Dilemmas of Muslim Halal Food Entrepreneurs in British Columbia, Canada

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Introduction

This article examines Muslim entrepreneurs in halal food entrepreneurship; e.g., restaurants and stalls, butcher shops, and grocery stores in British Columbia (BC), a multiethnic, multicultural and multi-religious province in Canada where quite sizeable numbers of immigrants of diverse races and ethnicities¹ from across the world have settled. Muslims comprise one of the many religious communities residing in the province, amounting to 1.4 percent of the total population; most of these are 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 – along with non-Muslim immigrants such as the Chinese, Vietnamese, Thais and Koreans – are renowned for their business prowess, and the majority of these are major entrepreneurs in food-related businesses in BC. This paper specifically sets out to examine the nature of halal practices among Muslim food outlets and to explore the motivations behind their growing numbers, as well as to investigate the nature of their survival and continuity in business.

Halal is an Arabic word meaning 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 business world, enterprises small and large, regardless of religious affiliations, are integrating halal practices in the delivery of goods and services to complement their mainstream business practices at the discretion of entrepreneurs.

¹. According to Immigration Watch Canada (IWC), the number of immigrants to Canada has averaged close to 250,000 per year over the past 20 years. That is 684 per day and 28 per hour.