

**Fischer, Johan. 2011. *The Halal Frontier. Muslim Consumers in a Globalized Market.* New York: Palgrave MacMillan. 202 pp. Pb.: £17.99. ISBN: 9780230114180.**

The book explores complex and multi-layered dimensions of transnational and local aspects of economic practices regarding marketing and consumption of *Halal* food among middle-class Malay Muslims in Britain. This book attempts to provide an insight that how religious interpretation, market economy, state interventions and consumption practices create a complex phenomenon in everyday social life that defines the process of identity construction among Malay Muslims in London. The book not only explores the fusion and fissions among the Muslim consumers of Halal in London, but also narrates the ambiguity and lack of secular disciplining of “religious markets and food” practices that British public in general is exposed to. The author uncovers how globalisation of religious market is giving birth to ‘political food’ among increasing Muslim consumers in Muslim societies as well as among Muslim diaspora. In his views, Halal food provides the space for diasporas to perform “politics at distance”. The author did his fieldwork with middle-class Malay Muslims in London with to see the reflections that Malaysian state presents a unique example among the Muslim countries that regulate, interpret, trade, control and produce the consumption practices and market for *Halal* food, for local as well as global Muslim consumers.

The author maintains the direct relationship between the nationalisation of Islam by the Malaysian state and the standardisation of Halal in the local and international markets. Islamic reformism and state patronisation of it have created the venues from where Halal was made accessible and in a way compulsory for Malay middle-classes. Halal also became a space for Malaysian state to introduce standards for Muslim world by satisfying middle-class consumer’s sense of taste and aspirations towards “ethical food intake”. The nature and type of food consumption makes social class a performative category as people cook and serve Halal and national food to guests and foreigners at their homes. The increase in the number of Muslim customers under global capitalism has evoked the contestation over the Durkheimian concepts of sacred and profane in their daily lives at Malaysia and elsewhere. Malaysians in Britain are predominantly Malays because of Malaysia’s state policy of providing privileges, opportunities and benefits to Malays more than Chinese and Indian ethnic minorities in business, education and jobs etc. The writer interviewed and collected data from middle-class young Malays who arrived at London in the previous two or three decades. The contestation over the control and definition of what is Halal or who can certify Halal products are common debates observable at all public forums, whether official or unofficial. The obvious proponents of these debates of standardising public consumption of Halal are religious scholars and activists who are in close association, both professionally and socially, of Muslim entrepreneurs and businessmen while the potential opponent is the secular state. The process of globalisation of Halal finds London as potentially conducive space for introduction and clientele. While the state is silent over the issue of Halal recognition, the reason is not only state’s claim to be secular, but at the same time, there is a disagreement among Muslims over the authentic definition of

what is Halal. There are competing bodies and personal narratives embedded in sectarian interpretations, which claim the authority to define and interpret what is Halal. Malay people on the other hand, do have a set definition of Halal that is told by Malaysian state through national curriculum. But in a cosmopolitan environment like London, the issue of defining Halal is an open debate among Arabs viewing themselves as gatekeepers of Islam, Pakistanis having a demographic advantage among British Muslims and Malaysians with a state sponsorship over defining Halal while other Muslim ethnic groups having their own economic and social reservations over the issue. There is a mixed feeling among Malay consumers about logos of Halal food items available in various stores. For most of the consumers in London, the Halal logo alone is not enough attraction to buy anything. The Halal has created an urban landscape of its own in London through discursive practice as well as market visibility. However, the domesticated intake of Halal food items by Malay consumers is an indicator of a lack of total satisfaction on the present Halal urban landscapes. Another aspect about increased consumption of Halal food in London is that people perceive it as clean, hygienic and pure food.

The author infers that the state's secularism in Britain shows its authoritative and regulative presence on issues related to public expressions of morality like the veiling of Muslims women in some ways, but it is silent over the issues of public consumption like the intake of Halal. However, the writer informs reader about international marketing of Halal by another state like Malaysia, but misses the demand and aspiration of some European state to control it. The book does not talk about the anti-Halal movement in London by animal rights groups and debates on compulsory stunning. Malays are negligible in numbers among the Muslim population in London. Other diasporic communities, such as Pakistanis, Arabs, Bangladeshis, Africans and Indian Muslims, who are part of Halal markets not only as consumers but also as sellers and traders, have more potential to provide a better and in-depth picture of Halal consumption patterns in London than the diaspora Malays. However, as the writer has tried to link the Malaysian state's venture capitalism advancements and its reflection among people's behaviour, the selection of Malays as research informants makes more sense, as other Muslims communities do not have this nationalist context while consuming Halal.

The book as a whole provides a valuable ethnographic insights to the reader about national politics of Malaysia and its link with the quest for consuming Halal among Malays in London, diasporic identity construction patterns, capitalism's co-option of Muslims markets and middle classes by making relevant adjustments, and an analysis of narratives and discourses that channels the ideals of "distinction" and "taste" among Muslim middle classes by advocating type of moral consumption and ethical life styles while living in global society and economy that operates on the principals of "sinful" Western capitalism.

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