

RPCS

QUARTERLY

Developing New Horizons of Knowledge for
Islam in the Contemporary World

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EVENT SUMMARY

The inaugural RPCS Seminar was held at the Pan Pacific Singapore on 22 November 2022, to discuss local trends on halal consumerism and its governance, including its various driving forces as well as emerging issues and concerns. Our RPCS Research Fellow, Ustaz Fathurrahman M Dawoed, was joined by esteemed guest speakers Mr Zalman Putra Ali, Director, of Halal Development, MUIS, and Ustaz Mohd Kamal Mokhtar, Associate Member of the Fatwa Committee. The seminar was attended by 105 participants, comprising of local asatizah, halal practitioners, educators, and academics. Based on the feedback gathered, majority of the participants found the presentations and discussions to be informative and insightful.



Contact us at RPCS@Muis.gov.sg

RPCS
RESEARCH PROGRAMME IN THE STUDY
OF MUSLIM COMMUNITIES OF SUCCESS



EMPOWERING THE COMMUNITY ON HALAL MATTERS: A COLLABORATIVE WAY FORWARD

I. OPENING SPEECH BY DEPUTY MUFTI DR MOHD MURAT MD ARIS

In his opening address, Deputy Mufti Dr Mohd Murat Md Aris highlighted how the increasingly complex and challenging issues currently faced by the Muslim community require in-depth study, research and conversations in order to propose effective solutions moving forward. Likewise, the global halal industry is undergoing rapid developments and expansion, including a trend of mandatory certification of non-consumables (like medicines, cosmetics, appliances and even clothing) observed in neighbouring countries. Considering this, how far should Singapore's local certification bodies go in terms of their religious positions, policies and certification?

Deputy Mufti expressed the belief that the seminar serves as an opportunity to revisit and delve deeply into some of the concepts and principles that have long existed within our religious traditions. These key foundational concepts and principles are intended to provide the guiding framework and yet allow for the space to creatively explore fresh approaches to address the challenges, as we grapple with new questions and issues, and come up with relevant solutions. The seminar also provides the platform to discuss some of the unintended implications of halal certification and regulation may have on social cohesion, including the increasing demands by Muslim consumers for specially allocated facilities and amenities, more food establishments, and the halal certification of products that were previously unprecedented, such as e-

-lectrical appliances. Such demands raise concerns about the potential risk of reducing common spaces and unintentionally fostering religious exclusivism within a highly diverse plural society.

In his closing remarks, Deputy Mufti shared his aspirations for the seminar to enable participants to gain more insights and new perspectives on the various aspects of halal certification and industry, as well as the best practices moving forward at both individual and societal levels. He also reminded the audience that the ongoing collective aim is to collaboratively think of ways and means to empower the Muslim public without over-relying on official halal certifications. He stressed that the hallmark of a successful people is when they -on their own personal accord- feel accountable, confident, and empowered in making their own decisions on halal matters whilst remaining faithful to the principles of Islam.

II. MANAGEMENT OF HALAL CERTIFICATION IN SINGAPORE: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES, BY MR. ZALMAN PUTRA ALI, DIRECTOR OF HALAL DEVELOPMENT, ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS COUNCIL OF SINGAPORE

In his presentation, Mr Zalman provided a comprehensive overview of the current state of the global halal landscape, including the varying halal standards imposed by various halal certification authorities. Amid this context, Singapore is ranked 7th among countries with the most robust halal ecosystem and is first among non-Muslim countries (The State of Global Islamic Economy Report 2022- Dinar Standard). Mr Zalman shared how Singapore's Muis Halal Standards comprises both religious and technical components. Muis is the sole authority vested with powers to issue halal certificates and regulate holders of such certificates under the Administration of Muslim Law Act (AMLA). Notably, its halal certification enjoys international trust and recognition. Regarding the future of Singapore halal certification, Mr Zalman underscored the importance of leveraging technological advancements, which hopes to enhance the robustness of halal assurance and also improve efficiency, thereby attracting more business and create opportunities for more actors to enter the halal sector.



In more recent times, it can be observed that various segments of the Muslim community have developed a heightened sense of reflection on whether our local halal certification genuinely encompasses the concept of *toyyib* or wholesomeness. In sum, we are witnessing a perceptible shift in terms of how people perceive halal certification as of late, as it has been deliberated on whether halal requirements ought to expand beyond the basic conventional understanding of permissibility in accordance with religion and to consider other factors such as the product's healthiness, environmental impact, and its contribution to animal welfare. In keeping up with the rapid developments of the food industry, which include the use of new food technologies and novel ingredients, new complexities may arise, necessitating deeper and more careful deliberations and broader considerations. This begets the question of how far we wish to go with halal certification and to what extent we need to determine if a food product or ingredient is halal or otherwise, in accordance with Islamic guidance and in keeping with broader ethical and circumstantial considerations.

III. FATWA THOUGHT PROCESS FOR CONSUMABLES IN SINGAPORE, BY USTAZ MOHD KAMAL MOKHTAR, ASSOCIATE MEMBER OF THE FATWA COMMITTEE



Ustaz Mohd Kamal started his presentation by delving into the Islamic guidance pertaining to consumables. He underscored that as outlined in Section 33 of the Administration of Muslim Law Act (AMLA), the tenets of the Shafi'i school of law must be adhered to. However, he added that the provision allows for flexibility in the interest of the public. If MUIS or the Legal Committee deems that adhering strictly to the Shafi'i school of law on a matter would be contrary to public interest, they may adopt the tenets of any other recognised schools of Muslim law, provided that comprehensive details and explanations are provided. Within this context, Ustaz Mohd Kamal shared some examples of past fatwas issued locally. He highlighted how they were based on the best judgment that the fatwa committee could provide based on the information given at that point in time.

Elaborating further on the thought process behind formulation of fatwas, Ustaz Kamal presented the various applied principles that were used throughout fatwa deliberations. Using contemporary examples based in Singapore, Ustaz Kamal elaborated on oft-evoked principles, such as the concept of *Ḍarūrah* (ضرورة)¹, *Istiḥālah* (استحالة)², *Istihlāk* (استهلاك)³, as well as the concept of *‘Umūm al-Balwā* (عموم البلوى)⁴, among many others.

Another principle that is considered during fatwa deliberations is the concept of *Takhayyur* (تخير), which is the principle of selectivity and is one of the provisions that is explicitly outlined in the Administration of Muslim Law Act (AMLA). This principle allows for a broader examination when issues cannot be resolved within the confines of the Shafi’i school of jurisprudence. In such cases, the deliberative scope expands to include other schools of jurisprudence where relevant and necessary for a comprehensive resolution.

Ustaz Kamal also discussed some of the issues and challenges in addressing topics brought to fatwa discussions surrounding halal matters. He pointed out that sustainability, food security and environmental issues must also be carefully taken into consideration alongside our Islamic values, guidance, and principles. Ustaz Kamal concluded his presentation by sharing his aspirations to empower the Muslim community with knowledge and a good understanding of our local fatwa position on halal issues. This would equip the community to make its own choices and avoid overreliance on halal certification.

[1] *Ḍarūrah*: Dire circumstances or exigencies.

[2] *Istiḥālah*: Can be defined as the transformation or conversion of material which involves changes in its composition and properties. It involves transforming impure materials (from an Islamic law perspective) into something pure/clean. Please refer to *al-Zuhayli, Qadaya al-Fiqh wa al-Fikr al-Mu’asir* (Damascus, Dar al-Fikr, 1428H/2007), vol 1, pg. 58.

[3] *Istihlāk*: The word *istihlak* comes from the Arabic root word (مَلَكَ), which means 'perish'. *Istihlak* refers to a process of perishing. In this case, the element that is being perished is deemed impure. There are several processes that could perish or remove impure elements. The common example given by scholars of jurisprudence (*fuqaha'*) is the mixing of a drop of alcohol with abundant water.

[4] *Umūm al-Balwā*: When a matter becomes widespread/general and is difficult to avoid, then the matter becomes *Umum Al-Balwa*. For example, a butcher will always be in contact with meat and blood from the meat. Hence we cannot deny that some parts of his clothes will be splotted by blood. However, he needs to avoid this as best as he can.

IV. ASATIZAH'S PERSPECTIVES ON HALAL FOOD CHOICES IN SINGAPORE, BY UST FATHURRAHMAN M DAWOED, RPCS FELLOW



Extending the conversation from the previous two speakers, Ustaz Fathurrahman explored the pivotal role of the asatizah in addressing the need for the empowerment of individuals on halal matters. Ustaz Fathurrahman highlighted the substantial influence that asatizah wield in shaping the religious thinking and practices of our Muslim community, including in halal public education.

As part of his research project under the RPCS Fellowship Programme, Ustaz Fathurrahman focused on unravelling the viewpoints of the asatizah on halal matters. He arrived at this focus through an extensive literature review of studies and surveys previously conducted on halal consumption patterns in Singapore in recent years. These earlier studies unveiled significant trends within the broader Muslim community on various matters pertaining to halal consumption such as the over reliance on halal certification, the level of comfort with the usage of common spaces and appliances, as well as a limited understanding of the principles guiding the distinguishing of what is 'halal' or 'haram' for consumption.

Referencing findings from a survey, he revealed that as trusted sources of information, religious teachers and religious talks rank only second to parents and family, followed by other sources such as online and mass media. This underscores the crucial significance of understanding the perspectives and mindsets of the asatizah on halal matters and their consequential impact on halal public education in general. This would in turn, play a pivotal role in affecting the level of confidence and effectiveness in empowering individuals to make informed decisions on halal consumption.

Ustaz Fathurrahman presented the key findings of his research project, which involved collecting primary data through focus group discussions and interviews with members of the local asatizah fraternity. While the Office of the Mufti has previously issued the basic guidelines and principles to help members of the community make informed choices regarding halal food confidently, the majority of asatizah in Singapore may have differing views and positions. Some of the key findings on asatizah's attitudes toward halal matters include how they rely heavily on the halal logos issued by trusted bodies. Most of them consider the cross-mixing of food, including at the molecular/DNA level, to render halal food impermissible for consumption. Despite the respondents' awareness of the different scholarly opinions related to ritual cleansing (*sertu*) of utensils, many still prefer to opt for a restrictive position and some even refrain from using shared appliances or utensils unless necessary.

In light of these findings, some of the proposed recommendations include equipping asatizah and the community with a comprehensive understanding of halal matters while emphasizing the need to explore broader literature and alternative scholarly interpretations. Additionally, another recommendation would be to review our local madrasah curriculum on halal education, making relevant resources accessible across a broader range of platforms, including online sources via websites and online applications.

CLOSING REMARKS BY MUFTI DR NAZIRUDIN MOHD NASIR

In his closing remarks, Mufti Dr Nazirudin acknowledged how halal consumption is integral to our faith and can be perceived to be an extremely spiritual aspect of religious life. The discussion on halal is a prime example of the numerous multi-dimensional and complex socio-religious issues in contemporary times. As discussed throughout the different presentations, the various components and variables are intricately interwoven, encompassing consumer demands and behaviours, industry practices, the impact on society and the environment, public understanding and awareness, as well as the role of religious leaders and asatizah.



In discussing the need to tackle some of the halal consumer norms and behaviours, the important question lies in the possible implications if such norms and behaviours observed were to get even more entrenched. Mufti suggested that the first potential implication would be a more restrictive type of religiosity where people are very concerned about the halal status of everything around them. A more serious possible implication would be the cognitive dissonance that Muslims may experience when dealing with serious existential issues like global warming and sustainable food choices. On the one hand, we require highly innovative thinking and approach to solve these problems, but what we have, on the other hand, is a restrictive mindset that only allows certain types of food or ingredients. Consequently, a preoccupation with stringent halal certification requirements for many items would limit our ability to actively contribute to the development of novel solutions for these pressing issues

Hence, it is important for us to understand that questions of such nature require us to consider the wider impacts and long-term consequences. This necessitates fostering a culture of debate and discussion in deliberating and finding solutions for our modern socio-religious lives. Engaging in discussions of such nature is essential to help us avoid a myopic and parochial religious thinking when addressing emerging issues and grappling with novel questions.



REGARDLESS OF RACE, LANGUAGE OR RELIGION: BETWEEN ASPIRATIONS AND LIVED REALITIES

BY DR MATHEW MATHEWS

*HEAD OF IPS SOCIAL LAB AND PRINCIPAL RESEARCH FELLOW AT THE
INSTITUTE OF POLICY STUDIES*

21 October 2022

I. INTRODUCTION

This round table discussion (RTD) focused on one of RPCS' three focus areas – Society. Findings on recent trends related to racial relations and their impact on social cohesion in the Singaporean context were presented. The analysis aimed to explore how minority communities, including Muslims, can coexist harmoniously with others within broader plural societies, and how they can navigate emerging issues and continue to be constructive contributors. In his presentation, Dr Mathews summarised the key findings from the Channel NewsAsia – Institute of Policy Studies Survey on Race Relations, published in April 2022.

II. ATTITUDES TOWARDS PRIVILEGE AND MERITOCRACY

Generally, survey respondents expressed the belief that meritocracy in Singapore is not contingent upon race. Most felt that everyone has an equal opportunity for success or wealth, irrespective of their race. Respondents were also optimistic that meritocracy will

continue to prevail in the future and that minorities will continue to be judged by merit rather than race. However, respondents with higher education levels from racial minorities adopted a more cautious outlook.

While slightly more than half of all respondents felt that being of the majority race is an advantage, such sentiments were more prevalent amongst racial minorities and the younger generation. They were also more likely to perceive that people of the majority race could go about their lives without learning about the minorities' cultures. To address these concerns, most underscored the importance of political leaders enabling open discussions about racism, although some acknowledged that potential adverse effects may arise, contributing to racial tensions.

III. RACIAL PREJUDICES AND BIASES

Distinct from global trends, most respondents did not consider cultural appropriation to be an issue. Dressing up in the ethnic attire of other races was generally deemed acceptable in Singapore. Similarly, having racially exclusive social circles was viewed as not inherently racist by more than half of all respondents. Notably, compared to previous data, there was an increase in acceptance towards having individuals of other races as potential family members. Furthermore, respondents displayed a greater openness to the prospect of a non-Chinese Prime Minister or President, which may positively influence changes to the Elected Presidency.

While most respondents viewed expressing racial humour in the public sphere to be racist, it was deemed more acceptable in private. This suggests that while individuals may still harbour stereotypes towards other races, they have developed a level of discernment in effectively managing and refraining from airing their prejudices publicly. Also, despite reaping the same economic benefits from rental opportunities irrespective of race, many still exhibit racial bias when renting out rooms or units. With regard to employment, respondents from minority communities were less likely to be comfortable when asked about their religious affiliation during an interview, anticipating potential adverse effects on their employment prospects. Although racial minorities are more affected by incidences of racial discrimination at work and in the housing market compared to the majority, only a small proportion of respondents have reported experiencing such incidents firsthand.

IV. GENERAL ASPIRATIONS

In general, older respondents were less likely to be interested in discussions on race-relations, whilst highly educated respondents, especially those from racial minorities, were more likely to regard them as important and meaningful. It is noteworthy that more than half of all respondents believe that it would be beneficial for race-relations in Singapore if people identify more as Singaporeans rather than hyphenated identities such as Singaporean-Chinese, Singaporean-Malay, Singapore-Indian or others. However, many are less supportive of policies governing identity and race-relations to move towards a race-blind direction. Overall, most respondents felt that Singapore's policies governing race relations, were well thought out, and expressed optimism that these policies would continue to be carefully managed and improve over time.



APPOINTMENT OF SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATES FOR THE SECOND RUN OF THE RPCS RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMME

On February 26, 2023, two candidates were successfully appointed under the second run of the 2023 RPCS Research Fellowship programme. The ceremony was held in conjunction with the 2nd Graduation Ceremony for the Postgraduate Certificate in Islam in Contemporary Society (PCICS) at the Flower Field Hall at the Gardens by the Bay Singapore. The appointment of Ustazah Dr Siti Nur 'Alaniah Binte Abdul Wahid as RPCS Research Fellow and Ustazah Fatimah Binte Azmi as RPCS Associate Research Fellow was witnessed by PCICS graduates, guests, MUIS senior management and Guest-of-Honour for the Graduation Ceremony, Mr Masagos Zulkifli, Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs and Minister for Social and Family Development and Second Minister for Health.

The RPCS Fellows will receive support for their research with mentorship provided by identified academics and practitioners, with regularly scheduled check-ins to discuss their the progress of their research project and gain constructive feedback. Our fellows will also be granted access to various academic and research resources such as online journals and databases, paid access to libraries in local tertiary and research institutions. They will also embark on a specially curated training and development programme throughout their fellowship, corresponding with various stages of their research. Additionally, they will be provided with the necessary support by the RPCS Secretariat in carrying out their research fieldwork and data collection. The fellows will present their findings through RPCS Roundtable Discussions and Seminars in the later stage of their fellowships.

APPOINTMENT OF SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATES FOR THE SECOND RUN OF THE RPCS RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMME

USTAZAH DR SITI NUR 'ALANIAH BINTE ABDUL WAHID

Research Topic:

Defining Family in the Context of a Secular
State Multireligious Society



Ustazah Dr Siti Nur 'Alaniah Binte Abdul Wahid holds a Doctor of Philosophy from the Centre for Advanced Studies on Islam, Science and Civilisation (CASIS). Prior to that, she graduated from State Islamic University Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta with a master's in interdisciplinary Islamic Studies. She currently serves as an associate member of the Fatwa Committee and is a freelance lecturer, speaker, and trainer at various institutions locally and internationally. For her RPCS research project, she aims to analyse the concept and function of family and the household from classical Islamic literature, extrapolating insights applicable to the present context, given the current needs, social realities, values and practices of Muslims in Singapore.




USTAZAH FATIMAH AZMI

Research Topic:

An Empowering Approach to Fatwa and Irsyad:
Principle-based versus Prescriptive-based Approach
in Issuing Religious Guidance: An Analytical Study
on Tudung Fatwa & LGBTQ+ Irsyad

Ustazah Fatimah received her bachelor's degree in Islamic Jurisprudence and its Foundations from the University of Jordan and recently completed her master's degree from the same institution. In her capacity as a Mosque Religious Officer at Al-Muttaqin Mosque, she actively conducts research and curates religious content for the mosque's online and offline programs. For her RPCS research project, she seeks to examine whether the 'Principle-based Approach' in issuing Fatwa and Irsyad is the best way towards producing a Muslim community of success where the community can confidently make informed decisions based on the values and principles set out by the Fatwa Committee.



THE RESEARCH PROGRAMME IN THE STUDY OF MUSLIM COMMUNITIES OF SUCCESS (RPCS)

The Research Programme in the Study of Muslim Communities of Success (RPCS) is developed as part of Muis' efforts in advancing religious thought leadership for the future. The programme seeks to develop contextualised bodies of knowledge on socio-religious issues that are typical for Muslim communities living in secular states and advanced economies. The RPCS focuses on developing new understanding, interpretations and application of Islamic principles, values and traditions to contemporary issues and challenges through its research and publications.

The RPCS aims to bring together local scholars and senior practitioners to study current and future issues in the socio-religious life of the Singapore Muslim community. Through RPCS seminars, workshops and roundtable discussions, it serves as a platform to nurture the right intellectual ecology and environment to facilitate the growth and development of its own group of religious leaders, scholars and thinkers who are seen as authentic and credible to guide the local Muslim community.

Aside from conducting research, the RPCS also aims to develop future thought leaders through its fellowship programmes and research training workshops to familiarise with the evolving religious discourse and analysis of issues relevant to the theme of Muslim Communities of Success. Its research agenda encompasses three broad areas:



GOVERNANCE

Islam, Secularism & Diversity

Study and develop new understanding on the relationship between religion and secularism, identify models of successful citizenship and contribution, and formulate a robust and credible framework of successful living drawn from Islamic traditions, history and experiences.



SOCIETY

Family & Social Cohesion

Identify ways of supporting and strengthening the family institution and review laws as society evolves so that they remain resilient amidst these challenges, and how religions can be an effective resource in enriching further the common space and common good in any pluralistic society.



SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Biomedical ethics, new food technologies, digital technologies and ethics, crypto-currencies

Develop Islamic thought and ethics to provide new guidance on issues such as new food technologies, digital and financial technologies, environmental challenges and others.

If you are interested in the topics and discussions covered in our RPCS Roundtable Discussions, do keep a look out on our website and related platforms for upcoming sessions. We look forward to providing a safe space for collaborative learning and the building of new bodies of knowledge on the range of topics covered. Please visit

www.muis.gov.sg/officeofthemufti/RPCS

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