

# The halal creams that let Muslim faces glow

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**When Layla Mandi failed to find cosmetics consistent with her Muslim faith, she developed her own range, which goes on sale this month. Nicole Hill / The National**

DUBAI // As a freelance make-up artist, Layla Mandi was shocked to discover three years ago that many cosmetics contain animal residues, including pig products. Since then, she has spent her time developing her own halal skin care range.

Now a self-employed businesswoman, Miss Mandi, 32, hopes to fill what she sees as a gap in the cosmetics industry for Muslim women in the region.

"I am providing a service to women who want an alternative," she said. "Some people don't care what is in their skin products or how they are produced, but for those who do I think there should be options."

Miss Mandi, a Muslim convert, started her make-up career in her native Canada when she was 17. At the time she was surrounded by Muslim families and she started exploring the Islamic faith.

As the years passed and she became more adept in her field, she began to look beyond the labels of the products she was using every day, and realised that the ingredients of many creams, lotions and make-up items did not fit with her idea of Islam.

In many brands she found animal by-products such as blood, urine, fats, gelatine from horns and hooves, swine placenta and stearic acid, a fatty substance derived from the stomach lining, often of pigs.

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (Peta), the international animal rights organisation, confirmed the use of these substances in its consumer's guide to living, which says: "Slaughterhouses must dispose of the by-products of billions of animals every year. The solution is selling them to food and cosmetics manufacturers."

Also, unless specified otherwise the fats in glycerine, keratin and collagen, all commonly found in cosmetics, are from tallow, which is produced at animal rendering plants where carcasses are ground down and melted to extract the residual fat.

"When I read all of this I found it disgusting," said Miss Mandi. "I certainly did not want to put it on my skin where it would get absorbed into my body. I wanted to find an alternative."

In 2006, she moved to Morocco to find out more about Islam and the lifestyle of Muslims.

"I assumed, just as in the food sector, there would be plenty of halal cosmetics for Muslim women. But I suddenly realised there were none," she said.

"In fact, people either didn't know or didn't care that the cream they were putting on their face had pig and other animal derivatives in it. I decided to try to make my own."

The following year Miss Mandi moved to Dubai to research the shopping habits of Arab and Muslim women, and to develop her products she hired a chemist and a dermatologist in Canada.

"It felt natural for me to pursue this," she said. "Skin products are my passion. I love moisturiser; it makes my skin feel better, look better I love the packaging and the way things feel and smell.

"My way of life as a Muslim was also really important to me, so to find something which combined the two was great."

Halal cosmetics are not a new idea. According to The Halal Journal, approximately US\$150 million (Dh551m) worth of halal products pass through the UAE every year, a large proportion being cosmetics and personal care items. But they are not readily available to consumers. At the Halal Expo 2008, Raees Ahmed, the director of the event's organising company, said there was "an excellent opportunity for halal cosmetics players to take advantage of the booming demand."

A recent survey by KasehDia Research Consulting, the company that organises the World Halal Forum in Malaysia, said 57.6 per cent of Muslims in Singapore and 37.7 per cent in Indonesia, both emerging markets, were aware of halal cosmetics and would buy them if they were available.

Ahmad Azudin, senior manager for halal standards and systems at the International Halal Integrity Alliance (IHI) in Malaysia, said: "There is a growing demand for these products and an increasing awareness with consumers about animal contamination.

"It is not just the porcine products that cause a problem for Muslims. There are a lot of lipsticks that contain blood, which is considered also impure."

In response, Mr Azudin and his team are working on implementing an international halal standard for cosmetics by the end of next year.

"It is one of 10 areas we are focusing on," he said. "We are developing production standards for skin care, hair care, oral products and fragrance in compliance with the Sharia board at the IHI.

"There will be strict guidelines to follow and this will give confidence to all consumers."

Mr Ahmad added that halal products were also becoming popular with non-Muslim buyers.

"They are clean, wholesome and there are no impurities that go into the manufacturing process. Everyone, not just Muslims, likes the idea of that," he said.

Consumer opinion in the UAE was mixed as to whether using products with animal derivatives was haram.

"I'm of the opinion that if you are not eating it, it is OK," said Anisa Alkos, a full-time mother living in Abu Dhabi. Obviously I'd rather not put anything on my body that contained pig fat, but there is nothing to make it clear."

In the May issue of last year's Halal Journal, Kamarul Kamaruzaman, its managing editor, wrote that "due to its biological similarities to human placenta and its excellent skin healing properties, swine placenta is considered to be the darling of the cosmetics industry".

Some Islamic scholars, he wrote, cited the change of state of the product, or istihala in Arabic, as the central argument for accepting the use of gelatine and cosmetics.

However, according to the mufti at the official fatwa call centre of the UAE, pork products in any state are "absolutely haram".

"Everything from the pig is rejected," he said. "We can't eat it, buy it, sell it, wear the leather or even touch the animal.

"It is nejes [dirty or impure] and we can't use it on our body, a person will then not be in a state of purity fit to pray."

Hanna Jaffer, 25, is one consumer who said she would be changing her habits for good.

"I was shocked when I heard how they make skin creams. I don't think it will be OK to use, however much it is sanitised or changes form," she said.

"Our religion disallows it and from now on I will only be using halal products."

Miss Mandi's One Pure Skin Care range will go on sale at the 50 Degrees boutique in the Souk Al Bahar in Dubai, on Saudi Arabian Airlines and online at the start of Ramadan later this month.

Although her products, which include eye cream, moisturiser, cleanser and toner, were initially certified by the Malaysian authorities, they are now being produced and given halal certification in Italy.