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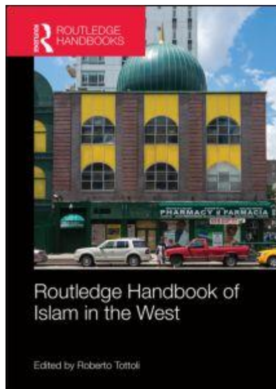

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Muslim material culture in the Western world

Johan Fischer

Introduction

When I was walking down the Edgware Road in central London[1] in August 2009, the large number of "Islamic" products and services offered caught my eye. I was there in connection with a research project that explored the proliferation of *halal* ("permitted") as a global religious market, with a particular focus on the role of Malaysia and Malays in this market in London. The Islamic market so ubiquitous in the Edgware Road signifies some wider transformations that have taken place during the last decade or so, including a changing Islamic business and entrepreneurial environment in London, but also more globally, as we shall see in this chapter. Most of the shops, restaurants, cafés, money transfer agencies, kiosks, barbers, banks, and estate agencies here are run by Muslims. The growth of Muslim businesses in London reflects the wider growth of and will to invest in ethnic minority businesses in the UK (Ahmed 2008: 655).

At the same time, scholarly interest in Islamic markets is growing. For example, from an interdisciplinary perspective the edited volume *Muslim Societies in the Age of Mass Consumption* (Pink 2009) argues that, in spite of the intensifying globalization of markets and consumption, these processes have received modest scholarly attention. More specifically, this volume explores issues such as the changing spaces of consumption, branding, and the marketing of religious music as well as the consumption patterns of Muslim minority groups.

The proliferation of Islamic commodities and services on a global scale applies to what has been called the globalization of religious markets (Lee 1993) – for the sake of argument I shall call these "Islamic markets." Politicians, bureaucrats and entrepreneurs use the popular mass media to manipulate popular desires (Lee 1993: 37). More specifically, Islamic commodities and services are advertised globally as religious necessities that fulfill private desires such as piety, purity, and health – all intimately linked to the "market for identities" (Navaro-Yashin 2002: 11). Inspired by the recent work of Daniel Miller, I understand material culture to be how things work by being invisible, unremarked upon, familiar, and taken for granted: "such a perspective seems properly described as material culture since it implies that much of what makes us what we are exists … as an exterior environment that habituates and prompts us" (Miller 2009: 50–1).

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This chapter explores contemporary Muslim material culture, paying particular attention to London. It examines different types of commodities ("paraphernalia," clothes, and *halal*) and "Islamic" services (delivered by Islamic organizations, "ethnic" consultancy companies, and banks), arguing that emerging Islamic markets raise a number of broader questions pertaining to the relationship between Muslim identities, shopping, and recognition.

More recent literature on migration shopping explores how modern and globalized forms of consumer capitalism have generated the growth of ethnic and "roots" celebrations. In the USA from the 1970s onwards, for example, companies started to turn away from mass advertising campaigns to focus on segmented marketing approaches and migrant shopping in particular. In migration shopping, academic ideas about multiculturalism in modern societies fuse together with the interests of the business sector. Thus, migrant groups were targeted as essential segments of modern consumers who, to a large extent, construct individual and group ethnic identities through their shopping. In the USA, such migrant shopping campaigns have targeted Jews, Irish Americans, Hispanics, and, more recently, Muslims, for example (Halter 2000). In US advertising and mass media, as well as in the new media environment of blogs, video, and social networks, Muslims and Islamic identity are taking center-stage (Hastings-Black 2009).

More specifically, these broader questions relate to globalized Islam post-9/11; shopping as a patriotic duty in mass culture; modern Islam as a discursive tradition; "the secular" as an epistemic category and "secularism" as a political doctrine; as well as Charles Taylor's idea that identities are partly given shape or denied by the recognition or non-recognition of others.

Setting the scene: Muslim consumer culture in contemporary London

In 2006, the Office of National Statistics estimated that there were 1,558,890 Muslims in Britain. The two largest groups are Pakistani (43.2 percent) and Bangladeshi (16.55), while "Other Asians" account for 5.8 percent (www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=954 and www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=957, accessed November 12, 2009). The Muslim population in London is one of the largest in any European city and Islam is the second largest faith in London after Christianity. According to the 2001 census, 607,000 people living in London identified themselves as Muslims, that is, 8.5 percent of London's population. (www.london.gov.uk/gla/publications/equalities/muslims-in-london.pdf, accessed November 12, 2009).

London qualifies as a "global city" (Sassen 2002: 2) as it plays an important role in linking the national as well as European economy with global circuits of commodities, people, and ideas, and this is also the case with the Islamic marketplace. Muslim space-making or landscaping in London and comparable cities is the production of the social and cultural space of networks and identities created as Muslims interact with one another and with the larger community (Metcalf 1996: 2). The proliferation of Islamic markets contributes to social and cultural space-making in a city such as London. Often it is certain activities – shopping and eating, for example – that contribute to the creation of "Muslim space" (Metcalf 1996: 6). Another example is the display and transmission of the Arabic word *halal*, written in Arabic and/or Roman characters, and its involvement in the production, recognition, and contestation of *halal* space in London.

The spatial contexts of producing, displaying, selling, and shopping for Islamic commodities in the Western world have received modest attention. Shopping for Islamic commodities cannot be divorced from the context in which they are sold, that is, the spatial context of such consumption may in practice be just as significant as the qualities of the paraphernalia, food, or services. Hence, Islamic markets are not merely conditioning and conditioned by aesthetics and the religious self-understanding of Muslim consumers. They also reflect much more mundane

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understandings and practices, such as social aspects of chatting or socializing with the butcher in a *halal* butcher shop or customers in a convenience store. In recent years, *halal* spaces such as restaurants, butcher's shops, grocery and convenience stores, supermarkets and hypermarkets are proliferating in London. These Muslim spaces or landscapes often materialize in the interfaces between Islamic "paraphernalia" (using, for instance, plaques with Islamic calligraphy to evoke a form of Islamic authenticity), *halal* commodities (a growing number of Muslim consumers are concerned not only with traditional *halal* food requirements as stated in the Qur'an, but also contamination from *haram* ("forbidden") sources in products such as confectionary, toiletries, and medication), as well as Islamic organizations or "ethnic" consultancy firms that certify commodities or advise companies about proper Islamic branding and advertising.

In many parts of London, such as the Edgware Road, Finsbury Park, and Whitechapel Road, *halal* is a distinctive presence on signs and in butcher shops and restaurants. Lately, *halal* certified products have been appearing in large numbers in supermarkets such as Tesco (a UK-based international grocery and merchandising retail chain – Tesco is the largest British retailer by both global sales and domestic market share) and Asda (a British supermarket chain that retails both food and merchandise). In effect, the novel ubiquity of *halal* in some parts of London can be seen as a form of urban space-making (Metcalf 1996) and Islamic visibility (Esposito 1995: 195).

In itself, a city such as London can be said to be a charismatic entity (Hansen and Verkaaik 2009). Charisma is today being democratized in the marketplace, for example, and this has "entailed a measure of objectification – standardization, definition, and tangibility – and a commercial exchangeability of objects, attributes, and skills that are assumed to produce charisma" (Hansen and Verkaaik 2009: 7). The proliferation of Islamic markets in London is a good example of a particular type of urban exchangeability that is imbricated in the mundane practices of everyday shopping to effect charisma among Muslims.

Islamic paraphernalia: of plaques and cell phones

In many of the grocery stores in the Edgware Road, a wide variety of Islamic paraphernalia is also sold. These Islamic commodities are no longer an expression of esoteric forms of production, trade, and consumption, but part of a huge and expanding globalized market marked by intensified flows of mass-produced commodities. Based on fieldwork among Muslim Sierra Leoneans living and working in Washington, DC, D'Alisera (2001) shows that a global trend in recent years has been the emergence of a thriving business in Islamic goods. Items from stickers, rugs, holiday cards, and plaques with Islamic calligraphy to special types of holidays aimed at Muslim audiences, watches displaying prayer (*salat*) times and other features, logos and ring tones on cell phones, clothes, etc. touch upon and "Islamicize" virtually every aspect of life (D'Alisera 2001: 97). At the same time, there has been a marked change from craft production to mass production of religious commodities (Starrett 1995). All these types of products are available in the Islamic marketplace in London.

D'Alisera's study explores in depth how and why Muslim Sierra Leoneans in Washington, DC inscribe religious identity onto their cars by means of a variety of Islamic commodities, such as bumper stickers displaying Qur'anic verses in Arabic. This type of decoration "serves to reflect the ways they bridge the gap between various, sometimes competing modes of reference, and thus define their place in the community" (D'Alisera 2001: 97). These forms of decoration, marking, or tagging of commodities or space are visible not only on the Edgware Road, but also in other areas of London that have sizeable Muslim populations.

When imported into Muslim homes, these religious commodities are highly visible manifestations of ways in which Islam can be domesticated, that is, given material expression in the

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intimacy of the home. The effect of this importation of Islamic paraphernalia is to individualize the house and thus transform it from being a mere commodity into a home. An example of this is that a plaque with Islamic calligraphy may serve a number of purposes. First, of course, it is an Islamic symbol or emblem seen as protecting the house and its inhabitants. Second, plaques or signs can also serve the purpose of marking Muslim space in public. A large part of my fieldwork took place in *halal* restaurants, particularly Malaysian ones, where I ate *halal* food and discussed *halal* with guests, restaurant owners, and *halal* traders. Several of the most popular Malaysian restaurants in London advertise themselves as "Malaysian (*halal*) cuisine" on signs. In one of these restaurants there are several tourist posters from Malaysia, but no visible Islamic paraphernalia, such as plaques with Islamic calligraphy. Another Malaysian restaurant in North London, which is part of a food court located in Oriental City Shopping Mall, likewise advertises itself as serving "*halal* Malaysian cuisine." Adjacent to the food court is an Asian supermarket that also sells fresh *halal* meat and a whole range of other *halal* products, as well as Islamic paraphernalia. In this restaurant in North London a plaque with Islamic calligraphy is visible behind the counter. In another Malaysian *halal* restaurant in Paddington, West London, plaques with Islamic calligraphy as well as the Malaysian national flag call attention to the focus on Malaysian Muslim *halal* cuisine.

Another dimension is the way in which cell phones and their widely marketed Islamic paraphernalia can be seen to inscribe technological equipment with some sort of "sacred" quality. Adding to this trend, in 2004 Ilkone Mobile, a Dubai company, launched an Islamic cell phone (www.ameinfo.com/43982.html, accessed November 12, 2009). Besides sending an SMS (Short Message Service) at prayer times, it can point to the exact location of Mecca from anywhere on the globe. On the one hand, the cell phone in itself is a quintessential example of a commodity that has been introduced fairly recently into the global market and also a relatively expensive commodity that some Muslims may conceptualize as a trendy and technologically advanced piece of Westernization or globalization. On the other hand, it is a social piece of equipment through which families can communicate in a rushed everyday life where both parents and children are often away from home.

London is a thriving market for a wide range of Islamic paraphernalia that can serve a number of purposes. This wide and growing range of commodities signifies intensified flows of goods in the era of globalization. During my periods of fieldwork in London, I spent a great deal of time in Muslim shops that sell Islamic paraphernalia and it was evident that these commodities are imported from all over the world, eventually reaching London, where they can contribute to the marking of commodities and private/public spaces.

The proper and improper dressing of Muslim bodies

The French concept of *laïcité* roughly translates as secularism. With particular reference to the question of why the law against religious signs in public schools was passed, Bowen concludes that the veil in France symbolizes rising Islamism, decaying social life, and "tracked" anxieties about the fraying of the Republic, as well as political Islam (Bowen 2007: 242).

The heated debate about religious signs in public, and Muslim women's dress in particular, is by no means limited to France. These questions are controversial in many European countries, including Britain. During my fieldwork in London, Muslim women's right to wear the *niqab* (a veil that covers the face) was criticized and questioned in the media. One headline read "This Veil Fixation Is Doing Muslim Women No Favours. We need an honest debate about women and Islam. But the current politically driven campaign is making that more difficult" (*Guardian*, October 19, 2006). Another headline was "Tribunal Dismisses Case of Muslim Woman

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Ordered Not to Teach in Veil" (*Guardian*, October 20, 2006). Finally, in an article headed "White Pupils Less Tolerant, Survey Shows," the point was made that "Arguments about the Muslim veil in Britain are part of a wider debate taking place across Europe. Amid competing claims of religious freedom and official secularism, some argue that the debate is motivated by growing intolerance of Muslims" (*Guardian*, October 21, 2006). Thus, the veil is essentialized as "Muslim culture" and thought to establish a "community" with shared values despite ethnic, national, and linguistic diversity (Bauman 1996: 23).

Why is the dressing of Muslim women's bodies such a controversial question in a modern European context where bodies are constantly subjected to forms of experimentation in terms of dress, fashion, and plastic surgery? Human bodily existence can be seen as both the basis and the "model" of the constitution of the subject or the self. The body is essential in consumption as it is the site for often involuntary and revealing display. For Bourdieu, the most significant process of embodiment is the interaction that takes place between bodies, on the one hand, and the space structured around myth and ritual, on the other (Bourdieu 1977: 89). Dressing the body is "a means of symbolic display, a way of giving external form to narratives of self-identity" (Giddens 1991: 62). The main point here is that the dressing of the outer body is where the inner worlds of individuals and groups meet and/or conflict with the surrounding society. It is the overt dressing of Muslims that tends to generate intensifying debates about what is proper/improper religious signification of public bodies.

Debates over Muslim dress have been explored in an extensive body of literature and it is not within the scope of this article to discuss or review all this literature. An example of an illuminating study (Tarlo 1995) of the *hijab* in Britain suggests that its adoption by middle-class Muslim women is often a product of the transcultural encounters they experience in a cosmopolitan urban environment. The article shows that the resonance of the *hijab* in Britain and elsewhere in the West is constantly being reshaped both through contemporary political events and their media coverage, as well as through the actions and campaigns of *hijab* wearers.

With reference to France and Britain, Werbner considers the ambiguities and ambivalences associated with the politics of embodiment surrounding veiling and honor killings comparatively, and the implications for ongoing debates on multiculturalism. She argues that the publicity surrounding symbolic practices of sexual intimacy in the context of modernity may come to be loaded with secondary symbolic connotations, often highly politicized, for both Muslims and Europeans, leading to "irresolvable conundrums" (Werbner 2007: 161).

In Turkey, secularists' fantasies about Islamists in public life have actively produced and maintained versions of Islamism (Navaro-Yashin 2002: 7). Consequently, Islamists' compulsions to gender segregation and veiling are not essential features of Islam. Rather, Islamists "began to know themselves and to take action upon the world in assuming, internalizing, reversing, and upholding what secularists had demonized" (Navaro-Yashin 2002: 42). The politics of identity within these groups has been deeply influenced by an expanding consumer market in the context of the globalization of the 1980s and 1990s. In this context, Islamists molded an Islamic consumer ontology emerging in this new market for identities (Navaro-Yashin 2002: 111). These controversies around the "veiling-fashion" are by no means resolved in modern Turkey and pose a latent field of tension (Gökarıksel and Secor 2009).

My fieldwork in London showed that some Malay Muslim women in London, but by no means all, wear the *tudung* (long headscarf). Based on my previous periods of fieldwork in urban Malaysia, it was clear that comparatively more women would be wearing the *tudung* in the Malaysian setting. This indicates that claims concerning piety and Islamic identities through dress for women in particular are not necessarily stronger in a diasporic context. Indeed, the diasporic context can be supportive of more relaxed sentiments compared with the homeland.

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I suggest that, contrary to the tendency in much literature to see ethnic and religious traits reinforced in a diasporic context, the opposite effect is possible; that is, migrants may feel that in London, for instance, they can escape or negotiate what are seen to be dogmatic or conformist forms of religion in the homeland. Hence, the highly politicized discourses that again and again stress that Muslim women do not have a choice when it comes to dress are not necessarily backed by empirical evidence.

Halal I: in and between bodies

Halal literally means "lawful" or "permitted." The Qur'an and the *Sunna* (the life, actions, and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad) exhort Muslims to eat the good and lawful food God has provided for them, but a number of conditions and prohibitions are imposed. Muslims are expressly forbidden to consume carrion, spurting blood, pork, and foods that have been consecrated to any being other than God himself, which are said to be *haram*. The lawfulness of meat depends on how it is obtained. Ritual slaughter, *dhabh*, requires that the animal is killed in God's name by making a fatal incision across the throat. In this process, the blood should be drained off as fully as possible. Among Muslim groups and individuals, the question of the stunning of animals prior to slaughter is highly contested; that is, some Muslims consider only meat from unstunned animals to be *halal*, while others accept that stunning is part of modern and ethical food production.

In spite of the fact that they are not mentioned in the Qur'an, consumption of a number of creatures has been forbidden by the *ulama'* (Denny 2006: 278). Another significant Islamic prohibition relates to wine and any other intoxicating drink or substance, all of which are, according to the majority of opinions, *haram* whatever the quantity or substance (Denny 2006: 279). Muslim dietary rules assumed new significance in the twentieth century, as some Muslims began striving to demonstrate how such rules conform to modern reason and the findings of scientific research. Another common theme in the revival and renewal of these dietary rules seems to be the search for alternatives to what are seen to be Western values, ideologies, and lifestyles. These re-evaluations of requirements and prohibitions are prominent, first, in post-colonial Islamic cultures such as Malaysia and, second, among diaspora groups, for whom *halal* can serve as a focal point for Islamic movements and identities (Esposito 1995: 376).

In the modern food industry around the world, a number of Muslim requirements have been taken into account, such as a recommendation to avoid substances that may be contaminated with porcine residues or alcohol, such as gelatine, glycerine, emulsifiers, enzymes, flavors, and flavorings (Riaz and Chaudry 2004: 22–5). Commenting on this area, an article in the *Guardian* (October 26, 2006), "Something Fishy in Your Pasta?," demonstrates that in some cases gelatine, among other things, is being "sneaked" into a variety of foods. The problem in certifying food and other products with regard to these substances is that they are extremely difficult to detect. For some Muslims, *halal* sensibilities necessitate that *halal* products be produced by Muslims only, and that this type of production be kept strictly separate from non-*halal* production – not unlike the way in which the proliferation of rules and taboos concerning food in orthodox Judaism excludes others as "unclean."

My study of modern *halal* in London demonstrated that many British Muslims and organizations call upon the state to help recognize and standardize *halal*. Contrary to the intense debate over veiling, there is no corresponding state discourse on *halal* in Britain. *Halal* in more and more commodities and contexts is becoming important for Muslim identities and bodies. At the same time, Islamic bodies or organizations in Britain try to certify and institutionalize *halal*, whereas state bodies are largely uninvolved. Apparently, secularism as a political doctrine

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defines the secular in everyday life in terms of overt dress codes or of Muslim bodies, whereas more covert *halal* consumption in these bodies is seen to be uncontroversial or unimportant (Fischer 2009b). What is more, the state plays a central role in the governance of London itself. Many Muslims in London consider the city a frontier wilderness that is in need of governance.

An EU-supported project "Religious slaughter: improving knowledge and expertise through dialogue and debate on issues of welfare, legislation and socioeconomic aspects" (DIALREL) explains that "religious slaughter has always been a controversial and emotive subject, caught between animal welfare considerations, cultural and human rights issues. There is considerable variation in current practices and the rules regarding religious requirements are still confusing." DIALREL "aims to gather this information by encouraging a constructive dialogue between interested parties" (ec.europa.eu/research/biosociety/food_quality/projects/168_en.html, accessed October 23, 2009).

As we saw it with regard to urban Muslim spaces or landscapes, *halal* is highly visible in signs and logos in the urban landscape. There are hundreds of *halal* butchers in London, that is, shops that mainly sell meat. They can be classified according to ethnicity and are often run by Pakistani, Indian, or Bangladeshi Muslims. In many cases *halal* meat is sold together with, for example, Mediterranean or Afro-Caribbean/Asian specialities.

The huge Tesco Extra store in Slough, outside London, a hypermarket, boasts of having the widest "Asian world foods" ranges, including *halal*, in Britain. Downstairs in the Tesco Extra store in Slough there is a more traditional *halal* butcher, operating as a concession selling fresh meat. Anecdotal evidence from my fieldwork in this area suggests that Tesco, by using this store in Slough as an entry into the *halal* market, has reduced sales among *halal* butchers in the surrounding area. Around the same time, in the Asda supermarket in North London, I found Halal Food Authority (HFA) certified chilled chicken and mutton; in other words, this shop too is undercutting the prices of local butchers. As I shall discuss in detail later on, the HFA is one of two Islamic bodies set up in 1994 to certify *halal* meat and other types of products. *Halal* is being lifted out of its traditional base in local *halal* butcher's shops to become part of "world food" ranges in major supermarkets.

Slaughter in accordance with Islamic law has been permitted in the UK under the Slaughter of Animals Act of 1933 (Charlton and Kaye 1985: 490; Lewis 1994; Vertovec 1996). The hostility to religious slaughter "heightened awareness of Islamic practice and a sense of self-identity among a growing number of British Muslims" (Ansari 2004: 355). There is an emerging literature on ritual slaughter and *halal* meat consumption in the West (Bergeaud-Blackler 2004, 2007; Bonne et al. 2007).

In this respect, the state has recognized religious needs and adapted policies to accommodate Muslim groups. However, as the understanding and practice of *halal* production, trade, and consumption are being transformed to involve more and more types of products, not unlike what has already happened with regard to kosher products, the state is called upon to help regulate these commodities. While the state in Britain recognizes traditional *halal* requirements, such as religious slaughter without stunning, it has virtually no authority to inspect, certify, or standardize *halal*. In the eyes of some British Muslims, this leaves consumers unprotected against growing commercial interest in *halal*. Hence, the more the culture of Islamic consumption asserts itself, the more the state's incapacity to define what is legitimately *halal* is felt. Contrary to the intense debate in Britain over veiling (overt and on bodies), for example, there is no corresponding state discourse on *halal* (covert and in bodies). Only recently has the established concept of *halal*, which largely focuses on ritual slaughter and pork and alcohol avoidance, been resignified and assumed new meanings in terms of what is pure, sacred, appropriate, or healthy.

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Halal II: "doubled in size for 2006"?

In November 2005, the Halal Exhibition at the major World Food Market (WFM) in London was held for the first time. In addition to the large number of booths displaying *halal* products, WFM also offered seminars on the business potential of *halal* in the rapidly expanding "ethnic food" or "world food" market.

The quotation in this heading is taken from a claim made in a pamphlet promoting the World Food Market held in 2006 in London that, compared with 2005, this event had "doubled in size for 2006." The exhibition may have "doubled in size," but the statement also reflects a broader *halal* hype in London. A large number of companies and Islamic organizations are represented at the Halal Exhibition, each with a particular understanding of what can be considered proper *halal* consumption. Companies at the Halal Exhibition also present a whole range of new products, such as chocolate and toothpaste, which can be subjected to divergent forms of standardization and certification. Supermarkets such as Tesco and Asda have introduced a *halal* chocolate bar (www.ummahfoods.com). Among other slogans, the advertising says, "Community & chocolate close to your heart? Isn't it time your chocolate bar did something more than just taste good?" The bar's label also carries the wording: "10% of net profit goes to charity." In addition to the large number of booths displaying *halal* products, WFM also offered seminars on the business potential of *halal* in the rapidly expanding "ethnic food" or "world food" market.

The controversial question of *halal* certification surfaced on the first day of the WFM seminars. A former director of environmental health and consumer affairs services, Dr. Yunes Teinaz, who was also an adviser to the London Central Mosque on *halal* questions, accused many of the companies present of promoting *halal* products that were not properly *halal* certified by an Islamic authority. For this adviser, the lack of a state body in Britain that is capable of inspecting the "totally unregulated" *halal* market has left this market open to fraud, corruption, and without any kind of standards, uniform certification, or legislation. This, in turn, is distorting the commercially promoted image of *halal* as healthy, pure, and modern food in an era of food scares. In the eyes of this adviser, as well as of many Muslims in London, the Jewish system of kosher certification is seen as a model for the institutionalization, standardization, and certification of *halal* in the gray zones between religious revivalism, the state, and consumer culture.

Present at WFM were, first, numerous Islamic organizations, groups, and individuals that understand and practice *halal* in divergent ways, including the HFA (www.halalfoodauthority.co.uk), set up in 1994 to certify *halal* meat.[2] Second, a number of government institutions, such as schools and hospitals, were represented in that they are experiencing an increase in *halal* sensibilities among Muslim groups. Third, several market research firms specializing in "ethnic markets" participated to provide in-depth understanding of the transformation of *halal*. Finally, a large number of confused Muslim consumers were there to learn how modern understandings and practices of *halal* are being transformed. In Ahmed's study of the marketing of *halal* meat in the UK between local shops and supermarkets, he concludes: "These issues and problems also have religious, traditional, ethical and industrial relations dimensions" (Ahmed 2008: 667). The emergence of *halal* as a global Islamic market evokes a whole range of social, moral, and religious questions. *Halal* lends itself well as examples of types of commodities to which certification as service is important.

Islamic services: certification, ethnic business, and banking

We have seen above that Dr. Yunes Teinaz criticized products that were being promoted for not being properly certified. In front of a large audience at a WFM seminar in 2006, he made it

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clear that there are extensive opportunities for fraud and corruption within the *halal* trade as well as in the local certifying bodies such as HFA and the Halal Monitoring Committee (HMC) (www.halalmc.co.uk) – both represented in the audience at the seminar. He called for the Muslim community to "wake up" and "clean up their act," and finally declared that the state authorities might be willing to "take somebody to court" and "take enforcement action," but these bodies "feel that the Muslim community has not decided yet what the definition of halal is in the first place."

These views are supported by Dr. Yunes Teinaz, who has worked on illegal food and brought cases to court for ten years. As he explained to me, "You can easily buy certification if you pay for it. And they get away with it because there is no control, regulation or inspection from the state." The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), an interest group, warns that up to 90 percent of the meat and poultry sold as *halal* in the UK may be being sold illegally and not slaughtered according to Muslim requirements. Consequently, several supermarkets are marketing their *halal* meat as 100 percent *halal* authorized by the HFA.

As *halal* and the aspect of religious slaughter increasingly infused Muslim identity in Britain, the need to establish a body of *halal* butcher shops was recognized. Consequently, in 1994 the HFA was set up with encouragement from the Muslim Parliament of Great Britain, a pan-Muslim interest group, and the HFA established a network of approved abattoirs and shops to provide the community with independently certified *halal* meat (Ansari 2004: 355). On the HFA's website the organization is described as a voluntary, non-profit-making organization (www.halalfoodauthority.co.uk). The HFA is "regulating, endorsing and authenticating" as well as "generating" its funds through fees paid for audit by slaughterhouses and cutting plants (www.halalfoodauthority.co.uk).

In contrast to the Jewish certification and institutionalization of kosher, the approach to *halal* among Muslims in Britain has been more fragmented and disunited, and "the broad range of emerging political demands may have served to dilute organizational effectiveness" (Kaye 1993: 251). Moreover, Muslim organizations in Britain claiming to represent the Muslim community are of relatively recent origin and often lack both resources and political experience (Kaye 1993: 247). What some Muslim groups call for is a national standard for *halal* that can mark a kind of British Muslim unity and identity. The central difference, of course, is that the secular state in Britain is reluctant to extend recognition of a relatively fragmented *halal* market beyond already existing regulation of food in general.

When I visited the HFA, there seemed to be a discrepancy between its visions, ambitions, and policies stated on the organization's website and the modest office facilities in London housing the organization's limited number of staff. My point here is that *halal* is a significant field for claiming recognition in a fragmented religious market, whereas practices of regulating *halal* are highly resource demanding. At WFM in 2005 and 2006, the HFA president Masood Khawaja was present, as was a representative from the HMC, Yunus Dudhwala. The HMC was established in 2003 in Leicester and, contrary to the HFA, is against the stunning of animals before slaughter. These two organizations can be seen as competitors with overlapping interests and claims to authority in the *halal* market.

Many of my informants saw the proliferation of *halal* in the UK as an overwhelmingly commercial endeavor for which Islam is a vehicle pragmatically employed by Islamic organizations, Islamic nations, and the *halal* industry. However, the HFA president objects to such commercialization of *halal* and maintains that there is also a distinctive religious or ethical aspect to *halal*. This is a significant point because, in the current *halal* market, a large part of the production and trade is carried out by non-Muslims, so maintaining that there is a definite religious aspect to *halal* is also a way of linking *halal* to Muslim groups and their interests. A large part of

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the research into *halal* and other forms of religious and ethnic marketing in the UK is carried out by "secular" market research companies such as Mintel (www.mintel.com) and Ethnic Focus (www.ethnicfocus.com), which are starting to recognize the commercial aspects of *halal*. The HFA president Masood Khawaja criticizes Mintel's overly commercial approach to *halal* but, at the same time, supermarkets in London such as Tesco and Asda require products that are *halal* certified by locally recognized bodies such as the HFA and HMC.

Islamic organizations in Britain claim authority through and compete over *halal* in the interfaces between expanding markets, the secular state, and the rights and demands of Muslim consumers. At the same time, these organizations push for a form of national *halal* standard, which could be seen as a sign of Muslim unity and identity. So far, these organizations have not been able to unite Muslim groups around a shared vision of standards. As more and more products appear in this expanding market, both Islamic organizations and commercial interests compete over standards and certification on the margins of the secular state. The emergence of this type of Islamic consumption draws attention to the state's incapacity to regulate *halal* and thus to recognize a Muslim "community."

In the Edgware Road you also find a branch of the Islamic Bank of Britain (www.islamic-bank.com), which promotes itself by saying: "As the first stand-alone, *shari'a* compliant, retail bank in the UK to be authorized by the Financial Services Authority we aim to provide a friendly, inclusive and personal service for all our customers." Based on fieldwork among participants in a local currency system in Ithaca, New York, as well as among Islamic banking practitioners in the USA, Indonesia, and elsewhere, Maurer (2005: 9) concludes that the modern "recuperation" of Islamic banking is not necessarily a reflection of its scriptural or medieval contractual forms of the past. In all this, the question of interest (*riba*) is essential.

The UK is one of the leading European countries in terms of Islamic banking. Compared with Islamic banking and finance (IBF) in Muslim countries, religious and political influences have been downplayed in the case of the UK, that is, "the emergence of Islamic banks in the United Kingdom is purely based on economic foundations" (Aldohni 2008: 198). Several factors have influenced London's status as a center for IBF: it is a global city; the attraction of oil wealth influenced the strategy of the financial authorities; the growing wealth of British Muslims represents a new source of funding that requires special facilities; it supports the aim to regulate Islamic banks to stop underground Islamic banking transactions (Aldohni 2008).

In much the same way as certification and ethnic/religious marketing/business can be seen to purify commodities and services, Islamic banking may be about controlling or purifying money. This point, I think, can also be applied to services such as certification and ethnic/religious marketing.

Discussion: Islam, shopping, recognition

This final section will discuss some broader issues that arise from the previous discussions of the emergence of an Islamic market for identities in which paraphernalia, dress, *halal*, and services play an important role. In Faisal Devji's book *Landscapes of the Jihad: Militancy, Morality, Modernity* (2005) he argues that 9/11 has transformed Islam into both an agent and a product of globalization, making it a global phenomenon that demands an opinion about itself. Ironically, the demonization of Islam and Muslims that followed in the wake of 9/11 was complemented by the recognition that Muslims were also consumers with certain demands that were open to commercialization. It is in this context that the empirical material discussed above should also be seen, that is, modern Islamic markets are global in scope. This point also has salience in a global context of free markets and trade that may reinforce intensified flows of Islamic commodities and services.

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Shopping has become a patriotic duty in mass culture (Fischer 2007, 2008; Zukin 2004: 14), especially now in times of an economic crisis that is felt globally. Therefore, a number of moral imperatives related to shopping link the shopping of individuals and groups with national sentiments and discourses. In this sense, shopping as a public activity is inescapably linked to the performance and spatial context of Islamic markets. Shopping is "the zero point where the whole economy of people, products, and money comes together" (Zukin 2004: 14). Of course, Muslim populations in the Western world are highly diverse. For example, a study of the Tatar minority in Poland shows that "Islamic" products are targeted at specific groups of Muslims with particular needs priorities (Górak-Sosnowska and Lyszczarz 2009). One way of conceptualizing Muslim diversity draws attention to the discourses about what Islam is or ought to be and the divergent responses produced by these controversies (Bowen 1993). In much the same manner, my research among Southeast Asian and British Muslims reflects the force of Islam as a discursive tradition, especially with regard to the way consumption is contested and debated in everyday life.

The following example from my research among middle-class Malays in London illustrates a specific point of tension or distinction between a modern Muslim puristic and a pragmatic orientation. While the moral stress on proper Muslim consumption with regard to paraphernalia, dress, *halal*, and services is morally given among a more puristically oriented group, pragmatic Muslims either reluctantly accept the imposition of this form of Islamic moralism or simply reject it as a material and thus shallow display of belief – as Islamic materialism or excess. An informant of mine, Nur, who was a woman in her thirties, clearly represented the more pragmatically inclined group. She explained the distinction between her personal position and "the other group," and emphasized that Islamic consumption in all its forms had become expressive of an unbearable moralism among those who, through proper Islamic consumption, tried to perform the role of perfectly pious Muslims. In other words, to Nur, this moralistic attitude was merely a public performance intended to display proper and balanced consumption and taste. Indicative of her more pragmatic stance, she concluded, "Islamic belief alone should be fine." Among Muslims in London, I found this form of discursive tension to be central.

Indeed, the idea of Islam as a discursive tradition is not recent, but rather an immanent feature of the history of Islam (Asad 1986: 14). Consumption or shopping as a point of debate in Europe and the USA can be seen to constitute such a new domain of contestation. The point here is that emerging Islamic markets may be just as contestable to some Muslims as they can be between groups of Muslims and non-Muslims, for example in the case of divergent understandings of proper/improper dress. In the end, social identity, Bourdieu maintains, is defined, asserted, and practiced through difference or distinctions (Bourdieu 1984: 172). As we saw in the case of distinctions between Islamists and secularists in Turkey, the politics of identity within these groups has been deeply influenced by an expanding consumer market in the context of the globalization of the 1980s and 1990s and this tendency, I would argue, has been accelerated in the new millennium.

Arguably, the "æsthetic motive" is endemic to religion (James 2002: 355), that is, "the visible world is part of a more spiritual universe from which it draws its chief significance" (James 2002: 375). For Muslims, the Islamic market may simultaneously be a manifestation of the visible and mundane world of shopping, on the one hand, and a spiritual universe, on the other hand, that helps shape both a moral and an aesthetic community. With respect to British Pakistanis as an aesthetic community, for example, this is intertwined with the moral community generating "moral conflicts about the legitimacy of aesthetic forms, or, indeed, of a morality which rejects these valorised forms" (Werbner 1996: 92). Theological aesthetics considers religion in relation to sensible knowledge, that is, sensation, imagination, and feeling (Viladesau

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1999: 11). Islamic markets are good examples of the interplay between aesthetics and the more mundane, in the form of shopping that is also informed by convenience, thrift, and health, for example.

The proliferation and transformation of modern forms of *halal* in Britain shed light on the way in which *halal* as a theological concept is being resignified. Insightfully, Asad (2003: 1) asks what the connection is between "the secular" as an epistemic category and "secularism" as a political doctrine. A preliminary answer is that "the secular" comprises concepts, practices, and sensibilities that conceptually are prior to secularism (Asad 2003: 16). Modood writes that "political secularism can no longer be taken for granted but is having to answer its critics as there is growing understanding that the incorporation of Muslims has become the most important challenge of egalitarian multiculturalism" (Modood 2006: 37). Egalitarian multiculturalism builds on the idea that identities are partly given shape or denied by the recognition or non-recognition of others: "Due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need" (Taylor 1994: 26). More specifically, there is a demand, as in the case of *halal* and dress, for example, for public institutions to acknowledge "ways of doing things" (Modood 2005: 134) privately as well as publicly; that is, while powerful political discourses and bodies regulate and discipline Islamic dress and banking, *halal* is largely outside state control.

The modern market for Islamic identities is sensitive to both excessive as well as insufficient regulation and control. In modern consumer societies such as Britain, the state plays a crucial role in trying to balance the forces of religion and markets. In shopping, the whole economy of people, products, and money comes together, but shopping and markets also generate debates about what Islam is or ought to be and divergent responses produced by these controversies. For some Muslims, the Islamic market may simultaneously be a manifestation of the visible and mundane world of shopping, on the one hand, and a spiritual universe, on the other, that helps shape both a moral and an aesthetic community. "The secular" plays an important role in balancing regulation, control, and the rights of consumers in modern societies. Modern citizens, religious or not, tend to be recognized as democratic consumers with rights in the interface between markets and the state.

Conclusion

Many Western nations do indeed qualify as "consumers' republics" (Cohen 2004). The consumers' republic embodies a post-World War II strategy, emerging in order to reconstruct the nation's economy and to reaffirm its democratic values by promoting the expansion of mass consumption. Policy-makers, business, labor leaders, and civic groups all try to put mass consumption at the center of their plans for a prosperous nation. The health of the economy itself is measured according to indicators such as consumer confidence, spending, and housing construction (Cohen 2004: 401). In the Islamic market, identities, discourses, distinctions, the secular, and recognition tend to meet and be contested.

London has become a European center for Islamic markets during the last decade or so, and this has changed the Islamic business and entrepreneurial environment in Britain. Similar trends are recognizable on a global scale, that is, the global proliferation of Islamic commodities and services that are advertised as pure, pious, and wholesome are part of a market for identities. As a global city, London links the national as well as European economy with global circuits of commodities, people, and ideas, and this is also the case with the Islamic marketplace. Emerging Islamic markets reflect a particular type of urban exchangeability that is imbricated in the mundane practices of everyday shopping to effect charisma among Muslims.

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In the eyes of some Muslims, the Islamic market is a way to control or purify money/shopping in everyday transactions. However, these ideals or practices are part of Islam as a discursive tradition, especially with regard to the way consumption is contested and debated in everyday life. Islamic markets, like any other market, are sensitive to both excessive as well as insufficient regulation and control by the state. In modern consumer societies such as Britain, the state is trying to balance the forces of religion and markets. In the end, modern citizens, religious or not, tend to be recognized as democratic consumers with rights in the interface between markets and the state.

An important theme was authority, particularly linked to the power involved in *halal* certification embedded in contemporary Malaysian and Islamic institutional discourses and practices. In a broader perspective, these ambiguities challenge the role religion and piety should or should not play in contemporary life among Muslims in the West. In the case of *halal* in Britain this was discussed as a sign of the state's unwillingness or incapacity to recognize the demands of religious consumers. Islamic organizations in Britain claim authority through and compete over *halal* in the interfaces between expanding markets, the secular, and the rights and demands of Muslim consumers. The state in Britain has virtually no authority to inspect, certify, or standardize *halal*. In the eyes of many of my informants, this leaves consumers unprotected against growing commercial interest in *halal*. At the same time, some of these Muslims feel that when the state or authoritative religious institutions are not involved this leaves *halal* open to excessive commercialization. This impotence of the state is reinforced, as more and more products appear in this expanding market in which both Islamic organizations and commercial interests compete over standards and certification on the margins of the secular state.

Notes

1 Starting in 2005, I have visited London on several occasions. The extended period of fieldwork in London took place from July to December 2006, with one shorter stay in the spring of 2007. The methodology for this study was ethnographic, that is, I spent an extended period of time on research in London exploring, and I committed to adapt to this environment and to develop a sensitivity to the people I was learning from. During fieldwork in London, I spent a great deal of time in *halal* restaurants and butcher's shops, and in grocery stores, supermarkets and hypermarkets selling *halal* and other forms of Islamic products.

2 The Islamic Cultural Center (ICC) in Denmark is comparable to HFA, but on a smaller scale. It was founded in 1976 and is housed in a villa in the northwestern suburbs of Copenhagen, Denmark. ICC is privately run and houses a mosque, has a Qur'an school, and also arranges courses for local Danish Muslims, who for the most part are of Arab and Pakistani origin. ICC is the largest *halal* certifier of meat as well as non-meat products in Denmark. Denmark is a major exporter of both food and non-food products and thus *halal* is an important question for the state and companies.

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