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INTRODUCTION

Norshahril Saat and Sharifah Afra Alatas

Three Malay bachelors had a long day at work. They gathered at one of their colleagues' workplaces and started their journey back to their house, by foot. Along the way, they discussed ways to reward themselves for the hard day's work. One suggested dining out, but the rest disagreed, preferring to cook. So, they stopped halfway and bought a live chicken from a Chinese seller by the roadside. This was how business was conducted in the 1950s in Singapore. "Two katis, so three ringgits!" said the seller. The three men agreed to share the purchase. They carried the living chicken all the way home. Upon arriving, they were greeted by a man called Nyong who was sweeping the compounds of the village. The man teased the bachelors, "So who would cook for you?" Despite being unmarried, the men replied that they were trained to cook, and requested Nyong to slaughter the chicken.

That was the opening scene of the movie *Bujang Lapok*, one of the well-known P. Ramlee comedies. While the film shared the struggles of young bachelors in pre-independent Singapore, scenes like this also encapsulate the lifestyle before the Islamic resurgence movement in the 1970s. Imagine how different the three bachelors would behave today. They could drop by a supermarket, choose slaughtered chickens from the freezer, and they could choose which part of it rather than purchasing the whole chicken. Being good Muslims, they can verify its halalness by looking at the halal logo indicated on the packaging, without needing to pass it to another Muslim to slaughter the chicken. The identity of the chicken owner is also unknown as the chicken might have been slaughtered at the slaughterhouse.

While once it was not uncommon for Muslims to patronize halal poultry without halal certification (because it did not yet exist), it is now almost unthinkable. A halal certificate symbolizes that the meat at a given

supermarket is permitted for consumption, while the meat without such certification is deemed prohibited. The meat would have undergone a thorough process to meet halal standards.

The halal industry in Southeast Asia has been growing since the 1980s. It is a by-product of the Islamic resurgence (some referred to this period as Islamic revivalism or *dakwah* movement) which swept across the region in the 1970s and 1980s, witnessing the importation of ideologies from the Middle East such as Salafi-Wahhabism from Saudi Arabia, Shi'ism's *vilayet-e-faqeh* inspired by the 1979 Iranian Revolution, and the *tarbiyah* movement adapted from the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Though competing with one another, these ideologies shared the common goal of establishing an Islamic socio-political order as an alternative to a Western order. Southeast Asia became the hotbed of Islamic resurgence, with groups championing a dogmatic ideology which emphasized "Islam as a way of life". Members of these groups, known as Islamists, were active on campus and in urban centres. At the same time, the emerging Muslim middle classes in Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore provided the demand for halal consumer goods and the intellectual drive behind these movements. In the initial phases, the movement sought to focus attention on building Islamic states and implement shariah laws. Such demands were not realized after those in charge of the states refused to budge, so Islamists focused their attention more on developing shariah-compliant societies while grappling with development and modernity.

From the 1980s to the early 2000s, Islamic resurgence has manifested in aspirations for a "shariah-compliant" modernity. This aspiration for shariah compliance has resulted in institutional formations such as Islamic banks and increased religiosity in matters of identity formation. This process includes the increased donning of headscarves by Muslim women and the desire for greater forms of Islamic education. So too is the increasing demand and supply of halal consumer goods and services. Today, a shariah-compliant lifestyle has become so dominant that questioning it would be deemed un-Islamic, and critics would be easily brushed off as "liberal" Muslims. Beyond establishing Islamic financial systems and requiring halal certification for food and beverages, segments of the community now call for halal labels for non-consumable products such as paint, plastic bags, detergents, facial products, and electronics. Even the tourism sector is distinguished between shariah-compliant and non-shariah-compliant. Thus, with its penetration into various aspects of society, economics, and personal life, it has become difficult to reverse the emergence—and even institutionalization—of a shariah-compliant or halal lifestyle. It is therefore worth exploring the

consequences of the emergence of such a lifestyle, and its similarities and differences with the calls for an all-encompassing Islamic lifestyle made in the 1970s and 1980s.

In today's context, halal lifestyle and consumption cannot be reversed to pre-resurgence levels. One could no longer question the process. A society captured in the *Bujang Lapok* scene described earlier would be unimaginable today; in fact, many of the portrayals of Malay society in the films created in the 1950s to 1970s would be deemed to be not conforming to Islamic standards.

Objectives of this Book

Shariah, Society and Stratification: Muslim Lifestyles in Southeast Asia examines the impact of Islamic resurgence in Southeast Asia five decades on. It compares five maritime Southeast Asian countries: Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. It focuses on what/who are the drivers of shariah-compliant business and certification; the extent to which Muslim societies embrace a shariah-compliant lifestyle whether through entertainment, literature, fashion, tourism, or food; and the prospects of a shariah-compliant lifestyle in the digital age.

In addressing these points, this volume has three objectives: (1) to identify specific trends in halal demand and consumption in Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. Such trends could include consumption patterns of traditional halal products such as food and drink, as well as non-traditional halal products and services, such as literature, banking, online dating, and tourism; (2) to identify the political, social, economic and religious forces behind these trends. It will examine the organizations, policies and actors who drive these trends. It will also look at how technology and social media influence consumption patterns among different age groups and socio-economic classes; and (3) to discuss the potential consequences of these trends.

To meet these objectives, the chapters are organized in two parts: Part I looks at the drivers and processes behind greater adherence to a shariah-compliant or halal lifestyle. Faegheh Shirazi (Chapter 2) focuses on an expanding global Muslim consumer market and how businesses' use of halal certification is more about commercial profit rather than honouring religious practice and faith. In the process, the chapter exposes how there have been goods fraudulently labelled as halal to take advantage of Muslim spending power. Chapter 3 by Mohammad Hashim Kamali looks at the emergence of halal industries and lifestyles in Southeast Asia in

general, and Malaysia in particular. It provides an overview of the growth of industries such as halal fashion, cosmetics, dating and matchmaking in the region, while looking at halal standards, certification, industrial parks and pharmaceuticals in Malaysia. The chapter concludes that there has been much enthusiasm for the growth of various halal industries, whether from consumers, producers, or the state, and that more effort should be made to realize Malaysia's successful transition to a halal economy.

Moving on to Indonesia, Syafiq Hasyim (Chapter 4) looks at the role of Islamic organizations in promoting a shariah-compliant lifestyle. More specifically, it discusses how the Indonesian Council of Ulama (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, MUI), through its issuing of *fatwa* (legal opinions) has been successful in promoting "shariahtization through lifestyle". In doing so, the chapter illustrates how a shariah-compliant lifestyle in the aspects of food and finance, for example, is more palatable to the Indonesian public than other organizations' calls for an Islamic state. To close this section, Tawat Noipom in Chapter 5 traces the growth of the Islamic finance industry in Thailand and its impact on Muslims there. An analysis of its growth reveals that while Islamic finance has been beneficial for Thai Muslims, the industry has become more commercialized and no longer focuses as much on religious requirements as opposed to commercial goals. Consequently, the chapter suggests that such commercialization might be the only way for Thai Muslims to keep the industry alive and preserve a part of their Muslim identity.

Part II then looks at specific case studies in the region and examines how there has been a socialization of a shariah-compliant or "Islamic lifestyle", influenced by the forces of neoliberal capitalism. Azhar Ibrahim (Chapter 6) examines the impact of shariah-compliance on reading culture in Malaysia. In doing so, he focuses on the calls for "Sastera Islam" (Islamic Literature) and how such calls have produced more exclusivist literature. In the process, there is a rejection of literature that emphasizes the values already entrenched in Malay literature, such as humanism, pluralism and multiculturalism. Focusing on a more private aspect of life, in Chapter 7, Wahyudi Akmaliah discusses the emergence of online halal dating among Muslim youth in Indonesia and how this has been fuelled by the rise to prominence of new religious authorities in the country, large-scale digitalization, and the global phenomenon of halal online matchmaking among Muslims.

Siti Mazidah Mohamad in Chapter 8 then looks at the case of Brunei and how non-state actors such as micro-celebrities, influencers, and ordinary youth participate in everyday halal activism on digital media. In discussing

their digital presence, she argues that the everyday surveillance and moral policing of Muslims' everyday lives is illustrative of shariah-compliant use of social media which serves to reinforce the hegemonic practices of the country's religious authority. In Chapter 9, Norshahril Saat brings readers worldwide and discusses how shariah compliance has affected tourism. Looking at the case of Singapore, he argues that the rise of the Muslim middle class, combined with the forces of Islamic resurgence, have contributed to the growth of shariah-compliant tourism. However, while shariah-compliant tour packages may fulfil Muslim travellers' needs, they tend to lack a holistic approach and are superficial in cherishing Islamic principles, at the same time giving little regard to inequality, environmental concerns and good standards.

Sharifah Afra Alatas and Nadirah Norruddin (Chapter 10) continue on the topic of the Muslim middle class and how the growth in popularity of Islamic-inspired products is illustrative of a moulding of an "Islamic lifestyle". Their discussion raises questions about how the commodification of religion and conspicuous consumption may affect expressions of religiosity or undermine the spiritual value of important religious symbols. In Chapter 11, Sheikh Mohamad Farouq and Nailul Farah Mohd Masbur also examine the commodification of religion in Singapore, arguing that the forces of neoliberalism and Islamophobia have allowed market actors to capitalize on Muslim piety for commercial gains. In doing so, they look at three case studies of paid partnerships between Singaporean Muslim micro-celebrities and business corporations, demonstrating how the aforementioned forces interact with a Muslim's sense of piety. Finally, Amporn Marddent (Chapter 12) examines how Muslim women in Thailand negotiate the shariah and halal requirements through their entrepreneurial activities. In studying women who own small food businesses, she illustrates how their religious identities influence their business practices and the provision of halal goods and services.

Book's Limitations

The editors of this volume declare at the outset the limitations of compiling a book on evolving trends. First, it is impossible to cover all ASEAN countries in an edited volume. Even though we have limited the scope of the book to maritime Southeast Asian countries, we are unable to include Muslims in the Philippines due to space constraints. This is not to imply that the countries not covered in this book are less important. As this is the first book discussing a relatively understudied subject matter, we hope

countries left out in this volume will be covered in subsequent books, once scholarship on this area develops. To be sure, Muslim societies are also grappling with pressures from other parts of the region, as well as globally, to meet prescribed standards of shariah that did not exist in the past.

Second, the authors in this volume too have different views regarding the status of shariahtization. Some are more sympathetic compared to others, as they grapple with the data presented to them. Ultimately, as editors, we allow for differences of opinion, as long as writers are not promoting exclusivist or radical ideas, such as promoting the Islamization of societies at the expense of minority rights. Southeast Asian societies cherish diversity, and multiculturalism remains the crux of their national identities. More importantly, the contributors' standpoint is backed by extensive data and case studies from fieldwork. All authors acknowledged that there was a significant change in how Muslims expressed their identity before the Islamic resurgence (in the 1970s) and thereafter. None of the authors pass judgements of lifestyles before that period as un-Islamic or not conforming to Islamic teachings.

The chapters in this volume cover a range of issues over selected Southeast Asian countries. This does not mean that issues highlighted in one case study do not occur in another. The book can be treated as a conversation starter, and it is worth to cover other countries in depth in future.

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