

Op-Ed

How nail polish has become a symbol of resistance for this Muslim woman

Azmia Magane opens up about forging a groundbreaking business partnership that pushes back against messages of intolerance

BY AZMIA MAGANE 06.16.17



FINGER NAILS POLISHED WITH #HALAPAIN (MUSLIMGIRL.COM)

Before Trump

Last summer, amidst campaign rhetoric around a “Muslim ban,” I was a blushing bride to be, preparing for my upcoming wedding in Morocco. The idea of a “Muslim ban” sounded so far-fetched and unconstitutional that, initially, I didn’t pay too much attention to it.

I was also pitching a nail polish collaboration to Orly Nails on behalf of MuslimGirl.com.

Despite the fact that capitalism is always looking for any way to make a buck, Muslim women – and Muslims in general — are overlooked and underrepresented in mainstream American industries.

Finding modest but fashionable clothing is difficult, especially amidst spring and summer offerings. (But now Dolce & Gabbana has Muslim women covered, literally — the company introduced D&G abayas last summer, but not in the American market.)

Discovering that your favorite sweet treat has pork in it is a major bummer. (Haribo and the people who make Rice Krispy treats, are you reading this? Email me, please!)

Making little tweaks to products or offering an alternate formulation that eliminates pork and/or alcohol to make the product *halal* (Arabic for “permissible”) for American Muslim consumers would result in companies being able to tap into previously untapped markets with [major spending power](#) across many industries.

When people think of halal, they immediately think of food. Halal food is a [\\$20 billion industry in America](#), but the halal industry itself is much bigger than food, and includes beauty products, medicines, household goods, and other everyday necessities.

Halal nail polish was something that I’d always struggled to find. With my wedding coming up, I was trying to find the perfect polish. About two weeks before I was leaving for Morocco, I saw that my favorite brand, Orly, had launched a new line called Breathable. The polishes were vegan and cruelty-free. No alcohol, no pork. I was ecstatic!

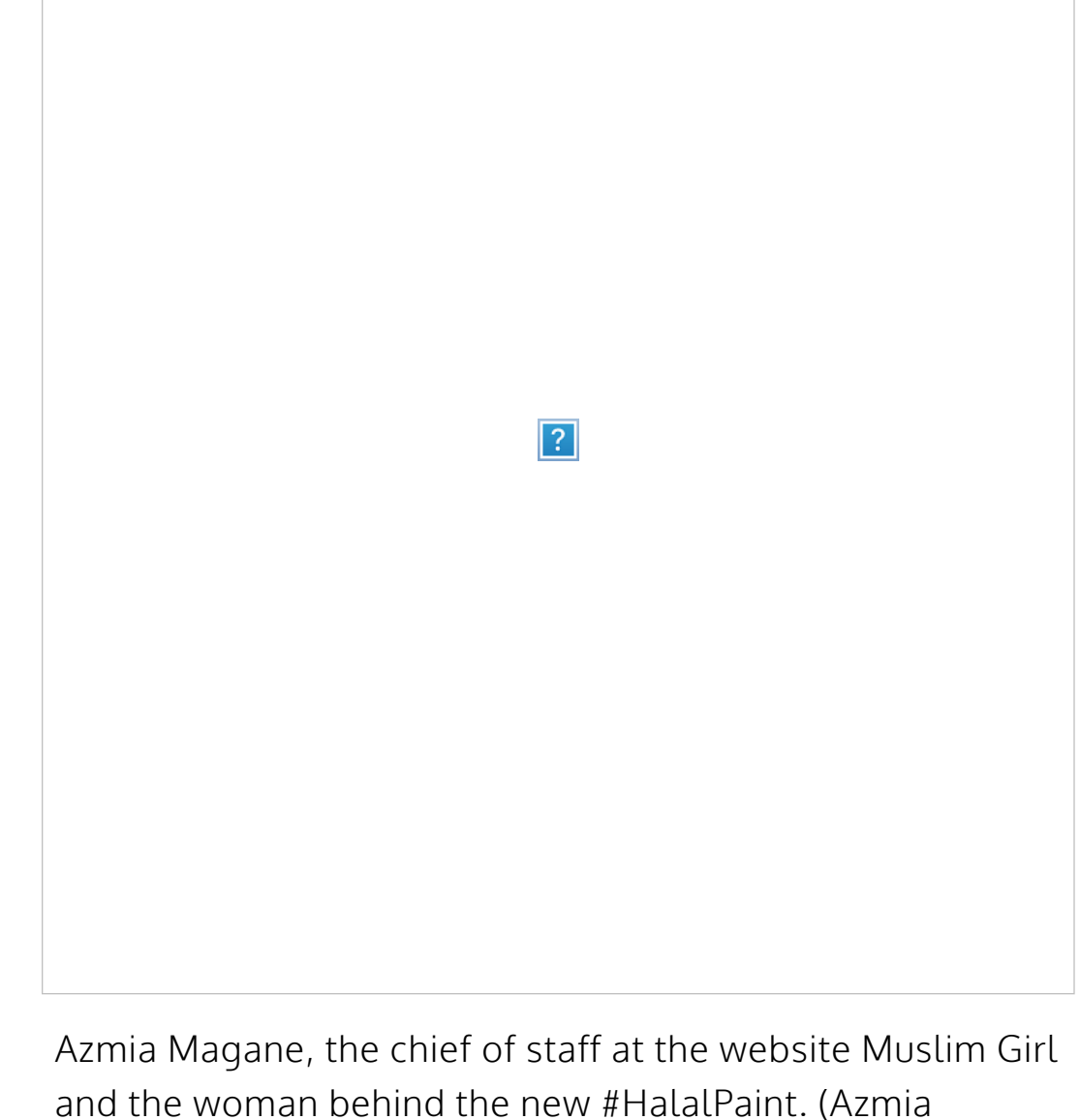
But the polishes had another unique feature that excited me even more. The unique feature of Orly’s Breathable formula is that it allows oxygen and moisture to reach the nail. This is super important because some Muslim women believe that the ablutions (ritual washing) we perform before every prayer don’t count if there are barriers that stop water from making contact. Traditionally-formulated nail polishes are thought to create a barrier that prevents ablution water from touching the nail, usually making it a no-go.

I also had an idea. If I was this excited, I was sure that other Muslim women would be, too. I knew that I wasn’t the only one frustrated by the lack of inclusivity in the beauty industry or mainstream American industries, and what better way to change that than to lead the charge and the conversation? Why not start a conversation and pitch a collaboration between Orly x Muslim Girl that would cater to Muslim women? I reached out to Orly before I left for Morocco.

After Trump

Now, almost a year later, my vision has come to life with [#HalalPaint](#), a six-color capsule collection from Orly and Muslim Girl, released earlier this month. The partnership is groundbreaking in that it’s the first collaboration by a mainstream American brand that’s designed to cater to Muslims.

Initially, my vision was about beauty inclusivity for Muslim women. The product having been brought to market is one of the proudest moments of my life and it means so much more to me than I could have ever imagined.



Azmia Magane, the chief of staff at the website Muslim Girl and the woman behind the new #HalalPaint. (Azmia Magane)

Over the past year, I’ve heard Muslims spoken about, and to, as if our only contribution to society is within the context of national security and terrorism. I’ve watched politicians have higher expectations of Moe (real name Mohammed) from the halal food truck on the corner, expecting him to do a better job of thwarting violence than trained intelligence and law enforcement agencies, which is just ridiculous. Politicians and pundits frequently pressure our community to “condemn” things and/or “report” things, and **we do**.

Omar Mateen, the Pulse shooter, had been [investigated by the FBI twice](#). Salman Abedi, the Manchester bomber, had been [reported by his own family and others in the Muslim community](#); he was [reported five times!](#) There are reports that [at least one of the London Bridge attackers](#) had been reported twice — once by a friend. He was a known extremist who was actually (irresponsibly) [given a platform by the media for his hate](#). If the FBI or law enforcement can’t do anything to stop it, how can anyone expect us — private citizens — to do a better job than them?!

I have been blamed for things I had nothing to do with — and asked to apologize. I have been asked or told to condemn things that it should go without saying are reprehensible — shouldn’t *any* loss of innocent life be condemned and abhorred?

I have grieved for and been heartbroken for people I’ve never met all across the world, and I have grieved for my community, Orlando, Florida, in the wake of multiple mass shootings over the past year.

Since Donald Trump has taken office, I’ve been told some pretty awful things both online and in person. My physical safety has been threatened a few times over. I’ve been told to “Go back to Iraq,” when I’m not even Iraqi — I’m thinking that’s perhaps the only country in the Middle East that individual could name offhand.

I’ve been told to “go back” to my country, when I was born here — in a military hospital, no less. I’ve been told to take the “towel” or the “rag” or the “sack” off my head, because “This is America, and America is a Christian country.” I’ve been told, “F**ck you, Muslim,” in the workplace, and called a “terrorist” by a man who was wearing a shirt that read “Muhammad Ali is the greatest.”

I’ve listened to the man now somehow in charge of the country say that “Islam hates us” and talk about his Muslim ban. I’ve watched him blame Saudi Arabia for 9/11, then turn around and agree to sell its government [billions of dollars in weaponry](#). I’ve received threats of genocide and messages saying that Muslim should leave on our own accord to avoid violence against us. I spend many sleepless nights thinking about Muslim bans and the possibility of internment camps, for which there is a frightening legal precedent due to [this 1944 Supreme Court ruling that’s never been overturned](#).

Today, I spend another day of Ramadan without my husband, and I break my fast alone. It’s our first Ramadan together as a married couple, but he’s in Morocco and I’m in the U.S. I haven’t seen him for two months now, and I don’t know when I’ll get to see him again. I’ve had four surgeries since December — the fourth one was just this past week — and my requests for my husband’s visa to be expedited have gone unanswered, despite our attorney’s persistence and Congressional inquiries on our behalf. Sometimes I want to move to Morocco, but I can’t bear to leave my grandmother, who raised me, behind. She is the only halal that I’ve ever known and I don’t know how to be without her.

Today, I see this nail polish collaboration as something bigger than myself, and Orly x Muslim Girl. In this collaboration, I see the future: I see the kind of legacy and world I want to leave behind for my future children, a future where there’s something for everyone, options for all, and everyone is invited to the table and to the conversation.

Some people don’t seem to understand that we can be American and be Muslim, too. They don’t seem to understand that Muslims are not a homogenous, monolithic population, who all hail from the Middle East. Muslims have been part of this Land before America even existed, and have been part of America throughout its existence.

I’ve always believed in beauty as being a force for good in the world, but I never imagined that a nail polish could be so symbolic or politically-charged. My hands may be small, but they can build bridges, shatter ceilings, and tear down walls. And it doesn’t hurt that my nails look good while I’m doing it.

Today, I see this nail polish as part of #TheResistance. It’s for Muslim women, by Muslim women, in collaboration with a mainstream American beauty brand. It is our way of taking up space at a time when we are excluded, when others want to completely erase us. It’s a way of celebrating ourselves when our very existence is an act of resistance. It is my way of building bridges in mainstream America when others are talking about bans and building walls.

Azmia Magane is the chief of staff at [Muslim Girl](#), the largest website for Muslim women in the West. Follow her [on Twitter here](#).

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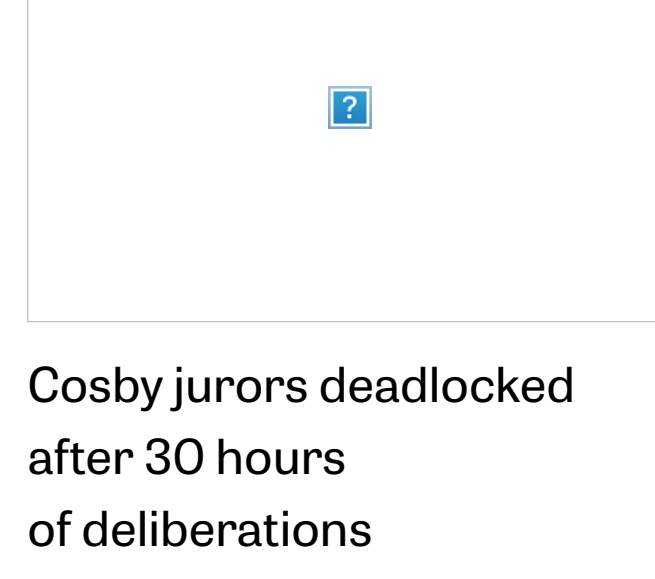
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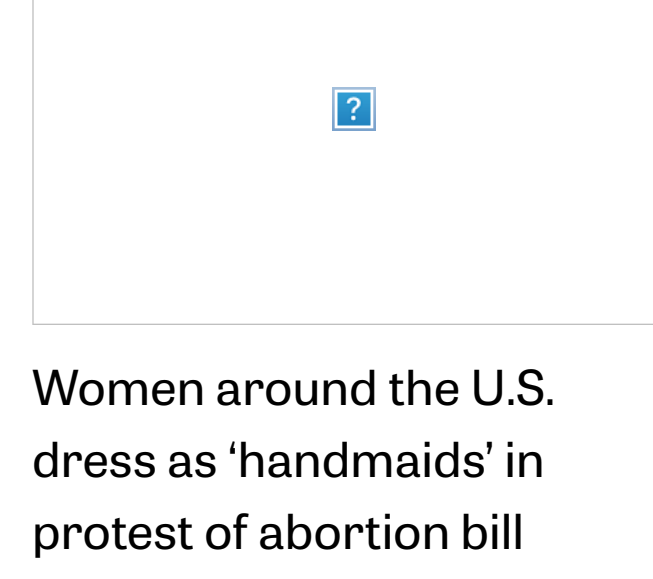
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