

Indonesian Diaspora Halal Cuisine as Cultural Diplomacy

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to construct a conceptual model of how halal cuisine, as practised by members of the diaspora, functions as a mechanism that transforms religious norms and process standards into symbolic capital and cross-cultural trust by mapping the halal gastrodiplomacy value chain from upstream to downstream, linking regulations. This study utilises library research to conduct an in-depth analysis of various scientific sources, constructing a comprehensive and reflective theoretical framework on Indonesian diaspora halal cuisine as a form of cultural diplomacy. The results conclude that Indonesian diaspora halal cuisine is the most concrete and political form of cultural diplomacy, as it blends taste, values, and strategy into a new global language about Indonesia. It demonstrates how the diaspora kitchen has evolved into a space for negotiation between faith and the market, between authenticity and adaptation, and between spirituality and commodification. Halal cuisine is no longer merely a religious symbol, but has evolved into an instrument of soft power that connects identity politics, the creative economy, and national image. From the tension between values and exchange rates, the most honest diplomacy of taste is born, one that does not subjugate but invites the world to understand Indonesia through the aroma of halal, warmth, and humanity.

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of halal cuisine among the Indonesian diaspora is rooted in the dynamics of Indonesian migrants scattered across various parts of the world, whether as migrant workers, students, entrepreneurs, or professionals in strategic sectors (Fahrullah & Musafak, 2025). In the midst of their lives in foreign countries, cuisine becomes a form of expression of nostalgia, identity, and resistance to global cultural homogenisation. The kitchen becomes a microcosm for the diaspora to preserve their cultural roots while introducing the values of their nation to the local community.

Halal cuisine is not merely a consumer product but also a political statement of identity and a diplomatic instrument that projects the image of Indonesia as a religious, friendly, and inclusive nation (Wekke et al., 2024). The halal label attached to Indonesian diaspora food products is not merely a spiritual category, but a symbol of integrity, cleanliness, and trust that is recognised globally (Calder, 2020). This makes Indonesian halal cuisine not only accepted by the Muslim community but also appreciated by non-Muslim consumers as a representation of quality and production ethics.

Historically, Indonesian cultural diplomacy has been rooted since the early days of independence when Indonesia sought to assert its existence and identity on the international stage (Cohen, 2019). The use of performing arts, batik, gamelan music, and cultural festivals became part of a foreign policy strategy that emphasised soft power. However, cuisine has only gained serious attention as a medium of diplomacy in the last decade, in line with the growing global interest in Asian food and the increasing awareness of the economic potential of gastronomy-based creative industries.

The Indonesian diaspora plays a central role as non-state agents who expand the reach of diplomacy through everyday culinary practices (Yayusman, Mulyasari, et al., 2023). Restaurants, food stalls, and culinary festivals managed by the diaspora become arenas for cultural encounters, places where Indonesian identity is negotiated, constructed, and disseminated in tangible and enjoyable forms. Through the flavours of rendang, satay, fried rice, or gado-gado, the global community can experience a national narrative framed in simplicity of taste, yet rich in cultural and religious meaning. Interestingly, the halal dimension in Indonesian diaspora cuisine functions as a cultural signifier that strengthens the credibility and appeal of these culinary products in the global market.

The concept of halal is not merely a marker of religiosity, but also a global ethical standard related to hygiene, sustainability, and animal welfare (Rahman et al., 2024). When Indonesian restaurants in London, Tokyo, or New York display halal certification, it not only affirms their commitment to Islamic principles but also radiates universal values of moral and social responsibility in food production. In an increasingly complex global political context, culinary-based halal cultural diplomacy has also become a strategic arena for nation branding. Indonesia, as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, has both a moral responsibility and an economic opportunity to become a leader in the global halal industry (Patrisia et al., 2025). This potential is not limited to food products, but also extends to the tourism, cosmetics and halal lifestyle sectors. However, this strength needs to be capitalised on through an integrated diplomatic strategy, in which the diaspora plays an important catalytic role.

The Indonesian culinary diaspora is not just food sellers, but also cultural ambassadors who introduce the Indonesian values of tolerance, cooperation and warmth (Yayusman, Yaumidin, et al., 2023). When customers in Melbourne enjoy Betawi soto or in Amsterdam taste *tempe mendoan*, they are actually interacting with a cultural image that contains a

diplomatic message about diversity and harmony. The halal cuisine of the diaspora also serves as a medium for economic diplomacy, opening new trade channels and strengthening bilateral relations between countries.

In many cases, restaurants and culinary businesses managed by the diaspora serve as gateways for Indonesian products, such as spices, coffee, and other processed food ingredients, to enter the global market (Wijaya, 2019). This illustrates the close relationship between cultural diplomacy and economic diplomacy, where both reinforce each other in advancing national interests. Through halal culinary diplomacy, Indonesia can utilise the power of people-to-people diplomacy to expand its network and increase its influence at the international level without relying on formal political instruments. On the other hand, the government can also strengthen this initiative by supporting policies such as promoting halal cuisine in diplomatic missions, international halal certification, and training diaspora business actors in restaurant management and cross-cultural marketing (Adel et al., 2021).

More than just a commodity, the cuisine of the diaspora also tells a story about history, spirituality, and human values. Each dish carries a story about the traditions, geography, and philosophy of life of the Indonesian people. For example, *rendang* is not only a delicious dish, but also represents the values of patience and cooperation, which are embodied in its long and collective cooking process. Similarly, *satay* and *sambal* represent the spirit of diversity that blends harmoniously in one dish. Through this culinary symbolism, the Indonesian diaspora conveys a strong diplomatic message about the character of a friendly, open, and community-oriented nation. Halal cuisine becomes a universal language that enables cross-cultural communication without tension, bridging differences through enjoyable and meaningful shared experiences.

To sharpen the argument about Indonesian diaspora halal cuisine as a form of cultural diplomacy, this section summarises the most relevant literature review, emphasising the objectives and essence of the novelty of this research compared to previous studies. Gastrodiplomacy literature generally positions food as a tool of soft power for image-building and nation branding. Rockower (2012) defines gastrodiplomacy as a cross-border culinary promotion strategy implemented by influential middle powers (e.g., through the 'Global Thai' programme) to strengthen cultural brand recognition and political appeal; these key works provide a conceptual foundation that taste and dining experiences are strategic communication mediums in public diplomacy, not merely a culinary creative industry.

The soft power framework itself is rooted in Joseph Nye's (2008) conception of cultural appeal as a source of non-coercive influence, which shapes the preferences and perceptions of others, forming a relevant theoretical basis when halal cuisine is examined as a representation of the values of cleanliness, ethics, and community that sell Indonesia's reputation in the eyes of the global audience. Bonne and Verbeke (2008) demonstrate that Muslim consumers perceive halal as a credence attribute that promises process control and integrity of halal status, making certification a crucial tool for mitigating information asymmetry between producers/sellers and buyers. These findings reinforce the assumption that in cross-cultural markets, trust in halal labels transforms religious attributes into quality signals that are recognised across identities.

Complementarily, various studies on Islamic branding warn that selling halal is not synonymous with the religion of sale, because effective branding must navigate emotions, symbols, and expectations across segments, so that halal appears as a universal ethic (cleanliness, honesty, sustainability) as well as an identity. Wilson and Liu (2011) articulate the challenges of Islamic branding, which demand cross-market sensitivity and caution against

stereotypes and over-claims of religious nature; this elaboration is essential to prevent the reduction of halal culinary diplomacy to the mere commodification of religious symbols.

The regulatory framework also receives special attention in this study because the halal diplomacy ecosystem relies on the credibility of certification. Law No. 33 of 2014 concerning Halal Product Guarantee (JPH) and the establishment of an institutional scheme for its implementation confirm the transformation of halal from the ethical-religious domain to a quality infrastructure compatible with the global supply chain. These legal documents demonstrate the state's mandate to ensure clarity, transparency, and certainty of halal status, prerequisites that resonate with findings on consumer behaviour regarding trust in halal labels. Based on these gaps, this study aims to construct a conceptual model of how halal cuisine run by diaspora actors functions as a soft power converter. This mechanism transforms religious norms and process standards into symbolic capital and fosters cross-cultural trust by mapping the halal gastrodiplomacy value chain from upstream to downstream, linking regulations (JPH Law and certification scheme).

METHOD

This study utilises library research to conduct an in-depth analysis of various scientific sources, including books, academic journals, policy reports, and digital publications, to construct a comprehensive and reflective theoretical framework on Indonesian diaspora halal cuisine as a form of cultural diplomacy. This approach does not merely compile secondary data but positions literature as a space for intellectual dialectics between concept and context. Through the integration of Joseph Nye's soft power theory (Nye, 2019), Rockower's gastrodiplomacy (2012), Appadurai's gastro-politics (1988), as well as studies of Islamic branding and halal consumer behaviour, this study interprets halal cuisine not only as an economic product and expression of religiosity, but also as an instrument of cultural communication that articulates values of trust, ethics, and national identity. This cross-theoretical integration enables a new reading of how halal cuisine in the diaspora operates on three levels: as a medium of public diplomacy, as a symbol of global trust, and as an arena for identity negotiation amid the tide of globalisation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Halal Cuisine as an Instrument of Soft Power and National Identity in the Global Arena

Indonesia, as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, has tremendous potential to utilise the cultural dimension of Islam as a source of soft power. One of the most notable manifestations of this soft power is halal cuisine, which serves not only as an economic product but also as a tool of cultural diplomacy that conveys a narrative of national identity, religious values, and a distinctive yet moderate representation of Islam. Halal cuisine has become a symbolic face that communicates to the world that Indonesian Islam is not exclusive, but rather friendly, inclusive, and tolerant, with values that have long been the ideological foundation of Islam in the archipelago (Thahir, 2021).

In the context of gastrodiplomacy, as explained by Paul Rockower (2012), food serves as an essential means for countries to strengthen their nation branding through universal sensory experiences. Culinary diplomacy subtly operates soft power, connecting cross-cultural communities through the enjoyment of taste, aroma, and visual imagery associated with a nation's signature dishes. Food has the unique power to create emotional bonds and facilitate intercultural dialogue without relying on verbal language. In this case, Indonesian halal cuisine occupies a strategic position because it has dual values: on the one hand, it represents

the rich diversity of the archipelago's gastronomy, while on the other, it reflects an ethical and spiritual commitment to the universal principle of halal (Mardani et al., 2025).

The flavours of rendang, soto, satay, and nasi goreng are not merely culinary experiences, but also symbolic narratives about the history, values, and character of a nation. Through diaspora food stalls in Amsterdam, London, Tokyo, and New York, halal culinary diplomacy works on a micro level through daily interactions between diaspora culinary actors and local consumers, while sending a macro message about Indonesia as a peaceful, open, and creative Muslim nation.

In the context of the theory of gastro-politics introduced by Arjun Appadurai (1988), food is never neutral because it is always a field of symbolic and political struggle over meaning, identity, and power. When Indonesia showcases its halal cuisine on the global stage, what is at stake is not only the deliciousness of the taste but also the image of Indonesian Islam in the eyes of the world. Appadurai states that the practice of eating and serving food always involves power relations and morality that regulate who can eat what, with whom, and in what social context.

Indonesian halal cuisine has become a space for negotiation between modernity and tradition, between universal Islam and local Islamic practices, and between cultural diplomacy and identity politics. The state seeks to project an image of moderate Indonesian Islam through culinary diplomacy. Still, in practice, this narrative also has the potential to become entangled in the tension between efforts to demonstrate tolerance and the tendency to emphasise religious identity differences. In other words, halal cuisine operates in a state of double ambiguity; it is both a tool for inclusion and a means of exclusion. Still, it can also be a tool for exclusion depending on the context of communication and global public acceptance.

Within Nye's (2019) soft power framework, cultural appeal will only be effective if the message conveyed is considered credible, authentic, and does not impose ideology. Therefore, Indonesia's halal culinary diplomacy faces a serious challenge: how to promote a moderate and open Islam without falling into artificial image politics. Some observers note that, in an effort to present a moderate Islam, the state often constructs narratives that are too elitist and formalistic. In contrast, the power of cuisine lies in its everyday nature, spontaneity, and sensory experiences that are closely tied to the community.

When the state attempts to institutionalise halal culinary diplomacy, for example, through the Indonesia Spice Up the World programme, there is a risk that the logic of promotion and commodification will replace organic cultural meanings. In this context, halal culinary practices carried out by the diaspora may be more effective as soft power because they are authentic, rooted in direct interaction with the public, and naturally reflect moderate Islamic values through actions rather than rhetoric. However, the effectiveness of Indonesia's halal culinary diplomacy cannot be separated from global perceptions of Islam and the term halal itself.

In many Western countries, the concept of halal is still often associated with stereotypes of political identity and fears of fundamentalism (Jafari & Saleh, 2025). Therefore, Indonesian halal cuisine faces a dual task: deconstructing negative images of Islam while introducing the richness and diversity of the archipelago's cuisine. In this case, the halal label is not merely a religious mark, but also a representation of universal ethics that emphasise cleanliness, transparency, animal welfare, and social responsibility. This perspective aligns with studies on Islamic branding and halal consumer behaviour, which demonstrate that halal is now understood not only by Muslim consumers but also by the broader community, who associate it with trust and quality. Wilson and Liu (2011) argue that effective Islamic branding does not

impose religious symbols, but rather one that interprets Islamic values within a universal human context .

Halal culinary diplomacy also operates in a highly competitive arena among Muslim-majority countries such as Malaysia, Turkey, and even Thailand, which is not a Muslim country but has successfully built the 'Thai Halal' brand in the international market. Malaysia systematically links halal with the Halal Hub concept, which covers industry standards, tourism, and global certification through institutions such as JAKIM. Turkey utilises its Ottoman heritage and historical image of European Islam as an exotic attraction combined with secular modernity. Indonesia is positioned between these two poles because it has the largest Muslim population and cultural resources, but has not yet fully established a consistent and integrated halal branding system.

National programmes, such as Indonesia Halal Lifestyle or Indonesia Spice Up the World, are only partially effective, as they are still limited to promotional activities and have not yet developed a strong brand identity at the global level. In this context, Indonesia's halal culinary diplomacy needs to evolve from a mere promotional project into a sustainable cultural strategy that not only showcases taste but also conveys the values and lifestyle of moderate, inclusive, and contextual Indonesian Islam.

One interesting aspect of halal culinary diplomacy is that it represents a form of cultural hybridity unique to Indonesia. Many Indonesian dishes have evolved from a rich history of blending local, colonial, and transnational cultures: spices from the Maluku Islands, cooking techniques from India, Chinese influences in noodles and tofu, and European influences in bread and cakes. This hybridity reflects the character of Indonesian Islam, which is not puritanical but rather adaptive and open to outside influences.

In the context of gastrodiploamacy, it is precisely this diversity that becomes a symbolic force, showcasing Islam as a flexible and friendly civilisation. When UNESCO recognised *rendang* as an intangible cultural heritage, it was not only the recipe that was promoted, but also the social philosophy behind it: patience, cooperation, and respect for nature. These values convey a subtle diplomatic message in line with the principle of soft power, namely an appeal that arises from authenticity and human values (Karimullah & Rozi, 2023). Therefore, Indonesian halal cuisine can be a concrete representation of Islam wasathiyah, a middle path Islam that is neither extreme nor compromising on principles.

The international community often views Islam in a homogeneous framework influenced by geopolitical issues, terrorism, and sectarian conflicts in the Middle East. In this context, halal culinary diplomacy has a difficult task: to negotiate the perception that Islam is not monolithic, that there are versions of Islam that promote social harmony and cultural progress, such as those found in Indonesia.

This is where halal cuisine plays an extraordinary symbolic role because it presents a face of Islam that can be literally felt through pleasant flavours, rather than through abstract theological discourse. However, a paradox arises when the state overemphasises the image of 'moderate Islam' as an exclusive political identity project because this risks creating the impression that moderation is a politicised diplomatic commodity.

Effective halal culinary diplomacy should not only present moderate Islam as a slogan, but also bring it to life in real social practices, characterised by openness to interfaith collaboration, support for diversity among business actors, and alignment with universal human values (Haerunnisa et al., 2023). Beyond its political and cultural dimensions, halal cuisine is also a global economic phenomenon worth billions of dollars. According to the State of the Global Islamic Economy report, the global halal food market continues to grow annually

and is projected to reach trillions of dollars over the next decade (Fitriyanti et al., 2025; Rahmani et al., 2023).

Indonesia is strategically positioned not only as the largest consumer but also as a potential producer, with its wealth of spice raw materials, a creative workforce, and an extensive diaspora network. However, this potential has not been fully optimised due to the weakness of the integrated halal value chain, from certification and distribution to promotion. Halal certification, which should be a competitive advantage, still faces challenges in terms of international recognition. In the context of soft power, strengthening a credible and globally recognised certification system is not only a matter of technical regulations, but also about Indonesia's moral and diplomatic legitimacy in the eyes of the world. When Indonesian halal products are recognised as meeting global standards, it is not only the quality of the products that is recognised, but also the credibility of the country as a guardian of ethical and spiritual values.

The Tension Between Authenticity and Adaptation in Diaspora Culinary Practices

Amidst the Indonesian diaspora network spread across various countries, ranging from migrant workers in the Middle East to students in Europe, and from restaurant entrepreneurs in America and Australia, cuisine has become a bridge connecting the past and the present, home and abroad, as well as locality and globality. However, behind the role of cuisine as a tool of cultural diplomacy lies a latent tension between authenticity and adaptation. On the one hand, the diaspora feels the need to maintain the authenticity of taste, halal values, and culinary identity as a form of loyalty to their cultural origins (Yew & Tan, 2022). On the other hand, the realities of the international market, food regulations, and consumer preferences demand adjustments to remain relevant and acceptable.

It is this negotiation that makes diaspora cuisine not just a food product, but a complex socio-political practice. In this place, the meaning of 'Indonesia' is renegotiated in a global context. Authenticity in cuisine is often understood as the purity of origin, adherence to traditional recipes, or the use of conventional techniques. However, in diaspora practice, authenticity is not a static category but a dynamic process that is constantly being negotiated. A Padang restaurant in Melbourne, for example, cannot fully replicate the authentic Minangkabau flavour due to differences in raw materials, customer preferences, and local health regulations (Lipoeto et al., 2001; Mardatillah, 2020). Australian beef has different fat characteristics than local Indonesian beef. Additionally, chillies, coconut milk, and spices may need to be imported at a high cost or replaced with alternatives available in the local market. In situations like this, authenticity becomes a curated experience, not simply an inherited one.

Diaspora restaurant owners do not simply copy recipes; instead, they create new versions of authenticity that are adapted to the local social and economic context (Clair et al., 2011). This is what Homi Bhabha refers to as the third space, a hybrid space where identities and cultures interact, forming new meanings that are neither entirely local nor global. However, the adaptations made by the diaspora often present moral and cultural dilemmas. Changing flavours to suit Western palates can be seen as a betrayal of cultural heritage, while maintaining authentic flavours can mean losing customers and economic sustainability.

A meatball stall in Amsterdam that replaced used cooking oil with olive oil and reduced salt content to comply with EU health standards, for example, may be considered inauthentic by the diaspora community itself. In fact, this decision was a response to regulatory pressures and different market tastes. In this context, authenticity can no longer be measured solely by

similarity in taste, but rather by loyalty to deeper values such as cleanliness, honesty, and the intention to preserve tradition even through changing forms.

In other words, adaptation does not mean losing identity, but rather a strategy for survival amid the globalisation of taste that demands compromise without erasing meaning. The tension between authenticity and adaptation becomes even more complicated when halal values are included as an essential dimension in the culinary practices of the diaspora. For Indonesian Muslim communities abroad, halal is not just a category of consumption, but also a marker of morality and religious identity.

Maintaining the halal status of products in a non-Muslim environment requires considerable patience and creativity. In some cases, the diaspora must import halal-certified raw materials or even slaughter animals themselves in accordance with Islamic law due to limited supplies. On the other hand, to attract non-Muslim customers, many culinary businesses in the diaspora present halal as a symbol of ethics and hygiene, not merely a religious aspect. This is where the value of halal has expanded in meaning, from its original spiritual dimension to become a symbol of global trust and confidence. When Indonesian halal restaurants in London write on their menus that 'halal' means 'clean and responsible' food, they are selling not only food, but also a universal ethical narrative. Halal, in the context of the diaspora, has become a language of cultural diplomacy that connects faith with human values. However, this transformation in meaning is not always accepted without resistance.

Among the diaspora community itself, debates arise about the extent to which compromises can be made regarding halal standards. Is the use of uncertified but believed to be safe substitute ingredients still considered halal? Does allowing alcohol for non-Muslim customers in restaurants that sell halal food mean violating principles? Questions like these show that religious authenticity also faces equally intense dynamics of adaptation. Halal, in this sense, is no longer merely a matter of fiqh law, but rather an arena of gastro-politics in Arjun Appadurai's mind, as a social practice that negotiates power, morality, and identity through food. In diaspora dining spaces, halal serves as both a meeting point and a point of tension between loyalty to religious norms and the need to operate in the global market.

The tension between authenticity and adaptation is also evident in the economic and political dimensions of identity. Diaspora restaurants and culinary businesses are often not only business entities but also symbols of national representation (Karimullah, 2024b; Karimullah et al., 2023). When someone opens an Indonesian Cuisine restaurant in Tokyo or Los Angeles, they bring not only recipes but also the image of their nation. Every change in a recipe, every adjustment to the seasoning, has political implications for how the international community views Indonesia. If the food is adapted too much, there is a concern that it will lose its Indonesian soul, and if it is too authentic, it may be difficult for foreign audiences to accept. This is where the dilemma between cultural diplomacy and economic sustainability arises. Diaspora cuisine must continue to exist within two logics: the universal logic of taste and the particular logic of identity. In this case, soft power built through halal cuisine operates in an ambivalent space, where cultural power is measured not only by its ability to attract, but also by its ability to adapt without losing meaning.

When a customer in Paris enjoys fried rice made by an Indonesian diaspora, what they experience is not only the taste but also the values behind it, such as hospitality, harmony, and simple spirituality. However, this soft power will only endure if the perception of authenticity is maintained. Authenticity here does not mean total originality, but rather cultural credibility, that is, the extent to which the transformation of taste remains associated with its origins. When 'Sate Madura' is adapted into chicken skewers with peanut sauce to make it easier for

Western consumers to understand, the beauty of its soft power lies in its ability to convey meaning without losing its roots. Adaptation carried out with cultural awareness can expand its reach without erasing its identity. However, in global practice, authenticity has also become a commodity to be sold.

The label 'authentic Indonesian cuisine' is used in many diaspora restaurants as a marketing strategy to emphasise exoticism and originality. In this case, authenticity is no longer a fact, but a constructed image. As Jean Baudrillard said, modern society lives in a world of simulacra where representation is more important than reality. The authenticity of diaspora cuisine is often a simulacrum, a taste that is claimed to be authentic but has in fact been recontextualised. Paradoxically, however, it is precisely this simulation that keeps Indonesian identity alive in the eyes of the world. Constructed authenticity still has a social function in maintaining the continuity of cultural narratives amid change.

The halal culinary diplomacy of the Indonesian diaspora can also be seen as a form of citizen diplomacy, where individuals act as cultural ambassadors who introduce Indonesia not through speeches, but through taste. However, the effectiveness of this diplomacy depends on the ability to strike a balance between authenticity and adaptation. Restaurants that are too local may only attract diaspora customers, while restaurants that are too global may lose their diplomatic function as bearers of national identity. This is where creative strategies become important in presenting Indonesian flavours in a globally acceptable package without erasing their symbolic meaning. For example, a restaurant in Canada sells a Balinese Chicken Bowl with a modern presentation but still retains the typical Balinese base *genep* seasoning. Innovations like this are not a betrayal of tradition, but an expression of the diaspora's creativity in transforming heritage to be globally relevant.

The issue of authenticity and adaptation also touches on emotional dimensions and collective memory. For the diaspora, food is not just about taste, but also memories of home and the past. Every bite of nasi uduk or soto carries a nostalgic aroma that connects them to their homeland. In this case, maintaining the authenticity of taste is a way to preserve identity and avoid cultural dislocation. However, when food is adapted to local ingredients and techniques, feelings of loss and unfulfilled longing arise. On the other hand, from a market perspective, adaptation is inevitable. Globalisation has created a taste economy in which food must compete in a market of symbols and experiences (Mak et al., 2012).

Diaspora restaurants sell not only food, but also narratives of exoticism and cross-cultural togetherness. In such a market, flexibility is key to survival. In the context of Islamic branding and halal consumer behaviour, the debate between authenticity and adaptation also has implications for communication and marketing strategies. Halal, as a global brand, embodies universal values of cleanliness, honesty, style, and ethical production (Aoun & Tournois, 2015). However, in non-Muslim markets, this message must be conveyed without appearing exclusive or ideological.

Several restaurants in Europe use the terms ethical food or responsible dining to communicate the meaning of halal to non-Muslim consumers, while still maintaining Sharia standards (Halimi et al., 2022). This strategy demonstrates the diaspora's adaptive ability to transform religious symbols into a global ethical narrative. Even so, the tension between authenticity and adaptation is never truly resolved because of the dynamics inherent in the diaspora's existence itself. In culinary practice, this tension becomes productive because it forces innovative reflection on identity. Diaspora cuisine is not merely a reproduction of tradition, but also a space for creating new meanings that reflect the complexity of living between two worlds. It is a manifestation of cultural hybridity, a place where traditional values

and global modernity engage in creative dialogue. This hybridity is not a sign of loss, but rather a testament to the vitality of Indonesian culture, which can adapt without compromising its essence.

On a broader scale, diaspora cuisine serves as a platform for cultural diplomacy, strengthening Indonesia's global presence. Through food, values such as hospitality, cooperation, and spirituality are naturally conveyed to the worldwide public. However, for this diplomacy to be effective, the state needs to understand that culinary identity cannot be standardised. Efforts to standardise Indonesian food abroad must take into account the dynamics of adaptation carried out by the diaspora. When the state demands authenticity in a narrow sense, it ignores the fact that Indonesian culinary identity has always been fluid and multivocal from the outset. Indonesian food itself is the result of a long encounter between Arab, Indian, Chinese and European cultures. The cuisine of the diaspora is clear evidence that identity is not fragile in the face of globalisation, but instead finds its vitality amid the currents of mixing. It is a manifestation of a civilisation that is not afraid of change because it believes that Indonesianness does not lie in uniformity of taste, but in the courage to grow roots in new soil without forgetting one's origins.

The Halal Economy and Cultural Commodification in Public Diplomacy

Indonesia, with the largest Muslim population in the world, has excellent potential to play a significant role in the global halal industry (Utomo et al., 2021). The government recognises this potential and has begun to integrate the halal narrative into its public diplomacy strategy. Programmes such as Indonesia Spice Up the World and the promotion of the Halal Lifestyle abroad show how the country is trying to package Islamic values and Indonesian culinary culture as marketable economic assets. In such promotions, rendang, satay, and soto are presented not only as cultural heritage, but also as commodities with export value and investment potential. The halal label serves as both a moral certificate and a mark of quality, attracting the international Muslim market and non-Muslim consumers who associate halal with food safety and hygiene (Ab Talib, 2017).

In the context of public diplomacy, the promotion of halal cuisine cannot be separated from the logic of the global political economy, which involves various actors, including states, corporations, diaspora communities, and certification bodies. The state utilises halal as a nation branding tool to enhance its reputation in the global market (Butt et al., 2017). At the same time, businesses employ the halal label as a differentiation strategy in a competitive global market. Diaspora communities, on the other hand, occupy a dual position, serving as both an extension of cultural diplomacy and economic actors who must adapt to local market dynamics and regulations. Indonesian diaspora halal restaurants in London, for example, are not only places to eat but also showcases of diplomacy that represent the nation's image. However, at the same time, these restaurants must also compete with halal culinary businesses from other countries, such as Malaysia or Turkey, which have stronger institutional support.

This phenomenon can be analysed through the concept of gastrodiploacy developed by Paul Rockower. Rockower asserts that food is a unique instrument of public diplomacy because it can create emotional connections between nations and global communities—food functions as a universal language that transcends ideological and geographical boundaries. However, in the neoliberal context, gastrodiploacy also has a significant economic dimension. Countries not only want to spread their cultural image, but also market their products. In the case of Indonesia, halal cuisine serves a dual function: as a representation of cultural identity and as a creative economic product that generates foreign exchange (Nurizka

et al., 2025; Setyaningsih & Fuady, 2025). The country showcases its Indonesianness through taste, but behind it lies a measurable economic calculation. Soft power, which should be based on the appeal of values, has evolved into a soft commerce strategy due to the overlap between cultural diplomacy and market promotion.

This intersection between morality and the market creates an interesting epistemological tension. In the logic of the halal economy, what is presented is not only the halal product itself, but also the marketable image of piety and integrity. Halal becomes a brand signifier that marks a commitment to ethical production and consumption. However, when these religious values are traded, paradoxes arise, such as the notion of spirituality, which should be non-material, now being measured by economic parameters (Karimullah, 2024a). This process illustrates what George Ritzer calls the McDonaldization of Religion, namely the rationalisation and standardisation of religious values to suit the logic of industrial efficiency and control. Halal certification has become a form of modern rationality that regulates the relationship between religion, the market and the state. Meanwhile, the state utilises this certification as a diplomatic tool to expand its influence and strengthen its bargaining power in the trillion-dollar global halal market.

Within Arjun Appadurai's framework of gastro-politics, food is not only a matter of consumption, but also a field of power. When Indonesia and its diaspora promote halal cuisine, they are playing symbolic politics involving the relationship between religion, economy, and national identity. Gastro-politics in this context is not just about who eats what, but who has the authority to define the meaning of halal, who benefits from certification, and who has the right to represent Indonesia's halal status. The government, through institutions such as the Halal Product Guarantee Agency (BPJPH), seeks to assert the state's role as the guardian of halal. However, in the international arena, Indonesian halal certification must compete with institutions from other countries that have different standards. This shows that halal, which should be universal, has become a political commodity subject to economic and diplomatic interests.

The diaspora community plays a crucial role in this dynamic, as it operates at the intersection of culture, religion, and the market. On the one hand, they become informal ambassadors who introduce the moderate and tolerant values of Indonesian Islam through halal cuisine. On the other hand, they are also involved in market logic that forces adaptation to local tastes and international regulations. Indonesian halal restaurants in Paris, for example, must adjust ingredients, flavours, and presentation to be accepted by European consumers without losing their halal label. This adaptation process is not only technical but also ideological: halal is transformed into a universal language of quality, not merely sharia compliance. In this context, the diaspora becomes a hybrid actor that carries out both cultural and economic diplomacy.

They sell Indonesian flavours, but they also sell the narrative of halal as an economic added value that can attract non-Muslim customers. Halal has become a global trademark that combines religiosity, modernity, and business ethics (Gauthier, 2021). However, this commodification process is not without risk. When halal is reduced to a selling point, its spiritual meaning can be eroded. Halal products become mere market differentiation, not moral statements. In the long term, this can lead to tension between intrinsic values and exchange values, between sincerity and strategy. The government, in its efforts to promote the halal industry, has the potential to facilitate the instrumentalisation of religion for economic interests. On the other hand, diaspora communities that use halal as a branding tool also face an ethical dilemma between profit and principle.

This phenomenon reflects a new form of moral capitalism, in which religious values become integral to market logic. Halal no longer functions solely as a spiritual guide, but also as a symbol of status and prestige. In the global market, halal consumption is identified with an ethical, clean, and modern lifestyle. The term halal lifestyle has emerged, encompassing not only food, but also fashion, tourism, and finance. Thus, the term "halal" has expanded in meaning from the realm of worship to encompass the cultural and economic spheres. However, this expansion also demonstrates how capitalism can co-opt moral values into commodities that can be sold. In the context of public diplomacy, countries are capitalising on this trend to enhance their appeal, as Indonesia is not only promoted as a tourist destination but also as the centre of the world's halal lifestyle. Here, cultural and economic diplomacy merge, where taste, morals, and money are intertwined.

The tension between idealism and commercialisation is also evident in national branding strategies. Countries such as Malaysia and Turkey have already utilised halal as part of their geopolitical strategies. Malaysia has positioned itself as the World Halal Hub, boasting a globally recognised certification system and extensive promotion through the JAKIM agency. Turkey leverages its Ottoman heritage and religious tourism to blend Islamic identity with secular modernity. Indonesia, in an effort to compete with them, often presents a narrative of moderate Islam and cultural diversity as its competitive advantage (Al Hamid et al., 2025; Nuriskandar et al., 2025). However, without a strong and integrated halal management system, Indonesia's halal diplomacy risks being trapped in mere symbolism. Campaigns such as Indonesia Spice Up the World have indeed succeeded in attracting attention, but they have not yet been able to fully convert cultural narratives into sustainable economic power. Public diplomacy driven solely by image, without structural support, creates a fragile soft image that easily elicits sympathy but is challenging to sustain over the long term.

The promotion of halal cuisine can be viewed as a form of cultural commodification, a process in which cultural elements are produced, packaged, and sold in the global market. In this context, halal becomes a signifier that has been decontextualised from its original meaning. It is no longer merely an expression of faith, but a branding strategy governed by capitalist logic. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer pointed out, the culture industry tends to transform authentic values into mass-produced consumable products (Khandizaji & Caputi, 2021). In halal diplomacy, Islamic values that initially emphasised simplicity, social responsibility, and economic justice have been transformed into a glamorous and competitive consumer image. Migrations and diasporas, consciously or unconsciously, have become part of the global capitalist machine that exchanges spiritual values for symbolic and financial capital. However, to understand this phenomenon more complexly, it must be acknowledged that commodification does not always mean a degradation of meaning.

Commodification can be an effective strategy for expanding cultural and economic influence in certain contexts. Indonesia's halal culinary diplomacy, for example, provides an opportunity for the global community to learn about peaceful and inclusive Islamic values through an enjoyable and non-confrontational medium. When non-Muslim consumers enjoy chicken satay or rendang at Indonesian halal restaurants, they are not only purchasing food, but also engaging in cultural interactions that foster mutual understanding. In this case, commodification serves as an effective channel of soft power, provided it is conducted with ethical awareness and control over the narrative. This means that the issue is not whether halal is commercialised, but how it is commercialised and for what purpose.

Indonesia's halal culinary diplomacy today stands at the crossroads between culture and economy, between spirituality and the market. On the one hand, it demonstrates success in

building bridges between nations through taste and ethical values. On the other hand, it raises critical questions about the integrity of values when religion is used as a promotional tool. If halal diplomacy is carried out without reflection, there is a risk that all that will remain is the image of halal as a brand without spirit, culture without meaning. To avoid this, a balance must be struck between economic strategy and cultural responsibility. The state must ensure that the promotion of halal is not only aimed at increasing foreign exchange, but also at strengthening global awareness of the ethics, justice, and sustainability inherent in the concept of halal.

CONCLUSION

Indonesian diaspora halal cuisine is a subtle yet subversive form of cultural diplomacy, as it operates in an unconscious realm, yet changes global perceptions of Islam, Indonesia, and national identity through the power of taste. In every plate of rendang, satay, or gado-gado, there is a narrative of gentle Islam, open nationalism, and down-to-earth humanity. Halal cuisine proves that identity politics can be articulated without hard-line ideology, that nationalism can be conveyed without propaganda, and that values can be disseminated without coercion. However, there is also a tense paradox because amid commercialisation and globalisation, halal diplomacy risks losing its spirituality when halal is reduced to a market label and authenticity is turned into a sales strategy. This is the dilemma facing Indonesian civilisation today: between preserving meaning and selling it. In the future, Indonesia's halal culinary diplomacy will require the courage to go beyond mere cultural promotion to become a living practice of values, making halal not a slogan but an ethic, and not an image but a commitment to justice, sustainability, and humanity.

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