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**(RE)THINKING THE CATEGORIES OF HALAL AND HARAM:
NOTES ON ISLAMIC FOOD RULES IN SINGAPORE***

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**(Re)thinking the Categories of *Halal* and *Haram*:
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Abstract

Muslims generally use the labels *halal* and *haram* to describe and classify their food and drink. Over time, this tended to assume and produce monolithic and homogeneous conceptualisations of *halal* and *haram*. This, however, neglects a complex of personal and social meanings practitioners tap from their vast, taken-for-granted corpus of social knowledge, many of which have transformed its original theological descriptions of *halal* and *haram* to possibly include adapted local and regional meanings. This paper thus deconstructs these taken-for-granted conceptions of *halal* and *haram* on the grounds that these descriptions and meanings are not historically static, but are socially constructed. As such, this paper looks not so much at *halal* and *haram* as theologically defined, but rather, attends to the processes by which these categories are negotiated and socially structured by practitioners in everyday life. By taking the example of a three-generational, self-ascribed ‘Malay/Muslim’ familial household in Singapore as a case-study, I argue that: (1) there coexists a diversity of constructions and meanings of *halal* and *haram* in Singapore over the process of time and, in effect, show (2) how food performs as a social idiom and intermediary that further illuminates the negotiation, contestation, and perpetuation of evolving religious identities of these social actors. In so doing, the treatment of the categories *halal* and *haram* and its intimate affiliation to ‘Muslim’ and ‘Islam’ as problematics instead of givens, not only directs attention to the fact that *halal* food is an important identity marker that asserts and reinforces religious group memberships, but also addresses the ways of *being* and *doing* ‘Muslim’ in accordance to different historical and social milieus of individual practitioners.

Introduction

Throughout the Islamic world today, Muslims generally use the labels *halal* and *haram* to describe and classify their food and drink. Theologically defined, *halal*, which is Arabic in origin, means legitimate or permissible, but it is occasionally translated to mean acceptable or not forbidden in Islamic law. Thus, food (and drink) under this category are permitted for consumption and production by Muslims. *Haram*, on the other hand, refers to the opposite – food (and drink) that are unlawful or prohibited in Islam. Over time, this tended to assume and produce monolithic and homogeneous conceptualisations of *halal* and *haram*. This, however, neglects a complex of personal and social meanings practitioners tap from their vast, taken-for-granted corpus of social knowledge, many of which have transformed its original theological descriptions of *halal* and *haram* to possibly include adapted local and regional meanings. Relevant and extensive research pertaining to the cultural meanings of food in religion and spirituality in different social and historical contexts (Khare, 1992; Sered, 1988)¹, in particular with regard to food rules and prohibitions (Douglas, 1966, 1997; Harris, 1997; Hunter, 1997) have shown how food then becomes the symbolic medium through which relationships are established between divinity and practitioners. However, these primarily take such food rules and prohibitions, including the categories *halal* and *haram*, as unproblematic and objectively given. Further, works on food rules and religions such as Islam in Southeast Asia have been largely neglected, if not omitted, from the corpus of sociological and anthropological literature.

This paper thus deconstructs these taken-for-granted – and hence commonsensical – assumptions and conceptions of *halal* and *haram* on the grounds that these descriptions and meanings are not historically static and homogeneous, but are themselves socially constructed. In so doing, it inquires: What are the ways in which food and drink are defined as *halal* and *haram*? How are the boundaries drawn between the categories of *halal* food, and non-*halal* food items? As such, this paper looks not so much at *halal* and *haram* as theologically defined, but rather, attends to the processes by which these categories are negotiated and socially structured by social actors in their everyday lives. This involves investigating how authoritative/theological constructions, and representations of *halal* and *haram* in relation to food and drink, are translated and negotiated in the everyday life experiences and situations of practitioners.

One possible direction towards investigating the relevance of *halal* and *haram* food in everyday life is to focus on a small group of individuals, and describe how they make sense of such categories in particular situations. By taking the case of a three-generational, self-ascribed ‘Muslim’ familial household in Singapore as an example, I argue that: (1) there coexists a diversity of constructions and meanings of *halal* and *haram* in Singapore over the

process of time that emerges from individual practitioners' different orientations to religious authority and, in effect, show (2) how food performs as a social idiom and intermediary that further illuminates the negotiation, contestation, and perpetuation of evolving religious identities of these social actors. In so doing, the treatment of the categories *halal* and *haram* and its intimate affiliation to 'Muslim' and 'Islam' as problematics instead of givens, not only directs attention to the fact that *halal* food is an important identity marker that asserts and reinforces religious group memberships, but also addresses the ways of being and doing 'Muslim' in accordance to different historical and social milieux of individual practitioners. In other words, the level of religiosity and affiliation within a familial and religious paradigm and its link to the conceptions of *halal* and *haram* in the everyday life of practitioners cannot be viewed apart from particular historical events and incidents, which occur both at the individual and familial levels.

Methodological Framework

Adopting a social constructivist trajectory, this paper looks to the subjective meanings and treatment of the categories of *halal* and *haram* (in relation to food and drink) in a 'Muslim' family in Singapore as it is actively lived, felt, and experienced by them. This is done so as to understand the processes in which these categories are socially constructed, and how these structure the everyday lives of social actors. In this respect, their social realities stem from manifold, often conflicting mental constructions that are socially and experientially grounded (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Lupton, 1996). This involves attempts to recognise the ways in which their food preferences and prohibitions developed and are reproduced as commonly held social knowledge, and how members of the family make sense and meaning out of particular situations using elements of this corpus of commonly shared social knowledge. It follows that the examination of food consumption in part attempts to codify how individual family members learn, apply, and re-apply the tacit rules and regulations governing food prohibitions, and that each and every member operates under the limits that the family bases itself on.

Given that, and the focus of this study, which is to analyse such a multidimensional social phenomenon such as the meanings of food rules and prohibitions in the context of the family, this necessitates the employment of multiple qualitative methods. The combination of multiple, often complementary methods, empirical materials, and perspectives in this study should also be understood as a strategy that adds rigour, flexibility, and depth (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998; Goode and Hatt, 1981). As Denzin and Lincoln (1998:3) argue, 'qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings,

attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them...and deploy a wide range of interconnected methods, hoping always to get a better fix on the subject matter at hand'. As such, this study is largely based upon primary data gathered from fieldwork that employed multiple qualitative methods and research strategies, including unstructured interviews – both informal (conversational), and in-depth – and direct observations of members in the family in everyday activities as and when the opportunities arose over a period of six months. These were carried out with two aims in mind. Firstly, given the potentially intimate nature of food rules and practices within a familial domain, it was imperative that social proximity and familiarity were established first to assist reducing the hierarchical distance between interviewer and interviewee. Observation, as a method of the social sciences, involves reflective subjectivity as a perspective, and an immersion into the actor's social world as a tool (Brewer, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Warren, 1974). As Warren contends:

Reflective subjectivity acknowledges the humanness of the sociologist while increasing the reflective observation of everyday life through special training and special tools such as field notes and interviews. Entering the setting as an actor allows to the sociologist both existential freedom and sometimes painful constraint. The constraint resides in the fact that an observer may have to lay aside her prejudices and fears, likes and dislikes, annoyances and timidities, and approach people and situations within the setting that seem unappealing, hostile or inaccessible. The freedom is intrinsic to being an actor on the social scene, and it means that all data are fundamentally a product of the human ways of gathering and interpreting them (1974:168).

Secondly, observing them in their everyday life situations (such as during mealtimes) helps reveal the intricacies and often taken-for-granted dimensions that provides a more comprehensive view of the treatment and meanings of *halal* and *haram* food within the family. To engage in direct observation in this context therefore would mean, to borrow Warren's words, 'to...make friends, join cliques...while trying to remain sociologically reflective not just as an actor on the social scene, but an analyser, noter, prodder and prober of it' (Warren, 1974:175). In the case of my research, this means observing mealtimes and situations when food and drink are present. However, 'the sociologist need not carry out exactly the same activities as others, in order to be a participant observer. He (sic) may, instead, attempt to find some other role which is acceptable to the group ... (it) may vary from complete membership in the group to a part-time membership in the group' (Goode and Hatt,

1981:121). In fact, ‘it is not necessary that his (sic) role playing be complete. It is possible to take part in a great many activities of the group, so as to avoid the awkwardness of complete non-participation, while taking on the role of the observer and interviewer for other activities’ (Goode and Hatt, 1981:123)². The case study approach of a self-ascribed ‘Muslim’ family employed herein is in line with the methodology of social constructivism that is carried out in such a manner that the actors’ points of view are incorporated within the sociological inquiry of the respondent under investigation (Hamel *et al*, 1993), thus in effect, allowing an in-depth understanding of and deeper dimensions to the meanings of *halal* and *haram* amongst social practitioners in the family.

Constructions of *Halal* and *Haram* in Singapore

In order to arrive at the basis of the significance of *halal* and *haram* in the everyday lives of practitioners, it is, of course, of primary importance to first take into consideration the role of ‘Islam³’ as it is understood and experienced in their lives, and the demands that it makes in practice as well as in theory upon those who profess it. This will help to better situate the importance of particular historical and social contexts in which the categories of *halal* and *haram* are socially constructed and consequently felt and experienced. In other words, it is pertinent to understand the living forms of ‘Islam’ that surround practitioners, which in turn, affect their conceptions of *halal* and *haram* in relation to food and drink in their everyday lives.

‘Islam’ in the Context of Multi-Ethnic, Multi-Religious Singapore

The fact that the island republic of Singapore, with a population of 4.2 million and a land area of approximately 682 square kilometres, is one of the most ethnically and religiously complex nation-states in the world, has oftentimes been paradoxically regarded by the ruling government as both a ‘blessing and challenge’ (Singh, 1999). Significantly, this heterogeneous and diverse character is institutionally simplified into four distinct, recognised census categories – ‘Chinese’, ‘Malay’, ‘Indian’ and ‘Others’ (CMIO) – but these can be broken down into many subgroups. In the ‘Malay’ community, for example, which forms the largest ethnic minority in Singapore (nearly 14 per cent of the total population, or 408,000), distinctions are readily made between those of Malay or Indonesian origins, which include, amongst others, the Javanese, Minangkabau, Buginese, and Boyanese. In terms of Singapore’s multi-religious make up that includes Buddhists, Taoists, Christians (and other denominations), Hindus, Sikhs, Jainists, Judaists, Zoroastrianists, Shintoists, and Confucianists, 15 per cent of the population of Singapore are Muslims⁴. Despite the secular

nature of its State and governance, Singapore is certainly not atheistic. If anything, ‘religion’ is judged by the State to be an important basis and repository of traditional, ‘racial’ values that serve the critical function of transmitting particular moral norms and values. Consequently, religious freedom is constitutionally guaranteed and protected, in so far as political authority is not contravened by these religions⁵. The close and often synonymous affiliation and conflation between ‘Malays’ and ‘Islam’, the second largest religion in the world, is largely due to the fact that almost all ‘Malays’ are Muslims by birth, and that the Malay language is often considered the Islamic language of Southeast Asia⁶ (McAmis, 2003), though to a lesser extent, there also exists a sizeable number of Indians and a growing number of converts to Islam from the Chinese and other communities⁷.

While it is oftentimes perceived that ‘Islam’ is a standard, homogeneous religion, particularly in authoritative discourses, a closer examination of the Islamic world reveals that ‘Islam’, like many other religious orientations, is not a monolithic and unvarying religion in the world. There are in fact varieties of constructions and internal diversities within Islam that are available for practitioners to select from. In fact, ‘Islam’ can be similarly divided into conservative, modernist, moderate, liberal, fundamentalist, and other labels that require a specific description for each group or division. The internal diversities in Islam in the context of Singapore are largely due to the fact that historically, Singapore’s Muslim population, which is predominantly migrant, shares common, unifying lineages and histories with other Muslims in the region, particularly from Indonesia (such as from Java) that includes, more significantly, the manner in which Islam had spread in a closely proximate region such as Southeast Asia. Historically, the coming of Islam into the region – which occurred over a time span of several centuries – was a long, slow, and complex process⁸. Most of the simplest rudiments of Islam did not contradict the largely eclectic character of indigenous religious beliefs, and a high degree of accommodation was thus made where these conflicted with Muslim law (including food rules and practices). Further, the social aspect of intermarriage was also a contributing factor to the adoption of Islam as a natural outgrowth of such marital relationships.

The ‘Islam’ embraced by most practitioners in the region, including Singapore, did not therefore derive directly from what was practised and understood in Arabia or then Persia (which itself was very different to what is practised there now). ‘Islam’ in the local and regional context is oftentimes blended with a syncretic combination of local, pagan beliefs, and philosophic concepts that were transmitted and socialised through generations until contemporaneous times. The retention of beliefs in magic, the power of incantations, spirits, and mediums persist and co-exist alongside the declaration of the *shahada* (i.e. that there is no other God but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of God). ‘Islam’ as locally practised thus absorbed many pre-Islamic religious aspects of Hinduism, Buddhism, animism, and local

customs in a syncretistic fashion to include magical and mystical elements to gain the adherence of the populace (Abdullah, 1996; Karnow, 1964; Kiefer, 1986; McAmis, 2003; Rauws, 1935; van der Kroef, 1962; Woodward, 1989). In fact, there continue to be some Muslims in Singapore who embrace certain customs and practices that are in contravention to the tenets of orthodox Islam as it is now commonly defined. Further, the migration of many inhabitants from Indonesia, Malaysia, and other parts of Southeast Asia into Singapore historically also meant that they brought along with them their respective religious and cultural beliefs, which, more often than not, included such pre-Islamic forms of religious practices as have continued into contemporaneous times.

The extent to which 'Islam' has been accepted among its practitioners in Singapore thus differs substantially from individual to individual. In this respect, there are many types and degrees of Islamisation⁹, though all Muslims, irrespective of any internal diversities within, fundamentally believe in the five pillars of Islam viz. *zakat* (alms-giving), fasting during the month of *Ramadan*, performing the *haj* (pilgrimage) to Mecca, the performance of *salat* (daily prayers) five times, and most importantly, the profession of the *shahada*. Nonetheless, today, more than 99 per cent of Muslims in Singapore are *Sunnis*, of whom the majority adopt the *Shafi'i* schools of Islamic jurisprudence, while the remaining *Sunni* Muslims follow the *Hanafi* schools of jurisprudence. Although *Shi'ism* is gaining popularity, less than 0.1 per cent of the Muslim population in Singapore practise this. The others include *Ahmadis* or *Qadianis*, and there is also a small percentage from *dakwah* camps, such as the *Muhammadiyah*. Further, many Muslims in Singapore continue to practise 'folk Islam' where there exists a prevailing element of syncretism and mysticism (located herein). This already signals the internal diversities and contradictions within the category 'Islam'. Given that however, the fact is that certain constructions of 'Islam' are more efficiently imposed on, and disseminated to Muslims in Singapore, than others.

Authoritative/Theological Constructions of Halal and Haram in Singapore

The authoritative religious constructions¹⁰ of 'Islam' in the context of Singapore, including the meanings of *halal* and *haram*, are primarily controlled and disseminated by the *Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura* (MUIS), or the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore. MUIS is a centralised, state-backed organisation whose influence and control over Islamic issues in Singapore is very extensive and far-reaching. Established in 1968 to advise the government on Islamic matters¹¹, MUIS attends to the religious, social, and welfare needs of Muslims in Singapore. Its functions and responsibilities are spelt out in the Administration of Muslim Law Act (AMLA), which generally cover the building and administration of mosques under the Mosque Building Programme, *madrasahs* (Islamic religious schools), *wakaf* (endowment)

properties, coordinating family development programmes, collecting *zakat* (alms/tithes) from the Muslim community, providing financial assistance or bursaries to needy Muslims, and lastly, issuing *halal* certificates to food establishments in Singapore. Through its monopoly over information, such as via its *khutbah Jumaat* (Friday sermons) read out by *ustaz* in mosques, and the publication of free religious material, MUIS selects the doctrines it considers appropriate to the daily lives of Muslims in Singapore. Given its dominance and monopolised control in the context of Islam in Singapore, the constructions of what is regarded *halal* and *haram*, in effect, are strictly defined and enforced using the authority and legitimacy from various Koranic verses, including specific texts of prohibition. *Halal* in this respect¹² refers to ‘foods and drinks (that) are permitted for consumption by Allah S.W.T – the Supreme Law Giver’. *Haram*, on the other hand, refers to ‘food and drinks (that) are absolutely prohibited by Allah S.W.T – the Supreme Law Giver’. This includes carrion, flowing blood, the flesh of the pig, that which has been strangled to death, that which has been killed by a blow, that which died by falling from a height, that which was gored to death by an animal, that which wild beasts have eaten, that which has been slaughtered on stone altars to idols, and that which has been divided by lottery¹³. In addition to these, all items that intoxicate, including alcohol and drugs¹⁴, are regarded as *haram*¹⁵. While this is so, there exist certain concessions, where in certain events and circumstances, it is permissible to consume the *haram*. These include dire situations where no other food is available to the individual. Additionally, *shubhah* (*mashbooh*), meaning ‘suspect(ed)’ in Arabic, is used to describe the ambivalent and doubtful status of a particular food or drink, while the notion of *makruh* is attributed to food items that are generally objectionable and discouraged, but not *haram*. The constructions of *halal* and *haram* recognised by MUIS therefore closely parallel and correspond to their theological meanings.

Negotiated Constructions of Halal and Haram

While these authoritative constructions of *halal* and *haram* are wide-ranging and thus constitutive of an individual’s stock of social knowledge, these obscure the fact that *halal* and *haram* are practised, interpreted, and negotiated very differently in the everyday life of social actors, which I argue, is contingent upon their social and historical situations. In other words, how do specific religious discourses and authoritative pronouncements shape patterns of consumption on a day-to-day basis over time? Thus, I show and describe, through some brief examples, how individuals in a particular family have, over three generations, translated authoritative and theological meanings of *halal* and *haram* in their everyday lives in practice, and in effect demonstrate how they have negotiated their religious (and ethnic) identities in the Singaporean context.

The family¹⁶ in Singapore serves as an ideal focus because it is an important context in which everyday life interaction can be observed. The three-generation family as a point of reference in this paper is composed of fifteen individuals listed in Figure 1. A and B (the first generation) are the parents of C, D, and E, who are/were married to C1, D1, and E1 respectively (the second generation), except for C, who divorced from C1 eighteen years ago. Each of these three couples has children: C2 and C3 are the children of C and C1; D2, D3, D4, and D5 are the children of D and D1; and E2 and E3 are the children of E and E1 (the third generation). Table 1 presents relevant data concerning their self-ascribed and census racial group, though all members in all three generations are Singaporeans and define themselves as ‘Muslims’. Family residential patterns have modified over the years, though all the children and families (including spouses and respective children) have, for particular periods of time, lived in the residence of A and B, which is regarded as the ‘family home’. Further, all three residences are located close to one another. In this respect, family members’ interactions with one another are reasonably intense, particularly during Muslim festivals such as *Hari Raya Aidilfitri* and *Hari Raya Aidiladha*, as well as on special occasions such as birthdays and anniversaries, where family members will normally gather at the residence of A and B. The younger grandchildren of A and B, particularly D4, D5, E2 and E3, often spend time here during weekends and school holidays. At other times, A and B visit the respective homes of C, D and E, and live there for a short period of time. The family history spans the period from early twentieth century Dutch East Indies and British Malaya to the period of Singapore’s independence (1965 to the present). These historical milieux form the vanguard against which family members have evolved, and are continuing to evolve, their religious identities, and in turn, their respective conceptions of *halal* and *haram* in the context of Singapore.

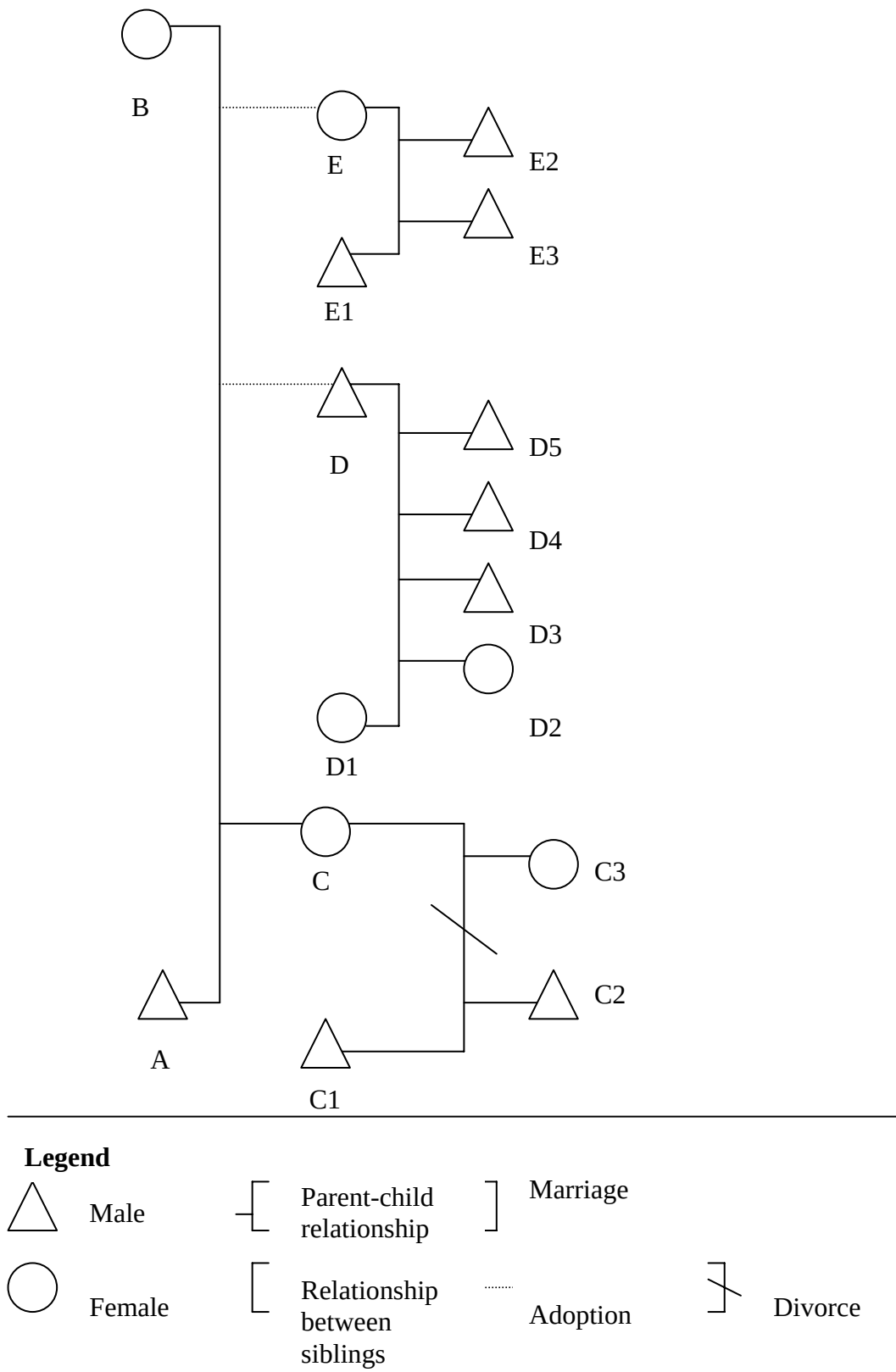
Figure 1

Table 1

Person	Age	Ascribed Religion	Census Race	Ascribed Race
<i>First Generation</i>				
A	80	Islam	Malay	Malay/Javanese
B	67	Islam	Malay	Malay/Javanese
<i>Second Generation</i>				
C	48	Islam	Malay	Malay
C1	55	Catholicism	Chinese	Teochew
D	41	Islam	Malay	Malay
D1	40	Islam	Malay	Malay/Javanese
E	39	Islam	Malay	Malay
E1	45	Islam	Malay	Boyanese
<i>Third Generation</i>				
C2	26	Islam	Chinese	-
C3	25	Islam	Chinese	-
D2	10	Islam	Malay	Malay
D3	8	Islam	Malay	-
D4	6	Islam	Malay	Malay
D5	3	Islam	Malay	Malay
E1	9	Islam	Malay	Malay
E2	7	Islam	Malay	Malay

The First Generation: A was born the fourth child of five siblings to his Indonesian parents who had migrated to Singapore from Batavia, or what is now known as Jakarta. His parents were upset over the treatment of Indonesians by the colonial Dutch, and had thus decided to move away from Indonesia to Singapore. A's father was a staunch religious instructor or *kiai*, who taught the Koran to young children free of charge, including A. However, he died at a relatively young age, and left A's mother and children behind. To support his two elder brothers' English education in secondary school, A had to stop school and help his mother sell *kueh* (cakes) to eke out a living in *Kampong Chia Heng* located along Novena Road. His mother passed away shortly after, and he thus had to fend for himself at a relatively young age. He decided to take night classes to study English, and enrolled himself thereafter into the employ of the British army. B was born to a Hokkien¹⁷ migrant family in Singapore in 1936 but was then adopted by a family from East Java (Indonesia), who had migrated to Singapore in the 1920s in search of better job opportunities. Her adopted mother from Ubud (in Bali) was a divorcee who married B's father, an electrician, from a town in Java (Indonesia) called Kendal to escape numerous advances of attempted rape by her stepfather. B was raised as a 'Muslim' in a village in Singapore named *Kampong Tan Hock Chai*. During the Japanese Occupation, she helped her mother sell various sorts of *kueh* (cakes) to supplement the much needed income of their family. She married A, who by then had worked his way up to be an army captain, via an arranged proceeding in 1954 when she was sixteen, and subsequently had C a year later in 1955. They lived in *Kampong Tullock* in what are now the premises of the National University of Singapore (NUS), but later moved to an apartment along Holland Road.

The fact that their parents were migrants from Indonesia (who relied heavily on *adat*), their subsequent upbringing and socialisation in the faith, and their family histories were important factors that shaped the ways in which A and B interpreted and negotiated *halal* and *haram* (in relation to food and drink) in their everyday lives. Further, there was, at that point in time, little formal or institutionalised means of control over the teachings of 'Islam', including what constituted *halal* or *haram*, which was largely a loose set of acceptable and non-acceptable food and drink. A, for example, drank *arak* (alcohol) during his years in the army, particularly during festive occasions or after work, and though there was a recognition that drinking alcohol is *haram* theologically, he did not regard it as such.

A: 'I didn't have a proper religious education back then when I was young, even though my father was a religious teacher. My parents died when I was young, and I had to look after myself. My siblings were already married and had their own individual families. Anyway, they were also unwilling to help out. So I was on my own. And I forgot

what I had learnt during my religious classes with my father, it was so long back. Then in the army, I picked up drinking *arak* just to unwind or enjoy myself. Well, everyone was doing it. I think that it's okay and I don't think I considered it *haram* then, it's like a drink, any drink, as long you don't get intoxicated, don't go overboard, that's okay... There was also the hardship that I went through. As I said, my father passed away young, then my mother, then you had the Japanese Occupation. Anyway I didn't get drunk, unlike the rest, so I considered myself pretty good. *I do see myself as a good Muslim*, not perfect, but good. But I needed to drink to ease my mind, and also to appease my immediate superiors, or they would get upset if I didn't drink. For them, it was like a social bonding thing [emphasis mine]¹⁸.

In the case of B, the combination of her upbringing in a closely knit village and the fact that she was raised and socialised in a family that was highly influenced by Javanese custom (known to be heavily couched in mysticism) shaped B's belief in the elements of 'folk Islam' (such as *bomoh* [shaman] consultation), even if it involved shamans from different religious orientations, like Taoism, Hinduism, and 'Shenism'¹⁹. As mentioned previously, there increasingly exists an influence of orthodox Islam that has always viewed negatively such elements of 'folk Islam' as *bomoh* consultation, Muslim martial arts, and *kuburan keramat* (miracle-working grave) worship²⁰. B's religiosity was thus framed in accordance to her upbringing in 'folk Islam' and the co-existence of borrowed Indonesian, pre-Islamic customs, alongside the orthodox teachings of Islam, which did affect the way she conceived *halal* and *haram*. For example, it did not affect B significantly that her husband was drinking, not only because it was not customary for women then to question the actions of their spouses, but because alcohol, particularly rice wine and palm wine, was used as part of ritualistic offerings in her parents' village in Bali, Indonesia to purify an area by expelling evil, demonic influences. While the fact that theologically speaking, practices such as drinking alcohol were in contravention to Islamic dietary rules, B argues that there was a need to balance, reconcile, and negotiate *adat* (custom) and *agama* Islam (religion) in their everyday lives to continue to cement bonds within the community for group solidarity and cultural affirmation, in spite of the apparent contradictions involved. In this respect, the importance of a particular food and drink as potent symbolic markers of religious (and possibly, ethnic) identit(ies) and difference in *adat* override the theological, orthodox meanings assigned to such food/drink items as *arak*.

There were certain qualifications however. Like A, B felt that the act of drinking alcohol was not acceptable, and regarded as *haram* in certain circumstances, particularly when alcohol was taken excessively so that it eventually led to intoxication.

B: 'I was brought up to respect both my *adat* and religion, and that the two can go together. Part of it is to recognise that your role as a wife is not to question your husband. He is the head of the family, and as long as he takes care of the family, for me, it's okay. Just as long as you don't take alcohol to the extreme, then I think it's not *haram*. It's a fine line, but you need to take in exceptions. Anyway, back in Ubud, *arak* was regarded by the villagers not only as a recreational drink, but also part of *adat* ritual. You have to respect your *adat*, it's part of life, and it ties you and your community together. That's why I think in such a case, *arak* is acceptable.'

While both of them were not particularly staunch orthodox Muslims, and recognised the importance of *adat*, they did regard and identify themselves primarily as 'Muslims', and as *orang Melayu* (Malay people)²¹, and saw to it that their children, particularly C (being the eldest), learnt and practised both *agama* Islam and *adat* to enable her to transmit such values to her younger siblings, and her children in future, including particular food rules and practices.

A: 'We have to be responsible Muslims at the end of the day. Yes, I drink and gamble at times, but we are still Muslims, and as parents we have a duty to educate our children. We have a social responsibility to do so, and be guided by our religious faith as well as our *adat*. We just can't do things, or eat this food because we like this or that. There is a system to follow, there is our *adat* and *agama*.'

B: '*Adat* is very important, and we, as parents, need to pass this down to them when they are young. The earlier they learn, the better. We are *orang Melayu* and must keep up with *adat*.'

This being said, conceptions of *halal* and *haram* are individualised and constructed for A and B, and thus need not necessarily follow the theological definitions. While certain food items and drinks like alcohol are theologically defined as *haram* but *halal* to A under certain circumstances, other food items, especially 'Chinese-Muslim' cuisine, such as *wantan*²², *dim*

*sum*²³, and *bak chang*²⁴ that has recently been sold by certain *halal* certified food establishments, are regarded as *mushoob* by both A and B.

B: 'How can I eat such food? Our *agama* doesn't allow *babi* (pork) in it. Cannot eat *babi* I'm sure there's *babi* in it. Even if they have that certification, that *halal* chop, I'm not totally sure. So these sort of things better stay away.'

The Second Generation: A and B have three children comprising a daughter (C) and two other adopted children, a son (D) and daughter (E). All were 'born' Muslim preceding the separation and independence of Singapore from British Malaya. C, the eldest, was born one year after A and B were married in 1955. D was born in 1962 into a large Javanese family, but was given up for adoption to A and B largely because D's biological parents, who were working colleagues of A, had experienced financial difficulties, and were unable to take proper care of D. They further felt indebted to A and B for frequently helping them out in their periods of financial crisis when they were in need. E was born in 1964 to the niece of B. Prior to E's birth, B teased her niece, who by then had borne eight children, suggesting that she give the child she was carrying to her when the child was born. B's niece, however, was receptive to the idea, and decided that it was for the good of the child (E) to be given away since she had many children herself, some of whom were still very young. Despite the racial complexities that were inherent, C, D, and E were registered in their birth certificates, and subsequently identity cards, as 'Malay'. All three children, with the exception of E who continued her studies at pre-university level, attended and completed their primary and secondary education in English-language medium schools. Additionally, they were given Islamic religious instruction, initially by A when C, D, and E were younger, but later by an *ustaz* (religious instructor), though C and D stopped attending classes shortly after. Prior to marriage, all three possessed minimal knowledge of the doctrines and laws of orthodox Islam. They were able to recite important verses from the Koran from memory, which thereby constituted the maximum degree of religious education for them. Like their parents, C, D, and E were not deeply rooted in orthodox Islam, but continued to practice 'Islam' as learnt and understood by them in their everyday lives with little retaliation or question, including the meanings of *halal* and *haram* that were orally passed down by A and B. Given the strong importance of *adat* in their stock of social knowledge, such meanings were often fused with a mixture of pre-Islamic elements. Their levels of religiosity, however, shifted significantly after each of them became married, and this, in turn, marked differences in the manner in which C, D, and E interpreted and negotiated the meanings of *halal* and *haram* in their everyday lives, in spite of similarities in socialisation.

C married C1 in 1976. Born the sixth child of a Roman Catholic family of thirteen siblings, his father, who had a second wife, is Teochew, while his mother is Peranakan²⁵. Though many works argue that religious switching in modern societies is a function of intermarriage, in which religion plays a significant role (Hassan, 1974; Kuo and Hassan, 1979; Tamney and Hassan, 1987), neither C nor C1 converted to the other's religion. In other words, C1 did not convert to Islam, nor did C convert to Roman Catholicism. There existed, however, a reluctant acceptance between both sets of parent-in-laws (i.e. the parents of C1, and A and B). In fact, their marriage was only recognised as legal in the civil courts, but not under *Syariah* (Muslim) law. C and C1 have two children, comprising a son, C2 and a daughter, C3, born in 1977 and 1978 respectively. C continued to identify herself as a Muslim, and did not renounce Islam, but she did attend church masses with her family as a non-Catholic, and celebrated Chinese and Christian festivals, such as Chinese New Year, Christmas, and Easter, alongside *Hari Raya Aidilfitri* and *Hari Raya Haji*. Her ostensible lack of understanding of orthodox Islam then, her socialisation and leaning towards 'folk Islam' when she was younger, and her marriage to C1 were all important social factors that contributed to how very divergent the notions of *halal* and *haram* were experienced and conceptualised by C at that point in time, vis-à-vis authoritative constructions of *halal* and *haram*.

C: 'Then, when I was married to C1, I was young and had my own understanding of 'Islam'. I felt that since everything was determined by God, surely my marriage wasn't a sham. So I treasured my husband and my children, and as a wife, I wanted to do his bid and follow him, of course not blindly, but for the sake of the family, I didn't mind sitting in church. Normally we'd go to Siglap or Novena. I also tried to be united with his family. I mean I considered myself a Muslim then, but I didn't think it was wrong to sit in a church...I did eat pork during festivals like Chinese New Year, you know for his family, *babi* (pork) is everywhere in their cooking. At that point in time, I let my guard down, and to me nothing was *haram*, even liquor. I mean I don't deliberately just take these things...I felt it was okay then. No inhibitions. I even let my kids take them then. I mean they're kids and weren't exactly Muslims.

Thus, the inclusion of pork and alcohol as non-*haram* food items, to C, did not negate her identity as a Muslim, in spite of marked and evident contradictions between theological

meanings of *halal* and *haram* food, and the meanings that were felt and understood by C in her everyday life. A and B were, however, unaware of this aspect of C's life.

C: 'During those times, my parents were not really in favour of me getting married to C1 because he didn't want to convert. But they let me anyhow, as long I didn't denounce (sic) Islam, which I didn't. They don't know that I ate pork then or drank. I guess (if) they would be okay if I drank, since A drinks, but I think they would have flipped if they knew I took pork. I think I would have ended up as one of those suckling piglets roasted to the fire (laughs). But to me, it wasn't *haram* then, really, I didn't know why though.'

These meanings, however, shifted in time when C and C1 decided to divorce in 1989. She was granted sole custodial rights over her children, C2 and C3, and shifted back to the residence of A and B for a short period of time. During this period, C was emotionally unstable, and drank alcohol frequently. It was only after a period of self-reflection that C decided to return, in her words, 'to the true path of Islam, and ask for Allah's forgiveness'.

C: 'I knew I had a lot of *dosa* (sins) when I was younger and foolish. I partly blame my parents (A and B) for not correcting me, or providing me with the proper religious knowledge when I was a child, but it's no point blaming them or dwelling on the past. What's done is done, it's better to look at (sic) the future. I didn't know my marriage would fall apart, but thank God I have C2 and C3. In a way, I think God has shown me the way...I mean, look at what I did before, I drank *arak*, ate pork, I mean it's *haram*, but to me then, it wasn't. I thought well, these things were okay. Now I have changed for the better. But I don't regret my past. What's the point regretting? You learn from your mistakes.'

C has not remarried since, but now has a long-term relationship with her companion, whose wife had passed away of cancer. His high level of religiosity and strong knowledge of orthodox Islam has influenced her present understanding of Islam and its teachings. In this respect, her conceptions of *halal* and *haram* are now moral imperatives in her everyday life that closely correspond to its theological constructions and meanings. She does not patronise food joints and establishments that serve non-*halal* food, even if they do not serve pork or

lard, since they are not certified *halal* by MUIS. During observations in mealtimes with C and her family outside their home, there was a concerted effort by C to consume *halal* food and drinks so as to strengthen her *iman* (faith)²⁶, which, to C, is constitutive of being a ‘good Muslim’. In fact, she stays clear away from items which she regards as *makruh* (or objectionable), such as certain forms of seafood like *belut* (eel), and *ketam batu* (a type of crab), which belong to *dua alam* (two environments)²⁷.

C: ‘To be a good Muslim, you have to closely follow Islam’s teachings, you have to believe in it, and that includes your everyday practices like eating and drinking. I now make it a point to not eat indiscriminately. I only eat and drink *halal* now...Even *makruh* food, I will not eat’.

D and E married D1 and E1 respectively, both of whom have, recognise, and acknowledge their Indonesian origins, but readily identify themselves as both ‘Muslims’ and ‘Malays’. D1 is the second daughter of a Javanese family, who continue to have strong roots in her grandparent’s town located near Bandung in central Java (Indonesia). Her grandparents, like the parents of A and B, had migrated from Indonesia in search of better work opportunities in Singapore. D married D1 in 1993, and they have a daughter (D2), and three sons (D3, D4 and D5). D1’s lineage and ancestry that includes Japanese, Hindu-Indian, and Dutch-Christian influences, partly framed her socialisation and understanding of ‘Islam’ that was not so dissimilar from that of D (and A and B). While both D and D1 were accommodative to pre-Islamic influences and various elements of *adat*, particularly in traditional dance which they were both actively involved in as part of their career, their conceptions of *halal* and *haram* in relation to food and drink were deeply rooted in the teachings of orthodox Islam, though both conceded that they make allowances during certain times.

D: ‘Both of us are Malays and Muslims, but I see myself as a Muslim more. Before, my parents saw *bomohs*, and all, but at first, I didn’t think it was wrong, in fact I thought drinking *arak* was okay, but a few years after that, it didn’t feel right. When I saw my father (A) drink when I was young, first it was like normal. But, but later after learning more, I had doubts. I mean I was sure my dad was a good Muslim...I asked B but she said it was okay. Then she told me the story of how back in Indonesia, some towns were okay about it. But I find it wrong now. That’s why for me now, although I respect my *adat*, especially since I teach and choreograph traditional Indonesian and Malay dance

which rely heavily on *adat*, we have to see what's more important to us, and for me, it's *agama*...That's why for food, for me, it's very, very important, especially since I have four children, to eat *halal* food. You have to set a good example to them. And that of course means you have to eat and drink what's right and accepted in Islam, that means no liquor, no pork, no lard, and when you eat out, you have to make sure that it's serving *halal* food. Not only must it be *halal* food, but must be prepared in the *halal* way'.

D: 'When I was growing up, my family made it a point for me to know, and respect my *adat*, that there is a tradition to follow, and we had to follow it, because that's what makes us who we are. But after I married D1, this all seemed to change. I have a family now, and Islam is an important part of our lives, even though I'm still not so familiar with it. And we have to practise it in our everyday lives. So when it comes to food, I agree with D1 when she says that *halal* food is a must...But there are exceptions *lah*. I admit I did drink alcohol before, but only to keep me warm. I was in the U.K. and it was very cold'.

E1, who is Boyanese, is the third born in a family of four siblings. His father left his mother to take care of the family when he was five to take on a second wife, and did not return. He did not receive proper Islamic instruction, and mainly learnt it from his elder brothers, though he admits that he is not 'the perfect Muslim', especially when he was young. E1's mother was extremely steeped in animistic and pre-Islamic beliefs, regularly consulted *bomohs*, and at one point in time, even dabbled with *orang halus* (metaphysical spirits). His mother felt that there was nothing wrong in this, especially if it meant protecting her immediate interests. This correspondingly influenced his outlook and understanding of Islam, including his conceptions of *halal* and *haram*, and his treatment of food and drink. For example, to E1, drinking alcohol was not *haram*. At times, E1 used to drink alcohol at home. He married E in 1996, after the dissolution of his first marriage (from which he had three children). E and E1 together have two sons, E2 and E3. E is not significantly affected or concerned by E1's minimal level of religiosity, largely due to her own lack thereof. However, she insists that in spite of her lack of knowledge in Islam, she regards herself as a 'good Muslim'. One of the main ways in which she compensates for the lack of knowledge is through her actions in everyday life, particularly in terms of food and drink. For example, she does not consume *haram* food or drink, and ensures the meals she prepares at home are all *halal*. Additionally, she ensures that

her children, E2 and E3 eat and drink *halal*, and are adequately socialised in the fundamental tenets of Islam.

The Third Generation: This generation consists of eight children (C2, C3, D2, D3, D4, D5, E1, and E2). The age disparity between the eldest (C2) and youngest (D5) is wide. With the exception of C2 (26 years old) and C3 (25 years old), who are the biological children of C and C1, the rest of the other children are below ten years old. All eight have had or are going through formal education in national/government schools²⁸, or university, and identify themselves as ‘Muslims’, though not all refer to themselves as ‘Malays’.

Unlike the rest, C2 and C3 were not ‘born’ into Islam. Following C1, both of them were ‘born’ Roman Catholic, recognised institutionally as ‘Chinese’²⁹, and carried both Christian and dialect names. Prior to the divorce of C and C1, C2 and C3 attended Sunday church masses along with their parents, and enrolled for catechism classes. They celebrated Chinese, Christian, and Muslim festivals, which included Chinese New Year, Christmas, Easter, *Hari Raya Aidilfitri*, and *Hari Raya Aidiladha*. When they were young, ‘religion’, to both of them, was generally taken-for-granted and so commonsensical that it became an unquestioned everyday life accomplishment. During this period (until 1989), neither C2 nor C3 differentiated between *halal* and *haram* food, particularly during non-Muslim festivals, where they consumed pork and other non-*halal* meat³⁰. Instead, they categorically defined such food ethnically and according to each respective festival.

C3: ‘We had no conception of what *halal* or *haram* was. Back then (in the 1980s), a lot of places we went to like McDonalds or Burger King was not, in retrospect, *halal*. During festivals like Chinese New Year, I only knew I was eating Chinese food, such as *bak kwa*³¹, and pork rib soup, while my aunts and uncles were guzzling down beer. In fact, our mum (C) didn’t stop us. During *Hari Raya*, it was Malay food. It was only later when both of us made the distinction.’

C: ‘I know I didn’t stop them eating pork, but they were young. But it was okay for me. I know E didn’t like it. In fact, C2 once told me that E chided them at A and B’s house for not having Muslim names, and for eating non-*halal* food. It was at the eating table, and suddenly they wanted a McDonald burger! And McDonald then wasn’t *halal*. I mean thinking back, I know now she has a point, and that there was no judgment on her part but not all of us were perfect. Even her husband,

E1, isn't. But I know deep in our hearts we are good Muslims, even if we may have some flaws. Even if we sin.'

After the divorce and the period that followed, both C2 and C3 were converted to Islam. They temporarily returned, along with C, to the residence of A and B, and were instructed in the fundamental tenets of Islam by A. Both of them admitted that they had never actually questioned this conversion, but were aware that their mother's choice was a carefully considered one. They grew to accept and practise 'Islam' in their everyday lives, but had their respective meanings and interpretations of it over the years that ensued, including the ways in which they conceived and framed what was considered *halal* and *haram* food.

C2: 'My relationship with Allah (God) is a private and intimate, individual matter. I am convicted to the faith, there's no doubt in this case, and I do consider myself a Muslim, if not a seasonal Muslim, since I only pray during important Muslim festivals. I know I may not pray, and I don't eat *halal* food, and my mum (C) continues to hint and mention that I needed to pray, at least once a day would do. But that doesn't make me a bad person, or a bad Muslim for that matter. For me, I mean it really doesn't matter if the meal is *halal* or not, as long as it doesn't contain pork or alcohol. And I like to eat, especially if it's something new. I can have someone eating pork next to me, and it doesn't bother me at all. Even for plates or utensils, as long there's no pork, or at least if I don't know whether there's pork in it, *it's halal to me* and I'll eat it. I mean there was this time while I was in Hong Kong, and my friend and I entered a noodle eatery. I then ordered chicken noodle only to realise later that the broth was made with pork ribs! But did it taste good (laughs). Even if pork has touched the plate, just remove it, I don't mind. All these divisions of why certain seafood or crabs can't be eaten or if it's *makruh*, my mum (C) tells me "oh then you must stay away", well, this doesn't really affect me. To me, that doesn't make you any less of a Muslim. I've seen more hypocritical Muslims who preach a whole lot, but drink alcohol by the barrels, have extramarital affairs, dabble in black magic, but pray five times a day, and go for pilgrimage. To me, your actions speak louder than words, and really, to me, as long as you have a good heart and soul and do good, that makes you a good person, regardless of religion. And that makes you a good Muslim. You don't moralise or judge against

someone just because he or she eats non-*halal* food. Everyone is human and not perfect. Only Allah is.'

In the case of C3, who is currently a teacher in an autonomous primary school in Singapore, religion plays a fundamental role in her everyday life. In spite of her rational, modern outlook on life, she does not feel that this is incompatible or in contradiction with her own sense of religiosity. Like C, she believes *agama* builds her *iman*, and does so by abiding closely to the tenets of Islam, such as performing the *salat* five times daily, and dietary rules, though she does make some concessions.

C3: 'I follow the *halal* and *haram* rules closely, yes, but I do admit I make some exceptions. Like when I'm abroad, and there's no Muslim food, I eat seafood or salad. When I was in Seoul (South Korea), it was so hard to find food, that I ate McDonalds fish fillet burger or some tuna sandwich. Sometimes, I do so in Singapore, but not all the time, only in some cases like sushi takeaways. But generally I eat *halal* food. But I'm not so strict on myself like C. Look at me now, I'm eating sushi with you, as long as that place doesn't serve pork, it's fine, but I'm more comfortable if the food place has a *halal* cert(ificate). Anyway, since sushi is mainly seafood, all seafood is *halal* to me.'

However, both C2 and C3, who do not regard or affiliate themselves racially as either 'Malay' or 'Chinese', readily omit the role of *adat* in their everyday lives, and prioritise their identities as 'good Muslims' instead.

C2: 'I don't believe in race, and I don't affiliate myself with any racial category. What's the point? That's just bollocks. A and B talk to me on the importance of *adat*. So do my uncles and aunts. But really, while I respect the fact that it may be important in their lives, it's not for me. In fact, some *adat* practices are totally in conflict with Islam. I think you get stuck in a moralistic plane when you think that, oh, if you don't follow it, it'll vanish into thin air, your culture will be gone, your tradition, but it's crap. You adapt, things transform. You burn *kemiyen* (incense) in the home during *Maghrib*³², that's not an Islamic practice, it's Hindu. I think if you can construct and interpret your life as you like it, I think I can do the same way. As long as I don't offend or harm

anybody, I think it's okay. And some of these *adat* are not Islamic to begin with.'

C3: 'I tend to agree with my brother (C2). These *adat* practices are often not in sync not only with modern times, but not with Islam. Like the *kenduri*. I'm not against it, but people come to offer prayers to the deceased, but end up after that eating like a celebration. I heard someone asking my grandmother (B) "what food you cater ah? Oh that one very nice" and then chatting about all this nonsense like "Wah, you so big, when are you getting married ah?" instead of observing a certain modicum of respect.

The other children (D2, D3, D4, D5, E2 and E3) are all below ten years old, and while interviews with them were difficult to conduct, it is pertinent to point out that all of them, with the exception of D5, who is only a year old, are aware of the theological meanings of *halal* and *haram*. For them, they unquestioningly abide by these rules set, calling themselves 'good Muslims' who will, in the words of D3 'go to heaven'. D3 and D4, for example, point out that 'good Muslims don't eat pork, or drink beer, because beer's *air kencing* (urine)³³.' Thus, their meanings of *halal* and *haram* generally correspond with the textual, theological meanings of the named categories.

The multiple (re)constructions of the once taken-for-granted and commonsensical categories *halal* and *haram* by individual practitioners from the three different generations demonstrate the complexities embedded beneath these categories over time and social context that divert attention away from the textual and theological definitions towards the shifting and negotiated meanings that the categories hold and experience for ordinary individuals in practice. Their respective conceptions of *halal* and *haram*, in effect, correspond to the ways in which they shape their individual Muslim identities, to which the next section discusses.

Being and Doing 'Muslim': Food Rules and Religious Identit(ies)

The manifold meanings and conceptions of religious food rules to individual practitioners are important and central aspects of the social construction of their self-identities, and are inextricably and symbolically connected to religious group memberships (Caplan, 1997; Fischler, 1988; Fox, 1999; Lupton, 1996). While many of these conceptions are culturally reproduced, sustained, and enforced, at times even fiercely, from generation to generation, and are generally adhered to, as the case study in this paper has shown, there are various instances that transpire in everyday life where such meanings undergo numerous adaptations

and negotiations through space and time. What these illustrate is that food rules have histories, and that the many shifts and divergences that take place intra- and inter-generationally should be understood in their respective historical and social milieux. The very fact that A and B, for instance, share similar historical roots and origins (from Indonesia), and were both heavily influenced by pre-Islamic folk beliefs that formed part of their *adat*, in effect, shaped their conceptions of *halal* and *haram*. This was also the case for C, D, and E in the formative years of their lives. This being said, it does not mean that their meanings and conceptions of *halal* and *haram* rules remained static across time. In fact, for C, for instance, her meanings and configurations of *halal* and *haram* shifted considerably to embrace the authoritative and theological meanings of these labels after her marriage with C1 was dissolved.

As practitioners continuously (re)configure such food rules and practices, they simultaneously (re)define, and (re)negotiate their relationship to their religion (i.e. Islam), which, in turn, shapes and frames their respective religious identities. In this case, the individual practitioner's conceptions of *halal* and *haram* in her/his everyday lives are related to her/his constitutive meanings of Muslim-ness, and the ways of being and doing 'Muslim'. Typologically, three patterns that occurred through time can be extracted from the case study³⁴, which I briefly describe as follows:

(1) There is, in some instances, an implicit assumption made by several members in the family, the most pronounced of which comes presently from C, that being a 'good Muslim' means closely doing 'Muslim' including the observation of Islamic dietary rules of *halal* and *haram*, which will, in turn, help fortify and build up an individual's *iman*. This opinion is similarly shared, to some extent, by her daughter, C3, most members of the younger generation (who do not question the teachings and tenets that are learnt by them), and E presently.

(2) There are also other instances where the food rules of *halal* and *haram* are rejected, where any food or drink regarded as theologically *haram* is re-configured as non-*haram* by the individual practitioner. This is most evident in the case of C during her marriage with C1, where even pork and alcohol, theologically defined as *haram*, was interpreted and socially configured as *halal* by C. She, however, continued to see and identify herself as 'Muslim', though she assigned no ostensible moral judgment with regards to her conceptions of *halal* and *haram*, and her consequent actions.

(3) Most other members in the family, such as A, B, C2, C3, and E1, however, negotiate their identities as 'Muslims' by not entirely embracing or rejecting the *halal* and *haram* dichotomy

as theologically defined, but formulating certain individual concessions in accordance to particular circumstances. For instance, though *arak* (alcohol) is non-permissible theologically, A and B consider it *halal* under certain conditions, such as when it is not drunk in excess. This is because of the importance of observing and reconciling *adat* in their everyday lives. For C3, food concessions are similarly made when she goes abroad, while in the case of C2, all food and drink except pork and alcohol are regarded as *halal* in his terms. In this respect, the theological meanings girding *halal* and *haram* are negotiated in their everyday lives, and the social (re)constructions that emerge out from this negotiation are regarded as very real and legitimate to the social actors. To them, 'Islam' plays a significant role in their lives and has acquired a valuable status, irrespective of the ways *halal* and *haram* (in relation to food and drink) are translated in their everyday lives. In this respect, being and doing 'Muslim' does not depend upon an observance or non-observance of *halal* and *haram* rules [as compared to typology (1)], but rather upon her/his wish to be called a Muslim.

As a corollary, this can be extended to the issue of the role of *adat*. The conflation of ethnic and religious identities (especially for A and B) has framed the manner in which food rules are interpreted, and practised. For A and B, as examples, the need for and importance of *adat* are inextricably tied to their ethnic identities as *orang Melayu* and their religious identities as 'Muslims'. While A and B often conflate the two together, there are some members in the family who reject the category of Malay and *Melayu* identity, and primarily embrace Islam instead. As this paper has demonstrated, there were, as in the case of C2 and C3, non-Malay members who described themselves as Muslims. Further, there are empirical examples of 'Malays' who were not Muslims and subscribed instead to Christianity or other religions (though admittedly this is a numerical minority). In fact, empirically, there is no one-to-one correspondence between *Melayu* and a Muslim identity, as the case study has shown, though at a commonsensical level easy equations can be readily made between particular ethnicities, languages, and religions (PuruShotam, 1987; 2000).

Thus, each individual member has, over different times and phases in their lives, constructed and re-constructed their understanding of *halal* and *haram*. While there are differences as illustrated, it is particularly pertinent to note that all members in the family in question consciously and explicitly embrace the label 'Muslim' as personally and social relevant in their everyday lives. More often than not, such self-ascription are voluntarily invoked and seen positively. In other words, given that some members follow closely to and embrace the theological and authoritative meanings of *halal* and *haram* (such as C, C3, D2, D3, D4, D5, E1, and E2), while many others have adapted and negotiated their own individual constructions of what these labels mean (such as A, B, C3, and E1), this demonstrates that not only are the concepts of *halal* and *haram* variegated and easily malleable, but it also shows

that this does not necessarily make 'Islam' any less important in defining and structuring their religious identities.

Concluding Remarks

Oftentimes, Islamic religious food classifications and prohibitions of *halal* and *haram* are conceived unproblematically as static, rigid, and bounded entities. Yet, as Soler (1997) suggests, no set of food rules can be understood in isolation or in a social vacuum. The restrictions and limitations of solely treating and studying food rules in a vacuum easily obscure and negate the complex of meanings of such food rules in everyday life. Therefore, to extend the argument further sociologically, this paper has attempted to show how theological constructions of *halal* and *haram* are translated into the everyday life practice of social actors. Using a case study of a Muslim family in Singapore, this paper has demonstrated that there are multiple and diverse ways in which *halal* and *haram* are socially and constantly (re)configured, (re)interpreted, and (re)negotiated in the everyday lives of social practitioners in a Muslim family. These diversities and variations, in turn, are linked to the multiple religious (and possibly, ethnic) identities of members in the domain of the family. In this respect, this paper often alludes to the need to look beyond and not treat such categorisations as givens. In so doing, this reveals the dynamic and vibrant character of not only food rules (which are hence liable to change in time and space), but also the agencies of individual social actors in their attempt to make sense of their everyday lives.

Notes

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1 On the whole, relevant and extensive research has been conducted on issues pertaining to the social meanings of food in different social and historical contexts. Food studies provide many insights into gender, religion, family, ethnicity and community. These include the political economy of food production and distribution in the context of a global division of labour (Bryant *et al*, 1985; McMichael, 1998; Morgan 1996), and the cultural role of food in the maintenance and negotiation of familial relations (Beardsworth and Keil, 1997; Charles and Kerr, 1988), gender relations (Counihan, 1999; Devault, 1997; Lupton, 1996), class/status relations (Bourdieu, 1986; Crotty, 1999; Mintz, 1985), and race/ethnic relations (Chua and Rajah, 1996; Ikeda, 1999).

2 This has been a classic pattern in social research. Goode & Hatt (1981) gave the examples of Le Play who used such a method in his study of European working-class families a century ago, and by the Lynds in their modern studies of Middletown. In such studies, the investigators have lived as members of the family, as participants in community services, taking part in games and dances, or even in study groups. They nevertheless made clear that their purpose was to gather facts (Goode & Hatt, 1981:123).

3 According to Benjamin (1987), Islam can be understood and hence categorised as a transcendental mode of orientation, where the Other constitutes the tacit, taken-for-granted, pre-reflective notion out

of which an awareness of self is constructed. Interpersonal relations are imaged in causality, where ego uses force or threat of force to coerce alter-ego. This, in turn, generates a fundamentally interfering mode of social interaction, and a continuous attending by ego to other people's actions. In the Other-focus, the deity is overtly accorded mysterious and unknowable characteristics.

4 While most Singaporeans profess some kind of faith/religious orientation, there are a substantial proportion (of about 13 per cent) of the population who are agnostic and atheistic.

5 This is stipulated under the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act in Singapore, as well as in Article 15(4) of the Constitution of the Republic of Singapore, which states that all individuals are assured of the freedom to choose and adopt any religious affiliation, and all religions were granted equality and the autonomy to manage their own affairs provided the citizens do not engage in any 'act contrary to the general law relating to public order, public health or morality'.

6 The assumption of a close affiliation between ethnicity and religion in Singapore is, however, particularly complex given the various ethnic sub-groups under each census 'racial' category. While it is commonly assumed that, for example, most 'Indians' are 'Hindus', most 'Chinese' are Chinese religionists (Wee, 1976), and 'Malays' are Muslims, these associations are not always correct. Not only are there religious internal diversities (as will be pointed out in due course), but there are other 'racial' groups who do not fall into these categories. As an example, the 'family' studied in this paper is characterised by a large degree of 'inter-racial' marriage.

7 Historically, for example, during the Dutch administration of Dutch East Indies when the government promoted the use of the Malay language, they were inadvertently promoting the spread of Islam in Southeast Asia.

8 In fact, Ibrahim et al. argue that 'this Islamisation process may have had no one definitive beginning, and also, that it certainly has had no end' (Ibrahim et al., 1986:3). While many scholars agree that Islam first entered Southeast Asia through merchants of the Muslim-controlled Indian Ocean trade route in the 13th century, not much is known about exactly how Islam progressed. For further information on this issue, see, for example, essays in *Readings on Islam in Southeast Asia*. eds. A. Ibrahim, et al. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

9 Today, while there exists a recent Islamic resurgence in the form of the *dakwah* (mission) movement toward a more 'orthodox' style in Southeast Asia, including Singapore, pre-Islamic forms of religious practices continue to endure.

10 There are several Islamic non-government organisations providing a multiplicity of educational, welfare, rehabilitative, and allied services. They include the Muslim Missionary Society Singapore (*Jamiyah* Singapore), the *Muhammadiyah* Association, the Islamic Theological Association of Singapore, the Islamic Fellowship Association, and the Muslim Converts' Association of Singapore (*Darul Arqam*).

11 Prior to the formation of MUIS, two Muslim bodies were established by the British colonial government to deal with matters pertinent to Muslim affairs. The first body formed in 1906, which was run by government officials, was the Mahomedan and Hindu Endowment Board to look into the problems encountered by the Hindu and Muslim communities. Nine years later, the Muhammedan Advisory Board was then set up to deal with Muslim affairs specifically in Singapore. Malay-Muslim leaders however felt that there was a need to form an organisation that dealt specifically with Islamic issues. Hence, an appeal was made in Parliament, which culminated into a bill passed in Parliament known as the Administration of Muslim Law Act (AMLA). Subsequently, MUIS was established.

12 These definitions, where in quotes, are taken from MUIS' main website www.muis.com.sg

13 This is quoted in *Surah al-Maidah* (5:3) which states that: '(The items) made forbidden to you (for oral intake, are): The dead, and the blood (which when allowed an exit, leaves the organ and tissues and flows out), and flesh of the swine, and that which has been pronounced for other than Allah, along with Him, and the one killed by strangulation, and one killed by violent blow or hit, and one killed by a head-long fall, and one killed by the goring of horns, and that which a wild animal has eaten – except that which you cleansed (by providing an exit to the free blood through a cut on the carotid arteries at

the neck), and that which is sacrificed at the places and sites dedicated to other than Allah (like an altar of a god); and it is forbidden to you to make divisions, (shares, portions, and rights) (of meat) on the basis of lottery or raffling with arrows – (all) this, to you, is *Fisqun* (impiety and disobedience). Other food prohibitions are also spelt out in the *Surah Al Baqarah* (2:173), which states: ‘He (Allah) has only forbidden you ‘the dead’, and the blood, and the flesh of swine and what has been dedicated along with Him, for other than Allah...’, and the *Surah An-Nahl* (16:115), which states: ‘Surely what (is correct is that) He has forbidden you *Al-Maytata* (The dead animal), and the blood, and the flesh of the swine, and that: mention has been made, for other than Allah, with this (eatable item)...’

14 This is reflected in the verse in *Surah al-Maidah*: ‘O you who believe! Truly, intoxicants and gambling and divinations by arrows are an abomination of Satan’s doing: avoid it in order that you may be successful. Assuredly Satan desires to sow enmity and hatred among you with intoxicants and gambling, and to hinder you from the remembrance of Allah and from *salat*. Will you not then desist?’ (5:93-4)

15 The theological reasons why such food items are regarded as *haram* are multiple and complex, but most are due to health reasons. For a more detailed discussion on the theological aspects of these prohibitions, see *Al-Qardawi* (1991), pp. 39-79.

16 I refrain from using the term ‘household’ since firstly, I base my study on respondents who constitute a family, but live in different households. Secondly, the notion of household does not enable researchers to study how people use family language, which would neglect a great deal of sentiment and related sense of connection, exchange, and obligation that goes well beyond the household (Bernardes, 1999). The distinction between ‘household’ and ‘family’ is that a household refers to a residence group which carries out domestic functions, while a family is seen essentially as a kinship group (Allan and Crow, 2001; Bernardes, 1999; Maynard, 2000; Yanagisako, 1979).

17 Hokkien is one of the many Chinese dialect groups in Singapore that include Teochew, Cantonese, Hakka, Shanghaiese, and Hainanese. As mentioned, these groups have now been institutionally subsumed under the census category of ‘Chinese’.

18 All the interview statements of A and B are translated from the original Bahasa Melayu.

19 ‘Shenism’ is one of the many beliefs adhered to by the majority of the Chinese population in Singapore. Using Buddhism as a base line, V. Wee, in her article *Buddhism* (1976), differentiates between Buddhist systems that refer directly to specific Buddhist canonical traditions (such as Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism) and those which have no direct Buddhist canonical reference. Shenism belongs to the latter group, which does not have any canonical tradition of any kind.

20 Some MUIS policies are against the evolution of new *keramat* graves and many old ones have been demolished in the course of urban development. A *fatwa* (religious ruling) was introduced by MUIS to the effect that the construction of any permanent structures on grave sites was forbidden, and thus *haram*.

21 Ethnic identities at that juncture historically (in the early twentieth century, before independence) were not circumscribed strictly in the fiat of CMIO categories. Such categories emerged and were particularly intense after Singapore’s independence in 1965. Thus, the identity of *orang Melayu* in Singapore included indigenous Malay as well as the numerous Indonesian dialects, such as Javanese, Minangkabaus, Buginese, and so forth.

22 *Wantan* refers to bite-size, deep-fried dumplings made of normally of minced pork and shrimp fillings wrapped in flour skin.

23 In Cantonese, *dim sum* means ‘the heart’s delight’ or ‘touch the heart’. They are also known as *yam cha*. *Dim sum* is Cantonese cuisine that comes mainly in the form of steamed and fried dumplings containing a wide array of fillings. They are usually served in tiers of bamboo steamers or small to medium-sized plates (so that many different varieties can be sampled). Though there are exceptions, a large proportion of *dim sum* dishes have pork filling.

24 *Bak chang* refers to glutinous rice dumplings with pork and chestnut fillings wrapped in *pandan* (a type of plant) leaves.

25 Peranakan, or Baba, referred to a group of people who were Straits-born Chinese (i.e. those born in the Straits Settlement, which comprised Singapore, Malacca, and Penang). Historically Chinese traders and merchants married into the indigenous Malay populace and settled down there, borrowing extensively from the Malay custom and language, including food and dress.

26 *Iman* is normally used to describe the fundamental beliefs of Islam, that is, the belief in one God, belief in angels, belief in all the prophets and messengers of God, belief in the truth of all the revealed books, belief in the Day of Judgment, and belief that the good and the evil all come from God. *Iman* is expected to be manifested in piety and expressed in one's actions.

27 There have been considerable debates amongst the ulama (Islamic religious scholars) whether animals/marine life belonging to *dua alam* (two environments), which refer normally to aquatic marine life that can live both on land and in water, such as *ketam batu* (a type of crab), and *penyu* (turtle), is *halal*, *makruh* or *haram*. Here, M. Douglas' classic work on 'The Abominations of Leviticus' in her book *Purity and Danger* may be useful to make sense of the prohibitions in terms of category violations. Beings respecting the order are regarded as 'pure' and, within food categorisation, edible. It could be said that these are symbolically and thus practically 'in control'. In contrast, those which transgress the boundaries and disregard the order such as aquatic reptiles, and amphibians, swarming both in water (fish) and on solid ground (animal) – are anomalous, impure, polluting and inedible. As ambiguous beings they are symbolically and hence practically 'out of control'.

28 Schools in Singapore comprise primary schools, secondary schools, full schools and junior colleges. Some of these are government schools, fully funded by the government, while some are government-aided schools, which are heavily subsidized by the government and managed by committees made up of private individuals. Some are independent schools run by their respective Boards of Governors, which decide on staffing, curricular and policy matters within the institution. Some government and government-aided schools are given additional resources and greater autonomy to function more like independent schools and these are known as autonomous schools.

29 In Singapore, while religious choice is protected constitutionally, one's 'race' is solely determined by not only the CMIO quadrotomy, but more pertinently by the 'race' of one's biological father. In the case of C2 and C3 therefore, they were 'Chinese' since C1 is Chinese.

30 In this case, non-*halal* meat did not only include pork, but also meat, such as lamb or chicken, that was not slaughtered in accordance to Muslim law.

31 *Bak kwa* refers to sliced roasted pork normally eaten during important Chinese festivals such as the Lunar New Year.

32 *Maghrib* is one of the five Muslim prayer times (aside from *Subur*, *Zohor*, *Asar*, and *Ishak*). Often regarded one of the more important prayer times, it starts from sunset till *Ishak*.

33 This statement was derived when I was sitting down with D3, D4, D5 and D6 in front of the television when a beer advertisement was shown. Immediately, D4 and D5 remarked that this was *air kencing*. The immediate parallel and likening of *air kencing* with alcohol is mainly due to the socialisation of what is constitutive of *halal* and *haram*, and the punishments during the Day of Judgment if they fail to abide. Those who drink alcohol, for instance, have to drink their own *air kencing* (urine) as punishment during the Day of Judgment.

34 Typologies are useful ways in to order and present the complexities of the empirical data collected. It must be reiterated that these are not static, but as illustrated, can change over space and time.

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