah, who, at the time, was a marketing executive for a large Malaysian food producer that specialized in halal products. When I met Sarah at a coffee shop a few days later, she introduced herself—laughingly—as the halal-sausage queen—this because, she explained, she was instrumental in promoting the halal breakfast sausages that had become one of the companies most popular products and, thus, established her reputation among businesses interested in the market for halal products. According to Sarah, Malaysia was at the forefront of promoting this market and, if I wanted to understand the business of halal, I would have to understand what was going on in Malaysia.

Sarah convinced me to miss the planned itinerary for the day, and instead go with her to meet one of her colleagues, Rizal, a writer and researcher at a media company called KasehDia; he was, according to Sarah, “someone who really understands what is going on with halal in Malaysia.” Despite Rizal’s tight schedule, he agreed to a short meeting with Sarah and me. He enthusiastically explained that Malaysia would soon have a government agency dedicated to halal issues and focused on working with businesses to promote the industry (HDC, the Halal Industry Development Corporation, began operating a year later in 2008). He reiterated Sarah’s view that Malaysia really was at the forefront of the emerging halal industry; HDC’s orientation towards the business of halal was, he explained, central to maintaining this leadership position.

When he asked me about the organization I “represented,” I realized that I had, unwittingly, given the impression that I was interested in getting into the halal industry rather than studying it. When I explained that I was doing research with an informal, forty-member co-op dedicated to providing ethically raised meat to its members, Rizal was visibly underwhelmed. KasehDia did consulting work with some smaller firms, but with the aim of developing them to a level at which they could compete in international markets. In Rizal’s view, the future of the halal industry was the development of standards that would regulate the buying and selling of tons of halal products across international borders. He went on to suggest that the production of halal goods for niche markets, as he typified the aim of the co-op, was “old-fashioned.”

Despite this rocky start, Rizal and I met again during this initial trip to Malaysia, and, perhaps because he was contemplating pursuing a master’s degree himself, he was quite interested in the research project I was just beginning to piece together. Before the end of the trip, I stayed with Rizal and his family for two nights and even made a daytrip with him to Port Klang (fifty kilometers west of Kuala Lumpur) both to see the Straits of Melaka and to look for “authentic” Malay houses in the intervening villages—something Rizal was very keen for me to see. Since 2006, both Sarah and Rizal have continued to be regular interlocutors and, I would say, friends. They were key informants when I returned to Malaysia for a month in 2007 and a few weeks in 2008 to collect sufficient data to complete my MA. They were also among my initial contacts during the fieldwork between August 2014 and December 2015 for this dissertation.

My decision to pursue a halal-focused research project was solidified during that initial trip to Malaysia. The differences between halal in Chicago and in Malaysia were obvious, but more pointedly, Malaysia was developing just the sort of business-focused halal that Aileen was

raising concerns about. So, the same processes of standardization and commercialization were afoot at both sites. In the titles of these sections, I index the difference between Chicago and Kuala Lumpur as the difference between a *scene* and an *ecosystem*. The distinction is inspired by the fact that during my more recent fieldwork in Kuala Lumpur, I noticed informants using “halal ecosystem” far more frequently than in the past. I asked Sarah about this; while she was not sure that the term was trending, she felt that it made more sense than “industry” in many cases—while “industry” only points to the business aspects of halal, “ecosystem” includes the governmental and regulatory frameworks that make the business of halal possible.

While I have not traced the genealogy of *ecosystem* in relation to the Malaysian halal, as a term of business jargon, it was popularized by James Moore’s (1993) “Predators and Prey: A New Ecology of Competition.” The piece is a response to the late twentieth-century growing awareness of global interconnectedness in the business sphere. Drawing on the evolutionary insights of anthropologist Gregory Bateson and biologist Stephen Gould, in the piece Moore argues that the intensity of the interdependence, both cooperative and competitive, between businesses, supply chains, and populations of consumers forces analysts to attend not only to individual businesses and business leaders—the organisms of the business world—but the health, sustainability, and decline of overall business ecosystems, these knots of business entities that form communities. While I doubt that the term was used with such precision in many contexts, I retain its use in the dissertation for both ethnographic reasons, it is a term that is in circulation among halal industry professionals in Kuala Lumpur, and theoretical reasons, *ecosystem* conveniently overlaps with *assemblage*.

Scene, on the other hand, is not an analytic term, but is used to intuitively highlight the contrast with *ecosystem* as a mix of firms and ventures organized much more simply and with far

less hierarchy—it is a foil to the notion of ecosystem. This distinction echoes one made by Anna Tsing between her notions of assemblage and ecosystem (2015:22-23). In this account, ecosystems are often regarded as bounded and the relationships within them fixed. Assemblages, on the other hand, “are open-ended gatherings” (2015:23). The coordination of their elements is unintentional and thoroughly contingent. The distinction Tsing is making is between the modernist imaginings of all the bits and pieces of nature fit into a functioning ecosystem and the sort of motley groupings that spring up of necessity and happenstance as an assemblage in the aftermath of capitalist exploitation. For the purposes here, Tsing offers an important reminder that while ecosystems may take on the appearance of a system of well-integrated components, few systems are actually closed, new relationships between parts are always possible, and existing relationships are bound to change. The Chicago *scene* differs from the Kuala Lumpur *ecosystem* in their degrees of unsettledness. But as we shall see, while the assemblage (in my sense, not Tsing’s) of the halal ecosystem strives to rationally integrate its parts, the parts do not always act in accordance with such intentions.

Ontology and Categories as Anthropological Problems

Realism

To think about halal ontologically—to ask how halal *gets into the world*—is to approach it from a realist position. Realism in philosophy is not a general theory but, rather, a position staked out in regard to particular domains; that is, one is a realist in regard to some putative entity or domain of entities. The least controversial among these are particular concrete objects—like single rocks, individual people, particular planets, and so forth. Such things are generally contiguous substantive bodies that we can apprehend with our senses—they are the sorts of

things that can be bumped into. More problematic are groupings of like things such as species and types of things (for example, automobiles or sedimentary rocks). Debates in realism also involve abstract entities such as numbers and geometrical figures. Obviously, people also debate the existence of supernatural things like gods and spirits. The meaning of realism, then, unsurprisingly differs significantly depending on who is using it. However, broadly, realist claims about something posit that the thing in question does not merely exist in thought; real things are mind-independent things (Alston 2002:1 and Brock & Mares 2007:3). The inverse of realism is *conceptualism*, the claim that something exists only as an idea; merely conceptual things are mind-dependent things (Jubien 1997:28-30). A corollary of mind dependence is that if something is merely conceptual, then, when no one is thinking about it, it ceases to exist. So, for example, if no one is thinking about an imaginary thing, say, the ghosts that haunt my kitchen, then those ghosts are completely absent from reality—obviously, not even thoughts of them would exist. The take away here is that *conceptualism* is the claim that something only exists as an idea. We may also have ideas about *real* things, and often do; however real things have an existence apart from our ideas of them.

To be a realist, then, in regard to halal is to commit to the position that halal does not merely depend on belief or on people thinking about it; it is not merely conceptual—not just an idea. Such a position may appear counterintuitive—after all, halal is based in a particular religious tradition and it would seem impossible for those who are unfamiliar with Islam to “bump into” halal in any sense. Furthermore, we might suspect that, if those who believe in halal or are otherwise aware of it were to stop thinking about it (if, for example, they all just vanished), halal itself would cease to be. In short, halal may appear to be merely a conceptual

part of certain peoples' lives—it seems dependent on their ideas of it in which case it is not a feature of reality itself.

To understand how it is possible for a category like halal to exist independent of minds it is useful to consider artifacts. The point can be made using an unrelated example as a clear illustration and then considering how the case of the example applies to halal. Let's begin by considering a particular concrete object, the sort of thing over which there is little ontological debate. A well-known artifact such as Pablo Picasso's *The Weeping Woman* is a good example. This painting is a thoroughly contingent object; it exists only because it was conceived of and produced by Picasso. It is also thoroughly real; even if it were sealed in an inviolable vault, all records of it destroyed, and memories of it lost, it would persist as part of reality. More intriguing for the purpose here, *The Weeping Woman* is a cubist painting—it is a manifestation of cubist style. So, through its persistence, cubism too persists—even if all other cubist works were destroyed, its techniques forgotten, and any records of it lost. The persistence of the painting is sufficient to ensure that cubism remains part of reality. Thus, the *category* of cubism (instantiated by *The Weeping Woman*) is real, not conceptual.

I contend that the case of halal is parallel to that of cubism. Halal, like cubism, is manifested in a variety of modes: textually it is encoded into sacred literature, it is enacted through prescribed procedures for slaughtering animals for meat, and it is lodged in the very products themselves. Thus, if every scrap of literature referencing halal were lost and people forgot about it and became wholly ignorant of it, halal would persist as part of reality as long as a single halal item—a link of halal turkey sausage, perhaps—remained. The point here is that halal is not merely conceptual—it is not (just) part of an Islamic imaginary; rather, it persists in the

world. There is an echo here of Clifford Geertz's well-known maxim that "Culture is public because meaning is" (1973b:12).⁹

Ontology

An echo, but a heavily modulated one. Geertz's focus on meaning necessitates that symbols are public—meaning can only be produced through social interaction. So, in as far as culture is involved in the production and maintenance of meaning, Geertz shows conclusively that it is not merely conceptual; he successfully moves it out of peoples' heads. The above discussion, however, is intended to move beyond this position and show how *halal* straddles social and human-independent reality. This is the significance of invoking ontology rather than the more firmly established—and seemingly closely related—concept within anthropology, *worldview*. The latter, Geertz writes, refers to a community's "*picture of the way things in sheer actuality are, their concept of nature, of self, of society*" (1973a:127 emphasis added). So, while *worldview* moves us out of the solipsistic subjective world of the individual mind, the furnishings of reality remain marooned in the intersubjective world—that is, not dependent on a single particular mind, but on a community of minds. Ontology's promise is to foreground things themselves rather than people's experience of them. Or as Bruno Latour rails:

Are you not fed up at finding yourselves forever locked into language alone, or imprisoned in social representation alone, as so many social scientists would like you to be? We want to gain access to things themselves, not only to their phenomena. The real is not remote; rather, it is accessible in all the objects mobilized throughout the world. Doesn't external reality abound right here among us? (Latour 1993:90).

⁹ Hilary Putnam punctuates his argument for semantic externalism with: "cut the pie anyway you like, 'meanings' ain't just in your head!" (1998[1975]:236). While Putnam's argument is too complicated to adequately summarize here, my contention that *halal* should not be analyzed as merely conceptual resonates with the form of externalism he proposes—the notion that meaning is derived through direct reference to things in the world.

As Caspar Bruun Jensen (2016) points out, anthropological interest in ontology, while often represented as new, is traceable to STS (Science and Technology Studies) in the 1990s and a 2002 conference, *New Ontologies*, organized by Andrew Pickering. So, the anthropological conversation about ontology has been sustained over at least the past twenty years. Of course, this couple of decades pales in comparison to philosophy's engagement with ontology—from which anthropology adopts the concept—that began with the pre-Socratics in the sixth and seventh centuries BCE. Not surprisingly, the term has taken on a variety of meanings. While it would be futile to attempt to catalog them here—and even less realistic to suggest some conclusive evaluation of them, it is desirable to provide some orientation to its use in the present context.

As suggested by the discussion of realism above, a central concern of ontology is the existential dimension of what there is: *does a particular thing exist or not?* It is useful to clarify *ontology* by contrasting ontological claims against other sorts of claims, such as *epistemic* and *normative*. Far from being a mere intellectual exercise, characterizing the use of these three terms is necessary to understand both how this dissertation is organized (into two parts about ontology and ethics) and how I distinguish my own position from what has been called the ontological turn in anthropology. As with cubism above, this difference can be illustrated with a clear example and then applied to the case of halal. A convenient example is the assertion that *there is a God*; this claim can be easily varied to exemplify how these three types of assertions are distinct yet interrelated. In its initial form it is clearly ontological—it asserts that a particular entity has a positive ontological status: it exists. However, we also want to know how we could know whether such an assertion is true—what conditions must be met in order to consider that proposition to be among our stocks of knowledge. Such concerns about knowledge are

epistemic. Finally, the religiously inclined may hold that to believe such an assertion is morally commendable, that *we ought to believe the God exists*. Positions about ethical matters—what should be done—are normative. These, then, are three common types of evaluative claims: *what is*, *what is known*, and *what is good or valuable*. While they are certainly interconnected—*we should not believe in God if we don't have sufficient justification*, for example, is a normative claim that draws on both epistemology and ontology—they address discernable dimensions of reality.

However, ontologists are not only concerned with whether or not a particular thing exists, but also *how it exists*. Truths about numbers and geometric shapes, for example, seem independent of what people think about them and the empirical world, so they are often regarded as abstract things. Claims about fictional characters, however, are dependent on the texts about them and so are conceptual, at least in an extended sense. The point here is that, beyond mere existential determinations, ontologists seek to categorize things—determine what kinds of things there are. To put it slightly differently, ontologies reveal how or by what mode something exists. So, while ontology is often described as the study of *being itself* or *being qua being*, here it may be more accurately considered “the study of what categories of entities there are and how they relate to one another” (Lowe 2002:14) or, more simply, “what *kinds* of things exist” (Jubien 1997:24 emphasis added).

The above characterizations of ontology—as distinct from epistemology and ethics and as a certain kind of intellectual endeavor to determine what *kinds* of things exist—is important not only to describe a basic term central to this dissertation but also to distinguish it from another use increasingly common in anthropology.

The so-called ontological turn in anthropology is a trend typified by the edited volume *Thinking Through Things* (Henare, Holbraad, & Wastell eds. 2007b). In this volume, *ontology* is invoked as a strategy for dealing with radical alterity encountered during fieldwork. Thus, when an informant tells anthropologist Martin Holbraad, for example, that a powder used in a divining ritual *is* power, the authors insist that we take this as fact: the powder being presented to the anthropologist is a unique sort of thing that is utterly unfamiliar to those of us not involved with divining (2007a:11-12). On this view, anthropology is not an enterprise about negotiating various interpretations of a single universally shared world, but a process of coming to terms with numerous different worlds (2007a:9). Thus, it locates *difference* in fractured actuality, not in fractured interpretations (worldviews) of a shared universe. The motivation for this view is that it takes seriously claims about the world that differ from our own. The foil here is the anthropologist working with the conventional frames of *cultural relativism* and *worldview* and who assumes informants merely have a different, and often less nuanced, understanding of the same world with which the anthropologist is engaged (2007a:11). However, this type of ontological framework generates countless irreconcilable contradictions. To temper this, Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell, explain that their many-worlds view is not so much a metaphysical claim, but a *heuristic approach* to the problem of difference; “with purposeful naïveté, the aim of this method is to take ‘things’ encountered in the field as they present themselves, rather than immediately assuming that they signify, represent, or stand for something else” (2007a:2). So, the ontology of many worlds is not a claim about the way things are, but rather a strategy for approaching fieldwork.

It is the switch from *many interpretations* to *many worlds* that is marked by “ontology” in this framework. However, the primary concerns of proponents are epistemological. They are less

concerned about the way the world is than with how we *know* about difference. Furthermore, these epistemological concerns are driven by certain ethical commitments—*we ought to take seriously the claims of others even when they are vastly, even irreconcilably, different from our own*. Thus, while this theoretical turn goes under the banner of ontology, it is centrally concerned with epistemology and ethics.

This dissertation, on the other hand, is not invested in the pristine preservation of halal as a component of a Muslim world that is fundamentally alien to non-Muslims. Rather, the project pursued here is to describe how halal becomes part of the world, how it gets into and persists as part of reality. It is in this later sense that the project is oriented toward questions of ontology.

Along these lines, we need to ask: just what kind of thing is halal? Where would it fit into an ontological analysis of the world? John Esposito characterizes halal as a “Quranic term used to indicate what is lawful or permitted” (2003:105). Turning to the Quran itself, in an often-cited passage pertaining to halal, people are instructed: “So eat of what God has provided you lawful [halal] and good; and be you thankful for the blessings of God, if it be Him that you serve” (16:115). Halal is what is lawful or what God has provided to sustain humanity—it is a particular *category* of things. So, the type of thing halal is is a category.

Here it is perhaps necessary to clarify that the focus in this dissertation is the *ontology of a category* rather than *ontological categories*. Categories and categorizing are ubiquitous. “Every time we see something as a kind of thing, for example, a tree, we are categorizing. Whenever we reason about kinds of things—chairs, nations, illnesses, emotions...we employ categories” (Lakoff 1987:5-6). Indeed, in the view of George Lakoff, traffic with categories is synonymous with being human. However, only certain very general categories are *ontological categories*; such categories name the essential types of things that furnish reality. Jan Westerhoff suggests,

for example, that while *physical object*, *event*, and *property* are sufficiently general to be candidates for ontological categories, *pencil*, *explosion*, and *solubility* are not (2005:25). So, metaphysicians who are concerned about ontology must develop an account of generality that unambiguously picks out ontological categories from other categories.¹⁰

Our concern with the category of halal is different; it involves accounting for how this particular category is *established*, *grounded*, or *territorialized* within reality. The seemingly foundational nature of the types of categories metaphysicians are interested in, along with concepts like generalizability and intersubstitutability, allow them to carry out their work *a priori*—through argumentation without any attention to particular things (their conclusions apply to all things). Halal, however, is far less general; to understand it, we must attend to specific empirical sites in which it appears. The following passage from media and religious studies specialist Jeremy Stolow is suggestive of the issue:

The problem with the phrase ‘religion and media’ is that it is a pleonasm. Whether as the transmission of a numinous essence to a community of believers, the self-presencing of the divine in personal experience, or the unfolding of mimetic circuits of exchange between transcendental powers and earthly practitioners, ‘religion’ can only be manifested through some process of mediation. Throughout history, in myriad forms, communication with and about ‘the sacred’ has always been enacted through written texts, ritual gestures, images and icons, architecture, music, incense, special garments, saintly relics and other objects of veneration, markings upon flesh, wagging tongues and other body parts. It is only through such media that it is at all possible to proclaim one’s faith, mark one’s affiliation, receive spiritual gifts, or participate in any of the countless local idioms of making the sacred present to mind and body (2005: 125).

In this passage, Stolow insists that our experiences of transcendent categories such as religion or the sacred are limited to interactions with discourse, material, and bodies. So, he is making an ontological claim about what sort of things the religious and the sacred are. Or, to put

¹⁰ Though full consideration of ontologically basic categories is not within the purview of this project, it is important to clarify that, while *generality* is an obvious way to distinguish ontological from other types categories, Westeroff also considers other characteristics like *intersubstitutability* and *identity* as equally important (2005:40 & 59 respectively).

it slightly differently, *how they appear and get into the world*. This directly parallels the ontological question that I want to pursue about halal. Furthermore, in the passage, Stolow suggests a methodology for pursuing the question: attend to the texts, rituals, practices, and physical instantiations associated with the phenomenon—in this case, halal. This is just what I attempt to do in Part 1 of the dissertation.

I work with Stolow's insight by developing an account of how the category of halal gets into the world, but it seems to me preferable to modify his view in a slight, but significant, way. Rather than taking discourse, material, and bodies as *mediating* religion, I want to suggest that these forms *manifest* religion; that is, when they are taken collectively, they constitute the category of religion absolutely. Such a detail may seem like an overly picky adjustment, but it is significant. The notion of mediation necessitates a two-part relationship: there are the media (the content of interlocutors' experiences) and also the mediated (that is, in the passage above, religion or the sacred or whatever the abstraction being transferred to the sphere of experience). On this understanding, mediation invokes a Platonic metaphysics. This is tenable; however, we are left affirming the existence of mysterious transcendental or abstract entities—religion, sacredness or whatever it is that is being mediated.

Alternatively, the notion of *manifestation* I am suggesting draws on an *in re* (in the thing) model—it does not require the existence of abstract entities. Rather, on this view, the category of the sacred from the above passage would adhere in individual instances of sacred discourse, embodiment, and materiality—the category of sacredness itself is completely exhausted by the sum of these instances.

The opposition set-up here between Platonic and *in re* accounts as competing realist theories is standard within metaphysics. I will not pretend to add insight to that philosophical

conversation, let alone adjudicate between the two. However, I do see certain advantages in adopting the in re view in the context of the current project.

To understand these advantages, consider a challenge commonly posed against in re accounts: such an account would claim that a would-be abstract category is fully instantiated by its instances. However, how can these sundry instances be brought together within their respective category unless they all exhibit some specific characteristic that transcends their individual boundaries in such a way that allows them to share and be collectively identified by it? As an example, in re theories attempt to explain the category of blue as constituted and exhausted by the simple collection of all actual occurrences of blue in the world. But, if no reference is made to an abstract property of blueness that all these occurrences share, then what is that allows them to be classified together? Without an abstract (Platonic) property, in re theories appear to be at a loss about how to form categories.

My suggestion is that in re-style categories do not adhere because of some shared characteristic, but rather these categories consist of contingent constellations of discourses, materials, and bodies. The strategy here is not unfamiliar—it recognizes that a search for necessary conditions for membership within a category is a search for essences—a Platonic undertaking that cleaves to abstraction. A solution lays in the embrace of the contingent; categories are bound together by contextual networks that result from historical social processes. Talal Asad invokes such contingency when he writes of the similarly problematic category, the secular, that: “over time a variety of concepts, practices, and sensibilities have come together to form the ‘the secular’” (2003:16). On this view, the secular is a calcification resulting from the passage of time more than a rationally coherent category. Importantly, because categories are bounded together by social and historical processes, they are proper topics for anthropological,

sociological, and historical inquiry—not solely the domain of philosophy. To put it differently, such categories have social lives.¹¹

Assemblage

While Asad pursues a genealogical strategy to draw out the contingent elements constitutive of secularism, I propose using an assemblage framework to position halal. The notion of *assemblage* has received a great deal of attention in anthropology especially with the publication of Aihwa Ong and Stephen Collier’s edited volume, *Global Assemblages* (2005). The title of the volume names its unifying theoretical concept, global assemblages. On my reading, the emphasis of the volume is as much on *global* as it is *assemblage*. Collier and Ong draw readers’ attention to two senses of global.¹² In the first sense, it is used to describe something that is, “‘all-encompassing’...cover[ing] all times and places” (Collier & Ong 2005:10). In the second—and more pertinent sense—global designates phenomena whose significance or validity is independent of cultural or societal contexts; such phenomena can move between these contexts. Or, as Collier and Ong write, global phenomena “have a distinctive capacity for decontextualization and recontextualization” (2005:11). Such capacity for movement is exceedingly familiar in an era characterized by globalization. As an example, a laboratory protocol—say for screening drinking water—could be carried out in a variety of locations and cultural contexts while retaining the validity of its results. This sort of technoscientific practice is global not because it is present everywhere, but because its significance is not dependent on

¹¹ The *social lives* of categories is developed in chapter 3.

¹² In this passage, Collier and Ong are reflecting on a translated quote from Max Weber’s *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* in which word “universal” appears twice with quite distinct meanings in each instance. These meanings can be directly grafted on to “global”, they argue (Ong and Collier 2005:10-11).

where it occurs. The notion of assemblage follows from this idea of the global: the capacity for mobility is not just extractability, but also the ability to resettle into novel contexts. Such resettlements result in new arrangements of elements—they produce assemblages. So, a mobile water-testing protocol will have to settle into a relationship with a particular place’s water infrastructure, its regulatory regimes, and work rhythms of the technicians who carry it out, at the very least. Such resettled assemblages are likely to be marked by degrees of contestation and a certain amount of instability. Collier and Ong write, “the term ‘global assemblage’ suggests inherent tensions: global implies broadly encompassing, seamless, and mobile; assemblage implies heterogenous, contingent, unstable, partial, and situated” (2005:12).

As explained above, my use of *assemblage* is compatible with notions of global assemblage yet draws more directly on Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) ontological elaboration of the concept. These elaborations permit understanding how a thing may exhibit both stability and yet be susceptible to change. This capacity of assemblages is developed clearly in the Deleuze-inspired work of philosopher Manuel DeLanda. DeLanda insists that the French *agencement* does a better job in this regards than its English equivalent, assemblage; the French term captures both “the action of matching or fitting together a set of components” as it does the product of such an action (2016:1). Here Michael Peletz is right to draw the connection between assemblage and Claude Lévi-Strauss’s notion of bricolage as “processes *and* products of assembling, constructing, or creating” (Peletz 2013:606 emphasis added). Both DeLanda and Peletz highlight continuity between binary oppositions—change/stability and process/product rather than one of discontinuity that classifies things by identifying them with a single term of these binaries. Recognition of continuity is useful in unpacking the intent behind the question: *how does halal*

get into the world? The task is to understand halal as a particular sort of process of production—a project of becoming.

A key difference between assemblages and totalities (undifferentiated wholes) is that the former is characterized by *relationships of exteriority* while the latter exhibits *relationships of interiority*. Deleuze analogizes this difference through the contrast between *alliance* (relation of exteriority) and *filiation* (interiority) (Deleuze & Parnet 2002:69 as cited in DeLanda 2016:1). In an alliance, the component parties keep their own identities—they are collaborating partners but retain their autonomy. However, in a child-parent unity of filiation, the components co-constitute one another, a child is a child just in virtue of its relationship with a parent. Neither term can end the totality while simultaneously sustaining its own identity. The difference between these two types of relationships explains the *global* of assemblages—because components retain their autonomy, they can be shifted between contexts and be redeployed.

While Ong and Collier stress the fluidity of global assemblages by describing them as heterogenous, contingent, unstable, partial, and situated, such fluidity is only part of the story in the case of halal. As a category, halal is certainly shifting and open to contestation (as already illustrated in the previous section by events in Chicago and Malaysia), but it also exhibits considerable stability, having been, for example, codified in sacred literature since the seventh century (Esposito 2011:23). So, to be useful, assemblage needs to account for both fluidity and stability.¹³ DeLanda explains this capacity for both fluidity and fixity as a result of each assemblage being characterized by its position along two dimensions of being (2006:12-13). The first is the degree of its *territorialization*—the degree of stability exhibited by an assembled

¹³ George Marcus and Erkan Saka identify this aspiration to account for both fixity and fluidity within the same framework as a characteristic modernist trend across art, literature and social theory—a trend that, in their view, encompasses *assemblage* (2006:101).

thing. Territorialization increases as the boundaries of the assemblage are more clearly delineated and as its internal homogeneity is increased.

Take as an example a commercial venture such as a restaurant; its being is based on an assemblage of equipment, workers, and material to work with. As it develops from an idea—having a merely conceptual basis—to, perhaps, using a shared rented kitchen, to buying its own equipment and building and hiring a fulltime staff, it is increasingly territorialized.

Territorialization can be quite literal; it is a process by which a thing comes to occupy space (often physical, but as we shall see also conceptual, symbolic, and discursive) in reality. The restaurant above would be further territorialized if it opened at additional locations—it would literally occupy more of reality. The counter to territorialization is *detrterritorialization*, the process of an assembled thing retreating, its boundaries becoming less distinct, and the diminishing of internal homogeneity. To continue with the same example, while additional branches of a restaurant may increase its presence, and thus territorialize it, if these branches are radically different from one another (different menus, qualities, even atmospheres), such differences detrterritorialize the restaurant—they make the assemblage less stable.

DeLanda argues that *assemblage* is characterized as well by a second dimension, the positions of its components between *material* and *expressive* (2006:12-13). So, while material territorialization has to do with the effectiveness with which an assemblage occupies physical space, expressive territorialization involves the processes by which it occupies conceptual and symbolic space. Thus, while the building occupied by a restaurant may materially territorialize it, the building's design may brand the restaurant and contribute to its expressive territorialization.

In developing his notion of *network*, also based on Deleuze and Guattari's notion of assemblage (Jensen 2016:5), Bruno Latour invokes the useful image of a railroad system

(1993:117). It is easy to see how a railroad occupies a territory with its tracks, stations, trains, workers, passengers and such. Yet, its territory is not contiguous. Furthermore, we can imagine how a station that is far out on a seldom used line is less well integrated into the network (assemblage) than two busy stations that are connected by a rail line that is in constant use. Some lines may be so seldom used that they are discontinued and the connecting line even dismantled, removing the what-was-a-station from the network altogether. Similarly, new centers of population may lead to establishment of new tracks. Or, technological upgrades may replace the material components of the network. Reflecting on the sorts of inertias at play within such networks as well as its possibilities for change provides an exceedingly useful model for understanding how assemblages are subject to both fixity and change.

The framework of assemblage (or Latour's networks) show how categories such as halal persist in *re*. The Platonic account, again, would have us imagine halal as an abstract property that is then instantiated in some things, the permitted, and not others, the prohibited—rather like some things are blue and other things are not. An *in re* account characterizes halal as a category that is manifested through a congeries of territorializing components. The most obvious mode of territorialization is through the physical presence of halal products. Halal literally occupies space in the world through their material presences. That territorialization can be increased by further delimiting halal's borders by creating special shops or partitioned sections of shops that are stocked solely with halal products. But halal also occupies space with the machinery and facilities used to produce halal goods (the abattoirs or factory spaces used to assemble processed foods, for example, but also the offices used by organizations that certify products as halal and the laboratory space and equipment used to guarantee those certified products really are halal). Processes of certification and standards territorialize halal by producing greater homogeneity

among its constituent elements. Labels both materially territorialize halal, but also do so expressively by enunciating things' halal-ness. Though, the plurality of labels, along with the suspicion that some certifiers may be less reputable, may deterritorialize the assemblage. Religious texts, industrial standards, advertisements, and sermons all further expressively territorialize halal.

The category of halal is manifest through physical objects, production processes, industrial protocols, marketing strategies, consumer and religious practices, various types of prescriptive texts among other things. These are the modes of its territorialization. Some constituents, like the prohibition of pork and alcohol, are more central to the assemblage than others, such as halal nail polish. Just as in Latour's model of the rail system, less-well incorporated elements are less salient and more likely to disappear from the assemblage than those central to it. Thus, an in re account of halal, modeled as an assemblage, provides for both the stability and changeability of the category.

Summing-up Realist Ontology and Assemblage

In this dissertation, I use several framings that are either already well-established within anthropology or are becoming increasingly so. Yet, I have tried to show how each is put to work in new ways. First, I argued for an ontological understanding of halal that is realist. Such a position justifies foregrounding halal itself rather than merely analyzing it as ideas locked away inside people or as an element of a collective imaginary. It brings halal out into the world where it can be seen and interacted with—even among those who are not Muslim. This does not, of course, jettison people from the analysis. The existence of halal is thoroughly contingent on their efforts, aspirations, and projects. While the people who think and strategize about halal as well as

those who work in the industry will necessarily be a constant reference throughout the dissertation, their experiences will be particularly highlighted in the second part. Instead, the realist ontology situates halal as an artifact—something that is both the product of human effort and is real in that it has the capacity to stand on its own. I have also argued that halal is a category that persists as an assemblage. This assemblage framework allows us to account for the numerous simultaneous projects that contribute to halal’s territorialization as well as how the category is both susceptible to change and yet retains its identity. This capacity for change—particularly the proclivity for shifting prominence among components within the network of the assemblage—provides clues to understand Aileen’s anxieties about the increasing business interests in halal. Such interests have the potential to restructure halal, activating certain networks while obviating others. In this case, Aileen was concerned that the restructured category would become increasingly responsive to the demands of translocal markets and, thus, its use in the sorts of ethical projects envisioned by Aileen and her allies is foreclosed upon. To put it more generally, the ontology of halal has ramifications for the possibilities of its ethical engagements. The aim of this dissertation is to examine this relationship in the context of the Malaysian halal ecosystem.

Ethics as an Anthropological Problem

Just as anthropological discussions of *worldview* prefigure discussions of *ontology*, anthropology’s engagement with *ethics* parallels earlier discussions of *ethos*. Of the latter concept, Clifford Geertz writes, “[it] is the tone, character, and quality of [people’s] life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood; it is the underlying attitude toward themselves and their world that life reflects” (1973a:127). At first pass, this seems a rather gangly assortment of

things, but his inclusion of morals and aesthetics shows that what Geertz has in mind is the normative aspects of life— notions of what ought to be done. Notions that themselves are based on beliefs about what is good; that is, on values.

For the purpose here, what is important is that Geertz understands ethos to be intertwined with worldview; that the normative and the descriptive are bound together: “[t]he powerfully coercive ‘ought’ is felt to grow out of a comprehensive factual ‘is’,” he writes (1973a:126) and then again, “[m]orality has thus the air of simple realism, of practical wisdom; religion supports proper conduct [ethos] by picturing a world [worldview] in which such conduct is only common sense” (1973a:129). We have already seen that Webb Keane (2013) holds a similar view; ethical commitments condition ontological beliefs.¹⁴ Geertz, however, argues that ethos and worldview shore-up one another: worldview creates the conditions under which ethos seems reasonable and ethos imbues world view with an affective sense of authenticity (1973a:127). But here Geertz recognizes a problem, something that has troubled philosophers since at least the mid-eighteenth century with the appearance of David Hume’s *Treatise on Human Nature* in which Hume convincingly argued that an ought (an ethical claim) cannot be derived from an is (a descriptive claim about the world) (Hume 1993[1777]:469).¹⁵ While solving the philosophical problem raised by Hume is not Geertz’s primary concern, he is sensitive to the gap Hume identified

¹⁴ “Ontological” here should be understood as *weak* in Keane’s terminology; that is, as equivalent to worldview.

¹⁵ The problem here is that no matter how many facts—how many *is*’s—one knows about the world, regardless of their comprehensiveness and accuracy, one cannot know, based only on those facts, how to act in the relevant situation—one cannot know what *ought* to be done. As an example: imagine a sadist beating-up an innocent for the pure thrill of violence. We might know that the innocent has done nothing to provoke (let alone to deserve) the beating, that the sadist’s motives are purely self-serving, and that the innocent is in a great deal of pain. Yet, based on these facts, we cannot conclude that the sadist ought not beat the innocent. To make that judgment we must add an ethical principle—something like: *one ought not cause pain only to gratify a penchant for violence*. But the ethical principle is not in any simple sense an *is*, a fact, about the world (at least not in the same way *the innocent is in pain* is). To put it slightly differently, if the conclusion of an argument is a claim about what should be done, at least one of the premises of the argument must contain an ethical principle; such principles are never simple descriptive statements about the world.

between the descriptive and the normative. Geertz suggests the distance between the descriptive and the normative can be bridged, not by some form of valid deduction, but by symbolic meaning. Thus, sacred symbols become the glue that bind together ethos and worldview in Geertzian anthropology.¹⁶

While I do not propose following Geertz in analyzing halal as a sacred symbol that simultaneously makes the descriptive meaningful and the prescriptive reasonable, it is necessary to pay attention to how the descriptive and prescriptive are integrated. Focusing on ontology significantly alters the relationship between these spheres. The notion of worldview invokes a conceptual entity—some sort of shared, thus social, beliefs about the world. Ontology, as I argued above, concerns the actual contours and topography of reality (it is not merely conceptual). So, it forms a type of *field* (Bourdieu 1993) in which ethical projects can be reasoned out and undertaken.

Before explicating the relationship between ontology and ethics, it is necessary to say something about what ethics is and the particular notion of ethics pursued in the present project. Those interested in ethics often distinguish between broad approaches to its study: in the terms of ethicist Steven Smith, *living rightly* and *living well* (1980:18). The first is concerned with normative judgments. Is such-and-such an act right or wrong? Or what *should* one do in some particular situation? *Living well*, by contrast, is concerned with how to live a life that is worth living; that is, how to pursue value and avoid things that spoil value.

¹⁶ Geertz primary discussion of sacred symbols revolves around the characters of Javanese shadow puppet performances. The precise connection between descriptive and normative in that context is too complicated to develop here. As a simple preliminary example, however, he cites Oglala Native American cosmology centered on roundness. All of creation—the sky, the moon, the sun, the Earth—exhibit roundness. Thus, roundness and circles are associated with goodness while things lacking roundness—in particular rocks—are associated with evil (1973b:128).

While anthropologists engage with both these facets of ethics, *living well* has received the bulk of recent attention. This is perhaps because anthropologists are not overly interested in making judgments about right and wrong, at least not in regard to ethnographic accounts. But the focus on *living well* is also the result of anthropologists' recent interest in a particular version of how to live well, virtue ethics. Virtue ethics, derived from the works of Aristotle, suggests that to live well, one needs to inculcate certain virtues. This process of inculcation is of interest to anthropologist because it occurs through social processes—often through systems of education. There are obvious resonances with Michel Foucault's notion of *technologies of the self*—techniques practiced upon the self to achieve particular ethical and aesthetic forms; that is, modes of transforming oneself into a particular type of subject (Foucault 1997:177). This concept, along with others from Foucault, has become exceedingly influential in anthropology. Saba Mahmood's (2005) argument that Muslim women in Egypt, by adhering to religious disciplines, agentively cultivate a form of ethical self that is out of step with many feminist ideals is a primary exemplar of such projects in anthropology—though there are many others. Charles Hirschkind (2006) argues that the discipline of listening to recorded Islamic sermons is a technique of self-cultivation used by some Egyptians to become devote Muslims. Daromir Rudnycky (2010) documents the role of an Indonesian franchise offering business trainings based on Islamic principles, Emotional Spiritual Quotient seminars, to enhance worker productivity through building Islamic character. Johan Fischer explores how buying halal goods has been transformed into *shopping for the state*, a government-promoted discipline that produces Malaysians who are both better Muslims and more patriotic citizens (2008:34-35). Patricia Sloane-White (2017), as a final example, provides an account of Malaysian business executives who promote not only the success of their enterprises but also the growth of Islam by

ensuring employees adhere to religious expectations. Each of these projects is centrally concerned with modes of self-formation that involve inculcation of habits.¹⁷ The formation of ethical selves, in these accounts, is based on such disciplinary processes.

While inculcating virtues is an important aspect of Aristotelian ethical thinking, it does not exhaust it. The ultimate aim of Aristotelian ethics is to achieve a state of happiness, *eudaimonia* (Aristotle 1984:18). Edward Fischer (not to be confused with Johan Fischer, mentioned above) explains that the *eudaimonia* is not the same as the *hedonic* happiness of day-to-day life—the buoyant, positive, and often ephemeral emotion of pleasure; rather, it is better thought of as *wellbeing* or *life satisfaction* (2014:2). Thus, for example, the hedonic pleasure of smoking may be avoided in order to promote good health, an important component of wellbeing. Indeed, “*eudaimonia*” is glossed as “flourishing” by some ethicists (Smith 1980:25). On this view, then, the concept of living well is centrally concerned with identifying and describing the conditions under which flourishing takes place.

There is, however, little agreement about just what these conditions are. Smith reviews six accounts of flourishing and concludes “the...views that I have discussed here by no means exhaust the list of plausible candidates” (1980:25). One of the most significant ways in which these accounts differ from one another is in whether they claim that all people flourish under the same conditions or if each individual or each community flourish under conditions specific to them. This is the question taken up by E. Fischer (2014) who compares the conditions under which two quite different groups of people flourish: middle-class urban Germans and Guatemalan coffee farmers. He proposes a set of conditions for flourishing that is divided between core, (nearly) universal conditions—adequate material resources, being healthy and

¹⁷ Aristotle conceived of virtues as particular kinds of habits—those worthy of valorization (Aristotle 1984:20-21).

safe, and having strong social relations—and more variable, subjective conditions—ability to pursue aspirations, sense of dignity and fairness, commitment to a greater life purpose (E. Fischer 2014:5).

In this dissertation I do not investigate the general conditions under which flourishing occurs and whether those conditions are general, idiosyncratic, or somewhere in between (as they almost certainly are). However, one of the conditions identified by E. Fischer has particular bearing on understanding the ethical issues surrounding halal, *the capacity to pursue aspirations*. The idea here is that the degree to which I am able to pursue, with realistic expectation of achievement, my aspirations in family and social life, romance, vocation and so forth, I can be said to be flourishing. “Living up to the expectations of particular values is in many ways the stock and trade of human existence” (E. Fischer 2014: 6).

To understand how aspiration relates to the ontology of halal another concept, *opportunity structure*, is useful. Opportunity structures define the space of possibility within which aspirations are achieved or frustrated. They include: “market relations;...norms; ethnic, gender, and other systematic distinctions;...legal rights; and [a] whole range of institutional factors” (E. Fischer 2014: 6). Thus, *opportunity structures*, are the assemblage of elements that contribute and detract from carrying out actions. While claiming that the assemblage of halal is merely a space of aspiration—a list of assets and obstacles for achieving some aim—strikes me as overly reductive, this is one of the ways in which it is encountered.

Above I invoked Bourdieu’s notion of social field; we can think of a social field an expanded version of what E. Fischer calls opportunity structures. The social field, however, is not just a storehouse of potential tools and obstructions, it constitutes the very terrain in which aspirational projects are carried out—to a significant degree it conditions what sorts of projects

can even be conceived of as possible within its domain. If we think about halal as such a field, Aileen's anxieties about the proposed codification of an Illinois halal standard becomes understandable—such a change would be a significant shift of the very grounds on which she was striving to establish another engagement with halal through the co-op. Chapter 7 investigates limits on the kinds of projects that are being pursued in the Kuala Lumpur halal ecosystem.

Above I recognized that while anthropologists have engaged ethics more from the angle of *living well* than *living rightly*, they have worked from the second perspective as well. Anthropologists have limited interest in making normative claims—claims about what is right and what is not; however, they have great interest in developing an understanding of how others make such claims. In this regard, anthropological projects about *living rightly* are positioned as descriptive rather than normative—they become projects about decision making. One component of such projects is describing the social field of decision making as a *puzzle space* productive of what Stephen Collier and Andrew Lakoff (2005) call *regimes of living*. Such regimes are a strategic response to moments at which ethical questions (questions about what to do) arise in technical domains—organizational administration, city planning, or finance and banking, for example (2005:22-23). At such moments these domains become *problematized*. The idea of problematization is borrowed from Foucault (1997:117&290) and used to characterize processes by which a domain, such as those listed, is interrupted in a way that causes it to lose its familiarity and certain difficulties arise within it. This allows the domain to become an object of thought, a puzzle space for ethical deliberation.¹⁸

¹⁸ It is useful to think about problematization in contrast to Michael Lambek's notion of *ordinary ethics*—"ethics that is relatively tacit, grounded in agreement rather than rule, in practice rather than knowledge or belief, and happening without calling undue attention to itself" (2010:2). There are a limited number of circumstances in which ethics become explicit.

“Deliberation” may be somewhat misleading in that it suggests a process of withdrawing into oneself to privately mull over an issue. While that might be the case, the type of deliberation concerning us here should be taken to apply just as well to groups of people, whether school administrators having to strategize about improving student performance on standardized exams, for example, or a group of protestors who encounter a police barricade barring a section of its intended march route. The difference between these two examples is the degree to which the strategy acted upon can be regimented—made compulsory. Regimes, then, are strategies for coping with these difficulties that arise as objects of deliberation and regimes of living are strategies that have been institutionalized, regularized, or systematized to some degree—that is, they are “situated configurations of normative, technical, and political elements that are brought into alignment in problematic or uncertain situations” (2005:31).

In his research concerning middle-class Germans’ sense of wellbeing, E. Fischer, provides an illustrative account of problematization that takes place in the ordinary every-day domain of shopping for food (2017:45-46). In this case German shoppers report buying far more organic, free-range eggs than are actually purchased. E. Fischer interprets this discrepancy as revealing a conflict of values; while people in his study population see themselves as the *type* of people who are engaged in sustainability and prize humane treatment of animals, the more than 200% premium paid for these eggs is too much to follow through with enacting those values—at least in the egg market. In regard to problematization, the case is interesting because shoppers’ deliberation over what sort of eggs to buy is enabled by a complex German egg-origin labeling system as well as a strong discourse about sustainability and animal welfare. The strategy for

negotiating it—the accompanying regime of living—seems to be buying the cheaper, conventionally produced eggs and lying about it.¹⁹

In terms of halal, what is important here is that E. Fischer highlights the conflict in values that becomes salient for some reason—in this case, because of a complex labeling system. Having to choose between this or that product based on nearly invisible quality differences or half-hidden production processes can be paralyzing. Yet, if we take seriously the connection between personal identity and consumption choices in consumerist societies, these are not superficial decisions—they determine who we are. In chapter 6, I describe and interpret several cases in which interlocutors had to negotiate competing values in regard to halal. We see that despite the intensification around promoting halal in Malaysia—a conscientious attempt to establish a certain regime of living—people remain very agentive in how and when they choose to engage it.

Summing-up Ontology and Ethics

In this section I have explored a number of notions, many with philosophical pedigrees, and considered how they have been deployed in anthropology generally, and how those uses can be extended to understand the halal specifically. It is perhaps useful here to review them and how they fit together. This dissertation starts with the question: *how does the category of halal become present in the world?* I take this to be an *ontological* question, one about the modes of the category's existence. I then argued that a *conceptual* account of halal—one that takes it to be a mere idea or part of an imaginary—is insufficient. Instead, halal is a type of artifact, something

¹⁹ Interestingly, one of E. Fischer's suggestions to increase wellbeing is to remove conventional eggs from the market. Without the temptation of the cheaper product, shoppers would be better able to align their behavior with their values. Removal would also eliminate the necessity, perhaps even the possibility, of deliberation.

whose presence in the world is the result of human activity, but also has a reality apart from human thought—it is *real*. This realist ontology is the first theoretical frame.

If halal’s being isn’t rooted in ideas, then what is its foundation? It is here that *assemblage* is a useful notion. The category of halal exists in a mesh of institutions, discourses (including ideas and beliefs), and practices. It’s the aim of the first part of this dissertation to map the components and relationships of that assemblage.

Part 2 of the dissertation explores how people interact with the assemblage of halal; its focus, then, is the relationship between *ontology* and *ethics*. In this regard, the halal assemblage is a context for action; it makes choices discernable and serves as a space for deliberation. It is a *social field* in which a set of expectations for how to act, a *regime of living*, is at play. This is the theoretical framework for the dissertation: ontology is connected to ethics as the assembled terrain contextualizing deliberation; and this deliberation (and resulting action) is the playing out of expectations encoded into a regime of living.

Kuala Lumpur and the Ethnography of Halal

“Do you know where Bukit Jalil is?” asked Dr. Anis, a researcher at UPM (University Putra Malaysia). During a break at a seminar at the university, we were talking about traffic—the bane of living in the greater Kuala Lumpur area—and commute times from her home in Bukit Jalil. I had been in Kuala Lumpur for about six weeks, long enough to recognize names from signs and transit stations, but not to know how parts of the metro area linked up with each other. I guessed vaguely, “Just a little north of campus, no?” She looked blankly at me for a moment, and then laughed. No doubt reflecting on the time she had spent in the US as a student, she responded, “I

forgot that Americans use north and south to give directions.” Bukit Jalil was north of UPM, but more relevantly in her eyes it was at one of the tolls on the Kuala Lumpur-Putrajaya highway.

I noted the conversation because it seemed odd to me but did not think about it again until a couple of months later when, in December, I got a motorbike license. The day after I got the license, I rode between Kota Damansara, the suburb where I rented a room in a house in a comfortably middle-class neighborhood, and IPPH (Halal Product Research Institute) at UPM, where I was doing fieldwork. Despite having looked at maps and memorized the highways I needed to take, I became so lost that it took me more than three hours to get to IPPH. I would be embarrassed to admit how long it took me to find my way back to Kota Damansara at the end of the day, but I will confess that the last of my frustrated phone calls to the friend who was renting the room to me was placed from a park less than a mile from the house—*in the very neighborhood I was living in*, but failed to recognize in my exasperated state.

Another two weeks passed before I realized the relevance of what Dr. Anis had told me. Drivers seldom navigate around Kuala Lumpur by road names or cardinal directions. Rather, it is necessary to know the townships, districts, landmarks and areas one will travel through to get to an intended destination. Thus, to travel from IPPH to Kota Damansara, for example, I first rode toward Puchong and then Sunway. After Sunway, I continued to the second road after Paradigm Mall and followed that through a tunnel under the expressway and by the Tropicana Resort golf course. With an easy left-hand turn after the golf course, I was on the, now, familiar roads of Kota Damansara—a trip that took forty-five minutes on a motorbike even with traffic. Highway tolls serve as concrete indicators of progression along highways—essential markers when travelling to unfamiliar locations. Highway direction signs work with a similar logic: an exit sign may name the roadway it exits onto, but the essential information is the list of places you can get

to by following the exist. If those places are between you and your destination, it is a good exit to take.

This, then, is how I came to spatially apprehend Kuala Lumpur's halal ecosystem: as a noncontiguous set of institutions, research facilities, meeting places and businesses, linked together by more or less familiar landmarks. JAKIM's halal hub, for example, located in Putrajaya, was a long ride from Kota Damansara, in the direction of the Subang airport. HDC was quite close, near Damansara's IKEA and the Curve Mall. Many of the businesses I visited are located in central Kuala Lumpur, in the direction of the National Palace then either toward Parliament or the UMNO headquarters building depending on which part of Kuala Lumpur I was trying to get to.

At the same time, I was also learning about another layer of Kuala Lumpur's halal geography. In my experience, it is the norm for residents of Kuala Lumpur to eat many—perhaps all—their meals out; food is relatively inexpensive and there is a wide array of choices.²⁰ During my fieldwork, most evenings I ate out with friends and their acquaintances. While there are some types of eateries that cater to all Malaysians, such as modern versions *kopitiams* (Chinese coffeehouses) and *mamak* (Indian Muslim) stalls or cafes, I became increasingly aware that depending on who I was eating with, we would end up eating in different areas—that is, many eateries have distinct ethnic characters that determines their clientele. Furthermore, eateries of a type often cluster around one another to give sections of a street particular ethnic character. For example, on most evenings I would join my landlord, Riz, and his friends to eat in the evening. We often went to a particular cluster of three restaurants located in a shopping complex

²⁰ This penchant for eating out is based on my experience and what I have been told by interlocutors. In 2007, the first time I stayed with a Malay family, for example, the mother of the family apologized for going out to eat so often, explaining “we hardly ever eat at home—it's not like the *kampung* [village] when we had time to cook.” She suggested that cooking at home was a Malay tradition being lost. Of course, this and other reports remain anecdotal.

(architecturally similar to North American strip malls but also influenced by Chinese shophouses). Several months into this nearly nightly ritual, we ventured beyond the usual places to try a new restaurant that had opened on the next street of the complex. I had driven passed the street but had never walked down it. I was surprised to see that it too had several busy eateries, but they were, based in part on the displays of Tiger and Heineken beer advertisements, identifiably Chinese. While it is not surprising that Riz and his friends would not eat at these clearly non-halal restaurants, it is perhaps remarkable that Chinese residents did not eat at Malay restaurants either. These sorts of divisions within foodscapes is something I will return to in the second part of the dissertation; here I note it as one of the ways I came to understand the spatiality of halal during my research.

Propelled by the need to travel to various locations to meet with people working in the halal industry, the system of familiar landmarks by which I navigated the city certainly grew over the fifteen months (September 2014 to December 2015) of my fieldwork. However, I was not starting from zero. As noted above, I first visited Kuala Lumpur in May 2007 as part of a study-abroad course. I had already been doing research about halal in Chicago for about six months but had no idea that Malaysia was implementing its own sophisticated halal agenda. Since this initial visit, I have spent an additional four months spread over three trips doing research in Malaysia before beginning my dissertation research in 2014.

It is with the network of people I met during these early shorter visits, several of whom I have known for nearly ten years, that I initiated research for this dissertation. Some of them have become friends as well as people I can turn to for information, clarification, and opinions about the industry. Almost all the people I met during these preliminary periods of research have changed jobs; several of them have left the industry altogether. Such shifts have resulted in an

expansive network—people have moved between bureaucracies and research institutes, have founded new companies, or have moved between bureaucracies. Through this network I established connections with many of the people and institutions central to my research interests. I spent nearly three months at IPPH as a visiting researcher as well as visiting other research institutes and laboratories. At HDC, I spent many afternoons in their comfortably airconditioned Global Halal Support Center research library as well as attending several meetings at the executive headquarters with a friend, the owner of a halal-focused media and research company, who was working with HDC as a consultant. It proved more difficult to form relationships with JAKIM. While shortly after arriving in Malaysia I was introduced to another graduate student who also worked as a halal auditor, he could not offer me introductions to more senior staff in JAKIM's Halal Hub. However, on three occasions I did visit the Halal Hub to meet his colleagues and tour the facilities. I also focused on Zilzar, an online halal trading platform, visiting their headquarters numerous times to conduct interviews and spent time socially with a group of its employees. In addition to these three organizations, I attended twelve conferences and three training seminars all related to halal. Finally, I spoke with owners and managers at food manufacturers and restaurants. These along with daily observations while eating and spending time with acquaintances make up the ethnographic material drawn on for this dissertation.

Supplementing the ethnographic material, I have also collected discursive material from newspapers, public relations and promotional corporate publications, websites and social media. Such sources document not only an idealized and professionalized image of the halal ecosystem, but also reveal overlaps, fissures and lacunae, within that system. Together the experiences

collected ethnographically and these discursively-encoded representations are the modes that produce halal—that make it present in the world.

Finally, it is important to note that English is a common language within higher education and the business sphere in Malaysia. As such, the majority of my interactions with those involved in the halal industry were in English. However, I have studied both Indonesian (a dialect of Malay) and Malay since 2006—in the US as well as in intensive courses in both Indonesia and Malaysia. While this knowledge of language was not necessary for interviews, it did allow me to participate in seminars, presentations, and training courses that were conducted either in Malay or a combination of English and Malay common in Kuala Lumpur. As well, I regularly interacted with interlocutors and friends in a mix of English and Malay.

Organization of the Dissertation

The remaining chapters of this dissertation are elaborations of the interventions described above. The next chapter sets the scene for the dissertation by examining the historical and social contexts that have led to the emergence of the extensive attention given to halal; that is, it examines the context in which halal has become problematized. Part 1, consisting of chapters 3 through 5, maps the ontology of halal—the processes through which the category is being territorialized. Chapter 3 explores the bureaucratization of halal by contrasting the functions of ritual and bureaucracy in facilitating social production and transformation—producing recognizable types of food, for example, from living creatures or recontextualizing exotic foreign products in ways that make them familiar and safe. Chapter 4 revisits a classic issue in anthropology concerning the relationship between religion and science in the context of halal laboratories. These labs are ultimately tasked with managing challenges posed by the fact that

the quality of halal-ness is ultimately invisible. Labs must develop techniques of surveillance that ensure that things claimed to be halal actually are halal. Chapter 5 considers the role of business firms in territorializing halal. Specifically, it examines three businesses that have had considerable impact not only on the contours of the halal industry in Malaysia, but also contributed to Malaysia's rise as a hub for the global industry.

There are certain risks in developing the ontology of halal in terms of these three sectors. First, by treating them separately in their own chapters, there is the suggestion of discreteness. On even cursory reflection, such discreteness is obviously illusory. Both in terms of structure and function these sectors are intertwined with one another—for example, the ability of laboratories to screen gelatin products for genetic signatures that are indicative of porcine (something that would clearly indicate the product is not halal) only becomes relevant in conjunction with a bureaucratic process of labeling products. It is exactly this type of mutually constituting entanglement that results in an assemblage rather than a mere congeries of sundries. These connections will be emphasized in the following chapters and should be kept in mind.

Second, the focus on these sectors may appear to make the obviously false claim that they somehow exhaust the modes in which halal is territorialized. In this dissertation, I mainly focus on the Malaysian halal ecosystem. The reason for this is twofold. First, it is within the context of this ecosystem that novel social forms are emerging to administer to, commodify, research, surveil, and control halal. So, it the space of problematization. Second, Kuala Lumpur is indisputably a hub of this ecosystem and it is vying, with considerable success, for a hegemonic position within this network. Thus, while focus on the Kuala Lumpur halal ecosystem does not exhaust the territorializations of halal, it does at least have the potential to show why there has been so much movement around halal in the past decade.

Part 2 consists of two chapters examining the ethical impacts of the modes in which halal has been territorialized. Chapter 6 considers how this configuration of halal has resulted in a bifurcated foodscape; one in which recognition by authorities controlling halal labeling is unavailable to small vendors and, in many cases, irrelevant to them. I argue in this chapter that the halal ecosystem is centrally concerned with cosmopolitan businesses that are either importing food, such as international chains, or those businesses that aspire to export products from Malaysia. This leaves the vast majority of food sellers in Malaysia dependent on other modes—often tacit—of indicating to customers whether (or not) their food is halal. This is, I conclude, a deterritorializing feature of the halal assemblage. In Chapter 7, I explore the narratives of professionals who work or have worked in the halal industry paying particular attention to how they have formulated and reformulated their career projects in response to shifts in the configuration of halal. Finally, I conclude with a reconsideration of the ethics of halal in the context of long-standing concerns within various forms of social criticism, including anthropology, about increasing standardization of social life around market logics.

Contexts: Malaysian Developmentalism and Islamization

Vignette 1: A Seminar

There is a common story among university students and faculty in Malaysia that the national campuses were purposefully located outside of cities in order to isolate students. The first time I heard this was in 2013 while studying Malay language at UMP (University of Malaysia Pahang)—a campus that seems to have been hacked-out of a random parcel of jungle along an east-coast highway some thirty miles south of Pahang’s state capital, Kuantan. Indeed, our language instructors (undergraduates at the university), playing on the remoteness of the campus, delighted in telling us that tigers had been seen on campus, though none of them knew by whom or how long ago. These UMP students suggested that university planners had intended the location as a measure to control students—presumably by keeping them under the pastoral gaze of administrators and away from urban vices. However, a year and a half later, I encountered another interpretation of this account of purposeful isolation. Drenched half in sweat and half by a downpour that had seemed to come out of nowhere, I complained to a professor at UKM (National University Malaysia) about the fifty-minute walk across campus—again seemingly cut from the jungle (it was indeed possible to watch monitor lizards in one area of campus with a little stream)—and this after a forty-minute train ride from Kuala Lumpur. The professor chastised me for being too impatient to wait for the shuttle bus from the rail station—people do not walk on campus, she insisted, much of it doesn’t even have sidewalks. She then asked if I knew why the university was located so far outside of Kuala Lumpur. I recounted the

explanation I had heard at UPM and she agreed that that was likely part of the reason but claimed that a more substantial reason was to keep students from interfering in politics. By locating campuses outside urban centers, it made it difficult for students to effectively confront politicians. I asked others about this over the next several months of my fieldwork—a portion of which took place at these remotely located, sprawling universities—nearly everyone was aware of this second explanation, even if only a few took it seriously.²¹

Whatever the actual case, this is what I was thinking about in January of 2015 as I made my way across the campus of UM (University Malaya), another characteristically sprawling campus. UM, however, unlike many other campuses, is located quite centrally in Kuala Lumpur—perhaps because it is, as its name suggests by invoking the colonial label *Malaya*, the oldest university in Malaysia (established in 1962).^{22 23} Its location made it easy enough to get to by public transportation, but the over-crowded campus shuttles obliged me to make a march across campus to the Faculty of Law building where the seminar, *Politicizing Islam*, that I had come to attend was being held. I arrived characteristically sweaty and disheveled, something those who invited me, by then regular contacts, politely overlooked. The seminar was cast in a

²¹ It is, however, interesting that many of these universities were founded in the decade following President Sukarno's 1966 ouster from power in neighboring Indonesia which was accompanied, if not impelled, by protesting university students (Roosa 2006:270 n.107). In fact, Malaysia's *Universities and University Colleges Act*, which provides guidelines for the establishment and administration of universities, was enacted in 1971—just five years after the Indonesian protests. The fact that Sukarno's despotic successor, President Suharto, was also ousted from power under pressure from demonstrating students in 1998 speaks to the power of campus-based political movements (Elson 2001:267).

²² That is, established in its current form. In 1949 the University of Malaya was created from the merger of two colonial-era colleges located in Singapore, then part of British Malaya (see following footnote). The university grew and, in 1959, a separate campus was created in Kuala Lumpur. In 1962, UM became an independent university, while its Singapore branch became the National University Singapore (University of Malaya 2016).

²³ *British Malaya* was a colonial construct denoting collectively the Federated and Unfederated Malay States of the Malay peninsula and the Straits Settlements (the English East India Company-controlled ports of Penang, Melaka and Singapore). In 1957, the *Federation of Malaya*, consisting of what is today peninsular West Malaysia, emerged as an independent state. In 1963, Singapore, Sabah (British North Borneo) and Sarawak (the latter two comprise modern-day East Malaysia—along the northern coast of Borneo) were incorporated into the *Federation of Malaysia*. In 1965, Singapore seceded from the federation thus fixing the present-day borders of the federation (Ooi Keat Gin 2018:93 & 160-161).

fairly neutral tone as the exploration of the role of Islam in relations between the Malaysian state and society. However, as my host, a sociologist at UM, admitted during a break, it was as much an opportunity for academics to come together and discuss the so-called “sedition dragnet”—the Najib-government’s (r. 2009-2018) use of a colonial-era anti-sedition law to quell criticism of the government—that was crescendoing at the time of the seminar (Human Rights Watch 2014 and Amnesty International 2016). The papers addressed increasing standardization of Islam in Malaysia—particularly in ways that delegitimized forms of liberal Islam (feminist and liberal interpretations of Islam as well as Sufism), the ongoing moral panic concerning the *ajaran sesat* (misguided teachings) of Syiah Islam, as well as book bans, crackdowns on cross-dressing, and attempts to dissuade Malay women on campuses from wearing full-face veils. While these papers were interesting, at the center of the seminar were the conversations between participants. One of the papers was given by a professor who was himself caught-up in the recent dragnet, being charged only two months earlier with sedition. Of the small group present—fewer than twenty people—in addition to that professor, two others had encountered legal entanglements. One was an author whose books had been banned and the other was a lawyer who had faced sedition charges under an earlier administration. The ongoing conversation between them was almost jovial, I thought. There was certainly a sense of outrage that the government continued over so many years to attempt to control speech but also a feeling of comradeship: these three represented a kind of heroic resistance—their narratives were tangible forms of injustice around which activists converged.

While I was aware of the controversy surrounding the Sedition Act—it had been increasingly covered in both the Malaysian and international media in the first months of my fieldwork—I had paid little attention to its connection to Islam until the seminar. By April 2015

(two months after the seminar), the Sedition Act was amended to specifically include anything “that appears to promote ill-will / hostility / hatred on grounds of religion” as constituting sedition (*Malay Mail*, 10 April 2015). However, even at the time of the seminar, the Act was being used to target people for government-perceived offenses against Islam (as examples, see: *Malay Mail*, 10 September 2014 and *The Star*, 11 January 2015). This is not surprising given that politics in Malaysia is heavily ethnically inflected and that Malay ethnic identity is intertwined so tightly with being Muslim that the two terms are often interchangeable in Malaysian contexts (Shamsul 1997:209). Over the course of my field work, tensions between Malays and non-Malays appeared increasingly exacerbated and Islam was often at the center of these tensions.²⁴ The flurry of sedition charges highlights attempts by the Malaysian state to regulate public discourses, particularly regarding Islam.

Vignette 2: A Malaysian Start-Up

In March 2015, I was invited to participate in a panel discussion hosted by the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative, a program run by the US embassy. The discussion was meant to address opportunities for young people to transform their communities, particularly through entrepreneurship. Not knowing much about entrepreneurship or instilling leadership skills, my invitation was, no doubt, due to the organizer’s, Rizwan’s, desperation to find speakers. I knew Rizwan, a twenty-seven-year-old Malay man from Singapore, because he was a junior executive at Zilzar, a technology company running an online trading platform for halal products. While employees at Zilzar regularly refer to it as a start-up, it is no shoe-string operation. Though a

²⁴ In no small part, these exacerbations were the result of Najib’s struggle to maintain legitimacy in the face of corruption allegations and limited Islamic credentials (Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid & Che Hamdan Che Mohamad Razail 2015:314 & Jenkins 2016).

young company (officially launching its platform in 2014), Zilzar was already an increasingly familiar element of the halal industry landscape, both in Malaysia and internationally, while I was doing my fieldwork in 2015-2016.

Rizwan had arranged for his employer to host the discussion at its swanky office space located in an elite business district in central Kuala Lumpur. Several months earlier I had been to their first rather humdrum smaller office space in the same building; I was surprised by the new larger space. During that earlier interview, Rizwan had described Zilzar to me as aspiring to become a halal version of online commerce giants like Alibaba and Amazon. Indeed, the office looked like what might be expected from a hip technology company in Shenzhen or Silicon Valley. The seminar room in which the panel discussion took place, for example, could have been the set of some MTV show from the early 2000s. It was enclosed on only three sides so that it opened on to the larger office space with its more conventional assortment of work areas. The room was dramatically lit with adjustable stage-like track lighting. On one side of the space was a frosted glass-top conference table around which the panelists sat. On the other side of the room, facing the conference table, was a range of free-form seating options—beanbag chairs and fabric-covered geometric blocks that could each be independently arranged and seat several people. The young leaders of Southeast Asia who had been invited to the event arranged themselves among these furnishings. The third component of this staging area was a projection screen for presentations set between the conference table and the seating area. However, this screen—and this what made the space feel like a television set—did not face either the panelists or the young participants (both groups would have to turn their heads slightly to see it), but rather faced out through the “fourth wall” into Zilzar’s office area where a second seating area had been created in rows of chairs for an audience of Zilzar employees and embassy staff who watched

us—the panelists and this cadre of millennial-aged future entrepreneurs—discuss community development. Clearly, the young attendees were not the only ones present yearning for success; the space itself divulged similar aspirations by deploying idioms adapted from an international, business-focused imaginary.

This hip business aesthetic of the designed office space was reflected in social interactions within the space as well. Rizwan greeted me, for example: “Grab some pizza, bro. There are some great people to network with here.” And later, shortly before the event began, “Do you have a PowerPoint, bro?” “Bro” is used fairly commonly by young men around Kuala Lumpur—something my Malaysian friends and I would occasionally make fun of when we overheard it: “*Malam ni nak makan kat mana bro?*” (“Where do you want to eat tonight, bro?”). But this was the first time I had been referred to as “bro” in Malaysia.²⁵ After the event, I went out for coffee with several of the people from Zilzar and noticed that all the men, including an executive in his late forties, used “bro” to refer to each other. Several weeks later, I asked a friend, who also works at Zilzar, about this. She rolled her eyes and told me that one time when she was with her teenage son, she had had to drop off her manager after work. Her manager, being friendly, asked her son a bunch of questions peppered with “bro.” Her son later told her, “Your boss tries too hard to be cool.”

While I was fascinated by this space and these interactions, I was also ill at ease. A discomfort that likely became all the more evident with my overly academic introductory

²⁵ More traditional Malay terms of address are based on kinship. “Abang,” for example, literally means older brother but is often used to address any man older than the speaker but not old enough to be of the speaker’s father’s generation—in which case “pacik,” uncle, would be appropriate. Some women refer to their husbands as abang. Because of this, women, particularly if they are unmarried, may sometimes avoid using “abang” as it may be interpreted as flirting. In such case, “encik,” mister, might be used instead, though it is likely to seem overly formal in many contexts. These anxieties over terms of address and the movement away from using kinship terms indexes the rise of cosmopolitan professionalism in Malaysia. While “bro” strikes me as exceedingly casual, it jettisons the provinciality of kinship terms and draws on a broader Western (especially US) based cosmopolitanism judged appropriate in the context of a technology company.

statement suggesting that, based on my discussions with university halal institute students, the halal industry offered not just business opportunities, but also a chance to broadly rethink the ethics of commerce. I had no idea where to look as I spoke—at the panelists on my right, Southeast Asia’s future leaders on my left, or the audience directly in front of me; however, I managed to stumble through my five minutes. Happily, my co-panelists seemed much more at ease and delivered their lead-ins with considerable panache.

One of them particularly seemed to touch on themes that resonated with the sorts of aspirations that animated the event and the space. A USDA representative from the US embassy spoke about the transformation of the food retail scene in Malaysia. The retail chain, Giant, for example, had grown from a small family-owned grocer in the 1940s to the largest food retailer in Malaysia—having more than 130 hypermarkets all over the country by 2015. Beyond this proliferation of hyper- and supermarkets, Malaysia’s *kedai runcit*, small family-owned sundry shops that serve particular neighborhoods, were also changing. A government initiative, the Small Retailers Transformation Program, sought to help these shops modernize by upgrading their facilities, installing air-conditioning, widening aisles, improving lighting, and providing marketing training. The speaker’s broader point was that the tastes of Malaysian consumers are changing and retail spaces are responding to these new preferences. These shifts toward modern consumerism, he suggested, create numerous opportunities for entrepreneurship. In the context of my own interests, the transformations he described also marked a significant shift in relations between people and the goods through which their lives are increasingly constituted—a shift that invited, even required, a reorganization of notions of halal.

Regulation and Developmentalism

I start with these anecdotes because they introduce the two broad historical themes traced in this chapter. The first of these themes is the highly-regulated character of Malaysian society. In this respect, Malaysia appears to be emulating Singapore, a state that has achieved economic development through a strategy of rigidly-regulating its population, politics, and even space (Limin Hee & Giok Ling Ooi:2003). The spatial isolation of potentially politically disruptive students is an example of Malaysia's attempt to create a similarly regulated society (or at least an example that regulatory strategies are common enough in Malaysian politics that they serve as ready, common-sense explanation for Malaysians). In matters of Islam, however, state regulation is so prominent that it may be regarded as a defining characteristic of Malaysian Islam (Osman Bakar 2008:82 and Liow 2009:4). It is the genealogy of this form of heavily regulated Malaysian Islam that constitutes one of the threads pursued in this chapter.

The second thread is the developmentalist preoccupations of the Malaysian state.

Developmentalism is an ideology that prioritizes economic growth, improved standards of living and consumerism (Abdul Rahman Embong 2001:62, Loh Kok Wah 2001:186, and Hill 2012:24). Nurturing entrepreneurial tendencies certainly resonates with such an ideology (Sloane 1999:10-11), as does the valorization of international aesthetic forms—such as in language, design, and modes of consumption. A combination of state inducements and increasing salience of business interests in Malaysia has promoted developmentalism. The second thread of historical analysis in this chapter traces the factors contributing to developmentalism.

Halal appears as an area in which state interest is doubly determined: it combines concerns of religion with those of consumption—the driver of economic growth in modern

economies. Jointly, then, these two historical threads comprise the context for the problematization of halal.

Malaysian Islam Before 1969

From its very arrival in Southeast Asia, Islam has been enmeshed in commercial interests. While Arab traders were familiar with maritime Southeast Asia as early as the tenth century (Andaya & Andaya 2001:54), Muslims from south India were far more influential in introducing their religion to the region. K.R. Hall, for example, drawing on records kept by Jewish traders based in Cairo, established that Indian Muslim merchants dominated the trade between the east coast of India and Southeast Asia—and these traders, in turn, supplied goods to Arab merchants on the west coast of the subcontinent (1977:219-220). This trade pattern is contemporaneous with the appearance of Muslim grave markers in Sumatra (the island that, along with the Malay Peninsula, form the Strait of Melaka) in the thirteenth century (Drewes 1985:9-10). This period appears to be the earliest substantial inroads Islam made in Southeast Asia.²⁶ Muslim communities in the Malay Peninsula were established by the fourteenth century (Funston 2006:52).

There are records of Arab Muslim communities in Southeast Asia as early as the ninth century. Research by Sharon Siddique (1985) and Leif Manger (2010) shows that Arabs have long history in region, though difficult to date with precision. More interestingly, both these scholars document how many individuals move between Malay and Arab identities according to

²⁶ Peter Lape pushes this date back a century citing archaeological sites in the Banda Islands (in the eastern Indonesian archipelago) that, although pigs were common in these islands, contain no pig bones. He argues that these were sites of early Muslim communities (2000:146).

instrumental dictates. In any case, the presence of Arab Muslims in the region is likely to have also contributed to the spread of Islam.

Barbara Andaya and Leonard Andaya draw attention to trade with Chinese Muslims as another vector through which Southeast Asians learned about Islam (2001:54-56). Specifically, these historians suggest that the fourteenth-century Terengganu Stone, a monumental stone inscribed with an Islamic edict that was found on the east coast of the Malay Peninsula, served to broadcast the local ruler's Islamic credentials in a bid to attract Chinese Muslim traders. A century later, on the opposite coast of the peninsula, the young Muslim entrepot of Melaka cultivated patronage from the Chinese Ming dynasty through the mediation of the Chinese Muslim admiral, Zheng He (Reid 1993:205-207). Recognition by China was important for the survival of Melaka which was surrounded by larger or more powerful polities such as Pasai, Aru and those in Siam and Java. This relation of patronage is particularly interesting (and perhaps mildly ironic) because fifteenth-century Melaka is often conceived of, or at least employed rhetorically, as a golden-age of Malays. The entrepot's cosmopolitanism as a gateway for global trade, importance as a center of Islam, and eventual regional political influence are "presented as an inspiration for modern state builders, and a model of what 'Malay' people can achieve" in present-day Malaysia (Milner 2008:47). The Melakan Sultanate is also central to the genealogy of the notion that Malay-ness as comprised by profession of Islam, speaking Malay, and adhering to Malay custom (Siddique 1981:77). This constellation of traits is cited in the Malaysian constitution (Article 160, Clause 2) as legally defining Malays (Osman Bakar 2008:91 & 106 n.23).

The role of trade in the introduction of Islam to Southeast Asia distinguishes this history from that of the more popularly known Arab-Muslim expansion of the seventh and eighth-

century in the Middle East (including North Africa and Andalusia) which was characterized by military conquest (Lapidus 2014:48-50).²⁷ While parallels between the imbrication of commercial interests and religion in this early history and those in present-day Malaysia are intriguing, caution is necessary in interpreting them—certainly there are significant differences, not only between mercantile networks and today’s global capitalism, but also the present-day Malaysian Islam and that of the region eight centuries ago. However, this continued intertwining of religion and economics is a unique characteristic that deserves attention.

Just as Chinese, Indian and Arab traders had been drawn to the bustling commercial scene in Southeast Asia, Europeans, too, came in pursuit of fortune. However, their intentions were to seize control of the trade rather than merely participate in it. In 1511, a date often accepted as the advent of European colonialism in Southeast Asia, Melaka came under the control of the Portuguese (Ricklefs et al. 2010:128-129). The Portuguese believed that by controlling Melaka, the dominant entrepot in the region by that time, they would control trade through the strait; however, increasingly traders chose other regional harbors in which to carry out their business. By the mid-seventeenth century, Melaka was captured from the Portuguese by the VOC (the Dutch United East India Company) who aligned themselves with the Malay sultanate based in Johor (located in the south of the peninsula). The Dutch eventually ceded control of the port to the British as part of the 1824 Anglo-Dutch Treaty that divided the straits territory between these two European powers, leaving the Malay Peninsula (including Singapore) under the control of the British (Ricklefs et al. 2010:151).

²⁷ Though the process was not necessarily always peaceful in Southeast Asia as evidenced by the fall of the Buddhist-Hindu kingdom of Majapahit to Muslim armies in the early sixteenth century (Reid 1993:133) and suggested by Lape’s reading of the archaeological record in the twelfth-century Banda islands (2000:147).

While the British were indisputably the major power in the peninsula by the first part of the nineteenth century, their interactions with communities outside the Straits Settlement entrepôts of Singapore, Melaka, and Penang were limited. That is, until competing coalitions of Chinese merchants allied with local Malay leaders began to clash over access to tin mines—the value of which was increasing with European demand (Ricklefs et al. 2010:176). This unrest provided the pretext for the British to extend its administration across the peninsula. This expanded bureaucracy brought greater numbers of Europeans to Malaya—not only to serve as officials, but also to exploit economic opportunities, especially as rubber planters (Ricklefs et al. 2010:178).

The British practiced indirect rule by cultivating alliances with Malay elites—stripped of much of their political power—but their prestige preserved through careful cultivation of social statuses. The peasant Malay base continued to subsist as fishers and rice growers. Chinese migration to the peninsula was left unchecked because the British believed the Chinese to be industrious. Within the Straits Settlements Chinese migrants were valued as laborers, traders, and entrepreneurs, and elsewhere in the peninsula for their role in tin mining (Ricklefs et al. 2010:179). Finally, the British also facilitated Indian migration, through schemes of indentured servitude, to supply labor for rubber, sugar, and coffee growers. Thus, the nineteenth-century expansion of British political rule crystalized a demographic typology: native Muslim Malays were either entrenched in politics (if elite) or subsisted as rural farmers/fishers (if non-elite), Confucian or Buddhist Chinese were engaged in business enterprises and tin mining, and Hindu Indians worked as laborers, particularly on plantations, but also in rail and telecom (Hirschman 1987, Gomez & Jomo 1999:13, and Osman Bakar 2008:87). These cluster identities based on

ethnicity, religion, and labor sector continue to hold sway in Malaysian society—even if facts on the ground are, unsurprisingly, more complicated.

This sort of *plural society*, in which social groups live and work next to each other but lack common social identification (Hefner 2001:4 & Siddique 2001:166), particularly concerned J. S. Furnivall (1944), a British administrator in the waning days of European colonialism. He argued that the discreteness of social groups, their lack of *social demand*, “shared tastes, values, and identities” (Hefner 2001:5), meant that they lacked the resources to integrate socially, which he took to be a precondition to developing effective modes of governance (Siddique 2001:167). And, indeed, the problem of pluralism was among the principal challenges facing Malaya when it became independent in 1957. In the first years after independence, the ruling coalition, the Alliance, managed to bring together Malay, Chinese, and Indian ethnic political parties. The coalition foregrounded economic development, but also focused on distribution of its benefits across the ethnic spectrum they represented (Andaya & Andaya 2001:293-294).

The fact that this early government was in a position to be concerned about wealth distribution is indicative of the strong economy it inherited from the pre-independence era. This economy was initially based on the export of rubber and tin, but in face of diminishing demand for tin, was soon diversified to include palm oil—and later still, timber, iron ore and, importantly, manufacturing (Andaya & Andaya 2001:294-295 and Hill 2012:7-8). While the economy was growing, Malays were increasingly dissatisfied with development schemes—such as FELDA (Federal Land Development Authority) that sought to increase the amount of arable land available to Malays—which relegated Malays to rural areas and the agricultural sector. While Malays clamored for more access to business and industrial sectors, there was increasing concern about Malay privilege among Chinese and Indians. For example, plans were put into

motion to limit education in national schools to English and Malay, abolishing Chinese- and Tamil-medium schools (Andaya & Andaya 2001:291 and King 2008:78-79). In view of such policies, it appeared that the Chinese and Indian political parties in the Alliance coalition were unable to defend their constituents' interests against the larger and more dominant Malay party. In the 1969 parliamentary elections, the Alliance, though able to keep its majority, lost considerable ground to opposition parties. The Chinese and Indian parties in the Alliance had been unable to deliver their constituents' votes and the main Malay opposition party, PAS (the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party), split the Malay vote with the governing party, UMNO (United Malays National Party). The blow to the Alliance, and especially UMNO, was seen as a loss for the Malay political program of special privilege based on being "original inhabitants" of the peninsula.

The day following the election results, opposition party supporters celebrated the victory in the streets in Kuala Lumpur and taunted Malays. The next day, Malays took to the streets in a counter demonstration that turned into a multi-day riot in Kuala Lumpur and continued sporadic violence throughout Malaysia over the next two months (King 2008:79). During these riots, commonly referred to as the 13 May Incident, nearly two hundred people were killed and more than four hundred injured while six thousand homes were destroyed according to official numbers—almost certainly significantly underestimated (Andaya & Andaya 2001:298). The victims of this violence were predominately Chinese. As a result of the violence, a state of emergency was declared, and parliament was suspended.²⁸

²⁸ Parliament was reconvened in February of 1971. In 1973, The Alliance coalition was replaced with *Barisan Nasional* (National Front), a broader coalition of parties, in order to contest the 1974 elections (Gomez & Jomo 1999:22). Barisan Nasional won the 1974 elections and, with UMNO as its dominant member, continued to be the ruling coalition until the 2018 general election when the Pakatan Harapan (Alliance of Hope) coalition succeeded it, ending 61 years of UMNO leadership.

The 13 May Incident is a definite landmark in Malaysian history (Andaya & Andaya 2001:301 and Liow 2009:30). It marks the transition from an era of colonial rule and early nationhood to the period of political and economic development that has produced the present-day nation-state. And, by many measures, it has been successful: economically Malaysia has experienced five decades of high growth, “a record that has been matched by few developing economies” (Hall 2012:3); politically it is very stable—both internally and externally, Malaysia has avoided major conflict²⁹; and while it is heavily invested in its Islamic identity, religiously-inspired militarism has made little headway in the country (Osman Bakar 2008:81 and Liow 2009:3-4; see Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid 2002:88-89 and Abuza 2003 for discussion of the scope of Islamic militant activity in Malaysia).

Two events during my fieldwork convinced me of the continued cultural salience of the 13 May Incident for many Malaysians. The first was during a walking tour of Kampung Baru sponsored by Kuala Lumpur City Hall. Kampung Baru, now located in the center of Kuala Lumpur, is a settlement (literally a *new village*) that was established by the British in the early 1900s, on what was then the northern periphery of the city, as a sort of preserve for Malays who were seen as shut out of the Chinese and British dominated city—a place in the city for Malayness (King 2008:35-36). Today the streets of Kampung Baru stand in contrast with the ultra-modern cityscape—including the Petronas Towers, the twin tower icon of Malaysia’s modernity—immediately adjacent. The tour showcased this contrast, our guide pointing out that, except for the mosque, the elevation of the architecture was much shorter than the elite leisure and business districts that surrounded it. Dotted among these low buildings are what she referred

²⁹ There are exceptions: the riots of 1969 and continued lower-level ethnic tensions, the pre-Independence “Konfrontasi” military conflict with Indonesia, and the “Emergency” conflict with the (Chinese) Malayan Communist Party in the peninsula, as well as violence in the eastern Malaysian state of Sabah related to territorial disputes with the Philippines.

to as “traditional” Malay houses—raised wooden structures with gabled roofs and colorfully decorated eaves. Absent from Kampung Baru are the shophouses and their modern variations that are ubiquitous in much of the rest of the city and index Chinese-ness. The tour also visited a reconstruction of the Malay social club where UMNO, the dominant Malay party, was said to have formed. What was not mentioned during the tour was that Kampung Baru was also the initial flashpoint from which the 13 May riots started. After the tour, while I walked to the light rail station with the tour guide, I asked if she knew what parts of the kampung had been affected by the now more than forty-year-old riots. She replied, “We don’t talk about that on the tour; as Malaysians, we don’t really like to talk about that at all.” I regretted having asked an impolite question and felt that the remainder of the walk was awkward.

The second event was the “red shirt” demonstration I observed in September 2015. The demonstration was in support of the pro-Malay political agenda of the UMNO-led government. It was a response to the “yellow shirt” demonstration that had taken place two weeks earlier to demand the resignation of the scandal-burdened prime minister, Najib Razak, and promote corruption-free governance more generally.³⁰ Both demonstrations were ethnically valenced: red-shirted Malays and yellow-shirted Chinese (though the yellow-shirt demonstrations attracted politically liberal Malays and many Indians as well). The protest signs I saw at the rally included messages such as “Melayu Bersatu” (Malays United) and “Jangan Pijak Kepala Melayu” (Don’t Step on the Heads of the Malays). The second sign referred to challenges to the special rights of Malays, such as state-sponsored affirmative-action programs that, among other things, guarantee a quota for Malays at universities, give Malays preference in buying and financing homes, and provide incentives for Malays to start businesses. Another sign particularly caught my attention

³⁰ After Pakatan Harapan’s success in the 2018 general election, Najib was arrested and is facing multiple corruption charges.

as I perused a throng of red-shirted young men who had gathered in front of the entrance to Petaling Street—a shopping arcade dominated by Chinese hawkers. The sign read, “Jangan Hasut Benci Melayu Seperti 13 Mei” (Don’t Provoke the Malays Like on 13 May). Given the violence of the 13 May Incident and the proximity of this crowd to a clearly marked Chinese space, the invocation of the riot felt very threatening.³¹ Both these events, then, are indicative of the continued rhetorical power of the riot and highlight the fact that, while Malaysia has made considerable progress in terms of economic development, education, and technology, it has not transcended the ethnic and religious tensions that threatened to undo it during its early years.

In respect to the interests of this chapter, the 13 May Incident should also be understood as a watershed event. The initial response was clearly developmentalist; the rioting made it evident that if the nation-state was going to hang together, educational and economic discrepancies between the small upwardly mobile, business-savvy, mostly-Chinese, urban class and the larger underdeveloped, mostly-Malay, rural class would have to be mediated. The resulting policies also, however, had consequences for the trajectory of the transformation of Islam in Malaysia (Shamsul 1997:212).

Developmentalist Response

The NEP (New Economic Policy)—the primary legislative response to the riots—pursued national unity among Malaysians in two ways: the elimination of poverty among all ethnic groups and restructuring society in order to undo the colonial legacy of associating ethnic groups with particular occupations or sectors of the economy. So, in spirit at least, the NEP was

³¹ The demonstration overall was peaceful. Though the crowd in front of Petaling Street was dispersed with water cannons after several hours. It is unclear whether this policing action was strictly necessary or if it was instead a demonstration of police power. In either case, no rioting was reported.

developmentalist in Francis Loh Kok Wah's (2001) sense. It foregrounded economic development while, supposedly, deemphasizing political issues. This ethnic ecumenicalism was essential to getting the support necessary from the Chinese and Indian parties to implement the program. However, rather than transcending ethnic politics, the NEP ultimately ushered in an era of its intensification (Gomez & Jomo 1999:24-25 and Nasr 2001:70).

The NEP was implemented over the course of four five-year plans, from 1971 to 1990. Its specific programs included: the development of (especially rural) infrastructure; improvement of education through building more schools and improving existing ones, developing the university system, providing scholarships, and introducing a quota system; increasing employment opportunities; and working to achieve parity between ethnic groups' control of equity in the private sector.

While developmentalist in outlook, the implementation of the NEP was narrowly focused on Malays (Liow 2009:32). The NEP may have been formulated to promote national unity, but equally as pressing from the perspective of UMNO was the need to rebuild confidence in the party among its Malay base. The same ethnically-inflected argument served both purposes: "since Malays and Bumiputera had been the most economically deprived groups under colonial rule, it was only justified that they be given disproportionately greater help in accessing the country's revenue-generating sectors after independence" (Tajuddin 2012:153). Thus, the practical focus of the NEP became the improvement of the Malay community vis-à-vis the Chinese community.³² Political stability, proponents claimed, is a precondition for development, so all Malaysians had to acquiesce to affirmative action policies favoring Malays. Furthermore,

³² Though the rhetoric of the NEP uses "bumiputera" which includes, in addition to Malays, non-Malay indigenous people in both the peninsula (*Orang Asli*) and the Bornean states, in fact non-Malay indigenous populations (especially the *Orang Asli*) continued to be neglected during the NEP (Gomez & Jomo 1999:40 and Andaya & Andaya 2001:306).

anything that would threaten stability by offending “ethnic sensitivity”—including questioning the special status of Malays—was increasingly treated as a legal offence (Loh Kok Wah 2001:185-186 and Tajuddin 2012:154). This wariness around such sensitivities remains pertinent in Malaysia, as the case of the professor described in the first of the introductory vignettes above demonstrates.

By 1990, NEP policies appeared to achieve considerable success. Poverty had been reduced by 30% and the difference between Malay and Chinese incomes had also been considerably reduced (Tajuddin 2012:153). Furthermore, the Malay share of national wealth had increased to about 20%, up dramatically from less than 2% before NEP (Andaya & Andaya 2001:315). Despite this increase, Chinese equity continued to rise too—taking over shares of the economy that had been held by foreign interests (Andaya & Andaya 2001:315). This general prosperity mitigated the ethnic tensions resulting from the NEP. UMNO and MCA (the Malaysian Chinese Association), the principal parties in BN (Barisan Nasional), re-established support among their base constituents as evinced by BN’s success in elections continuing until the May 2018 general election.

In view of these outcomes, many commentators see the NEP as a success. Azlan Tajuddin, for example, writes, “Despite criticisms regarding the discriminatory nature of the policy, NEP proved to be one of the most successful affirmative action programs in the world” (2012:153; see also Hefner 2001:30). While such accolades are justified, they ought not obscure less benevolent outcomes. NEP policies ignored, and perhaps even exacerbated, the poverty of plantation-based Indians and non-Malay Bumiputera (Andaya & Andaya 2001:305-306 and Peletz 2005:245). Furthermore, though the Malaysian economy grew at a respectable rate during the NEP era, it did not grow as fast as other Asian economies (Gomez & Jomo 1999:25 and Hall

2012:3). It may be that Malaysian economic growth had more to do with a booming regional economy than the specifics of the NEP.

Edmund Terence Gomez and Jomo K.S. point to several other troubling features of the NEP. Chief among these concerns is that the NEP encouraged cronyism and rent seeking—that is, the cultivation of close relationships with politicians by businesspeople as a means of acquiring subsidies, low-interest loans, licenses, and other concessions, made available for distribution through the NEP. In return politicians received stock options and corporate directorships (Gomez & Jomo 1999:25 and 41). While such patronage relationships may be, in some contexts, a strategy for building cooperative relationships between firms, government, and financiers (King 2008:267 n.28), Gomez and Jomo argue that in the Malaysian context these relationships represented egregious inefficiency because the beneficiaries lacked business acumen (1999:51). Ross King sums up the situation: “Malaysia’s industrialization occurred through the medium of multinational corporations (including *Chinese* Malaysians, Singaporean and Hong Kong capital), not through Malaysian entrepreneurship. The Malaysian conglomerates increasingly became ‘rentierist’ or simply ‘cronyist’” (2008:86).

While participation of Malaysian Chinese-controlled firms and capital were essential to Malaysia’s economic development, this was despite rather than because of the NEP. One of the effects of the NEP was a “brain drain” in which talented Chinese, unable to be placed at national universities because of limited space—the result of NEP quota systems³³—and anxious about business prospects within the country anyway, emigrated in search of more promising opportunities (Hefner 2001:30). Chinese businesses within the country increasingly sought international investments, believing them to be more secure and promising than domestic ones.

³³ This shortage of placement opportunities within higher education was alleviated to some extent by policies that permitted the establishment of private colleges and twinning institutions (Andaya & Andaya 2001:335).

Chinese firms choosing to continue to do business within Malaysia either formed patronage relationships with politically connected Malays or, especially in the case of small businesses, pooled their money in investment holding companies to retain their influence (Gomez & Jomo 1999:44-49).

Furthermore, not all Malays had equal access to NEP programs and benefits. Because distribution was facilitated through patronage networks, those who were best socially positioned to access such networks—namely elites—received the greatest benefit. Of course, such elites were also the ones least affected by the poverty and social disparities the NEP was intended to alleviate. Gomez and Jomo cite two examples of such poorly conceived NEP programs that were squarely targeted at core Malay economic activities: fishing and rice farming (1999:28). The first was a subsidy on diesel fuel prices meant to benefit fishers by offsetting one of their input costs. However, only large boats use diesel, poor fishers were far more likely to use small gasoline engines, if they used them at all. Similarly, guaranteed price schemes and subsidized fertilizers benefitted large rice producers to a far greater extent than poorer farmers working small plots. So, despite the undeniable success during the NEP in reducing the poverty rate and improving the standing of Bumiputras vis-à-vis Chinese Malaysians, these policies also exacerbated class tensions among Malays. In assessing the overall strategy of the NEP, Shamsul A.B. aptly characterized it in the words of W.F. Wertheim, “betting on the strong few and not the weak many” (Shamsul 1997:210).

This intra-Malay tension appeared, in part, with the emergence of a new class of *Orang Kaya Baru* (New Rich People). Shamsul provides a layered genealogy for the term (1999:90-92). He suggests it first occurred in the colonial era when the existing Malay aristocracy came to terms with newly minted Malay civil servants (of the British administration) and, later, members

of parliament. These *new* elites were granted titles that recognized their elevated social standing and yet continued to differentiate them from the aristocracy—the old guard. Thus “Orang Kaya Baru” became a way of conceptualizing new political elites. However, Shamsul goes on to note that the term was also used, often derisively, in villages to highlight the behavior of someone who had acquired wealth and was spending it conspicuously or in idiosyncratic ways (he mentions, as an example, a villager buying an electric refrigerator even though their village had not yet been electrified). In a similarly critical vein—and particularly in the NEP-era of patronage—“Orang Kaya Baru” was used to insinuate that someone had made their wealth through corruption. In any case, whether used with the positive valence of an honorific for new political elites or negatively to criticize people affecting lifestyles beyond their posts, the term indexes class difference by highlighting social friction.

Despite the obvious successes of the NEP, Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad (r. 1981-2003 and 2018-the present) recognized that the policies had fallen short in many respects. He was particularly concerned that Malays had become overly dependent on the government. In this respect, Mahathir’s ideas converged with other Malay nationalists who, while not discounting the effects of colonialism, focused on supposed Malay cultural traits, such as “lack of rationality, fatalism” and a nonchalant attitude towards work, as the cause of “economic backwardness” (Shamsul 1999:96). In 1991, in the wake of the NEP, Mahathir propounded “Vision 2020”—while not really a set of policies, the statement articulated the Prime Minister’s aspirations to set Malaysia on a course to becoming a fully-developed nation by the year 2020. Many of its aims are similar to those of the NEP: creating a unified and peaceful nation, recognition and maintenance of Malaysia’s multiculturalism, and promoting both economic growth and parity between social groups. However, both “Vision 2020” and the formal NDP (National

Development Policy) that followed a few months later as the NEP's successor, stressed adopting a scientific outlook and being open to technological innovation, enacting ethical and spiritual self-discipline, and becoming both responsive to market demands and internationally competitive (Gomez & Jomo 1999:169). This new agenda had a specifically neoliberal character that differentiated it from the old NEP.

While "Vision 2020" and the NDP both foregrounded a form of developmentalism that transcends ethnic communitarianism, again, just as in the case of the NEP, implementation was Malay-centric. In fact, Mahathir was squarely targeting the Orang Kaya Baru who had emerged during the NEP. He referred to them as the *Melayu Baru*, the New Malays. At the core of this notion of Malay-ness was the trait of self-reliance; Melayu Baru actualized entrepreneurial values and skills and would be able to compete in the marketplace—particularly with Chinese Malaysians—without depending on the state intervention (Shamsul 1999:100-103).³⁴ Recently, Patricia Sloane-White has ethnographically explored the divide between the NEP-generation of Malay businessmen and this younger, thoroughly entrepreneurial class. She found that the latter often regarded the privilege enjoyed by their predecessors with disdain; indeed, according to one such informant, "UMNO-aligned Malay businessmen [of the NEP era]...had 'bribed and cheated' their way to corporate and material success" (2014:24). So, the sort entrepreneurship that is at play here cannot be reduced to mere business or technological savviness but should instead be understood as a broader form of ethical self-making.³⁵ Unsurprisingly, then, *Melayu Baru* has become entangled with Islamic notions of ethics producing an idealized figure of the Muslim entrepreneur. It is to the Islamic component of that figure that I now turn.

³⁴ Though this independence is an ideal—Malays continue to enjoy special privileges and advantages in Malaysia.

³⁵ For example, Shamsul writes that according to "Vision 2020" propounded by Mahathir "Malaysia shall not follow the same route the West took...to industrialization and modernization...Malaysia's path to 2020 shall be guided by spiritual, religious, and moral consciousness of the highest level" (1997:220-221).

The Role of the Islamic Resurgence

Reassertion, revival, resurgence, revitalization, renewal and *awakening* are all concepts scholars have used to describe a set of interconnected Islamic movements that “endeavour to re-establish Islamic values, Islamic practices, Islamic institutions, Islamic laws, indeed Islam in its entirety, in the lives of Muslims everywhere...[and] attempt to re-create an Islamic ethos, an Islamic social order, at the vortex of which is the Islamic human being, guided by the Qur'an and the Sunnah” (Chandra Muzaffar 1987:2). A central feature of these types of movements is the reclamation and reactivation of a past, often identified with golden ages of Islamic civilization such as the period of the Four Rightly-Guided Caliphs (632–661 CE) or the original Muslim community in Medina established by Muhammad himself (622-629), during which Muslims adhered to an authentic and unadulterated form of Islam. Importantly, such movements not only exhort Muslims to return to “authentic” expressions of Islam, but also challenge non-Islamic social systems and demand their transformation. Because it captures this sense of confrontation, including Muslim and non-Muslim anxieties around it, Chandra Muzaffar prefers the nomenclature of “resurgence” (1987:2-3), a precedent I follow here.

While the Islamic resurgence is global in scope—best understood as one dimension of an even broader global reemergence of religion generally (Chandra Muzaffar 1987:13-14 and Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid 2002:103), it is of course articulated in socio-cultural and political-economic contexts of specific places (Peletz 2005:245). In Malaysia, political activity organized around Islamic idioms can be traced to at least as early as the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century nationalist resistance to colonialism. British indirect rule depended on the mediation of pre-colonial Malay elites, namely the sultans and their attendant aristocracy. The colonial polity

protected aristocratic status of these elites while denying them any real power (Nasr 2001:34). This colonial system also enhanced the tie between Islam and the sultanates by improving collection of religious taxes and management of endowments as well as introducing and maintaining Islamic courts. Furthermore, the British encouraged the formation of religious councils that managed sultanates' religious affairs thus giving rise to an early form of religious bureaucracy (Nasr 2001:34). These councils were staffed by officials from villages whose expertise was most often in "syncretic" forms of Islam that mingled Islamic (sometimes mystically oriented Sufism) practices with different court rituals (often derived from pre-Islamic Buddhist and Hindu influences) and pre-Islamic spirit beliefs that persisted among Malays. This coalition between British colonialists and Malay political and religious elites effectively excluded the *Kaum Muda* (Young Group), Islamic reformers who, influenced by notions of orthodox Islam circulating in the Muslim world, vigorously criticized these syncretic forms (Roff 1967 and Peletz 2002:53). While traveling around the Muslim world often to pursue education, these reformers encountered not only puritanical interpretation of Islam but also anti-colonial nationalist ideologies and so associated closely with other nationalists and socialists in Malaya (Liow 2009:19 and Nasr 2001:34). The *Kaum Muda* movement ultimately made significant contributions to the formation of the Malay nationalist movement.

As the oldest and largest explicitly Islamic party in Malaysia, PAS (Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party) is among the most recognizable features of Malaysia's Islamic landscape. PAS grew out of a schism within UMNO in the early 1950s during which a group of *ulama* (Islamic scholars) decided they could better pursue the aim of developing an Islamic society outside of UMNO (Liow 2009:23). PAS is *Islamist* in precisely Joseph Chinyong Liow's definition of the term: it represents a "ideological politicization of Islam" (2009:6), specifically aspiring to

establish Malaysia as an Islamic state.³⁶ It is convenient to distinguish between PAS and UMNO by thinking of the former as oriented toward Islam and the latter toward Malay identity (Chandra Muzaffar 1987:79), though, as emphasized above, *Malay* and *Muslim* are tightly entangled in Malaysia. This distinction is muddled even further with Liow's observation that at its core, UMNO's politics has always been and continues to be Islamist in many respects (2009:4,7 & 12). The more salient distinction between PAS and UMNO is their particular "brands" of Islam; the political necessity of maintaining this distinction has driven the process of "piety trumping" in which both parties are obligated to appear more Islamic than the other resulting in increasing religious conservatism in Malaysia (Liow 2009:13 & 15 and Peletz 2005:247). While it may be inaccurate to think of PAS as the Islamic opposition to secular (though Malay) oriented UMNO, since its founding, PAS has certainly been the main opposition to UMNO. Its stronghold is on the east coast of the peninsula where it has, on different occasions, won state elections.³⁷

In the decades immediately following independence (the 1960s and 1970s), Malaysians saw the emergence of another sort of resurgent movement: the *dakwah* movement. In fact, "dakwah" has become the term used most often in Malay to denote Islamic resurgence. In Arabic, it means "inviting," "calling," or "summoning" and refers to the practice, seen as obligatory by some Muslims, of calling people to the proper worship of the one true God—that is, to the practice of proselytizing (see Shamsul 1997:210). While historically, particularly during the initial Arab-Muslim expansion (610-750 CE), *dakwah* initiatives focused on non-Muslims (Esposito 2011:87), the present-day global movement, including its expression in Malaysia, is more focused on making existing Muslims better Muslims (Funston 1985:171). Thus, *dakwah*

³⁶ Importantly, PAS rejects militarism and seeks to implement its agenda through electoral politics (Abuza 2003:52).

³⁷ As of 2018, PAS controls the states of Kelantan and Terengganu, and has, in the past, also held the state of Kedah.

movements are intended to strengthen faith and practice, correct individual Muslims who have gone astray as well as guide society at large toward more Islamic principles.

Chandra Muzaffar argues that dakwah movements originated in Malaysia with the urbanization of the Malay population (1987:13-14; see also Nagata 1984:56-59 and Zainah Anwar 1987:21-22). Drawn to growing opportunities in urban centers and government inducement to pursue them, these rural-to-urban migrants found themselves enmeshed the social structures of modernity which segment life into discrete categories such as work and home or labor and recreation. Newly urbanized Malays struggled to synchronize these segments, something they had not needed to do in organically organized village life. On this account, dakwah appealed to Malays because of their alienation in novel modern urban social settings—Islam in this form provided them with the means to reconcile the fragmentation characteristic of urban life. While this “cultural shock” thesis (Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid 2002:100) is plainly too pat, it does properly highlight that the dakwah movement, while eventually influential in rural areas (Shamsul 1997:218), was primarily an urban phenomenon.³⁸ It also highlights the notion of unity that is central to dakwah principles. In this regard, Sharon Siddique points out that many Muslims regard common conceptions of religion as something merely concerned with spirituality and ritual as overly narrow; rather, Islam is *al-Din*—an Arabic term translated as *religion*, but on this account taken to also include the political, legal, and material (economic) aspects of life (1985:337; also Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid 2002:103). This contention is sometimes expressed in the Arabic slogan: *Islam din wa dawla wa dunia* (Islam is religion, politics and [day-to-day living in] the world). This notion is directly opposed to the urban

³⁸ Michael Peletz argues that “ordinary Malays”, those not engaged in dakwah movements, are often ambivalent toward dakwah principles (1997 and 2002:225-227).

fragmentation of life pointed to by Chandra Muzaffar; instead it foregrounds continuity across life's various vistas.

Among dakwah groups, perhaps the most influential was also among the earliest: ABIM (Malaysian Muslim Youth Movement) was founded in 1969 at the University of Malaya by the National Muslim Student Association (Shamsul 1997:213; also Peletz 2005:246). It was led by the charismatic Anwar Ibrahim and intended to oppose secular and Western values, such as hedonism, materialism, and relativism among young people and members of the new Malay middle class (Chandra Muzaffar 1987:48). Somewhat shielded by its strong Islamic credentials, ABIM was also able to criticize the ruling party, UMNO, on various fronts ranging from corruption and failure to institute true Islamic governance (permitting alcohol sales and gambling, for example) to its unjust and repressive policing tactics (such as detaining people without charge for extended periods of time). Anwar also spoke forcefully in defense of Malaysia's multiculturalism and against UMNO's conflation of Malay and Muslim—and the pitting of their constituents against non-Muslim and non-Malay Malaysians (Chandra Muzaffar 1987:49-50).

Perhaps the event that, more than any other, marked ABIM as a serious actor in the field of politics was its role in facilitating a student demonstration in 1974 against rural hunger and poverty (Zainah Anwar 1987:23, Shamsul 1997:213-215, and Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid 2002:101). This led to the arrest of more than a thousand demonstrators including Anwar. And, as Shamsul observes, it identified ABIM as a source and foundation for opposition politics, particularly in view of PAS, in the same year, briefly joining the ruling coalition led by UMNO (1997:214). Together these events—the protests and its rise as a platform for opposition

politics—solidified ABIM’s position in Malaysian society and brought increased attention (and scrutiny) to dakwah movements in the country.

By the mid-1970s, a transformation had taken place within the campus-based dakwah movement. Up until that point, most of the Malays attending university had been liberal arts students—Malaysian universities simply did not have the facilities or the expertise to train students in the sciences. However, by the mid-1970s, Malaysian universities had begun significantly expanding their science facilities. Malay students who had received government funding to study sciences overseas began returning to staff these new departments; they brought with them not only technological expertise, but also experiences with modernist and puritanical Islamic groups in the Middle East and South Asia (Shamsul 1997:215 and Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid 2002:100). These non-Malaysian Islamic groups were more focused on promoting (their idea of) an authentic practice of Islam than on social justice—which had been a primary concern for ABIM. With growing numbers of science students, this new perspective quickly dominated campus dakwah groups. Shamsul makes the provocative argument that the proliferation of this demanding form of Islam among science students is not happenstance, but rather reveals a correspondence between their religious thinking and their scientific training: “positivistic scientific paradigms...have provided these students with the analytical tools for the reinterpretation of Islam in a narrow, legalistic way” (1997:224). I will return to this issue of the relationship between Islam and science in the Chapter 4.

A very different sort of dakwah movement was also drawing public attention in the 1970s. *Darul Arqam* (from Arabic: “Land of Arqam”—Arqam was one of the companions of the Prophet) was characterized by its separatist tendencies. Established in 1973, the movement consisted of commune-like communities with their own houses, mosques, schools, markets,

clinics and horticultural plots (Chandra Muzaffar 1987:44; also Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid 2015 & 2016). These communities were meant to emulate the earliest Muslim communities in the Arab peninsula that were established by Muhammad. Members adopted Arab customs of dress and food—going as far as using horses as modes of transportation. Arqam’s teachings emphasized the role of individual character in a just and righteous society; that is, society was understood as a reflection of its members’ characters. However, the movement’s teachings were not limited to the cultivation of pious characters, but also included practical training in business and management. Such skills were understood as necessary to form a just mode of economics as an alternative to the broader Malaysian and international system.

In 1994, Arqam was declared a deviant sect by the Malaysian government and subsequently banned. It was charged with establishing a military wing and colluding with militants in southern Thailand. However, Arqam’s leader had also claimed to be more popular than Mahathir—a criticism that likely drew the ire of the prime minister (Chandra Muzaffar 1987:58 n.7). Johan Fischer suggests that Arqam also may have been targeted by the state because, by enacting independence from the state, Arqam had become implicitly critical of it (2008:3-4; see also Liow 2009:57-58). While self-sufficiency may have been valorized as a prominent Melayu Baru virtue, UMNO recognized the political necessity of keeping Malay support—and safeguarding their role as benefactor was the surest way to continue to command that support. If Malays were to become self-sufficient, it would be on terms not detrimental to UMNO’s continued political dominance.³⁹

By the 1980s it was clear that the government needed a more sustained and consistent response to the dakwah movement. Shortly after Mahathir took office in 1981, he started a

³⁹ Ahmad Fauzi Adul Hamid (2015 & 2016) follows the ways in which Arqam has rebranded and repositioned itself. It continues as a set of interrelated enterprises now based in the Middle East under the name Global Ikhwan.

process of *Islamization* aimed at reconfiguring the government and its mechanisms to conform to Islamic principles and mandates (Liow 2009:46 and Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid & Che Hamdan Che Mohamad Razail 2015:308-311). This process involved the establishment of National Dakwah Month, the introduction of religion as a subject on national school exams, founding an Islamic university, remodeling the national banking and financial systems to reflect Islamic values (by eliminating interest, specifically), launching Islamic think tanks to develop new government policies, and enhancing enforcement of Islamic-based laws (Shamsul 1997:218). Importantly, these initiatives made it possible to entice Anwar Ibrahim, who was among the most prominent dakwah leaders, to join UMNO and the Mahathir-led government.⁴⁰ To a great extent, then, the Malaysian state was able to co-opt the dakwah agenda. But as gestured to above, it would be incorrect to assume that these processes of Islamization were merely cynical political moves; rather, UMNO was already firmly committed to its own agenda of political Islam, and competition between it and PAS or various dakwah groups is best understood as a ratcheting up of ideology rather than merely taking on competitors' platforms to secure political support (Liow 2009:13).

UMNO's brand of political Islam was further entrenched through the establishment of a sophisticated Islamic bureaucracy. When Anwar joined UMNO, he brought with him many of ABIM's other Islamic scholars, thus providing a ready cadre to staff such bureaucracies (Liow

⁴⁰ In 1998, Anwar, by then Deputy Prime Minister and seemingly positioned to assume the prime minister position after Mahathir, was sacked and jailed on highly-suspect allegations of corruption and sexual offenses orchestrated by Mahathir (see Peletz 2009:211-215 for a full discussion of this case and its contextualization of the political-cultural dynamics of Malaysia). Anwar was released from prison in 2004. However, sensing he was again becoming a political threat, the Najib government tried him on sodomy charges, just as the Mahathir government had done, leading to Anwar being imprisoned again in 2015. In 2018, after UMNO was defeated in elections for the first time in Malaysian history, Anwar received a royal pardon. He has since returned to parliament and is again one of the most powerful politicians in Malaysia, second—as before his first imprisonment—only to Mahathir.

2009:47).⁴¹ While tentative steps in bureaucratization had already been made by UMNO under Mahathir's predecessors, "the transformation of JAKIM [Islamic Development Department of Malaysia] from a tiny secretariat to a full-fledged multi-division department...is what distinguishes Islamisation under Mahathir from that of past administrations: the resulting fortified and expanded religious bureaucracy" (Tan Beng Hui 2012:36). JAKIM is the quintessential Malaysian Islamic bureaucracy; its influence is heightened by its placement directly within the Department of the Prime Minister. While its official role is to foster Islamic practices and attitudes by coordinating the efforts of individual states' Islamic authorities (constitutionally, Islam is a matter for state governments, though the growing influence of the federal government challenges this role of the states [Liow 2009:49 & Tan Beng Hui 2012:35]), JAKIM is involved in a wide-range of activities: monitoring and rehabilitating Islamic "deviants," developing policy related to Islamic family law, advocating for stricter policing of "indecent acts" (such as kissing in public) particularly when committed by Muslims, handling issues around apostasy and relatedly, at least in the eyes of JAKIM, monitoring and providing counseling and training to new converts, and finally—directly related to this dissertation—handling the certification of halal food and products (Liow 2009:49-51). In the following chapter, I will address the processes through which halal has been bureaucratized as well as the specific mechanisms by which it manifests halal.

Patricia Sloane-White observes that, while the dakwah movement and subsequent processes of Islamization in Malaysia are often "viewed by scholars through the macro-lens of politics, 'political Islam,' or Islamism," anthropologists have also examined the micro-processes

⁴¹ Tan Beng Hui notes that these bureaucracies were further staffed with both Islamic scholars who, if not absorbed by the government, may have challenged its legitimacy, as well as numerous students who, having studied abroad—often in the Middle East—with scholarships under the NEP, were returning to Malaysia in search of employment and with heightened awareness of Islam (2012:38).

of Islamization—how it engages and is engaged on the level of the individual (2017:1). This more fine-grained approach reveals, among other things, that the notion of Islamization is anything but clear. In his ethnographically-grounded research concerning Malaysia’s Islamic courts, for example, Michael Peletz develops a critique of *Islamization* arguing: “as the term is generally used...it obscures an understanding of recent developments bearing on Malaysia’s increasingly powerful *syariah* judiciary...and the direction in which it is currently moving” (2013:606). In his view, transformation within the courts is as much the result of *corporatization* and *bureaucratization* as it is Islamization. Peletz supports his critique by examining, among other things, the ways in which the Islamic courts emulate the civil courts: syariah lawyers style themselves after civil-court lawyers—particularly in terms of dress, and the court system aspires toward corporate-like efficiency and convenience afforded by technological sophistication. In a later paper, Peletz (2015) illustrates these transformations of the Islamic judiciary ethnographically by revisiting a court where he did research in the late-1980s. He describes not only the ways in which the appearance of the chambers and professional dress of court officials have changed, but also the ways in which officials interact with petitioners—both more formally and more punitively. These transformations, in Peletz’s estimation, have less to do with anything essentially Islamic than with emulating international tropes of professionalism.

In her research, Sylva Frisk (2009) grounds Islamization in the religious lives of Malay women—elite, educated, suburban women specifically. While expansion of Islamic regulation of society is commonly represented as detrimental for women (often with good reason, see Sloane-White 2017:203 n.1), Frisk explores the ways in which these women actively engage Islamization as an arena in which they can develop their religious characters with relative autonomy from men. Prominent among these engagements are religious and Arabic classes

arranged through mosques—though attended mostly by women, such classes tend to be led by men (Frisk 2009:70-76). However, Frisk also documents the emergence of *majlis doa*, prayer gatherings in homes that often involve women exclusively (2009:147-154). Such gatherings share elements with established Malay traditions like feasts (*kenduri*) but do not necessitate the involvement of male religious experts and are aimed at coping with conditions of modern suburban life—particularly stressful life events like children sitting for school exams or leaving for college, marking transitions in religious development, or even undertaking house renovations (2009:147). In Frisk’s view, such engagements demonstrate the processes of Islamization at the individual, even intimate, level and ground abstract political aspirations in private lives.

While Frisk primary focus is the domestic sphere, Patricia Sloane-White (2017) interrogates the processes of Islamization in Malaysian workplaces. Sloane-White’s primary interlocutors are businessmen of what she calls the *sharia generation* who, like the preceding *NEP generation*, have outstanding educational pedigrees (most having attended school internationally), but unlike the earlier generation, are “active students and advocates of Islam and Islamization” (2017:50-51). These men model themselves as *khalifahs*, leaders who are masters of both the material and spiritual worlds and are obligated not only to be good Muslims themselves but also strengthen the *ummah*, the Muslim community as a whole. Part of this obligation to the ummah involves encouraging their employees to be good Muslims (2017:72-73). While both men and women are subjected to ethical discipline within Islamic workplaces, women are particularly susceptible. Sloane-White documents, for example, men “joking” about polygamy with women (2017:113-114). Such jokes are often very sexual and, in US contexts, may well be regarded as sexual harassment. Sloane-White argues that such joking behavior is used to discipline women, reminding them of their precarious situation: men may make sexually

suggestive jokes about polygamy because Islam permits polygamy (Sloane-White argues that, in many ways, polygamy is increasingly accepted in Malaysia [2017:122]). Women, however, cannot reply both because they are expected to be chaste and modest and because they cannot take a critical stance toward an Islamic practice (2017:120-121).

Finally, it is important to recognize that, with a population of over eleven million non-Muslims, Malays are not the only ones affected by ubiquitous Islamization in Malaysia. Andrew Willford (2006) argues that Indians represent a special challenge to Islamic reimagining in Malaysia. Hinduism, court culture, and artistic forms from India characterized much of Malay culture before its embrace of Islam. Even after Malayness became linked with being Muslim, certain customs, like *kenduri* feasts retain pre-Islamic Hindu elements. So, in the current era of Islamization, according to Willford, Indians—and particularly Hindu religious practices—are read by Malays as images of their pre-Islamic selves—as the “uncanny other” (2006:59 & 76-77). Not surprisingly then, the constitutional right to freely practice one’s religion notwithstanding, Indians face considerable oppression. A prominent example of this is the difficulty of getting permission to establish new temples and recognition for existing informal temples (2006:58). Furthermore, Indians in Malaysia continue to have less access to education and to be poorer than their Chinese and Malay counterparts.

In the case of Chinese Malaysians, it is not that they are cast as something primeval, but instead regarded by the Malay-centric Malaysian state as competitors who are interloping on the Malay homeland. Donald Nonini argues that it is against this Malay chauvinism that Malaysian Chinese social life has been shaped (2015:16-17). As one example of how Chinese cultural forms emerge in the context of Malay domination, Nonini describes public temple rituals that involve the appropriation of public space “enact[ing] a cosmopolitical sovereignty over the

public space of the city and manifest[ing] as alternative sovereignty to that of the Malaysian state” (2015:253). This transformation of space is effected through the gathering of people, amassing offerings to the gods, and using the city streets for processions. That the transformation was effective is evidenced by an anecdote about the (Malay) city police trying to limit the size of the joss sticks that could be offered during celebrations because they supposedly posed a fire hazard.

So, while positioned differently, both Indian and Chinese Malaysians must contend with the Malay-centric state and its Islamic aspirations. Though the constitution guarantees Malaysians the right to practice their religion, the spaces available to non-Muslims to do so are surveilled and restricted. Islamization, unsurprisingly, appears to be exacerbating ethnic anxieties.

These examples show how broad processes of Islamization—transformations on the scale of institutions—get translated into people’s lives: through formal interactions with state institutions, personal aspirations, workplace discipline, and mediated through religious pluralism. Examining halal allows us to see how processes of Islamization are translated into marketplaces and how people navigate it in those contexts.

Summing-up Regulation and Developmentalism

These two intertwining currents, developmentalism and state regulation particularly of Islamic matters, constitute two of the most significant conditions under which the Malaysian halal ecosystem has emerged. On the one hand, Islam is both deeply embedded in Malay identity and central to political contests in Malaysia. Because of this, it is heavily regulated by those engaged in these contests. Furthermore, the state has both the expertise and resources to entrench its

version of Islam by establishing bureaucracies to manage affairs related to Islam. On the other hand, the drive to become a highly-developed nation has resulted in the emergence of a stable middle class with cosmopolitan consumer tastes as well as a willingness to engage with international markets. The demand for international goods and concern with Islamic orthodoxy produce the grounds on which halal—which is ultimately concerned with proper modes of consumption—becomes a problem. As an acquaintance explained—while driving her Mercedes-Benz to Cyberjaya to show me her office and the facilities at the new University Islam Malaysia—“we [Malays] want to explore new kinds of foods like McDonald’s, but we need to be sure that these are places that are okay for us.”⁴² It is just this sort of concern that the halal ecosystem—the complex system of regulations, technologies, branding, and marketing focused on halal—has emerged as a response to. It ensures that middle-class Muslims can be comfortable consuming goods even when they know little about the conditions under which the goods are produced. Similarly, this system permits large multinational corporations, whose production chains involve multiple suppliers from various regions around the world, to market their products to Muslims. The elements that constitute this ecosystem emerge out of Malaysia’s history.

Defining Halal

Definitions have a contradictory nature; they are both authoritative and hollow. The best sorts of definitions attempt to survey and catalog the multiple uses of a term—they record the *types* of meaning a term carries within socially-situated conversations. A poorer kind of definition attempts, out of sheer force of authority, to prescribe how a term ought to be used, to delimit the

⁴² In an effort to bolster its national car manufacturer, Proton, Malaysia has implemented tariffs on imported cars. Thus, having an imported car is a definite status symbol. Among Malaysians I talked to about this, Mercedes-Benz was a highly-desirable car brand; many even knew the lettered classes that Mercedes-Benz uses to grade its cars—something I was unaware of before these conversations.

possibilities of use. The problem with either sort of definition is that it ignores the dual tendency of language; Mikhail Bakhtin recognized this as meaning's tendency to be simultaneously conditioned by centripetal and centrifugal forces (1994:33). The meaning of each *token* of a term—each of its appearances in usage—results from a combination not only of its previous usages (centripetal forces), such as its definitions, but also the response it receives, which is not necessarily determined by its past appearances (and so is, potentially, a centrifugal force). Or, from another vantage, definitions presume to categorize the various meanings of terms based on essential similarities and differences between their meanings; difference becomes a criterion for exclusion and similarity for inclusion. The problem with such essential *types* is that each *token* of a term's occurrence is similar to other tokens in some respects and different from them in other respects—the determination of similarity and difference is always, to some degree, arbitrary.⁴³ Definitions, then, are attempts to order meaning by ignoring, perhaps even disallowing, the centrifugal or creative use of terms. They cannot account for the aspect of meaning that is produced in the give and take of social exchange—the irreducible open-endedness of language (Bakhtin 1994[1929]:35).

The point being made here is relevant in two ways. First, in many respects this dissertation is an attempt to document the broad process of *defining* halal. Muslims have always eaten food and used goods that have been permissible; yet, only relatively recently (in the past thirty years), for reasons identified in the previous section, has it become necessary, desirable, and possible to codify production standards, surveil production chains, and develop labeling and marketing for halal. This reconfiguration of halal is the process of extracting halal from the give

⁴³ As will be explored in Chapter 3, arbitrariness is a feature of bureaucracies.

and take of social exchange and inscribing it with a determinant form that is legible to particular types of actors: state-sanctioned regulators, corporations, and consumers.

These issues of definition are also relevant here because they suggest a particular way of approaching the material dealt with in this section. Returning to the position set out in the introduction, *halal* is an assembled category; in other words, it is constituted by parts that *territorialize* (manifest, make present in the world) *halal* both materially and expressively. In this section, then, I want to examine how *halal* is expressively territorialized in a range of texts, that is, the meanings of *halal* that stabilize the assemblage. The most authoritative territorialization of *halal* is, of course, the Quran, followed closely by the actions and sayings of Muhammad preserved in collections of *hadis*—the traditions of the Prophet.⁴⁴ The Quran and these traditions are the main sources for Islamic thought and interpretative techniques—referred to as *fiqah* (jurisprudence)—that have been used to establish *syariah* (Islamic law). While full consideration of Quranic, *hadis*, and *fiqah* literature in relation to *halal* is beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is useful to consider several examples of how it appears within these literatures as a way of establishing rudimentary defining notions of *halal*—the expressive territorializations that are at the center of the assemblage. I will also consider technical literature intended for *halal* manufacturers and popular guidebooks for Muslim consumers. Finally, I will consider the treatment of *halal* in academic texts. Each of these bodies of texts is a mechanism not only for describing or analyzing the existing phenomenon of *halal* but is productive of it—they are modes of *halal*'s manifestation.

⁴⁴ Throughout the dissertation I default to Malay spelling—as codified in *Kamus Dewan*, the national Malaysian Malay-language dictionary—for Islamic terms that are uncommon in English.

Halal in the Quran and in Popular Religious Literature

In August 2015, while attending an event in central Kuala Lumpur about entrepreneurship in the Islamic economy, I met a representative from one of Spain's halal certification bodies. He was excited about visiting Malaysia, but also surprisingly critical of the halal industry: "there's too much disagreement," he complained, "we should be cooperating, but instead everyone has their own ideas about halal and they want the others to follow." We talked more about competition over halal standards and, after several minutes, he said that he was actually not sure if the industry was on the right path; Islam, he explained, after all, is never supposed to be burdensome.⁴⁵ But it seemed to him that demands for certification *do* burden businesspeople, forcing them to pay an additional fee just to sell their products.⁴⁶ After a moment, he reflected: "originally for Adam and his wife everything was halal—only one tree was forbidden."

I draw attention to this comment because it sheds light on an often quoted Quranic passages regarding halal: "eat of what God has provided you; follow not the steps of Satan" (6:142). *Not following Satan* here is an allusion to Adam and Hawa being convinced by Satan to break this original solitary food prohibition. This passage provides clues to the multiple logics that lie behind dietary prescriptions in Islam (Lowry 2003:173): such rules serve as a means of testing believers' obedience to God; however, the proliferation of rules may also serve as a punishment for disobedience—the Quran contains several references to cumbersome Jewish dietary laws as an example of such punishment (4:160, 6:146, and 16:118). The notion here is that dietary laws are justified simply because they are prescribed by God—there is no further

⁴⁵ This is a common sentiment I heard during my fieldwork and is reflected in, among others, this passage from Quran 2:185: "Allah intends for you ease and does not intend for you hardship".

⁴⁶ I had heard the same concern in 2008 from a certifier in Iowa, but in that case the certifier dismissed it.

reason or rationale. This issue is one that researchers in halal laboratories must contend with and something that will be returned to in chapter 4.

Like many concepts, halal's meaning emerges most clearly through comparison with other related concepts, chief among these is its opposite *haram* (prohibited, forbidden, unlawful). Since most things are halal, both categories of halal and haram are more easily delimited by focusing on the relatively few things that are haram. Two Quranic verses reveal the basic food proscriptions: 2:173 and 16:115. In both, the same four types of substances are identified as forbidden: carrion, blood, meat from swine and meat that has been ritually dedicated to anything other than God. Carrion is further described in another passage (5:3-4) as meat from animals that have died from strangulation, bludgeoning, falling, or killed by another animal as prey. The prohibition on blood refers specifically to the blood that flows out of the animal when it is slaughtered—the traces that remain in muscles is not haram.⁴⁷ While the Quran only refers to the meat or flesh of swine, Quranic commentators interpret the prohibition to include anything derived from any part of the animal (Waines 2002:220).

The prohibition on meat from animals over which something other than God has been invoked mirrors another Quranic injunction that *requires* that God's name be invoked over meat before it is consumed—presumably when the animal is slaughtered (6:118, 121). So, not only is it necessary to avoid meat slaughtered according to non-Muslims ritual practice, it is necessary that animals are properly slaughtered. This raises several issues, prominent among them: what is entailed in the (ritually) proper slaughter of animals?⁴⁸ While the Quran is clear that animals

⁴⁷ Though experts I have heard speak on this matter, including academics at University Putra Malaysia and abattoir plant managers, insist that an effort must be made to allow as much blood as possible to drain from the carcass.

⁴⁸ The Arabic words for slaughter are *dhaka* or *tadhkiya* which are used synonymously (Usmani 2006:25). The ritual enactment of slaughter is not different in form than that of sacrifice (*dhabihah*). Interestingly, I found that Muslim living in the Chicago area and trace their heritage to South Asia often use *zabiha* (a variation of *dhabihah*) to mean halal. In Malaysia, I never heard any of these terms and found only some people involved with the halal

killed for meat must be properly slaughtered (5:3), and that invoking the name of God is part of that process, the details of slaughter had to be developed through juridical interpretation; not surprisingly, there are some differences among these interpretations (Usmani 2006:26). Broadly, animals are slaughtered by cutting the neck in a single stroke with a sharp blade (there is disagreement about which internal parts of the neck must be severed). Small animals (like goats) are laid on their left side, large animals (like camels) remain standing, but in both cases the animal is oriented toward the *kiblat* (the direction of prayer—toward Mecca).⁴⁹ Before the cut is made, the *tasmiyya* is pronounced—that is, the name of God is mentioned⁵⁰ (though there is disagreement about whether intentionally or unintentionally neglecting to do so disqualifies the act [Francesca 2006:55 and Usmani 2006:36]). Finally, the animal is allowed to bleed out (Usmani 2006:27-47, for full description, see Francesca 2006:55).

In broad outline, this is the process of proper slaughter accepted by most Muslims. In the following chapter, I discuss a case in which Muslims reject food prepared by other Muslims (despite it being certified halal) because they do not believe it truly meets the requirements for proper slaughter. But more commonly, people accept products as halal even if there is some disagreement among Muslims about legal interpretations or the precise processes for proper preparation.

Concerns about proper slaughter, however, raise another difficult question regarding food prepared by non-Muslims. On one reading, the Quran is clear about this matter: according to the popularly cited verse, 5:5, “And the food of those who were given the Book is permitted you,

industry were familiar with the Arabic terms. Instead, Malaysians most often used either the English word “slaughter” or the equivalent Malay word “sembelih.”

⁴⁹ Though according Riaz and Chaudry it is the slaughter person, not the animal, which should be oriented toward Mecca—and this they relegate to a “secondary requirement” of proper halal slaughter (2004:67).

⁵⁰ The formula for this invocation varies, but *Bismillah Allahu Akhbar* (in the name of God; God is the Greatest) and *La Ilaha illa Llah* (there is no god but God) are among the most common—though any mention of God is sufficient (Usmani 2006:35 n.22).

and permitted them is your food.”⁵¹ So, food prepared by at least some non-Muslim groups is clearly permitted to Muslims. However, non-Muslims slaughter animals by methods clearly interdicted in other Quranic passages, so the issue of food prepared by non-Muslims is another contentious issue that must be contended with through juridical interpretation.

The famous twelfth-century Andalusian scholar, Ibn al-Arabi, claimed that the permissibility of food from Jews and Christians is categorical; it’s permitted regardless of the process of production—though al-Arabi may himself have contradicted this claim in a later passage of the same text (Usmani 2006:52). In the late eighteenth-century, Egypt’s influential grand mufti, Muhammad Abdu, similarly ruled that food prepared by Christians, regardless of method, is permissible to Muslims (Francesca 2006:56). On the same matter, Usmani cites a tradition of the Prophet that was reported by his wife, Aisha, according to which, when asked whether it was permissible to eat meat from a group when it was uncertain whether the butcher had invoked God, Muhammad said that it is permissible and that God’s name should be invoked before the meat is eaten instead (2006:65-66). These examples of permissiveness aside, the broader opinion is that food from Jews and Christians is permissible only in the case that the proper procedure for slaughter is followed (Francesca 2006:56 and Usmani 2006:52 and *passim*). A slightly more restrictive position is taken by Riaz and Chaudry in their technical guide for industrial production of halal food: “A slaughter performed by religiously observant Jews or Christians which properly meets all halal blessings and regulations may be used only under restricted and limited conditions” (2004:192).

⁵¹ This passage refers to “the people of the Book” (Arabic: *ahl al-kitab*). These are groups who received scriptures from God before the Quran was revealed such as the Torah and the New Testament (these earlier scriptures were abrogated by the revelation of the Quran according to Islamic tradition). Specifically, the term refers to Jews, Christians, and Sabians, though it is sometimes applied to other groups such as Zoroastrians as well (Esposito 2003:10).

While considering technical details such as the above provides a sense of the contestations around proper slaughter, a broader social point should not be neglected—one that explains why these details are important and is recognized in the Quran itself: “We have appointed for every nation a holy rite, that they mention God’s Name over such beasts of the flocks as He has provided them. Your God is One God, so to him surrender” (22:34). This passage corresponds with the view that dietary rules are “emblematic...‘markers’ separating one religious community from another” (Waines 2002:219). So, this expands the logic of dietary laws identified above. Not only do such laws serve as a way of testing humanity’s faithfulness and as a mode of punishment if humanity fails at those tests, but it is also a way in which communities differentiate themselves and maintain their identities as unique from one another. This casts halal in a particular light given the sorts of ethnically-inflected political and socio-cultural tensions present in Malaysia. While halal’s role as a group marker is an issue that will be returned to throughout the dissertation (particularly in Part 2), here it is noteworthy that halal rules regulate exchange between Muslims and non-Muslims; that is, they not only limit, but also *enable* exchange. This is an important point in appreciating how different types of actors, say Malay activists on the one hand and businesspeople involved in international commerce on the other, draw on dietary rules in quite different ways.

In addition to the prohibitions already mentioned, alcohol is another widely recognized halal proscription. Unlike the other interdictions, the prohibition of alcohol appeared incrementally in Quranic revelation and, because of this, has been a topic of extensive juridical argumentation. In one verse, 4:43, praying while drunk is forbidden, but there is no prohibition on alcohol per se. Another passage, 2:219, reveals that drinking wine is a heinous sin, but then, ambiguously, suggests that it has some useful qualities, and finally declares that its sin outweighs

its usefulness. It is 5:90 that is often cited as conclusive; according to it, both wine and gambling are abominations and the work of Satan. Exegetes have explained this ambiguity as a way of slowly introducing the prohibition to a society where drinking alcohol had been a social custom (Kueny 2006:482). Also, through analogic reasoning, most interpreters agree that the prohibition on *khamr* (wine) extends to all intoxicating substances. The renowned ninth-century Persian Quranic commentator, Al-Tabari, for example, argued that the word “khamr” shares a root with the word “khammara” (veils), thus, wine veils (confuses) the mind and that is the reason for its prohibition, so any substance that similarly confuses mental processes is likewise prohibited (Waines 2002:221). Under this reasoning, all alcohol and recreational drugs are prohibited. Shahab Ahmad, however, excavates another Islamic discourse on wine that is non-legalistic and, instead, valorizes wine as good for the body as a kind of medicine and good for the spirit (2016:58). This alternative discourse, Ahmad argues, is just as legitimately Islamic as the legalistic prohibition. Such a view has little traction in Malaysia. However, there are further complications with the proscription alcohol, particularly in the context of industrially processed food, that will be explored in more detail in chapter 4.

So, these are the five basic dietary prohibitions: carrion, blood, swine-derived products, meat from improperly slaughtered animals, and intoxicants. It is important to mention that several passages listing these proscriptions also state that, if someone finds themselves in a situation in which it is impossible to follow these dietary laws (a state called *darurat*), then it is permissible to eat something that under other conditions would be forbidden—providing that one did not intend or desire to break the prohibition (2:173, 5:6, 16:115). According to these verses, this exception for constraint or extreme necessity is an extension of the principle mentioned above that Islamic practices are not difficult and so is an expression of God’s mercy.

It is also useful here to introduce another Quranic term that often occurs along with halal: *thoyyib*.⁵² For example, verse 5:90 begins: “Eat of what God has provided you lawful and good.” “Lawful” in this verse is a translation of “halal” and “good” of “thoyyib.” But in Malaysia (and the halal industry more broadly) “thoyyib” is more often interpreted as “wholesome.” In a 2008 interview in Chicago, an American Muslim man who was involved with slaughtering animals for a small meat co-operative described the term to me as “something that is completely perfect, it is good in every way” to which he added the exclamation *Subhan Allah*—which he explained means “God is perfect” and is used to express a sense of awe at the beauty and perfection of the created world. So, the notion here is that thoyyib goes beyond merely permissible, it is something that is good in itself—a thing that has virtue. Thoyyib is an increasingly important concept in research institutes and the halal industry in Malaysia because it suggests that the justification for at least some Quranic dietary laws goes beyond testing or punishing humanity or as a means of distinguishing believers from non-believers. Instead, dietary laws have utility—they benefit those who follow them. Research institutes are interested in demonstrating these additional goods and some of their research efforts are dedicated to that end. Producers of halal products are interested in the thoyyib aspects of their products because they are additional features to market. Though such ambitions should not be interpreted too cynically—that dietary laws have practical benefits is seen as evidence of the wisdom in Quranic guidance.

The above discussion has focused exclusively on dietary laws—this is because these rules are central and often synonymous with halal; however, the Quranic concern with halal and haram

⁵² This is a term that does not appear in the Malaysian national dictionary, *Kamus Dewan*. “Thoyyib”, then, is a common spelling in Malay-language academic writing (see, for example, Nurdeng et al. 2013); however, the term also appears as “tayyib”, “toyayib” or “thayyib” among other variations.

addresses other spheres beyond that of food.⁵³ Joseph Lowry cites specifically family law (particularly which relations are eligible marriage partners and which are not) and ritual (especially issues pertaining to ritual purity) (2003:172). While these other aspects of halal are important within Malaysian society, the halal industry—with its focus on marketable goods—takes its cue much more from rules pertaining to dietary law than these other spheres.

Yet, there is another dimension of halal that is relevant here. Lowry points out that, while the Quran uses a “rubric of halal and haram” (the lawful and unlawful), later scholars found it useful to develop a set of evaluative categories that overlap with halal and haram, but also permit finer grading and a capacity to evaluate a very wide range of behaviors (2003:175). These categories are: mandatory (*wajib*), recommended (*mandub*), permitted (*mubah*), disapproved (*makruh*), and forbidden (*haram*).⁵⁴ The first four terms are gradations of lawfulness—of halal, while the last is, of course, equivalent to unlawful. While not locatable on this legal spectrum, *mashbooh* (doubtful) is a sixth term that appears in discourses about halal. The category of doubtful applies when it is uncertain which of the above categories is applicable to the thing in question.

An example helps explain why a more complicated, graded set of evaluative terms is desirable. A long-time Malay friend of mine actively practices Islam (he prays, fasts, and has been on a minor pilgrimage to Mecca), but he also smokes cigarettes. I asked him if smoking is halal. He explained that it was not exactly halal, but because it did not exist at the time of the

⁵³ More specifically, the above discussion is focused on meat from domesticated animals. The Quran also explicitly allows hunting (though not while performing pilgrimage)—including hunting with dogs (5:6, 96), and it allows seafood (5:99). Hadis have led at least some exegetes to regard meat from other animals as haram, such as donkeys (though this was perhaps a temporary ban), animals with canine teeth, and birds with talons (al-Qaradawi 1994:53). Some exegetes also regard scale-less aquatic or semi-aquatic animals (lobster, shrimp, octopus, squid, eels and frogs, for example) as forbidden (Rias & Chaudry 2004:80-81). Foodstuffs from non-animal sources are generally halal—though in my experience mushrooms are sometimes questioned (though I have not encountered this in Malaysia).

⁵⁴ The foreign language terms here are transliterations of Arabic, but they also appear in Malay as technical terms.

Prophet, there could not be any prohibition against it in the Quran or hadis; therefore, it was merely disapproved of (makruh).⁵⁵ He may just as well have claimed smoking was doubtful (mashbooh) because, although there are some scholarly opinions that it is haram, not all scholars agree.⁵⁶ The point here is that while the rubric of lawful and unlawful was sufficient within Quran and hadis, the two ultimate sources of authority within Islam, a more nuanced mode of evaluation was necessary for later scholars who, unlike the Quran and hadis, are liable to biases, mistakes, and oversights.

From the above it is clear that rules concerning halal are derived from several Quranic passages and numerous hadis as well as sustained effort by Islamic scholars to interpret them. This range of material poses a special challenge for individual Muslims who struggle to incorporate halal practices into their daily lives, so various halal handbooks and guidebooks have appeared in response to this challenge. Perhaps the best known is Yusuf al-Qaradawi's *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam*. This text first appeared in 1960 with the purpose of "introduc[ing] Islam and its teachings to Europe and America, educating the Muslims who reside there and attracting the non-Muslims toward Islam" (1994:1). Al-Qaradawi addresses lawfulness and unlawfulness broadly including such varied topics as dress, home decoration, livelihoods, interactions between men and women, relations between parents and children, business dealings, recreations, and relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. Underscoring the strong association of notions of halal with food, the first topical section addresses food and drink. In addition to the types of concerns already addressed above, al-Qaradawi adds a layer by considering the permissibility of making and selling things it would be impermissible for

⁵⁵ Part of the ease of practicing Islam is that everything is permitted *except* those things that are explicitly forbidden.

⁵⁶ These scholarly opinions are circulated as *fatwas*, legal decisions made by *muftis* (jurists) regarding some matter. Indeed, the Malaysian Fatwa Council issued a judgment against smoking in 1996 (*Malay Mail*, 25 June 2013). My friend is either unaware of this or, more likely, for some reason feels he can disregard the ruling.

Muslims to consume or use. Drawing on hadis, he concludes that things forbidden to Muslims for use, are also forbidden to them to profit by; this is particularly clear in the case of alcohol and pork (1994:73-74 & 141).⁵⁷ Thus, prohibitions that initially appear to be merely about diet are shown to be applicable to a much broader range of life activities.

However, the real contribution of al-Qaradawi is not the ways in which he expands discourses about halal, but that he packages it in an accessible single volume. In addition to multiple English-language printings, *The Lawful and Prohibited* has also appeared in Malay as an inexpensive mass-market two volume set under the title *Halal & Haram* edited by Mustaffa Suhaimi (2003). A much higher-quality edition appeared in 2016 as *Halal & Haram Dalam Islam* translated by Mohammad Hafiz Daud.⁵⁸ The point here is that al-Qaradawi's popular interpretation of halal-related fiqh is widely known in the Muslim world.

Halal Haram (Consumers Association of Penang 2006) is another handbook intended as a non-specialist guide. However, its tone and approach are quite different from al-Qaradawi's text. First, though in English, it is clearly written in and for a Malaysian context.⁵⁹ *Halal Haram* does not present itself as a scholarly work, rather it draws predominately on news stories (most often taken from Malaysian—usually Malay-language—newspapers) for the material it discusses and relies on the authority of Malaysian Islamic institutions such as the National Fatwa Council

⁵⁷ Similar concerns are current in Malaysia. For example, I observed a speaker at the 2015 World Halal Conference harangue an HDC executive about the hypocrisy of claiming that Malaysia Air's foodservice is halal when they also serve alcohol—specifically the speaker complained that this forced Muslim flight attendants to serve alcohol.

⁵⁸ It is interesting to note that, while the 2003 translation fails to acknowledge that it is based on al-Qaradawi's work, the 2016 translation puts the mufti's name and photograph on the front cover. Curiously, on this cover his name appears as Qarad*h*awi (though not on the publication page in the front matter of the book). While *dh* is a standardized way of transliterating the Arabic letter appearing in the name, I am not aware of al-Qaradawi's name appearing by that spelling in any other context. The reason for this idiosyncrasy appears to be emphasis on the fact that the text is of Arabic origin and, therefore, perhaps, more authentic. If the 2003 translation was incautious or blatant plagiarism, the 2016 version utilizes al-Qarad*h*awi's identity for promotion.

⁵⁹ I am not aware of a Malay-language edition of the book. This fact suggests that the book is intended for a solidly middle-class and urban readership that is more likely to regularly use English or even prefer it to Malay.

and JAKIM (Malaysian Department of Religious Development). Yet, it sometimes strikes a critical tone toward those same institutions; for example, the preface implies that JAKIM has not been active as it could be: JAKIM “should push for enactment of federal and state legislation regulating the production, transportation, storage, distribution and sale of *Halal* food...[and] provide for strict punishments of those who misrepresent non-*Halal* food” (2006:8). Or, in another chapter, recalling a controversy from the 1990s, the book calls into question assurances given at that time by a division within the Prime Minister’s Office that a particular brand of gelatin was really halal (2006:98).

While *Halal Haram* does cite several Quranic verses and hadis as well as set out basic terminology, given its journalistic leanings, it is not surprising that it is more focused on contemporary practicalities and controversies than it is on fiqh. Among its topics: common foods that surprisingly contain gelatin (often from porcine sources), difficulties in ascertaining whether cheese rennet (commonly taken from calves’ stomachs) came from a properly slaughtered animal, common beverages that contain alcohol, issues with genetically engineered food, haram ingredients used to make cosmetics, food additives that ought to be treated as *mashbooh* because they are derivable from multiple sources, as well as consideration of the problem of halal labeling given that so many foods are imported into Malaysia. The popular culture focus and tone of *Halal Haram* highlights an interesting ratcheting phenomenon of the halal ecosystem: while industry efforts highlight halal as a desirable feature of consumables, this heightened awareness provokes consumer anxieties about the authenticity of manufacturers claims and leads to demands on manufacturers for increased verifiability and strictness. This is a dynamic will be considered again, especially in chapter 4.

Another type of guidebook is *Halal Food: Kuala Lumpur* produced by KasehDia, a media company that was at the center of the halal industry in Kuala Lumpur until quite recently.⁶⁰ This guide is one of eight such books that provide paragraph-length descriptions of halal eateries in countries or global cities frequented by Muslim travelers.⁶¹ The Kuala Lumpur guide contains entries for 113 eateries (or food courts) providing details such as whether they are air-conditioned, family or business friendly, noisy or quiet, accept credit cards, and whether they are wheelchair accessible. Significantly, the guide also distinguishes between eateries that “are halal certified by a certification authority” or “have at least one Muslim owner”—fitting one of these descriptions is necessary for an enterprise to be considered for the guide (Jumaatun Azmi 2007:9).⁶² While the guide does address a wide-range of different types of eateries, from Western-branded fast food chains, to some of the ubiquitous *nasi campur* restaurants,⁶³ the cosmopolitanism of the guide is clearly bared, not only by the fact that it is published in English and Arabic (not Malay), but that it includes many upscale fine-dining establishments specializing in global cuisines. An entry for an Italian restaurant, for example, features an image of a dining room with elegantly set tables, one of which is occupied by a couple being served glasses of wine by a formally dressed waiter (Jumaatun Azmi 2007:24)—an image that resonates more easily with notions of business travel than halal. This series of guidebooks has not been updated

⁶⁰ The case of KasehDia is explored in chapter 5.

⁶¹ The other guides focus on Australia, Canada, Dubai, Kuala Lumpur (Arabic language edition), London, New Zealand, Singapore.

⁶² This recognition of a distinction between formal certification and tacit recognition of halal-ness is described in part two of the dissertation.

⁶³ *Nasi campur* (literally “mixed rice”) restaurants are among the most popular style of eateries in Kuala Lumpur. Typically, patrons are issued plates with a large scoop of rice (or, for the truly famished, two) and then make their way around buffet-style tables of meat, chicken, and fish dishes as well as a variety of cooked and raw vegetable dishes and a selection of spicy *sambal* sauce condiments. When the patron is seated, a staff worker calculates the cost of the plate based on the quantity, number and type of dishes selected. The precise formula for the calculation is most often a mystery for the diners, but my interlocutors agreed that the price would go up or down slightly depending on whether the diners were regulars and on the ethnicities of both the diners and the worker doing the calculations (though the prices are so reasonable that such differences cause little agitation).

since 2007, though during an interview in 2015, the managing director of KasehDia told me that they may be revived as an online resource or smartphone app.

Halal Food Production (Riaz & Chaudry 2004) is a handbook aimed at yet another audience: halal industry professionals—particularly food manufacturers. The authors both hold PhDs in food science, so it is unsurprising that the book focuses more on practical problems of food manufacturing than Islamic jurisprudence. Though the second chapter does review Quranic verses related to halal, there are references to neither hadis nor Quran in the remainder of the book; instead, the text is focused on compliance with country and regional halal production standards (2004:51-55). It is worth noting that in their review of existing standards outside the US, Riaz and Chaudry explicitly discuss those of Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia while the Middle East and South Asia are discussed as conglomerate regions. These divisions are interesting because they underscore that countries in Southeast Asia have been more preoccupied with issues of halal than other parts of the Muslim world and, as such, they have been at the forefront of developing halal standards and systems of certification. Another interesting feature of this book is its use of the concept of HCPs—*halal control points* (2004:3). Here the authors are adapting an idea from food production management systems: HACCP—*hazard analysis and critical control points*. HACCP is a food safety system that identifies points within a manufacturing process that are critical in ensuring that the final product is safe to consume (such as minimum temperatures for pasteurization). HCPs, then, are points in the manufacturing process which are critical in ensuring that the end products are halal. An obvious example of such a point is the slaughter of an animal, which must of course comply with ritual observance. Quality control managers can focus their attention on these critical points reducing the risk of error and contamination. So, for each category of product discussed in the text—meat, dairy, fish

and seafood as well as those containing potentially problematic ingredients such as gelatin, enzymes and alcohol—Riaz and Chaudry construct a flow chart for the production process highlighting HCPs, points at which otherwise halal products may become contaminated. The notion of HCPs is common in Malaysia and identification of such critical points within manufacturing procedures is necessary in order to receive halal certification from JAKIM.

Here it is useful to draw attention to certain trends within the halal-related literature presented thus far. First, from the discussion of Quran, hadis and their exegeses, it is clear that multiple logics contribute to the rationale of dietary restrictions: they are divine tests for humanity, punishments, markers of social difference as well as wise guidance away from the harmful and toward the good. Here Collier and Ong's characterization of global assemblages as "product[s] of multiple determinations that are not reducible to a single logic" is apposite (2005:12). The multiple purposes of halal restrictions suggest that, at its very foundation, the category of halal exhibits characteristics of an assemblage. Notions of what is or is not halal became clearer over the course of revelations of Quranic verses (the prohibition on alcohol is the clearest example of that). But these notions were further solidified during the generations after Muhammad through consideration of hadis and the development of a sophisticated science of jurisprudence—the process by which the procedure for slaughtering animals was codified is evidence of this. The broader point is that the category of halal, even at its ursprung, is not singularly manifested; rather it is assembled over time from a variety of textual sources and interpretive efforts and interests.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ It is not my intention here to contravene the religious claim that God is the sole determiner of what is or is not halal. My argument that halal is an assemblage is in reference to my guiding research question: *how is halal made present in the world?* The answer pursued here is compatible, I believe, with believers' convictions.

A second and, perhaps, more important point is that, as an assemblage, the category of halal is apt to reconfiguration. What I mean by this is not that the definition of halal changes, but rather it is put to different and potentially novel uses. Lowry's observation, cited above, that exegetes in the generations following Muhammad reworked the "Quranic rubric of halal and haram" into a five-part gradation of lawfulness (2003:175) is an example of such a reconfiguration. Similarly, the transition from Quranic references to proper slaughter to the establishment of the actual ritual process of slaughter (through interpretation of prophetic traditions) and finally to texts such as Riaz and Chaudry's that sum up the ritual procedure in three pages (2004:18-21)—with no references to either Quran or hadis—is another example of reconfiguration. Indeed, the Riaz and Chaudry text is addressed to anyone interested in producing products for Muslim markets regardless of religious affiliation, not just Muslims. A related point becomes evident by considering KasehDia's *Halal Food* and the Penang Consumers Association's *Halal Haram*. Both texts are specifically addressed to Muslims who are consuming products circulated through global production chains. They strive to make the category of halal relevant to that circulation—legible to consumers and valuable to producers. The ways in which these texts manifest halal is conditioned by the growing relevance and force of global markets. I refer to this increased orientation toward the market as *marketization*; this reconfiguration of halal under market conditions is the broad theme of Part 1 of the dissertation.

Halal in Academic Literature

Academics—generally non-Muslim—have also written about halal. Earlier academic works tended to address halal indirectly by inquiring about the usefulness, logic, and origin of food prohibitions; in doing so they often conflated *haram* with the analytic category of *taboo*.

However, as halal has become a more salient category for regulators, marketers, and consumers, some academics have turned their attention to this more recent form of the category. This dissertation is part of that latter set of projects.

Fredrick Simoons' (1961) *Eat Not This Flesh* serves as an example of the earlier approach. Simoons motivated his research by observing that, given the increasingly pressing problem of feeding populations across the (1960's) world, social scientists must understand and take seriously the variations in the foodways of different sociocultural groups; such cultural biases, he reasoned, may be an obstacle to sufficient nutrition (1961:3). His project, then, is mainly a descriptive one. Working from a cultural geography perspective, Simoons identifies certain food trends, such as pork avoidance, and then, based on its contemporary distribution, considers how it diffused between sociocultural groups. Simoons' favored explanatory framework is one that we have already seen, that foodways serve a symbolic function by distinguishing between sociocultural groups. Thus, he argues that pork avoidance is best understood as a bias of pastoralists (who, because of their lifestyle, cannot easily raise pigs) against agriculturalists (among whom pig raising was common) (1961:41). Once this avoidance had emerged, it was diffused through religious systems such as Jewish kashruth rules and Islam. Simoons gives other examples of foodways serving to articulate antagonistic cultural relationships such as Ethiopian Christians avoiding both camel meat and coffee because they were associated with Muslims (1961:42).

Marvin Harris's engagement with food laws overlaps with Simoons' in that he focuses narrowly on proscriptions asking, "Why then did the Lord...forbid his people to savor pork or even touch a pig alive or dead?"—particularly given that "of all domesticated mammals, pigs possess the greatest potential for swiftly and efficiently changing plants into flesh" (1985:67).

Harris thus sets up a puzzle: why would a sociocultural group encumber itself with such food rules? Much more so than Simoons, Harris seeks a causal explanation for prohibitions; not descriptions of their form. Regarding pig avoidance, he begins by discounting two of the most common explanations. The first is that pigs are observably unclean—they wallow in mud that is often polluted with their own waste (1985:68) and the second is that pork is a particularly ready vector for transmission of disease (1985:69-70). Harris objects to the first because pigs will only wallow in their own waste if no other source of mud is available⁶⁵ and they are not the only animals that will come into contact and occasionally eat feces—goats and chickens will do so too under certain conditions. The second explanation is equally unconvincing according to Harris first because trichinosis, the primary parasitic infection contracted from pork eating, was not linked to pork until the mid-nineteenth century. Furthermore, other animals commonly carry other, often more devastating, diseases such as anthrax among cattle, sheep, and goats. Risk of trichinosis infection, he points out, is easily countered by cooking meat sufficiently, while this is not the case for anthrax.

Setting aside these hypotheses about hygiene and health, Harris turns instead to consider the ecological conditions under which pig avoidance emerged and under which it has persisted. He argues that this prejudice against pigs grew during the New Kingdom period of ancient Egypt (1567-1085 BCE) as the result of growing human populations in the Nile valley (1985:83-84). While pigs efficiently convert vegetable calories into meat, to do so they must eat grains, potatoes, soybeans and other low-cellulose foods, thus they compete with people for daily victuals (1985:73). Cattle, sheep, and goats, on the other hand, are satisfied with high-cellulose grasses and straws. The upshot: to raise pigs in arid conditions under increased pressure of

⁶⁵ Pigs must wallow to control their body temperature—they cannot perspire or pant efficiently.

growing human populations would mean letting people go hungry. That it remained a possibility to raise pigs in the arid climes of Middle East—it was just resource intensive to do so—Harris observes, is just the point of the taboo; if something is not possible or desirable, there is no need to proscribe it—only actual temptations require castigation (1985:77).

Having established an etiology, Harris conjectures that sociocultural groups in which such aversions are norms may continue to adhere to them even when freed from the ecological constraints that produced them—provided that adherence becomes neither an economic nor nutritive penalty under the novel conditions (1985:83). While characteristic foodways, such as pork avoidance, may serve as an identity marker as Simoons suggest, this is a secondary function and one that is fairly easily abandoned according to Harris’s account.

While both Simoons and Harris address specific food rules, such as pork avoidance, Mary Douglas (2002[1966]) focuses on the broader cultural system from which food proscriptions emerge. Here it is useful to revisit Douglas’s well-known definition of dirt “as matter out of place” (2002[1966]:44). The importance of this definition is that it points to an orderliness, a system—dirt is something that, for some reason, is outside that system. While some systems may be purely idiosyncratic, most reflect standards of a social group and thus are public. Furthermore, because of this publicness—others’ persistent assent to the system—they are authoritative; they compel compliance from community members (2002[1966]:48). Thus, when Douglas turns to explaining a particular food rule, like pig avoidance, she does so by reflecting on the broader system of which it is part—she pursues its internal logic (2002[1966]:62). In respect to animals, “cloven-hooved, cud-chewing ungulates are the model of the proper kind of food for pastoralists”, this exemplar is based on familiarity with the most common kinds of animals pastoralists actually keep: cattle, goats, and sheep (2002[1966]:67-68).

Pigs are cloven-hooved, but not cud-chewing; thus, they are outside the system and considered unclean.

Douglas's account overlaps with that of Simoons in that both conceive of food proscriptions as elaborations of that with which sociocultural groups are already familiar. However, in Douglas's view, proscriptions are derived from the logic of a given social system, while for Simoons they are based, at least in the case of pig avoidance, on intergroup antagonisms. Harris actually articulates an argument parallel to Douglas's; however, in his view, the dual conditions of being cud-chewing and cloven-hooved are purposefully contrived to exclude the economically-demanding pigs, so the logic of the exclusion is not the cause but merely a post hoc rationalization of the proscription (1985:79).

For the purposes of the current project, it is not necessary to adjudicate between these etiological accounts. However, it is worth noting that they are not, in any strong way, incompatible with one another. Each emphasizes particular processes over others—group identity maintenance and diffusion of sociocultural practices, internal logic, or suitability to ecological conditions—but none strictly excludes the others as possible contributors. Furthermore, each of these frameworks provides directions of inquiry pursued in this dissertation. Simoons claim that food norms contribute to the maintenance of group identity is something has already been mentioned in regard to halal. Indeed, we saw above that the Quran (verse 22:34) itself appears to acknowledge this in regard to the proper slaughter of animals. While the transnational supply chains through which consumer goods are circulated render the type of ecological analysis carried out by Harris inconsequential, just as Harris began with the conditions posed by the physical environment, those very supply chains are the conditions that serve as the present-day context for halal—they are a contributing force of its reconfiguration.

And while this dissertation is not centrally concerned with the logics of religious legalism as Douglas's analysis of dirt is, it is focused on the logics of bureaucratization, corporatization, and technoscientific complexes.

Summing-up Historical Background and Literatures About Halal

This chapter establishes a background or, perhaps, a range of backgrounds against which I endeavor to understand halal. In the first part, I argued that the heavily regulated character of Malaysian Islam and the developmentalist aspirations of the state establish the grounds for the problematization of halal. I then turned to the review of literature to establish a foundational understanding of the notion of halal. However, rather than dryly expound a definition of halal sufficient to include all its sundry examples, I have attempted to show how it emerged from religious inspiration and experience as well as a variety of intellectual and, eventually, commercial endeavors. I also reviewed academic engagements with halal showing how the current project builds on their insights.

Part 1

Ontology

3

From Ritual to Bureaucracy

“Whereas before everyone thought, oh, I’m a halal meat producer, or I’m a halal restaurant, or I do this halal or that halal,” an executive from KasehDia explained to me during a 2008 interview, “we wanted to get everyone to realize that they are part of a whole halal supply chain, a whole value chain that had things in common that made them a market, that made them an industry.” The insight here is, I find, remarkable: the difference between a mere congeries of similarly engaged firms and an industry is just *recognition*. Such recognition, though, extends beyond the conscious awareness of those within the firms—beyond mere imagining—to a socially-produced recognition up and down supply chains, by agencies and regulators, and by existing and potential customers. That is, becoming an industry depends on restructuring the category of halal in a way so that it is useable by industry actors—it requires specific forms of territorialization. KasehDia made it its business to produce just this sort of recognition in regard to the halal industry. And perhaps its greatest innovation in this respect was the WHF (World Halal Forum). First organized in 2006, at the peak of its popularity in 2008, it drew 1190 delegates from 57 countries (World Halal Forum).

As successes are prone to do, WHF—along with the halal product tradeshow, MIHAS (Malaysia International Halal Showcase)—led to a proliferation of conventions, seminars, conferences and meetings, all focused on various aspects of the business of halal. It was at one of these events, the 2015 OIC (Organization of Islamic Cooperation) sponsored Muslim World BIZ conference and tradeshow, where I encountered a vendor promoting PowerCat, a halal cat food.

Bemused, I stopped at the display and asked why cat food needed to be halal? The representative admitted that the idea might seem strange, but it should not. Citing a hadis according to which a woman was condemned to hell because she starved a cat, the representative explained that people are obligated to take care of their pets and keep them healthy, yet most pet foods are made from inexpensive and poor-quality ingredients that food processors have left over. Furthermore, he added, Muslims are more comfortable having halal products in their homes, even if those products are not for humans to use. What is interesting about this rationale is that it mines another dimension of halal values; it is not something that merely meets the requirements of halal standards (something PowerCat does by avoiding proscribed components and preempting concerns about proper slaughter by limiting its offerings to fish-based varieties), but is good (thoyyib) because it reflects a concern for animal welfare and is a safe, healthful product made in sanitary conditions. Indeed, another indication of PowerCat's commitment to thoyyib qualities—as well as its customers' class and tastes—is that its products are certified organic as well as being halal.

Intrigued, I decided to purchase a sample for my landlord's cat. However, when I paid, the representative handed me a bag that did not have a halal label on it. I asked if I could have one with the label, but he explained that the company is not allowed to sell the bags with the labels because the product is not certified by JAKIM (Malaysian Department of Islamic Development), but by MUI (Indonesian Council of Islamic Scholars). Confused, I asked why a Malaysia-based company had sought Indonesian certification. The representative said that JAKIM refused the application for certification because they do not have a standard for pet food. MUI, however, was willing to apply their existing standard (though also not specifically for pet food). Yet, I observed, markets in Malaysia sell many products with non-JAKIM halal logos.

The representative explained that such goods are produced outside of Malaysia and therefore could use non-JAKIM labels (though the issuing certifiers must still be approved by JAKIM). However, if a product is manufactured within Malaysia, it must be certified by JAKIM if it claims to be halal. So, PowerCat could be sold in Indonesia and Singapore labeled as (MUI-certified) halal, but because it was produced in Malaysia and had not been certified by JAKIM, it could not be labeled halal in Malaysia—even though MUI is a JAKIM-recognized certifier. Later I learned that this arrangement had been worked out informally by an international association of the religious ministries called MABIMS (Religious Ministries of Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore). An executive at Malaysia's HDC (Halal Industry Development Corporation) told me that, because these four countries each have well-established authoritative Islamic bodies managing halal, the religious authorities agreed to accept one another's certifications in the interest of promoting regional trade but also agreed not to compete with one another.

I start this chapter, indeed this first part of the dissertation, with the case of PowerCat to highlight several issues. First, PowerCat provides an intriguing example of what Fischer (2008) calls *halalisation* (2008:29-32), the increasing salience of halal/haram judgments by specialized regulators (such as those that constitute MABIMS) regarding a growing range of things. Pet food, as something that does not commonly spring to mind in discussions about halal, is on the horizon of this expanding jurisdiction. The fact that JAKIM refused to expand its jurisdiction to the product while MUI was willing to do so and, that as a result, the product was encumbered with complex labeling restrictions, shows the thoroughness with which these regulators approach their work. More importantly, the case underscores the importance of standards as the primary mechanism through which certification takes place. Yet, while standards are fastidious about protecting certain values (such as, in the case of Malaysia, avoiding porcine-derived elements

anywhere in production processes and ensuring proper slaughter), they are silent about others (such as animal welfare referenced in the hadis cited by the PowerCat representative).

Furthermore, while standards provide a façade of clarity, this case makes it very clear that the modes of governance involved with implementing such standards is anything but transparent; certifiers struggle to discover a balance between protecting their own jurisdictions and being sufficiently cooperative to ensure thriving trade and their own relevance.

The aim of this chapter, then, is to uncover the roles of such bureaucratic institutions and especially the role of their primary instrument—the standard—in Malaysia’s halal ecosystem. To draw out the significance of bureaucracy, I begin by comparing it with another sociocultural institution, namely ritual, and argue that in the halal ecosystem ritual and bureaucracy are conflated to achieve both legitimacy and market legibility. Then, using interviews and organizations’ promotional material, I explore the roles of both JAKIM and HDC, the two primary halal organizations in Malaysia, and their relationship to one another. I then turn to a close reading of Malaysia’s halal standards supplemented with the accounts of people involved with creating them. Finally, I consider some of the Malaysian-based efforts to coordinate halal standards globally and the challenges those efforts have faced.

Marketization

In the last chapter, the concept of marketization was introduced. A more thorough account of this process, as well as its connection to *assemblage* and *the ontology of categories*, is necessary before proceeding with the first part of the dissertation—the investigation of the various modes in which the category of halal is territorialized, that is, manifest or made real, within the Malaysian halal ecosystem. Stuart Plattner’s distinction between *market* and *marketplace* is

useful in this regard: “‘market’ [means] the social institution of exchanges where prices or exchange equivalences exist... ‘[m]arketplace’ refers to these interactions in a customary time and place...[a] market can exist without being localized in a marketplace, but it is hard to imagine a marketplace without some sort of institutions governing exchanges” (1985:viii, see also Plattner 1989:171 n.1). So, while “marketplace” points to temporarily and spatially specifiable events of exchange (the actual event of being at the desk of a salesperson buying a car, for example), “market” refers to the broader conditions that enable marketplaces to function (such as *car loans*—it is not a singular tangible thing, nor is it merely an idea, but rather it is a logic or strategy that coordinates the efforts of the car buyer and dealer with those of manufacturers and financiers).

This distinction helps explain my decision to focus on *marketization* as the central process to be analyzed in regard to halal rather than some, perhaps, more familiar process like *commodification*. Commodification refers to a process by which something which previously had no exchange equivalence—a price by which it can be procured—acquires one. That is, it is the process through which something that was previously excluded from marketplaces, is introduced to them. Such a process does not capture much about the phenomena surrounding halal, however, as trading has been part of Muslim societies since their very beginnings—Muhammad himself was a trader, working as a steward on the caravans of his wife, Khadija (Esposito 2011:6). Thus, trade of halal goods in marketplaces—commodification of such goods—is hardly a recent development.

However, since the publication of Arjun Appadurai’s (1988) *The Social Life of Things*, it has been clear that commodity status is neither identical across things nor is it necessarily—or even usually—permanent (see also Starrett 1995). Consider, for example, a wedding ring that is

produced and marketed as a commodity, but once it has performed its role in a marriage ritual, it is no longer regarded in terms of its exchange value—at least not primarily. In fact, it may well be considered exempt from having such value. However, if the ring is inherited or the marriage dissolved, it may again come to be regarded as a commodity. The point here is that the commodity status of things is socially produced—they are, like people, literally social beings. The central question concerning halal, then, is not how halal things have become candidates for commodity status, but how their status as commodities has shifted with the emergence of halal industry and what social processes are implicated in this shift.

James Carrier observes that “‘the Market’ is not what people do and think and how they interact when they buy and sell, give and take...it is a conception people have about an idealized form of buying and selling” (1997:vii). Carrier views the market as a type of ideal representation with origins in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain that has, in recent decades at least, come to flourish best in the United States. Despite this inclination to regard the market as primarily a discursive entity, Carrier recognizes that it has come to have global significance through practices of post-Second World War American power, financial institutions, foreign exchange and bond markets, and international standards for accounting, banking and stock markets (1997:viii)—all modes of what we may think of as territorializations. This global spread of the market—again not as a mere idea, but as a network of hierarchical practices as well as interrelated ideas about them (so departing somewhat from Carrier’s analysis)—provides insight into why understanding halal requires looking beyond marketplaces. When there is a transaction involving a halal good at, say, a Malaysian hyper-market, the entities brought into play transcend the particular shopper and clerk. Rather, it involves multinational corporations (like Tesco or Nestle) and their supply chains, halal certifiers, and their networks of recognition, international

and local discourses about proper consumption by Islamic scholars and ordinary Muslims, as well as local and idiosyncratic tastes and class constructions. It might be thought that, with so many interests and agendas bearing down on a transaction, there is barely room for the narrow self-interest of shopper and clerk.

So, the focus on marketization foregrounds, not how things are introduced to—or engulfed by—marketplaces, but transformation of the institutions conditioning possibilities within marketplaces. The modes of these transformations are numerous, but the main ones—the ones explored in the first part of this dissertation—are: *bureaucratization*, the advent of numerous government agencies⁶⁶ tasked with regulating and promoting the halal industry; *introduction of halal technoscience*, the emergence of research institutions focused on surveilling the industry as well as developing new products for it; and *commercialization*, the founding of businesses that, more than merely producing and selling thing for the marketplace, are exploring novel ways of creating profit from the industry.⁶⁷ These intertwined processes are implicated in the broader process of marketization—that is, in orienting halal toward the market.

Such orientation is at the crux of the marketization process being highlighted here. The emergence of industry standards for halal, cadres of professionals to produce and enforce those standards, technicians and scientists capable of analyzing products to identify their constituents

⁶⁶ Strong government regulation of Islam in Malaysia (see Chapter 2) has led to state-bureaucratic governance of halal. However, this is not the case everywhere, particularly not for secular-identified states (aspects of this difference are explored in Fischer 2011). In the United States, for example, the prominent halal certifiers are non-profit organizations—though, in many cases, such non-profits maintain exceptionally close relationships with the halal-related businesses they certify. This relationship between businesses and certifiers is also central to understanding the difference in logics pursued by HDC and JAKIM as will become evident in this chapter.

⁶⁷ The difference between *marketization* and *commercialization* may, at first, seem less than clear. In the framework I develop here, *commercialization* involves processes that are closely related to acts of selling—everything from branding, advertising, and package design to actually delivering a sales pitch to a potential customer. *Marketization*, on the other hand, includes *commercialization*, but also a broader swath of processes as well. Recall from the PowerCat case that negotiations between government-sponsored religious authorities were implicated in how PowerCat could represent its products. Such negotiations are quite distant from the act of selling; rather, they produce the conditions in which selling can occur.

and develop new halal-compliant ingredients, as well as associations, consumer researchers, and publicists are all modes of territorializing halal. Such territorialization is not, however, neutral; rather it has a particular aim: to orient the category of halal toward the ideas, practices, and institutions of the market. James Scott's notion of *legibility to the state* is useful in this regard (1998:2-3). Scott recounts how administration of early-modern European states involved developing novel ways of seeing the territory state officials controlled. Such strategies of seeing were preoccupied with providing an account of the resources of the state—for example, its size of population and extent of forest. However, Scott argues, accounting for such resources is not merely a matter of developing passive techniques of measuring existing phenomena, but rather of instituting modes of control that shape the phenomena. In the case of population, states created and enforced the institution of surnames (1998:65). This institution organized populations into traceable lineages that were useful to administrators. Similarly, not only did early forestry experts develop models for estimating the amount of timber a tree would yield, but also programs for replacing natural woodlands that were cut-down for timber with state-managed forests organized for optimal production and extraction of timber—that is, naturally occurring woodlands were recreated to more closely approximate the forestry models (1998:15). So, Scott's notion of legibility is not just about seeing phenomena more clearly but also about transforming phenomena so that they acquiesce to particular modes of seeing.⁶⁸

In just this way, marketization of halal is not a matter of transparently translating religious dictums from the Quran into the language of twenty-first century economics, but rather

⁶⁸ Just writing this passage exposes the influence of the ideas of the early-modern state. “Timbre” is, of course, nothing but the substance of cut trees transformed by the intention to incorporate it into human projects; similarly, “population” consists of nothing but a larger or smaller crowd of politically bounded people. The fascinating issue here is not that there is a conceptual component to these categories, but how these conceptual components become manifest in the world—how the German *Normalbaum* (*average tree*) goes from being a model for estimating the amount of timber that a tree will yield to actual forests of *Normalbaum* (Scott 1998:15-17).

of transforming the category to become legible to the market. The advent of halal-related bureaucracies, businesses, and technoscience, for example, transform the assemblage—transform the ontological basis—by which the category is manifest; that is, its mode of being in the world is transformed. This shift in mode of being is conditioned by demands of the market. The halal-ness of PowerCat, for example, has relatively little to do with inherent qualities of the product (which, being fish-based, are not very controversial), but rather with standards and their enforcement. Halal labeling, the visual representation of certification according to halal standards, is a strategy for promoting the functioning of markets—an innovation intended to get goods (or at least their packaging) to vouch for themselves rather than depend on an actual person within the marketplace to do so (as a vendor at a farmers or wet market might do). Such complicated systems of standardization and certification are a necessary development for a market that connects consumers to impersonal corporate producers that, themselves, often serve as façades for extensive production chains that extend across multiple national and cultural boundaries. *Marketization*, then, names a process by which characteristics of things, such as halal goods, become legible within the impersonal market.

Ritual and Bureaucracy

In this section, I show how bureaucracy has increasingly encroached on ritual as the mode by which social statuses are ascribed. To do so, I contend first that *social being* involves movement between *social statuses* and that such movement is often facilitated through ritual—this is one of the primary ways in which ritual is efficacious. However, bureaucratic devices have become increasingly important in governing statuses—so much so that it has become conflated with ritual. I then discuss how this transformation relates to halal.

Drawing on Appadurai (1988), I have claimed that at least some things have social lives. This claim depends on a parallel between such things and people. Namely, that these things, like people, have a capacity to carry statuses. By *status* I mean to have a position within or be a member of a category. Some statuses seem to be inherent or natural to an entity. Any human, for example, has the status of being a mammal, the integer 2 has the status of being greater than 1, and all triangles have the status of being three-sided. However, more interestingly, people have statuses that are not at all integral to them. In his 1936 textbook of anthropology, Ralph Linton writes of a supposed Mr. Jones that his membership within his community “derives from a combination of all the statuses which he holds as a citizen, as an attorney, as a Mason, as a Methodist...and so on” (1936:113). What is important here is that, unlike the integral statuses considered above, these ones mentioned by Linton are socially produced.⁶⁹ Linton goes on to argue that social processes often take precedence over natural ones in producing such statuses: a “child becomes a man not when he is physically mature but when he is formally recognized as a man by his society. This recognition is almost always given ceremonial expression in...rites” (1936:118).

In this passage, Linton conceives of rites as “recognizing” status, as a sort of social marker or public announcement of status membership. While this is correct—rituals do commemorate and signpost events—I suggest that they also often serve a more fundamental purpose regarding status. To make this point, it is useful to consider philosopher of language J. L. Austin’s analysis of language as not only meaningful but as also having the capacity to do things (1994[1975]:33-35). Austin analyzes this complex relationship between *meaning* and

⁶⁹ This notion of status being invoked here is an intuitive one and should not be confused with more technical uses of the term such as those developed in the work of Max Weber according to whom *status groups* are communities that are formed through social esteem grounded in consumption and contrasted with *class* (1958:405). The term’s use here is far more general.

doing through a three-part analysis of *the utterance*, that is, any instance, written or spoken, of language use. First, the utterance's meaning must be decoded—the utterance is *meaning bearing*. Thus, if you say to me, “an officer is here”, your utterance denotes (bears meaning about) a state of affairs such that a person of a certain authority is present. However, your (hypothetical) utterance also has an *intention*: if I am a fugitive on the run, it is a warning; or if I am waiting to report an incident, it is a reassurance or perhaps an invitation to begin the report. Finally, and most interestingly for our purposes, utterances are *efficacious*, they have the capacity to produce effects—to make things happen. If your utterance is a warning, for example, it gets me to flee; and if it is an invitation, it gets me to begin speaking.

This framework—an account of the operation of language—can be usefully applied, I contend, to analysis of ritual. When Linton notes that recognition of adulthood is often expressed through ritual, he identifies the *intention* of the ritual, that of commemoration. In such cases, ritual *means* something; it *tells* the community that the object of the ritual now occupies a new status, a new category. So, the *force* of the ritual—its effect—is the spread of news about the object of the ritual.

However, in the same set of passages, Linton appears to acknowledge that this analysis of *ritual as proclamation* is incomplete when he writes, “the child becomes a man not when he is physically mature but when he is formally recognized as a man by his society” (1936:118). Here the suggestion is—so subtly, different—that bodily maturity does not determine adulthood, but that adulthood itself is truly brought about *through* the ritual recognition of society. So, the *intent* of the ritual is not mere recognition, but to effect that transformation of youth to adulthood. Its *force* is not that the community merely *knows* the young person is now an adult, but rather that the young person *becomes* an adult.

The above discussion highlights issues of efficacy. My contention is that ritual, like language, does not only carry meaning, but that “ritual is work” (Bell 1992:viii). That language has such a capacity is evident; consider the following examples: a parent uttering to a misbehaving child, “you’re grounded”; a police officer saying to a suspect, “you’re under arrest”; or a minister announcing to a couple, “I now pronounce you married.” Utterances such as these foreground the *force* words have. In fact, it is difficult to say what these particular utterances *mean* apart from what they *do*—they are better analyzed as tools for effecting transformations than they are conveyors of meaning. Furthermore, there are precious few alternative means of sanctioning someone through arrest or grounding or binding a couple in marriage apart from leaning on efficacy of language.

The same appears true of ritual—which, after all, often depends extensively on language. Roy Rappaport recognizes this capacity within ritual, but he qualifies it by making a distinction between technical acts and ritual acts (1999:47-48). While both types of acts claim efficacy, the mode of this efficacy is quite different: *technical acts* have material consequences that are the result of deploying specific means—they are transparently means-ends affairs; *ritual acts*, however, when they are claimed to be efficacious, achieve their ends through occult forces—they are cases of essentially opaque causation. Stanley Tambiah, however, emphasizes the imbrication of ritual *with* the technical: “the [ritual] technique...gains its realism by clothing a metaphorical procedure in the operational or manipulative mode of practical action” (1968:194). In the context of halal, the tension between and imbrication of practical technique and ritual technique is particularly illustrative. The most obvious halal ritual is that of slaughter described in the preceding chapter. It will be recalled that proper ritual slaughter requires orienting the animal toward Mecca, invoking the name of God, and killing the animal with a single slicing cut

to the neck. Halal slaughter is, then, equal parts religious ritual and practical procedure. The practical procedure without the ritual will still result in a slaughtered animal, but it will not be a *halal* slaughtered animal. Yet, I maintain that we need not turn to unpacking notions of the occult in order to understand how halal “gets into” a ritually slaughtered animal.

Instead, I suggest looking slightly further back at scholar’s long preoccupation with the efficacy of ritual. Already in 1909, Dutch folklorist, Arnold van Gennep, had written: “life comes to be made up of a succession of stages...[f]or every one of these events there are ceremonies whose essential purpose is to enable the individual to pass from one defined position to another” (1960[1909]:3, see also Turner 1977:94). It is from the work of van Gennep, and Victor Turner’s mid-twentieth century elaboration on it, that we get a model of how ritual allows a passage from one status to another—if ritual is understood as a procedure for moving people from one status to another, then van Gennep and Turner show us the mechanics of that procedure.⁷⁰

To return, then, to the starting point of this section, people occupy multiple status positions at any one time and over time leave some statuses and come to occupy others. Shifting between these statuses is commonly associated with ritual. This is true even when the status has the appearance of being the result of the processes of biological life—birth, maturity, death; the biological process is conflated with a ritualistic one. What I have attempted to emphasize above is that ritual is not something that is simply added on to an event of status change—an aesthetic

⁷⁰ In brief outline, passage rituals (those that move a person between statuses) operate in three stages. In the first stage, the initiate is separated from an existing status (this is marked symbolically in any number of ways—perhaps by shaving off hair or dressing in a particular way). From that point, the individual is in an in between state—no longer what they were, but still not what they will become. This is the *liminal* state during which the initiate may receive special training or teaching. Finally, the initiate is reintegrated into society with a new status encumbered with all its rights and obligations (Turner 1977:94).

elaboration⁷¹— but it is, in at least some cases, the very mechanism of the transformation itself. Furthermore, this mechanism operates socially—it is social in character. Finally, because ritual may be integral to taking a position within a category, in such cases, it is a powerful means of territorializing that category. Thus, the traditional US ritual of marriage, including the all-important utterance, “I now pronounce you man and wife,” is a powerful mode of making the category of *being-married* present in the world).⁷²

So, the issue of the efficacy of ritual—or, specifically in the case that interests us, *how halal gets into a properly slaughtered animal*—is, I believe, resolvable through attention to shifts in status. Above I proposed that things having social lives entails their having the capacity—parallel to people—to carry statuses. The analysis of ritual, then, is intended to make plausible the further claim that the social lives of some things, again like people, involve ritual transformation between categories. In the case of ritual slaughter, the animal is not only transformed from living to dead but also, through the enactment of ritual, transformed into something permissible for people to use, something halal—its status shifts.

The above discussion supports the position that halal things have ritually-conditioned social lives. However, some might worry that this is misleading. While dictums concerning halal do address ritual—particularly those concerning slaughter, the majority are not ritualistic, but rather are prohibitions. Halal, then, appears to be more about taboo than ritual. While such a claim is not unfounded, I would suggest that, in this case, taboo and ritual collapse into one

⁷¹ We might also think of Gilbert Ryle’s well-known *ghost-in-the-machine* criticism of Cartesian dualism (2009[1949]:5-8). I do not take ritual (or, at least, not all ritual) to be merely a folk-practice that attempts to give a humanistic dressing to essentially naturalistic phenomena.

⁷² Importantly, I am not claiming that all categories are territorialized via ritual or that the only way of transitioning between categories is ritual. When a police officer says, “you are under arrest”, it is not clear that that is a ritual. The process of putting someone under arrest should probably be understood in political-juristic terms, not religious ones. Whether it is better to delimit the use of *ritual* to the sphere of religion or entertain talk of courtroom rituals and the like, I am happy to leave moot.

another. The ritual of proper slaughter is, after all, the flipside of the proscription of eating meat from improperly slaughtered animals. It is not too improbable to think that the act of not eating pork, for example, is the ritual enactment of the prohibition of pork.⁷³ Whether this sort of logic can be expanded to, say, a halal food manufacturer who (ritually?) avoids using a porcine-based emulsifier in a sauce, readers can decide for themselves. In any case, the points pursued below will not suffer gravely even if one insists that the notion of ritual only partially captures the social life of halal things.

The emergence of the halal industry that has coincided with the reorienting of halal from local marketplaces to the sphere of the broader market—that is, marketization—has augmented the ritually-conditioned social life of halal things and even, to some degree, supplanted it. We can get a sense of this by considering how other types of rituals have been augmented or have even atrophied. To return to the example of marriage, while wedding rituals certainly persist among most social groups, it is possible in many instances to get legally married without any sort of religious ritual. The couple's appearance in some sort of governmental office or court may be required and, therefore, some semblance of ceremony maintained, however it is certainly imaginable that a marriage could be effected strictly through filing forms. More to the point, it is nearly unimaginable that a marriage could be successfully effected without such official filings, at least anywhere governed under modern statecraft.

Michael Peletz provides an interesting example of just this sort of encroachment of bureaucracy on ritual in his analysis of *talak* divorce in Malaysia (2018:657 n.6 & 673). *Talak* is a form of Islamic divorce in which a husband repudiates his wife, that is, announces his rejection of the marriage. If a husband does this in any context, whether or not his wife or any official is

⁷³ Fasting, such as done in observance of Ramadan, is, after all, regarded as a ritual activity.

present, it effects a valid divorce. However, in Malaysia it is illegal for a husband to do this without permission from an Islamic court. Men who do effect divorces through talak without such permission are increasingly facing legal sanction from the courts. The Islamic courts in Malaysia, a powerful symbol of modern bureaucracy in the country, are providing a check on a ritualistic way of effecting divorce. While the ritual is still effective in itself, Malaysia's officialdom is making every effort to imbricate its use in bureaucracy.

The point here is an obvious one. While rituals persist, their importance is subordinated to bureaucracy. And just as recognition of people's statuses is increasingly dependent on bureaucracy, the status of things is undergoing bureaucratization. By the early twentieth century, Max Weber had already identified and described the defining characteristics of bureaucratic governance (Weber 1958:196-244).⁷⁴ Among bureaucracy's most prominent elements include: being staffed by career officials who have technical administrative training (evidenced by their certifications), hierarchical organization so that authority is derived from superiors and superiors supervise the work of subordinates, and the functions and capacities for each position within the hierarchy is well defined with the result that the bureau as a whole is composed, not of particular individuals with personal insights and ambitions, but of roles that might be filled by any qualified individual.

Ideally, and perhaps only ideally, the aim of bureaucracies is to optimize the completion of managerial tasks within society (or any relatively large organization). Such optimization extends from bureaucracies' ability to depersonalize its tasks—each member of the bureaucracy conducts their business according to well-defined rules regardless of their own dispositions or

⁷⁴ *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* was published posthumously in 1922. Though a full English translation did not appear until 1968, by the mid-twentieth century, sections of it had been published and the tenets of Weberian social theory were well known within English-language social sciences.

the person or case their work addresses. Thus, bureaucracies function algorithmically: they pursue their aims through an ordered series of steps. These steps, like the organizations they order, are amenable to mapping diagrammatically and other modernist modes of representation, rendering them legible in exactly Scott's (1998) sense. This quality of being impersonal and rules-dependent leads both to the praise of bureaucracies as the most rational and efficient mode of governance as well as the criticism that they are inflexible and insensitive to people's needs; this dual evaluation is captured in Weber's metaphor of an iron cage (Weber 2001[1930]:181).

Understanding the relationship between writing and bureaucracy has been a persistent occupation of anthropologists. Perhaps this is because it recapitulates the classic political question of anthropology—investigated most famously by E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1969[1940]): *how is political action possible in the absence of a state?* Decades later, Jack Goody asked: *what's the relationship between writing and the development of the polity* (1986:91)? To which he answers, "Writing was not essential to the development of the state but of a certain type of state, the bureaucratic one" (1986:92). The identification between writing-based polities and bureaucratic ones is, of course, only partial. Rather, Goody suggests a type of spectrum. While in small social groups members are able to appeal to directly to leadership in person, this is not possible in a society of even moderate population size or territory. In the latter types of cases, contact between leaders and members is mediated through intermediaries and messengers (Goody 1986:106). While systems of such intermediaries are suggestive of bureaucracies, these roles are not formalized and they depend on personal associations with both the populace and the leadership. In the context of West Africa, Goody's area of expertise, bureaucracies appear with the institution of colonial indirect rule and the exchange of reports between "native" leadership and the colonial officials becomes necessary (1986:113-116). Such reports along with maps and

censuses require cadres of properly trained (literate) officials on both the colonial and “native” sides of the administration. The development, then, of forms of governance that were writing intensive coincided with the appearance of forms of expertise like that ascribed to bureaucrats by Weber.

More recently anthropologists have turned their attention from bureaucracy as an ideal type to empirical cases. However, at least two recent studies continue to foreground writing as one of bureaucracy’s primary features—particularly in the form of *the file*. Matthew Hull begins his ethnography with a description about an Islamabad-based informant who enthusiastically went through a thick file he had compiled about the ownership of his house and property with the anthropologist—a file that the owner believed to replicate government file on the property (to which the owner did not have access) by including all the various maps, receipts, contracts and forms regarding the property (2012:2). What surprised Hull was the degree of enthusiasm with which the man narrated his efforts and aspirations in collecting the contents of the file. The material file itself serves as an object of pride not that different from the actual property.

According to Hull’s broader argument, this pride is not misplaced. Bureaucratic operations are a central feature of modern urban life, and files are the objects of these operations. So, in another case described by Hull, property owners seek reimbursement for property that was seized as part of an urban developmental project; the success of these claims depend on the coordination of the efforts of property owners, their communities, politicians, and bureaucrats. Case files become the central mode by which these efforts are coordinated and the claims pressed (2012:204-209). Files do not function solely to represent information, in this case, rather they are the very terrain of these contests.

Akhil Gupta (2012) makes a similar claim arguing that writing itself constitutes bureaucracy. In an ethnographic vignette, Gupta tells of a group of officials holding an open session at a village so that inhabitants could get any necessary signatures that they may require. The officials harangue the secretary that even if no inhabitants attend and no work gets done, he must file a report, “‘it doesn’t matter what you write...write something and send it up’...their actions would come to naught if they were not recorded” (Gupta 2012:152). Gupta’s point here is that the secretary’s report does not merely inscribe information about the session (there is, after all, very little to say about it), rather the report is constitutive of the session. It may be hyperbolic to claim that the report is identical to the session, but clearly there is a sense that, for the session *to count*, it must be recorded. Or, as another of Gupta’s informants says, “if it is not in the file, it does not exist” (2012:146).

Gupta’s observation that paperwork—report writing—is constitutive of bureaucracies themselves echoes Weber’s concern, cited above, that the utilitarian logic of bureaucracy is likely to “cage” the human spirit (Weber 2001[1930]:181). Gupta’s concern for human spirit is analyzed through lens of arbitrariness: “bureaucratic action repeatedly and systematically produces arbitrary outcomes in its provision of care” (2012:6). He motivates this claim by analyzing another ethnographic vignette in which a doctor and a state official must determine whether applicants in a rural Indian village qualify for an age- and income-based pension (2012:10-11). Because villagers seldom know their precise age, the doctor must certify their age by, in effect, guessing. Yet, on some occasions the state official disagrees with the doctor’s “expert” opinion and insists that the forms be changed. The official also doubts the village headman’s certification regarding number of children and landownership. Overall, Gupta presents an image of bureaucratic decision-making shot through with arbitrariness.

Gupta focuses on the arbitrariness of outcomes—it is arbitrary whether the villagers in his example manages to qualify for the pension. But we can also ask about the origin of this arbitrariness. At first, we might suspect that it has something to do with the competence of the officials involved. However, it is unclear what their alternatives are—how they could *do bureaucracy* better in this case. They have a set of parameters that are given to determine qualification and must figure out how to apply them. While the figures of the official and the doctor are not particularly sympathetic, Gupta does not think we can place too much blame on them. I would suggest that the arbitrary outcomes are strongly conditioned by the arbitrariness of the given parameters. While determining whether someone is elderly or suffers from poverty is not particularly problematic in common social situations, discerning the precise thresholds of these conditions is impossible. What justifies setting the criterion for elderly at sixty years? Why not sixty-five or fifty-nine? No answer can be given because *it is arbitrary*. Yet, if qualifying for the pension affects access to sufficient food, for example, the ramifications are obviously significant. But this is exactly what bureaucratic rules require—precisely defined categories. Such rules persistently violate the wisdom of the Aristotelian adage “to look for precision in each class of things just so far as the nature of the subject permits” (Aristotle 1984:2).

So, in addition to mapping the bureaucracies central to the halal ecosystem, in this chapter I examine the types of work they do which, unsurprisingly, are heavily oriented toward writing. Arguably, the form of writing that lies at the heart of the halal industry is *the standard*. This document identifies the conditions that must be met for something to be halal and doing so faces the difficulties of precisely delineating the boundaries of halal—thus risking arbitrariness. Much in the same way that owning property or holding an open session for a village is only possible if properly documented in a file or report, ritual observance of halal rules within the

industry are only possible if they are compliant with the appropriate standard. Furthermore, this compliance only becomes real—territorialized—when it is attested to through further documentation in the form of *certification*. Just as it would be unrealistic to claim that an owner's property is identical to the paperwork supporting the claim to the property or that holding an open session in a village is identical to the report about that session, it would be wrong to identify ritual observance of halal prescriptions with the bureaucratic documentation of them. However, *to count, to be legible, to be real*, these bureaucratic forms are necessary for—are *constitutive of*—house ownership, holding a meeting, and, indeed, ritual observance of halal rules. This chapter attempts to unpack this constitutive relationship between halal bureaucracy and ritual observance of halal rules. In it, I argue, echoing Hull and Gupta, that bureaucracy should be understood as a primary mode through which halal is territorialized; that is, bureaucracy lodges halal in the world—it does not merely record and store information about it.

Two Centers of Malaysia's Halal Bureaucracy

I began my first period of fieldwork in Kuala Lumpur in early May 2008, just in time to attend the third annual World Halal Forum. A good deal of the buzz at the forum was about HDC (Halal Industry Development Corporation) taking over responsibility for halal certification from JAKIM (Department of Islamic Development Malaysia). The beginning of the forum was marked with the ceremonial entrance of then-prime minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (r. 2003–2009). In his address, the prime minister touted as a great success HDC's first completed certification—of Thailand-based toothpaste manufacturer Colgate-Palmolive Ltd. Throughout the forum attendees were told of the great advantages of having a single organization dedicated to coordinating all issues related to halal. During a forty-mile bus ride to visit the then-recently

opened halal zone within the Port Klang Free Trade Zone (I was able to go because Nurdeng, a researcher at KasehDia, had arranged a media pass for me) these benefits were again explained to us with a great deal of stress put on the assurance that HDC would be able to process applications for halal certification within thirty days.

After the excursion to the Port Klang, I had coffee with Nurdeng. He explained that the length of time JAKIM had been taking to process applications was too unpredictable; some applications were processed in four months, others were taking longer than a year. This was evidence, according to the researcher, that, as a bureaucracy, JAKIM was insensitive to the needs of companies. It didn't really matter whether the process took weeks or months, in his view, but companies needed to know how long it would take in order to plan their business around that time frame. HDC's thirty-day processing time, along with its other initiatives, were intended to answer to just these sorts of concerns. As the prime minister said during his address at the World Halal Forum: the integrity of halal would be HDC's primary objective, but, he reassured attendees, integrity could be protected while the process remained responsive to the industry. Exactly how this balance between integrity and industry interests would be achieved was not addressed.

Whatever advantages HDC held over JAKIM in being responsive to industry, its tenure as Malaysia's certifying body was short lived. In April 2009, Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi was succeeded by Najib Razak (r. 2009-2018), and under this new leadership, responsibility for halal certification was transferred back to JAKIM in July of that year. This volleying of certification authority between these two agencies was not overly surprising to those within the halal industry. While most of the people I interacted with during my 2008 and 2009

trips to Malaysia appeared to have confidence in HDC and believed that it would better represent the interests of halal-focused firms, there were dissenting opinions as well.

An executive retired from a prominent Malaysian food manufacturer, for example, complained that by granting Colgate-Palmolive Ltd. their first certificate and actively publicizing it, HDC was sending the wrong message. Colgate-Palmolive Ltd. is a huge corporation and it is not even based in Malaysia. He worried that smaller Malaysian companies were being ignored while HDC pursued multinationals that could pay high fees. Equally distressing for him was the fact that the certification was not for food, but for toothpaste. In his view, halal is about what one eats or drinks—not about cosmetics and toiletries. So, he was very critical of both the expanding jurisdiction of halal evaluations and the development of bureaucracies intended to adjudicate them.

Similarly, a junior writer for KasehDia, Amsyar, confided in me that JAKIM, not pleased at losing certification, in an act of what he called sabotage, moved its halal auditors to other departments within JAKIM so their expertise would not be available to HDC. When I tactfully asked HDC officials about this, they said that it was not the case—in fact HDC did “borrow” (“*pinjam*”) numerous experts from JAKIM during the time it handled certification (though when I asked one of these borrowed experts about his time at HDC, he said he did not like it and was happy to go back to JAKIM).

During this time, HDC also had trouble locating itself structurally within Malaysia’s bureaucratic landscape. Initially, HDC reported directly to the Office of the Prime Minister. However, by 2008 it was put under the authority of the Economic Planning Unit and then the office of Islamic Affairs. Finally, in 2010, it was moved out of the Prime Minister’s Office altogether and located under the aegis of MITI (Ministry of International Trade and Industry).

The people I spoke to about this were hesitant to say why they thought HDC had been shunted around in this manner. The question was brushed off with, “it is political” or “there were conflicts of personality.” However, Aminah, an ex-HDC executive, did say that this double marginalization—losing real regulatory power and being shifted out of the Prime Minister’s Office—severely limited HDC’s ability to act effectively. In her view, the nature of the halal industry requires coordination between numerous government agencies—the Departments of Standards, the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Domestic Trade, and the Department of Veterinary Services, prominent among them. Under the prime minister, HDC was structurally above other departments and ministries; they could induce cooperation between them. In its new position in MITI, Aminah feared, these efforts were more likely to be lost in the fray.

It was through this controversy over certification that I was introduced to halal bureaucracies. In this section, drawing on interviews, agency promotional materials, and site visits, I describe HDC and JAKIM as the central agencies that territorialize the Malaysian halal ecosystem. The competition over certification described above demonstrates that this territorialization is anything but a straightforward process.

HDC Interview with Aminah

As already mentioned, KasehDia executives take credit for coining the phrase “halal industry,” thus suggesting that their firm, to some extent at least, represents a watershed for the developments around halal—not only in Malaysia, but globally. When I related this to Aminah, the ex-HDC executive mentioned above, she disagreed vigorously. Though Aminah now works in a field only tangentially related to halal, she cut her teeth working at JAKIM for six years and HDC for more than two years—she is truly a veteran of Malaysia’s halal bureaucracies.

I have heard Aminah's version of the history of the halal industry a number of times. The most complete versions were during interviews with her—one in 1998 when she was still an HDC officer and another in 2015 when I met her at her new office outside Kuala Lumpur. However, talks by HDC representatives that I have attended—including two by Jamil Bidin, CEO of HDC—often include a “background history” PowerPoint slide that comes very close to replicating the history Aminah narrates—picking out identical events and setting them at nearly the same dates. I suspect that this similarity is evidence of the profound influence Aminah had on HDC while she was there.

This history, as Aminah narrates it, starts well before the 1999 founding of KasehDia. It foregrounds development of mechanisms for halal certification. Starting in the early 1970s, Pusat Islam (Islamic Center) in the Prime Minister's Office started issuing letters for halal products. There were no inspections or even strict guidelines, just a shared perception of what sorts of things are halal. In 1994, a more formal process was instituted involving inspection by religious officials; certified products used a common logo established by Pusat Islam. Between 1998 and 2001, Malaysia experimented with privatizing halal certification. Ilham Daya, a private firm, won permission to handle halal certifications. However, companies complained that the fees being charged for the process were unreasonably high and that the certification process itself was not clear to applicants. I first heard about Ilham Daya during a 2008 conversation with Amsyar, the writer at KasehDia, he mentioned that there were rumors that Ilham Daya had paid people in the government in order to take over certification—essentially renting it. When I asked Aminah about these rumors, she said that she did not think that was the case; rather it was just that Ilham Daya did not do a very good job. My sense is that Aminah dislikes discussing controversy and perhaps even felt it was a little rude to bring up the subject. Whatever the case, in 2002,

JAKIM—itself having been created only in 1997—took over responsibility for halal certification. Prime Minister Abdullah announced plans to create HDC in 2006 and by April of 2008, HDC had taken over responsibility for halal certification with promises of increasing efficiency. Then, as recounted above, in 2009, coinciding with the transfer of the prime ministership to Najib, certification was shifted back to JAKIM. JAKIM’s Halal Hub division has handled it since.

Coinciding with these shifting grounds of authority, a series of halal standards were also developed. Aminah was part of the team tasked with creating the first halal standard, *MS 1500: 2004 Halal Food*, that appeared in 2004. It was the first national halal standard in the world, so Aminah had to study the international standards and guidelines compiled by the Codex Alimentarius, used by the United Nations to promote safety and fair practices in regard to food, as well as standards recognized by ISO (International Standards Organization). Indeed, Aminah is clearly proud that *MS 1500* is recognized by ISO. The excellence of the standard is further attested to by the fact that, according to Aminah, other countries have directly copied it (I can confirm this at least the case of Brunei whose main halal standard, *PDB24:2007: Brunei Darussalam Standard for Halal Foods*, is identical to *MS 1500* with the exception of a more comprehensive glossary). This too is a point of pride for Aminah, “this is okay—we don’t want anything, we want to share knowledge—it’s a matter of friendship.” Questions of friendship aside, the spread of *MS 1500* ensures that Malaysia is recognized as a reference for the global halal industry; such recognition is essential for Malaysia to establish itself as a global halal hub.

In the introduction to this chapter, I described how PowerCat was unable to even submit an application for halal certification to JAKIM because Malaysia does not have a standard for pet food. The refusal to apply existing standards to a new category of products points to a certain

conservatism on the part of JAKIM auditors. This conservatism is also expressed in the proliferation of halal standards since the 2004 appearance of *MS 1500*. It seems that Malaysian halal authorities have adopted a policy of producing a specific standard for each category of goods to be certified. Not only has this initial standard been updated, so auditors now refer to *MS 1500:2009* (instead of *MS 1500:2004*), but it has been joined by eleven other standards—these range in subject from toiletry and personal care products to pharmaceuticals and the hospitality industry (that is, halal tourism).⁷⁵ One of the standards provides definitions of basic halal-related terms and concepts, while two others address management requirements for firms seeking certification (such as the establishment of halal advisory councils for larger firms)—effectively, bureaucratic rules for companies’ internal bureaucracies. Later in this chapter, I examine more closely *MS 1500* as the prime example of a halal standard.

HDC Interview with Nur Aini

HDC’s operations are spread across two locations both located in the district of Bandar Utama Damansara in the western Kuala Lumpur suburb of Petaling Jaya. HDC’s headquarters are in the KPGM Tower which it shares with IBM Malaysia among other tenants. The office complex is well-known—perhaps because it is very close to, and so shares a skyline with, 1 Utama, Malaysia’s largest shopping mall. I have visited the office on five occasions: once in 2008 to interview Aminah; then in 2015 for another general interview with Nur Aini, a manager at HDC

⁷⁵ These are the twelve standards listed by HDC: MS2594:2015, Halal Chemicals For Use in Potable Water Treatment—General Guidelines; MS2610:2015, Muslim Friendly Hospitality Services—Requirements; MS1500:2009, Halal Food: Production, Preparation, Handling and Storage—General Guidelines (2nd Version); MS2200: Part 1:2008, Islamic Consumer Goods—Part 1: Cosmetic and Personal Care—General Guidelines; MS1900:2005, Quality Management Systems—Requirements from Islamic Perspectives; MS2300:2009, Value-Based Management System—Requirements from an Islamic Perspective; MS2424:2012 Halal Pharmaceuticals—General Guidelines; MS2400(1-3):2010 Series on Halalan-Toyyiban Assurance Pipeline; MS2393:2010(P), Prinsip Islam dan Halal—Definisi dan Penjelasan Istilah; MS2200-2:2012, Barangan Gunaan Islam—Bahagian 2: Penggunaan Tulang, Kulit, dan Bulu Haiwan—Garis Panduan Umum.

who I met at the World Halal Conference; and three more times in 2015 to sit in on meetings between HDC staff and Rizal, a friend who owns a small halal-focused research and media company and was at that time working on a report for HDC. The second location, GSHC (Global Halal Support Centre), is in the First Avenue office building, separated from HDC's main headquarters only by the façade of a luxury hotel—so within a three-minute walk. For a few weeks, I spent afternoons at GSHC to take advantage of their airconditioned library. I have also attended trainings there.

The meetings I have attended at HDC headquarters all had similar patterns to them—one that is common to visiting offices generally. After signing in at the building's security desk, I took the elevator to the fifth floor. The HDC lobby is not particularly big, but is very formal feeling; the floor, walls and seating are a light cream color and the stone floor is inlaid with the HDC logo. Like many offices all over the world, it is very well airconditioned to permit men to comfortably wear dark professional suits that would be completely impractical without it. With one exception, the women I saw in the office all wore *tudung* head-coverings—a Malaysian variation on the ubiquitous head-coverings of Muslim women everywhere. Along with the *tudung*, the women at HDC mostly wore *baju kurung*, a long skirt with a loose fitting, long-sleeved blouse. The overall effect of the appearance of the office is one of exceptional professionalism. So much so was this the case that the first time I visited the office, I felt horribly underdressed in dark brown chinos and a button-up shirt with rolled sleeves. In subsequent visits I attempted, with limited success, to correct this by adding a navy-blue blazer only slightly wrinkled from being stowed in my backpack during the motorbike ride to the office.

The first time I visited the office, in 2008, I was left waiting in the lobby for a long time—more than half an hour. I had never met Aminah before and assumed I was being snubbed.

When she entered the lobby from hallway behind the reception desk, she came directly over to me and greeted me so gregariously that any impression of affront was erased. Aminah led me to a small conference room and, after fetching a shawl, rejoined me and closed the glass door so we could begin our meeting. I mention this because it is one of the few times in Malaysia that I have been in a closed room alone with a woman wearing tudung—which is a mark of religiosity and often a tendency to avoid any interaction with the opposite sex that has even a slight possibility of impropriety.⁷⁶ Perhaps Aminah felt comfortable speaking with me alone because the door was glass and, while it looked out on to an empty hallway, the reception desk was only steps away. But I suspect it also had to do with the fact that she was a well-respected, senior, and authoritative figure at HDC and, part of her professionalism, was that she could meet with people as she needed to. Similarly, when I met Aminah in 2015, we talked alone in her closed-door office.

While my meeting with Nur Aini in 2015 was similar in as far as I was left waiting in the lobby for a substantial amount of time before she appeared, it differed significantly in other respects. My conversation with Nur Aini took place in the same room in which I had interviewed Aminah or the one next to it—it cannot recall for certain. But this later meeting was also attended by another woman who I assume was an assistant to Nur Aini—we were not introduced to each other. This woman sat at the table with us but did not engage in our conversation and seemed much more intent on her phone than the discussion. I had the impression that she was there specifically to provide an unassailable atmosphere of propriety.

Aminah was generous with her time. The first time I met her we talked for more than an hour. She had no set agenda as far as I could tell and allowed me to guide the discussion with my

⁷⁶ Khalwat, the state of being alone with someone of the opposite sex, is an offence in Malaysia and is enforced by state religious department officers.

questions. She asked several times, “Is there anything else you need to know, Sean? Anything I can tell you?” Our second meeting was longer, filling most of a morning and spilling over into a lunch with some of her new colleagues. By contrast, I felt that the meeting with Nur Aini was very directed—she had a general PowerPoint presentation she talked through with me and then asked me if I had questions before she had to leave for another meeting. Our meeting lasted less than an hour.

Both Aminah and Nur Aini were exceptionally friendly and appeared eager to talk about HDC. Everyone at HDC—probably in professional settings everywhere—is busy and has limited time. It is likely that, as a lower ranked officer at HDC, Nur Aini has less control over her schedule than Aminah—or, perhaps, she was just particularly busy on that day. The point here is not that Nur Aini was unkind or not forthcoming, but rather that Aminah is exceptionally enthusiastic about halal and the possibilities of HDC. This is not only my impression; as I met people involved with halal over the course of my fieldwork, I was told numerous times that I should talk with Aminah—she is highly regarded both on the industry and academic sides of the halal ecosystem. Though she is no longer at HDC, she continues to attend halal conferences, do consultant work for the industry, and occasionally give talks about halal.

At our first meeting in 2008, Aminah and I spent a good deal of time talking about HDC’s newly acquired responsibilities as Malaysia’s halal certifier. The transfer from JAKIM had just been effected a few months before our meeting. She stressed that HDC would still be dependent on JAKIM for expertise—that they would need to borrow staff for their religious expertise. They would also be drawing on the expertise of other departments within the Malaysian bureaucracy such as the Veterinarian and Chemistry Departments for their scientific expertise. She acknowledged that putting together a reliable system of certification was a

complex project and HDC was expected to do so very quickly. In retrospect, her anxieties seem well placed.

When we met in 2015, Aminah explained the transfer of certification back to JAKIM was a response to confusion among consumers. “JAKIM is trusted in Malaysia, really all over the world,” she said, “but back then, when we were still just beginning, people weren’t sure about HDC—they thought we just took care of businesses.” She added that JAKIM had the expertise too, they are staffed by people who know Islamic law, by comparison, HDC’s staff came from the business world, “the CEO is an economist,” she explained. So according to her explanation, while it may have been a sensible experiment to see how the more business-oriented HDC handled certification, ultimately its shift back to JAKIM rationalized the ecosystem. They were simply better situated to handle certification. The sort of politics gestured to by Amsyar, in which JAKIM actively subverted HDC’s attempt to take over certification, are absent in Aminah’s account. If such a competition had been afoot, I am confident Aminah would know about it. But it is difficult to say whether her refusal to acknowledge it is because it is mere fantasy or Aminah’s attempt to stay above the fray.

During my meeting with Nur Aini it seemed to me that she had a definite sense of what our interview should be about: a summary of HDC’s current line of programs. She positioned a MacBook on the conference table between us and, more or less, followed the order of the slides in a PowerPoint presentation. It was clear that she was familiar the slides and, while her words did not seem overly-rehearsed, I believe it was a talk she was familiar with giving.

Nur Aini began with a brief overview of HDC’s history. This gave me a chance to ask about the transfer of certification authority between JAKIM and HDC. While Nur Aini said that she was uncertain why the back and forth transfer had occurred, she added that JAKIM is

“Malaysia’s competent Islamic authority” (a phrase taken directly from the *MS 1500* halal standard), so it should be the agency to handle certification. She also pointed out that HDC had not completely retreated from certification; in their advisory and consultancy role HDC continues to offer services helping companies prepare to be certified. This includes anything from working through product declaration forms and other paperwork with clients before it is submitted to JAKIM to conducting walk-throughs of premises to make sure that they are standards compliant.

An HDC initiative that Nur Aini was more enthusiastic to talk about was their 2012 launch of a halal mobile app. The main function of the app is to locate halal restaurants through phones’ GPS systems utilizing certification information from JAKIM. The app not only identifies certified establishments, but also provides dates of validity for certifications—Nur Aini pointed out that this is one way of contending with the problem of establishments posting counterfeit or out-of-date certifications. HDC plans to extend the functionality of the app so that it can be used internationally—so in any region in which there are JAKIM-recognized certifiers, the app would be able to locate establishments that have been certified by them. Nur Aini was uncertain to what extent that feature of the app had been developed. More peripheral features include an archive of HDC and halal-industry related news stories and some basic statistics about halal in Malaysia (for example, there are more than 6700 current JAKIM halal certificates in Malaysia). None of my friends or acquaintances outside the halal industry had downloaded the app (though several did so after I asked them about it); it seems that the app has yet to make headway in popular usage.

In many respects, after being stripped of certification authority, HDC’s remaining *raison d’être* is supporting Malaysian companies that have ambitions to export and participate in

international business. For example, Nur Aini described an HDC program she was involved with in which HDC partnered with Nestle to offer a two-day training for small and medium companies about how to become suppliers for multinational corporations. During the training they discuss everything from what sorts of certifications are needed (JAKIM-halal certification among them), how to improve production facilities, and networking to get contracts. These programs, Nur Aini explained, are a way of getting companies into their Halal Business Transformation Program that leads companies through three phases (Incubation Companies, Featured Companies, and Champion Companies) to become ready to export their products.

Perhaps HDC's most visible initiatives to help halal businesses become successful is the OneTouchPoint project facilitated through the GHSC (Global Halal Support Centre), located at the second of HDC's office spaces. The center was established in 2012; its OneTouchPoint initiative is meant to gather together, at one location, all the information and resources of interest to halal-related firms. Nur Aini explained that many of HDC's trainings take place at the center, but the spaces are also available to be rented for press releases, project launches, seminars, or even small business meetings. But the real benefit of the center—the reason it is a “one stop shop for halal” in the words of Nur Aini—is that people with questions about halal can stop in anytime, even without an appointment, and the staff will answer their questions or will arrange for a meeting with someone who can. This assistance is often free; if the questions are very complicated then a “reasonable” consultancy fee is charged. These fees, Nur Aini explained, are based on the type of business the client is asking about—“a *macik*⁷⁷ asking about a nasi lemak stand won't have to pay, but a Chinese shipping agency will of course.”

⁷⁷ “Macik” is a Malay kinship term for “aunt” but it is also used to address any Malay woman the age of the speaker's mother. Maciks are also figures of Malay respectability and, sometimes, conservatism.

This last comment interested me because it was not immediately clear whether the salient difference between the *macik* and the shipping company is size or ethnicity. So, I asked whether a medium-sized Malaysian food processing facility that was Chinese owned would be charged the same as a similar facility that was Bumiputera (Malay) owned. Nur Aini immediately understood what I was getting at and said that of course they would be charged the same, HDC's aim is to help *Malaysian* companies become globally successful. But then she went on, explaining that eighty percent of food companies in Malaysia are Chinese owned: "But also, eighty percent of small and medium industries are Malay owned. There is no point in sabotaging non-Muslim companies, they can also produce halal food—we should not hamper them. We would like a win-win situation; you go ahead, but we will help the small ones. But you are strong, you go ahead."⁷⁸ The message here is a bit mixed. On the one hand, HDC is interested in the success of any Malaysian halal-focused company. However, they have a special focus on small and medium companies—particularly those who want to expand into international markets. Since most of these companies are Malay owned, by default HDC's special focus is Malay enterprises.

The point here is not to produce an exposé on the unannounced ethnic politics of Malaysian bureaucracies. Rather it is to underscore, as I believe Nur Aini was, the complexity of ethnicity, wealth, and professional sectors within Malaysia. The colonial stereotypes of Malays as inept, small scale traders and Chinese as savvy business people persists. I believe that in the eyes of Nur Aini, and perhaps many Malaysians, HDC's efforts are an attempt to undo this colonial heritage. However, it actually re-inscribes it. Nonini points out, Malay-centric political

⁷⁸ I have heard this statistic before—that eighty percent of the Malaysian food industry is Chinese owned. I do not know its source. However, based on HDC's own numbers, far more non-Bumiputera companies receive JAKIM halal certification than Bumiputera ones. So, while this does not reflect ownership within the food sector generally, it does show the sort of non-Malay dominance Nur Aini is concerned about within the halal sector.

discourses depict Chinese as “pragmatic, economizing, self-aggrandizing agents...identified with immoral capitalist behaviors” (2015:111). So, while, on the face of it, Nur Aini’s claims that HDC is focused on offering assistance to those who most require it, such as the *macik* small-scale trader, her discussion simultaneously constructs the *macik*’s counter, the savvy Chinese businessman who is capable of thriving without assistance—and, indeed, will thrive in any circumstance because of lack of moral scruple. So, this discussion with Nur Aini hints at the ways in which present-day government initiatives continue NEP-era attitudes.

Turning to the GHS Centre, it occupies a street-level space in the First Avenue office building. Its broad window façade is clearly sign-boarded and accessible directly from the street—there is no need to enter the office building and negotiate the security desk. If the atmosphere of HDC is professional, the GHS Centre is distinctly modern. Beyond the reception is a wide-open space with high ceilings and a number of differently configured sitting areas for consultations—some based around desks, others, low tables. The center of the space is dedicated to exhibition kiosks featuring firms that have worked with HDC and their products. These spaces are also available for rent to businesses wishing to promote their products. Behind and to one side of the exhibition space is a large enclosed cube that extends from floor to ceiling. The top of the cube, accessible by a set of stairs, is the conference room which seats more than 20 people around its center table, with room for more against the walls. There are large windows cut into the conference room that look out on to the exhibition and meeting spaces below. On the other side of the exhibition space, also accessible by stairs, is the “Halal Knowledge Centre”, a fair-sized library staffed with research librarians available to put together research for particular questions. As I mentioned above, I worked in the library in the afternoons during a particularly unpleasant hot spell that made working in my un-airconditioned Kota Damansara room too

uncomfortable. To do so, I became a GHS Centre member which involved filling out forms that were submitted with a photo and a fifty-ringgit (US\$ 13) student membership fee.

The GHS Centre is impressive, both as a physical space and in terms of the ambitions behind it, but my impression was that it is underutilized. Although on a few occasions other people walked through the library browsing the shelves, I never saw anyone besides the desk librarian spending any significant amount of time there. Similarly, at the meeting tables and desks, I did occasionally see people sitting there in what appeared to be meetings, but on most afternoons, I did not see anyone. Certainly, I never saw the space filled with anything approaching its capacity. And while I saw the conference room being used once for a meeting (besides the two training sessions I attended), it was usually empty. I asked the desk librarian if she felt that the center was busy. She said that during events it can be quite busy, but at other times there was not that much interest. She explained that most of the research that the librarians do is for HDC's own reports and presentations. This sense of underutilization is something I encounter repeatedly over the course of my fieldwork as I became more familiar with Malaysia's halal infrastructure. There is a good deal of effort and money put into these facilities, but it is not clear who precisely is supposed to use them.

As mentioned above, I attended two HDC trainings at the GHS Centre. The first, in August 2015, was a program called Introduction to Halal and was meant to give a general overview of the concept of halal, issues of certification and Malaysia's role promoting halal business globally. The main trainer was an HDC employee named, Zainab. She had one assistant who handled the audiovisual components of the presentation. I counted seventeen attendees including myself. Of the attendees I spoke to, one was a man from a newer hotel located in the administrative capital, Putra Jaya. He was interested in Syariah-compliant tourism and being able

to attract Muslim business travelers to the hotel. I also met a woman who is a partner in an upscale Indian restaurant opening in the popular Bukit Bintang area in central Kuala Lumpur. She thought that, because the area is popular with Arab tourists, being halal certified would help the restaurant capitalize on the location. The most interesting person I spoke to was, Nazri, in his mid-twenties, one of the youngest participants at the training. Nazri owns a small barber shop in Kota Damansara—quite close to where I stayed (I regularly went to the shop for haircuts after the training). Nazri had created his own hair pomade—a slicked-back undercut with a sharp part was a trendy look among young Malaysian men during my fieldwork. The officer who was assisting him with licensing the product suggested that he get it halal certified as well. Attending this training was a first step in the process for Nazri. (When I left Malaysia, three months later, Nazri had still not applied for certification, but said he still wanted to, he just did not have the time.)

The second training I attended, in October 2017, was an informational session about a government grant available to small and medium enterprises for additional training. According to the presenter, Cik Dian—a member of HDC’s training staff, this grant was being offered as part of Malaysia’s Vision 2020 program according to which by the target year, 2020, 75% of the workforce was to be skilled labor. HDC halal training programs were eligible for using this funding, and so they were willing to help small and medium businesses apply for the grant. In a conversation with one of the twelve attendees after the session, she summed up the grant program as amounting to part of the government (HDC) trying to get money from another part of the government (in the form of the grant). However, she felt that it would be worthwhile for her company, a pharmaceutical manufacturer in Penang, to apply. While she is non-Muslim Chinese,

she admitted that it was becoming increasingly clear that halal certification would be a boon for their company.

While this cynicism is surely not entirely misplaced, there is another logic at work here as well. Cik Dian made this apparent when she explained that the difference between HDC and JAKIM is parallel to that between a driving school and the actual licensing authority. To get halal certification, businesses must not only meet specific halal guidelines as codified in standards, they must also have a *halal assurance system*. Before 2014, this was only a requirement for large companies and multinational corporation. But now the requirement was being implemented, though less stringently, for smaller companies. Part of the assurance system is having a trained staff—HDC trainings count toward that criterion. As trainings are quite expensive (ranging from 500 to 1850 ringgit / US\$ 125 to 460 per person), this requirement is a disadvantage for smaller companies. Indeed, as explored in Part 2 of this dissertation, many smaller enterprises do not get halal certified—the hypothetical macik selling nasi lemak invoked by Nur Aini would be unlikely to ever seek halal certification. The training grant is an attempt to offset that disadvantage for smaller companies. Though it does so by creating a system in which businesses must apply for a grant to get the training they need in order to apply for certification—all of this to get certification that nasi lemak is halal, something no one ever really doubted.

Visiting JAKIM

JAKIM is a huge agency. It has twenty-two divisions that handle everything from fatwas and dakwah religious outreach to coordinating enforcement of Islamic laws with state religious authorities and, of course, issues pertaining to halal through its Halal Hub Division. Before the

1970s, the agency was a modest secretariat. When Islamic matters were placed directly under the Prime Minister's Office in 1974, it became the Religious Affairs Section. It continued to be upgraded throughout the 1980s and 1990s (during Mahathir's first administration), until it emerged in 1997 as JAKIM (Tan Beng Hui 2012:36 n.74).

In a display of JAKIM's increasing influence, in December 2015, the deputy minister in charge of Islamic affairs, Asyraf Wajdi Dusuki, requested that JAKIM's 2016 budget be increased from 725 million ringgit (US\$ 181 million) to 1 billion ringgit (US\$ 250 million), explaining that the increase was needed "to better combat 'extremist' ideologies like the Islamic State (IS), liberalism, pluralism, and the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community" (*Malay Mail*, 27 December 2015). This drew the ire of, among others, the sultan of the state of Johor, Ibrahim Ibni Sultan Iskandar, who demanded that JAKIM give an account of its spending to the Conference of Malay Rulers. He argued that Malay rulers (the sultans) have ultimate Islamic authority in states and JAKIM only plays a limited advisory role, so it is unclear why they require such a large budget.⁷⁹

The story is an interesting one for several reasons. First, it points to the influence JAKIM has; it is able to demand a very large budget. Second, there is a clear sense of the normative mission of the agency—the moral threats it sets itself against are not only political-religious movements, but also progressivism generally. But, most interestingly for the present purpose, it highlights another contested space occupied by JAKIM. Constitutionally, the Malaysian states are given authority over Islamic matters either through the sultanates or religious affairs offices. So, there is a tension between these state authorities and JAKIM as a federal agency, and this tension is what the Sultan of Johor was reacting to. While JAKIM is a powerful agency, its

⁷⁹ Nine Malaysian states are headed by sultans. Though the actual political power of these hereditary institutions is quite limited, they are often able to effectively intervene in issues related to Malay identity and Islam.

authority overlaps with other power brokers, whether with HDC over governance of halal or with the states over Islamic affairs generally—within these overlapping spheres JAKIM’s legitimacy is contested.

Emphasizing its status as a federal agency, JAKIM’s facilities are located in Putrajaya, some twenty miles south of central Kuala Lumpur. Putrajaya became the administrative capital of Malaysia in 1999, when the Office of the Prime Minister along with its associated sections and offices were moved there by Mahathir. Intensive development and design of the nineteen square-mile area began in the early nineties in preparation for the move. Officially the reason for the move was to escape the congestion of Kuala Lumpur, but the relocation took on symbolic value as the culmination of a series of political transformations that gave the federal government more power vis-à-vis the states and sultans (see Bunnell 2004 and King 2008).

During my first trip to Malaysia in 2007, my hosts, probably unsure what to do with me one Saturday afternoon, took me for a driving tour of Putrajaya. The city is architecturally striking: impressive bridges—some ornate, others starkly modern—span the series of waterways that surround Putrajaya; its wide roadways and clearly marked intersections contrast with those of Kuala Lumpur; and the domes of Palace of Justice, Putra Mosque and the Prime Minister’s Office are extraordinary (even if more architecturally-trained eyes, like those of Ross King, see in them un-reflective, postmodern re-imaginings from the *Arabian Nights* [2008:11 & 160]). But my hosts, a well-off retired Malay couple, repeatedly commented how empty it was—“all this money spent, and no one lives here,” they marveled.

By 2015, the population of Putrajaya had grown and was just over eighty-eight thousand; however, ninety-seven percent of this total was Muslim (presumably Malay) (Department of Information 2015). I found evidence of this myself while walking around Putrajaya’s Alamanda

shopping mall before a meeting with Hannah and Amirul, a married couple, in their late twenties, both of whom are JAKIM officials. While waiting for the meeting it seemed to me that there were far more Malay families in the mall and very few young people just hanging-out (*lepak-lepak*) than is common in most malls in Kuala Lumpur. Amirul and Hannah confirmed that this was true. They, like many others, had decided to move to Putrajaya because the government was offering discounted housing to civil servants. Because most government workers are Malay, Putrajaya had become a Malay enclave by default. They explained that hanging out at malls was more common with non-Malay teenagers because Malay parents were stricter with their children. Of course, the ethnic production of Putrajaya is not just happenstance, but rather a purposeful contrast with Kuala Lumpur and its historical identification as a Chinese enclave (King 2008:21-22).

My meeting with Hannah and Amirul that day ended up being more social than research-oriented. I got to meet their three-month old daughter and, as it was Raya season, the month of celebrations and open houses that follows Ramadan, I brought them some home-baked cookies. I had met Amirul more than four-months earlier. He was a master's student of a professor I know at the University of Malaya—she had given me Amirul's contact information and we had arranged to meet at his JAKIM office in Putrajaya. However, this was my first-time meeting Hannah, and I took the opportunity to ask her a few questions about her job.

Hannah is not directly employed by JAKIM, rather she is a food scientist who JAKIM has arranged to borrow from the Ministry of Health. At JAKIM she audits halal certification applications to be certain that they are adequate and the applicant is ready for a review by a site audit team. She said that applications can get quite long because, while each application has to be paid for, there is no limit on the number of products that can be included on a single application.

So, material pertaining to several products must be reviewed for each application. I asked Hannah how working at JAKIM compares to being at the Ministry of Health. She said she really liked it because “there’s a sense of peacefulness, like when it’s time to pray, everyone just prays—there’s no questions about it, you don’t even have to think about it. It’s like everyone has the same sense of things.”

This reminded me of something that Amirul had said at our earlier meeting at his office. When I asked him why there had to be two agencies, HDC and JAKIM, to deal with halal, he admitted that he was not sure, but that having worked at both of them (Amirul was one of the experts who was transferred to HDC during the period it controlled certification), he found HDC’s office to be big and imposing. People working there also prefer using English rather than Malay. He thought that smaller Malaysian businesses might see this arrangement and figure that halal certification was just for large multinational companies.

I asked Amirul how JAKIM differed from HDC in this respect, after all, we were meeting at the Halal Hub’s offices that expand across two floors of Putrajaya’s PjH Tower, a twelve-story office building overlooking the Seri Wawasan bridge—perhaps the most iconic of Putrajaya’s bridges. It would be difficult to imagine a more imposing, if impressive, scene. Amirul said that he was not really sure how to explain it, but he felt that smaller businesses were just more comfortable with JAKIM. But in revisiting these interviews, I think it is clear why Malays in particular might be more comfortable approaching JAKIM—not only is its office clearly marked as Malay—the people working there are Malay and everyone speaks Malay, but even the space it is situated in, Putrajaya, is Malay. This is yet another possible reason for the return transfer of certification to JAKIM; not because of political rivalry or because JAKIM simply has the right expertise to carry out certification. Instead, JAKIM just better fits

Malaysians (or at least Malays) expectations of what an agency administering an Islamic service should be like—culturally, JAKIM is a better fit than HDC.

I met with Amirul three times at the Halal Hub. Over the course of these meetings he offered other contrasts between JAKIM and HDC. Perhaps the most significant was in regard to enforcement: the Trade Description Act of 2011 contains provisions specifically addressing halal issues, such as making it illegal to declare anything halal that has not been certified as such by JAKIM—this includes indirect claims like “safe for Muslims” or “Syariah compliant”. In other words, the act protects the use of halal so that JAKIM solely controls its use and it tries to prevent workarounds through firms turning to near synonyms of halal.

Amirul, however, pointed out a complication with the act. Because it is intended to protect consumers, the act falls under the jurisdiction of the MDTCC (Ministry of Domestic Trade, Cooperatives and Consumerism). JAKIM is attached to the Prime Minister’s Office, not MDTCC, so JAKIM officials are powerless to enforce the act, even if they encounter infringements. Thus, before the updated 2011 act, JAKIM would have to report infringements to MDTCC and then jointly take punitive action (such as suspending certification or pursuing fraud charges). The 2011 act gets around this encumbrance through a bit of bureaucratic machinery: it allows the ministry to issue authorization cards that recognize the holders as “Assistant Controllers of Trade Descriptions” and are authorized to enforce the act. Amirul laughed at me when I asked if I could see one of the cards, but he showed me his own card (although he works mainly as an auditor for applications, he sometimes works in enforcement). The card looked like an ordinary identity card more than the sheriff’s badge I was perhaps hoping for. It had Amirul’s photo on the left side, his name, a government seal, and then both the names JAKIM and MDTCC. A number was also printed on the card. I noticed that Amirul’s card had a rather low

number and asked if it reflected the number of cards that had been distributed. He said yes and that he had been among those to receive cards in the initial distribution. He guessed that since he had received his card, around two-hundred and sixty enforcement cards had been issued.

Amirul explained that the types of violations they encounter are usually quite minor, often for issues of cleanliness or mistakes in paperwork—such as using a new ingredient without properly informing JAKIM. In these cases, he just gives warnings. Though in one case, a food court in a mall did not have its certification renewed because some of its stalls had repeated violations.

Because the 2011 Trade Description Act post-dates the transfer of certification back to JAKIM, it clearly was not key to the transfer, but it is likely that, because JAKIM is specifically named in the act, the agency will continue to control certification in the future. However, the function of the authorization cards is also redolent of the above discussion about the relationship between ritual and bureaucracy. The transmission of such a card activates a particular authority for its holder, who is eligible for such a card in virtue of their status—not as an individual, but because of the professional role they occupy. This is a transformation effected sans ritual but takes place instead through the bureaucratic process of card distribution.

My conversations with Amirul did not solely revolve around the differences between agencies, he also described his own work and the process of certification generally. A process that begins with determining which of JAKIMs seven schemes apply to the product or service to be certified: food and beverage, premises (such as a restaurant, food court or hotel), consumer goods (such as leather goods), cosmetics and personal care, abattoir, pharmaceutical or logistics (such food distribution services). This determines which standard will be applied by JAKIM. Applications are submitted via the on-line Malaysian Halal Portal. This is part of a broader e-governance program devised by the government to increase efficiency—though, Amirul

explained, supporting documentation is mailed directly to Halal Hub, so linking the paper documentation with online applications still involved a lot of office work. Each input used in the production process must itself be certified halal by either JAKIM or a JAKIM accredited certifier. So, if a manufacturer is producing turkey bacon that uses turkey from the US and an emulsified flavoring sauce from Malaysia, the turkey must be certified by one of two US certifiers recognized by JAKIM and the sauce would have to be certified by JAKIM. Documentation of these certifications would be submitted to JAKIM along with the application for the bacon. Some things, like salt and fresh vegetables are halal by nature and JAKIM neither requires nor offers certification of them.

The applications are then reviewed for all the necessary documentation—these are the “adequacy audits” that Hannah works on. Once the application passes this initial review, a team of JAKIM inspectors visits the production or business site. The number of inspectors and their particular expertise depend on the size of the firm and the type of product or service being reviewed. Teams always include a shariah-expert, Amirul’s expertise, but may also include food scientists, chemists, or veterinarians (often borrowed from other agencies). Sites are examined for cleanliness (Amirul specifically mentioned that he looks for evidence of rodents, roaches and house lizards), employee health (particularly documentation of typhoid vaccinations), properly maintained file of halal paperwork, and suitable arrangement for employees to pray. Evaluations involve visual inspection as well as interviews with management and workers separately. The team then prepares a report for the Syariah committee either recommending certification or not. Amirul explained that the cost of applying for certification is determined by the size of the firm, so a multinational corporation could pay up to US\$ 2400, medium firms pay 700 ringgit (US\$

175), small firms pay 400 ringgit (US\$ 100), and micro firms pay 200 ringgit (US\$ 50).

Certification must be renewed every two years.

Once certification is granted, the enforcement branch of the halal hub will conduct unannounced inspections at least twice a year. I asked Amirul what these inspections were like: were people nervous? As an inspector, does he try to be friendly? Professional? Intimidating? He laughed at the last possibility—and indeed given what I know of his demeanor, it is difficult to imagine Amirul coming off as intimidating. He said that people who are new to the process are always nervous and he tries to be friendly, but, in the end, he has to be professional and make sure that the standards are being followed. He went on to say that sometimes it is easier to audit non-Malay businesses because for them halal is just a set of rules that have to be followed. It is the same as a health code or good practices certification. But sometimes Malays think that, because they are Muslim, whatever they do, whatever processes they use are already halal. If Amirul tries to correct them, they will argue with him. He said that this is particularly difficult if the business owner is older than him.

I asked if bribes were ever offered to inspectors. He said that sometimes they were and explained that the auditor would refuse the bribe or just ignore it if possible. The Halal Hub was instituting a new anti-corruption program at the time of the interviews, but Amirul did not yet know how it was supposed to work. When I asked if he had ever been offered a bribe, he said, thank God, he had not.

During my first visit to the Halal Hub, I asked Amirul if I could see the other offices. He agreed and along with two of his co-workers took me around. We had been meeting in the audit office, where Amirul spends most of his time. We were in one of three small enclosed meeting rooms along one wall. The windows of the room looked out on rows of desks with low dividers

between them; I estimated about fifty in total. One of the desks in the first row was Amirul's—it had some folders piled on it and a corded office telephone. There were a few people around, but most of the desks were empty. Amirul explained that this was because they were out doing site inspections. Yet, it seemed to me that many of the desks were unused. Amirul estimated that there were sixty employees in the Certification and Logos Branch of the Halal Hub, divided between processing applications and auditing sites. The only decoration in the room was Arabic script across the tops of the otherwise plain building-support pillars spelling out various Islamic virtues: *fitra* (divine nature), *tawhid* (the oneness of God), *iman* (faith) among others.

We left the auditors' office, walked across an outdoor courtyard, and entered the front part of the processing office (also part of the Certification and Logos Branch). There were four desks in this area, two of them were staffed and one of the staff members was assisting two clients. I asked one of Amirul's co-workers what he thought they were doing. He said that the couple had probably come in to get help with the online application—some people were not very comfortable with computers and needed help with just this technological aspect. He explained that this office was open to anyone who needed any sort of assistance with the application process; JAKIM's goal, after all, is to get as many things certified halal as possible. Amirul joined in adding that this is the office in which his wife, Hannah, works. She complains to him that it would be better if more people would come to the office for help; people are hiring consultants, some of whom do not know the correct processes themselves and they end up delaying certifications—while charging their clients fees for doing so. When I asked how many applications they process a year, the three of them came up with a range of estimates. The first

was over a thousand a year, but they all agreed that that was far too low. They settled on 125 per month, but stressed that it may be as high as two or three hundred some months.⁸⁰

We exited into the courtyard once again and proceeded through the main entrance of the PjH Tower. We went up an escalator and were at the front desk of the Halal Hub headquarters. My three guides used their IDs to pass the turnstile entrance; however, they had to do some explaining about me before the guard at the desk let me through. The lobby is broad and has high ceilings but devoid of decoration or even furnishings. Its main feature is a gigantic window that overlooks the Seri Wawasan Bridge. We settled into one of a series of window-fronted conference rooms. And my guides told me that this was the executive floor: the Administrative, Enforcement and Standards branches of the Halal Hub are housed there. They estimated that thirty people worked in Administration, sixty in Enforcement, and another twenty in the Standards branch. Amirul said that it would be better if we did not go in the actual offices of the branches, but instead they showed me an organization chart for the Halal Hub that was posted on a hallway wall. They pointed out several positions that had not been updated, so were wrong. Again, the space felt quite empty (granted we were in the lobby and the offices themselves)—we encountered only three people on the short tour, all men dressed very professionally in dark suits (Johari and his colleagues wore black pants with tucked-in conservatively-colored button up shirts—more casual than the people we encountered). My guides were anxious to go, so we soon returned to the offices downstairs.

This section gives a sense of the differences between HDC and JAKIM, not just in their functions, but in the way they present themselves. HDC is more cosmopolitan—indeed one of its

⁸⁰ Later, HDC's Global Halal Support Center provided me with statistics that showed in 2014, JAKIM processed 5710 certification applications (on average, 476 per month). It approved 3233 applications (269 per month) for an overall acceptance of 57%.

main agendas is to get Malaysian companies ready to compete in international markets. JAKIM cultivates a more Malay identity. Though this distinction should not be pressed too far; it is also clear that HDC tends to focus on cultivating Malay businesses above others and below we will see that JAKIM is engaged in multinational efforts to harmonize halal standards. It is also evident from the above that neither of these agencies is static, rather they are in competition with each other and other social institutions and must strategize to stay relevant and to get the resources they need to persist.

Reading the Standard

As has already been argued, documents are at the center for bureaucracy; they are what makes bureaucracies stand apart from other sorts of governance (Goody 1986:92). In the descriptions of HDC and JAKIM's Halal Hub, we see that governance in the sphere of halal takes place through granting and withholding certification through procedures of auditing. These principal bureaucratic practices are keyed in to a further document: *the standard*. Standards support techniques of producing conformity, which is, of course, desirable in industrial manufacturing. It is from the world of industrial manufacturing that the notion of the halal standard has been adopted. Indeed, Aminah, who was directly involved in the production of Malaysia's halal standards explicitly invoked both ISO and the Codex Alimentarius—the two exemplars of international standardization. For Aminah, the fact that Malaysia's *MS 1500* food standard received ISO accreditation signifies its success.

Yet this process of moving from prescriptions that were initially recorded in the Quran and hadis and then underwent centuries of juristic analysis to industrial production standards should be regarded as anything but straightforward. In this section, then, I examine this process

of standard production critically by closely examining the primary example of Malaysia's halal standards: *MS 1500:2009—Halal Food - Production, Preparation, Handling and Storage – General Guidelines (Second Revision)*.

The producers of this standard were working in a new literary genre—one in which the notion of halal had not previously been explored. It may be tempting to think of their effort as one of translation. However, even in Walter Benjamin's well-known essay, "The Task of the Translator" (2000), in which he is hostile towards the notion that translation is intended to make information encoded in an unfamiliar language available in a familiar language, he still insists that successful translations maintain "harmony" with their originals; that is, the expressive project of the translator in the target language parallels the project of author in the original language. I think that focusing the connection between production standards and syariah-based halal prescriptions places emphasis in the wrong place. A successful standard is not one that harmonizes with its source material, but rather is something that facilitates production and marketing. Amirul's remark that it is often easier to audit non-Muslims who see halal merely as a set of guidelines that must be adhered to than it is Muslims who have lived experience with halal is evidence of the limited purpose of standards—they demand conformity, not authenticity. *Transcription* is a more adequate notion; it conveys a transfer across purposes—an opening up (or cracking open) to new possibilities of novel deployments, just as in *musical transcription* a piece of music is transformed in order to be performed by a different ensemble of musical instruments. That is to say, *transcription* is not about maintaining parallels, but about putting things to new uses.

However, this raises the problem of legitimacy; any normative text must establish itself as legitimate in order to press its claims over our action. Here it is useful to contrast *MS 1500*

with what, in his *The Dialogic Imagination*, Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin refers to as *the authoritative word*:

The authoritative word demands that we acknowledge it...[it] is located in a distanced zone, organically connected with a past that is felt to be hierarchically higher...Its authority was already *acknowledged* in the past. It is therefore not a question of choosing it from among other possible discourses (1994:78-79).

Authoritative discourse stands in contrast with other forms because, according to Bakhtin, the meaning of most utterances stand open and incomplete until some response is made to them—they are intended to generate a response. However, *authoritative discourse* is intent only on generating consent.

Clearly, sacred texts, like the Quran and hadis, are such authoritative texts. Their authority is based on their distance and incomparability to other types of texts. The legitimacy of *MS 1500* is differently based. Perhaps surprisingly, it makes very little attempt at deriving legitimacy from connections to sacred texts. First, *MS 1500* has appeared in various editions: the first in 2000, then as a revised version in 2004 and again in 2009. These iterations are shown in the documents' titles (for example: *MS 1500:2004*). Furthermore, the changes in each revision are enumerated in the document's *Foreword* section emphasizing the editability of the text. Equally as significant, the front matter of the document includes a list of the ministries, government departments, government-linked companies, community organizations, trade groups and university research centers that were part of the committee that produced the standard; for *MS 1500:2009*, for example, there are 41 organizations listed. These characteristics show that *MS 1500* is not intended to transcend the possibility of response—in fact, it identifies the 41 organizations that acted as stakeholders in producing the text. It is equally clear about its openness to revision.

However, *MS 1500* is still authoritative in that it makes normative claims on those who engage in halal commerce. It legitimizes these claims in a register different than that of Bakhtin's *authoritative discourse*. First, *MS 1500* is formatted into numerically enumerated sections, subsections, and sub-subsections that follow the international conventions of the ISO. This format de-provincializes the document and sets it in the context of international commerce. Furthermore, *MS 1500* does not draw on the authority of religion for its legitimacy (there are no Quranic verses, no appeals to jurisprudence, and Islamic terminology is limited to a definitions section). Rather, it appeals to the authority of the Malaysian state for legitimacy. The cover of the document prominently features the coat of arms of the Malaysian state. The second page identifies the Department of Standards as the producer and publisher of the document. This page not only describes the aims of the Department of Standards, but identifies the specific legal act that gives it the authority to establish standards—Act 549, enacted in 1996.

The centrality of appeals to the authority of the Malaysian state and to international regulatory bodies is not surprising given the intended audience of the document. Several interlocutors over the course of my research, including Aminah, have pointed out that the many of the Quranic passages dealing with halal are addressed to *al-nas*, the people, and not only *Muslimin*—that is, not only just to Muslims. Aminah takes this to indicate that halal rules are meant to benefit everyone—not just Muslims (and that halal marketers ought to be developing strategies to appeal to non-Muslim, as well as Muslim, consumers). *MS 1500*, however, addresses neither Muslims specifically nor people generally. Rather it addresses companies and corporations—such as McDonald's, Nestle, Colgate or large Malaysian producers such as Prima and Ayammas—that are looking for ways to expand their markets.

Nurdeng, the KasehDia researcher, explained how a subtler shift in agency was implicated in the creation of halal standards. According to Nurdeng, there are two kinds of obligations in Islam: *fardhu 'ain*, those that are incumbent on each and every Muslim (such as prayer), and *fardhu kifayah*, those that are necessary for someone to undertake (such as guarding a community), but not necessary for each and every Muslim. According to Nurdeng, the Department of Standards effort to create a halal standard is a *fardhu kifayah*—a collective obligation. Interestingly then, these business-oriented standards also shift the weight of the moral obligation to observe halal. Whereas the Quran addresses all people, the standards address commercial ventures. In as far as the everyday goods people use are produced and marketed by businesses, ensuring halal status has become a collective rather than individual obligation.

This last point connects to the position staked out by Aileen, the Chicago-based food activist introduced in the opening vignettes of this dissertation. It will be recalled that Aileen was opposed to the establishment of halal standards in Illinois. She argued that such standards would represent the interests of large food producers and may well function to conceal the methods and ingredients used in production. Aileen's position, then, is one of opposing the shift from individual to collective obligation.

Her concern may be legitimate. Very few consumers read *MS 1500*, rather they interact with the standard through halal product labeling. So, if JAKIM determines that a product meets the criteria set out in *MS 1500*, then the product can use JAKIM's halal label. The role of the individual, then, becomes that of the consumer—their obligation is to choose the product with the label rather than the one without it. This may seem straightforward, but such labels, as Aileen pointed out, can hide as much as they reveal. For example, one of the very controversial issues in halal production of chicken is whether the chickens must be slaughtered by hand, or whether it is

acceptable to mechanize the act of slaughter (as is common among industrial chicken producers around the world). In the 2004 version of *MS 1500*, guidelines were set for acceptable modes of mechanized chicken slaughter: the machine must be activated by a Muslim slaughterman who says the blessing as he does so and he must remain in the production area while the machine is operating. These guidelines were removed—most likely because they are controversial—in the 2009 version. So, now *MS 1500:2009* is silent on the issue. Indeed, there seems to be a fair amount of confusion about the topic; one of my interlocutors in Malaysia, an administrative manager at a multinational fast food chain, told me that she had visited a mechanized production plant in Malaysia producing for the chain, while both Amirul and Aminah have assured me that there are no mechanized processing facilities in Malaysia.⁸¹ In fact, the Malays I know who do not work in the halal industry, do not think mechanized chicken processing is really halal. Furthermore, there appears to be a general belief that JAKIM-labeled halal chicken is hand processed.

JAKIM's refusal to explicitly reject mechanically-slaughtered chicken led to a surprising outburst at MIHREC (Malaysia International Halal Research and Education Conference), which I attended in December 2014. While people were getting their food from a lunch buffet provided at the conference, an attendee from the UK stood up and loudly announced that none of the meat should be eaten because JAKIM permits non-syariah compliant slaughter (referring to mechanized processes and stunning) of animals. There was not much of reaction, people just continued with their meals. One of my table companions remarked that he should just eat the fish, if he did not like the meat. After the conference, when I told a Malaysian friend about the

⁸¹ It may be that there was some confusion in our conversation and that the manager had visited an abattoir *outside* of Malaysia that supplied chicken to the Malaysian branches of the chain. JAKIM permits halal-certified eateries to import and use mechanically-slaughtered chicken, though it is not preferred.

outburst, she was quite surprised saying that the man's attitude was completely "un-Islamic". She insisted that if you are someone's guest and they give you something that they say is halal, you should accept it. If it is not halal, it is the host's mistake, not the guest's.

Another difference between the 2004 and the 2009 versions of *MS 1500* underscores further limitations of standards as a normative genre. During an interview, Dr. Kamarul, a food scientist at University Putra Malaysia who served as a member on a technical committee working on Malaysia's halal standards, pointed out that the 2004 version of the standard uses the term "intoxicant" as a prohibited category, but in the later version uses "khamar" instead. Dr. Kamarul explained that this decision was made because "intoxicant" was being confused with alcohol. He pointed out that a great many foods and drinks contain alcohol but are not intoxicants, so the Quranic term "khamar" was used instead in an attempt to clarify that minute amounts of alcohol that are used as stabilizers or naturally occur in foods and drinks are not prohibited.

Dr. Kamarul was pleased with the improvement, but it did not solve the problem of alcohol and halal certification. The question remained for the committee, how much alcohol could be present in a certified product? JAKIM currently permits .01% (though this is not codified in *MS 1500*⁸²), Brunei does not permit any alcohol, and Indonesia and Singapore permit up to 1%. However, some popular foods that are, in Dr. Kamarul's view, clearly halal, exceed even the 1% level. He said the best example of this is *tapai*, a popular fermented rice sweet that is regarded as a traditional Malay desert. Yet, when testing samples of *tapai*, Dr. Kamarul found that they can have an alcohol content equivalent to beer. Realizing that JAKIM could not prohibit Malays from eating *tapai*, the technical committee set about trying to answer the

⁸² This is particularly confusing because at an HDC presentation, I was told JAKIM used .5% as a limit (which is the same as the limit set in a fatwa by al-Qardawi, the well-known Egyptian mufti), but a presenter at the World Halal Conference 2014 said that JAKIM sets the limit at .05%.

question, is tapai an intoxicant? They surveyed hospitals and police departments to see if there were any records of tapai intoxication; unsurprisingly, there were none. So, tapai remains permissible.

The point here is that, because of their need to be explicit, standards are often arbitrary. Just as in the case cited by Gupta, besides the bureaucratic rule, there is little reason to provide a pension for a sixty-five year old, but not a sixty-four year old (particularly when you have no way of ascertaining age to begin with). Similarly, there is little reason to allow foods that contain 1% alcohol, but not 1.1% (particularly when you are going to make exceptions for favorite deserts anyhow). Bureaucratic processes demand more precision than our categories normally bear. Efforts to operationalize them are so technical as to become laughable.

Such incidents point to the limitations of standards. They do not capture the subtleties of the ethical positions from which they are derived. They flatten ethical reflection to mere binary. While in the context of halal, this is not only desirable for industrial producers, but even necessary, it distorts the implicit categories that are part of social life. It is as if the sharper and clearer standards are, the more useful they are for business, but the less meaningful they are to people. While standards are clearly a move towards *rationalization*, their *reasonableness* remains in question.

MABIMS and International Cooperation on Standards

The clash of rationalization and reasonableness is not the only tension to confront standards. Again, the *raison d'être* of standards is to ensure conformity across spatial and temporal boundaries in order to facilitate commerce. Yet, enforcement of standards happens within very explicit boundaries—determined by the jurisdiction of the certifying bodies. When certification

is handled by the government (or government-linked agencies), as is common with halal in Southeast Asian countries (specifically Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand), these jurisdictions coincide with national boundaries. So, there is a tension between certifying authorities: complete dismissal of other certifiers obviates the possibility of an international halal market, but being too permissive detracts from one's own authority. So, how to protect sovereignty while promoting cross boundary trade?

One of the slipperiest issues to deal with in order to promote cooperation between certifying agencies is differences between standards. As we saw above, the Singaporean halal authority allows higher residual alcohol content in certified goods than Malaysia, and Brunei permits none at all. Navigating such differences has led to a range of initiatives each championed by particular governments, sectors within the industry, or multinational organizations. In this section, I will consider one strategy being pursued by the Malaysian halal agencies to contend with the issue of multiple national standards.

Nurdeng, the KasehDia researcher, pointed out to me during a conversation in 2008, that Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's aspiration to make Malaysia the global halal hub was quite improbable; Malaysia is not resource rich, so it is not a huge exporter, and its population is not large or particularly wealthy, so its consumer demand is limited. It lacks a foundation from which to demand manufacturer and trader recognition of their standards for halal. Malaysia's advantage was that it recognized the potential for a halal industry early, and, because it has great management infrastructure, was able to quickly put together clear standards. Thus, Malaysia won recognition as an initiator of the international conversation about halal and has managed to hold some sway. However, now that other countries have established standards and are ramping up efforts to become centers for halal business themselves, Nurdeng was skeptical about Malaysia's

ability to compete with the multitude of other standards, some of which were backed by significantly larger economies.

One of the ways JAKIM has managed to keep Malaysian standards from being swamped by the proliferation of different standards is to cooperate regionally with other certifying authorities. This cooperation is maintained through an informal agreement by MABIMS—an international association of the religious administrative bodies of Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore—that these countries would recognize each other’s certifications.⁸³ The agreement, as I understand it, was *very* informal, a verbal agreement without as much as memorandum of understanding to solidify it.

I learned about MABIMS and the mutual-recognition agreement by attending a series of meetings at HDC in late 2015, with Rizal, a friend who I have known since 2007. Rizal, the CEO of a halal-focused research and media company, was hired by HDC to write a report that would be circulated in HDC and JAKIM that explores the possibilities of further coordinating the halal standards of MABIMS members. Members of the organization had decided to formalize their mutual-recognition agreement and this was the first step in that process. Rizal brought me along to attend three of his meetings at HDC as writer on his staff. While I did do some editing and proofreading for the report, I was not involved with the research or primary writing—in actuality, my invitation was more of a favor.

The meetings at HDC were all with the same person, Mira, who was heading up the MABIMS report. They took place in the set of meeting rooms where I had interviewed Nur Aini and Aminah, but the meetings with Mira were less formal and shorter—the longest was about forty minutes. The first one set up expectations for the report, identifying the subjects that it

⁸³ Malaysia also a similar arrangement with Thailand, who is not a member of MABIMS.

needed to address. The second and third were progress reports and going over comments from additional reviewers (one of whom was Aminah). At the meetings, I stayed mostly in the background to be certain that Rizal and Mira could get what they needed from the meetings.

The main theme of the report was *harmonization* rather than *standardization* of MABIMS members' halal standards. The idea was that, while it is highly unlikely that members would give up their standards to adopt a single agreed upon one (say, an ASEAN-wide halal standard), there is already considerable agreement between the existing nation-based standards. This agreement should be built upon, while points of irreconcilable difference would be worked-out in either direct two-party negotiations (as opposed to through MABIMS) or may just be irremovable blocks in the flow of trade for type of goods in question. Rizal explained it to me this way: issues of alcohol content can probably be worked out—everyone agrees that alcohol is haram, and the percentages allowed in any of the standards is miniscule. It would not take much to get all members to agree on one of the percentages. However, mechanical slaughter of chicken may be more problematic. Singapore accepts it under specific condition, but Brunei outright rejects it. It is unlikely that, even with heavy regulation, Brunei will budge from its outright ban on mechanical slaughter. Similarly, Singapore, with its small chicken processing industry and very high labor costs, is unlikely to adopt hand-slaughter processes that would significantly push up production costs. Rizal concluded that it is likely that mechanical slaughter represents an absolute limit on the possibility of Singapore selling chicken to Brunei. The paper identifies stunning animals (either through electric shock or percussion) as another similarly problematic subject for harmonization.

There are several things to notice here. The first is the structural complexity surrounding standards. Just from the perspective of Malaysia's involvement, to get standards to be responsive

to the needs of international trade JAKIM must participate in an association of neighboring countries' religious authorities in an effort to formalize an existing informal agreement. The first part of the process involves JAKIM requesting a study from HDC, HDC organizing the project and hiring Rizal. Rizal then finds out what the report is supposed to say (it should promote *harmonization* not *standardization*), writes it, and it is circulated back through HDC and JAKIM. This is a baroque process to say the least. That is not to say that I think it is somehow unimportant. It does a type of work that, in the absence of the process, it is not clear how it could be done. Like a marriage ritual, it is difficult to see *how* exactly it effects the marriage, but without the ritual, people cannot be married. These bureaucratic processes of meetings, report writing, and paper circulation are necessary for commerce, for the circulation of goods—goods from which we, the consumers, construct our daily lives. These processes condition the things that line stores shelves, rendering them knowable and acquirable. This point will become more evident in the next chapter exploring the role of scientific laboratories in the halal ecosystem.

Summing-up Ritual and Bureaucracy in the Halal Ecosystem

I began this chapter with a discussion of marketization—not merely the process of bringing something into a market by setting an exchange value for it (that is, not merely commodification), but orienting a thing toward market exchanges generally, so that it becomes self-explanatory in *any* market. Or to put Scott's (1998) *legibility* to a slightly different use, marketization refers to making a thing legible in *the market* (as opposed to *familiar* within some *marketplace*). I argued that this process lies at the foundation of the activity around halal. In short, halal is being territorialized in ways that orient it towards the market.

One of the primary activities involved in the marketization of halal is *bureaucratization*—the subject of this chapter. Here I made a comparison between ritual and bureaucracy and argued that, in the context of halal, the two are increasingly intertwined and serve to facilitate goods *getting* or *being recognized* as having the status of halal. I then examined HDC and JAKIM as the primary agents of bureaucratizing halal in Malaysia and explored *the standard* as their primary tool for doing so. Finally, I consider conflicts between standards, these quintessential bureaucratic modes of bureaucracy, and the strategies deployed to mitigate them.

Resurfacing from close examination of these processes and techniques of bureaucratization, what is fascinating is the distance between these bureaucratic modes of halal and the Quranic injunctions discussed in the previous chapter. It is astounding that an injunction against drinking alcohol precipitates the necessity of measuring the alcoholic content of hot sauces, for example, down to (at least) the tenth of a percent and also leaves an entire community of highly educated scholars puzzled about the permissibility of eating a traditional desert. Such things were unimaginable twenty-years ago, let alone at the time of the Prophet. But this *is* what is required to transcribe these injunctions into market conditions.

Halal Science, Halal Labs, and Halal Debacles: the Problem of Invisibility

During my second week of research at IPPH (Halal Products Research Institute) at UPM (University Putra Malaysia), I was invited to attend a seminar at which MA and PhD students in the program were presenting their research proposals. The proposals covered a range of technical issues: techniques for examining amino-acids in gelatin to determine if it is fish-, bovine-, or porcine-derived; determining the best method for extracting the beneficial compound from a folk-medicinal herb used as an anti-aging treatment; and investigating the physiological effects of different methods of slaughter on chickens as well as its effects on the shelf-life and quality of the meat.

However, it was the line of questioning that followed one of the student's presentations that most interested me. This project proposed to examine the effects of non-halal fish feed (porcine- or blood-based feed) on fish marketed to Muslim consumers. The issue identified by Atiqah, the student researcher, is that, while fish are generally recognized as halal (as evidence, she cited Quran 5:96, 16:14, and 35:12), raising them on non-halal feed may abrogate their halal status. Atiqah proposed analyzing samples of porcine-fed fish for porcine DNA to determine if the offending substance persisted in the meat. She also proposed a tasting panel to determine characteristic differences between the meat of porcine- and non-porcine-fed fish. Her advisors first asked where she would get participants for her tasting panels. Atiqah immediately understood their concern and assured them that they would be non-Muslims—feeding porcine-fed fish to Muslims would be unethical. Then Dr. Irfan, a senior member of the faculty, asked

what she would do if her tasting panel discovered that porcine-fed fish are better than those raised on other feeds. Atiqah, eloquent up to that moment, stumbled and said that she would just report the results from the panel. Sensing that the answer was not satisfactory, she continued by explaining that porcine-based feed was not natural for fish, so she believed that the meat of such fish would be inferior. I had not immediately understood the intent behind Dr. Irfan's question; he was asking: what if the morally right—the religiously obligatory—thing to do led to substandard results? Atiqah had, I believe, understood the question this way and in her first answer tried to avoid it by insisting that no matter what the results, as a no-nonsense researcher, she would report them. Then, seeing that her tack had not been completely effective, she defaulted to the position that the morally right thing would, ultimately, result in the best outcome. However, this response too did not seem to completely satisfy Dr. Irfan. Instead another evaluator, Dr. Awis, added that he had recently read a paper that found catfish raised on porcine feed produced higher quality meat than those raised on other types of feed. It was clear that Atiqah did not know where to go with this comment and so the rejoinder came from Dr. Irfan. To my surprise, he explained that this would be a great result for Atiqah; it would force her to contend with the relationship between science and syariah—that, after all, he continued, was the purpose for which IPPH was founded.

Dr. Irfan's comment reminded me of a conversation I had had the year before, in 2013, when I was studying Malay at the UMP (University of Malaysia in Pahang). I was telling a lecturer about my research and she responded by saying I would find that halal was important for a different reason than I thought it was important. She went on:

Muslims don't need halal labels to find food. I already know what I can eat and what I can't—if I'm in McDonald's in London, I have fish. But labels let us know that it is a place that Muslims can go—they Islamize it; we feel more comfortable. If we see a Chinese place with the red lanterns, we think, "umm, maybe not," but then if we see a

halal logo, we think, “okay, maybe we can try this.” It’s good for non-Muslims, they don’t have to become Muslim, but it’s good to know the scientific reasons why pork and alcohol are not healthy.

What stands out in this comment is the connection the lecturer makes between Islamization and science; it appears to assume that scientific facts support the truth of Islam—science will, ultimately, find that there is practical benefit in Islamic prescriptions. Thus, science is in service to Islam as a type of rhetoric that can be used to persuade outsiders. This suggests that science has very little to offer those already inside the religion (at least in this regard). The exchange between Dr. Irfan and Atiqah, on the other hand, stakes out a different relationship between Islam and science—one in which there can be robust disagreement, the resolution of which requires study and creative reflection.

Science and Religion in Anthropological Perspective

While Victorian-era theorists imagined that science would replace religion through a natural process epistemic maturation as societies evolved (see, for example, Frazer [1961:371]), by the time academic anthropology was being established, Bronislaw Malinowski had staked out a different position. “If by science,” he wrote, “we understood a body of rules and conceptions, based on experience and derived from it by logical inference...then there can be no doubt that even the lowest savage communities have the beginnings of science” (1948[1925]:34).

Malinowski understood science not as the successor of religion, but as an epistemic mode that exists contemporaneously with religion. While both these accounts affirm the universalism of science, they do so in different ways. The science-as-successor model conceives of science as reliably apprehending the truth of phenomena, thus its claims are universally valid. We can think of this as a *substantive* account of science. Malinowski, however, conceives of science as a type

of activity (involving the systematized operation of thought on experience) that is generally engaged in by all societies. Though its organization and claims may be specific to a community, as a general method of comprehending the world, it is universal in distribution in this view. This is a *formal* account of science. In terms of relationship to religion, then, these notions of universality have different results. The substantive account renders religion as old-hat, as an occupation of pre-moderns (and thus as provincial). The formal account, however, suggests the possibility of co-existence of science and religion, though each is put to different uses (thus religion, too, is universal or, at least, widely distributed).

Both the substantive and formal accounts conceive of the categories of science and religion as discrete—they are identifiable in their own right and, importantly, separate from one another. Muzaffar Iqbal, a Canadian Islamic scholar, refers to this separation between science and religion as “the current prevalent position,” writing that it is so hegemonic that “if any interaction between religion and science becomes unavoidable, it is normally perceived as negative” (2007:16-17). Iqbal traces this position back to the philosophy of Immanuel Kant in the eighteenth-century and the theology of Rudolph Bultman in the early twentieth century (2007:61). Iqbal argues that the conundrum concerning the proper domains of science and religion is a vexation with specifically European Christian roots. As we saw in chapter 2, Islam, when regarded as *din*, is a very inclusive notion that embraces not only worship and ethics, but also politics and worldly matters. These latter worldly matters include both economics and science (Iqbal 2007:62-63). The Arabic term *ilm* (knowledge) includes scientific knowledge, but is not limited to it. Thus, study of Quran and hadis is regarded as *ilm* just as much as the study of physics. In the ethnographic material below, we see that, despite this different historical trajectory, anxiety about the competing authorities of religion and science is evident in the

context of halal science. However, the overriding contention among halal scientist seems to be that the two are ultimately reconcilable and jointly point toward truth.

While more recent cultural anthropologists have not been particularly interested in whether imbrications of science and religion are positive or negative, such amalgams have attracted their attention as curious and productive fields of inquiry. For example, Stanley Tambiah, drawing on Max Weber, argues that both science and religion are rational ways of understanding the world, though each draws on a different facet of rationality (1990:144). According to Tambiah, science depends on instrumental reason—systematic deliberation about how to achieve particular ends.⁸⁴ Religion, alternatively, draws on absolutist rationality; that is, it chooses from among possible ends and efforts are oriented unwaveringly toward the end. Importantly, then, science is agnostic about the ends it pursues—it cannot adjudicate between them—and religion is primarily concerned with determining the proper aims (ends) of humanity. But both, in Tambiah’s estimation, are rational enterprises.

The rise of scientific creationism, which gained popularity in the US beginning in the 1970s, is an intriguing ethnographic site of mixing religious and scientific authority. This anti-evolutionary movement claims that findings in the fields of geology, anthropology, biology and zoology among others, are alternatively either fraudulent or compatible with biblical descriptions of creation. Scientific creationism, according to Christopher Toumey, attempts to “recover the moral authority of science [that had been]...lost” when the figure of the Protestant naturalist was displaced by that of the secular scientist (1994:23). To do so, creationists endeavored, with some

⁸⁴ The idea of science as concerned solely with calculative reason may seem overly narrow. Pure science, for example, which is chiefly devoted to furthering knowledge appears little concerned with application. Tambiah, however, is addressing applied science, that is, *technoscience*, which is, after all, the primary idiom of current science (1990:150). Given the constrictions around access to funding for research, the notion of pure (non-applied science) may be something of a mirage (1990:143).

success, to “signal to the U.S. public that creationism had a strong claim to scientific authority” by convincing school boards to include creationism in curricula for teaching science (1994:35). In other words, creationist sought serious consideration of their worldview by associating it with the symbols of science—a form of legitimacy seeking that Toumey refers to as the “trivial model of science” (1994:15).

Susan Harding (2000), in her examination of the religious movement inspired by celebrity preacher Jerry Falwell, discusses another instance of this strategy of associating biblical creation with science. She describes visiting a creationist museum at Falwell’s Liberty Baptist College; “for all appearances”, she writes, “the Museum of Earth and Life History was a natural history museum” (2000:220). The first exhibits she describes are predictably creationist spins on evolutionary accounts of the fossil record and extinction. However, Harding gives more attention to an exhibit that consists of “a dozen small animal bones sticking out of a bed of unadorned plaster of paris” described as a jumble of bones from a small dinosaur, a human, a lemur, an eel, and a cat, that were all trampled in the rush to get on Noah’s Ark (2000:223). Harding is taken aback by such a strange and outlandish display in what is supposed replicate the authoritative and staid environment of the scientific museum. She wonders if the display is even trying to *pass* as science, or if it is instead performing a burlesque of science, winking at its sympathetic audience.⁸⁵

Reflecting on Toumey’s and Harding’s projects is useful because they map out a range of possible configurations between science and religion. The first is one of sincerity: if scientific methods are earnestly and unbiasedly applied, they will confirm religious precepts . The second is utilitarian; it recognizes the cultural capital associated with science and attempts to leverage

⁸⁵ Indeed, Harding later discovered that the display was a joke—one that many creationist viewers did not find funny. The display was eventually removed (2002:224).

that capital by adopting the symbols of science. The third again recognizes the cultural capital associated with science, and adopts its symbols, but it also tacitly acknowledges its own façade in doing so. In this last case, recognition of the independence of the religious claim is upheld—it does not seek scientific verification, bona fide or counterfeit, but rather plays at the norms of scientific authority, ultimately showing disdain for them through its burlesque.

There is no reason to assume that these three “models” somehow exhaust the possible configurations between religion and science (almost certainly they do not) or that they are generally applicable types (they could be idiosyncratic, singular occurrences). However, they do provide an interesting framework to think through events such as the exchange between Dr. Irfan and Atiqah as well as the comment made by the UMP lecturer. At some level, it is likely that the three of them would agree that the legitimacy of Islam, the rightness of halal rules, is completely independent—that no scientific discovery could undercut it. And yet at another level, if there is wisdom, practical reasons, or benefits in following Islam—in following halal prescriptions—scientific investigation ought to be able to show this is the case. In this chapter, I explore how activities at IPPH are oriented between such notions of science and halal. I also consider the role of halal laboratories more generally by examining a controversy concerning halal-certified chocolate bars that tested positive for porcine-DNA contamination.

Halal Product Research Institute (IPPH)

The first time I encountered the notion of a halal laboratory was at the 2008 World Halal Forum. Chulalongkorn University had sent a delegation of its students from Bangkok, Thailand, to represent the halal lab that had just been set-up at their Halal Science Center. One of these students proudly described—in much more technical detail than I could possibly absorb—the laboratory’s ability to identify porcine-derived ingredients in common processed foods. At the

time, I thought it was a bit over the top. Was genetic testing really necessary to know whether or not something contained pork? When I told a Malaysian friend working in the halal industry about Chulalongkorn's lab, I expected her to dismiss it as an example of overreach. However, not only did she already know about the lab, but expressed consternation that Buddhist-majority Thailand had developed such a lab before Muslim-majority Malaysia.

My friend was not, apparently, the only one disappointed in Malaysia for not keeping up with its non-Muslim majority neighbor. By the time I began my dissertation research in 2014, Malaysia had five halal labs. The first was at UPM's IPPH. The research institute had been proposed as early as 2003; the following year it started its research program as the Halal Unit in UPM's food science department. By 2006, it was rebranded as IPPH, in part, to emphasize that its scope extended beyond concerns about food (hence, Halal *Product* Research Institute). The service lab component of the institute began its operation in 2011. By the time I began my research it was accredited by the Malaysian Department of Standards and recognized as a panel lab for JAKIM—thus results from this lab are among the most widely recognized in Malaysia, both by government bodies and private industry.

While having such a highly regarded lab is a major status marker for IPPH, the institute actually consists of two labs in addition to the service lab. In many respects, the main lab at the institute is the Halal Science Lab. This lab is focused mainly on two areas: authentication (developing techniques for testing products for prohibited constituents) and developing alternative products to replace commonly-used prohibited constituents (such as developing new forms of non-porcine gelatin). In 2014, IPPH had just under seventy graduate students registered in programs associated with this lab. The other research and education lab housed at IPPH is the Policy and Management Lab. This “laboratory” focuses on issues of syariah, standards creation,

and aspects of promoting and managing halal-focused enterprises. In 2014, thirty graduate students were registered in programs associated with this lab.

I started my interviews at IPPH with the senior faculty member, Dr. Irfan. This interview was rescheduled several times, leaving me the impression that he would have preferred to avoid it all together. When we finally met, he had asked Encik Ramli, IPPH's accountant, to join us. I had emailed Encik Ramli to request a meeting to discuss the institute's budget and funding at the same time I had emailed Dr. Irfan with an interview request. I now wondered if my interest in discussing funding had been the reason both for the rescheduled interviews and why Dr. Irfan and Encik Ramli preferred to meet me together.

Dr. Irfan's assistant was out of the office the day of our interview, so when I came into the office, the assistant's desk was empty. Dr. Irfan had heard me enter though and appeared at his office door directly behind the assistant's desk and invited me to come in. Encik Ramli was already there. Besides quick greetings and introductions, Encik Ramli seemed anxious to get down to matters. He began by apologizing that it would not be possible to give me precise budget information because it was "controversial" (did he mean "confidential"?). I said that I was a little surprised that funding for an institute at a public university was not public. He replied that it is because the grants are competitive—if they publicize their sources, other institutions could pursue the same grants. He said, however, he could provide a broad outline of their funding: between 2012-2014, IPPH had received about 1 million ringgit (US\$ 250,000) in grants. Sixty percent of these were from government agencies (he mentioned JAKIM, the Ministry of Science, and the Ministry of Agriculture) and forty percent were from the private sector. It was at the mention of the private sector that I realized that I had not been clear when asking about IPPH's funding—I was wondering about university funding for the institute, not specific sources

for research funding. It was about these private sector grants that Encik Ramli did not want to share information. Such grants were arranged through memorandums of understanding between the grant providers and the institute, he explained; the provider gets tax breaks from the government. Encik Ramli talked more freely, I felt, about institute funding from the university—it was around 500 thousand ringgit (US\$ 125,000) a year and was roughly the same for all the university research institutes.

At this point, Dr. Irfan interrupted and asked if I wanted to know anything else about IPPH or if I was just interested in financial matters. Fearing that he felt I was wasting his time (why had he invited Encik Ramli to join our meeting if he did not want to be part of the discussion about the institution's finances?), I laughed uneasily and said that I was actually much more interested in the work being done by the institute. This comment seemed to signal a shift in the discussion and with brief goodbyes, Encik Ramli returned to his own office.

Considering what I took for a rocky start, the interview with Dr. Irfan was friendly and went quite long—nearly an hour and half. Dr. Irfan initially studied mechanical engineering at a university in the UK. He went on to get a master's degree in food science in the US before returning to Malaysia to study for his PhD. In the 1990s, after a few years in the private sector auditing Nestle production facilities around the world, he took a position at UPM.

I asked about his training in Islamic studies. He laughed and said that this was the very problem IPPH was meant to overcome. JAKIM had lots of expertise in Islamic law, but they lacked background in science, “so if they get a list of ingredients from a company, they have no idea what they are looking at: Is it prohibited? Is it haram? How can they answer?”, he explained. But in the food science department at UPM before the creation of IPPH, they had the opposite problem; scientists know about the ingredients, but not the syariah implications of these

ingredients. He admitted he was one of those scientists and went on to explain that when he was schoolboy in Malaysia he had to go *sekolah agama* (religious school) after public school each day. He said that he was not a very good religion student; he learned enough Arabic to pray and read the text of Quran—but, beyond a few popular verses, he could not understand it. In fact, he said, he did not read the Quran in a way he could understand its content until he was a graduate student in the US and bought a seventy-five-cent used copy of Maulana Muhammad Ali's English translation (a Quran that he still keeps). But he also claimed that, even though he did not study syariah, like all Malays, he understood halal because he grew up with it—he learned from his parents.

He said that the dearth of experts in both science and syariah was a challenge for the institute too: they needed to figure out how to develop projects that included both the hard science lab and the social science (Policy and Management) lab? He found that science-focused projects were sometimes too technical to see discern their syariah implications. I mentioned the research project that had been proposed at the student seminar about extracting the compounds from an herb to be used in anti-aging products. He said that, actually, that project would be a great one for collaboration—the student, attached to the Halal Science Lab, had not considered the syariah implications of trying to preserve youthfulness and beauty, but that was an important question she would have to review. He went on to compliment Dr. Shadi, the director of the Policy and Management Lab, in connecting syariah with scientific findings. He mentioned a paper that Dr. Shadi had written in collaboration with the science lab about possible non-halal (animal bone-based) compounds used in water filters and their effect on the halal status of water.

Dr. Irfan appeared to really want to emphasize that IPPH was striving to achieve the aim articulated by former-Prime Minister Abdullah, making Malaysia into a global halal hub. In Dr.

Irfan's view, IPPH was doing this by creating international relationships. Through the Policy and Management Lab, for example, they had signed an MOU with Prince of Songkla University (PSU) in southern Thailand to share technical information with PSU to help establish a halal science program there. The science lab was working directly with the New Zealand dairy and lamb industries from which Malaysia imports many products. IPPH is also working with Japanese companies that are interested in JAKIM certification to promote their exports to the Middle East.

I asked Dr. Irfan if he thought that the current Najib administration was as supportive of the halal hub idea as Abdullah had been. He hesitantly confirmed that it was—because halal is obligatory for Muslims, he reasoned, the government had to support the industry; it was supporting the people. But he went on to explain that the idea had been Abdullah's so, naturally, he had put more effort into supporting it. Also, Abdullah was an Islamic studies student, so he was more concerned with issues of Islam than Najib. I heard similar sentiments from others involved with Malaysia's halal initiatives—under Najib the industry was still getting attention, but the pace of development had slowed with the shift in government.

I met with Dr. Anis in the offices for her lab a short walk from IPPH's main building. She apologized for the state of the offices, they were in the process of moving from the food science department complex and still did not have things arranged. She asked if it was okay if we sat in a common area outside her office—she said that she could not stand being in the office when it was in such disarray. I agreed of course, though I wondered if her preference to talk in a common area had also to do with a desire to avoid any appearance of impropriety.

Like Dr. Irfan, Dr. Anis was educated internationally. Though she was born in Malaysia, she spent her teenage years on the east coast of the US and then went to university in Oregon,

studying biology at first but eventually switching to food science. She finished a master's degree in Louisiana before returning to Malaysia where she became a lecturer at UPM and eventually also finished her PhD there.

The main question I had for Dr. Anis was: what is the difference between halal science and conventional food science? When I asked, she laughed at the question. But then immediately said that she understood my confusion. "First you have to understand, Sean, that halal is not just about food," she explained, "but a whole range of products Muslims use. You must know that Malaysia doesn't just have a food standard, but a whole series of standards for cosmetics and pharmaceuticals too." I said that I realized that halal was broader than just food, but I was still confused; it seemed that some of the projects being undertaken at IPPH did not involve syariah in any direct way. Dr. Anis, nodded and said, "so, you want to know about the difference between halal and thoyyib." She went on to explain IPPH was established with the aim of addressing several issues: the increasing amount of food Malaysia was importing, the fact that new processed foods often contained ingredients that consumers were unfamiliar with, and that food processors did not know their supply chains. "Basically," she said, "a hotel restaurant might think that the turkey sausage they were selling was halal, the manufacturer might say it is, but there was no way to know who the manufacturer's supplier was." One solution was JAKIM certification—for a company to be certified all its suppliers have to be certified. But another solution, Dr. Anis explained, is the scientific one: foods can be tested for containments—this was the role that IPPH was trying to fill.

Dr. Anis pointed to another area with which halal science could help: developing halal replacement products. As an example, she told me about one of her students who was concerned because she did not have funding for a project. But then she noticed that another project was

using catfish but was not using the catfish skins, so she figured out a project to explore the possibility of using the skin to make an alternative to porcine-based gelatins. Dr. Anis was impressed with the student's ingenuity.

So, testing for haram materials and developing halal alternatives are halal science's main contributions. Dr. Anis, however, was concerned that the replacement component of halal science had gone too far:

When I was a graduate student, for a while, I was working with textured vegetable product—it had no flavor and bad texture. I didn't understand why anyone would want to eat it. They were trying to turn it into all kinds of things. I thought, yuck. But now we see halal food producers trying to make halal versions of bacon and ham—to get as close as they can. People want to look at the negative thing and see how close they can get to the haram without crossing the line. This doesn't follow the spiritual element of the religion.

Instead, Dr. Anis suggested that halal science should focus on producing things that improve people's lives—that is what the thoyyib component of halal science does. It looks for innovative ways to improve health and people's enjoyment of things. She said that one of the thoyyib-focused products that they were working on was a disinfectant derived from seaweed. It would, she hoped, be safer than the available chemicals. Of course, such a product also blurs the distinction between the development of Islam-centric products and conventional products; there is nothing obviously Islamic about a non-toxic, seaweed-based disinfectant. But this was exactly the point, Dr. Anis explained, halal and thoyyib need not focus narrowly on the Muslim community—it could be involved with developing products for all people. Dr. Anis said that more and more she is trying to encourage IPPH to think along thoyyib lines—how halal science can help people.

The halal aspect of halal science remains, however, the primary concern for the institute, she conceded. This focus was necessary in order to provide oversight for industry—"which is

always looking for shortcuts to improve profit.” She concluded, “Labels don’t do any good unless there are ways to check that they are accurate and true.”

It is just these types of concerns about credibility that is central to the work of IPPH’s Service Lab. It took me several weeks to get an interview with Dr. Aqil, the head of the lab, both because of his busy travel schedule (which included trips to New Zealand and Australia) and his obligations on campus, including not only work at the lab but also teaching in the food sciences department.

I met Dr. Aqil at the service lab which is housed in building next to IPPH’s main building. To gain entrance to the building, I had to be buzzed in. IPPH’s main building also had this type of security, but it wasn’t used during the work day. The lobby of the service lab had a comfortable sitting area that was decorated with a large painting of the ninety-nine names of God. The other labs lacked this sort of space to cater to visitors and clients.

On the way to Dr. Aqil’s office, the office manager who had let me into the building led me through the small administrative work area and past the two labs that are the core of the service lab. While all the labs at IPPH were enclosed and lockable, the service labs had keypad locks that needed to be unlocked with a code to gain access, and, unlike the other labs, they were closed in the middle of the working day. This extra security is part of the lab’s accreditation. In order to protect accuracy and reliability of their results, the possibility of accidental contamination or tampering must be limited.

Upon greeting me, Dr. Aqil apologized that it had been so difficult to arrange an appointment and then apologized again that he only had half an hour (though the meeting ran a bit longer than an hour). He explained that the first thing I should know about this lab is, unlike the other labs, it generated its own income—in fact it generated income for all of IPPH. They

currently offered six accredited lab services and they are working on accreditation for two more services. I asked who their clients were. Dr. Aqil replied that government agencies like JAKIM would use the services as well as manufacturers from, mainly, the food industry. I was confused why JAKIM would use the lab at IPPH when they had access to the Malaysian Department of Chemistry lab. Dr. Aqil explained that the national lab did not specialize in halal, but was a general lab, so they were doing work for all the departments in the government and often had a backlog. So, when JAKIM needed results more quickly they would send the samples either to IPPH or to the other JAKIM panel laboratory, TPM BioTech.

The services offered by IPPH are split between the two labs: the physical lab, which focuses on analysis of amino acids and especially DNA testing for porcine contamination, and the chemical lab that does alcohol content analysis. I asked Dr. Aqil if he thought that DNA analysis was really necessary to test products for porcine and ensure they are halal, after all, I pointed out, Muslims have been eating halal food since the time of the Prophet. He laughed and said that sometimes it did seem a little excessive, but:

We don't know where our food comes from now. How can we be sure it is halal? I was just in New Zealand. Malaysia imports a lot of lamb from there, but the farmers raising the lamb, the people in charge of the abattoir, they are not Muslim. Second, foods are highly processed now, they're exposed to high heat several times. This process of heating them destroys chemical compounds; it makes it difficult to test what kind of meat is in the product. But DNA is really stable, so it can be identified even in processed products.

He went on to explain that the really difficult issue was determining the proper level of sensitivity for the test. The copyrighted techniques of the IPPH lab, for example, can test for porcine DNA down to the level of 0.001 nanograms. However, if other labs are using less sensitive techniques, then they will report fewer positive results than IPPH. Dr. Aqil suggested that industry would prefer less sensitive methods. So, the lab had to walk a line between being thorough and reliable, but not being so stringent that they chase clients to other labs.

I asked Dr. Aqil if the lab was busy, if they had a lot of regular clients. He replied that, honestly, they were not very busy. Currently the lab employed three chemists and three DNA technicians as well as four support staff and that is enough for their workload. He mentioned that several months previously there had been an issue with fish balls, and for some time after they were swamped with samples, but that only happens when food manufacturers are concerned about a potential problem. Dr. Aqil said that, in his view, the problem is that JAKIM does not require laboratory testing, so any business IPPH gets from industry is voluntary. He only mentioned one contract customer, a frozen beef patty producer that that was importing ingredients; they regularly tested the patties as part of their quality assurance protocol. The service lab's other assignments are "one offs" that are usually in response to issues or scares along supply chains.

I asked Dr. Aqil how, if the lab did not have a reliable client base for their services, did it generate income. He agreed that this was a problem and they had only recently begun actively recruiting clients; they were offering these new clients not only halal testing, but also "thoyyib testing" (caloric and nutrient analysis). IPPH also generates income, he explained, by licensing their trademarked analysis techniques to other labs and training their staffs. He suggested that these trainings were quite profitable.

Things were perhaps even quieter at the last of IPPH's labs, the Policy and Management Lab. Not really a lab at all, Policy and Management occupied a suite of rooms in IPPH's main building. It consists of a main room with two cubicles for staff researchers, and three other desks for an assistant researcher, an assistant to the laboratory head, and an empty desk. There were two smaller offices attached to the main room, one of which was occupied by a postdoc and the

second was used as a prayer room for the staff. Finally, there was also a large office that was occupied by Dr. Shadi, the laboratory head.

When I met Dr. Shadi, he explained that his lab was quieter than the others because most of the students at IPPH had science backgrounds and so wanted to work in the science labs. And, of course, the students who were interested in syariah were engaged mostly in text-based research and, so, were not often in the office.

I asked Dr. Shadi why they called his office a lab. He laughed and admitted that he did not know. He supposed that it was because IPPH had grown out of the food science department and that it was founded by scientists—they thought of research in terms of labs. He also suggested that it may have been easier to get approval and funding from the university for the institute if it seemed to be fully committed to science. But none the less, he insisted that the Policy and Management lab was an important part of IPPH. He explained that while “syariah” is translated as “Islamic law”, the notion of “management” does a better of representing its intent. In his view, it is not so much a rigid set of laws, but a set of principles that guides Muslims through anything they undertake: their family life, governing a city, conducting scientific research, anything at all. To be effective, syariah has to be responsive to different contexts, so he disagrees with the position that syariah is rigid and inflexible.

He insisted, for example, that “Muslims still have a lot to learn about pigs.” He explained that it was true the Quran is clear that it is forbidden to eat the flesh of pigs, so that is fixed. And from this clear proscription, Muslim scholars have decided that it is prohibited to use anything that comes from pigs, their bones, their hair, or leather made from their skin. Science is, however, continues learning more about the benefits of materials derived from pigs, and Muslims should not ignore this science. He stressed that halal and haram are not based on

whether something is useful—the prohibition on eating pig meat is absolute, but Muslims are also enjoined to learn, they cannot ignore science.

I was intrigued by Dr. Shadi’s interpretation of syariah and asked what sorts of projects they were working on at the lab. He said that the major project they were currently working on was related to halal slaughter. The procedure for halal slaughter, he explained, is well established; however, it was also clear that Muslims were obligated to treat animals humanely, as they are part of God’s creation. The postdoc in his lab was working with Dr. Anis (from the service lab) to develop an experimental protocol to measure animals’ levels of distress during different methods of slaughter. I asked what they would do if they found out that halal slaughter caused more distress than other methods. Dr. Shadi said that would be good because it would increase their knowledge of the world. They could then explore ways of reducing the animal’s distress while still meeting the conditions of slaughter. Toward the end of our conversation he returned to his point that the Policy and Management Lab is central to IPPH’s operation; by reminding people of syariah, he claimed, it instilled in them a purpose. “Halal science,” he said, “is science with an aim; science without syariah is aimless.”

Summing-up the IPPH Interviews

There are several things to note in the above interviews. First, while IPPH is seeking—and struggling—to align syariah with lab-science, its expertise is skewed toward science. Of its four main administrators, only one has a background in Islamic studies. Dr. Irfan’s dismissal of his own limited exposure to formal Islamic studies is also interesting. It is reminiscent of JAKIM auditor Amri’s complaint about Malay business owners who assume that their practices conform to halal standards because they are Muslims. In the context of IPPH, Dr. Irfan’s comment seems

to suggest that halal is a shared context—part of the tacit knowledge that the researchers already share. If so, then science serves only a verification function; it does not expand knowledge of halal, but functions to sustain and promote it.

Dr. Anis’s concern about the myopia technologically-sophisticated halal replacements’ potential to misguide is even more intriguing. Here the configuration of science and religion is different; science threatens to corrupt religion. It risks focusing so narrowly on the particular conditions of halal that it risks obscuring its purpose. Dr. Shadi’s observation that syariah gives science a purpose is apposite here.

Dr. Shadi presents us with yet another configuration of science and religion. His insistence that syariah experts pay attention to what science has to say about pigs suggests a parity between science and Islamic knowledge. He maintains syariah’s independence from science—science cannot determine what is halal or haram. But he also insists that syariah experts, in forming their opinions about what is halal and haram, cannot ignore the world—syariah ought to be sensitive to contexts and science can help clarify those contexts. Similarly, his comment that “science without syariah is aimless” echoes Tambiah’s contention described above that, while science is primarily concerned with instrumental rationality (means-to-ends reasoning), it cannot distinguish between different ends. The absolutist rationality of religion, however, is centrally concerned with compelling humanity toward specific ends. The Policy and Management lab, it seems, is intended to fill just this sort of role in the formation research projects undertaken at IPPH.

The interview with Dr. Aqil does not suggest a particular alignment between science and religion as much as it opens the question about the usefulness of IPPH’s broad enterprise of exploring relationships between halal and science. Despite its technological sophistication and

recognition as reliable by the state and JAKIM, the commercial lab has a limited role in the halal industry. The notion that, in absence of knowing a product's origin or history, its halal status can still be uncovered is an attractive one. Such a notion is more alluring still in a world in which we are faced with shelves upon shelves of goods whose identities and origins are hidden behind potentially duplicitous packaging. Yet, it is not clear how scientific findings about goods fit into the world of production and consumption. Where do they appear? Under what conditions and at whose behest are they produced? Who maintains authority to interpret them? The following section explores a case in which scientific findings bolt from the laboratories in which they are generated and bound into the marketplace. It moots the question: does scientific scrutiny of goods create confidence or provoke anxieties?

Unruliness and the Halal Laboratory

On 24 May 2014, reports appeared in both Malaysian and international media that Cadbury Confectionary Malaysia Snd Bhd—that is, the Malaysian branch of Cadbury, the world's second largest confectionary company—had recalled two varieties of its candy bars because the Health Department had found in them traces of porcine DNA. While the fact that industrially-produced foods are so complex that porcine-derived ingredients show up in something like chocolate bars is itself surprising, the report was positively alarming to Malays—not only is Cadbury a well-known and popular brand, but its products are also JAKIM certified. Yet it appeared that Cadbury had caused its Muslim consumers to unwittingly transgress Islamic law, and, furthermore, that JAKIM, whose intended purpose is to provide assurance of halal-ness, had been ineffective at stopping this from happening.

Over the next several weeks a mini-drama played out. Within hours of the recall announcement, JAKIM released a statement that certification for the two products had been suspended pending its own investigation and social media sites such as Facebook and WhatsApp surged with news, allegations, and rumors about the recall. Within days, Muslim NGOs made demands including calling for boycotting Cadbury. Even in the early press coverage, however, there were strange elements; for example, *The Star*, one of Malaysia's most popular newspapers, reported that "In a statement...[health] ministry director-general Datuk Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah said that the tests had been conducted following speculation on social media on May 23 alleging that the chocolates contained porcine DNA" (*The Star*, 24 May 2014). Clearly, social media had an important role in the unfolding of this fiasco, but why would ordinary social media users come to suspect anything about the genetic background of these ingredients? And had the Ministry really collected samples, done tests, and released results in a forty-eight-hour period? It would later be revealed that the samples had been analyzed in February, several months earlier and that a leak had forced the Health Ministry to acknowledge the test results.

As I had not yet arrived in Malaysia, I became aware of the recall through Facebook posts by Malaysian friends that expressed exasperation not only with Cadbury and JAKIM, but also with the reactions of other Malaysians. In one widely circulated and discussed video clip from KiniTV, Sabariah Abdullah, a spokesperson for ACCIN (Allied Coordinating Committee of Islamic NGOs), claimed both that consuming porcine-derived ingredients causes one to physically resemble a pig ("*muka kita bernampak hampir-hampir sama macam itu, macam babi*" ["our faces become more and more like it, like a pig"]) and demands that Cadbury pay for blood transfusions for Muslims to replace their now porcine-contaminated blood ("*saya nak Cadbury*

bayar semua orang Islam pergi kepada some research lab tukar darah cuci darah kami” [“I want Cadbury to pay for all Muslims to go to some research lab to have blood transfusions”]) (KiniTV, 27 May 2014).⁸⁶ PPIM (the Malaysian Consumer Association), in a comparatively less extreme statement, called for all of Cadbury’s production facilities to be closed (*New Straits Times*, 28 May 2014).

Then, on 2 June, just over a week after the initial news broke, JAKIM released the results of its own tests that found Cadbury products were free of any porcine-derived ingredients and reinstated the suspended halal certificates (*The Star*, 2 June 2014). Surely such speedy action was intended to reassure consumers and minimize damage to the Cadbury brand; however, it raised an exceedingly bothersome question as well: how was it possible for the Health Ministry to come to one conclusion and JAKIM to come to a different conclusion while both base their claims on the results of laboratory investigations?

The key notion to understanding these events is concern with exposure: anxieties about exposure to impurities; exposing truths about goods through certification processes and genetic essences through laboratory-based procedures; and the unintentional exposure of rifts between government agencies and the fallibility of scientific claims. Exposure assembles together religious convictions, technoscientific knowledge production, bureaucratic governance, along with practices of consumerism, production, marketing, and media. In this section, I want to discuss how the spaces between the assembled components became productive of the unexpected—in these spaces, seemingly inert and staid technoscientific claims became lively and, even, unruly. Social media moved test results outside their native laboratories and interpretative communities. This movement enlivened the results, endowing them with a social

⁸⁶ KiniTV is an online independent and controversial Malaysian news site.

life beyond what their producers intended for them—a *social life* lodged between Arjun Appadurai's (1986) notion—which, again, recognizes that things shift social statuses according to how they are incorporated into our lives—and Bruno Latour's (1988) notion of *actants* as any human or non-human that provokes a response (actants include, for example, both the scientist who adds nutrients to a bacteria colony intending it to grow *and* the bacteria colony that unexpectedly dies causing the scientist distress). The social life of these particular laboratory test results is effected through their jumping from one social context into another, but unlike many shifts in social status, these transformations are neither well-defined nor predictable, rather they are undermining and provocative.

At the center of the chocolate debacle is the role of the halal laboratory. As already described, Malaysia has identified halal as a potential driver of economic growth at least since Abdullah's 2003 announcement about becoming a hub for halal business. An initial challenge for this ambition is that the *quality of being halal* is invisible to consumers—one cannot distinguish between confections that use halal emulsifiers, for example, and those that use porcine-based emulsifiers. The difference is hidden within the production process—hidden physically from the sight of consumers and also hidden by the technical knowledge required to understand the processes. Economists refer to these sorts of invisible, yet desirable characteristics as *credence qualities* (Wolinsky 1995). Credence qualities include any feature of a product for which it is consumed, yet whose presence consumers cannot ascertain through their experience. These include qualities such as *organic*, *green*, or *local*.

Even though such qualities are real, they are intangible, so strategies must be deployed to make them legible to consumers in markets. The most familiar strategy is, of course, branding—the producer tells the consumer that the credence quality is in the product. If the good carries a

certification from a third-party organization, usually in the form of logo, the customer can be even more confident that the quality, though hidden, is actually present. Certainty—and, therefore, value—can be elevated further if the certification is backed-up by laboratory surveillance deployed to detect the presence of the desired characteristic. This, then, is the central task of the halal lab, to scrutinize commonplace goods for characteristics that escape non-specialist understanding and experience of them; that is, to divulge the secrets of our everyday things. In tandem with JAKIM’s certification and labeling schemes, such scientific testing renders halal legible within the market.

As we have already seen, most of what constitutes halal laboratory science diverges little from the laboratory settings and protocols of conventional science; this consistency with standard science practices is part of its legitimacy. However, halal scientists in Malaysia have developed a few innovative pieces of technology that push at the boundaries of what is comfortably regarded as standard science. IPPH, for example, developed a portable porcine-DNA detection unit that requires little expertise to operate—a sample is inserted into the machine and, after an hour, the results are shown on the unit’s screen. Similarly, the halal institute at International Islamic University Malaysia developed an “electronic nose” for detecting both lard and alcohol. This handheld device works by analyzing the gases that emanate from samples. BioTech, the professional lab that shares recognition with IPPH as being the only two JAKIM panel labs in Malaysia, offers a CSI (contamination scene investigation) service—the pun on the title of the popular TV crime series is intentional. The BioTech team will fully investigate cases in which a product is unexpectedly found not to be halal in order to protect brands’ reputations as well as to bring legal charges in cases of fraud or sabotage.

Even though these more colorfully promoted interventions may be intended to attract general attention, the technology itself and the results produced by it are intended for specialists: scientists and the cadre of religious experts who control certification. So, returning to the debacle involving Cadbury, what we see is laboratory test results jumping boundaries. The intentions of the Department of Health, whatever they were, were interrupted by the unexpected release of their results, through a leak on social media. This put at risk not only the reputation of a huge multinational corporation investing in Malaysia, but also JAKIM and its halal certification scheme. Under such conditions, one might suspect, as several Malaysians I spoke to about the incident did, that the outcome of JAKIM's retest of the products was a foregone conclusion. Yet, the question of the discrepancy between the test results remained. JAKIM provided a couple of explanations: its samples had come directly from Cadbury, not from retailers—so it was possible that the contamination had taken place in the retail setting. Furthermore, JAKIM stressed that it sent its samples to the Department of Chemistry—the only lab authorized to do halal testing for the purposes of certification (Leong 2014).⁸⁷ The Health Department, for its part, explained the delay in releasing its findings as the result of its ongoing investigation (*New Straits Times*, 28 May 2014).

More importantly, however, the real culprit according to JAKIM was not withholding results from the public, the disorganization between government bodies, or questionable processes of certification, but social media. In interviews with JAKIM experts, Malaysians were chastised for circulating news about highly technical matters they did not understand (*New Straits Times*, 28 May 2014 and *Malay Mail*, 20 June 2014). Here, Sabariah Abdullah's demands

⁸⁷ The article does not acknowledge that both IPPH and BioTech are JAKIM panel labs and, therefore, can be used for certification purposes. It is correct, however, that the Department of Chemistry is the primary lab used by JAKIM.

for Cadbury to pay for blood transfusions served as a ready example of overzealousness and ignorance about the intricacies of genetic testing. A spokesperson for the Health Ministry complained that the speed with which social media spread the news of the porcine contamination made it impossible for them to respond sufficiently. A religious expert added further support by admonishing people that extreme and unschooled views were never sanctioned by Islam. The upshot of this line of argument seems to be: these things are better left to experts.

The Cadbury debacle is not the only problematic case to crop up in the quickly developing halal industry, but it is a particularly good example of the intricacies involved in trying to maintain a market based on invisible credence qualities. Such efforts require coordination between divergent epistemic forms (bureaucracy and science) and cooperative consumers. And even then, objects themselves do not always act according to the intentions of the involved parties, even in the relatively small and thoroughly regulated Malaysian context.

Summing-up Halal Science and Halal Laboratories

This chapter investigates science and religion as disparate bases for authority and how they are, though with considerable anxiety, intermeshed in the operation of the scientific halal laboratory. These laboratories, then, become intriguing loci of the territorialization of halal; they help define and fix the category, but not in any straightforward way. Because of the prestige given to science and technology, they are powerful sources of legitimacy—for something to be *made scientific* is to ensure that it has a place in the modern world. However, the process of making halal scientific is to divide its allegiance; it is, after all, already nestled in another set of powerful discourses and practices, that of Islam. Thus, in the process of rendering the category of halal amenable to the practice of science, the category is at once potentially both stabilized and destabilized—

territorialized and deterritorialized. We see this in the misgivings of the scientists: technology has the ability of producing pork-free bacon but does such a product encourage Muslims to approach what is forbidden? And what if products that are forbidden (such as fish raised on porcine-based feed) are scientifically shown to be superior to halal alternatives? Do such findings pose a challenge to the presumed wisdom, and ultimately the authority, of Islamic prescriptions?

Though nothing is settled about the relationship between science and religion in regard to halal, the impetus to produce scientific findings about halal continues—driven by the demands of a market bent on developing ways of marketizing halal as a credence quality. While these findings are produced for one reason, the second part of the chapter considers a case in which such findings slip into different social contexts—ones outside the control of the halal experts—and end up serving very different purposes. What was intended to ensure the smooth functioning of market exchanges gums them up instead, and, if only in a small way, calls into question the authority of halal experts and the reliability of scientific findings generally.

Whereas in the previous chapter, bureaucratization appeared to be a fairly complete process, the relationship between halal and technoscience remains messier, less fixed, and less decided. While science is a powerful way of territorializing halal, the undecided nature of its configuration with Islam renders it unpredictable.

Commercialization: Producing More Halal

In her description of work in Malaysia's Islamic economy, Patricia Sloane-White offers a characterization of the Islamic workplace (2011:308-309 and 2017:71 & 75-76). The notion of the Islamic workplace, of course, extends beyond a business that merely employs Muslims. Rather, it is a workplace in which the leaders strive to create a culture that corresponds to syariah principles. One of the directors she spoke with, in fact, claimed to run his corporation "like 'a small Islamic state'" (2011:307). Islamic corporations not only avoid such obviously haram elements as dealing in interest, but also strive to inculcate religious values and demand ethical behaviors that conform to syariah. Toward that end, the Islamic workplace is governed by syariah-based codes and rules by which employees are expected to abide (2017:71). The intention of the Islamic corporation and the Islamic workplace it encompasses, then, is not merely to be profitable or produce a valuable product, but also, in the words of one of Sloane-White's interlocutors, "to produc[e] 'more of Islam'" (2011:306; also 2017:5).

Here Sloane-White is taking a step beyond what Daromir Rudnycky (2010) claimed in his study of an Indonesian steel company's adoption of ESQ (Emotional Spiritual Quotient) training for its employees. This training was intended to inculcate workers with Islamic values because such values are "conducive to the goal of reorganizing the company according to a strictly market rationality" (2010:21). In other words, training employees to be good Muslims makes good business sense. Sloane-White's interlocutor, however, regards the machinery of the corporate workplace as a means of producing a society more aligned with Islam; that is, they envision using business to bolster Islam rather than Islam to bolster business.

I was intrigued with Sloane-White's and Rudnyckyj's descriptions of the Islamic workplaces they encountered. One of the reasons is because they do not coincide with what I have observed in the halal industry. While perhaps HDC and JAKIM resemble these descriptions of workplaces ordered by Islamic discipline (Hannah, the application auditor at JAKIM, did praise the strongly religious atmosphere at JAKIM), the commercial firms I am familiar with appeared quite different. In fact, in 2008, one of the first times I met Nurdeng, this KasehDia researcher asked me:

If you saw me walking in Manhattan, would you know I worked in the halal? No, I could be a banker on Wall Street or a businessman. We don't wear long beards, some of the women cover their heads but it is very professional.

Nurdeng stressed—even took pride in—the fact that KasehDia was indistinguishable from firms not related to halal or Islam. Similarly, Sarah, another professional in the halal industry who I have known for several years, confided in me that she was going to wait until she was forty before she became *alim* (pious). So, while there are certainly some very religious people in the halal industry—indeed, in the context of the same conversation, Sarah said that she thought most of her co-workers were quite religious—it would be inaccurate to say that workplace culture is generally religious. This is not to challenge Rudnyckyj's or Sloane-White's observations (Sloane-White is explicit that Islamic workplaces she describes represent only a small percentage of workplaces in Malaysia), but to note that, contra to what may be expected, the halal-focused firms described in this chapter are not Islamic workplaces in the above sense.

Sloane-White's observation that producing “more Islam” is a fundamental aim of these corporations, just as essential as being profitable, is more resonant with my experience in the halal industry. In fact, it contains an insight that is useful for distinguishing between different types of firms in the halal industry. To see this, it is necessary to go back to the 2008 comment

made by the KasehDia executive that KasehDia “wanted to get everyone to realize that they are part of a whole halal supply chain, a whole value chain that had things in common that made them a market, that made them an industry.” While KasehDia was struggling to get this set of manufacturers and producers to recognize their identity as an industry, KasehDia itself became a new sort of firm within that industry. It did not produce halal sausages, like Prima, halal nuggets, like Ayamas, or halal toothpaste, like Colgate. Rather, KasehDia was in the business of *producing more halal*, by increasing awareness through the *Halal Journal*, the World Halal Forum, by compiling research, and serving as a consultant with private firms and government agencies. Other enterprises soon appeared and occupied the same niche, several of them directly related to KasehDia.

This chapter, then, investigates halal commercial firms. However, the focus is on those that are involved with *producing halal* rather than those that *produce halal goods*. These industry-focused firms are central to the commercial territorialization of halal. I focus particularly on the cluster of firms around KasehDia as well as the influence of Nestle—as one of the first multinational corporations to take halal seriously, it played an important role in the establishment of Malaysia’s certification process and so is very much involved with the production of halal (but also, of course, one of the world’s largest producers of halal goods).

If chapter three was written under the banner of *bureaucratization*, and chapter four under that of *technoscience*, this chapter’s guiding theme is *commercialization*. This notion should be understood as an extension of its near synonym *corporatization*, which has been pursued by a number of scholars in the context of Islam (Lawrence 1998; Siddique 2001; Sloane-White 2011 & 2017; and Peletz 2013, 2015, & 2016). In general, these researchers are interested not only in the proliferation of the corporate-structured businesses in the Muslim

world, but also the increasing dispersion and valorization of corporate culture and practices into other aspects of society. Peletz conceives of corporatization as characterized by the adoption of particular hierarchical social structures, concern with profit, implementation of Taylor-like efficiency, and administrative and managerial norms (2013:614; also 2016:239). He argues that Malaysian Islamic courts increasingly reflect these characteristics. Sloane-White contends that Islamic corporations are not merely business that abide by Islamic law, but rather have become sites that “emplace Islamic norms, ethics, hierarchies, practices, and gendered identities” (2017:5). Thus, one could “see” Islam by observing the goings-on at one of these corporations in much the same way as one could at a mosque or other traditional Islamic institution. While corporatization foregrounds a certain type, maybe even aesthetic, of governance and disciplines of the workplace, commercialization shifts the focus onto what these corporations produce. It is about processes of cultivating something so that it becomes more valuable within markets. One of the most common strategies for such cultivation is brand building—creating a sense of enthusiasm, or associating particular values with a product. To some degree, the enthusiasm around branding in the halal industry has been transferred to *lifestyle marketing* which depends on connecting with consumers through social media. According to this sort of rubric, KasehDia is involved with commercializing halal.

Visiting Nestle

“Don’t you find the talks boring?” Firdaus asked with a smile. I was not sure what to say, I had only met Firdaus a few moments ago while getting some *kue* (sweets) during a break at the 2014 MIHREC (Malaysian International Halal Research and Education Conference). His opening question to me had been, “Are you Muslim?” While I had answered his first question honestly, I

decided to be cagier with the second and replied that I had not yet decided and asked him what he thought. He said he always enjoyed conferences because academics had interesting ideas; however, they did not think enough about how industry could apply them. He was responding to a paper we had just heard about logistics and the benefits of being able track the specific routes of shipments of halal goods as a way of ensuring their integrity—a surveillance technology that appeared to me both cumbersome and of limited utility. I asked him if he worked in the halal industry. He replied that he was the halal operations manager for Nestle. He invited me to visit his office one day, if I would be interested.

Several weeks later that day arrived and I was struggling to find the motorbike parking at the Surian Tower in Mutiara Damansara, the location of Nestle’s Malaysian Headquarters. Finally, I was resigned to illegally parking on the sidewalk—in a line of at least thirty other motorbikes—before hurrying off in an effort not to be late for my meeting with Firdaus. The Nestle lobby was bright and friendly feeling with broad windows along one wall that would have afforded a nice view of Mutiara Damansara from its twenty-second-floor vantage had there not been a nasty haze hanging in the air that week. The receptionist informed me that Firdaus would be a few minutes but invited me to have a beverage from the Nestle automatic beverage machine. I had just finished dispensing a Nescafe when Firdaus appeared and directed me to join him and Zahriah, another staff member of Nestle’s Halal Affairs Department, in a meeting room on the far side of the lobby.

Zahriah teased Firdaus saying that he should tell me the history of Nestle’s halal initiatives since he has been at Nestle since it started. Firdaus laughed but said it was true, he has worked at Nestle for thirty-five years. He recited a history that paralleled HDC’s account of the emergence of halal certification. In the 1970s, there were no authoritative bodies or standards for

halal, so businesses would generally just declare their own products were halal. Nestle, however, was already working with Muslims managers to be certain that the products they were marketing were appropriate for Muslims. In the 1980s, Nestle started forming halal committees consisting of Muslims who “had a good knowledge of Islam” to provide more formal oversight of production. Nestle was the first company to receive halal certification when JAKIM’s predecessor began offering it in 1994. And in 2012, the Halal Affairs Department was established by Nestle with Firdaus as its manager.

Firdaus explained that he did not have any special training in Islam, he started as a production manager at one of Nestle’s factories outside of Kuala Lumpur in 1996. Since he was the only Muslim on the managerial team, he was asked to take responsibility for halal oversight at the facility. At that time, it was not a paid position, but just an extra role he did “out of obligation to the community.” It was not until 2010 that Nestle established specific halal positions within the company.

Zahriah said that her experience was much the same. She was the only Muslim in the research and development department in which she worked, and so was asked to serve as its halal executive, which she did for six years. Before she was asked to serve in the role, Zahriah said that she had no idea that such a thing even existed.

Their main duty as part of Nestle’s halal administration was to thoroughly vet any new material that was proposed for use in products. Firdaus stressed that they did not simply rely on certificates, but rather went to suppliers and reviewed their processes and checked on the sources of *their* inputs. He said that in one case, Nestle sent him to Europe to audit a potential supplier of a chicken-based product. He found that the plant was processing chicken supplied to them by an abattoir in a third country, so he traveled to that country to review their slaughter methods. “We

are very thorough,” he concluded. Zahriah added that with the new world of social media, it was essential that they be thorough, “companies used to be able to contain their information, but now, any mistake or oversight, it will be spread by social media before managers in the company know about it.”

I asked about their relationship with Nestle Global. Was the parent company supportive of these halal initiatives—especially given that their products are marketed all over the world, not just in Muslim-majority countries? Were there concerns about the added cost of this comprehensive oversight? Zahriah said that they had always been supportive; because they are a multinational company, they realize the importance of being sensitive to the cultural norms where they do business. She went on to say that in terms of halal, this was really a boon for Nestle. The middle class in the Muslim world is expected to bloom over the next thirty years and, because Nestle is a trusted halal brand, they will profit from this development, she predicted.

Firdaus explained that it was incorrect to think of their vetting process as additional oversight. These audits are part of what any multinational company does when it is considering a new supplier; the halal component is just an additional step in reviews that would already take place. Regarding Nestle’s brand outside the Muslim world, he said that Islamophobia is a concern for the company—they have to understand the culture in which their products are being sold. So, if Nestle is exporting to a country that is “sensitive about Islam,” they will not put the halal logo on the packaging. Zahriah added, “Muslims will still be able to find it.” They both laughed.

Finally, I asked about Nestle’s relationship to JAKIM and HDC. Firdaus said that Nestle is a full supporter of these agencies. It is always willing to support their events by providing

speakers or any assistance that they can. Nestle actually developed its own halal guidelines in 1997 and, according to Firdaus, these guidelines were used by JAKIM to develop the national *MS 1500* halal guidelines. Nestle was also represented on the working group committee for the halal standards; they provided input from the perspective of the industry—*the practical viewpoint*, according to Firdaus.

Zahriah said that part of the reason for their strong relationship with JAKIM is that Nestle puts a lot of effort into working with its suppliers. Thus, JAKIM knows that when one of these companies applies for or renews its certification things will go smoothly. Firdaus added that Nestle co-sponsors a mentoring program with HDC for smaller companies. Nestle shares with them its experience and helps prepare them for becoming suppliers to multinational corporations. He said that HDC and JAKIM really appreciated the interest Nestle takes in improving Malaysian companies. Firdaus explained that, as a Muslim, providing these types of services was part of his obligation to improve the community.

Summing-up the Visit to Nestle

This interview was much more staged than I would have liked—it was clear that Firdaus and Zahriah were going to focus only on the most positive aspects of the halal industry; this type of professionalism and brand control is, of course, part of successful commercialization. Still, a few things drew my attention. First, the intensity of the oversight inherent in the relationship between Nestle and its suppliers is astounding. Suppliers must demonstrate compliance not only with JAKIM's standards, but also with Nestle's guidelines as they are subjected to nearly duplicate audit processes. I think Zahriah's comment that this is, in part, due to the intense pressure companies feel to protect their brand given the unruly workings of social media, is also

revealing. However, perhaps more importantly, the interview makes clear the long history of industry involvement in halal, at least from Nestle. The sorts of internal oversights JAKIM is now requiring for certification were already in place at Nestle; in fact, Nestle's own guidelines influenced the production of Malaysia's standards. Now both Nestle and Malaysia's halal agencies are engaged in the intense cultivation of smaller enterprises. What became clear during this interview is the considerable role industry has played not only in the productive aspects of Malaysia's halal industry, but also the shaping of the halal ecosystem.

The KasehDia Cluster

KasehDia has already been mentioned several times in this dissertation. In part, this is because when I first came to Malaysia in 2007 and 2008, they were everywhere in industry. *The Halal Journal*, the trade magazine published by KasehDia, was a common sight at halal events. They had access to the major players on both the industry side of halal—like Nestle and Ayamas—and the regulatory side—like HDC and even the prime minister's office. KasehDia's name, then, seemed synonymous with the rise of the halal industry. The other reason for my frequent references to KasehDia is that this enterprise served as my introduction to the Malaysian halal industry. The people who worked there continue to be among the most informed people about the industry.

For reasons that will be discussed in Part 2 of the dissertation, KasehDia has receded from the halal industry landscape and a core group of its employees is working on a new business concept that takes a different tack on halal sensibilities. However, when I arrived at KasehDia in 2008, for an interview with Amir, one of its founders, the business occupied two offices in Desa Sri Hartamas, a wealthy township on the western periphery of Kuala Lumpur. I

met with Amir in the general work area of their office. It was a comfortable space, but not at all fancy. It appeared very utilitarian—various workstations piled with papers interspersed with sitting areas. Despite this, there were only a few people in the office. Amir explained that it was not usually so quiet, but because they had just finished the World Halal Forum everyone wanted a break, so they were on leave. Between the two offices, KasehDia employed forty people—writers, researchers and support staff.

According to Amir, KasehDia had started as a media company interested in Muslim-focused businesses. It started by publishing the *Halal Food* city guidebooks, but then became more interested in the companies that were supplying food to the restaurants in the guide. This led to the idea for *Halal Journal* “which is a business about the business of the halal industry” he suggested jokingly. They were surprised and energized by the interest the halal industry professionals showed in the journal. So, they developed the idea of the World Halal Forum as a way for people all over the world who are connected by the trade in halal goods to meet in person. The 2008 forum that had finished a few days before my interview with Amir drew almost 1200 participants from 57 countries; Amir suggested, modestly, that it had been a success. Since they had started the Halal Journal, KasehDia was collecting a great deal of data and had access to people, organizations, and businesses, all over the world, so they were also functioning a research firm.

Ultimately, he concluded that he did not know exactly what sort of business they were at that point; their aim was “just to implement good ideas.” I asked if that meant they were interested in expanding outside of halal. Amir responded, the firms and enterprises with which they work “need to be in line...they need to be halal in nature in the sense that we’re not going to do anything that is not halal, but it doesn’t mean we need to be constrained by halal.”

I asked Amir about their relationship with HDC. He said that HDC was an important client and he praised the transfer of certification to HDC (certification would, of course, be transferred back to JAKIM a year later). JAKIM was too governmental, he suggested, it was just not flexible enough to work well with the industry. He trusted that HDC would be more responsive. However, he stressed, KasehDia was completely independent of either HDC or JAKIM; these government agencies were primarily committed to the Malaysian halal industry and, while KasehDia was happy to work with Malaysian firms, it was not solely committed to Malaysia.

Along with expanding its own business models, KasehDia had also become something of an incubator for halal-focused enterprises. In 2008, it housed two additional start-ups. The first was IHI (International Halal Integrity) Alliance. Just as I was finishing my meeting with Amir, Darus, part of IHI's management team, was leaving for lunch and invited me along.

Over lunch, Darus described IHI as “a limited by guarantee venture, it's a shell, a two-dollar company.” The idea for the alliance had come from the first two World Halal Forums which had involved a good deal of quarrelling about standards (frankly, that was true of the 2015 World Halal Conference as well). The idea behind the alliance was to adopt the best standards; the ones that impelled the broadest agreement among the various certifying bodies. Interested certifiers could then join IHI and co-brand goods with both their own halal logo and that of IHI—the idea being that IHI's logo would be widely recognized, so manufacturers would be more likely work with certifiers that belonged to IHI because their products would be recognized as halal in global markets.

While IHI was domiciled in Malaysia and had just received a 15 million ringgit (nearly US\$ 4 million) grant from the Malaysian government (still under the halal industry-friendly

Abdullah administration), IHI was struggling to de-provincialize itself from the Malaysian halal industry. Darus explained that the grant from Malaysia was meant to encourage other governments to support the initiative, not to tie IHI to Malaysia. As part of its effort to underscore its independence, Sheikh Saleh Kamel was named IHI's chairman in a special announcement at the World Halal Forum. Saleh Kamel is both Arab and a Saudi national, therefore, eminently Muslim; he is also the chairman of ICCI (the Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Industry) and one of the top thousand richest people in the world (Forbes 2016). This aura of piety, Islamic cosmopolitanism, and business acumen was intended to inspire confidence in IHI and offset its Malaysian origins. I will consider the dwindling influence of IHI along with that of KasehDia in the second part of the dissertation.

The third firm domiciled in KasehDia's office was Askar Financial, a private equity firm founded by several people connected to KasehDia. Sarah, the halal-industry professional mentioned above, followed its progress. She explained the rationale of the enterprise thus: "there's a lot of money in the Middle East—it all needs to get invested somewhere and wherever it goes has to be halal, syariah-compliant." However, after a year the project was abandoned because it was unable to draw interest or raise significant funds. While Darus felt that the managerial team lacked the right composition—"investors are drawn to big personalities or established firms; [Askar] didn't have either one—they just didn't have enough people with private equity backgrounds"—Sarah suggested that investors are just more interested in profitability and syariah compliance is only a secondary concern.

Perhaps the most interesting thing about Askar is that one of its team members, Rushdi, has gone on to form another halal-related enterprise, Zilzar. In many respects, Zilzar has filled the space left by KasehDia's retreat. Zilzar's name, for example, appears as a co-sponsor at halal

and Islamic-economy focused events. But Zilzar's presence in the ecosystem is made even more tangible by Rushdi's frequent appearances as a speaker and member of panels—he is a talented presenter. Several other members of Zilzar's management team are also quite talented public speakers and help make Zilzar's presence felt at industry events.

In February of 2015, I made my way to the rather posh office of Zilzar in central Kuala Lumpur—I describe this office in Chapter 2. This upscale suite of offices is one way in which the enterprise does not resemble KasehDia. I met with three members of Zilzar's management team: Raj from digital marketing, Jess from trade development, and Syukri from compliance. They explained that Zilzar is an online marketing platform for halal goods; it will become, they hope, the halal equivalent of the Chinese online retailing behemoth, Alibaba. When it is completed, the platform will have three parts. The first is a section for business to business trades. This was the part that they were working on most intently at the time of the interview because it is the backbone of their whole business. They were frustrated that they could not make faster progress.

Jess, for example, was trying to get halal certifiers to register accounts. Once registered, businesses that have received certification from these organizations can verify for potential buyers that their certificates are legitimate and current. Zilzar, therefore, does not need to negotiate the controversial grounds around standards. Any certifying body can register (with some oversight); buyers determine whether the certifier's values match their convictions. However, according to Jess, certifiers were very hesitant to register. They seemed to think that registering in the same system as other certifiers who do not share their standards would somehow downgrade their own status. At the time of the discussion, it was still very much a work in progress.

The planned second part of the site is for business to consumer trades. This part of the site was still in development but would give consumers the same options of verifying sellers' halal certificates. The third part of the site is Zilzar Life, a "Muslim lifestyle portal." When I admitted that I was not sure what "Muslim lifestyle" meant, Raj was visibly annoyed. He said that it was a way of generating business opportunities by drawing on the way people represent themselves in social media. I asked if that meant they were collecting data on people from their profiles, comments, and such. He said that was part of it, but for now it was intended to create buzz for the platform—to give people a reason to come to the site. Zilzar Life features essays and news about different consumer activities Muslims might be interested in, such as halal food, modest fashion, and halal travel. Many of the pieces are written specifically for the site—not recirculating other sites. A section of the page is for people who want to submit pieces of writing for the site. Based on my visits to the website, it is updated fairly regularly and there is some activity in the comments sections for stories, but it does not appear particularly energetic.

Finally, I asked how Zilzar is intended to make revenue. Syukri explained that they would eventually draw commission on trades. However, trades could not yet be completed on the site, rather buyers and sellers were meeting on the site and then completing the trade offline. At the time of the meeting, then, the main sources of revenue for Zilzar were subscriptions and advertising. They all admitted that they were frustrated with the slow start of the site—they started working on it in 2013 and had an international launch (attended by then-Prime Minister Najib) in October 2014, and a Malaysian launch in December 2014, but the site was not fully functioning even several months later.

Summing-up Commercializing Halal

This chapter documents some of the strategies firms in Malaysia have deployed in efforts to commercialize halal. While they have met with considerable successes—the World Halal Forum and Zilzar’s recognizability at industry events stand out as examples—this success has been uneven. Halal commodities—frozen chicken patties, non-pig leather handbags, or porcine-free stir-fry sauces, for example—remain among the most durable territorializations of halal; halal brands and lifestyles have shown themselves to be far more fragile. If Zilzar is successful at achieving even a fraction of the recognition that Alibaba demands, it will become a powerful mode in which people interact with halal. But at this point, that recognition is less than certain.

The intention of Part 1 has been to provide an account about how the ordinary social processes of bureaucratization, technoscientific interventions, and commercialization, function to make the category of halal real—to bring it into the world. This *presenting* is achieved through territorializations, such as the creation and enforcement of standards, subjecting would-be halal components to laboratory analyses, and the promotion of particular brands and notions of lifestyle. However, these processes are rocky and their effectiveness is not guaranteed. Sometimes success of the territorialization is limited because of competition—such as that between JAKIM and HDC—other times because of the wiliness of the things themselves—such as scientific findings being circulated and interpreted through social media. These sorts of contestations are also part of the assemblage and reaffirm its changeability.

I have argued that these territorializations are not aimless or random, rather they are intent on orienting halal toward the market. This process of marketization makes halal legible within the market. That is, it makes halal extractable from and deployable within a multitude of

contexts. A fully marketized halal would be just as recognizable in a Malaysian hypermarket as it would in a midwestern US farmers market. In the next part of the dissertation I explore how this marketized halal appears in Malaysian foodscapes as well as its ethical implications as it sets limits for the sorts of projects that can be pursued by halal-industry professionals.

Part 2

Ethics

Halal Foodscapes

On 24 September 2016, the following *Malay Mail* article was linked to a friend's Facebook page: "New Halal Logo Only for Muslim-Made Products". The article explained that the label, intended to certify that a given product was made by a Muslim-owned company, would be issued by a Malaysian Islamic NGO, IKIAM (Malaysian Institute of International Islamic Cooperation) with assistance from a federal agency, RISDA (Rubber Industry Smallholders Development Authority). RISDA's involvement with the initiative is undoubtedly linked to the fact that Zahidi Zainul Abidin serves as the chairperson for both IKIAM and RISDA. According to the article, IKIAM was in fact proposing two labels: the first is for products or companies that have JAKIM halal certification but also want recognition as being Muslim-owned enterprises; the second is for Muslim-owned firms that are not (yet) JAKIM-certified but may still benefit from being recognized as Muslim businesses. In another *Malay Mail* story (29 September 2016), Zahidi claimed that goods produced by Muslims are in demand because they are seen as "cleaner and better and of higher quality" by both Muslims and non-Muslims. Furthermore, he explained that some Muslims regard goods produced by non-Muslims as *mashbooh* (doubtful) because they are uncertain whether non-Muslims sufficiently understand halal, even if their firms and products are certified. According to this rationale, then, the IKIAM-labeling scheme has the potential to benefit small enterprises that face difficulties meeting JAKIM's criteria for halal certification.

Sarah, the friend—and veteran halal-industry professional—who had linked the article to her post reacted to it, writing: it is increasingly difficult for small Malay businesses "to compete

if you don't meet international standards, not just halal. Issuing another cert for Muslim producers won't solve anything other than create even more confusion for the consumer. It saddens me that our halal industry hasn't moved anywhere since 2006 [the year of the first World Halal Forum]." In an online chat with Sarah, she explained to me that the proposed IKIAM label is symptomatic of the same problem that had caused KasehDia to withdraw from the industry; people are too caught up in strictness of halal regulation—racing for the most restrictive standards. In her view, the industry should work with the standards it has—which are clear and strong in Malaysia—and focus on becoming more competitive and creating better products.

Sarah was not alone in her criticism of the proposed label. Several days after the announcement, in his own Facebook post (reported in *The Star*, 27 September 2016), JAKIM Director General Othman Mustapha wrote that the 2011 Trade Descriptions Act stipulated that JAKIM is Malaysia's only "recognized authority" regarding issues of halal certification, and, that without JAKIM's permission, issuance of other halal-related certificates is illegal. In the same *Star* article, other Islamic NGOs are cited as critical of the proposed label because it would provide an opening for each government agency to pursue specialized halal labeling. The Consumer Association of Penang, for instance, complained that the proposed label revealed that RISDA was overly focused on issues related to Islam while it is supposed to be advocating on behalf of all smallholders.

Degrees of Halal?

I start this part of the dissertation with an example of intensification of halal labeling to highlight a fissure in the understanding of halal. Since starting this research in 2006, interlocutors have

emphasized the fact that halal is singular—there are not different kinds or different degrees of halal. Aileen, the Chicago-based food activist whose activities are discussed in the introduction of the dissertation, for example, once cautioned me against distinguishing between *industrial* and *non-industrial halal*. “God determines what is halal and what is not,” she insisted, “it is the same in the factory or in our homes.” Similarly, while discussing different countries’ standards for halal, Rizal, the industry researcher, remarked that it is frustrating that standards vary so much when “halal itself is fixed and clear.” Yet, at the 2015 World Halal Conference, a speaker talking about an imagined product that was grown on a halal-certified farm, processed in a halal-certified manufacturing plant, purchased by a Muslim household from a halal-certified shop, and moved between these locations by halal-certified transporters, as 100% halal.

Notions of degrees or types of halal are more difficult to dismiss than it may at first seem. It could, for example, be assumed that by “100% halal” the speaker was not referring to the extent of the product’s halal-ness, but the degree of certainty the consumer experiences. This approach of epistemologizing talk of halal degrees, however, does not work in all cases. In the review of the Quranic treatment of halal in chapter 2, for example, we saw that the foods of the people of the book (Jews and Christians) is permissible to Muslims, yet I noted that there is considerable hesitancy to eat food that is not prepared by Muslims (and JAKIM does not certify food produced by, say, kosher manufacturers). While some of this hesitancy may have to do with uncertainty about whether non-Muslims practices are sufficiently similar to those of Muslims or, in cases such as Nestle or Cadbury, in which non-Muslims specifically follow halal guidelines, whether they may not sufficiently understand these guidelines, it is also grounded in the conviction that something produced by Muslims is just *more* halal than something that is

produced by non-Muslims. This latter conviction is captured perfectly in the logic of the proposed Muslim-made label.

This chapter explores notions of certainty about and degrees of halal-ness through the optic of *foodscapes*. By the means of this optic, I intend to capture the ways in which people in Kuala Lumpur encounter the food that they eat—that is, the tangle of eateries and food stores that appear on Kuala Lumpur’s cityscape. Of particular interest is, of course, how halal appears (or how its absence is made evident) within that foodscape. This optic allows us to understand the varied ways in which my interlocutors interact with halal in their urban environs.

Foodscape is derived from series of terms introduced by Arjun Appadurai which include *ethnoscape*, *mediascape*, *technoscape*, *financescape*, and *ideoscape* (1996:33). For Appadurai these scapes are ways of conceptualizing the varied modes of globalization involving the flow of people, images, machines and techniques, value, and ideas. Just as a landscape provides a frame for perceiving the movement of things, the notion of a mediascape, for example, frames and renders identifiable the movement of images (similarly, while a landscape is constituted by a parcel of space seen as a fore-, mid-, and background, the mediascape consists of various electronic and paper platforms that facilitate the movement of images). For Appadurai such scapes serve primarily as a means of gauging global flows of various types, but for purposes here it is important to recognize that scapes are useful in that regard just because they delineate the actual fields within which these flows occur. Thus, if we want, for example, to understand flows of images, we must attend to the contexts and practices in which they are created, circulated, and appreciated. In short, analysis of a mediascape (or any other scape) involves understanding how an image is *territorialized* (how something is made present in reality; how it comes to occupy a particular territory). However, it seems to me that the notion of scape goes beyond reference to

territorialization and, by the emphasizing the visual—how a particular phenomenon or set of things *is seen*—underscores the apprehension of a particular mode of a thing’s manifestation—how it is encountered.

By focusing on foodscapes, I hope to achieve two things. The first, and main focus of this chapter, is to shift attention from the halal ecosystem—that is, the production of the category of halal—to how it is encountered or appreciated. I write of *appreciation* rather than *consumption* to keep the focus somewhat broader than the overly economic dyad of *production* and *consumption*.⁸⁸ I have in mind something like arts appreciation—a type of consumption that intertwines apprehending a thing as well as understanding or reflecting on it. Appreciation requires, or at least allows, a more sustained and varied interaction than is characteristic of most acts of consumption. This complexity is important because, although my interlocutors sometimes expended considerable effort to locate halal products and verify their halal-ness, at other times they assumed a thing was halal or seemed altogether unconcerned about it. This variability, I argue, reflects the various ways in which foodscapes are appreciated among my interlocutors.

Foodscapes are also the idiom through which the ontological is connected to the ethical—they are the *social field* in which deliberation takes place. In this regard, scapes are to be understood not merely as presentations of reality, things only to be apprehended, but they are also contexts in which action can be undertaken. That is, they are not only seen, like oil-paint renderings of landscapes but entered into like arenas—*social fields*. We will recall that these are not empty fields open to free play; they have typography establishing valorized aims, rules, limits and conditions—the imperatives of the contest at hand, whatever it may be (Bourdieu &

⁸⁸ It ought to be borne in mind that distinctions between *territorialization* and *appreciation* or *production* and *consumption* is easily overstated. A work of art, for example, is further territorialized through its appreciations such as reviews that appear in newspapers. It is equally as obvious that in acts of production certain resources (inputs) are consumed.

Wacquant 1992:98-100; see also Bourdieu 1993). Appadurai too recognizes that scapes are both apprehended and also inhabited as “fields of possibility” (1996:31): “these landscapes are eventually navigated by agents who...[have]...their own sense of what these landscapes offer” (1996:33).

The broader point here is that, as contexts for action, scapes have a distinctly ethical dimension. It is useful to recall that *ethical* is a slippery term with multiple senses that are easily conflated (Lambek 2010:9). Among the more obvious are *ethical* in the sense of *deserving praise* (think: “returning the money is the ethical thing to do”) and *ethical* in reference to a condition, situation, or action that is amendable to or demanding of explicitly normative adjudication—it is right or wrong, good or bad—(“whether or not to euthanize an animal is an ethical problem”). While such normative evaluations are clearly ethical, deliberation regarding other types of situations concerning *what ought to be done* sometimes escapes recognition as ethical. Consider questions about what to major in at university, whether to invest time in a career or instead travel, or whether to sleep in late or get up and write. Such choices cannot be evaluated straightforwardly as right or wrong, yet we reflect on them and (often) resolve to undertake some course of action in relation to them. This, then, is the domain of ethics as *practical reason*—reasoning that leads to action (Wallace 2014). Any sort of deliberative action—action that is chosen—is the result of practical reason: everything from deciding to embark on a long-term life project to choosing to purchase one type of toothpaste over another. What keeps these choices in the sphere of ethical is that they are concerned with pursuing the good—however that is defined (productive of thriving, compliance with duty, resulting in the greatest overall happiness, or something else); one alternative is chosen over the others as *being better*.

So, it is this sense of *ethical* that the second part of the dissertation is concerned with. In this chapter, I explore what the foodscapes of Kuala Lumpur look like and how my interlocutors appreciate, engage and negotiate them.

Foodscapes and Halalscapes

It may be surprising that I have chosen to pursue *foodscapes* rather than something like *halalscapes*. It is, after all, true that the range of domains and products that are under the purview of judgments about halal-ness extends beyond that of food. Banking and finance, for example, are identified in Malaysia⁸⁹ as being halal (or Islamic or syariah compliant) or not. Halal designations, and their near synonyms, are increasingly regarded as relevant to a range of other commercial sectors as well: health care, logistics (shipping), and tourism prominent among them. But even within the more limited sphere of halal products there is a seemingly ever-increasing range of goods: cosmetics (such as Zahara's water-permeable fingernail polish intended to be compatible with ritual ablutions), personal care products such as toothpaste, deodorant and hair products (such as Sunsilk's Fresh and Clean shampoo which is advertised as formulated for the needs of hijab-wearing women), as well as goods such as leather products—particularly shoes and handbags which could come from pigs or animals that have not been slaughtered according to syariah procedures. Among the more surprising halal products I have encountered are speed-dating services and a men's cologne (many regard the wearing of scents by women—at least in public—as not permissible) that has shavings of meteorite in it and claims to keep away bothersome spirits. So, given this broad range of products, why focus narrowly on food?

⁸⁹ Again, while Malaysia has been a global leader in halal industry and Islamic finance, such enterprises are in no sense limited to Malaysia. Both Turkey and Dubai have, for example, expressed ambitions to be centers of the global Islamic economy—a catch all term meant to include both halal industries and Islamic finance.

The first reason is, as mentioned in previous chapters, one of salience— notions of halal are deeply imbricated in the foodways of many Muslim communities. As will be recalled from Chapter 2, dietary matters (along with ritual observance and family relations) fall within the rubric of halal and haram in the Qur'an itself (Lowry 2003:172 & 174), so it is of little surprise that foodways continue to be a primary locus of halal concerns. This emphasis on food is also reflected and further reinforced by the recent creation of industry standards for halal which are primarily concerned with food production and only secondarily with other matters.

The everydayness of foodways also contribute to their salience in concerns about halal; food, unlike issues of lawfulness of marriage partners, is dealt with numerous times a day, thus it is an exceedingly common way in which people interact with notions of halal. So, although judgments about halal are applicable to myriad of things, behaviors, and social arrangements, they are imbricated in none of these as deeply as with foodways.

Yet the more interesting reason for focusing on foodscapes rather than halalscapes is that halal is not only positively signaled within Kuala Lumpur's foodscape, but, at least occasionally, its absence is actively marked as well. This latter type of marking does not only occur to warn Muslim consumers, but also, as we shall see, as a means of promoting certain eateries or products. While such conspicuous signaling of halal's absence is obvious in considering foodscapes, it is, of course, by definition, not part of the halalscape. Furthermore, these negative markings provide a sense of antagonistic and humorous elements characterizing relationships among Kuala Lumpur's ethnically and religiously plural population.

Encountering Kuala Lumpur's Foodscape

A significant shift occurred in the character of my dissertation fieldwork when, about four months after I arrived in Kuala Lumpur in 2014, I moved from Bandar Sunway to Kota Damansara. While both of these townships are examples of satellites that collectively constitute the Greater Kuala Lumpur area that has emerged during the past thirty years, the social networks I encountered in these two communities were quite different from one another. In Sunway I lived in a large complex (more than three-thousand units) of low-rent flats—many of which, like the one I rented, are owned by Chinese Malaysians and rented to migrant workers from Africa and South Asia as well as to students who attend the private colleges located in Sunway.⁹⁰ My neighbors, for example, included migrant workers from Mali and Nigeria, an older Indian woman who was supported by her children, and a newly-married couple—a Malay woman and Nigerian man, both in their mid-thirties. While I was usually the sole occupant of my flat, the owner had offered me a discount so her daughter, an artist, could occasionally stay there with her team of mural painters when they had contracts nearby, so I occasionally shared the space with four recent art-school graduates—two of whom were Chinese, one Indian, and one Malay.⁹¹

While the apartment complex where I stayed was clearly lower-income, Sunway, outside the grounds of this complex, has a very middle-class—even affluent—character. In addition to the private colleges, Sunway is also home to Sunway Pyramid, an Egyptian-themed luxury shopping mall and theme park (with an ice-skating rink), as well as a large medical center. Terraced housing—a type of ten- to twelve-unit row housing in which units share sidewalls but have front and back yards—is common in Sunway, as are standalone bungalows. These

⁹⁰ Because of public university quota systems in Malaysia, the enrollment in private colleges is majority non-Malay.

⁹¹ In the cities of Penang and Ipoh, murals have become an attraction. Some of these mural artists are even regarded as celebrities. This trend has caught on in Kuala Lumpur and teams of young “graffiti artists” are hired to paint bars, coffee shops and eateries interested in cultivating a hip appearance.

contribute to Sunway's middle-class character (see Fischer 2008, particularly Chapter 4, on Malaysian housing styles and class). But even much of the condominium-style housing, the complex where I lived excepted, tends toward affluence—the flats across the street from my complex, for example, fronted a controlled-access lake, that, despite its small size, was home to several luxury boats.

The owner of the flat I rented pointed out that property in Sunway is mostly owned by non-Malays—particularly Chinese. The Muslims living in my complex were mostly non-Malaysian and had to make a nearly one mile walk to the nearest mosque (across a busy overpass of a major expressway) for Friday prayers. The main mosque in Sunway is across from Sunway Pyramid mall and is, again, separated from it by a busy expressway. Malay friends who visited me in Sunway commented about the non-Malay character of Sunway as well, saying—particularly of the complex—that, with all its non-Malaysian tenants, it seemed like it was not in Malaysia at all. The subtext of these comments becomes unmistakable when connected to advice from my Malay neighbor: “there are so many [migrant] workers here, be careful walking home.” Though, happily, I never had any negative encounters.

Even though I already knew a number of people in Malaysia when I arrived, while I was living in Sunway, I spent a considerable amount of time alone—including eating at the row of simple restaurants and stalls that serve the housing complex. Though this allowed me to explore these eateries without concern about dietary restrictions and preferences, I learned little about how such foodscapes are navigated—beyond learning to navigate them myself. This changed when I rented a room in a terrace house in Kota Damansara. Zikri, a self-employed baker, co-owns the house with his older sister. However, because of the location of his sister's work, she lives in a flat closer to central Kuala Lumpur with her husband and children. So, Zikri stays in

the house by himself and uses the kitchen for his baking business, producing French-style cakes and confections for weddings, birthdays, corporate events as well as a few restaurant and coffee shop accounts. When I moved into the house in December 2014, Zikri was just finishing remodeling the kitchen in what he called a modern industrial style—cement floors and countertops with sleek black or stainless-steel appliances—a look popular in Kuala Lumpur’s trendy eateries. No doubt, part of the reason that Zikri was looking for a tenant was to offset the cost of this renovation.

Unlike the housing complex in Sunway, the section of Kota Damansara in which I lived had a much more affluent character.⁹² The section is divided into 6 distinct neighborhoods each with a guarded gate. Two of these neighborhoods consist of terraced housing. Three of the others are of semi-detached houses (each house shares one wall with another and has an open yard on three sides)—these are more expensive than terraced houses. The final section consists of bungalows, many of which have their own guards and swimming pools. There is also a park with a small pond surrounded by a paved walkway and exercise equipment, a public primary school which serves students from this section as well as those living in nearby sections of Kota Damansara, and a *surau* (prayer house) that, about a month after I moved to the section, was upgraded to a full mosque so that it could host Friday prayers. The majority of the twenty-seven households on the street where Zikri lives are Malay—only two are Chinese. Walking around the whole neighborhood of approximately ninety houses, Zikri was only able to identify fourteen of them as Chinese-owned and one as Indian-owned.⁹³ Part of the reason for the preponderance of Malay households is a quota system that set aside many of the properties for bumiputras as well

⁹² “Section” (in Malay *seksyen*) is a formal division within a township—Kota Damansara consists of thirteen such sections.

⁹³ Development of the neighborhood was only completed a few years ago and Zikri was one of its first inhabitants, moving in in 2006, so he knows many of his neighbors.

as financial incentives for bumiputra investment in housing—it is for these reasons that Zikri and his sister were able to purchase a house in Kota Damansara.

Over the eleven months I lived in Kota Damansara, I ate most meals with Zikri, his circle of friends and, less often, his brother or sister and their families. I also did a great deal of shopping, both for groceries and for baking supplies, with Zikri. And I regularly assisted with delivering orders to restaurants and coffeeshops—deliveries that often involved eating at the place being delivered to. Thus, I became quite familiar with a particular swath of eateries—some quite trendy, others much more modest—through my daily activities while living in Kota Damansara.

Living in Sunway during the first months of my fieldwork, I was already beginning to develop a notion of foodscapes. The initial insight came from Rizal, the halal industry researcher mentioned previously, whom I met for lunch shortly after I arrived in Kuala Lumpur to begin my dissertation research. We met at a *Mamak* restaurant, a type of 24-hour Indian Muslim eatery ubiquitous and exceptionally popular in Malaysia, and I remarked that, like *nasi lemak* (rice made with coconut milk which is often regarded as Malaysia's national dish), everyone in Malaysia seems to love Mamak restaurants. Rizal replied that this was just because Mamak food is cheap and fried, and the drinks always have a lot of sugar in them—these are things that, according to Rizal, all Malaysians like. He went on to say that he was even a little skeptical about whether the food was actually halal because Mamak restaurants seldom have halal certificates. He pointed to the set of certificates and licenses that were, like in most restaurants, posted on the wall behind the cashier station, indicating that there was no halal certificate. Rizal explained that JAKIM halal certification is often regarded as unnecessary in Malaysia. Most of the time Malays do not bother looking for halal certificates, instead they judge whether an eatery

is halal by other indicators such as its appearance and who works there. As I understand it, Rizal was saying that Malaysians had *ways of reading* foodscapes that often that made certification superfluous.

Thus, it was not surprising that in Sunway I never saw Malays in the Chinese-run coffee shop, with its Chinese character signboards and numerous pork dishes, or at the two Chinese-run *kedai runcit* (sundry stores) that sold alcohol. However, it was more surprising when I was told at another kedai runcit, this one run by an Indian Muslim family, that all meat in Malaysia is halal, so there was no need to display certificates. At a larger kedai runcit a few doors down, when I asked the cashier—who was wearing a tudung—whether the fresh meat and chicken were halal, I was shown a halal certificate for a chicken producer that I assume was a supplier of the kedai. The cashier seemed satisfied that this document was enough to establish the shop's halal credentials. It seems that these businesses establish their credibility as purveyors of halal goods, not through bureaucratic processes that result in certification, but by being recognizable as venues appropriate for Muslim consumers—that is, by becoming a recognizable part of the foodscape. This they accomplish through deployment of tropes—such as employing people who are clearly identifiable as Muslim, such as in the case of the larger of the above kedais or playing recordings of Quranic recital and displaying of images of Mecca on the counter behind the cashier station as did the other kedai. With such markers, certification from JAKIM is redundant and represents little more than an extra expense and hassle.

The growth of the Malaysian middle class, however, has seen the marked increase of new types of eateries as well—not only fast food, but American-style casual dining (such as Chili's, TGI Fridays, and Outback Steakhouse as well as similar Malaysian chains such as Secret Recipe, Manhattan Fish Market, and Pappa Rich). Grocery shopping, too, has changed with the

proliferation of super- and hypermarkets such as Tesco, Giant, and Village Grocers along with convenience stores, like Circle K and 7-Eleven, that now compete alongside kedai runcit in many neighborhoods. Because the forms of these establishments are cosmopolitan (they exist in similar form in many cities throughout the world), the tropes used to navigate the foodscape of kedai runcit and food stalls fail to provide much guidance. The appearance of Malay employees at a Starbucks, for instance, tells the potential consumer little about the establishment's process of decision making and who is in a charge of it (a process which, of course, occurs not only at the level of the outlet, but also that of the national region, world region, and global as well) and nothing about the restaurant's supply chain. It is here, within the context of the cosmopolitan foodscape, that JAKIM-issued halal certification becomes important. Yet, we should not be overzealous about the boundary between the local and the cosmopolitan. There are, after all, numerous of crossovers within the foodscape, whether it's a trendy coffee bar, such as one I frequented in Kota Damansara, which serves espresso drinks and churros and, yet, marks itself as Muslim-run by decorating its walls with Latin-script calligraphy images of *bismillah* (a common Islamic blessing) and the holy name Muhammad⁹⁴, or Wendy's offering a special for *buka puasa* (the meal eaten at sunset to break the daily fast during Ramadan).

Living and, importantly, eating with Zikri and those in his social circle gave me an opportunity to observe how people negotiate this bifurcated local/cosmopolitan foodscape as well as its grey intermediary zones. Here I take a cue from Purnima Mankekar who, in *Screening Culture, Viewing Politics* (1999), strives to understand the role of television watching in Indian

⁹⁴ Because creating images of people and animals is regarded by many Muslims as a sinful imitation of that act of creation that rightly belongs solely to God (al-Qaradawi 1994:108), calligraphic decorations of divine names and blessings are common in houses and businesses. These images are most often in Arabic script (there is a long history of Arabic calligraphy). I have only encountered such Latin-script images twice: once at the coffee shop referenced above and once at a housewares expo.

gender politics, in part, by sitting and watching television with families. Eating with people gave me a chance to see how people interact with the category of halal not as idealized consumers or devout Muslims, but in the course of their daily lives. This is not, of course, to imagine that my set of observations are representative of how most Malaysians think about halal. Rather my observations catalog a range of possible interactions with the category of halal. The particularity of these observations is evident, for example, from the backgrounds of those in Zikri's social circle.

While the group of people Zikri and regularly ate with varied considerably night to night, there was a core group of seven people any of whom might show-up on a given night. Of this group, all are Malay, there were three women and four men (though we ate more often with the men than as a mixed group), all were single except one of the women, they ranged in age from early twenties to early forties, most lived in or very near Kota Damansara (though they all had cars or motorbikes and we often met at eateries outside Kota Damansara) and, with the exception of one, all were professionally involved with baking. While Zikri is not particularly religious—he purposely shows up late to *kenduri* (ceremonial feasts celebrating events such as engagements, homecomings, circumcisions, and business openings) in order to miss the requisite prayers, many of his friends (and both his sister and brother) regularly pray (we had to consider prayer times when making plans to meet them). And even though Zikri does not often pray and never, to my knowledge, attended mosque during the time of my fieldwork, he certainly considers himself a Muslim. On two occasions we stayed up late while he explained why he believes Islam is the correct religion and suggested I should consider conversion. Similarly, Zikri fasts during Ramadan and told me he has never eaten pork (though he is quite happy that wine has become increasingly available in Kuala Lumpur).

My observations were, of course, not limited to Zikri's circle of friends. Many of my research interviews, for example, took place over meals or at coffee shops. In addition to these sorts of meetings that, admittedly, were contrived in the sense that they were centered on my research agenda, I also regularly met with Malay and non-Malay acquaintances to socialize over meals more generally. While surely falling short of any formal sense of representativeness, these observations are sufficiently broad to avoid the myopia of mere anecdote and are satisfactory for the present purpose—to show a variety of modes in which people encounter and interact with the category of halal.

Signaling Halal and its Absence

In Chapter 3, I describe the app developed by HDC that suggests halal restaurants near the user based on smart phone location information—an app that no one I knew actually used. For several months I regularly checked the app's recommendations in different locations. The problem with the app quickly became apparent—it consistently pointed to the nearest branches of the same chain restaurants—Pizza Hut, KFC and Secret Recipe seemed to appear most often. While I have eaten at these type of chain restaurants with Malaysians, such restaurants were rarely first choices. For example, one evening, a few weeks after moving to Sunway, a Malay friend suggested we meet at Sunway Pyramid Mall for dinner and a movie. Two of his friends, a couple, had been shopping at the mall and he wanted to introduce me to them. When we met, we had to decide where to eat. None of us, including myself, were familiar with the mall, so we had little idea of our options. While Sunway Pyramid, unlike many malls, does not have a food court, there is a section branded as “Asia Avenue” that features an eclectic group of independent shops, including a collection of eateries along “Eat Street.” We walked through this section, but my

companions seemed hesitant to eat at any of the restaurants there (at the time I was oblivious to its strong Chinese aesthetic—drawing on nostalgic imagery from traditionally Chinese Malaysian cities like Ipoh and Penang). By this point, the couple we were with were clearly annoyed that we could not decide where to eat. My friend finally suggested that we “just go to KFC”—which we did.

This vignette illustrates the lack of enthusiasm for chain restaurants, particularly fast-food restaurants, at least among those with whom I regularly ate. The instance was not the only time I observed this indifference; indeed, it seems to me that the times I did eat at chain restaurants with Malaysians were when we were traveling or in an area we did not know well. This is interesting, I think, because it suggests a reason why something like HDC’s app has little appeal. It generates recommendations based on halal certificates and, because chain restaurants are more likely to be international, professionally managed, and have large operating budgets than independent eateries, they are also more likely to be certified. These recommendations, therefore, are likely to be of limited interest. Furthermore, many chain restaurants, whether international like KFC or regional like Secret Recipe, have done considerable work developing their brands in Malaysia, including promoting their status as halal, so the app offers little additional information in this regard either.

In regard to the notion of foodscape, the above is important because it demonstrates the bifurcation that occurs within the Kuala Lumpur foodscape. The HDC app is biased towards a particular part of the foodscape—that which is most professionalized and congenial to bureaucratic-style oversight. However, in negotiating the halal contours of the foodscape, Malays are only partially, and perhaps not primarily, concerned with this cosmopolitan dimension of the foodscape. Rather, they more often patronize small, often family-run, eateries that are unlikely to

seek halal certification in its current form. The proposed IKIAM-RISDA certification described at the beginning of this chapter recognizes this fact. Using the distinction of Muslim ownership, the proposed certification would formalize recognition of one of features many Malays already use to determine the appropriateness of an eatery. It is also worth recalling, as described in Chapter 2, that in its attempt to map Kuala Lumpur's halal foodscape, KasehDia's guidebook, *Halal Foods*, includes not only eateries that have JAKIM certification, but also those that have at least one Muslim owner. The fact, then, that halal certification is relevant to only part of the foodscape is widely recognized; however, attempts to extend formal recognition of halal to other zones of the foodscape face obvious challenges. Primary among them: it moots the question of degrees of halal. Is a certified Chinese-owned restaurant on equal footing with one that is Malay-owned? Does it matter if the restaurant sources ingredients from Muslim-owned suppliers? Or does an established restaurant that serves cuisine widely-recognized as Malay even need a halal certificate? Would it be "more halal" if it had one? In the remainder of this section I explore how eateries' halal statuses appear, whether officially or informally, within the Kuala Lumpur foodscape.

Certification by JAKIM is among the most widely recognized indicators of halal-ness. In restaurants this certification shows up as a document usually posted behind the cashier station along with establishments' operation licenses and health inspection certificates. The halal certificates themselves—the physical documents—are all produced by the same division of JAKIM's Halal Hub, so they have a standard form. At the top of these certificates is the Malaysian national coat of arms, the name of the standard the document refers to (such as *MS1500:2009*), and the certificate's serial number. Everything on these documents is written first in Malay and then English. "Government of Malaysia" followed by "Certificate of

Authentication” and “HALAL” (in bold face, capitalized font) appear in the midsection of the document. Below this, the name of the actual thing being certified appears. This may be a list of ingredients or food products or it may be the name of the premises in the case of a commercial kitchen, for example. Below the product, the certificate identifies the particular business or firm applying for the certification and states that the applicant is in compliance with both Islamic law and the Malaysian halal standards and that this compliance is recognized by the particular state Islamic authority, such as the State of Kedah’s Department of Islamic Religious Matters, in which the firm is located. Finally, at the bottom of the certificate, JAKIM’s halal logo appears along with a reference number, the dates of issuance and expiration as well as the signature of JAKIM’s director general. Halal certificates, then, invoke Islamic law and Malaysian manufacturing standards as well as the authority of the Malaysian state broadly, the state-based Islamic authorities, and that of JAKIM (again, a department within the Prime Minister’s Office). These certificates are a means of coordinating these disparate, yet overlapping, discourses and bureaucratic authorities to territorialize the category of halal in a visible form within the foodscape.

Ironically perhaps, while I regularly looked for halal certificates at eateries, to my knowledge, none of my dining companions ever checked for such certificates before eating at a particular place—although those familiar with my research did sometimes point them out to me if they happened to notice one. I do not believe that this was because the people I was eating with did not care whether their food was halal or not, but rather that they had picked up on other cues—had read the foodscape without recourse to formal certification. These cues I discuss below.

Some restaurants, perhaps aware that customers are unlikely to look for certification documents hanging on a back wall, promote their JAKIM certification more assertively. McDonald's, for example, in some of its restaurants uses tray liners that feature a large image of a smiling McDonald's employee wearing a tudung head covering along with smaller images of a JAKIM halal certificate (in the form described above), a JAKIM halal logo, someone washing their hands, a very clean-looking stainless steel commercial kitchen, as well as several pictures of iconic McDonald's foods. The text on the liner is all in Malay and declares that McDonald's was the first eatery in Malaysia to be recognized for halal compliance by the Division of Islamic Matters (a predecessor to JAKIM—as described in Chapter 3). It goes on to assure readers that McDonald's food is produced hygienically and in compliance with halal regulations as specified by JAKIM. A web address and scannable QR code for the halal explanation page on McDonald's website appear at the bottom of the liner. While it is difficult to evaluate the effects of such messaging—customers, after all, have already made their purchases by the time they get their trays with the liners, the more narrative style of this type of message may be easier to relate to than the formal declarations of an official certificate. Furthermore, the tray liners are concerned with attesting to the compatibility and cooperation between two organizations—effectively brands—with which customers are likely familiar: McDonald's and JAKIM. Again, this message may be more accessible than a certificate that invokes a range of bureaucratic agencies whose precise functions may not be clear to many.

While halal certification did not appear overly important in navigating the range of eateries that appear in Kuala Lumpur, its role in grocery shopping was more pronounced. On one occasion, for example, Zikri had asked me to pick up a jar of curry sauce, when I arrived home, he asked to see it and carefully examined its label. Concerned, I asked if I had gotten the right

one. He explained that it was fine, he just wanted to make sure it was halal. Similarly, there are two baking stores located not far from Zikri's house. He explained that he preferred one to the other because it only sold halal ingredients—he knew this because one of his friends, also a baker, had told him that was the case. Several months later, having to get some things from the less preferred store because the other was closed, we discovered a list on the wall of the store that listed all the halal certified products they carried—it too was halal.

Most halal grocery products, like the above-mentioned curry sauce, have a JAKIM logo on their label. However, bulk items, like those sold at the bakery—or fresh meat sold from a grocery counter—lack labels, so their halal status is attested to by certificates that may be displayed somewhere around the products similar to those displayed at eateries. Zikri's preference for one shop over the other suggests the ramifications of the limited visibility of such certificates—because he had previously overlooked the halal list posted at one of the shops, Zikri depended on word of mouth to navigate between bakery supply stores. As far as I could tell, Zikri and his baker friend's preference for the one store over the other was the result of friendships they had with employees at the preferred store—this friendliness was translated into the sense that the store was also halal.

The form of JAKIM's halal logo is specified on JAKIM's website (www.halal.gov.my): it consists of an eight-pointed star at the center of a circle with “halal” written in Arabic script at its center and the Romanized equivalent in smaller script directly below the Arabic.⁹⁵ This star is enclosed by a circle and in the boundary between the star and enclosing circle “Malaysia” is written in Roman script above the star and again in Arabic script at the below the star. Two small five-pointed stars separate the Roman and Arabic words in the boundary space. The logo is to be

⁹⁵ <http://www.halal.gov.my/v4/index.php?data=bW9kdWxlcY9uZXdzOzs7Ow==&utama=panduan&ids=gp1>

printed on packages in either black or green ink. Finally, although not officially part of the logo, manufacturers are required to include directly below the logo the name of the standard in reference to which permission to use the logo has been granted, such as *MS 1500:2009*, and the reference number for the certified product.

As the sole “halal authority” in Malaysia, JAKIM certifications are the only halal certifications available to Malaysia-based enterprises. However, because many products are imported, shoppers at grocery stores encounter a range of halal certifications. This is the main reason that JAKIM has put effort into developing their logo and standardizing it—to have value, it must be distinguishable from other logos. At halal related events, such as the World Halal Conference and the World Halal Summit, JAKIM displays banners depicting the difference between its “authentic” halal logo and “false” ones. Some of the false logos are little more than the word halal appearing on the product without any credentials from certifying bodies, some are old forms of logos used in Malaysia or elsewhere, and some are logos from certifying bodies that have not been accredited by JAKIM. I have not seen this effort to “educate” the public about halal logos outside of halal events, so it may not be overly effective.

To confuse matters further JAKIM *has* accredited sixty-seven certifying bodies from forty-one different countries (Halal Hub Division 2017:54). Products that are certified by these non-Malaysian authorities are recognized by JAKIM as halal, though such products’ labeling includes the accredited body’s label, not JAKIM’s. So, shoppers in Malaysia may encounter a broad range of halal logos while shopping—some recognized by JAKIM and others not. When I asked people about if they trust halal labeling, a common response was that if, in good conscientiousness, Muslims seek out and buy halal-labeled products, they fulfill their obligation; if a company mislabels its products, the sin belongs to those responsible in the company, not

their customers. Amirul, the JAKIM auditor featured in Chapter 3, hesitantly agreed with this assessment, though he stressed that Muslims are obligated to try to determine whether a thing is actually halal—they should not just accept any claim. He cited a hadis that instructs Muslims to stay away from *mashbooh* (doubtful) things and treat them as if they are haram.⁹⁶ In any case, while halal certifications may play a larger role in navigating grocery stores than eateries, it is still a knotty field.

JAKIM's certification efforts also transform the appearance of halal within the foodscape in another way. While JAKIM primarily regulates ingredients, they are also concerned with the appearance of products and the ways in which products are promoted. For example, Rizal, the halal researcher, once suggested we meet at an A&W restaurant in Petaling Jaya, a drive-in restaurant that is something of a landmark for the area. When we arrived, Rizal pointed out that they did not serve “root beer floats”, but “RB floats.” He claimed that JAKIM would not certify a product referred to as beer—even if it contained no alcohol. Similarly, I noticed that “Coney dogs,” A&W's signature hotdogs slathered in chili, had been replaced by “beef Coneys” and “chicken Coneys.” These Malaysian variations not only clarify the type of meat used in the sausages and chili topping of these sandwiches, but also removed the confusing reference to dogs—an animal that many Muslims regard as only slightly less dirty than pigs. Rizal seemed to find the transformation of these names amusing.

A similar issue emerged in October of 2016, when Auntie Anne's pretzel outlets in Malaysia announced they would change the name of their “pretzel dog” to “pretzel sausage” in order to comply with JAKIM's conditions for halal certification (*Malay Mail*, 28 November 2016). I first found out about the case through a Facebook post by Sarah, who had also posted

⁹⁶ “That which is lawful is plain and that which is unlawful is plain and between the two are doubtful matters...he who falls into the doubtful matters falls into that which is unlawful” (an-Nawawi 1997:42).

about the proposed IKIAM/RISDA certification described in the introduction to this chapter.

Sarah was quite critical of the mandated name change; she thought it made Malays look unworldly—as if they did not know what hotdogs were. Others’ comments on her post tended to reflect her view, though one did express mild distaste for the image conjured by the name and suggested that “Muslims will be more comfortable ordering sausages...[that] will benefit the stalls.”

Amirul, the JAKIM auditor, told me about another case in which JAKIM objected to the way in which a product was promoted. He worked on a team that audited a Japanese company, Kewpie, that applied for halal certification because it wanted to export its line of mayonnaise-based sauces to Malaysia. One of JAKIM’s conditions for certifying the sauces was that Kewpie change the mascot on its label, a chubby winged cupid with a curl of hair on its head. Amirul said that the image was too close to an angel or spiritual being and could “confuse Muslim consumers.” Kewpie now uses an image of a waving wingless cupid for its products sold in Malaysia—the image could easily be that of a baby.

It is, I think, significant that each of the above cases involves an international company. This highlights one of the principal ways in which JAKIM-certification transforms the Kuala Lumpur foodscapes: by Islamizing the non-Islamic, it domesticates the foreign. It might be recalled that in Chapter 2 I quote a professor at the Islamic University of Malaysia who said, “we [Malays] want to explore new kinds of foods like McDonald’s, but we need to be sure that these are places that are okay for us.” JAKIM, then, is performing a translation-like task by which it simultaneously makes it possible for novel products to appear within the Malaysian foodscape—thus satisfying the new middle-class cravings for the cosmopolitan—and reshapes these products so that they are recognizable to the consuming public as appropriate for consumption. In this

regard, halal functions as a device by which the unfamiliar is sufficiently harmonized with the familiar without losing its aura of otherness.

The above cases are not, of course, merely about introducing foreign products to Muslim consumers. They also illustrate a particular way in which JAKIM endeavors to position halal in the foodscape. In many ways these cases are less about ambitions to increase the overall halal content of the foodscape than to decrease the potential for dissonance between JAKIM certifications and the products they apply to. Oxymoronic formation like “halal beer” and “halal hotdogs” potentially undermine certification by striking consumers as discordant. They interfere with the capacity of the JAKIM’s logo or certificate to thoroughly territorialize halal because they destabilize the logo’s pretention to bureaucratic rationality, scientific precision, and overall professionalism. Yet, we see that by trying to proactively foreclose on these *de*-territorializing effects, JAKIM opens itself up to being criticized as overly zealous and preoccupied with triviality.

While it is likely that in most contexts Malays pay attention to halal labeling and believe that it reliably distinguishes the halal from the haram and the uncertain, on occasions I encountered open suspicion of JAKIM’s competence and the trustworthiness of its logo. The debacle around the laboratory tests of Cadbury chocolate reviewed in Chapter 4 is one example of this type suspicion. However, I also encountered it among the individuals with whom I spoke. One example of JAKIM’s overreach that I heard repeatedly involved a supposed claim by JAKIM that Tabasco-brand chili sauce is not halal. I first heard this from a student at IPPH (Halal Product Research Institute) who explained that the Singaporean halal authority was better than JAKIM because JAKIM was overly suspicious of products that come from non-Muslim countries—this, according to his view, makes doing business more difficult in Malaysia. An

employee at the halal laboratory in Technology Park Malaysia told me a similar story claiming that a shipment of Tabasco was held up at port because JAKIM could not decide whether or not to accept its non-JAKIM halal certification. According to both stories, the issue was the product's alcohol content, a low percentage byproduct of the production process that both the student and the lab worker agreed should not abrogate a product's halal status. Whatever the history of JAKIM's concerns about Tabasco, its current position is that Tabasco is halal (*Sinar Online*, 15 June 2016).⁹⁷

A second IPPH student, Aiman, raised another concern about JAKIM's ability to reliably monitor the halal certificates granted to multinational corporations. Aiman, who in addition to studying for his MA at IPPH also helps with his family's catering business—not halal certified, was skeptical about the effectiveness of JAKIM's oversight. Once a company is certified, he suggested, they can change ingredients, so certification is no guarantee of halal-ness. When I countered that according to my understanding—based on what I had learned from Amirul, the JAKIM auditor—if companies change ingredients, they are required to notify JAKIM and get that new ingredient cleared; suppliers are one of the things that are examined during inspections. Amirul replied that he learned from a member of McDonald's corporate staff, a close friend of his, that McDonald's sauces, for example, have been changed so many times that JAKIM has no idea if they are halal or not. But because they have already been certified by JAKIM, the corporation gets away with these shifts in suppliers. Aiman's concerns about McDonald's sauces do not appear to be broadly shared; no one else mentioned this to me and I have found no newspaper stories or media posts expressing similar concerns. Yet, as an example, it contrasts with the Tabasco case: Aiman is not concerned that JAKIM has gone too far, that it is an overly

⁹⁷ Newspaper articles show that there was a controversy about Tabasco's halal status in 2011—but involving porcine-derived ingredients, not alcohol (*Star Online*, 19 June 2011).

exuberant regulator, but that it is incapable of sufficiently regulating companies—either because of its own ineptitudes or the wiliness of multinational corporations.

Furthermore, it illustrates how at least some opinions are formed about the halal industry. Aiman “knows” about McDonald’s sauce shenanigans from personal conversations with a friend who has an insider scoop. Thus, knowledge is being produced and exchanged outside—or perhaps better, alongside—the formal promotional messaging of the bureaucratic and commercial structures within the halal ecosystem. Such para-messaging is, of course, just the sort of thing that JAKIM blamed for the Cadbury debacle—revealing bureaucratic officialdom’s anxieties concerning its inability to completely control discourses about the domains over which it claims expertise. It is also suggestive of the dual-edged nature of branding more generally: while brands effectively humanize corporate modes of production and distribution, creating a relationship of trust with consumers, they are also liable to become sullied if they are associated with things that consumers find unethical, corrupt or otherwise undesirable.

While formal labeling of halal status within the foodscape undoubtedly occupies a privileged position—detractors notwithstanding—as previously mentioned, it is not the primary way in which Malays read the foodscape. The rotation of restaurants at which I regularly ate with Zikri and his friends, for example, included none that were JAKIM certified. I asked about this one night shortly after I began eating with the group. The consensus from Zikri and his two friends with whom we were eating that night was that these restaurants are too small to get halal certification, it would not be worth the extra cost. I asked whether they were concerned that some of the ingredients being used might not actually be halal—I suggested that the seasoning for the tom yum soup, popular at this restaurant, could well be from Thailand and might be produced under lax halal regulations. One of Zikri’s friends, Syah, a baking-school instructor in his mid-

twenties, said that the restaurant is very popular in Kota Damansara; if they used non-halal ingredients, people would find out and tell others about it. None of them expressed concern about the halal status of the fare.

Though none of my dinner companions that night said so, I suspect that a range of cues were present that suggested to them that the food at the restaurant was halal. This restaurant, Sinar, was the one at which I ate most often with Zikri and his friends. It was immediately adjacent to another restaurant that was well-known for *nasi lemak* (coconut-milk rice served with spicy *sambal* sauce, cucumbers, boiled eggs and dried anchovies)—a dish popular, at least in the national imagination, with all Malaysians and is, to my knowledge, always regarded as safe in terms of halal. The two restaurants, though maintaining separate menus and staffs, merged into each other during their evening hours of operation—serving until well after midnight. These late hours allow them, while maintaining a few tables inside near the kitchen, to expand their seating areas outside into what functions as a parking lot earlier in the day. Customers freely order fare from either restaurant from whichever serving staff member is convenient. In this way, the aura of familiarity, of assuredness of halal status, is shared between the two establishments and is firmly established by nasi lemak as a signature dish. While nasi lemak may be an exemplar of Malaysian food—a dish that all Malaysians eat regardless of religion, ethnicity and class, all of the food on offer at Sinar, and its nasi lemak-serving neighbor, are familiar to their customers. So much so that I had already been eating there for months before I discovered there were printed menus kept on the counter near the cashier station—people simply knew the types of dishes they served and ordered from that knowledge; I never saw anyone ordering from the menus. The point here takes us back to the claim that one of the main functions of halal certification is to Islamize the non-familiar—to render the alien as recognizably appropriate for Muslims. Since the food on

offer from these restaurants is already familiar to Malays, certification offers little further assurance.

Of course, the familiarity of the cuisine is only one of the cues present around Sinar. Across the street from the restaurants is a large night market that sells food, clothing, household supplies, jewelry, hardware, luggage, handbags and a range of other goods—often under unlicensed brand names. Like the larger and more famous Petaling Street market, the Kota Damansara night market is active every night with more or less permanent rows of shop stalls, unlike what is usually the case with smaller night markets which set-up in streets closed to traffic once a week for the purpose of the market. Unlike Petaling Street, however, which is heavily associated with Chinese sellers, the Kota Damansara market is clearly a Malay space—most of both the vendors and the shoppers are Malay. Sinar and its partner restaurant, as well as several small electronics stores that specialize in cell phone accessories, are part of the ensemble of the night market. After eating, for example, restaurant customers often descend a steep set of uneven metal stairs and cross the busy road to the market, while shoppers make the reverse trip to the restaurants. On many nights, particularly weekends, the parking lot-cum-dining area, as well as the main road separating the market and the bank of shops where Sinar is located, are jammed with cars and motorbikes.

Zikri's own business functions under a similar assumption of halal-ness. His French-styled cakes and torts are produced in his—extensively equipped—home kitchen and he has no employees (though he does draw on friends' support to assist with deliveries and during holiday seasons when he is particularly busy); thus he is licensed as a micro-business. JAKIM does not certify micro-businesses (a speaker at the 2015 World Halal Summit explained that such businesses should first focus on growth and professionalization and then seek certification). To

be considered for certification, businesses must have professional facilities and at least two employees. Because he lacks certification, Zikri cannot sell his baked goods to certified eateries. When I asked whether he was concerned about the inaccessibility of this market, Zikri explained that for his accounts it made little difference. The coffee shops he is selling to are not halal certified either; more than half of them are Chinese owned and unlikely to ever seek halal certification. The wedding venue which uses his cakes as part of their wedding packages is also Chinese owned and offers bar service as part of these packages—which precludes it from seeking halal certification. Since Zikri’s individual customers are recruited through social media and word of mouth, Zikri explained, his Malay customers “already know [his] cakes are halal” because they know he is Malay.

Interestingly, Zikri makes little attempt to emphasize this Malay-ness. Rather, he uses a French name for his business and even a website registered in France in order to have a .fr domain name rather than the .my of Malaysia. Yet, while I was living with Zikri, he acquired an account for Wrigley (the chewing gum and confectionary giant) providing a cake each month for their main office’s monthly birthdays celebration. He explained to me that he had gotten the account because the company wanted to reassure the office workers that the cake is halal. Zikri’s Malay-ness met this expectation. The point here is that Zikri’s own ethnic identity, even though he does little to emphasize it (and arguably underplays it), serves to reassure others that his products are halal.

While the above examples show that familiarity of market offerings and demographics serve as cues, they are rather passive ones. Some businesses go further by actively marking themselves as Muslim. The most ubiquitous of these are Mamak (Indian Muslim) restaurants. Everyone in Kuala Lumpur seems to eat at Mamak restaurants. For example, one evening, during

the month of Ramadan, I went with Zikri to meet his friend Faizal at a Mamak restaurant just outside a Kota Damansara shopping center. We sat down and ordered a few minutes before sunset and the breaking of the daily fast observed during the month. As the moment neared, the dining area filled with groups of Malays, many with plates of food already on the table awaiting the *adzhan* call to prayer indicating the breaking of the fast. I am continually surprised by how quickly people eat during Ramadan and within half an hour of the *adzhan*, perhaps half the tables were again empty. As Zikri and Faizal had not seen each other for several months (Faizal rarely joined the usual dining group), we lingered over glasses of sweet ginger tea. An hour or so after we had arrived in the restaurant, the dining area was again nearly full, but this time with Chinese families that had avoided the predictable sunset rush. We had decided to see a movie at a theater in the shopping center and, while waiting at the restaurant, I noted that as the Chinese families began to thin out, the crowd shifted towards younger Malay and Indian men arriving on motorbikes to hang out with their friends.

During other times of the year, when Muslims are not fasting, the crowds would likely be more ethnically mixed; however, the unique structuring of dining patterns during Ramadan underscores the ethnic plurality of Mamak customers. Yet, despite this heterogeneity as well as some uniquely Mamak/Indian dishes not available at Malay eateries, Mamak restaurants maintain a Muslim identity—without formal JAKIM certification. The Mamak restaurant in Kota Damansara, for example, has a wall decorated with a mural of the Kaabah in Mecca. The Mamak restaurants I observed all had some clearly Islamic decoration, usually in the form of calligraphy and most often as wall hangings near the cashier counter. Unlike Sinar and other Malay restaurants I became familiar with, the workers in Mamak restaurants were all men—so the obvious cue of the headscarf among workers was absent. However, on several occasions I

observed male workers wearing *kopiah*, the brimless white cap worn by men who have completed the pilgrimage to Mecca. Mamak restaurants, then, establish their halal credentials by being identifiable as a particular type of restaurant. They establish their membership within this genre—that of the Mamak eatery—through cues: dishes offered, decorations and, to a limited extent, dress.

Another genre of halal eatery is Chinese Muslim cuisine (*masakan Cina Muslim*). I learned about Chinese Muslim restaurants one evening when a friend, Irfan, after a day of hiking at a nature preserve just north of Kuala Lumpur, suggested we have dinner at one of his favorite restaurants near his home in Gombak (eight miles north of central Kuala Lumpur). The storefront of this restaurant combined Chinese elements with those suggestive of Islam. It was predominately red, a color unambiguously associated with Chinese preferences because of its connection with prosperity. But the font used on the signboard, while Latin script, was stylized to resemble Arabic. The name was surmounted by a logo combining the image of a triple-gabled roof, common to Chinese temple architecture, but topped with a crescent moon such as would be found on top of a mosque. Below this logo and Arabicized name is the slogan *citarasa asli masakan Cina Muslim* (the authentic taste of Chinese Muslim food). Among the dishes served at the restaurant were a number of recognizably Chinese ones: claypots, kung po, and kam heong, and ingredients include things that are more common to Chinese cuisine than either Malay or Indian, such as deer and duck.

Much as in the case of the Mamak restaurants, these cues are sufficient to convince many Malays—at least the ones I was eating with—of the halal status of Muslim Chinese food. Several months later I was introduced to, Stanley, the manager of Tasty Spice in TTDI (Taman Tun Doktor Ismail, seven miles west of central Kuala Lumpur), another Chinese Muslim restaurant.

Like the restaurant in Gombak, Tasty Spice is not JAKIM certified, instead declaring on its signboard that it serves “Chinese Muslim cuisine.” According to Stanley, before he began working at Tasty Spice, the owners had planned to get certified; however, they found the requirements to be excessive. Stanley’s example of this excess was that during an initial visit to the restaurant, a representative from JAKIM—he was not clear about whether the person was an actual auditor—had said that they would have to renovate the lighting in the kitchen as it was not sufficient. He laughed asking, “what does that have to do with halal?”

Later I was able to ask Amirul, the JAKIM auditor, about whether insufficient lighting would preclude a restaurant from halal certification. Amirul said that auditors evaluate kitchens not only on their use of halal ingredients and procedures, but also on cleanliness and safety, so it was quite possible that a restaurant would be told to improve its lighting as a condition for its halal certification. Stanley, however, saw such requirements as examples of overzealousness. He said that their customers knew already that the food they served was halal, so there was no need to become JAKIM certified.

In all these cases—Malay, Mamak, Chinese Muslim restaurants, or even the coffee shop with the modern take on Arabic calligraphy described earlier in this chapter—businesses use cues other than JAKIM certification to ensure that they are read as halal within the foodscape. These cues function by referencing the Muslim identity of the proprietors, if not individual staff members. And these cues appear to be effective; during my fieldwork I did not encounter anyone who refused to eat at such restaurants, insisting instead on patronizing businesses that had been certified by JAKIM. Such acceptance was not the case, however, for all forms of non-JAKIM proclamations of halal-ness.

In December 2014, for example, I attended MIHREC (Malaysian International Halal Research and Education Conference) hosted by University Putra Malaysia. One of the most impassioned presentations was by a researcher from IIUM (International Islamic University Malaysia) who was discussing JAKIM's enforcement of labeling regulations. With the assistance of several student researchers, she had collected photographs of products using non-JAKIM recognized labels and signage that, at least potentially, violate the 2011 Trade Description Act—which prohibits any kind of self-declaration of halal, including the use of near synonyms such as “Syariah-compliant” or “suitable for Muslims” (the Trade Description Act is discussed in Chapter 3, see also Zalina Zakaria & Siti Zubaidah Ismail 2014). One of the most common forms of this type of self-declaration according to the researcher are signs proclaiming, “no lard, no pork.” While I have seen these signs in various types of restaurants—a restaurant specializing in Thai street food frequented by Zikri and his friends, for example, has such an announcement on its door—they appear particularly frequently on the signboards of Chinese seafood restaurants. Because seafood is recognized as halal by default, such restaurants pose little risk for Muslim diners. During my fieldwork, I ate at this type of restaurant several times with Malay acquaintances and at least three of them had such signage. Similarly, on another occasion, while walking through the Mines Shopping Mall in Serdang (twelve miles south of central Kuala Lumpur), I was handed an advertisement for Chinese New Year promotions at a seafood restaurant in the mall. The promotion was in Chinese and English and “no pork” was written by hand in its margin.

This sort of indirect announcement of halal status, unlike the above cues, does not reference the Muslim identity of proprietors or staff. Rather it just claims that pork is not served in the restaurant nor is lard used in the preparation of dishes—two ingredients often associated

with Chinese cuisine. Of course, and this was the point of the IIUM researcher, such reassurances do not guarantee that porcine (or other haram) elements are absent in all the ingredients used, such as in sauces. It is just this type of conflation of halal with mere alcohol and pork avoidance that stands behind JAKIM's and, in this case, the researcher's, admonitions that such unofficial signage "confuses Muslim consumers." The reaction to this sort of paternalistic concern for Malay wellbeing in the marketplace is, as we have already seen, met with ambivalence. On the one hand, it represents Malays as unsophisticated consumers who are easily misled, just as in the case of Malays' imagined bewilderment over Auntie Anne's pretzel dogs. On the other hand, it recognizes the reality that industrial food production is complex and it is often difficult even for experts in manufacturing to fully understand products' ingredients.

There is, however, another element here that should not be overlooked. While the cues discussed earlier are used by Muslims (whether Malay, Indian or Chinese), the unofficial "no pork, no lard" announcements are used by non-Muslims. Here we again encounter the logic underlying the IKIAM/RISDA certification—things produced by Muslims have a halal authenticity that non-Muslim produced goods lack. If halal functions in part to govern how non-Muslims produce and market goods to Muslims, then unofficial announcements regarding halal potentially undercut labeling as a strategy for doing so. It makes sense that these signs would come under a more intense attack than uncertified Muslim-run eateries.

Shortly after the MIHREC conference, I had the opportunity to ask Amirul, the JAKIM auditor, why steps had not been taken to stop the use of this type of signage. He explained that JAKIM's halal enforcement department had limited resources and that their priority was regulating businesses that are halal certified. While JAKIM does respond to complaints about businesses making fraudulent halal claims—particularly those that falsely claim to be JAKIM

certified, it does not generally monitor the claims made by non-certified restaurants. So, while posting such signs is, at least potentially, illegal, there is no reliable mode for enforcement.

Finally, it is worth noting that some restaurants make no public claims of being halal; however, if asked, they will provide the halal certifications of their suppliers. I learned about this when I met Stephie, a friend of Zikri's who has part ownership in three restaurants—in addition to being a yoga instructor. One of these restaurants, Traditions, is among of Zikri's favorite places to eat in Kota Damansara; because it is slightly upscale, it is not in the regular rotation of restaurants frequented by Zikri and his friends but is his first choice for celebratory dinners (birthdays, new accounts, friends' returns from vacations, and similar sorts of occasions). Stephie traces her family's history in Malaysia to the Baba Nyonya community—established by men migrating from China, perhaps as earlier as the fifteenth century, and marrying Malay women. Subsequently, these communities adopted elements of Malay tradition while retaining some practices from the Chinese provinces from which they migrated. The restaurant specializes in Nyonya dishes from these communities and so occupies a well-established position between Chinese and Malay cuisines.

Stephie is Buddhist and is not seeking JAKIM certification for any of the restaurants she owns. However, when, on my first visit to Traditions, she found out I was interested in issues around halal, she explained to me that the food at Traditions is halal. The chef is Malay and all of the meat comes from a halal certified supplier. She took a three-ring binder from the cashier station and showed me a document from a supplier stating that it is JAKIM certified. Stephie said that when customers asked whether the restaurant served halal food, they are shown this document. According to Stephie, in most cases this satisfies potential customers. However, just in the week before our conversation, she had a customer leave because he felt that there was no

guarantee that the ingredients used at the restaurant were actually from the supplier named on the document. Stephie said that, she was relieved to see him leave, “if someone is very strict,” she explained, “I’d rather not deal with them.” One reason Stephie is hesitant to deal with customers who adhere to a strict understanding of halal is that the restaurant also sells alcohol. While barware is separated from drinkware used for non-alcoholic drinks, all the dishes are washed together and, she admitted, they do not separate cutlery used in the bar from that used in other parts of the restaurant. Because this lack of meticulousness, Stephie said it was unlikely they would be able to satisfy strictly-observant customers.

The above examples provide a clear sense of how halal is represented within Kuala Lumpur’s foodscape—it reveals, in a sense, the topography of the sphere in which the foodscape overlaps with the halalandscape. In short, while parts of this sphere of overlap are marked by JAKIM certification, many others are not. These other parts become legible in a variety of ways: through cues that reference ethnic and religious identities, through informal (and potentially illegal) self-declarations, and by providing some bureaucratic reassurances of halal-ness to customers who are concerned enough to ask. However, as explained in the introduction of the chapter, halal is not only positively marked in the foodscape, it is also negatively indicated. In the remainder of this section, I describe various modes in which the absence of halal is made evident.

One of these modes—possibly the most ubiquitous—is foreshadowed in the descriptions above; it involves the clear demarcation of an eatery as non-Malay or as serving non-halal cuisine. I encountered one example of this when I began my MA research in Kuala Lumpur in 2008. I had become friends with Rania, the owner of the hostel where I was staying. Near the end of my stay, she invited me to dinner. I suggested that we explore Jalan Alor—a street lined

with restaurants that transforms into a crowded and well-known food destination in the evening. Rania suggested a Sushi restaurant instead because Jalan Alor “is so dirty.” Having known Rania for a number of years now, and having eaten with her at many “rustic” eateries, I realize that, more than the physical dirtiness of Jalan Alor, she was likely put off by its Chinese-ness and the ubiquity of pork dishes (the street and the area in which it is located, Bukit Bintang, are predominately Chinese). Further substantiating this speculation, on another occasion, Rania told me that she hates walking by stalls that sell *bak kwa* (barbequed pork jerky that is grilled over a charcoal fire) because of meaty-smelling smoke that wafts into the street and envelops passersby. There are several bak kwa stands around Jalan Alor. Since Rania turned down my invitation I have realized that the crowds in Jalan Alor consist almost entirely of Chinese diners and foreign tourists.

Earlier in this chapter I identified some of the cues that ensure an eatery is recognizable as one that does not cater to halal diets: Chinese character signboards, beer advertisements, and décor such as paper lamps or guardian lion statues. However, such cues are not, of course, necessarily Chinese. For example, in 2015, Irfan, the friend who had introduced me to Chinese Muslim food, and I went to watch the celebration of *Thaipusam* centered on the Hindu deity Subramanian—who is particularly revered by those who trace their heritage to south India as many Indians in Malaysia do. In Kuala Lumpur, the three-day celebration draws tens of thousands of participants and onlookers to the Hindu temple complex at Batu Caves, eight miles north of the city center. Irfan and I took the KTM (commuter train service) to the caves; by the time the train reached the Batu Caves stop, there was barely room to stand in the train car. The crowds thinned little on the grounds of the complex. After an hour or so of watching devotees carry offerings up the nearly three hundred steps to the cave sheltering the main temple, a bit

weary, I bought a bottle of mineral water and some Indian sweets made from condensed milk flavored with pistachios. Irfan was hesitant to try the sweets. He asked several times if I was sure that they were clean. I was confused by this hesitation because the sweet stalls were certainly as clean as the stalls in Gombak where Irfan had taken me on previous occasions to buy *kue*, Malay sweets. A few days later I was looking at pictures of the Thaipusam celebration Irfan had posted to Facebook. Several comments congratulated Irfan for learning about “different cultures.” These comments lead me to suspect that, like Rania’s concerns about Jalan Alor, Irfan was less worried about physical dirt than the appropriateness of eating something that was sold in the context of a non-Muslim religious celebration.

Certain dishes or types of food also function as cues of non-halalness. *Bak kut teh* (a pork-based herbal soup associated with the Chinese cuisine of the Malaysian port city Klang), for example, is a practical metonym for non-halal—that is, it is not just that bak kut teh is obviously not halal, but that it is semiotically representative of non-halal foodstuffs generally. While I was already partially aware of bak kut teh's reputation through conversations in which it was cited as a paradigmatically non-halal dish—I learned about the soup not from Chinese acquaintances but from halal industry professionals—its significance was underscored by a controversy that played out in the Malaysian media and courts starting in 2013. On 11 July of that year, during the month of Ramadan, Alvin Tan and Vivian Lee, a couple already notorious for blogging about their sex life, were indicted on charges stemming from a Facebook post in which they were shown eating bak kut teh and included the caption: *Selamat Berbuka Puasa dengan Bak Kut Teh...Wangi, enak, menyelerakan!* (“Break Fast with Bak Kut Teh ...Fragrant, delicious, and appetizing!”) punctuated with JAKIM’s halal logo (*Malay Mail Online* 27 May 2016). This image, with its Malay language caption encouraging media followers to break their

obligatory fasting with this notoriously non-halal dish, was highly offensive and ultimately led to Tan fleeing Malaysia and Lee being sentenced to six months in prison on a charge of sedition. The interesting feature for the present purpose is that Tan and Lee chose to use bak kut teh for their poorly conceived joke; the logic of that choice underscores the dish's association—representation even—of the non-halal.

I have described these three cases—Jalan Alor, Thaipussam, and the Tan and Lee controversy—not because they are typical, but because they emphasize how certain spaces are set apart and marked as being specifically not halal. They also underscore the binding together of halal with Malay identity as well as the opposition between Malay and Chinese (and, to a lesser extent, Indian) identities. More typically, non-halal spaces are marked merely by the absence of Malays—such as the afore-mentioned Chinese restaurants one street away from Sinar and the Kota Damansara night market. With their Chinese customers and staff there is nothing particularly controversial about the space, it is merely avoided—perhaps not even thought about—by Zikri and his friends. It is in the atypical cases, ones that give rise to discomfort—or even legal action, that we understand such spaces are actually bounded and marked by tacit cues.

Grocery supermarkets and hypermarkets in Kuala Lumpur are more explicit about segregating non-halal groceries from others. Many, such as the Giant hypermarket in Kota Damansara where I regularly shopped, have a specific section set apart for pork products and alcohol. In Giant this section is against the back wall of the store and is marked by a large red sign hanging from the ceiling that reads in Malay: *TIDAK HALAL* (“NOT HALAL”). Other grocers have separate rooms for non-halal goods. While I never bought pork while I was living in Malaysia, a (non-Muslim) officer at the US embassy told me that when he buys pork at his neighborhood grocer, Muslim clerks will not touch the package, so he packs it into his shopping

bag himself. I did not notice parallel qualms among Muslim clerks about handling alcohol. While I was living in Sunway, for example, I somewhat regularly bought beer at a 7-Eleven where the clerk, who wore a tudung head-covering, would test me on my Malay while she scanned and bagged the bottles. However, at Village Grocers in Kota Damansara, the section for non-halal goods, including its alcohol selection, has its own checkout area staffed by non-Muslims.

Even within the unmarked parts of these stores, I found signs warning shoppers about products with potentially problematic ingredients. At Cold Storage in central Kuala Lumpur, for example, a display of imported chocolate bars included the warning “contains alcohol” next to a product with a Grand Marnier flavored filling. Similarly, at Village Grocers in Kota Damansara, a sign admonishing shoppers to “check ingredients before purchase” sat atop a seasonal display of Chinese autumn festival mooncakes and, later, Christmas cakes. Such explicit messaging may be more necessary in retail grocery settings because other social cues are absent—that the clerk is Malay, for example, provides no assurance that the meat jerky snacks being purchased are halal.

Some restaurants also post “non-halal” signs. I mostly noticed these signs at the entrances of certain restaurants in shopping malls. A Vietnamese restaurant at 1 Utama shopping mall in Utama Damansara, for example, had such a sign posted directly in front of its reception podium. Another restaurant, at the upscale Publika mall (four miles northwest of central Kuala Lumpur), calling itself the “premiere pork steak house in Kuala Lumpur” follows this tagline on their menu with a “non-halal” announcement, rather than posting it at the restaurant’s entrance. While I did not often eat at such restaurants, I did ask Stephie, Zikri’s restaurateur friend, why restaurants would want to post such notices. She first suggested that some restaurants may just want to be careful; customers may not, for example, recognize that an unfamiliar dish contains pork. No

restaurant, she pointed out, wants to mislead its patrons or, worse, end up in a scandal with officials. Then she added that some property management companies may require such signs to protect themselves from becoming embroiled in public controversies. She said that she would not be surprised to see such a policy instituted at the struggling mall in which her restaurant, Traditions, is located. The mall had recently been bought by FELDA (Federal Land Development Authority) and the new management group was particularly interested in promoting bumiputra (essentially Malay) businesses. Stephie felt that such initiatives marginalized the non-Malay business operators who had initially rented lots at the mall. Specifically, she mentioned a Chinese-owned wine shop that was, she believed, being purposefully priced out of the mall because the new management did not want such an obviously non-halal enterprise on the property. As I understand her, Stephie sees policies mandating the posting of “non-halal” signs (if such policies exist) as a way of marking certain types of businesses as aberrations—enterprises that require additional oversight and management.

While non-halal signs are a rather neutral indication of halal status, some eateries appear to celebrate their status as non-halal. An upscale Spanish restaurant located on a road adjacent to Jalan Alor, for example, has as its tagline “porkielicious” and its signboard includes the cartoon image of a smiling pig. Just inside the door is a quite realistic life-sized figure of a pig and nearly every page of the menu is adorned with images of pigs. There is no need for a non-halal announcement at the entrance of this restaurant. I encountered similarly non-ambiguous décor at other restaurants as well. A bistro in the trendy Bangsar neighborhood in southwest Kuala Lumpur promotes itself as “the non-halal shop” and has as its logo a stylized image of a pig’s curly tail and backside, while another restaurant—this one located in Mutiara Damansara’s The Curve mall—decorated its walls with backlit raised cutouts of a pig and three piglets. These

restaurants clearly signal their non-halal status while appealing to customers senses of humor and, potentially at least, their disdain for regimentation of halal rules.

The clearest example I encountered of this type of humor being used to promote a business was a small gourmet seasoning company called Garam Haram. The name plays on the rhyme between the Malay words *garam* meaning *salt* and *haram* which, as already mentioned, is an antonym of halal, meaning *unlawful*, so the name of the business translates to *forbidden salt*. I met one of the partners in the business at a food festival at Sunway Pyramid Mall in December of 2014. She explained that their primary product is a line of Himalayan rock salts flavored with bacon, though they also produce mushroom pate and tapenade as well as roasted pork belly to order. She said that they had picked the name simply based on the catchy rhyme though, she admitted, it left no doubt about the non-halal nature of their products. In any case, over the ten months they had been selling the salts, they had had no complaints. What surprised me about her sales spiel, clearly well-rehearsed by the time she spoke with me, was that rather than promoting the pork-laced salts as some sort of decadent pleasure—which seemed to me to be the logic behind the name—she stressed that the salt they used was natural, no unnecessary processing or additional additives, and the bacon was of the highest quality. In short, according to her pitch “forbidden salt” was of higher quality and potentially healthier than other salts, not a sort of licentious treat.

The above examples point to the various ways in which *halal's absence* is marked in Kuala Lumpur's foodscape: implicit cues that are understood through ethnic lenses, explicitly through signage and partition, and by celebrating—often humorously—the obviously non-halal. Together with the markers of halal's presence, the above descriptions provide an account of what might be thought of as a halal aesthetic of the foodscape. That is, the ways in which halal is

encountered in the Kuala Lumpur food scene. It is not of course—nor is it intended to be—a comprehensive survey of that scene; rather it is an illustrative sampling. It is also, obviously, not objective; it is derived from my own perspectives living *and eating* in Kuala Lumpur with Malaysian friends and colleagues over many months of fieldwork. What is important about this representation of the foodscape is that it provides sufficient context to understand the field in which people negotiate issues of halal as they pertain to food.

Navigating the Foodscape

In general, as explained above, the people I most often ate with preferred smaller, often family-run, restaurants to national or international chains. An exception to this rule occurred, however, in the weeks leading up to Chinese New Year during which McDonald's has a promotional menu item: the prosperity burger. It is, I guess, the black pepper sauce that connects these oval beef or chicken patty sandwiches to Chinese cuisine and makes them appropriate fare for the lead up to the holiday. Curly french-fries and a fizzy orange-flavored drink round out the promotional meal. Shortly after advertisements for the 2015 prosperity meal began appearing, Zikri suggested we go to McDonald's Kota Damansara so I could try it because, as he pointed out, even though McDonald's is an American company, I could not get prosperity burgers in the US. Zikri sent a group WhatsApp message with an invite to join us at McDonald's rather than Sinar that evening. To our surprise, seven people joined us for McDonald's prosperity meals—a significantly larger group than the group of four or five that would have been likely had we gone to Sinar. While the prosperity burgers were tasty enough, I do not think this was the reason so many of Zikri's friends joined us at McDonald's. Rather, it seems that McDonald's, by leveraging its cosmopolitan—and therefore ethnically neutral—identity and its halal certification, is able to

successfully blend categories of Islam and Chinese in a way that makes eating its food a safe and socially acceptable way for the people in the group—all of whom were, with the exception of me, Malay—to participate in some way, however commercialized and distorted, in the excitement and anticipation of the approaching holiday. This is not to suggest that Zikri or his friends are naïve—that they believe that the food we ate at McDonald’s represents some actual version of Chinese food—but rather that it is an easy, low-stakes way to participate in the moment.

The broader point illustrated by this story is that, contra the impression perhaps created in the preceding sections, the foodscape is not uniformly partitioned into neat ethnic and religious spheres. While such spaces of exclusivity do exist—Sinar and Jalan Alor stand as examples—other spaces in the foodscape facilitate merging of identities, among them: Mamak and Muslim Chinese restaurants and, even, McDonald’s. In this section I explore several cases in which Malays negotiate this variegated foodscape and their own notions of and commitments to halal.

Among the professionals I know working in the halal industry, perhaps none is more familiar with my research project than Sarah. She is one of the people I met on my first trip to Malaysia in 2006 and, as someone who has more than twenty years of experience working in halal-industry related businesses, has been invaluable in providing insights into the industry’s workings. I met with Sarah regularly, often over coffee, during the course of my fieldwork. One afternoon in October 2015, she came to one of our meetings a few minutes late. As soon as she sat down with her coffee she said that she wanted to tell me about a shopping trip to Tesco she had recently made with her two daughters. Sarah explained that there are a few products they specifically look for at Tesco; one of them is a garlic flavored mayonnaise—however, because it is so popular, it is often out of stock. So, while her daughters collected other things on their list,

Sarah went to find the mayo and was able to get the last bottle. However, the bottle had a tag that she had not previously noticed. It said: “contains alcohol.” Sarah admitted that she was conflicted about what to do. On the one hand, she and her daughters really like the mayo and looked forward to getting it. Also, while the product may contain alcohol, it was not as if any of them were going to become intoxicated using it. On the other hand, however, one of her daughters is religiously inclined—others in the family, Sarah explained, sometimes teasingly refer to her as “ustazah” (an honorific used for religious teachers). As her daughters caught up with her, Sarah made the decision to tear off the alcohol advisory label and announced to her daughters that she had gotten the last bottle. They all cheered.

The anecdote is intriguing for several reasons. First it points to some of the problems inherent in labeling. Is a retailer advisory that a product contains alcohol equivalent to a “non-halal” label? Certainly not in Sarah’s eyes. Drawing on her background in food manufacturing and knowledge about labeling, Sarah knows that a great many products contain alcohol, so the more pertinent question, in her view, is whether using a product is liable to cause intoxication—unlikely in the case of mayonnaise. However, Sarah also had to consider the view of her daughter. The advisory label, after all, does make it seem as if the product is less than ideal for Muslims to consume—it suggests that it is less halal, not enough to get it banished to the non-halal section, but still requiring a warning. Ultimately, Sarah decided that she did not want to inhibit her daughter’s enjoyment of the product—a thing around which a mini family tradition had sprung up. To navigate this situation, Sarah had to consider the labeling policies of the retailer, her own knowledge of food manufacturing and halal labeling, as well as the sensitivities of her daughter. That she still felt some disquiet over her decision was suggested by her laughter while telling the story.

I have known Rania, the barbeque-pork adverse hostel owner, for only a slightly shorter time than Sarah. While some of her political views may run conservative (she was, for example, very critical of the 2007 Indian protests against mistreatment and discrimination by police, and I have heard her defend the special rights granted Malays on the basis that, since they are the original inhabitants of the peninsula, they deserve them), she has never appeared to be very religious. Her dress is generally casual—t-shirts and knee-length shorts or jeans—and would likely be regarded as immodest by many religious Malays. While I stayed at her hostel, although she enforced a no pork policy, she always stocked beer to sell to guests and would also drink herself during the barbeque patio parties she arranged several times a week. Rania is also a smoker, enjoying cigarettes, shisha (Middle Eastern water pipe) and, more recently, e-cigarettes. Shortly after beginning fieldwork in 2014, I met up with Rania at a *sup tulang* (a sweet and spicy beef soup with a bone-based broth) stall located under an expressway overpass in TTDI. While we sweated over our bowls of hot soup, she told me that she was thinking about starting to wear the tudung head covering. A few years earlier she had sold the hostel and was now working in a FedEx office. Most of the women she works with cover their heads. She stressed that “it’s not just the *maciks* [older respectable women, aunties],” but also the women in their twenties who were wearing tudung. Rania admitted that she was feeling a lot of pressure to conform. Yet, she worried that a tudung might get in the way when she goes hiking or to the beach in Langkawi (one of her favorite places to vacation). She also realized that if she started wearing tudung, she would have to stop smoking and drinking; she was not certain she wanted to commit to all those changes. On my daily commute to Kuala Lumpur from Sunway, I regularly passed through the KTM station at MidValley shopping mall where there was a large banner advertising an

upcoming “Hijab Expo.” I asked Rania if she wanted to go, suggesting that we could check out sports hijabs that she might be able wear while swimming or hiking.

A few weeks later we met again, this time at MidValley for the expo. While it had sounded like it would be fun when we had talked about it earlier, being at the expo was quite awkward. Rania was wearing knee length shorts and a loose long-sleeved shirt—clearly the least conservatively dressed woman there (though not all the women were wearing tudungs). I was wearing chinos and an untucked button down; while this may well have been appropriate, there were few other men around against whom to compare my dress. Walking around the exhibition space together, Rania and I seemed to draw a lot of stares. We stopped at a few displays and feigned interest in the racks of cloth, but no one approached us. Feeling awkward, and worried that I was making Rania feel even more awkward, I asked if she wanted to get lunch—she quickly agreed. We left the expo within twenty minutes of arriving.

Earlier we had agreed that after the expo we would go to an Italian restaurant not far from the hostel Rania used to own. After settling into a table at the familiar restaurant and deciding what type of pizza to share, Rania surprised me by asking if we should get wine too. I laughed and asked if she really wanted to; I thought she might be kidding. She said that she was not wearing tudung yet, and that the pizza would taste better with wine. We got a bottle.

While the irony of the above situation is humorous—a humor that was not lost on Rania—what interests me most about these events is how evident Rania’s deliberations are. Here I have strayed a bit from the tight focus on the foodscape to include Rania’s dilemma about appropriate Islamic dress for women. While religiosity is certainly part of this deliberation, it is not Rania’s only concern. Rather, she is also concerned about how adopting more conservative dress will impact her other habits. Yet, her desire to carry on with these habits is weighed against

her desire to socially fit in at her office. Part of the reason for Rania's increasing concern about religious aspects of her life is that also that she sees herself as getting older. In her early forties, Rania identifies neither with the younger twenty-somethings in the office (an age group she dealt with extensively while operating the hostel) nor the older maciks, all of whom are married and very focused on their families. In addition to this experience of being between social groups, Rania also faces pressure from a general expectation that, after forty, Muslims often increase their commitment to religious observances in recognition that the Prophet Muhammad began receiving Quranic verses at age forty. Her religious non-conformity can no longer be excused as youthful indiscretion. Despite the fact that we ended the day with a decidedly non-halal bottle of wine, I was left with the impression that Rania's deliberations about how she will conduct herself as a Muslim are anything but settled.

On another occasion Rania invited me to join a group of her co-workers for an after-work get together at a Thai restaurant. By the time I got there, the group was already seated and I had to squeeze in at the end of the table. Of the eight other people there, I knew only Rania and her friend Tariq, both of whom were seated on the opposite side of the table. Unsurprisingly, the conversations I could overhear were mostly about the FedEx office and so difficult for me to participate in. The woman sitting next to me, an Indian woman who I guessed was in her forties—and the only woman at the table besides Rania not wearing tudung—also appeared to be having trouble getting into a conversation, so we chatted together. Her name was Anitha and she told me about her house in Bangsar and how much the area had developed over the past fifteen years and I told her about my research. She seemed incredulous that a non-Muslim would be interested in learning about halal. She suggested that it was not very practical unless I was interested in starting a business.

As the group broke-up, it turned out that Anitha's car was parked very near my motorbike, so we walked across the parking lot together. Away from the rest of the group, she told me a story about her other job as a receptionist in an apartment building catering to expatriates living in Bangsar. In preparation for the Christmas season, the management had decided to put together care packages for their residents. Anitha suggested that they get sweets from a particular Punjabi restaurant renowned for its sweets. One of Anitha's co-workers, a Malay woman, volunteered to go with Anitha to pick up their order. As they arranged the pick-up over their lunch hour, Anitha suggested that they eat at the restaurant which, she stressed, served neither alcohol nor pork. Her co-worker balked at the idea, saying that it was not appropriate for her to eat in a non-Muslim restaurant. So, after picking up the sweets, they ended up eating at a Malay restaurant that Anitha described as flavorless. However, when they returned to the office, her co-worker insisted they open some of the Punjabi sweets to try them. Anitha told me this last bit laughing and added that Malays are often hypocritical regarding their concerns about halal.

While I agree with Anitha that the story is funny, I am not sure I agree with her charge of hypocrisy. Instead her story underscores something that has already been discussed in this chapter: halal is not only about fulfilling certain requirements; it is not an objective list of inclusion and exclusion criteria, but rather also about a sense of appropriateness—that an eatery or type of food is the sort of thing that is appropriate for Malay consumers. So, while Anitha's co-worker was doubtful about some aspect of the restaurant, once the sweets were domesticated in the context of the familiar office, they became unproblematic. Context is an important element for legibility of halal statuses.

While the cases described in this section involve ironies or even contradictions, I have not recounted them to be critical. Furthermore, I do not wish to imply that they are broadly representative of how most Malays (or other Malaysians) navigate the foodscape in relation to halal. Rather they are examples that highlight active negotiation of halal, moments when halal becomes the object of conscious deliberation. In the McDonald's case, halal certification made possible the blurring of Chinese and Malay spaces that in other contexts it functions to demarcate. In the case of the precautionary labels used by Tesco, Sarah drew on her own understanding of halal and empathy for her daughter to adjudicate between possible avenues of action. Rania is in a position in which she is forced to weigh what she sees as social and religious obligations against certain kinds of activities that she has, at least in the past, enjoyed. Finally, Anitha must tolerate what she sees as her co-worker's hypersensitivity to the non-halal/non-Malay, while her co-worker negotiates notions of appropriate and inappropriate, and domestic and foreign through the idiom of halal. No doubt such stories could be multiplied and each case would have a different nuance; it is not my intention to suggest a typology for organizing these experiences, but, again, to stress that people actively engage the category of halal—we can see that engagement against the backdrop of foodscapes. So, halal rules are not a type of algorithm that gives a predictable outcome, rather these rules are a set of tools that Muslims (and others) use alongside other tools to work through particular situations.

Summing-up the Ethics of Halal Foodscapes

In this chapter, I move away from accounts of how the category of halal is created, the ontological project of the dissertation, and take up the ethical project. The chapter develops this account of ethics in two ways. The first is to describe what I have called the halal aesthetic of the

Kuala Lumpur foodscape; that it, the ways in which halal-ness, both its presence and its absence, appears, is legible, to people navigating the foodscape through the everyday activity of going out to eat. This aesthetic is the context, the social field, for the ethical activities of deliberation and consumption. The second aim was to provide examples of how the negotiation of halal actually occurs; that is, how people grapple with the practical problems of satisfying religious and social obligations as well as obligations to themselves. By juxtaposing the context of practical action against accounts of actually carrying out practical action, I hope that the imbrication of the ontological and ethical is more clearly delineated.

Forging Careers: Anthropology of Failure

In the introduction I posed the question: *in what sense is the halal industry new?* It is a puzzling question because, on the one hand, the rhetoric around the industry suggests that it is something novel—something that has not previously existed. For example, recall the KasehDia executive who claimed that it was only through KasehDia’s goading that individual halal food producers and restaurateurs recognized that they were part of a broader industry—a whole value chain—and that it was this value chain for which they coined the appellation *halal industry*. However, on the other hand, Muslims have always eaten halal foods and avoided haram materials and, surely, many of these goods were circulated through markets. So, what is it that has shifted, changed, or been introduced that justifies the perspective that the halal industry is novel or new?

Over the course of the preceding chapters we have gleaned an answer to this question. It has to do with the modes in which halal is territorialized: a new halal literature in the form of industry standards, the emergence of bureaucracies as a new type of halal authority, development of meticulous regimes of verification as part of halal science, and the promotion of halal through market mechanisms and commercial practices. In short, the new halal industry is the result of disembedding the notion of halal from everyday practices and reworking it into an explicit and professional concept that is deployable, not only in particular marketplaces, but in *the market* generally. That is, in this process of becoming an industry, halal has been reconfigured to remove its provincial specificities and projected into the cosmopolitan sphere in which it is homogenized and equally legible to all consumers. To the degree which this transformation is achieved, it is

effected through the efforts of a cadre of professionals—bureaucrats, scientists, and businesspeople; it is these people, not farmers, food and goods producers or store proprietors, that are the workers in the new halal industry.

This *new halal industry* is best understood as part of a broad set of transformations often labeled as *neoliberal*. At the core of neoliberalism is, as captured in David Harvey’s now classic definition, the valorization of the market: neoliberalism is “a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (2005:2). In the preceding chapters, I have addressed this valorization of markets in the context of halal as *marketization*—the orientation, the directionality, of all these varied efforts to reconfigure the category of halal.

Bureaucratization, corporatization, commercialization, and scientification are all deployed in a more or less coordinated effort to give the category of halal life within the cosmopolitan market—to take a place alongside other trending market preoccupations like *organic*, *sustainable*, and *humane*.

An interesting element of Harvey’s characterization is neoliberalism’s commitment to an ethical outlook: *wellbeing* is best advanced through markets because they elevate individual *freedom*. A notion of freedom is also at play within the halal ecosystem. Halal labeling, supported by a technical certification regime, supposedly opens new vistas to the growing population of Muslims with sufficient wealth and leisure time to explore them. Marketized halal promises this class of consumers anxiety-free access to the world—whether eating at a nasi lemak stall or a Brazilian steakhouse.

However, whatever such freedom amounts too, it is obviously heavily mitigated. Halal labeling only promotes access to spaces that have already been thoroughly scrutinized, and often redesigned, by bureaucrats and commercial interests. Here we see another aspect of neoliberalism—one that differentiates it from classical liberalism. The latter prescribes strict limitations on any effort to regulate markets (inscribed, for example, in ideologies of small governments). Neoliberalism, however, pursues strategies of limiting state involvement in some contexts, but advocates for state efforts to create and support markets in other contexts (see Aihwa Ong’s notion of *neoliberalism as exception* and *exceptions to neoliberalism* [2006: 3-5]). The *new* halal industry of the early 2000s is a clear example of state actors taking an interest in a particular domain of economic activity and making it a project of their own by turning the mechanisms of the state towards its development.

In the preceding chapter, we saw that this movement toward a cosmopolitan, market-oriented notion of halal has, however, been only partially successful. While people do depend on formal halal certification to navigate certain parts of foodscapes, they draw on less formal notions of halal to orient their practical actions in other regions of the foodscape. Similarly, the enthusiasm for a halal regime that is thoroughly oriented toward business and markets tapered somewhat during the tenure of Najib’s prime-ministership (2009-20018). This chapter explores how these neoliberal processes of shaping halal have affected professionals working within the industry. Of particular interest is how the current territorialization of halal has affected the sorts of projects halal professionals are able to conceive of and pursue.

Discontented Professionals

I caught up with Rushdi, the CEO of Zilzar, after he gave a talk at the 2015 Muslim World BIZ Conference at Putra World Trade Centre—an event sponsored by the OIC Today (the business news publication of Organization of Islamic Cooperation). I was surprised to get even a couple minutes of his attention because at the other events I had attended, he had been swamped by name-card-proffering attendees anxious to make a connection with one Malaysia’s halal industry “rock stars”—as one of Zilzar’s employees, only half joking, once described him. I asked him about the notion of the *Islamic economy*, the theme of the conference, how is it different from the *halal industry*? Laughing, he said that World Halal Conference, World Halal Summit, and World Halal Forum already had the halal industry well-covered—the OIC had to have some theme for its event. He followed with the more serious explanation that the major difference is that *Islamic economy* is more inclusive than *halal industry*; the former takes into account all the things that contribute to Muslims’ participation in the economy, not just the production and sale of certified products. And, most importantly, it includes Islamic finance. I asked why Islamic finance is regarded as something separate from the halal industry. Here he was blunt: BNM (the Malaysian National Bank), the institution chiefly in charge of Islamic finance in Malaysia, does not want JAKIM interfering in finance. Islamic finance is very professional, profitable, and successful, while, in Rushdi’s estimation, the halal industry is still struggling to take off. He attributes this difference to the fact that JAKIM is a political institution while BNM is business focused.

Rushdi went on to say that the creation of HDC was intended to ensure that issues central to the halal industry, like certification, remained in the business sector. Since its marginalization by the Najib government, the industry has been politicized and not progressed significantly.

Rushdi's lack-luster evaluation of the halal industry was, at just over a year into my fieldwork, familiar. There seemed to be a sense of pessimism or jadedness among many of the halal professionals with whom I spoke. This negativity contrasted significantly with the earlier period of three months I had spent in Kuala Lumpur doing research for my MA thesis in 2008 and 2009. During this earlier research period, people were enthusiastic to talk about halal and seemed to earnestly believe that Malaysia was on the cusp of leading the Muslim world into a newly forged sphere of global business.

This chapter, then, explores connections between transformations within the halal industry and the emergence of pessimism. I track these transformations through various halal-related organizations introduced in Part 1 of the dissertation. Because I was able to interview many of the same people from my MA research again for my dissertation research, I am also able to chart shifting attitudes toward the industry. I argue that transformations within the halal industry account for the rise of pessimism among its professionals. In the last section of the chapter, I show how this understanding of the halal industry forms a critique of the neoliberal compulsion to establish markets.

Ethics of Work

Before delving into the ethnographic details of professionals' lives, it is useful to reflect on the relationship between ethics and work. While work—or at least its fruits—is generally valued, Max Weber argued that Protestant Christians elevated work, as a *calling*, to a moral value in itself (2001[1930]:79-81). That is, within the context of Protestantism, work was no longer valued merely for what it produced, the good that was derivable from it, but rather it was revalued as a pious activity itself—as a moral good. This culture of exalting work led to

accumulation of wealth and, ultimately, investment and the spread of capitalism. I am not suggesting that there is a fundamental revaluation of work within the halal industry, nor are there grounds to believe that the further imbrication of halal values and global economic systems will lead to a radically altered constellation of culture and business—though, in their most millenarian moments, some halal proponents do imagine such radical transformations. However, people working within the halal industry understand themselves as doing something that transcends mere business, they are doing something of religious import.

A clear example of this recognition is described in chapter 3 in which one of KasehDia's researchers, Nurdeng, explained that creating halal standards is an example of a particular kind of ethical obligation within Islam, a *fahrdū kifayah*—something that must be done, but is not incumbent on each and every Muslim. That is, creating standards is a kind of collective obligation—as long as someone does it, it is regarded as fulfilled. The people who undertake such obligations, however, are stepping into leadership positions from which they guide the broader Muslim community. Nurdeng explained that this sort of position can be dangerous: if leaders get something wrong, they mislead the community, not just themselves. For this reason, he insisted that it is exceedingly important that the halal industry compile production standards properly; they will, after all, be held responsible by God for any mistakes that they make. I heard similar sentiments from other industry professionals.

The above is not, of course, an example the Weberian *spirit of capitalism*—an elevation of the status of work that encourages more of it (and the accumulation of wealth). If anything, it may even dissuade people from certain kinds of work. But the overlap worth noting is that, like these early Protestant workers, halal industry professionals recognize that the value of their work is not merely material; there is also a religious component to it. To do well at work is consistent

with “the highest form [of] moral activity...the individual [can] assume” (Weber 2001[1930]:80).

As a moral activity, the work of the halal industry professional takes place within a particular *regime of living* (Collier and Lakoff 2005). This regime is assembled from the various bureaucratic, technoscientific, and commercial practices and organizations described in Part 1. Collectively, they condition the possible types of activities and projects that can be pursued under the rubric of halal. So, these projects, which constitute an aspect of professionals’ ethical lives, are enabled or inhibited by the precise properties of how the regime is manifest. This is the intricate play between the ontology and ethics of halal.

HDC Unmoored

Rushdi’s contention that HDC was intended to link industry and government through a business-friendly alternative to traditionally bureaucratic agencies reiterated opinions I encountered during my 2008-2009 research. As explained in Chapter 3, among the most publicized responsibilities of the newly-minted HDC was halal certification—the process for which the agency was guaranteeing to complete within a month of receiving applications. While it appears that HDC was able to fulfill this promise fairly reliably, responsibility for certification was transferred back to JAKIM a year later. Certification is important because it is one of the primary features of the new halal economy—the inscrutability of global production chains makes it an absolute necessity. While HDC had other responsibilities beside certification, losing that responsibility was a significant setback for the agency and made its marginalization possible, something we saw with its being moved out of the prime minister’s office and, after a series of complicated shifts, repositioned under MITI (Ministry of International Trade and Industry).

Aminah, the retired HDC executive, worked at the agency throughout this tumultuous period. From the launch of HDC to its transfer to MITI, Aminah worked in its Halal Integrity Unit. During my 2015 conversation with her, Aminah recounted how, in 2008, this unit found out it would be taking over responsibility for certification:

Between 2004 and 2006, I worked with JAKIM as a food scientist from the Ministry of Health. They had a certification system in place, but they were slow—there were already lots of complaints. Our [HDC] CEO saw the opportunity and put in a request to the Prime Minister. Our unit developed the concept paper. A month after HDC was launched, the CEO told us to drop everything and focus on certification. We were under the impression that it was just for international certification. I know how JAKIM works and we didn't want to step on anyone's toes. From 2008 to 2009 we handled all the certifications. It was really tedious, Sean. We incorporated people from JAKIM; our manager knew how to do this—give them better perks. We implemented a new system: if an application was in a section more than five days, bump it to the boss—applications moved. After the year, Najib came into office. JAKIM approached him and told him that they wanted certification back. It was returned. Personally, I was happy. We wanted to pass our system to them. It's difficult because they are syariah people and they don't expect you to tell them how to do things. So, we used [a state agency that facilitates transfers between agencies], I don't know why they need an intermediary. So, they got our system; it's better but there are still complaints. JAKIM hires a lot of people directly from university; they don't have the experience and take time to learn the job—I guess that's it.

Several things become apparent from this excerpt. First, the lack of coordination between parts of HDC. Aminah and her colleagues worked on the proposal to shift international certification to HDC, yet, when the shift was implemented, unbeknownst to them, responsibility for both domestic and international certification was transferred to HDC. Unsurprisingly, this put considerable strain on the unit, though, at least on Aminah's telling, it was a challenge the unit was able to meet. Second, the rivalry between government agencies is clear in this passage. HDC and JAKIM are competing for control over certification. It appears that this control is ultimately determined by who can best curry favor with the prime minister.

While it is clear that senior executives in HDC wanted to control certification, I was surprised that Aminah seemed ambivalent about it. I asked, if certification is so demanding and

apt to draw criticism, why was JAKIM eager to have it back? Aminah explained that this was because JAKIM saw certification as a religious matter and, so, something that, as the country's religious authority, they should control:

I don't want to say that scientists are second-class citizens at JAKIM, but decisions are made by the syariah experts there. I don't mind, I'll give them all the information, the data, and they can decide. I believe that this is right, the certifying body should be JAKIM.

In this passage, Aminah concurs with the decision to move certification back to JAKIM. She seems convinced that, because of their religious credentials, JAKIM is the proper authority to handle certification. Interestingly, this rationale does not address issues of competence or ability to meet the scheduling windows competitive businesses have to deal with—such issues were the initial justifications for moving certification to HDC. On this reading, it seems that JAKIM's eagerness to handle certification has wholly to do with preserving the coherence of legitimate authority: halal is a religious matter and, as such, it should be handled by religious experts.

However, in a different context, Aminah suggested another reason for this competition over certification. She explained that one of the HDC initiatives she was most involved with was developing halal training modules. She felt that this undertaking was particularly important because, on the one hand, the majority of companies applying for certification were not Muslim-owned, so the applicants knew relatively little about the requirements. These were the sorts of restaurants, Aminah suggested, that post “No Pork, No Lard” signs on their doors and believe that this is sufficient to be halal. On the other hand, there were applications from Muslim business owners who believed, because they are Muslim, anything they customarily did in the course of their business was already halal. During one of the training events I attended at HDC's Global Halal Support Centre, this distinction between Muslims' common knowledge of halal and a technical understanding of how certification functions was described as the difference between

knowing halal and *knowing halal standards*—people may have differing ideas about halal, but the standards are fixed and must be complied with independently of what people believe about halal. So, Aminah believed that professionalizing people’s understanding of halal (standards) was an essential component of HDC’s mission. She was proud that they had developed the world’s first halal training modules—based on the format of existing food safety training programs. However, Aminah complained that these training programs got less attention than they should have:

The trainings modules were not that popular. For a large training you might get 150 thousand ringgit [US\$ 38,000]; our CEO wanted to talk about millions [US\$ 260,000]. He said thousands don’t mean anything, you know? But to me, even if you get 200 ringgit [US\$ 60], it’s still money. I mean, it is more knowledge. It’s not about the money so much. The understanding of the industry is more important. So, we shared the training module with everybody. I think at that time we had 15 training partners.⁹⁸

The tension between Aminah’s view and that of Jamil Bidin, CEO of HDC, in the quotation is obvious (and likely overstated). However, the quote is also indicative of another reason why certification was so eagerly sought by HDC and why JAKIM wanted it return: it has potential to generate profit—more so than other halal-related business services. Aminah made both these points even more pointedly when, near the end of our conversation, again reflecting on her own relief when responsibility for certification was transferred back to JAKIM, she remarked:

I was happy when they took [certification] back, but I didn’t tell my CEO. He would say, oh no, it has to be HDC because then we would get the profits. And he would say that we must charge more. I’d just think, “Oh dear, this isn’t going to be good.” I think that, because it is for the community, you should not charge that much. You shouldn’t impose on the industry because this is for everyone’s own good. You are supposed to feed everyone with good quality products.

⁹⁸ While US\$ 38,000 for a training or US\$ 260,000 for certification may seem quite high, these relatively high costs are associated with services provided to international corporations and may involve teams travelling internationally to conduct them. Individuals in Malaysia seeking training, such as the events I attended, are nearer the US\$ 60 and some are even free.

Aminah's evaluation of HDC's efforts to become a certifying agency highlights two general points. The first is that much of the political and social jockeying around certification is about both authority, particularly religious experts determined to protect their domain of influence from other sorts of experts, and certification's potential to generate profit—certification is the most marketable of the halal-related services. The second point is that, in Aminah's view at least, these interested aims interfere with the nobler possibilities of halal—to spread knowledge and the production of high-quality goods for consumers. Aminah's views appear to be convergent with those expressed by Shireen, the Chicago-based food activist described in the introduction of the dissertation. Shireen worried that the establishment of formal halal standards was aimed at creating profit and that such profit motive threatened to strip halal of its transformative capacities. Aminah seems to have arrived at much the same conclusion.

Given the dissonance between Aminah's aims and HDC's trajectory, it is unsurprising that Aminah left HDC shortly after its transfer to MITI. During our conversation she did not elaborate on this event, describing it only as "retiring" from HDC. However, she also accepted a position as a lecturer at a university outside of Kuala Lumpur. When I met her for our interview, she was working on a research project investigating the verifiable benefits of the dietary and medicinal prescriptions described in the hadis. She was particularly interested in one of the Prophet Muhammad's practices of eating dates that had been soaked in milk; the Prophet, however, insisted on discarding any uneaten soaked dates after three days. Aminah said that scholars who had written about this practice focused on explaining why the dates were thrown out after three days, suggesting that it was either because they began to ferment (and so, became increasingly alcoholic) or because they went bad after three days. However, Aminah was more interested in uncovering the benefits of eating the dates during the first three days. During our

meeting, she was writing a paper based on her findings thus far and planned to present it at an upcoming symposium.

This academic track seemed well-suited to the sorts of values that Aminah had talked about earlier in our discussion. She was able to focus on research that explored ways in which Islamic understanding of nutrition, if not halal exactly, had the potential to improve health and well-being. So, I was surprised when she admitted that, “I feel very bad when I hear people talking about HDC being so quiet.” She explained that there is so much they could be doing: shoring up halal science programs, working on halal standards for media, and improving the halal industrial parks—some of which, according to Aminah, are not well administered. I asked if she would prefer working at HDC to her current position. She replied:

I wish HDC would call me and ask me to revive the whole HDC. I am very restless because I was there and there are so many things to do—that they should be doing. I should go back and work there; I can make the country move because I know what to do. Even when I was working there, they would ask, “what would you do?” and I’d say, “I would do a lot.”

So, despite Aminah’s misgivings about quarrels over authority and who gets to control certification, she was still very interested in developing the halal industry and promoting Malaysia as a global halal hub. This sort of enthusiasm is what I remembered from my earlier fieldwork and what seemed absent in more recent interviews. People were still invested in the idea of the halal industry, but they had been pushed to the margins of it.

KasehDia in Retreat

While the marginalization of HDC was unexpected, I was even more surprised by the seeming disappearance of KasehDia and its associated businesses. While in 2008 and 2009 it was nearly impossible not to encounter speakers from KasehDia at halal events or to see their name on

promotional material, during my 2014-2015 fieldwork, I saw them at only one event. Raihana, one of the founding members of the business, participated in a question and answer session at an event catering to entrepreneurs interested in the Islamic economy. She appeared along with Darus, who was part of the management team for IHI (International Halal Integrity Alliance), one of the start-up enterprises that was domiciled in KasehDia's offices.

After their session ended, I caught up with Raihana in the meet and greet section of the event intended for networking. I introduced myself and explained that in 2008, I had visited KasehDia's offices in Sri Hartamas (about five miles west of central Kuala Lumpur) and that I knew several people who had been writers or researchers for the company: Rizal, Amsyar, and Nurdeng. I had expected that these familiar names would produce some sign of recognition and a willingness to spend a few minutes talking. Instead, Raihana continued to stare at me with what I interpreted as a get-to-the-point type of look. I quickly said that I had also interviewed Amir, a cofounder of KasehDia, as part of a research project and that I was interested in a follow-up interview for my dissertation research. Still not smiling, Raihana said that Amir was no longer at KasehDia and now lives in Australia. Not at all optimistic, I asked Raihana if she would be willing to tell me about changes at KasehDia over the past seven years. She did not seem enthusiastic about the prospect but gave me her card and told me to contact her in a week to see if we could arrange an appointment.

A little over a week later I was riding through the confusing frontage roads and parking lots encircling the Plaza Damas office building where KasehDia is located. Fifteen minutes late and a bit sweaty, I finally walked through the door of the Starbucks where I was supposed to meet Raihana. I was worried that she would be annoyed or maybe even decide to cancel the

interview. Instead, the text message I sent announcing my arrival was answered with apologies that she was stuck in traffic and running late.

Raihana arrived half an hour later and we settled down with our iced coffees. Perhaps feeling apologetic for her lateness, Raihana was exceptionally affable. Before I had the chance to ask any questions, however, she wanted to know about my research, who was funding it, and who I was working with in Malaysia. She appeared genuinely interested and supportive, but I could not shake the sense that I was being screened. During my sixteen months of fieldwork, Raihana is the only person to whom I felt compelled to show my EPU (Economic Planning Unit)-issued research permit, though I doubt she found it at all reassuring.

In any case, she seemed satisfied—or at least bored—with my answers and so we turned to my questions. To my general question about what she was currently working on at KasehDia, Raihana explained that the company was basically closed for the time being. After the 2012 World Halal Forum, she realized that they were still having the same discussion that they had started at the inaugural 2006 forum: in a mocking voice she said, “the halal industry is worth trillions of dollars” and then continued in her own voice, “it’s the same thing; I’m like, haven’t we evolved from this?”. So, she decided to take what she called a “spiritual sabbatical” and figure out what her next steps should be.

Since suspending KasehDia’s operations, Raihana said that she realized that KasehDia had been founded with overly idealistic expectations. During the 1990s, she had studied communications on the East Coast of the United States. During that time, she realized that Islam had an image problem—one that, in her view, has only become worse in the intervening years. She and her partners “started KasehDia as a communication company because we saw the need to communicate Islamic values in more universal, inclusive and contemporary ways.” And, in

her estimation, they were relatively successful in raising awareness through the *Halal Journal*, the World Halal Forum, and various publications and consultancy work; they had managed to start a global conversation. This success was only partial, however, she explained, “communication campaigns are easy to do; now it is really up to the policy makers and the markets to institute these ideas—that takes a really long time.”

I asked Raihana what sort of transformations she would expect to see if policy makers did implement the kind of universal Islamic ideas KasehDia promoted. She explained that business is currently based on purely capitalistic principles; such principles advocate reducing costs, increasing speed, and increasing profit margins by using cheaper products. The result of adherence to these principles, she claimed, is subpar industries—including ones that are essential to our well-being, such as the food and pharmaceutical industries. Raihana explained that to advocate bringing these industries in line with universal Islamic values is equivalent to supporting secular values like sustainability or fair trade.

She insisted that universal Islamic values differ from what she called “syariah values”, explaining that “there has been too much focus on syariah and not enough on what it means—why is it there.” She illustrated the difference with an example: while advocates of syariah values would judge a chicken slaughtering operation according to how often the slaughterman cut the correct number of veins and arteries, an advocate of universal Islamic values would be more concerned that the chickens were treated humanely. “The purpose of prescribing a method of slaughter,” she reasoned, “is not to satisfy God by cutting the correct number of veins, but to limit animal suffering.”

This was one of the ways in which they had been overly idealistic in founding KasehDia, Raihana admitted, they had not anticipated the resistance they faced from what she called

“Islamic fiq entities”—she found it difficult to work with these types of religious stake holders. While I assumed she was talking about JAKIM officials, when I asked about examples of “fiq entities,” Raihana balked and said that this was getting into controversial territory. Instead she reiterated that KasehDia had made progress by raising awareness about universal Islamic values, but what they had not been able to do was achieve their implementation. She concluded:

There is a shift toward the right in Malaysia—to a more conservative kind of Islam. I do not subscribe to this front because Malaysia was always a very tolerant society. There is a rise of Islamic religiosity as well. But I don’t see the rise of spirituality and common decency and inner spirituality—this is very different than religion.

Raihana said that, while she does not anticipate re-constituting KasehDia as a communication company, during her sabbatical she formed some new plans for the firm as well as the World Halal Forum and *Halal Journal*. Because she was still in the planning phase, she did not want to describe these plans but encouraged me to keep a lookout for an announcement. I continue to do so.

What is striking about the above interview is its parallels with Aminah’s experience. While Aminah had been disheartened by crass profit motive and struggles for authority, Raihana was disillusioned by a certain brand of religious conservatism that she felt was impeding the positive transformation of the halal industry. Again, Raihana’s experience echoes concerns that I first encountered in conversations with Aileen. And, while Raihana expressed a degree of cynicism, underneath that was a continued commitment to an ethical project that she appears to believe is executable through the idiom of halal and universal Islamic values.

IHI and Disparate Halal Standards

I met Darus at a Starbucks near his office in Bukit Damansara, three miles west of central Kuala Lumpur. Although my primary purpose in talking with Darus was to learn more about IHI, of

which he was one of the senior executives, Darus also worked in HDC, was part of Askar Financial's executive board, and is a close colleague of Raihana (though he did not have a position at KasehDia proper). So, he knows the halal industry well. Yet, Darus started our conversation with an apology, "I must tell you that I have been out of the halal industry for two years—I still know a lot of the people, but I'm not quite as up-to-date as I used to be." He went on to explain with a laugh: "I have gone full circle and returned to my capitalist roots; halal was a bit of a diversion, but I have always been involved with private equity." He is now working with a holding company that has subsidiaries specializing in investment in non-medical hospital services and ship repair for the government and oil carriers. While Darus's primary focus is, thus, quite far from concerns about halal, he continues to hold a director position with IHI and work with them on a project basis.

Darus explained that he and the people at KasehDia based their business plan for IHI on conversations that were taking place at the first two World Halal Forums (2006 and 2007). Delegates were preoccupied debating which set of halal standards were the best and what was the right way to handle controversial issues like alcohol content, animal stunning, and automated animal slaughter. Similarly, businesses wanted a single standard so that any good produced according to the standard would be universally recognized—and marketable—around the world. IHI was conceived as a business-friendly way of harmonizing these competing standards.

By 2008 they had received a start-up grant from the Malaysian government and adopted the Malaysian standard as the basis for its standard. Sheikh Saleh Kamel, a wealthy Saudi businessman, was also brought onboard as chairman of the Alliance. While all the pieces necessary to resolve the issues around standards seemed to be in place, IHI never made much progress beyond these points. Darus explained, "it's a tough job, there are a lot of sensitivities

that have to be balanced.” Despite what is commonly claimed, Darus denied that disagreements about halal standards had much to do with schools of Islamic jurisprudence, “Maybe Shafi’i jurists say that four blood vessels in the neck must be cut to properly slaughter an animal and Malikis say there are only three, but that’s not what anyone is talking about.” Instead, people are concerned about the controversial issues: the permissibility of food prepared by non-Muslims, mechanical slaughter, pre-slaughter stunning and the like. Darus puts it pointedly: “If anyone says we will never get to an international standard because of differences between the schools of thought, that’s crap, no one ever talks about that—it is a very convenient sweeping statement to make, but actually that is not the case.”

Darus explained that they attempted several strategies to make IHI work. The first was as an independent private standard. The immediate problem is that many regions are already regulated. Trying to function as a private standard would have put IHI in the very awkward position of being based in Malaysia, but not being able to do any certifications there because it is in JAKIM’s jurisdiction. The second possibility was to work with a central authority like the International Islamic Fiq Academy, based in Jeddah. Darus explained that the academy includes scholars from all over the world, so everyone’s interests would be represented. But, of course, this too would involve local authorities giving up a degree of their sovereignty. A non-starter in Darus’s view. They also considered trying to become the standard for the OIC (Organization for Islamic Cooperation). But Darus was turned off by the complexity of the OIC’s bureaucracy, “even if a resolution is passed at the OIC level—even at the summit level—before it is implemented, it needs to be ratified by the individual member states; nobody does that—it becomes a nice piece of paper.”

Darus said that he had a kind of revelation while working with certifiers in Saudi Arabia. He was already very frustrated because there did not seem to be anyway forward. A religious scholar explained to him that he was frustrated because halal cannot really be put into a standard:

I was a little taken aback, I said, ‘what do you mean?’ He explained that there can only be guidelines. A guideline is just parameters. Whereas a standard...the reason why industry likes a standard is because it is very definitive, the more prescriptive, the better. There is no room for error, you are very sure of following what is the standard. And it is easy to audit as well. If you’re an auditor and you have a standard you can do a checklist—yes/no, yes/no. It’s very objective. But when you have guidelines, we have parameters, there’s a lot of judgment involved, it’s a lot harder to do. But I actually appreciate what he said because it is correct from a religious point of view. So, we have this dichotomy of expectations. You have an industry and even the consumers expecting something quite definitive as to what is halal, but you should be listening to the real Islamic scholars who actually disagree. They will say you cannot have a thin line that is halal and anything that goes outside of it is not halal. The best analogy I heard was, imagine a highway, you have a highway code, you have a speed limit of 110. You can do 100, you can do 90, or 109, but you can’t exceed 110. The problem is that you get people who are driving 80 and they see someone doing a 105 and they say, ‘oh, he’s speeding, that’s haram’, but he’s not, he’s still below the speed limit, but relative to the slower car he’s speeding. There are those who are naturally more conservative and they see a person being more progressive, pushing toward the boundaries and they say, ‘oh that’s haram.’

Darus was convinced by this scholar’s condemnation of the very aspiration to institute standards. When he returned from Saudi Arabia, Darus decided to abandon the aim of harmonizing standards. IHI began to focus narrowly on doing halal trainings, particularly for airlines, which it still does. Though Darus has moved on, for the most part, to private equity.

Darus’s story differs slightly from that of Aminah and Raihana in that Darus does not have some deeply held conviction about an ethical value that should be inculcated in the halal industry; rather, Darus is driven by a practical concern to increase the effectiveness of the way in which the industry functions. Both the lack of common standards and the lack of a generally agreed upon method for adjudicating controversial cases are broadly recognized as substantial problems for the industry. Yet, despite agreement about the problem, Darus was unable to gather support for any of the solutions he proposed. Well his commitments were different than those of

Aminah and Raihana, he faced a very similar obstacle—unwillingness to surrender authority or even a modicum of sovereignty. Ironically, this led Darus to reject the notion of standards altogether. In his experience it seemed unlikely that anything could bridge the gap between the conservative and progressive understandings of religion.

Work and Ethics

Above I suggested that work is, or at least can be, a type of ethical undertaking—a project. While innumerable conditions contribute to the project's success or failure, the sort of field or arena in which it is attempted is a significant one. In the case of halal, the context in which halal professionals perform their work consists of the assemblage of elements that have been lashed together. This assemblage conditions, either enabling or precluding, the possibility of specific undertakings.

The case of Darus's project of harmonizing halal standards provides, perhaps, the clearest illustration of this sort of conditioning of possibilities. As we saw in chapter 3, standards are a peculiarly bureaucratic type of entity. As such, they demand a degree of precision that results in the arbitrary establishment of limits. It seems to me that it is exactly this arbitrary characteristic of standards with which Darus is struggling in the case above. In order to harmonize standards, Darus would have to decide how progressive or conservative to set the limits; such a decision is inescapably arbitrary. That is the wisdom of the guideline over the standard—guidelines permit degrees variance and thus avoid the problem of arbitrariness. However, because in its current form, the category of halal has been territorialized by standards (in response to the demands of industry and enabled by the precision of technoscience), Darus's project is foreclosed upon—rendered impossible—and he has retreated from it.

Raihana's attempt to develop a notion of universal Islamic values encounters a similar obstacle. The *fiq* entities with whom she finds herself at loggerheads are committed to a literal reading of *syariah*, while universal Islamic values foreground the rationale for the law ("it's not the number of arteries that are cut that is important, but the degree to which the animal suffers"). But again, because *halal* is territorialized through bureaucratic institutions to which literal readings are legible in a way that interpretative rationales are not, the possibility for universal Islamic values to flourish is severely curtailed.

Finally, we see a straight forward clash between Aminah's project of promoting *halal* awareness and the structure of the organization in which she works that demands the foregrounding of profit. Not only must Aminah spend more time on projects that have more potential for profit, but her own project is dismissed as inferior on the same grounds. But because the category of *halal* is increasingly structured for the purposes of the market, her project, because it foregrounds different values, becomes increasingly difficult to pursue.

Again, we are reminded of Aileen's anxiety as powerful organizations and businesses began to join together to standardize *halal* in Illinois. She feared that such an understanding of *halal* would foreclose on the possibility of her own *halal* project focused on community building. These examples suggest that her misgivings may not have been misplaced.

Neoliberalism and Market Proliferation

It is surprising how these organizations, the core of what was the *halal* industry in 2008 and 2009, had retreated to the peripheries by 2014. This is particularly so given that the overall value of the global *halal* industry is estimated at US\$ 4.5 trillion and Malaysia's own *halal* exports are valued at US\$ 1 billion and continue to grow (*New Straight Times*: 1 October 2018). Yet, Darus,

referring to those still working in the halal industry, said to me, “I guess they still think there is something in it, but honestly, I just don’t see it.”

So, why have so many of the foundational industry organizations atrophied and its professionals grown jaded while the industry statistically appears to be healthy and growing? I suggest that the reason involves the neoliberal push to establish markets. The Malaysian state has taken an interest in the halal industry—it supports halal-related bureaucracies, lends its legitimacy to industry endeavors, and provides substantial funding. That is, it is cultivating markets just as the sort of neoliberal state described by Ong (2006).

However, the halal industry is not a unitary set of enterprises. Established food producers like Nestle and Prima (a large Malaysian-based food manufacturer) were operating in Malaysia well before the push for halal labeling and certification processes. They carry on with their businesses adjusting to regulation as needed. Certainly, the legitimacy of these brands benefits from certification, but they are not the part of the halal industry that is *new* or *requires development*.

To understand this other sector, the *new* halal industry, it is useful to recall Naomi Klein’s (1999) work on corporate brands. She argued that the internationalization of production enabled corporations to reposition themselves as purveyors of branded lifestyles rather than of particular products. Their goods—the production of which was outsourced—served as little more than the material substrate for the brand, the latter being the generator of profit. In many respects, KasehDia appears to have attempted a similar model. In fact, the subtitle of *The Halal Journal* is “Business, Trends, *Lifestyle*” (emphasis added). In short, the main business of KasehDia appears to have been promotion. The same is true IHI, and, even, HDC—after it lost its role as a certifying body. Yet, it is unclear to which public these promotions are targeted—it

is difficult to imagine, for example, a Muslim bolstered more by reading the *Halal Journal* than a religious tract, or a businessperson deriving as much cachet from it as from a Reuters publication. But more foundationally it underscores a problem with the neoliberal preoccupation with establishing markets—there may be some spaces that markets are simply unable to occupy no matter how thoroughly cultivated.

Conclusion: Market Orientations and Ethical Consequences

It is not, I suspect, uncommon for ethnographers to find at the end of their projects that the whole of their research has been an attempt to resolve—to come to terms with—some anomaly they encounter at the project’s very beginning. This is certainly my sense of the current project. I began with the slow realization that halal was not merely something inscribed in Islamic literature—a domain best suited to Islamic scholars seeking moral guidance or textual analysts piecing together histories. Rather, through the experiences of Aileen in the Chicago-based halal scene, I came to recognize the capacity of halal to do certain kinds of social work. Aileen envisioned halal as a mechanism for pursuing particular ethical ends: increasing community prosperity and well-being through the development of dense networks of local economic activity. However, Aileen also feared that this ethical capacity could be undermined by the establishment of business-friendly halal standards that would be enforceable by secular law—just the sort of standards being proposed by IFANCA (Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America). Aileen argued that such standards did little for the economic or physical well-being of the Muslim community; instead, they merely increased marketers—particularly industrial food manufacturers—access to the Muslim community. In this valuation, Aileen imagined a competing type of ethical work to which halal might be put: profit making as a brand in the global business sphere.

This tension between Aileen's vision for halal and that of standards' proponents does not directly reference scholarly interpretation of halal prescriptions, but the type of work halal should do. It is a contest grounded in debate over standardization, that is, debate over the ways in which halal is made present in the world—the ontology of halal. So here, at the very beginning of my research, was the problematic I have pursued over the course of this dissertation: the entanglements of ontology and ethics.

The contested state of regulation in Chicago stands in stark contrast to the situation in Malaysia. In fact, the Malaysian preoccupation with halal is an example of the very sort of collaboration between certifiers and businesses about which Aileen was anxious. It is this contrast that led me to recognize how carefully and conscientiously the sphere of halal had been crafted in Malaysia and convinced me that such an intricate assemblage was worthy of investigation. This project, then, though only half recognized as such at its outset, has explored the imbroglio of ontology and ethics through the lens of the category of halal as it is assembled in Kuala Lumpur. While not a primary focus of this project, I have suggested throughout the dissertation how, while Kuala Lumpur is a particularly prominent site of this production, the processes both influences and is influenced by actors beyond the boundaries of Kuala Lumpur, certainly, but also Malaysia itself.

By pursuing the notion of ontology, I echo an earlier anthropological interest in *worldview* (particularly Geertz 1973a). An important distinction between *worldview* and *ontology* is that the first is explicitly about *what people believe about the world and how they experience it*. Ontology shifts focus from this type of interiority to *the modes in which things come to persist in the world*, or as I have written throughout the dissertation: *the ways in which things get into the world*. In other words, ontology foregrounds things themselves, not merely

people's ideas about them. Thus, ontology is amenable to realist interpretations of things. In the introduction, I pursued an argument for a realist position in regard to the category of halal. In short, I maintained that the category of halal is an assemblage constituted not only by ideas, but also novel forms of discourse (particularly industrial production standards), practices (such as bureaucratic audit and certification, technoscientific intervention, and marketing), as well as physical objects (specifically the halal goods themselves and the signs by which they are marked). Collectively, these are the modes in which the category of halal is *territorialized*, the ways in which it becomes lodged in space and time—literally, comes to occupy territory.

As part of this realist argument, I endorsed an *in re* understanding of how the category of halal is manifest—that is, that the category consists entirely of its instances (the category of blue, for example, consists of the collection of all blue things in the world). Such an understanding draws on the contingent characteristic of assemblages—that they are not dependent on a single logic (Collier & Ong 2005:12). Latour's analogy of assemblage/networks to railroads is particularly helpful in understanding such contingency (1993:117). Major stations within a railroad system are connected to each other by the greatest number of well-maintained lines. While lines connecting to unpopular stations are few and may not be maintained. In terms of halal, prohibitions on pork and alcohol (territorialized in sacred texts, industrial standards, labels, halal products themselves and Muslim's consumption practices) are central to the category, they are well connected to a great many other parts of the assemblage. Other aspects of the assemblage, such as the acceptance of *tapai* (the popular fermented, and high alcohol content, rice-based sweet) as halal among Malays (territorialized by JAKIM's ruling, technoscientific examination of *tapai*, and Malay consumption practices), are far less well integrated parts of the assemblage as described in chapter 4. The fact that many non-Malay Muslims would not accept

tapai as halal—or even that technoscientific intervention was required to establish its halal status—are examples of how tapai also *detrterritorializes* the category of halal. Thus, it simultaneously territorializes the category by expanding the number of things within it and, in different ways, detrterritorializes it by facilitating differing opinions and blurring its contours. *Things*, then, in as far as they are assemblages, persist in a state of tension between territorialization and detrterritorialization.

If this is correct and things merely hang together as radical contingencies with no centers—no essences, what accounts for their stability? How do sundry elements get roped together into a thing to begin with? I contend that it is historical social processes that condition such coalescence. In other words, the truth of an assemblage is not dependent on some essential logic or undergirding structure that can be uncovered; rather we must attend to the intricacies of the social worlds in which it is produced. If compared to narrative styles, contingent assemblages are less like the cumulative storyline of a classic novel, say, *A Tale of Two Cities*—that leads inevitably to the guillotine, than that of a soap opera, like *General Hospital*—that is only loosely conditioned by theme and setting. The former has an internal logic that is amenable to synoptic retelling in reference to its endpoint, while the latter does not—it simply must be watched. Part 1 of the dissertation (chapters 3, 4, and 5) are specifically concerned with these contingencies: the processes and actors in Kuala Lumpur who are involved with producing the category of halal.

Chapter 3 examined the bureaucratic terrain of halal. I began that chapter by considering the relationship between ritual and bureaucracy. This comparison is motivated the observation that a central function of both ritual and bureaucracy is to effect transformation, that is, shifting between statuses. As moving through sequences of statuses is a central feature of social life, drawing on the work of Appadurai (1988), Kopytoff (1988), and Starrett (1995), I argued that

such social lives are not limited to people; things too move between statuses. In the case of halal statuses, bureaucracy and ritual have become conflated such that ritual observation, as in the case of proper slaughter of an animal, is only legible (Scott 1998) if it also bureaucratically recognized. This type of bureaucratic recognition is dependent on audit processes and its verification marked through labeling practices.

The primary focus of this chapter is the two Kuala Lumpur-agencies agencies most centrally involved in certification of halal: JAKIM (Malaysian Department of Religious Development) and HDC (Halal Industry Development Corporation). Of particular interest is how these agencies have competed against each other for control over the certification process. HDC, set-up as a government-owned corporation, was intended as a business-friendly agency that would function according to the same principles of efficiency and profitability that organize the business activities within the halal industry. Specifically, HDC promised to provide a quicker and more reliable process for receiving halal certification than JAKIM had been able to offer. While HDC appears to have been able to make good on that promise in 2008, by 2009, certification had been moved back to JAKIM. While the precise reason for the shift remains obscure, it appears connected to the shift from the Badawi government to the Najib government. For the purposes here, more important than the details of this shifting back and forth of certification, is that it makes evident the overlapping authority within the halal ecosystem and that there is contention within it. Furthermore, it highlights that, for the time being at least, the more traditional bureaucracy, JAKIM, maintains an advantage over the quasi-corporate agency. It also leaves HDC in a somewhat precarious position with no obvious *raison d'être*—though it now seems to have settled on a mission of training and promoting Malaysian export goods.

One of the main tasks of halal-related bureaucracies—reiterating the conflation between ritual and bureaucracy described above—is to *transcribe* religious rules, encoded in sacred texts and their interpretation by religious scholars, into industrial production standards, encoded in bureaucratic documents. One of the major challenges of this transcription process is that standards, to be useful to producers, require a degree of preciseness absent in religious texts. This gap between genres leads to arbitrariness in standards, as exemplified in the case of alcohol content in would-be halal goods. These standards must also grapple with questions about innovations in production processes that are not clearly prefigured in earlier sacred prescriptions (such as mechanical animal slaughter and technically complicated ingredients). These questions leave significant room for disagreement between religious scholars as well as tension between religious obligation and the exigencies of market competition faced by goods' producers. JAKIM has attempted to mitigate these tensions, at least in part, by cooperating with other regional halal authorities, specifically those of Indonesia, Brunei, and Singapore. This MABIMS (Religious Ministries of Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore) group meets every two years to ensure compatibility between these countries' standards and address issues of jurisdiction.

While bureaucracies are a new source of authority conditioning ideas and practices around halal and, thus, a central mode of territorializing the category, it is apparent that such agencies by themselves are insufficient. Production chains are long and complicated. Particularly, food manufacturing draws on a variety of unfamiliar ingredients—many of which are themselves produced through complex processes. Questions about whether haram components are present in goods necessitate not only bureaucratic oversight, but also technoscientific surveillance. The role of the growing number of laboratories and research institutes dedicated to halal science is the focus of chapter 4.

The central problematic of the chapter is the relationship between science and religion. The case of the halal laboratories is an intriguing elaboration on this, admittedly, perennial question because it involves working scientists—mostly food scientists—who are engaged in what is, at least partially, a religious project. The challenge for these experts is grappling with the tension between science and religion as distinct bases for authoritative and potentially incongruous claims. Unsurprisingly, the relationship between the two is construed in various ways: religion as impervious to scientific verification, science as a rhetoric for articulating religious truths to non-Muslims, science and religion compartmentalized in fully independent domains, and, of course, science and religion as modes of uncovering truth that are fully compatible. What struck me, however, is the willingness among many halal scientists to admit that the relationship between science and religion is unsettled—something that needed to be continually grappled with.

Perhaps more important than the research aspects of halal science is, as pointed to above, its capacity for surveillance of production chains. Certification and labeling work as forms of testimony: producers and auditors attest that manufacturing processes conform to production standards. However, auditors only intermittently visit facilities and even well-intentioned producers are liable to overlook aspects of the manufacturing process. Technoscientific oversight—testing goods for proscribed elements—is a means of ameliorating these types of potential shortcomings in the certification system. If some component is fraudulently or mistakenly labeled as halal, material testing has the capacity to reveal this lapse. However, in chapter 4, I describe a case of seeming-porcine contamination of Cadbury chocolate in which such scientific oversight goes awry. This controversy was not merely the result of piecemeal incorporation of laboratory technology into the certification process (which laboratories,

protocols and result perimeters are to be used and at what points in the certification process is laboratory testing to be done), but there is also the issue of overlapping authority (JAKIM is clearly responsible for issues pertaining to halal, but the Health Ministry also has an interest in the scientific surveillance of production chains). The ironic outcome was that laboratory tests, supposed to provide an objective check on certification, became a source of anxiety and muddled halal claims made by JAKIM and the manufacturer. As such, technoscientific interventions do not appear as any sort of panacea for the uncertainties remaining despite certification protocols.

Chapter 5 investigates the ways in which private enterprise contributes to the territorialization of halal—processes that I refer to collectively as commercialization. The most obvious form of commercialization is the production of halal goods. Foodstuffs are among the most salient of these goods, particularly those that contain meat or other animal derived ingredients. However, such products also include leather goods that eschew the use of pig leather, cosmetics or pharmaceuticals that avoid alcohol- and porcine-derived ingredients, and even services like transportation systems that do not traffic non-halal goods and Muslim-oriented tourism. Chapter 5, however, foregrounds a different set of enterprises, those that have made a business of promoting halal and developing halal markets. Paraphrasing Sloane-White (2017), I gloss these firms as being in the businesses of *producing more halal*, rather than focusing on particular types of goods. Their product is the halal industry itself and their production methods include industry research, brand development, and the general promotion of halal awareness. While in some respects these types of enterprises overlap with bureaucratic agencies and research labs, more so than these non-commercial firms, halal enterprises are intended to generate profit. This profit motive is believed by people within the industry to encourage

efficiency and a focus on customer satisfaction rather than quarrels over authority or particular interpretations of halal rules.

Among the most prominent of the halal enterprises located in Kuala Lumpur is the cluster of businesses around KasehDia—or at least this cluster *was* quite prominent. KasehDia’s founders take credit for coining the phrase “halal industry” and through their products—such as *The Halal Journal*, World Halal Forum, and *Halal Guides*—their brand became well known to halal businesses both in Malaysia and internationally. They were proponents of the creation of HDC and the transfer of responsibility for halal certification to it. KasehDia also attempted to organize international certification through its IHI (International Halal Integrity) Alliance initiative. KasehDia also spawned Askar Financial, a private equity firm focused on facilitating investment in enterprises within the Islamic economy, including the halal industry. This service was intended to connect Muslim investors with investment opportunities that consistent with dictates of Islamic law. However, after just under two years of not being able to generate interest, the Askar Financial project was abandoned. The activities of KasehDia and IHI have been similarly curtailed.

While the degree of KasehDia’s retreat from the prominence it enjoyed in the early 2000s was surprising, one of the executives from Askar Financial, Rushdi, has gone on to start another company, Zilzar, that has in many ways come to occupy a space within the Kuala Lumpur halal scene similar to that of KasehDia in past years. Zilzar aspires to provide an online trading platform patterned after behemoths like Alibaba—except that it will specialize in halal goods. So, while KasehDia specialized in print media, Zilzar is embracing e-commerce and social media. Like its predecessor, Zilzar continues to be a presence at halal-related events by sponsoring presenters and co-branding events. Despite having charted a promising course within

the halal industry, Zilzar has encountered a number of setbacks with repeated launches, difficulty attracting traders, and challenges creating Muslim lifestyle content. While the growth of the Muslim middle class seems to ensure increased demand for halal goods, the future of enterprises that seek to make a business out of supporting the halal industry is unclear—this despite that they were among the first to envision what a halal industry would be like.

Collectively, chapters 3, 4 and 5 describe the modes in which halal is made to be present in the world—the ontological status of the category of halal. This section of the dissertation is constructed around three broad points. First, that the category of halal is a *real* thing—that is, it is not something merely imagined or within the minds of certain people. A literal account of territorialization processes—the ways in which things come to occupy space (that is, territory)—makes this evident. While the category of halal is an important *concept* to many Muslims, and, therefore, does occupy a space within an Islamic imaginary, certain minds, or in the synaptic connections of particular brains, it is also expressively encoded in religious texts, production standards, and consumer-oriented guidebooks as well as materially in production and consumption practices, halal sections of grocery stores, and, of course, in halal goods themselves. Thus, the category of halal is not only in people's minds, it is in the world—it is real.

However, and this is the second point, territorialization is not an even process. Rather it is, at least in part, a social process that is contested and political. The uncertainty about whether HDC or JAKIM should be responsible for halal certification is an example of this sort of impediment, as are disagreements about whether machine slaughtered animals meet halal requirements. These sorts of tensions blur the boundaries between the halal and the non-halal; they deterritorialize category. Thus, like most assemblages, the category of halal exists in a state

of tension between territorialization and deterritorialization. This characteristic is a result of it being the contingent product of social-historical processes.

Finally, while contingent, these processes of territorialization are not random, rather they push the category of halal in a particular direction: to become legible within cosmopolitan markets, a process I have referred to as *marketization*. Ideally, under a regime of a fully marketized category of halal, a halal chicken patty that is produced in Malaysia from chicken imported from Thailand, would be equally recognizable as halal in Dubai as it is in either Malaysia or Thailand. To achieve such legibility, there must be agreement about halal standards, well-known and trusted brands recognizable through their labels, and systems of audit that include certification as well as technoscientific surveillance to avoid fraud. This ideal situation is, then, what all the processes described in the first part of the dissertation are aimed at: producing a marketized category of halal.

In the second part of the dissertation I move from examining how the category of halal is produced to how people interact with it—that is, from ontology to ethics. The contention is that the ontological structure of halal conditions the possibilities of how people engage it. Thus, the marketized category of halal becomes what Collier and Lakoff call a *regime of living* (2005:31-32). In other words, it is a set of institutionalized patterns that people must negotiate when determining how to act or what ends to pursue. The regime is a type of arena in which life's activities are conducted.

In chapter 6, I describe Kuala Lumpur's *halal aesthetic*; that is, how halal appears within the city's foodscape. I argue that this foodscape is bifurcated into local and cosmopolitan dimensions and that there are different ways of signaling halal and non-halal in each of these contexts—different ways of reading the foodscapes. Furthermore, JAKIM certification is far

more relevant to the cosmopolitan dimension than it is to the local one. I then describe how Malaysians who I spent time with during my fieldwork—often eating—interact with this foodscape. I particularly focus on cases that are problematic, cases that involve people negotiating expectations around halal. The rationale for foregrounding such cases is that they show how people think about halal and actively engage it, while such negotiations would be more difficult to discern when behavior unproblematically conforms to expectations. In other words, these cases show that the edges of the category of halal are jagged and unpredictably uneven and that there is a constant process of building them up as well as exploring their permeability. Muslims are not, of course, automatons following inflexible algorithms fixed by religious scholars, government officials, technocrats, or commercial campaigns, rather they engage the category of halal in novel ways, often meeting normative expectations, but sometimes contradicting, or just ignoring, these expectations. So, while the first part of the dissertation describes how certain actors assemble the category of halal, in chapter 6 we see that, while this assemblage does define the contours of the arena in which consumers encounter the material foodscape—and the world of goods more generally, the assemblage does not determine how people engage it.

Chapter 7 examines the territorialization of halal as a regime of living from another perspective, that of the professionals working within the halal industry. Specifically, I investigate the emergence of pessimism among halal professionals who I initially interviewed in 2008 and 2009 during research for my MA thesis. When I returned to Kuala Lumpur to conduct research for my doctorate, I was able to talk with these individuals again, often repeatedly. The enthusiasm I had noticed in my earlier research had faded in the intervening seven years. I trace this change through the professional biographies of these interviewees and argue that it is the

result of the failure to establish markets. More specifically, the enterprises with which these professionals were working ultimately failed to develop marketable products, so they contracted and their employees moved to other sectors and different enterprises. The wariness with which they regard the halal industry reflects these failures. Thus, while halal manufacturers, those companies that are engaged in production of halal goods continue to grow, enterprises dedicated to developing the halal industry have struggled to find their niches. The ironic outcome is that, while some of these businesses were at the forefront of creating the halal industry in 2007 and 2008, the current state of the industry precludes the successful functioning of these very enterprises. The particular modes of territorializing halal foreclose on the possibility of these projects.

By reflecting on the ontological condition of the halal industry in tandem with its ethical implications a very particular version of a perennial anthropological preoccupation emerges: the relationship between capitalism and religion. This interest dates to at least nineteenth-century Marxism and the early twentieth-century writings of Weber. The intensity of the relationship between these two domains of social life shows no signs of abating in more recent times (Roberts 1995). The relationship between capitalism and Islam also appears to be intensifying (Nasr 2009, Rudnyckyj 2010, Hefner 2012, Hoesterey 2016, Shirazi 2016, and Tobin 2016). This dissertation builds on these studies by foregrounding specific mechanisms, the processes of marketization, through which capitalism becomes imbricated with the religious category of halal. It goes on to explore the impacts this reformatting of the category has on how people interact with halal as well as the sorts of projects that can be implemented under its sway.

Appendix:

List of Acronyms

ABIM: Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia / Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia

ACCIN: Allied Coordinating Committee of Islamic NGOs

BN: Nasional Front / Barisan Nasional

EPU: Economic Planning Unit

ESQ: Emotional Spiritual Quotient

FELDA: Federal Land Development Authority

GSHC: Global Halal Support Center

HDC: Halal Industry Development Corporation

ICCI: Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Industry

IFANCA: Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America

IIUM: International Islamic University Malaysia

IHI: International Halal Integrity Alliance

IKIAM: Malaysian Institute of International Islamic Cooperation / Institut Kerjasama Islam

Antarabangsa Malaysia

IPPH: Halal Product Research Institute / Institut Penyelidikan Produk Halal

ISNA: Islamic Society of North America

JAKIM: Department of Islamic Development Malaysia / Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia

OIC: Organization of Islamic Cooperation

MABIMS: Religious Ministries of Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore / Menteri Agama

Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore

MCA: Malaysian Chinese Association

MDTCC: Ministry of Domestic Trade, Cooperatives and Consumerism

MIHAS: Malaysia International Halal Showcase

MIHREC: Malaysian International Halal Research and Education Conference

MITI: Ministry of International Trade and Industry

MUI: Indonesian Council of Islamic Scholars / Majelis Ulama Indonesia

MUIS: Islamic Religious Council of Singapore / Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura

NDP: National Development Policy

NEP: National Economic Policy

PAS: Pan-Malaysia Islamic Party / Parti Islam Se-Malaysia

PPIM: Malaysian Muslim Consumer Association / Persatuan Pengguna Islam Malaysia

RISDA: Rubber Industry Smallholders Development Authority

UKM: National University of Malaysia / Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

UM: University Malaya

UMNO: United Malay National Organization

UMP: University of Malaysia Pahang / Universiti Malaysia Pahang

UPM: University Putra Malaysia / Universiti Putra Malaysia

VOC: Dutch United East India Company / Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie (Dutch)

WHF: World Halal Forum

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