



HALAL FOOD DILEMMAS: CASE OF MUSLIMS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA

Sharifah Mariam Alhabshi

Senior Lecturer International Institute of Public Policy and Management, University of Malaya

ABSTRACT

The last decade witnessed an astronomical increase in the demand for halal products and services. The developments are imperative particularly in this globalizing world where the need to accommodate clients with halal preferences is intensifying given its relative impact on businesses in numerous but significant dimensions. However, how many businesses are abiding by the intricate rules of halal or can they really abide by the fundamentals of halal? This article examines Muslim food outlets viz. restaurants and stalls; and butchers and grocery stores in British Columbia (BC), Canada - a multiethnic, multicultural and multi-religious province settling quite a sizeable number of almost every ethnicity¹ in the world. Given the dynamic nature of BC, the paper specifically sets out to examine the nature of halal practices among Muslim food outlets and to explore the motivation behind their growing numbers and to check the nature of their continuity in business. Complementing this primary objective, the paper also seeks to justify the assumption behind the increasing accessibility to halal foods as attributed to the growing number of Muslim food outlets. Research found Muslims foods are readily available in British Columbia but specifically in areas where Muslims are concentrated. Muslim as mentioned here rather than halal seems appropriate given the nature of Muslim food stores that indulged in haram practices. By implication, though there are many Muslim stores, however, the zabiha conscious Muslims will still find difficulty searching for halal foods. The role of halal certification institution is still relatively insignificant in light of the low publicity of halal logo and certification. The future of halal zabiha stores at the moment seems questionable but the prospects of Muslims stores remain high in light of increasing Muslim migrants into Canada and the keen interest of the government to make "halal" foods, namely meat, its export niche. (334 words)

Keywords: Halal, Zabiha, Integrity, Muslims, Canada.

¹ According to the [Immigration Watch Canada \(IWC\) \(2011\)](#) the number of immigrants to Canada averages close to 250,000 per year over the past 20 years. That is 684 per day and 28 per hour.

INTRODUCTION

The last decade witnessed an astronomical increase in the demand for halal products and services. This is evident in notable halal surveys (see for example [The World Halal Forum. \(2010\)](#); [Irfan \(2008a\)](#)) that show Muslims worldwide becoming more and more conscious of what they eat and use, thus emphasizing that foods and services are ideal, proper and permissible by Islamic doctrines and hence, halal. Halal is an Arabic word translated to mean allowed, authorized, approved, legal or legitimate. These words are stated in the primary sources of Islamic law, the Holy Quran and the Hadith [the practice of Prophet Muhammad (SAW)]. Given its relative importance in today's world of business, businesses, small and large regardless of religious affiliations are integrating halal practices in the delivery of goods and services. For example, many financial institutions now have Islamic banking alongside conventional banking, moreover, this is more pronounced in the food and beverages sector where halal consumables are given special treatment in their handling and markedly distinguished through inscriptions from those considered mainstream. These developments are imperative particularly in light of globalization, which heralds the need to accommodate clients with halal preferences given their relative importance to the growth and expansion of businesses.

Literally, business is an integral part of an economic system where goods and services are exchanged for one another and usually for pecuniary purposes. Such economic activities require some form of investment and sizeable customer base to which its output can be sold on a consistent basis in order to make profit, expand and compete sustainably. This definition depicts a mainstream approach to business that rarely satisfies halal requirements. For example, the mainstream food safety (General Food Hygiene) Regulations 1995 that stipulates an extensive practice of good hygiene code of conduct among entrepreneurs falls short of basic halal requirements. Though halal practices are a niche area of business and as such, integrating its practices to complement mainstream business practices is rather open to the discretion of entrepreneurs. Halal principles stem to examine in detail the composition of food, dictate steps and rationalize why particular actions are taken, all in accordance with Islamic doctrines. For instance the Quran and Hadith clearly underline types of meat that are permissible for consumption namely *cow, lamb, goat and chicken, and then moves on to explain how these animals are to be slaughtered. Hence, animal slaughtering must be in accordance with the zabihah or the Islamic ritual slaughtering.* This method of animal slaughter involves a swift, deep incision with a sharp knife on the neck, cutting the jugular veins and carotid arteries of both sides but leaving the spinal cord intact. In addition, the release of blood after slaughter should be allowed to drain completely before it is handled. The entire process must be done with respect and compassion; avoiding as much as possible, animal pain or discomfort. However, many quarters are not in agreement with this approach. For example, some would not accept the recital "Bismillah" (In the Name of Allah) before the act of slaughtering. Also, others would not accept the way an animal is slaughtered – particularly the practice of cutting with a single swipe the large arteries in the neck along with the esophagus and

vertebrate trachea. In fact, the zabiha practice is seen by many people as an entrenched act of cruelty to animals. How many businesses adhere to the intricate rules of halal or can businesses comply adeptly with the fundamentals of halal? These questions lends credence to the observation by [Waarden and Dalen \(2010\)](#) who argued that “typically, transactions involving food are characterized by information asymmetries, meaning the seller tends to know more about the quality of a product than the buyer. Questions involving where, when and under what conditions was a food product harvested, preserved, processed, stored, and mixed are often asymmetrical between the buyer and the seller; and asymmetries increase as the distance from farm to fork increases”. As such, it is almost impossible for consumers to trace food products to the original producers even when it involves a short process from the slaughterhouse to the butcher shop. The safest way most Muslims pursue their halal interests as the food chain gets longer is by leaving the judgment of right or wrong to the seller/entrepreneur – understood in Islam as *aqidah*.² Hence, in the case where a business is run by a non-Muslim, the trust of halal implementation rests on the Islamic regulatory society that granted halal certification to that particular entrepreneur.

In light of the foregoing discussions, this article examines Muslim food outlets *viz.* restaurants and stalls, butcheries and grocery stores in British Columbia (BC) – a multiethnic, multicultural and multi-religious province in Canada where quite a sizeable number of immigrants of diverse race and ethnicity³ from across the world settled. Muslims are one of the many religious communities residing in the province with a total percentage of 1.4% of the total population comprising mainly of Albanians, Bosnians, Yemenis, Lebanese, Somalis, Bangladeshis, Saudi Arabians, Filipinos, Indonesians, Indians, Pakistanis, Fijians, and Malaysians. Of these groups of ethnic immigrants, the Indians, Bangladeshis, Pakistanis and Fijians alongside the non-Muslim settlers such as the Chinese, Vietnamese, Thais and Koreans are quite notable for their business prowess, with most of them being major entrepreneurs in food related businesses in BC. Given the dynamic nature of BC, the paper specifically sets out to examine the nature of halal practices among Muslim food outlets and to explore the motivation behind their growing numbers, as well as to check the nature of their survival and continuity in business. The paper also seeks to reconcile the assumption behind the increasing accessibility to halal foods and the growing number of Muslim food outlets in BC. The

²Aqidah as it relates to our behaviour and mentality means to be firm and tenacious. Every Muslim is expected to exhibit such traits when it comes to the fundamentals of Islam. Aqidah denotes firm believe in Allah and in everything that relates to Him – His worthiness of worship and lordship, his names and attributes, belief in the angels, books, messengers, destiny, the last day and everything authentic in the religion. We must accept Allah as the ruler and legislator and accept the messenger, peace be upon him, as one worthy of obedience and as a leader and guide whose behaviour and judgment we seek to emulate. Consequently, it is incumbent upon all Muslims to learn this, to know the purpose behind their existence, and to teach and spread this knowledge to children, families, and humanity. In the world of business, Aqidah literally invokes confidence and trust of moral and religious justification among Muslims.

³ According to the [Immigration Watch Canada \(IWC\) \(2011\)](#), the number of immigrants to Canada averages close to 250,000 per year over the past 20 years. That is 684 per day and 28 per hour.

rest of the article is organized as follows. Section two presents review of literature, while sections three and four discuss the challenges of halal certification and the obvious arguments against Muslim ways respectively. Research analysis and evaluation are presented in section five drawing lucidly, arguments and findings in response to the study objectives, while conclusions are discussed in last section.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Halal means permitted, allowed, authorized, approved, sanctioned, lawful, legal or legitimate and hence, describes appropriate foods and food preparation processes that are compatible with the Islamic faith. The different words used to describe halal and what it entails are clearly stated in the primary sources of Islamic law, the Holy Quran and the Hadith [the practice of Prophet Muhammad (SAW)]. The acceptance of halal in market circles has been quite remarkable following provisions to accommodate its fundamentals by different food and hygiene regulatory bodies. A good example is its endorsement by Codex Alimentarius⁴ Commission, which provides a general interpretation of halal and basic hygiene production practices that meet consumers needs (Codex, 1997). However, such a general interpretation could be nuanced by different Islamic schools of thought or Mazhab who may argue that the Codex Alimentarius Commission accepts the probability of minor differences in opinion over the interpretation of lawful and unlawful animals and the slaughter act. As such, different mazhab should provide detailed interpretation of halal expectations to their followers.

Often than not, interpretations of halal mostly reside with food producers. This is testament to the case of Maple Lodge Farms in Canada that was faced with issues relating to hand versus machine slaughtering and the recital of tasmiyah as chickens undergo slaughter. The company claims that during their chicken slaughtering process, recital of the name of Allah or tasmiyah was made at the beginning of the slaughtering process and assured that each chicken passed through this process. While some Muslim circles do not consider machine-slaughtering an acceptable method of animal slaughter as it is the case with Maple Lodge farms, however, The Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), Canada – the Islamic Authority that licensed Maple Lodge farms interceded to vindicate the company by stressing no difference between hands and machine slaughtered chicken. While this issue remains unresolved, Maple Lodge Farms nonetheless concluded that the company does not expect 100% market and to switch to hand-slaughter to attain 100% market will be impractical and cost ineffective in light of the large volume of chickens they produce daily (Hashimi, 2003). Guidance on appropriate Islamic practices rests upon the advice of religious bodies or religious teachers with acute knowledge of Islam. Similarly, the Holy Quran and Hadith or Sunnah (the practice of Prophet Muhammad SAW), which remain unchanged and unaltered and never in

⁴ Codex Alimentarius is a joint project of the World Health Organization (WHO) and Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), where WHO provides 1/3 of the budget to Codex and FAO provides the remaining 2/3.

contradiction provide Muslims with the best Islamic and religious guidelines. Sunnah is only an extension and explanation of the Holy Quran. However, the third and fourth Islamic law, Ijma or the consensus (an agreement of the Muslim community on a point of Faith or action) and Qiyas or analogy (the decision of an expert of Islamic law on the basis of known law given by the Quran and Sunnah) may be open to interpretation to suit the time, place, and circumstances of the issue in question (Regenstein *et al.*, 2003). The examples of Ijma are Travah prayers, two Azaans on Friday prayers and agreement of Muslims on the Quran compiled by Abu Bakr (ra). Qiyas or decision by religious expert on certain matters is permitted by the Quran and Sunnah because the Quran directs Muslims to use common sense in many areas. The legal expert compares the logic of an existing problem for which no direct solution is given in the Quran, Sunnah and Ijma. He forms his opinion and comes to a conclusion using common points between the two problems at hand. For example, Quran and Sunnah do not talk about using narcotics but Quiyas stipulates and declare drinking wine and use of narcotics as unlawful or haram. This is so given the fact that they both distort the sense of reasoning.

In a nutshell, halal is all about the adherence to Islamic law (syariah law), product quality, product safety, animal welfare, integrity and ethics. Integrity and ethics as a subset of halal is all the more important in the art of doing business in Islam as it shapes the entire qualities expected of a Muslim. Integrity involves moral judgment and character, honesty and leadership values. Individuals with integrity not only understand right from wrong but put it into practice in all they do. This is especially important in a business environment where moral uprightness sets the foundation for successful business relationships. Such an environment may have an accreditation body tasked with the function of honestly advising and recommending appropriate products for Muslims. Integrity is paramount for halal to take full effect as absence of it only makes its aims implausible. Looking at the deficit of integrity in a business environment, highlighted concerns on the dangers of decreased mutual trust on the social structure of society. Consequently, he points to issues ranging from certificate inflation to product laundering by mandated offices to an extent where oversight or complete takeover of responsibility is required by a higher authority to salvage the reputation of the process from where it draws its importance.

Ethics in the context of Islamic business combines a value-maximization concept with the principle of 'justice' for the general welfare of the society. These principles offer a means to create value and elevate the standard of living of people in general through commercial endeavors. The Islamic ethical guidelines ensure respect for, and the individual freedom of, both sellers and customers. Islamic ethics dictate that under no circumstances should sellers exploit their customers or in any way involve themselves in dishonesty, fraud or deceit. Any unethical business practice reflects injustice, which by definition, negates the concepts of brotherhood and equality of humanity that form the core of the Islamic vision (Saeed *et al.*, 2001). Moreover, they argue that the principles of justice and equity in Islam differ from secular ethics in many ways. For instance, they contend that Islamic ethics are based on the Holy Quran; their transcendental aspect of absoluteness and non-

malleable nature, all combined to emphasize value-maximization in view of the greater good of the society rather than the selfish pursuit of profit maximization. However, studies have also found large disequilibrium among Muslim buyers and sellers with sellers taking the advantage to cheat when confronted with price competition (Ahmad, 1997). Often than not, sellers adulterate ingredients like combining pork and steak to make kebab simply to reap extra profits – an act grossly offensive to Islamic morals and religious decency.

Challenges of Halal Certification

The principles of halal are intricate, with its practice best led by patient and morally upright individuals with appreciable understanding of the Quran. The efforts of these individuals are indeed commendable as they see to the protection and enhancement of Islamic ethics that shape the lives of Muslims. There are about 200 halal certification bodies in the world, all of who are bound by one central objective – to maintain a reliable system of certification and information on halal. Ironically, there is no unified halal standard in the world as there are different Muslim sub-groups with different ideologies. Moreover, most halal certification bodies operate under the emblem of different Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). In most cases, such an arrangement tends to distort the intended halal effect given the fact that such bodies and their staff may be indifferent to stated halal doctrines, making its success a far cry. This argument is consistent with (Waarden and Dalen, 2010) whose halal study in the Netherlands documents in its findings the country's refusal "to get involved in the regulation and enforcement of halal products [because] it does not accept the responsibility of protecting the religious security of its citizens...It remains to be seen if and when Western governments will change their present position to active involvement..."

In the absence of public regulations, there has been a plethora of private initiatives by religious bodies, scholars and schools offering halal certification and halal logos. Over the years there has been a steady increase of halal organizations who consequently, have recorded both positive and negative impacts on the halal industry and Muslim consumers. An example of such impacts relates to a recent case in Iowa, U.S, where a meat company named Miramar was alleged to have sold improperly branded meat products to a Muslim community. Given the long history of the company as a meat supplier spanning forty years, the implication of the allegation if found guilty translates to a practice of supplying non-halal meat to its unsuspecting customers for such a very long time. In addition, it will blemish the credibility and effectiveness of the U.S halal certification for its ineptitude of oversight functions. What will it take for the government to intervene appropriately? Waarden and Dalen (2010) believe time to be the best remedy as society evolves to usher in changes and improved understanding of halal, which would probably stimulate governments to active involvement. Apparently, comprehensive state intervention in favour of halal is beginning to emerge in the Western world with reference to the announcement by the European Commission (EC) to launch a survey aimed at checking whether consumers would prefer meat labels that provide detailed information about methods of animal slaughter and handling (Paun, 2012).

Argument against the Muslim Ways

There are arguments on the premise that no modern state in the Muslim world has practically implemented an Islamic economic system. The economic systems that exist today are most probably secular in nature with a trend removed from Islamic doctrines, which has continued to evolve overtime. Even the academic discipline of Islamic economics, which seeks to combine secular economic theories or (neoclassical) models with teachings of Islamic philosophy and law, is relatively a new and evolving phenomenon. The earliest publications in this field did not originate from scholars at leading Islamic universities in the Arabic core centers of the Islamic world, rather from academics in Asia (Nienhaus, 2010). Added references to Islamic teachings and, in particular, to the commercial law aspects of Shariah were often only superficial or cosmetic and served more to legitimize and mobilize than to provide a conceptual foundation.

Another view of Islamic thought even more insidious comes from Warraq (2005) a Muslim by birth but renegades and consequently perceives Islam with total disgust and hatred. The Islamic school of thought he led had total disregard for Islamic sanctity as the words of Allah (SWT) in the Holy Quran, Hadith and Fiqah were twisted, misinterpreted and rationalized according to simple logic of a man (Aladin, 1995). In the world of man on the one hand, there is *nafs* or soul, often considered the greatest enemy of man. This *nafs* or soul receive orders from the devil and tempts man into bad deeds. On the other hand, there are agents like mind, heart and conscience that order him to do well. In other words, doors of progress and evilness are readily open in the inner world of man. Therefore man has to be very careful not be tempted by the inculcation of *nafs* and the devil, rather, man must ensure the sovereignty of mind, heart, conscience and belief in his world and keep away from arrogance and evil deeds (Aladin, 1995).

Contrary to Warraq (2005) is Amina Cisse Muhammad, who was born into a Christian family and the granddaughter of a Baptist minister. She spoke of conversion into Islam through an analogy of a person drowning in a river.

“...despite the fact that a river’s current is very strong, much stronger than a human’s strength, it is the natural impulse of a person drowning in a river to try to swim against the current. The feat being impossible, this person will likely get exhausted and eventually drown from fatigue...However, if this person submitted to the flow of the river and allowed it to carry him/her long, perhaps along the way, a rock or tree branch would appear that they could grab onto and save themselves. In the same way, I was told, as humans we quite often resist the natural order of things – the Divine Laws and Decree of Allah – and we perish. However, if we were to submit to that natural order – indeed, to Allah – not only is our salvation possible, it is guaranteed” (Muhammad, 2012)⁵

⁵ Extracted online at: http://dearmuslim.com/ftpfiles/Why_I_Am_a_Muslim.pdf

Similarly, Mehmet (2011) argues that man decides whether to do good or evil. This argument is consistent with the story of the very first being, Adam (peace be upon him), through whom humanity has walked through two opposite paths, which will continue until the Day of Judgment. The two opposite paths is characteristic of good and evil. The 'good' aspect on the one hand is faith and conversion, which is characteristic of good, perfection, tranquility, and happiness; while the 'evil' aspect on the other hand embody blasphemy, astray and waywardness solely characterized by evil, destruction and aggression. Mehmet (2011) pointed out reasons that could drive an individual into blasphemy and astray. Among these are ignorance – meaning lack of judgment concerning the reasons behind the existence of all things; arrogance and vanity – meaning the feeling to see oneself superior like Nimrod and the Pharaohs claiming greatness against Allah (SWT). Mehmet (2011) further asserts that the polarization and opposition in the outer world also takes place in the inner world of humans. The heart, mind, and conscience urge humans into the path of faith. The self, desires and groundless fear lead one to the path of blasphemy.

METHODOLOGY

The paper follows the case study approach, often used to unravel the complexities of a given situation. A case study research deals with a particular case in its entirety, with chances of being able to discover how the many parts affect one another. It also allows detailed workings of relationships and social processes, rather than restricting attention to their outcome. According to Denscombe (2007), a case study focuses not only on the outcomes and results but also on the opportunity to explain why certain outcomes are the way they are, contrary to just finding out what those outcomes are. Looking at the growth of halal outlets for example, the strength of the case study approach would be that it could investigate the processes that explain such growth and how that growth interrelates with other factors.

The primary subjects for investigation are halal food outlets in the major cities of BC namely Vancouver, Surrey, Richmond, and Burnaby. The study explores possible pull and push factors of halal food establishments in a country that is dominantly non-Muslims. The case study approach is deemed appropriate for the study as the situation is not one artificially generated specifically for the purposes of the research. It is not like an experiment where the research design is dedicated to impose controls on variables so that the impact of a specific ingredient can be measured (Yin, 1994). In terms of data collection, one of the strengths of the case study approach is that it allows the researcher to use a variety of sources – meaning different types of data and different types of research methods as part of the investigation. In fact, a case study actually invites and encourages the researcher to do so. In light of this suggestion, this study applies a combination of data collection techniques, which includes observations of events within the case study setting combined with the collection of documents from official meetings and informal interviews with people involved.

The study commenced in early March 2012 and ended in early May of the same year. The initial preparation before field work comprised of activities including collection of facts and figures on issues of halal in Canada, which were gathered through printed literature and via internet sources. The output from this exercise is a list of halal outlets (inclusive of name, type, and location). A second round of data collection involved discussion with key agencies to familiarize with the nature of halal services in BC. In addition, a meeting was held with the Malaysian Consulate⁶ in Vancouver. Also, there were organized meetings with Muslims and non-Muslims students of Simon Fraser University (involving its two campuses - the main campus in Barnaby and the city campus in Hastings) and University of British Columbia campus.

The real field study exercise was divided into three categories. The first category involved observatory study of food outlets, including restaurants, groceries and butchers. The second category involved interviews with religious leaders and halal certification centers. The final category involved interviews with Muslim and non-Muslim customers, and occasionally, outlet owners and their helpers when granted permission to do so. In addition, photographic imaging and capture was highly instrumental to the research observation process as captured images brought to light facts that were not revealed during interviews. Email communication was also used to obtain information from offices outside BC. For example email communication was used to communicate with ISNA halal certification institutions of Canada and Halal Monitoring Agencies.

Analysis

This section organizes all information gathered on the ground. The discussion begins with findings drawn from the primary subjects of the research *viz.* restaurants, grocery stores and butcheries. Discussions are directed to answering the two basic research questions: what motivates Muslim entrepreneurs into food business and how have they managed to subsist in their businesses? Secondly, could the growing number of Muslim food outlets justify the assumption behind the increasing accessibility to halal foods? British Columbia is a huge province and Muslims constitute 1.4% (56,220) of its 4,076,264 population (see for more insights, Tables 1 and 2 and Figure 1). The relative small population of Muslims is spatially distributed among the largest municipalities of BC *viz.*, Vancouver, Surrey, Burnaby and Coquitlam.

Table-1. Muslim in British Columbia by Age Group, 2001

All ages	0-14	15-24	25-44	45-64	65-84	85 Above
56,220	12,615	9370	18,580	12,050	3415	190

Note: In 2006, the Muslim population was estimated to be 0.8 million or about 2.6% of the total Canadian population. In 2010, the Pew Research Center (PEW, 2011) estimated that there were about 940,000 Muslims in Canada. About 65% were Sunni and 15% were Shia. Some Muslims are non-practicing.

Source: Canada Census, 2001.

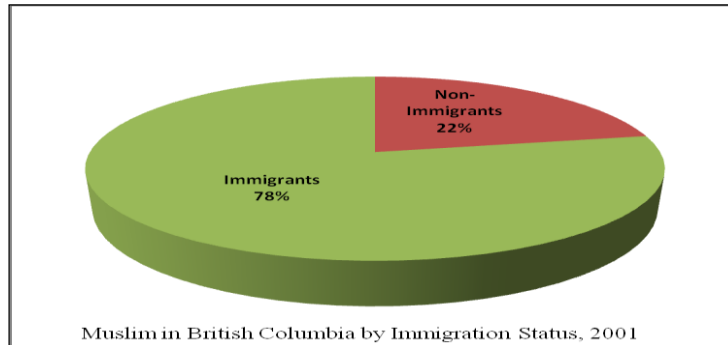
⁶Consulate General of Malaysia in Vancouver. Interview with the Consular, Mr. Haris Lisot, 6 March 2012.

Table-2. Muslim in British Columbia by Immigration Status, 2001

Total Muslim Population	Non-Immigrants	Percentage of Non-Immigrants	Immigrants	Percentage of Immigrants
56215	11,980	21.31	42,405	75.43

Source: Canada Census, 2001.

Figure-1. Muslim in British Columbia by Immigration Status, 2001



Source: Canada Census, 2001.

Only when guided by certain references, the search and documentation of Muslims could be a daunting task. Apart from geography, Muslims are also separated by their Islamic sects and ethnic origin. This observation is in line with (Todd, 2012a; Todd, 2012b) who attests that Muslims in Vancouver are unlike those in many parts of the world given their cultural and factional diversities. Muslim settlers in BC emanate from various parts of the world and are characterized by different norms and cultures as well as nuanced beliefs as evident among different Islamic sects or Mazhab like the Sunni Muslims, Ithna'ashari Shia Muslims, and Ismaili Shia Muslims. Even among Muslims from the same ethnic background, there are distinct Sunni and Shia traditions, and Muslims may differ among themselves in which aspects of their faith they emphasize. With regard to their varied countries of origin, the concern was on outlook. Irrespective of religious beliefs, people from the same ethnic origin show no differences between Islam and non-Islam like those from India and the Mediterranean countries. As such, determining halalness in food outlets becomes an odious task in light of socio-cultural, ethnic and religious integration. This situation is reflected in the following analyses.

Restaurants

Ninety-nine restaurants operated by thirteen ethnic groups were surveyed (Table 3). Apparently, majority of the restaurants (31) are owned by South Asians who specialize in Indian, Pakistani and Afghan cuisines. In the second place with 25 restaurants are the Lebanese and Turkish who specialize in Mediterranean cuisines. While the Syrians, Turkish and Iranians in the third place specialize in Middle Eastern and Persian cuisines. This group comprises the top three largest ethnicities in the restaurant business with a predominantly Muslim base.

Table-3. Muslim Restaurants in British Columbia by Ownership

Type of Cuisine	Number	Ownership
South Asians: Indian, Pakistani, Afghani,	31	South Asians
Mediterranean: Lebanese, Greek	25	Lebanese, Turkish
Middle Eastern and Persian	22	Syrian, Turkish, Iranian
North American & Mexican	12	South Asians
Chinese	4	Singaporean & China
Singapore & Malaysia	3	Malaysian
African	2	African
Total:	99	

Source: Author's survey, 2012.

Restaurants owned by South Asians are usually large in scale and popular with the non-Asians probably because they serve extensive range of cuisines that satisfy universal taste. In their menu, they consider vegetarian customers, non-meat consumers and all other customers with special food preferences. However, similar restaurants that cater for specific regional tastes like those of Malaysians and Singaporeans are struggling to survive. Moreover, there are only a relatively few Malaysians and Singaporeans in BC with most of them being non-Muslims.

With the exception of the very modern and exclusive restaurants that are referred to in Table 3 that are located either in Muslim dominated areas or areas dominated by immigrants from Southeast Asia namely the Filipinos, Thais and Vietnamese; the research finds few halal restaurants that opted to operate in white areas having to discontinue their businesses due to low patronage level. Based on the interviews with the Malaysian consulate in Vancouver, and restaurant owners from Richmond and Vancouver (Fraser Street and Marine Drive), and several non-Muslims in downtown Vancouver, we confirmed two reasons that dissuaded customers from halal restaurants, with the first being the suspicion on halal meat production and second, relating to the taste and food presentation. In fact, a student we spoke to in his argument on halal foods disclosed that:

“Halal food is not just some innocent, ethnic food. If you eat halal meat, you are eating meat from animals killed in the name of Allah, the god who, on almost every page of his holy book, sadistically commands our subjugation, destruction, and eternal torture. Why would I want to do that? The eating of halal food, the spread of it through this city (downtown Vancouver), our institutions, must be resisted...”

Mr. X McDonald on Granville Street.

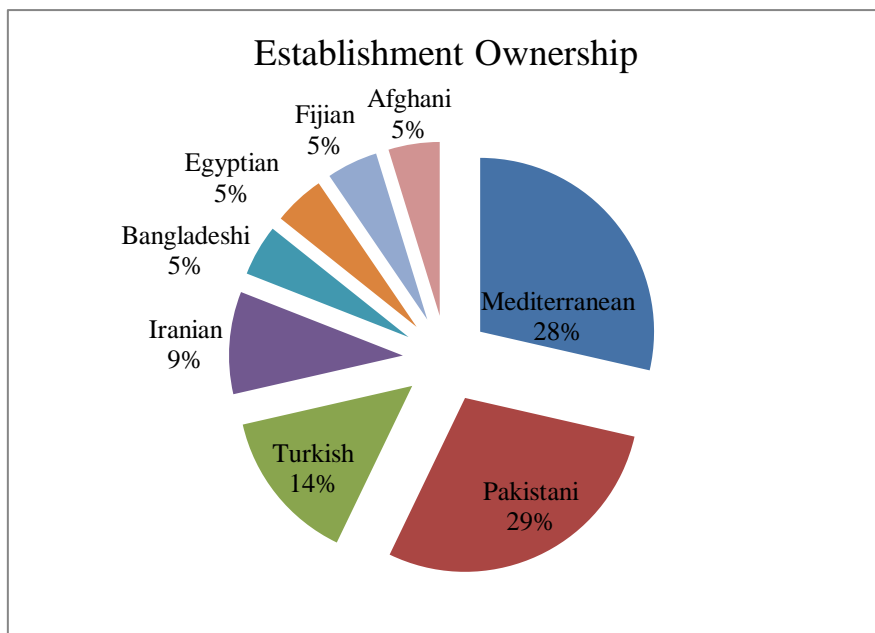
Pertaining to food presentation, some customers prefer to have their food with special beverages like wine or beer rather than ordinary soft drinks. The assertion by the interviewees were also confirmed by the researcher's observation, who saw customers leaving a restaurant after being told by a waiter that alcoholic beverages were not served at the premises. As advised by the restaurant operators from Marine Drive on becoming successful in the food business, a restaurant, besides offering quality and tasty foods, must strive to portray a neutral image; that is, refraining from posting halal signage or Quranic verses within the premises. The reason for doing so is to 'survive'.

Survival has forced some restaurants to opt for partial halal operation by offering halal and non-halal services side by side. For example, the chicken or meat served may not be from halal sources, and the restaurant offers alcoholic beverages usually upon request. Survival is important to business, especially when many of these proprietors have invested most of their entire life savings into the business. After sometime, especially when their savings begins to run out, some proprietors have to make drastic changes to attract the universal customers. Such changes are evident with bigger restaurants that have strategized to conceal their full halal status by making the halal signage less apparent. Smaller restaurants usually with less than five tables and stalls generally display the halal signage visibly in either English or Arabic writing. It is apt to assert that the risk in business is quite minimal with the smaller restaurants; moreover, the research observed they are almost fully patronized by Muslims.

Halal Grocery and Butcher Stores

Halal grocery stores (Table 4 and Figure 2) tend to be dominated by Pakistanis and Muslims from the Mediterranean (Lebanese and Turkish) and most are small, about 15 to 20 feet deep. Larger stores are operated by Pakistanis and Bangladeshis who sold both food and non food items like clothing, Indian handicrafts, and cooking utensils. Types of goods offered in smaller grocers such as Pamir Food Market on East Hastings and Mediterranean Grocery & Dollar Store in Surrey were similar to bigger stores but with lesser choices.

Figure-2. Store Ownership



Source: Author's Survey, 2012

Table-4. Grocery Store by Ownership

Store Name & Ownership	Number of Store
Mediterranean	6
PBF Pita Bread Factory	
Pamir Food Market	
Tibisti Restaurant and Grocery	
Refa Supermarket	
Mediterranean Grocery & Dollar Store	
New Gulberg Market	
New Hasty Market	
Rumi Rose Garden & Halal Market	
Mediterranean Grocery & Dollar Store	
Pakistani	6
Taqwa Halal Foods	
Pak Bazaar	
Danny's Market	
Aryan Bazaar	
Dunya Quality Meat & Seafood	
Habib Market	
Iranian	2
Polo Market	
Kandoo Grocery & Bakery	
Bangladeshi	1
Dhaka Bazar	
Egyptian	1
Naz	
Fijian	1
Fiji Islands Supermarket	
Afghani	1
Kabul Bazaar	
Total	21

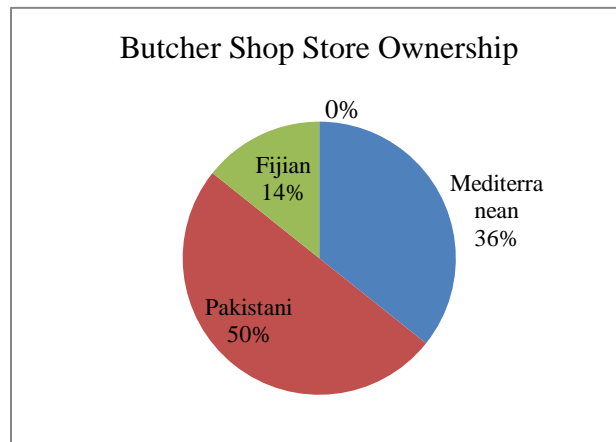
Source: Author's Survey in 2012

Other characteristics of these food outlets were ethnic focus and self-management. For example, those from the Mediterranean countries specialised in Mediterranean goods. Stores owned by South Asians engaged goods specifically from Pakistan and India. Store supervision of both the small and the large are managed by people from the same ethnic background. It was understood from respondents report that the preference for immigrants or people of the same ethnic group was due to the ability to communicate with customers often from the same ethnic community or region. Secondly, unemployment among immigrants from South Asia and the Middle East are high compared to immigrants from Southeast Asia (Canada, 2001), thus a successful entrepreneur makes it a point of duty to help people from his country of origin. The word halal written in English is apparent in all stores, usually inscribed alongside the store name. This indicates without doubt that

all goods sold are halal and acceptance is often gauged by the congregation of customers patronizing that particular store (see Appendix I).

As part of the study, fourteen meat stores were approached (Table 5 and Figure 3). Of the fourteen meat stores, two stores – A&A Meat operations and Taqwa Meat market both run by South Asians are large and well stocked with a large variety of products ranging from meat of different quality and cut, canned foods like beans and meat to bread and frozen pastry among many other products. This is a sharp contrast to the smaller stores, all of which are operated by people from the Middle-East, thus offering limited choices of meat types and quality. In all stores, the halal signage in English and Arabic are posted visibly outside and inside of each store (see Appendix II). Halal certification however, was visible only in one store, the Taqwa meat market. At least during visits by the researcher, meat stores were relatively empty in comparison to grocery stores that are packed to capacity with customers. A particular aspect the research tried to examine during the interview session was in the area of hygiene particularly with the butcher shops. The big butcher stores were very clean as food shelves, working area, fridges and floors were always kept tidy. The smaller stores, usually the one man stores were less cautious with hygiene as evident with some stores that had sticky floors, smelly fridges, unorganized storage cabinets and untidy food showcases.

Figure-3. Butcher Stores by Ownership



Source: Author’s Survey, 2012

Table-5. Butcher Stores by Ownership

Butcher Store	Ownership
Al Safa Halal Meat	Mediterranean
Al-Halal Meat and Seafood	Mediterranean
Days Seafood (Halal Meat)	Mediterranean
Alfaraza Halal Meat & Seafood	Mediterranean
Mediterranean Halal Meat	Mediterranean
Hafiz Halal Meats	Pakistani

Jasmine Halal Meat	Pakistani
Bachir Halal Meats and Deli	Pakistani
Lahore Halal Meat	Pakistani
A&A Meat Market	Pakistani
Taqwa Meat Market	Fijian
Butcher	Ownership
Mediterranean	5
Pakistani	7
Fijian	2
Total:	14

Source: Author's Survey, 2012

The researcher observed that customers who patronized these small butcher stores seem undisturbed by the disorganized appearance and unhygienic setup of these stores. Many of the customers live in the neighborhood and apparently, have established good relationship and trust with the butcheries for many years. By implication, they are comfortable with these stores as their patronage has not caused them any regret whatsoever. Like non-halal butcher stores, many have unattractive store façade, yet customers patronized the store because they like the meat quality and friendliness of the butcher. As mentioned in section two, in a business environment, trustworthy actions hence, social capital set the foundation for successful business relationships (Fukuyama, 1995), which resonates accurately in the research. While trust remains a vital element of business, it may be circumvented for selfish gains and this is where institutional enforcement is deemed relevant to stabilize interactions amongst business players. Sellers may exploit customers by selling meat deemed non halal as observed and cautioned by Saeed *et al.* (2001). Given this uncertainty and its likely repercussions, there is need for effective regulation and monitoring to complement trust among business players.

Halal Certification Bodies and Halal Monitoring

According to the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), the earliest initiative to promote halal certified foods in Canada was made by the Muslim Students Association of the United States and Canada in 1963. In 1981, the Association expanded to become the current ISNA. By 1988, ISNA had begun providing halal certification to the Muslim communities in Canada and the United States, and by 1990, the certification system had spread to other Muslim and non-Muslim countries. Subsequently, with increasing demand for halal foods and services, the responsibility of

halal certification was transferred to the Halal Certification Agency (HCA),⁷ a new agency under ISNA. In 2001, HCA took full responsibility for the certification of halal food products produced in Canada and United States and further introduced a new halal logo to complement the ISNA logo. With increasing Muslim immigration and expanding global halal market, some Islamic leaders and teachers have begun encroaching into the certification business. In 1998, a body called Halal Montreal Certification Agency (HMCA) was established and offered same services as ISNA. In 2003, the Halal Monitoring Authority (HMA), a department of the Jami'yyatul Ulama Canada, Canadian Council of Muslim Theologians (CCMT), and a non-profit organization joined the lucrative halal certification business, which meant there are three major halal certification institutions operating within Canada with three several halal logos.

The research found Taqwa Halal Meat store as the only business showcasing a certified halal logo. However, the finding became questionable when it was noted that HMA has not produced any Halal certification of red meat in British Columbia (see Table 6). By implication, Taqwa Halal Meat in Port Coquitlam made use of the halal certification issued to its other branches in Toronto or Ontario. Other meat stores only had inscriptions of halal in Roman alphabet (HALAL) or in Arabic (الحلال) (see Appendix II). Ninety percent of shops surveyed said displaying the certified logo was not necessary because their crafted logos sufficed to satisfy customers. The remaining ten percent reported that they had considered applying for a halal logo, but had second thoughts when they realized the tedious process and cost involved in getting halal certification.⁸ There is no urgency for store proprietors to apply for halal certification since a store without a certification and logo does not translate to defiance of any law or authority. Halal certifying institutions in Canada are voluntary entities; governments are not informed or involved in the Islamic requirements or standards except in the area of sanitation and hygiene. This is in line with the country's Charter where religious freedom is protected from state interference.

The non-interference code to some extent may have some negative impacts on religious beliefs and practices such as halal. For example, the initiative to apply for halal certification comes from the owners of food stores. After the submission of proposals for certification consideration by store

⁷ According to the [Meat Trade Daily \(MTD, 2012\)](#) Sunday 04 March), the Halal Monitoring Authority (HMA) is a non-profit organization established to provide assurance of genuine halal products through deployment of inspectors to inspect, regulate, monitor, supervise and label halal consumables from their sources to the consumer. It promotes the highest standards of halal, thereby serving all segments of the community, alleviating many of the concerns which arise in a cautious halal consumer's diet. The HMA is recognized as the most authentic halal certification body in Canada.

⁸For meat shops, restaurants and retailers, a monthly fee of about \$75 to \$150 (depending on the size of the facility) is applied to cover the cost of monitors, travel and equipment. Abattoirs, slaughter houses and meat processing plants are charged for the hours worked by inspectors, at \$14.50 per hour. A monthly administration cost of about \$100 to \$300 (depending on the size of the facility) per month is charged to cover costs related to equipment, labels, stamps, and administration.

owners, their stores will be subjected to inspection and scrutiny by the halal or Muslim authority. This often entails a careful scrutiny of the exact materials that are used for product development and how they are processed, down from the butchery and up to food preparation. Certification often depends on whether their processes appropriately adhere to the Muslim doctrines on halal foods. Since the halal certification institutions are in no way associated with the government, many halal stores as long as they possibly could, avoid the hassle of being checked and monitored. Considering the hundredths of butchers that existed in Canada, only 19 are certified, all of whom are concentrated in Ontario with none in BC (Table 6). In pursuit of the same line of argument, there are possibilities that since there is no authority to audit and monitor activities, some halal certification bodies may deviate from their objectives or may not be as strict as they ought to be.

Table-6. Halal Monitoring Agency Certified Product Supplier List, 2012

Area	Meat and Red Meat Products	Poultry Part Production Plants	Other Products*
Ontario	5	2	2
Toronto	1	0	0
British Columbia	0	0	2
Alberta	0	0	1

*NNote: Other products include milk protein concentrate and whey protein concentrate.

Source: (Halal Monitoring Authority, 2012).

EVALUATION

This study sought to explore factors that push Muslims into business and the nature of their continuity and survival in business. Second, in light of the growing number of Muslim food stores, this research assumes that awareness of halal among Muslims is high and accessibility to halal foods for Muslim community is increasingly becoming readily available.

Who are the Muslims and Halal

Canada is one of the very few Western countries that practice liberal immigration policy. The policy, at least from the perspective of the government is to materialize and enforce Canada's zero population policy agenda. Muslim immigrants make a small percentage of the total immigrants, however quite visible, especially those from the South Asian countries who are mostly concentrated in major cities, notably Vancouver in the British Columbia.

Literally, most immigrants came to Canada specifically with the hope of a better life through job opportunities. However, as this research found through discussions, observations and supported studies of [Social Planning Council of Ottawa. \(2006\)](#); some immigrants' sense of adventure and optimism are downplayed most often by insurmountable barriers to meaningful employment. Few immigrants return to their home country, but many, for quite a number of years have remained in Canada with self-employment like the establishment of ethnic-related business stores and enrolling

in low-pay blue-collar jobs being the available choice opened to them for a meaningful livelihood (Ferrer and Riddell, 2003; Aydemir and Mikal, 2005).

With regards to the former, due to tough competition among stores of the same type, some businesses were not better-off than those in the low-pay jobs. Low income usually among non-Canadian Muslims forced them to congregate around the same neighborhood or near friends or relatives from the same country of origin or at least region. This pattern of integration reduces transaction costs making it a lot easier for halal stores to proliferate fast and usually within the reach of majority of their consumers. This network within a community of resident business owners, consumers and the nature of business operations creates a huge sense of belongingness and trust among stores in an interconnected and reciprocal pattern. For example, a one-man butcher shop could request a customer who may happen to be his neighbor to oversee or watch over his shop for few hours of his absence. Similarly though common among small grocery stores, one could encounter a shop helper that cannot utter a word of English, yet manages the shop. Often, this implies that the proprietor is open to non-same ethnic customers or probably, customers solely from a particular ethnicity tend to patronize his store.

Furthermore, the study findings reveal the deplorable setting of small grocery and butcher stores, most of which were documented to be untidy and disorganized. Moreover, these small shops are clear extensions of their homes. In fact, customers are so attached to the shops that they seemingly approach them like neighbors' houses where they are trusted, free and comfortable. In the same vein, it might be unthinkable to discuss the element of halal in a Muslim's home taking into consideration that whatever is in a Muslim's home is halal. Conversely, an individual that does not belong to a common religious and ethnic setting may not accept for instance the custody of shop in the case of an owners absence or an untidy butcher. Criticisms that rise from nature of stores for example are not so much related to halal per se but more towards religious discontent.

Though majority of Muslims are surviving, however, there are few like the Fijians, Bangladeshis and Pakistanis that have expanded not only beyond their ethnic circle but into the global market. These are the non-stereotyped Muslims. The research discussions revealed that proprietors of big businesses understand quite well the difference between halal and haram, but at the same time also believe that to be discriminated against because of income and poverty is bad for Islam.

In terms of displaying halal signage, they saw nothing wrong by doing so even if they kept alcoholic beverages within their premises since such beverages were specifically reserved for non-Muslims. It has become apparent that in a bid to survive in business, business owners who are Muslims have had to adjust the rules on alcoholic beverages which strongly defies halal doctrines and that, which is cursed by Allah (SWT):

"God's curse falls on ten groups of people who deal with alcohol. The one who distills it, the one for whom it has been distilled, the one who drinks it, the one who transports it, the one to who it has been brought, the one whom serves it, the one who sells it, the one who utilizes money from it, the one who buys it and the one who buys it for someone else." (SunanIbn-I-Majah Volume 3, Book of Intoxicants, Chapter 30 Hadith No. 3380).

Similarly, the act of not displaying halal signage was acceptable as observed. For example, an Indian restaurant's proprietor argued that vegetarian foods requires no mention of halal for it automatically equates to halal. Generally, all plants are halal provided they are not poisonous and not adulterated to make them haram. Nevertheless, some Muslims may probe beyond the raw materials used, because halalness demands pure and clean in the whole production process of foods which includes processing, packaging, labeling, storage and transportation. This means processed vegetable-based food is not naturally halal if any of the production cycle is tainted with unclean elements (filthy or Najis) as in accordance with the Syariah Law. Uncertainty in the aspect of halalness even among Muslim proprietors forces one to question the integrity of halal stores or those labeled as Muslims stores particularly in light of their wrongful practices that significantly limit their halal credibility.

Is Halal Everywhere?

Interpretation of halal and haram resides in the Holy Quran and Hadith or Sunnah (the practice of Prophet Muhammad SAW) and they are unchanged and unaltered and they (Quran and hadith) never contradict each other. Nevertheless, not only those living in dominant non-Muslims countries could be persuaded by *nafs*— placing material wellbeing above everything even that of his belief in Allah. In accordance with Mehmet (2011), arrogance and vanity is the feeling of indescribable superiority that could be likened to Nimrod and the Pharaohs who claimed greatness over Allah (SWT), which often underscore peoples' drift to waywardness, astray and hence, indulge in acts of blasphemy. Taken as a point of reference, the heart, the mind, and the conscience urge humans into the path of faith, whereas the self, the desires and groundless fear in other humans leads them to blasphemy.

Consequences of self interpretation of halal explain the full and partial nature of halal stores, which could be taken as a mockery of the specialty of Islam and the importance of halal. This assertion is in tandem with Nienhaus (2010) who stressed that Islamic teaching and, in particular, the commercial law aspects of Shariah were often only superficial or cosmetic and served more to legitimize and mobilize than provide a conceptual foundation. Those who could not intelligently shun these words, especially when it comes from everywhere often find themselves astray. Moreover, such a scenario has become a trend succinctly argued by Muhammad (nd) that: "...despite the fact that a river's current is very strong, much stronger than a human's strength, it is the natural impulse of a person drowning in a river to try to swim against the current. The feat being impossible, this person will likely get tired and eventually drown from fatigue".

By implication, there are quite a number of Muslim stores in BC but their statuses of zabiha halal remain questionable. This in a way explains why restaurants in BC are very well patronized by Muslim tourists and young Muslims rather than the old/permanent Muslim residents. Apart from relatively high costs of meals, there is distrust in most restaurants' processed foods. This also explains the daily congregation of customers in grocery stores, an indication of huge preference for home-cooked meals as against buying ready-made foods. The link as to why some restaurants have to attract non-Muslim consumers is clear, basically due to weak support from the existing Muslim community.

Is there Possibility of Change?

There are three strong halal institutions in Canada and many small ones. So far, none could intervene to stop halal irregularities. In a nutshell, these bodies are ineffectual because there is no policy document in the rule of law that provides them with powers of oversight and control. A case in point is The Maple Lodge Farms issue over hand versus machine slaughtering and recitation of tasmiyah, which was overruled not by ISNA but the company, which argued its way out of the case (Hashimi, 2003). The profound weakness of Canada's Islamic halal institutions is not an isolated case as similar cases are found in many countries even in the dominant Muslim countries. In light of this shortfall, there is need to encourage businesses and the entire Muslim community to develop attitudes of cooperation and respect for Islamic halal institutions as they are critical to upholding the virtues that shape the intake of Muslims. Generally in daily life, Muslims are expected to base their justification of halalness with self knowledge especially the zabiha – for example, shopping based on trust irrespective of halal signage or logo.

However, as the Muslim population expands, there is need to have a body that could dictate rules and at the same time remain trusted. So far, non-Muslim countries including Canada have refused to get involved in the regulation and enforcement of halal product standards due to various legal and perhaps, even political and socio-cultural related issues. In the absence of state regulation, it is pertinent that the pursuit of halalness and its enforcement will remain ineffective and inefficient.

The contention here is that in principle, the state has the money, the human capacity and power to enforce its standards; sadly it is not doing so. Moreover, most citizens believe in the state being neutral and objective as against private actors with pluralistic self interest. As in the case of Australia for example, rationale debate over halalness and regulation by non-Muslim state came to a decision only when the state got caught up with scamps tarnishing halal exports from Australia. This led the Australian Royal Commission to release names of various companies that engaged in unscrupulous activities ranging from issuance of fake halal certification to those specialized in the forgery of exports documents.⁹

⁹ For a more comprehensive gist, see [Halal Focus.Com](http://HalalFocus.Com). 2011, Canberra Times, November 19, 2012.

CONCLUSION

Foods acceptable to Muslims are readily available in British Columbia but quite restricted to areas where Muslims are concentrated. Muslim as mentioned here rather than halal seems appropriate given the nature of Muslim food stores that indulged in haram practices. By implication, though there are many Muslim stores, however, the zabiha conscious Muslims will still find it difficult to source authentic halal foods. With regard to raw foods like meat, it is prepared and sold by various Muslim sects that come from different countries of origin; while customers' shopping patterns are based on religious and ethnic connections as well as long established trust.

The role of halal certification institution is still relatively insignificant in light of the low publicity of halal logo and certification. The future of halal zabiha stores at the moment seems questionable but the prospects of Muslims stores remain high in light of increasing Muslim migrants into Canada and the keen interest of the government to make "halal" foods particularly meat, its export niche.

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Appendix-I. Certified halal logo, Canada

ISNA Canada



Halal Monitoring Authority



Halal Monitoring Agency



Halal Montreal Certification Agency



Appendix-II. Halal Signage Displayed By Butcher and Grocery Stores in British Columbia



Dhaka Bazar, Halal Meat-Fish, Fraser Street, Vancouver, Bangladeshi



TaQwa Meat and Seafood, Port Coquitlam, Indian Fijian



Kabul Bazaar, Halal Meat Market, Burnaby, Afghani



Lahore Meat Market, Fraser Street, Vancouver, Pakistani

Tibisti Restaurant & Grocery, Victoria Drive, Vancouver, Turkish



Pamir Food Market, Halal Food, E Hastings, Vancouver, Mediterranean

