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Sentimental Textures of Personhood among Indian Muslim Family Businesses in Malaysia[1]

Waseem Naser[2]

Abstract

This paper presents ethnographic research conducted among Indian Muslim family businesses in Malaysia from October 2019 to September 2020. Their business practices depended on an intimate connection between the economic and domestic, sustained through the inculcation of particular sentiments. Yet, my interactions with them were frequently punctuated with expressions of ambivalence regarding these practices and sentiments. Some interlocutors saw their traditions and cultural practices as sustaining their businesses; for others, it is rather that their businesses provide an avenue for sustaining their traditions in Malaysia. This ambivalence was particularly pronounced among the younger generation, who grappled with the choice of whether to continue within their family businesses, or seek their livelihood elsewhere. By focusing upon sentiments attached to the family that incite motivation and productivity in the business, the article explores these business practices as a means of grasping forms of personhood among them. The conceptual focus on personhood is brought into conversation with the burgeoning literature on the anthropology of emotions. Specifically, the paper proposes that emotions can be conceived as a 'technique' of the body/person; it illustrates this through an ethnography of communities that privilege emotions as an aspect of social relations and embodied existence.

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Introduction

This paper focuses on an ethnography of emotions among a set of Indian Muslim communities in Malaysia to explore the notion of personhood among them. Indian Muslims form a conspicuous part of contemporary urban Malaysia. Numbering around 700,000, they have been successful in carving out particular sectors of the economy – in particular, restaurants, moneychanging shops and jewellery stores. In a country in which the theme of ethnicity – more popularly referred to as 'race' – plays an important role in both everyday life and academic discussions, Indian Muslims find themselves at an intriguing intersection of racial and religious identities. Following categories that derive from the colonial Malayan bureaucracy, the demography of Malaysia is classified broadly into three races – Malays, Chinese, and Indians. The Malay race is indelibly linked to the religion of Islam through constitutional and bureaucratic mechanisms (Omar 1993; Moustafa 2018), while the Indian race is often associated with Tamil Hindus descending from employees and labourers of the British colony brought in from India (Sandhu 2010). Indian Muslims thus do not exactly align with either of these categories. They claim their roots predominantly from the districts of Ramanathapuram and Tanjavur in the state of Tamil Nadu; as well from the Malabar province in the state of Kerala. Both these states are to the south of India, bordered by the Indian Ocean that links India and Malaysia. The monsoon winds that routinely breathe through these lands across the ocean have for centuries carried along with them traders, preachers, slaves, and pilgrims. Indian Muslims have a long history as entrepreneurs on these routes and continue to engage in entrepreneurship. Yet it is not with history that this article is primarily concerned.[3] The focus rests on an ethnography of their particular business practices that depend on an intimate connection between the business and family.

My interlocutors were keenly aware of the significance that their particular business practices have played in their social lives in Malaysia. They contrast these experiences with other Indian communities who do not have the same history of trading in Malaysia. The contrast often extends to Malays, who constitute the vast majority of Muslims in the country, and who have access to manifold opportunities for receiving state patronage and therefore do not have the same need to depend on family in business ventures. Yet, during my fieldwork among these family businesses, a sense of ambivalence became evident in the statements of my interlocutors. Some see their traditions and practices as having allowed them to profitably sustain their businesses in Malaysia. For others, it is the opposite: these businesses are a way to sustain their traditions and practices. Among the younger generation, young adults in the early years of their careers, this ambivalence was even more pronounced, as they grappled with the choice of whether to continue within their family businesses or seek a livelihood elsewhere. Others contemplated a return to the business after having already left to pursue another occupation. This 'ethnographic moment', based on fieldwork conducted from October 2019 to September 2020 in Malaysia, is brought into conversation with anthropological literature on emotions. Through this conceptual thread, the article explores the particular textures of personhood that are formed and instilled through their business practices.

Building on Yanagisako's work on family firms in Italy (Yanagisako 2003), the article illustrates how these family businesses depend on particular 'sentiments' attached to the family to elicit motivation and production in the business. The narrative of my ethnographic encounters presented

[3] The history of Indian Muslims in Malaysia is comparatively under-researched. Of these, Nasution (2014), Noor (2013), Mohamad (2004), and Amrith (2013) are worth mentioning. However, none of them go beyond the mid-twentieth century, and, with the exception of Nasution, they deal primarily with colonial archival sources. For an illustration of the contemporary Indian Muslim 'cosmopolitanism' in Malaysia today, see Aljunied (2017: 13).

here thus revolves around family-related sentiments invoked or expressed by my interlocutors. There is a particular focus on the “emotional tone” (Leavitt 1996: 518) of their discourses and practices, which is used to trace the associations that they attach to business individually or collectively. Emotions are taken here as “unified experiences” that combine bodily feelings with cognition (Beatty 2014: 559). They are thus “the very stuff of social relations” (Lutz 2017: 183). Because the range and scope of human emotions are dauntingly vast, the analytical focus is therefore on ‘sentiments’ – taken as second-order emotions that are articulated, anticipated, and reflected upon in social interactions.[4] According to this conception, persons are not simply the seat of emotion or the locus where emotion is experienced, but also its transmitters and transformers. The exchange and reciprocation of emotions in interactions engender and sustain social relations, in which certain emotions can be privileged and upheld as sentiments. While the emphasis on the relational aspects of personhood has gained traction in recent anthropological studies (Strathern 2020; Appell-Warren 2014), emotions as defined above can provide a particularly ethnographic and conceptual manifestation of relations in the formation of personhood. However, to avoid subsuming emotions completely into persons and relations, this paper presents emotions as a ‘technique’ in the Maussian sense of bodily capacity (Mauss 1973). While Mauss attempted to connect the notion of technique to a sense of persons ‘having a body’ rather than ‘being one’, his approach was embedded within the Durkheimian conception of the social/society that endows persons with consciousness. This in turn implied a societal “domination of the conscious over emotion” (Mauss 1973: 86). By contrast, my ethnography attempts to portray sentiments as involving substantive thought or cognition in human interactions. In my fieldwork, many of my interlocutors’ routine economic interactions significantly overlapped with family interactions. In this context, sentiments become observable as habituated practices that are nonetheless consciously articulated and inculcated.

On Approaching Sentiments

This article centers around the economic dimensions of family businesses. This deliberate ‘boundedness’ (Candea 2007) is a methodological choice that allows me to better highlight partialities and fissures. Thus, while the narrative often gestures towards the domestic domain, this domain will not be explored in depth here. As a male researcher investigating communities that have particular proprieties attached to gender interactions, my interactions with the opposite gender were always mediated by persons close to them who were of my gender. The predominantly masculine interactions described in this article, therefore, reflect the highly gendered differentiation encountered during fieldwork. The ethnography was based on participant observation and multiple forms of interviews; contacts were facilitated primarily through two means. The first was through close friendships built with Indian Muslim youth from these communities during my previous

[4] Fajans strictly differentiates emotions, as a private subjective state, from sentiments – defining sentiments as culturally constructed patterns of feeling that emerge in human interactions involving conflicting interests and expectations. This is illustrated using the example of the sentiment of shame (Fajans 1983). Bens and Zenker do not distinguish sentiments and emotions as strictly, and locate sentiments at the juncture at which individual and collective meaning-making converge to (re)produce normative orders. Sentiments are thus taken as evaluative regimes that cut across emotional and affective states (Bens and Zenker 2019). In my conception of emotions as a combination of bodily feeling and thought, sentiments are those emotions that are collectively privileged – as a means of disciplining and inculcating appropriate emotions in each other. I combine Fajans’s focus on the person with Bens’ and Zenker’s location of sentiments along a continuum of thought, feeling, and emotion.

postgraduate education in Malaysia.[5] During my fieldwork, these existing ties formed the main route for me to make contacts within these communities. Another route was through certain prominent Indian Muslim individuals and community leaders (all men), who opened doors to traders and businessmen. Without the references from these prominent individuals and the trust this invoked, it would have been extremely difficult to get time with businessmen for sustained conversations. In the initial months of fieldwork, these businessmen rarely had time to spare. Meetings were often cancelled or postponed abruptly. It was usual to have the person show up extremely late, with apologies about being held up with business. Conversations with them would often be interrupted by calls, customers, and inquiries. Unlike with my friends, these interactions rarely became intimate. Rather, they were often curt responses about the business with few opinions or reflections about their lives.

This rather formal setting was less conducive for inquiries about family, women, or intimate topics. But there were possibilities for extended conversations on particular topics of the business – like business cycles, expansion of their business, and relations among Indian Muslims. Such conversations included fleeting episodes of emotions in which cognitive assessments become combined with feelings. I began collating them, as I found that bringing up questions on these topics was the best way to sustain a conversation – one that would allow me to probe into the scenes behind the business. Over time, I gradually discerned a pattern of business cycles linked to family and migration, and I explicated my findings in the form of a brief writeup while in confinement during the Covid lockdown in 2020. These were sent to a select set of persons I had identified as key interlocutors – who read, corrected, and confirmed my analysis. This subsequently opened up further meetings with them and others that produced significantly more illuminating and deeper discussions, particularly on sentiments and cultural aspects of their communities. Yet much of these discussions depended on observations and encounters of their business routines and procedures, and it is here that the ethnography primarily attempts to locate sentiments. A methodological choice here was to go beyond constructionist frames of language for accessing emotions (Lyon 1995: 245). The ethnographic focus is thus less on emotional vocabularies and definitions, and more on business practices.

As much of my access to these sentiments came through naturally occurring dialogues and encounters, the writing of the ethnography thus attempts to replicate the haphazard nature of these interactions. Access to their emotive dimensions primarily relies on an empathetic ability to gradually grasp the emotional states of others. This can run the risk of assuming what one tries to prove (Lutz and White 1986: 415), which I argue can be mitigated by sustained dialogs on precisely these emotions and sentiments. Yet this can lead to another risk of attributing categories to my interlocutors that they might not necessarily affirm. This problem only becomes acute, in my opinion, when the object of study are emotions themselves. It is not the intention here to arrive at definitions or classificatory schemes of emotions among my interlocutors. Nor are analytical claims made about sentiments or emotions as an evaluative state of being. Rather, sentiments are taken up here as an illustrative means of grasping relations that are significant in the formation of personhood. A question that arises here is on the possibility of adequately capturing these sentiments in ethnographic writing. One proposed approach is to demonstrate emotions by writing "evocatively" (Skoggard and

[5] All of them were unmarried at that time and a frequent topic of our discussions was expectations at home regarding marriage in the near future. This was particularly pronounced among the women, who expressed more vulnerability regarding their futures. Of the men from these communities, most expressed anxiousness about the prospects of taking on the family business, or breaking out of the business cycle that many of their families were engaged in.

Waterston 2015: 111), or by playing on the emotions of the readers to convey and translate them (Leavitt 1996: 518). A similar approach is through the adoption of narrative techniques that provide "deep" descriptions of emotional episodes, where sentiments become forms of explaining, predicting, and judging (Beatty 2014: 558). Both these approaches require what Lutz calls "linguistic dexterity" (Lutz 2017: 185), as well as extensive time in the field and space in the writing. Pragmatic considerations dictate that a balance has to be struck here with regard to representing the particular type of ethnographic data accumulated during fieldwork.

In this paper, therefore, sentiments are represented through narratives of how my interlocutors relate the present to their pasts and futures. In what ways are the pasts evoked? Why is the present inhabited in particular ways? How are futures encountered? The emotional repertoires that my interlocutors drew upon to express and reflect on such questions are the colours chosen to paint on the canvass of the person. The paper follows a temporal order: It begins with stories told of their businesses in the past, moving on to stories enacted in the present, and subsequently stories about the future. The final part then examines the ambivalences highlighted earlier. To some, breaking out of these traditions and practices involves a sense of independence – particularly when this includes opting out of an arranged marriage. For others, the choice of returning to the family business from corporate/professional life also hinged on being independent with regard to family and sustenance.

Pretexts and Contexts: chronicles of the past

An account of an Indian Muslim business in Malaysia would generally begin with a man migrating to Malaysia from a city, town, or village in India in the early or mid-twentieth century. He would typically be described as unmarried – in his late teens or twenties. Unless he had a father or an uncle in the country, for each of the places of origin in India there were designated places in Malaysia where single migrants stayed until they gained some sort of employment.[6] During this initial "liminal" state, he would navigate the new environment, using his native networks to seek a livelihood for himself and his family back in India. My interlocutors frequently mentioned the importance of a form of trust based on where he "comes from" ("*ur*" in Tamil, "*naadu*" in Malayalam), by virtue of which he would seek out opportunities among existing Indian Muslim enterprises. If an immediate member of his family ran a business, he would often receive employment there. His trustworthiness would gradually increase as he satisfactorily carried out his job, or if he exhibited entrepreneurial skills. At this juncture, he would typically be presented with two opportunities from his employer – an opportunity to expand the business, and/or a proposal to marry a woman from among the employer's kin that would strengthen this trust. Promising individuals, or those from prominent families, might already have a proposal arranged before their initial migration that would add to their trustworthiness. Once the migrant branched out and/or married in, he was in a better position to exert his skills and thereby gradually seek his own independence as an entrepreneur.

Until the 1980s, the women mostly remained in India. While the men migrated to a new country and negotiated a place for themselves there, for women, migrating meant moving from their birth

[6] For example, the Malayan Mansion in Kuala Lumpur housed people coming mostly from Tanjavur and Ramanathapuram in the mid-twentieth century, and the Malabar Masjid in Segambut housed those coming from Kerala. Similar residences existed in Penang but were mostly limited to people from one specific local village network: they often took the form of housing for employees located above the premises of business.

household to the family household of the husband in their hometown.[7] The men in Malaysia would visit the family back in India once or twice a year, where they would spend around a month or two after appointing someone trustworthy to look after the business in their absence. Concurrently, some expressed a sense of regret that such practices of migrating at an early age for work resulted in the men never receiving more than a certain basic level of education. It was only rarely that I came across men who pursued education beyond high school prior to the 1990s, although their involvement in business at a young age was seen as having provided education of another sort – for example, fluency in multiple languages.[8] Starting in the 1980s, my interlocutors reported, economic opportunities increased and transportation possibilities improved, leading to the migrants' immediate families gradually joining them in Malaysia; this trend was particularly strong around the turn of the twenty-first century. These migrant families formed tightly knit social clusters based on shared hometowns; this is to an extent prevalent even today.[9] Comments also suggest that marriage was usually arranged within or between these clusters. The businessmen often saw such transactions as the domain of women, with their particular elaborate networks of interactions and negotiations.

Marriage offers could be for a bride living in Malaysia or back in India. Many of my interlocutors suggested that, in the past, marrying back in India was preferred for children who had grown up in Malaysia. The intention of this was, to borrow Mr.[10] Haja's words, to maintain their "roots" in India for the new family – which also meant keeping their "culture alive at home" in Malaysia. A crucial factor that comes into play here is the fact that marital ties provided a source of new potential employees: in this way, the new relations in India could become trustworthy in business – with the networks of trust even sometimes extending to an entire town or village. It gradually became clear to me that the negotiations of these arranged marriages usually included a business "investment" by the families for the new couple. Almost all businessmen and women would reveal, some upon reflection, that this practice ensured a mode of livelihood for the next generation while keeping the wealth and trust within the families. Some did admit that these often became a disguised form of dowry when the bridal family had to contribute more. Many were insistent, however, that this form of marriage did not just bring two individuals into a union, but also two families/businesses. I began to see it as a surprisingly effective mode of business expansion, particularly regarding finance and security.

The narrative till now has been person-centric. In order to get a more institutional understanding of their businesses, I look at the particular sectors that Indian Muslims primarily engage in today – restaurants, currency exchanges (called moneychangers in Malaysia), provisions stores (local term for groceries) and jewellers.[11] The descriptions are based on information from the sort of formal conversations mentioned earlier that had little sentimental elaboration. Yet, in subsequent conversations with the businessmen, I came to realize the value attached to the invocation of these memories in subsequent conversations. These memories became a key for me to grasp the emotional

[7] See an interesting collection of oral histories of these women in India by Fansura Banu (Banu 2020).
[8] Beyond their mother tongues of Tamil or Malayalam, the men are typically fluent in Malay and English. Fluency in Mandarin is also not uncommon, owing to the significant Chinese presence in Malaysian economy.
[9] This is reflected in the existence of hometown associations of Indian Muslims in Malaysia. During fieldwork, I took part in social gatherings of two of the largest associations – namely the village associations of Panaikulam and Alakangulam in Tamil Nadu – at which the attendance numbered in the thousands.
[10] I use the title "Mr." as a substitute for Tamil or Malayalam terms that I would use to denote respect towards senior persons I interacted with during fieldwork.
[11] Historical and archival sources suggest that Indian Muslims were commonly employed in bookstores, printing and publishing during the mid-twentieth century (Fakhri 2002); but I did not encounter a prevalence of this type of business among Indian Muslims during my fieldwork.

dimensions of their experiences of the present, as well as the hopes and concerns attached to their future in the country.

Restaurants

The history of Indian Muslim '*mamak'* restaurants in Malaysia today is popularly associated with the term "*nasi kandar*" (literally "rice stick" in Malay but generally meaning 'food carried on a pole'). The origin of this term is always traced to Penang in the early twentieth century, where Indian Muslim men from Ramanathapuram in Tamil Nadu walked around the town selling home-made food carried on a pole. They initially sold rice, and occasionally noodles, with Indian spices and curries. Since only the men migrated to Malaya, they employed women from another Indian Muslim community in Penang to grind the Indian spices for the curry. The curry would be cooked overnight and then reheated the next day until it became a thick sauce, which would be poured over the rice or noodles. I was also informed that a few of these men married Malay women who would cook for them with their own culinary fusions. The menu was initially restricted to types of food that could be carried around. This expanded once the sellers began setting up corner stalls inside the Chinese restaurants that were widespread throughout Penang at that time.[12] It was from this that *nasi kandar* subsequently developed into what today is a popular street food in urban Malaysia.

When I presented this account in my write-up to my interlocutors, a number of them pointed out that despite this story about the origin of the *nasi kandar*, there were already established Indian Muslim restaurants in urban Malaya prior to and during this time. These restaurants served "authentic" Indian food with very little of the fusions that characterize the *nasi kandars*. These were run by comparatively wealthier migrants, particularly from the district of Tanjavur in Tamil Nadu or Malabar in Kerala. Most were based in Kuala Lumpur (at that time a newly emerging city), but there were even a few in Penang and Johor. These businesses were confronted with successive social and political instabilities until the 1980s,[13] by which time many of the owners opted to close their restaurants and return to India. Of the few families who stayed in Malaysia, most of them no longer own businesses, but have moved on to other employments or professions. It was around this time – that is, in the 1980s – that the smaller *nasi kandar* run by men from Ramanathapuram gradually began expanding, particularly by tapping into cheap labour within and beyond their families back in their hometowns in India. This also coincided with the development of public urban housing projects in Malaysia that were targeted for a Malay working class. Their requirements for halal food were catered to by these Indian Muslim restaurants, who offered cuisines that were appetizing and affordable – gradually earning the epithet popular today of '*mamak'* (Tamil for uncle).

As my interlocutor Haji Shabeer pointed out, the employees were initially brought over under temporary visit visas, but they would typically overstay its duration until they made enough to go back home. 'Agents' – typically relatives of the restaurant owners in Malaysia – began cropping up in the towns and villages of Ramanathapuram, promising the men work in these restaurants. 'Commissions' and/or deposits would be charged for this, with the money often used to expand or set up new ventures in Malaysia. In the mid-1990s there was a nation-wide raid of these restaurants

[12] Some claim that this shift occurred when the British administration took measures against these *nasi kandar* due to hygiene concerns, and so they started to set up shop in these Chinese bistros, catering to customers who required halal food. My interlocutors note that the incorporation of sauces like *kicap* (sweet soya sauce) into the food also took place at this stage.

[13] These include the Second World War and the Japanese invasion of Malaya, Independence from the British in 1957, the racial riots of Kuala Lumpur in 1969 and the subsequent separation of Singapore, and the declaration of emergency by the government of India from 1975–1977 that restricted movement between India and Malaysia.

that resulted in the mass deportation back to India of those overstaying their visas. Visa permits for restaurant workers became stringent and significantly bureaucratized as a result.[14] Yet the demand and profitability of these restaurants only kept increasing with the turn of the twenty-first century. Today, families from Ramanathapuram still dominate the sector, but they are no longer the only ones involved in it: I observed an increasing consolidation of the market by Malabari businessmen from the district of Kasargod. These men still have most of their families and wealth in India, and tap into the unemployed youths back in their hometowns and villages. The fact that most of these Malabari families do not see their future as being in Malaysia implies a particular tendency to save for their eventual return to India. Yet, after a few years, these accumulated savings provide them an impetus to further invest and expand in Malaysia when business seems lucrative.

Moneychangers

Haji Shabeer, who runs two moneychanging shops in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur, traces the beginnings of the currency exchanges to the same time period that the *nasi kandar* men were selling food at the Penang ports. The moneychangers also began on the streets; dressed well and holding a ringer bell, they called out their services to people requiring their currencies exchanged. This route was chosen by those who had self-confidence in negotiating with strangers in multiple languages. But it was also chosen by those who were too lazy to carry food around, Haji tells me with a wink. Like the *nasi kandar*, in the beginning they rarely if ever had their own premises. A crucial turning point for these men was the Vietnam War, as US soldiers would arrive at Penang when on leave with plenty of dollars to spend. The Indian Muslim moneychangers saw a sudden rise in their profits and this eventually allowed them to rent space at the port or in the city. Since then, they have expanded throughout urban Malaysia, just like the restaurants. Mr. Majid was quick to point out that this business plays on thin margins of profit and requires only a few employees, who must, however, be highly trustworthy persons. Unlike with restaurants, there are not as many opportunities for hiring extended family members, but rather a tendency to confine the business to the immediate family. The expansion of business occurs slowly, through the accumulation of currency stocks and maintaining close networks with others in the field, in order to deal with sudden spikes in supply or demand. Consequently, the moneychangers whom I met during my fieldwork all belonged to families from Ramanathapuram.

Provisions Stores

My fieldwork findings suggest that provisions stores run by Indian Muslims can be traced back to plantation estates, mining sites, and housing colonies. Malabaris were particularly noted for running these provisions stores among Indian plantation workers or labourers' accommodations throughout Malaya in the early and mid-twentieth century; they often also acted as pawn-brokers, creditors, and money-remitters. I was also informed of a significant presence of Indian Muslim provisions stores in Ipoh and Taiping, which catered to a booming mining industry until the 1970s.[15] Apart from these, provisions stores were also present in areas with significant Indian Muslim presence like Penang,

[14] These and similar instances gave rise to Persatuan Pengusaha Restoran Muslim Malaysia (PRESMA), a prominent Indian Muslim association established in order to represent the needs and grievances of Indian Muslim restaurants (see https://www.presma.com.my/info/ – last accessed 17 August 2022).

[15] Prominent examples of such enterprises in Ipoh were Habeebullah Flour Mills, Abdul Wahab & Co (AKM), and Shaik Mohamad & Muradu Khan Co. (AJA) – all three were run by families from Alakangulam of Ramanathapuram district in Tamil Nadu.

Kuala Lumpur, Malacca, and Johor. Yet until the turn of the century, these entrepreneurs rarely brought their families to Malaysia. Following the "race riots" of 1969 and the gradual closure of rubber plantations and estates, many eventually moved back to India. Some were forced to remain in Malaysia owing to the uncertainty of going back,[16] while I also encountered a few who had married local women and permanently settled in Malaysia.

Similar to the expansion of restaurants laid out earlier, many new and enterprising Indian Muslims decided to set up provisions stores in newly developed urban housing estates from the 1980s. With the help of references from other established Indian Muslim entrepreneurs in Penang and Kuala Lumpur, they were able to obtain supplies on credit from mostly Chinese-run wholesale suppliers and open modest ventures.[17] Mr. Haneef tells me that after a few years they would typically expand, opening a second store managed by their sons or brothers. In other cases, he notes, these entrepreneurs expanded instead into other sectors, like restaurants and moneychangers, because many felt these sectors offered a larger volume of business or profit margins.[18]

Jewellery Stores and Other Vendors

The Kapitan Keling Mosque in the heart of Penang is perhaps the biggest Indian Muslim symbol of the city. When coming out of the mosque, one's gaze is met by a whole row of Indian Muslim jewellery stores.[19] I was informed by Mr. Kameel, who had once run a store, that certain entrepreneurs managed to get these lucrative spots at a comparatively low rent due to these lands being part of the mosque endowments (*wakaf*). Almost all of the owners were from the town of Panaikulam in Ramanathapuram, with adjacent shops often run by relatives. He recounts that when they obtained these spots around 40 years ago, some tried their luck with jewellery, others as moneychangers. Initially, they relied on contacts with certain Malay wholesalers from the state of Kelantan, along with a few Chinese dealers. Initial short credits would gradually grow in volume as the trust in the business picked up. While some eventually closed their business, most became successful and were able to expand into other areas of Penang, as well as in Kuala Lumpur.[20] This sector is not as widespread as the others discussed above, particularly due to the high investment that is required to begin one today. Apart from the jewellery stores, there were many individual Indian Muslim entrepreneurs who operated as bread sellers, hawkers, and other small-scale vendors, often on a motorbike or *pulley*. These entrepreneurs often came from villages or towns in India that had few support networks in Malaysia at that time, and thus had to start with low investments and then seek to gradually rise up.

[16] This was also due to the declaration of emergency in India during 1975–1977.

[17] My interlocutors mentioned a racial dynamic that is relevant here: most Chinese suppliers rarely or never provided credits to Malays.

[18] There are three particular exceptions though that expanded with high investments within this sector – Barkath (Penang), Hanniffa (Kuala Lumpur), and Mydin Enterprises (initially Kelantan); see (Pillai 2015: 38).

[19] Pitts Street and Chulia Street in Penang are the site of many of these jewellery stores today.

[20] There are two enterprises in Kuala Lumpur that claim to have a longer history in the country – Abdul Razak Jewellers and K.M. Oli Mohamed Royal Jewellers.

Trust: a mode of practice in the present

Throughout my fieldwork among Indian Muslim entrepreneurs in Malaysia, trust and trustworthiness were constantly invoked as central to their particular business practices.[21] Yet most of them were initially wary of divulging the details and intricacies of these business practices. Perhaps suspicions arose in them that, being an Indian myself, I was a potential businessman out to acquire privy information. I thus had to establish a certain level of trust with them, which was predominantly through receiving references from others. One illuminating breakthrough was made possible through my friendship with Shaduli, a colleague of mine at my earlier university. He arranged for me to meet with his father and brothers, who were all invested in the running of five restaurants they manage as a family. The father had migrated from Ramanathapuram four decades ago, initially selling bread on a motorbike. An investment in a modest restaurant in the suburbs after seven years gradually expanded into five branches today. The father was quick to express his humility, claiming that this was typical of those in his generation who had migrated to Malaysia. In the midst of a long conversation we had, I inquired about what made a business successful. After a momentary reflection, he replied in Tamil that it depended on "good employees, good location, and good family". Later, going through my fieldnotes, this in many ways summed up what other men had conveyed separately. In this section, I will therefore try to illustrate how trust as a sentiment operates through these three elements.

Routinization of Trust

The first exposure for most people to Indian Muslims in Malaysia is through '*mamak*' restaurants. They are a striking cosmopolitan space in many ways. At the counter one finds an Indian Muslim, behind him items that symbolically demonstrate his Islamic faith in a country that often equates his ethnicity with Hinduism. He communicates with his workers in Tamil, with his customers typically in Malay, and with suppliers or salesmen it is not uncommon to hear Mandarin or Hokkien. The food follows this diversity – one can choose from and combine a variety of Indian, Pakistani, Malay, Thai, and Chinese items: For example, noodles cooked in Indian spices, Indian flat bread served with Malay or Thai soup, hot milk tea topped with ice. These restaurants are common meeting points for quick meetings or casual discussions and often served as a place where I would meet my interlocutors as well.[22]

Shaduli's father and brothers explain to me that a chain of restaurants is typically managed with a centralized kitchen at the head branch. The different curries and *biryani* (spiced rice) are cooked here; leaving the basic rice, noodles, and breads to be made fresh at each branch. This allows for a standard flavour across the chain, handled by the head cook at the main branch. In their restaurant chain, different tasks were delegated among the siblings, with one brother in charge of logistics and the procurement of supplies for all the branches. Another brother dealt with the finances and accounting, the most crucial being collection of revenues from all the branches at the end of the day.

[21] By contrast, other sentiments were more often indicated through specific practices or actions. While I do not primarily focus on the "vocabularies of emotion" (Geertz 1959) accessed through language categories in a cultural context, worth noting that almost all of my interlocutors used the English term 'trust' or 'trustworthy' even if our conversations were in Tamil or Malayalam.

[22] For a portrayal of the restaurants as cosmopolitan spaces, see (Duruz 2014: 68). I endeavoured to gain insights through participant observation as an employee in a prominent restaurant in Kuala Lumpur, but this was curtailed by the Covid lockdown. Subsequent easing of the lockdown came with a lot of restrictions on the employees that can be present at a restaurant. Consequently, I did not pursue this avenue of data collection further.

The father, as the most experienced businessman, was based at the busiest branch, with his nephew employed to handle the administrative and bureaucratic affairs behind the business. The chefs and workers were all usually from their district of Ramanathapuram in India, but none were related to them. Family members, I was told, are rarely involved in the more labour-intensive work of cooking, serving, and cleaning in Indian Muslim restaurants. These employees are usually procured via agencies that operate among their local networks; other times a person would be recommended by a current employee.

Ali is another restaurant owner who I had a very good rapport with. His grandfather ran a successful restaurant until the mid-twentieth century, when his father took over the business. Now, in the hands of Ali, it has become a chain of restaurants. Since his family is based in India, he travels frequently back and forth between India and Malaysia, which made it difficult for me to meet him. But when we did manage to meet, his insights and clarifications were perhaps the most significant. Each of the branches he owns is managed by a close relative – either a brother, an in-law, or a cousin. A typical day for Ali involves a routine visit to each branch, sorting out legal or bureaucratic issues, as well as overseeing occasional repairs and maintenance. He visits his wife and three kids in India every two months and spends around two weeks there. During this time, he gets inquiries for employment opportunities from men seeking to come to Malaysia. If the person is well recommended he would be taken on as an employee in an open position in one of these branches. As the employee accrues or earns trust, he is typically put in charge of either the cash register or procurement. He may continue to gain trust and responsibility to the point that he is eventually entrusted with managing a particular branch. One of Ali’s main concerns is conflicts that arise with, or between, employees. These conflicts can potentially sour relations back in India as well. Ali also tells me of many instances where businesses have gone broke because the owners trusted employees who subsequently went on to swindle them, particularly at the cash register. While almost all restaurants today have surveillance technologies that mitigate this to a certain extent, for Ali these bring with them new possibilities for malpractice that they have to be alert to. He also was keen to point out how restaurants relied on bribery to acquire labour permits and licenses. Typically, a restaurant would be granted two or three labour permits per application. The level of connections that a restaurant owner has with ‘agents’, who can arrange for more permits via contacts they have in the bureaucracy, dictate how many he can actually employ.

The dynamics of moneychangers and provisions stores were slightly different, as they rarely involved labour-intensive tasks as with the restaurants. With the moneychangers I observed, there would typically be one or two persons at the counter dealing with individual customers. But the main activity occurs behind the scenes with travel agencies, corporations, or small enterprises requiring currencies on short notice. Extremely crucial to this business is the counting/sorting of the currencies and transporting it through ‘runners’. Both of these tasks can only be delegated to those who are extremely trustworthy.[23] I once managed to get an appointment with Siraj, who agreed to meet at his moneychanger office after lunch. Upon arriving there and inquiring at the counter for him, I was told to wait. After twenty minutes, I messaged Siraj informing him that I had arrived. He replied that he is in the back office, but is a bit busy and will meet me in a while. After an hour of waiting, the person at the counter – his nephew – approached me, having mistaken me for a businessman. When I informed him of my reason for being there, he went in and came back with an apology from Siraj,

[23] My interlocutors frequently mentioned the risks of being robbed that ‘runners’ are exposed to, given that they carry around cash frequently. As such, trustworthiness also has an element of being of able to protect themselves.

who relayed that he might be caught up for another hour. The nephew then went on to have a conversation with me and informed me that Siraj was counting currency stocks for a big request that had come up. In the meanwhile, customers would occasionally come in, inquire about exchange rates, and make currency orders. The nephew said that the customers who come to the premises constitute only a quarter of the business, with the majority of the revenue coming from corporate entities or travel agencies who require foreign currencies in bulk. To fulfill these orders, mid-tier moneychangers like them depend on borrowing from other Indian Muslim moneychangers, which requires maintaining amicable relations with their associates. The borrowed currency was manually collected, counted, and sorted by Siraj, which was why our meeting ultimately ended up being delayed for three hours.

The employment structure at provisions stores and jewellers is similar to that of the moneychangers. Most employees would be family members, as this assures a certain level of trust. Restaurants are the only type of business in my study where a considerable number of people outside the family have to be employed. For many of these entrepreneurs, informal relations with employees outside the family are fairly minimal. However, some do develop closer personal relations with these employees, particularly with individuals who have been employed in the business for a long time. Shazia, whose father got his start in Malaysia in the restaurant business, relates memories of her childhood in which the seven employees and her family occasionally went on excursions together for bonding. As the business expanded and more employees came in, her father could no longer afford to take the time for such outings. Yet in many ways, the family still maintains closer ties with this initial cohort of employees.

Spatial Dimensions of Trust

There was, and still is, a tendency for those from a particular locality in India to cluster in particular cities in Malaysia. Thus, those from the town of Panaikulam were found to be predominantly in Penang, those from Irumeni were highly concentrated in Ipoh, those from Alagankulam in Kuala Lumpur, and those from Vani and Kasargod in Johor. The historical geographical distribution is becoming somewhat less distinct today, as many young people are attracted to the vibrant and growing capital city Kuala Lumpur. But many outside the city are often reluctant to expand their business there, frequently complaining to me about exorbitant rents and lack of kin networks. Entrepreneurs indicated that they preferred expanding within the city that they have ‘trust’ in, and consider it risky to expand outside of it. As businesses thrived and multiplied in a given city in Malaysia, native ‘associations’ would frequently emerge in that city. These associations provided various avenues of support for the businesses, described by Haji Shabeer as encompassing “internal or external factors”. By the former he meant activities between the members – particularly through providing networks of trust, credit and reconciliation. The latter could be attempts to build relations of influence with bureaucratic and government officials in a particular city, or networks of potential employees in India – both of which are a source of crucial support for the business. The associations could become quite influential: one of my interlocutors accused one association of acting as a labour recruitment agency and attempting to monopolize the contracting of migrant restaurant employees. The association apparently did this by pooling up potential employees from India and tightening links they had within the Malaysian bureaucracy. Restaurant owners I interacted with would frequently express an intention to monopolize a particular city through these associations, or even seek new cities to expand into.

The spatiality was also dictated by the business dynamics described above. For restaurants, the current standard practice of having centralized kitchens means that it would be extremely difficult to transport the food daily to a branch that is outside a city. It is also difficult to manage the business on a day-to-day basis when there are few kin to rotate or take over. Similar dynamics are at play with moneychangers, where constant borrowing from and lending to moneychangers play a crucial part of their business. Thus, it would be difficult to succeed in another city without having a developed network of moneychangers there. Another factor is the availability of lucrative spots in a city. Shaduli's father mentioned locations adjacent to bureaucratic offices, housing projects or parking spaces as prime spots for restaurants today. As competition for such spaces has increased, obtaining them mostly depends on having influential contacts or agents in the city, which those outside its networks might find difficult to access.

Family as Trust

In the previous two sections, the sentiment of trust emerges as an epiphenomenon of human interactions that takes the form of emotive assessment of persons and places. Beyond this, trust also becomes embodied in particular ways that induce certain practices and conduct with regard to family. A near universal response to one of the questions I asked the restaurant owners illustrates the significance of family. Why is it, I asked, that a sector that caters predominantly to halal requirements of an urban Malay population has a disproportionately high number of Indian Muslim restaurants, and comparatively fewer Malay ones? I had thought this was a complicated question, and expected answers that might refer to their particular cuisine, or perhaps advantages they had because of being able to draw on cheap labour from India. Instead, nearly all of them responded with the same racialized joke. To paraphrase – "An Indian Muslim saves all his profits for opening a second branch, a Malay saves all his profits for a second wife".[24] Despite the obvious humorous exaggeration implied in these responses, the frequency with which it was invoked deserves unpacking. The connotation attached to savings that this joke implies will be explored in the next section. Here I will focus on the particular way that trust in the family is invoked through the value that is attached to a strict monogamous conception of marriage – with monogamy being something that my conversation partners saw as contrary to Malay Muslim sensibilities.

Coming back to the conversation with Shaduli's father, I probed further about what he meant by the "good family" that he claimed was necessary for a successful business. He described the need for committed family members who are willing to sacrifice for the business. There might arise situations when someone will have to take the night shift at the restaurant, or travel to another city to solve a legal or bureaucratic issue of the business or its employees. Being able to do so depended on a supporting and understanding wife and family. A good family also meant good standing among other Indian Muslims – through which it becomes easier to find marital alliances suitable for the business, raise finances within the community, procure trustworthy labour from India, or even settle bureaucratic issues via influential intermediaries. I regularly observed that these marital alliances were key for those families who wanted the next generation to be invested in the business. I once set out to meet Mr. Haja, a man from a prominent restaurant family, who, as I had been told, was going through a bitter dispute with another Indian Muslim restaurant owner. I was therefore careful to avoid

[24] On polygamy in Malaysia, see (Razif 2017, 2020). The practice of polygamy is often used by Indian Muslims as a marker of how Malays differ from themselves. Interestingly, Malay men often refer to marrying a second wife as "opening a second branch" (*buka cawangan baru*). I thank Nurul Huda for this information.

the other man's name in our conversation. Yet when our conversation shifted to the topic of arranged marriages, he casually mentioned that his family was negotiating for their daughter to marry the latter's son! Both the families were convinced that it was a good match, but were waiting for their son and daughter to agree to it.

The suitability of the spouse here typically depends upon the type and level of business of the families, as well as the mutual networks they are connected to. In case of one family business that was aggressively expanding their chain of restaurants during my fieldwork, a person within the family noted a particular concern with whom the male members in the family marry: they wanted the men in the family to remain in the business and not seek their livelihood outside it. Therefore, the men would be matched with women within the extended family connected to the business, or with families that cannot potentially provide the groom with opportunities outside his family's business. It was also common in such cases to arrange a match very early while the offspring were still teenagers and then subsequently marry them off once they both attain maturity. For the women in these families, preference was given to a groom who was trustworthy and could thus potentially join the family business, or with families that are willing to co-invest in the business through the trust provided by the marriage.

In many ways, it was the women who were more engaged in the process of 'matchmaking', as they frequently referred to it. Men often feigned ignorance over the intricacies of matchmaking when I asked them about it. Most women I met were intimately aware of who in their community was married and who was yet to be married. My contacts also indicated that women were the ones aware of the procedures involved in a proposal – how it has to be initiated, who has to be approached, and what needs to be discussed and negotiated. In some instances, there are intricate negotiations over the exchange of bridewealth and/or dowry – particularly when the proposal is between family businesses. Khalida described such an event between family X, which had a number of reputable businesses in the country, and family Y, which was comparatively less established. Family X was interested in arranging an engagement of their son to family Y's daughter. This was initiated through a surprise visit by members of the former to the latter's house. The father in family Y was thus unprepared for negotiating with the guests – although it was much more in the interest of his family to have the proposal go forward. After exchanging niceties and listening to the proposal, he tentatively suggested that he would think about it with his extended family and let them know about their decision soon. The mother, who had been present nearby in another room during this visit, sensed disappointment in the faces of the guests when they subsequently took their leave. Having hurriedly inquired of her husband about what had taken place, she immediately ran outside to the front porch where the guests were about to enter their car. She declared that their family was very much willing to go ahead with the proposal and would agree to any of their terms – including contributing a new house for the couple. She expressed her hope that they would forgive the misunderstanding on her husband's side for not agreeing earlier. Khalida recounted this anecdote as an illustration of how men are often ignorant of the intricacies of such negotiations.

The deep entanglements of business and family can also lead to cases where conflicts in one domain spill into another. Although I did not encounter such cases myself during fieldwork, I did encounter cases where trust become an impediment to the business. Faris's marriage, which was arranged by his family, involved both families investing in a new business venture for the couple. When we met, he told me that this restaurant business was not doing well, with losses eating into their pockets due to what he saw as mismanagement on the part of the families. The restaurant was still packed, though, with our conversation being frequently interrupted by the employees and customers. When asked if it was an issue of trust, he replied that there was no “mistrust” as such between those involved. It would have been easier to resolve the issue if that was so, he claimed. Rather, the families seem to lack confidence in the future of the economy, hindering his desire to improve or expand. Yet, closing the business is an extremely difficult decision that cannot be taken in haste. Many of those employed under their business license were family members from India; in addition, the investment was shared by both families. Therefore, a decision to close the business involved considerable stakes and could even lead to the breakdown of the marriage. Thus, in this case trust led the owners and the employees to push on with the business for each other. Before I could dig deeper into this aspect of trust, Faris was called into the kitchen. After he came back carrying food for us, our conversation drifted into other topics. Faris no longer wanted to talk about family or the business.

In other instances, trust does not develop as a result of a person’s character. Mannan often complained that his father never managed to be a successful entrepreneur because he “talked too much”. Mannan’s father had migrated to Malaysia in the 1980s, following in the footsteps of others in his family. He began as a cashier at his cousin’s restaurant in Kuala Lumpur, but never stayed at one enterprise for more than two years. As someone who was considered as prone to gossip, families were wary of divulging business and family matters to him. As such, he was never able to stay at one place and gain trust, but rather kept moving from one place of employment to another. He always managed to get work among his kin, but never succeeded in rising up in the business.

What is interesting here is not merely how trust is defined, but in particular, following Jiménez, what it *does* in social interactions (Jiménez 2011: 179). The fact of being from the same native town can often create a sense of trust between two Indian Muslims, even if they have never met before. Trust can also carry over from one sphere of life to another: trust accrued in business often made a person suitable to enter the family through marriage. Trust can also thus be elevated to a degree that it becomes extremely difficult to break out of. In this sense, trust opens up a space for working in the present more than in the future (Broch-Due and Ystanes 2016). The comforts of restricting certain interactions or activities like business to those within this space of trust can appear provincial to those outside it. I frequently heard complaints from others about how these communities keep to themselves in their business activities. But to those within these spaces, the sentiment of trust is a mode of practice in the present that brings with it certain expectations and proprieties.

Hopes and Fears: sentiments regarding the future

The previous sections looked at the sentiments attached to the past, followed by how the sentiment of trust played out in the present among Indian Muslim businesses. This section moves to their narratives about the future. In conversations about the future of the business, the practice of saving plays an important role.

Remittances as ‘Homage’

Mr. Nisham is a well-respected individual who was brought up in Malaysia but claims his roots from the district of Tanjavur in Tamil Nadu. He recounted that his community had dominated the Indian Muslim business scene until the 1980s, although most of those still in Malaysia today have moved on from entrepreneurship to a life in the corporate or professional world. He emphasized that this earlier generation of entrepreneurs rarely brought their families over to the country. Rather, they sent a considerable part of their revenues and savings back home in India, which were invested in assets like land or gold. After the independence of Malaysia from the British in 1957, most of these entrepreneurs lost confidence in the future of the country. Many stopped investing further in Malaysia, he told me, and their remittances to India increased in volume. Following the infamous "Race Riots" in Kuala Lumpur in May 1969, a significant number of these entrepreneurs shut their shops and returned to India for good. Similar narratives were provided to me by Malabari entrepreneurs in Kuala Lumpur, and traders from Alagankulam in Ipoh.

This period coincided with the growth of *nasi kandar* and other businesses from Ramanathapuram in Penang mentioned earlier. Those who stayed in Malaysia continued to place importance on savings that were to be remitted back to the family in India. Even after the 1990s, when married men's immediate families began migrating to Malaysia rather than remaining in India, the pattern of remitting savings back to India persisted. Families at that time, I was told, ultimately saw their future as being back in India, and a good part of their savings were reserved for an annual or bi-annual ritual visit to their native town or village. Many indicated that this was also meant to acculture the children to the local community and extended family in India.

Accumulating for the Business/Family

By the time of my fieldwork, these family trips to India had become less common. Rather, families were more inclined to bring their parents or relatives in India over to Malaysia. Mr. Rafi tells me that this was because entrepreneurs could no longer afford to take breaks as their businesses began expanding rapidly. Concurrently, they began to invest much of their savings back into the business to enable these expansions. In the case of restaurants, the predominant business today, Ali told me that an average restaurant requires an initial capital that could be recuperated in two or three years. By the third or fourth year, a successful business should be in a financial position to expand to a second branch. According to Haji Shabeer, at first Indian Muslims generally rented their business premises, but they gradually found out that owners would keep increasing the rent once the business began to flourish. Buying property instead of renting goes along with a shift in attitude: it is only when they see themselves in the country for the foreseeable future that they become comfortable in buying premises. This confidence becomes more pronounced when the family settles in the country or opts for citizenship. During my fieldwork, buying premises had become the norm, and I was generally informed that saving for the future expansion of the business had become an inculcated sentiment. This reflected in the fact that, as Haji Shabeer told me, they typically compete with each other to gain lucrative spots even before the facilities have been built, waiting in line at bureaucratic offices to reserve space in future condominiums or buildings.

Because the business expansion was also tied to the practice of arranged marriages, there is a strong sentiment in favour of allocating savings for the marriage of the children. It was previously a common practice, Mr. Iqbal tells me, to declare the contributions of both families for the new couple during the wedding ceremony.[25] Today, he says, this information is no longer publicized, but the practice of contributing resources for the new couple continues. Typically, the contributions take the form of gold, but may also include a prime business location, car, or even a house. Some of my conversation partners indicate that the largest contribution comes from the bride's family – effectively becoming a form of dowry. According to Mr. Iqbal, this can give the bride's family a sense of security. It can

[25] The declaration of business contributions took place alongside the declaration of the bridewealth during the wedding ceremony, a practice stipulated in Islamic law.

provide avenues for independence and livelihood for the new family, while simultaneously making it difficult for the groom to break out of the marriage.

"Islamized" Sentiments

There were some sentiments that my interlocutors were explicitly articulated as being motivated by Islamic beliefs and practices. The most common of these was a general suspicion of modern banks, owing to the Islamic prohibition of usury. This suspicion lingered even towards the "Islamic banks" that are prevalent throughout Malaysia, as many were not convinced that these banks are completely free of interest-based transactions. According to Haji Shabeer, one effect this had among Indian Muslim entrepreneurs was a preference for 'cash' transactions over banking or other financial instruments. Thus, purchases of land or other assets of the business were typically done using cash up front, mostly arranged by borrowing from others in their networks. Haji Shabeer admitted that many also opted for this in order to evade taxes. An additional motivation was the possibility of sellers offering discounts for up-front payment in cash. This created an incentive to keep cash reserves, or possibilities for quickly raising cash from within the community for such transactions. During the time of my fieldwork, however, these practices were becoming increasingly difficult to uphold – the state having implemented stringent regulations on accounting and tax policies. Almost all my interlocutors indicated that they now deal with Islamic banks in one way or another in order to comply with financial regulations.

Once borrowing loans from banks began to be accepted among Indian Muslim entrepreneurs, this created forms of debt that were "outside [the dynamics of] the community", my conversation partner Akram complained. As a religiously trained scholar (*alim*) within the community, he was concerned that these debts were affecting charitable spending. I had frequently seen evidence of the importance given to charitable spending practices in records of Islamic endowments (*wakaf*) by Indian Muslims in Malaysia and India (Nasution 2009: 106), donation campaigns for projects back in India, or even bequests in the name of families to feed people during the month of Ramadan.[26] Akram points out that generosity is a sentiment instilled through the very public way in which it is practiced – a view reiterated by many of my other contacts. Even a lightbulb donated to a mosque would have the family name of the donor on it, Akram noted. While some do engage in charity for social prestige, he says that most do it in order to invoke prayers in their names. These acts and prayers meant to benefit them in the future after death – in the grave and in the hereafter that Muslims believe in. Akram referred to a statement (*hadith*) of the Prophet Muhammed regarding the significance of generosity, and then went on to quote another *hadith* that a dead person cannot be buried until their debts have been settled by the family. Among an earlier generation of entrepreneurs, he said, such sentiments instilled a concern over accumulating debts. He recalls that there was a projected sense of thriftiness while they were in Malaysia, which would shift when they visited their kin in India – where there would be a conscious effort to project generosity and charitability as a successful businessman. His nostalgic musing is juxtaposed with a lament over the accrual of bank loans in the community today – either for the business, or for a house or car. Today, he has the impression that many families no longer have reserves to bequeath for endowments or charities, but instead pass debt on to their children. Coming from a preacher within the community, Akram's criticism of the accumulation of debt would have an effect on others from the community. It is with such uncertainties that the article

[26] This is called *morai* in Tamil and is still practiced in all the Indian Muslim mosques throughout Malaysia. Families compete to get their names on the "*masjid morai* list".

moves on to the final section on episodic encounters of ambivalences or ambiguities brought forth by such sentiments and practices.

Ambivalence: continuing or leaving the business

Today, when the families of Indian Muslims have now predominantly settled in Malaysia, one particular aspect that many constantly talk about to me is the exposure of the children to opportunities in Malaysia, particularly for education. Members of the Tanjavur community, for example, frequently describe themselves as having been at the forefront of Indian Muslim business in Malaysia until two or three decades ago. Yet the majority of those whom I encountered in Malaysia during my fieldwork have opted to move out of the family business. They cite education as the main motivation for this, with most of them being corporate professionals, doctors, lawyers, or professors. In other Indian Muslim communities in Malaysia, too, men who have left the family business similarly gave their reason as education. Some expressed reluctance to follow the stereotype of a restaurant '*mamak*' that they had been confronted with from other children at school, but the primary reason was the allure of the corporate or professional life that most Malaysian youths typically aspired to. It was also usually the case that at least one child from a business family was encouraged to seek a livelihood elsewhere, as a safeguard in case the family business were to collapse. Strikingly, however, during my fieldwork, I increasingly encountered instances of the 'return' into the family business of a generation of young men who had previously pursued professional or corporate employment. Disillusionment with corporate life or the lure of making profits in the family business are generally the reasons they gave for their return. Others expressed an intention to return during informal conversations; this was often articulated in the context of discussions about investment opportunities and business profitability in Malaysia.

Shaduli, as the youngest in his family, was groomed as the one who would pursue employment outside the family business. He therefore enrolled at a prestigious university and upon graduation managed to gain employment in a corporation as an accountant. He found the job hectic, and the pay was not to his desire. Yet, because of the difficult job market in Malaysia for new graduates, any sort of respectable employment was deemed to be good for 'CV purposes'. Two years into the job, with constant efforts to gain a better job position, the work pressure made him question the family decision. His brothers were involved in the restaurant business, and while it might not have the same prestige, they seemed to be earning more than him, as well as being much more flexible with regards to their 'work-family balance'. Eventually, Shaduli quit his job and decided to join the family business, even though other family members were critical of this on account of the money and time that had been invested in his education. Ultimately, he managed to convince his father about the lack of career prospects that his job offered. He now says he has much more time and money to spend on his family, even though the job is socially less prestigious.

For Shaduli, the quest for emotional fulfilment was intimately connected to satisfying economic aspirations as well. Yet in other instances, fulfilment in one area led to subsequent instability or disillusionment in another. Mannan was sent to India for high school education and returned for his graduation in Malaysia. He managed to obtain a job in the most prestigious company in Malaysia, which he saw as a big moment for him and his family. But a year into the job, he became disillusioned and complained about the stress, which conflicted with the type of social life that he was accustomed to. He constantly did not return home from work until late at night, and weekends were spent at home recuperating from exhaustion; as a result, he could not participate socially in the community like other family members. Eventually he quit, much to everyone's displeasure, and joined a few Indian Muslim friends as a senior employee in a new venture.

Such choices often come under the collective purview of the family as well. Hasan, whose family owned a few small enterprises, was given an expensive education as an aeronautical engineer even though his interest was always in the business. The sudden death of his father resulted in him becoming involved in the business, which his family felt would provide him with more time to attend to their needs. In other cases, educational decisions can have unintended consequences that play out to the detriment of the family/business. Haji Shabeer, who runs a moneychanger and a few provisions stores, educated all four of his children with the hope that their education would help in the growth and expansion of the business. Of these children, only the second son eventually decided to become involved in the business. The other two sons and the daughter chose to take up professional employment after their studies. Haji Shabeer said that only the second son was now in a position to help support his parents financially, while the other children often complained of having little savings from their jobs.

Structural Changes in the Business

Beyond these personal ambivalences, certain structural changes have also produced ambivalence in connection with business practices. A negative shift in sentiments towards the family business among the younger generation meant that many are not as open to the practice of arranged marriages vital to the business expansion. Added to this, the restaurant business, which had relied on networks in India to provide a pool of workers, found that these potential employees had begun to prefer more lucrative employment offers in the Middle East. This resulted in many families finding they could no longer effectively manage the number of branches that they had opened when it was easier to find trusted people to run them. I also encountered cases where families owned properties that were intended as bequests to their children for a future business, but which were lying dormant because the children had chosen other careers. Often the families responded to these issues by leasing out the administration of these branches or properties to third parties in return for fixed payments. These are typically taken up by new enterprising Indian Muslim migrants, who repeat the cycle of tapping into their contacts within the immediate family or unemployed youth back in India.

In response to the increasingly stringent regulations on licenses and labour permits for restaurants in Malaysia, I observed an interesting tendency for restaurant owners to 'corporatize' by acquiring licenses and permits on a large scale – both new and existing ones. These are developed and standardized into a chain of restaurants, with everything from the menu to the uniform of the employees regulated. These are then franchised out to the highest bidders, with each branch run independently – much like American fast-food joints. This is particularly attractive for those Indian Muslims seeking to return to business from corporate or professional life. As this franchising strategy can only be undertaken by those who can make large investments, it resulted in a tendency for big players to acquire the smaller struggling ones. The management of these chains no longer depends solely on the trust provided by family, but rather emulates corporate management techniques. I observed similar trends in the moneychanger sector as well. As Haji Shabeer told me, regulations that necessitate most transactions to be done through online banking or other accountable means have taken away from profits. Permit regulations have also been tightened, making it almost impossible to begin a moneychanger business from scratch. Consequently, the value of existing permits increases; as with the restaurants, this results in small moneychangers being gradually acquired by bigger ones.

Emotions as Bodily 'Technique'

I have illustrated the social lives of Indian Muslim entrepreneurs in Malaysia through certain sentiments gleaned from their business practices; sentiments being second-order emotions that are articulated, anticipated, and reflected upon in social interactions. I now examine the possibility of emotions being a "technique of the body" in the Maussian sense of the body as "man's primary technical instrument" (Mauss 1973). A technical action does not necessitate an external instrument (consider 'techniques' of dancing or martial arts). And even in the presence of an external instrument, certain bodily movements have to be learned for its performance. Mauss extends this line of thinking on techniques to different proprieties attached to mundane actions of the body across different cultures – diffused 'habits' of walking, eating, sleeping, swimming, etc. Humans are explored as having a body and knowing how to use it, rather than simply being a body. Since emotions have been illustrated as being embodied, what possibilities does the anthropological literature on emotions provide for conceiving them as techniques? Some of the earliest studies that directly engaged with emotions in anthropology are those of the culture and personality theorists like Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead. Their studies posited certain basic emotions as universal. Other emotions are complex derivations of these, with cultural processes providing particular textures to such emotions in each culture. Nonetheless, according to this theory, people outside these cultures are still have the capacity to empathize with these emotions. The succeeding interpretative school of anthropology increasingly argued in favour of the authority of culture over feeling, with different authors taking on variable levels of constructivist positions. Geertz argued that the Balinese only project emotions externally and do not have internal feelings like Westerners (Geertz 1966). Briggs argued that the Inuit do not have a sense of anger in their culture; rather this emotion is either repressed or rationally curbed (Briggs 1970).

Ensuing studies began to argue that emotions are best analysed through language and power, rather than as an internal sensation linked to an ostensive Western ideology of bounded personhood. This strong constructivist position on emotions resulted in a move away from psychologizing tendencies, and towards locating them in the politics and discourses of daily life. Michelle Rosaldo argued that emotions for the Ilongots of the Philippines are embodied thoughts – "thoughts somehow felt" – that gives a sense of involvement for a subject (Rosaldo 1984: 143). Lutz argued that the Ifaluk notion of '*fago*' – purportedly about sharing and compassion – takes on dimensions of power and hierarchy in the act of generous giving (Lutz 1988). Emotions are instances where the body is aroused through cognitive assessments of situations mediated by power and language. But this approach (followed, for example, by Geertz) has been criticized for substituting culturally generic actors with actors who end up being politically generic. Emotions become reduced to either an expression of authority or a protest against it (Beatty 2009). These theorists were also criticized for ignoring the autonomy of emotions in humans – drives, repressions and ambiguities; along with variations in their intensity and force (Rosaldo 1983).

Nevertheless, the ethnographic validity of all these studies, despite the shortcomings in their perspectives, raised a genuine question of what accounts for such differences in emotions across cultures. Beatty has argued that cultures may vary to the extent that certain feelings are 'emotionalized' or granted cultural complexity. Feelings may also vary based on different notions of personhood and the concomitant forms of relations (Beatty 2009). Although my interlocutors never articulated or indicated emotions as a distinct domain of experience, the ethnography illustrated certain sentiments that they singled out for cultural attention. While these sentiments were not designated with particular terms, they were illustrated here as modes of action and ways of relating with others. In this continuous and almost habituated reiteration, such sentiments can even become disconnected from feelings. They become as 'naturalized' as ways of walking or eating – a technique of the body à la Mauss (Mauss 1973). But even more critically, emotions and feelings are employed to inculcate specific sentiments – particularly in child-rearing. These sentiments are stabilized in children by producing particular feelings in them. This extends to adults as well, where traditional hierarchies and authorities articulate and uphold proprieties through emotions. The drive for migration and enterprising, the desire for arranged marriages, and a sense of thriftiness derived from anxiety over spending on oneself are all sentiments socially inculcated in this sense. Emotions thus become knowledge encoded in particular ways – a bodily technique, since they are habituated as well as learnt. This is illustrated in the following anecdote.

The Case of the Shoulder Pouch

On a late Tuesday night in January 2020, I sat at a *mamak* restaurant waiting for Farhan, who had asked to meet up for dinner. Farhan had been my colleague at university, enrolled by his parents there to break out of the family business and become an engineer. But he always had a fascination for enterprising and was the first interlocutor to show me around Indian Muslim markets in Kuala Lumpur. I vividly recall his portrayal of some of those Indian Muslim entrepreneurs as "real men" who garnered respect from their communities, despite their "simple" appearance and disregard for fame. He contrasted them with "shallow" corporate professionals, whom his family was forcing him to be. It was thus no surprise when I returned for fieldwork that he had decided to be involved in the family business. Back in the restaurant, he appeared two hours later than expected, accompanied by a beaming smile and a friend. He immediately asked if I noticed anything different about him. I pointed to a shoulder pouch strapped to his chest, my silence expressing annoyance at his unpunctuality. Irritated by my lack of enthusiasm, he asked me if I knew what his new pouch represented and playfully reproached me for my ignorance: "This pouch is responsibility, it's a job promotion for me." His father had delegated to him the duty of collecting the daily cash reserves from all the branches, and it was a proud moment that disclosed the family's trust in him. His friend teasingly interrupted: "You should see how scared he was to carry around so much money! He asked me to go along with him and didn't relax until all the money was handed over to his father." "Why are you still wearing it then", I asked. "To show off", the friend interrupted again, "maybe it will get him a good wife (*nalla ponnu*) if people see it on him." We all laughed and began ordering our food as Farhan declared that dinner was on him.

This anecdote in many ways captures the different layers of emotions among those present. Farhan was brought up in Malaysia in a household that was tightly connected with other households from their community. These interactions, wherein the familial often overlapped with the economic, were grounded upon the inculcation and circulation of emotions. Farhan and his father rarely spoke to each other as an inculcated sentiment of respect (Farhan) and authority (the father). This was habituated from childhood through domestic practices but persisted even during my fieldwork when Farhan was in his mid-twenties. He was never laid back or overtly cheerful in the presence of his father, and would only speak to him with reverence. His father would use very few words with him, and I never saw intimate discussions between them, even though they were involved in the same business. But his father's delegation of duty was interpreted by Farhan as an expression of confidence in him –

emotions becoming simultaneously a mode of practice and communication. This pride quickly changed to trepidation when confronted with the task, as his friend sardonically described. The long-desired responsibility was met with initial self-doubt, showing us that such sentiments may also be accompanied by ambivalent feelings. While emotions may be programmatically used to inculcate sentiments in others, they are also autonomous to a certain degree in persons and may vary in intensity.

Emotions also reveal the constitution of social relations – the hierarchies of age and gender being particularly visible here. Farhan had not directly conveyed his earlier desire to join the family business to his father, as he was hesitant to go against the family's wish for him to be an engineer. But he persistently articulated this wish to his mother, as boys were more inclined to express their vulnerabilities and desires to their mothers in these communities. And in typical fashion, it was his mother who eventually relayed this wish to his father and persuaded him. Yet in a community where gender interactions beyond one's immediate household are highly regulated, his friend's joke indicated how eligibility for marriage can be communicated through a shoulder pouch that represented a 'responsible' person. It would be inappropriate here for Farhan to signal his desire for marriage directly to a woman or an elder in the community. Rather these desires are mediated by elders who pick up on such signals as the shoulder pouch bestowed by a family. This is knowledge encoded in a particular way that he and his friend clearly grasped. The anecdote illustrates how sentiments singled out for cultural attention are both learnt as well as unreflectively performed such that they may even be disconnected from immediate feelings. It is at this level that emotions parallel techniques as habituated practices, primarily because they are granted cultural attention by these communities. Emotions thus take on the form of a bodily technique through which social relations are established and sustained, as well as a technique for disciplining and inculcating appropriate emotions in others.

Sentient Textures of Personhood

In anthropology, persons are socially engendered through attributes conferred on them in the form of status, role, or moral capacity. Personhood as an analytical category involves the juxtaposition of this concept of the person to the self, with the latter describing the internal reflexive awareness of a subject (Appell-Warren 2014). When explored as a distinctly human phenomenon, personhood involves the interplay between the attributions that make a person and the processes involved in its internalization. Personhood is thus processual and entails a capacity for action that is enmeshed in social relations, with these actions influenced by diffused ideas of what a person ought to be. While Mauss is often credited for popularizing personhood in anthropology (Mauss 1985), he appears not to have synthesized his studies on the body and the person (both of which were based on lectures delivered over a time span of three years). While his study of techniques of the body explored how persons in different cultures learn how to use their body by emphasizing the social aspects of the unconscious, his study of the person shifted the focus to ideas of consciousness across different cultures and timespans.

I argue that emotions, when posited as bodily techniques that my interlocutors singled out for cultural attention, serve to substantiate and symbolize personhood for them. Beyond a conception of emotions emerging experientially from the body, my focus on what happens between persons through the acquisition and deployment of such techniques disclose social relations that uphold this personhood. Mauss' oeuvre provides another key to establishing a link here between the body, relations, and personhood. In a short work/lecture prior to his article on techniques of the body, he argued that the presence of a technique allows us to derive a 'technology', in the sense of its logos or underlying logic (Mauss 2006). I argue that relations can be delineated as a form of technology in this sense – the technology of sociality for my interlocutors, and a technology of description for my ethnography. Beyond simply being a property of the body, emotions can thereby be illustrated as taking on relational capabilities and complexities through which we can analyse cultural forms.

The successful acquisition and transmission of these techniques indicate social conceptions of what a person ought to be, while moments of ambiguity or ambivalences disclose a subjective self who is aware of discrepancies between inculcated sentiments and actual feelings. This need not be the only means by which the 'person' and the 'self' rise to a certain level of consciousness. But this awareness of the 'person' and the 'self' are always mediated and sustained by such social relations. Relations thus act as the technological link between body and personhood here. In the case of my interlocutors for whom certain bodily techniques are privileged for the inculcation of personhood, the tendency is to displace the awareness of subjective dimensions of certain emotions. "This is how I am supposed to feel" or "this is who you are expected to be" are familiar instances of how such displacements are rationalized. These emotions, stabilized in the form of sentiments, reproduce particular social relationships. Yet reproducing such relations lead to a certain level of reflexivity, and it is here that relations ethnographically indicate forms of consciousness and thus personhood. While this paper has looked at the social aspect of the body by rendering emotions as techniques, the body's relational manifestations in space and time direct us to the possibility that such bodily dispositions can themselves be a form of consciousness that inform social life. Consciousness engendered through such culturally elaborated emotions is embodied and not solely cognized in an abstract 'mind'. Sentiments do not take the form of an explicit set of operational principles ingrained in the mind that the body sets out to do. Bodily awareness leads us to 'embodied' consciousness 'codified' in a particular way. 'Meaning' thus is not simply an intention that is translated into action by persons. Rather, it is realized in social relations through shared awareness of what an act entails and who the actor thereby is. Persons enmeshed in such relations are categorized according to their ability to anticipate and interpret intentions and meanings generated from a sequence of actions. Sentiments are thus particular ways of eliciting relations and making them visible.

Conclusion

This article explored an ethnographic moment among Indian Muslim family businesses in Malaysia through narrative illustration of regularity, continuity, and ambivalence in their business practices. The focus was on sentiments attached to these practices as a means of grasping textures of personhood among them. Emphasis was placed on ethnographic illustration of sentiments rather than theoretical elaboration. Consequently, the paper does not attempt to pin down sentiments in terms of a particular vocabulary. The sentiment of trust is an exception due to the frequency with which it was invoked by my interlocutors – but even here the aim was not at defining it, but to illustrate how it unfolded in social relations. The concern was to situate sentiments within practices like gendered migration, arranged marriages and savings. The approach followed in this paper is based on a methodological choice of going beyond constructionist frames of language for accessing emotions (Lyon 1995: 245). Furthermore, while other emotions like envy, anxiety, or greed can play a significant role in my interlocutors' businesses, they do not rise to the level of sentiments precisely because they are not 'articulated, reminisced and inculcated' in the same way as the sentiments illustrated in the preceding sections. The nature of sentiments is such that they do not clearly fall into a form of either feeling or cognition, but operate at a level where they are fuzzily combined. To some readers, a sentiment may appear too cognitive to pass off as emotion; while for others, it may be too affective to be considered as involving substantial thought. In writing, I have deliberately attempted to play on this ambiguity in order reflect the difficulty of disentangling cognition and affect in sentiments.

Emotions provided me an avenue to explore interactions between bodies as the locus of experience that engenders particular forms of sociality. This move from the body to relations allows me to posit the body as the site of personhood – evoking Strathern and Lambek's dialectic of embodiment of persons and personification of bodies (Lambek and Strathern 1998: 6). Rendering emotions as 'techniques' thus links the Maussian understandings of the body and the person that they call for. These techniques of the body were condensed by my interlocutors into a 'code' – emotions were codified into sentiments, a form of knowledge that they were intimately conscious of in their social actions. The body thus provides a particular way through which such techniques are codified. Personhood, disclosed here through the flow of relations that are analytically prior to a person, is thus a way of articulating how subjects analyze their own social lives and elicit relations from others.

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