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## **Religion and Everyday Consumption Ethics: A Moral Economy Approach**

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### **Abstract**

As research on ethical consumers and consumption practices has continued to grow, a complimentary body of work concerned less with ethical consumption but more with ethics in consumption has emerged. Problematizing the divide between ethical and non-ethical consumption, this stream of research focuses on the domain of everyday and explores the moral struggles individuals face while engaging in ordinary consumption practices. However, the attention on the ordinary runs the risk of obscuring the contribution of the 'extraordinary' or the transcendental to the ethical concerns embedded in the mundane flow of the everyday. This study addresses this blind spot and explores the ways in which religion is implicated in everyday consumption ethics. In doing so, I go beyond a view of religion as an individual trait and emphasize its role as a major institutional structure of the contemporary political economy. The empirical context of the study is the controversy over the so-called halal nail polish. The debate over the products' appropriateness for Muslim women provides a fertile setting to explore how an ordinary object becomes an ethical problem amid changing relations between religion and market. In order to trace and analyze the linkages between daily practices and institutional dynamics I draw from the moral economy framework and discuss the multiple and conflicting moral repertoires that shape the ethical evaluations of the object. The study offers several contributions to the existing theorizations of everyday consumption ethics and moral economies of consumption. It also highlights the potential of interdisciplinary approaches in providing a holistic understanding of the ethical and moral dimensions of consumption.

### **Religion and Everyday Consumption Ethics: A Moral Economy Approach**

The rise of consumption as a major force shaping the contemporary world has generated multi-disciplinary research interest on its ethical and moral dimensions (Barnett, Cloke, Clarke and Malpass 2011; Carrier and Luetchford 2012; Harrison, Newholm, and Shaw 2005; Lewis and Potter 2011; Shaw, Carrington and Chatzidakis 2016). The term ethical consumption has been used to describe a range of issues, practices and discourses related with green consumption (Moisander 2007), sustainable consumption (Connolly and Prothero 2003), political consumption (Stolle, Hooghe, and Micheletti 2005), anti-consumption (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007), voluntary simplicity (Shaw and Newholm 2002), fair trade (Doran 2009; Ozcaglar-Toulouse, Shiu, and Shaw 2006) and downshifting (Schor 1998). In general, ethical consumption is understood as engaging in purchase, usage and disposition behaviours that aim to minimize harm to people, animals and the environment (Harrison et al. 2005). Acting ethically is thought to require making changes in lifestyle and avoiding unethical choices (Clark 2006).

As research on ethical consumers and consumption practices has continued to grow, a complimentary body of work concerned less with ethical consumption but more with 'ethics in consumption' has emerged (e.g., Adams and Raisborough 2010; Ariztia, Agloni and Pellandini-Simanyi 2018; Barnett, Cafaro and Newholm 2005; Barnett, Cloke, Clarke and Malpass 2011; Clarke, Cloke, Barnett and Malpass 2008; Hall 2011; Pellandini-Simanyi 2014; Popke 2006). Problematizing the divide between ethical and non-ethical forms of consumption, this stream of research places the analytical attention on the ethical concerns embedded in everyday shopping and consumption practices. Underlying this focus is an understanding that consumption is always a moral matter and "all consumer behaviour, however ordinary and routine, is likely to be shaped by diverse values of caring for other people and concern for fairness" (Barnett, Cafaro and Newholm 2005, p. 17; Miller 1998;

Wilk 2001). Investigations of everyday consumption ethics reveal the multitude of moral regimes that guide daily consumption practices and the complex ethical struggles that consumers encounter in conducting their day-to-day lives.

The notion of ordinary plays an essential role in the conceptualizations of everyday consumption ethics. Implicit in this approach is an ordinariness both in terms of the objects of care and the practices of caring (Clarke et al. 2008; Daya 2016). Ethical sensibilities may infuse mundane consumption practices, such as grocery shopping or dining with family, and any product can become entangled in ethical considerations that are central to people's life – to be a good mother, a respected colleague, a proper husband. However, the notion of ordinary also implies “an ethics that is relatively tacit, grounded in agreement rather than rule, in practice rather than knowledge or belief, and happening without calling undue attention to itself” (Lambek 2010, p. 2). As such, in extending the realm of ethical consumption, the focus on the ordinary runs the risk of obscuring the contribution of the ‘extraordinary’ or the transcendental to the ethical concerns embedded in the mundane flow of the everyday. Religion, in particular, with its explicitly formulated norms and principles, seems to occupy a space outside the immanence of the everyday (Robbins 2016) and remains marginalized in the study of everyday ethics of consumption.

The goal of this research is to address this blind spot and explore the ways in which religion is implicated in everyday consumption ethics. In doing so, I go beyond a view of religion as an individual trait (Vittel, Paolillo and Singh 2005) and emphasize its role as a major institutional structure of the contemporary political economy. A growing body of work in anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, geography and marketing reports “the emergence of forms of religio-ethno-economic practice which are completely integral to consumer capitalism” (Gauthier, Martikainen, and Woodhead 2013, p. 269). Studies covering a broad spectrum of contexts, from Pentecostal movements to new age spirituality, mega churches,

and Islamic fashion, identify new practices and expressions of piety that are informed by both religious sensibilities and market dynamics (e.g., Casanova 2001; Comaroff and Comaroff 2001; Connell 2005; Fischer 2009; Hefner 2010; Ignatow, Johnson and Madanipour 2014; Jafari and Sürdem 2012; Lewis 2010; Redden 2016; Robbins 2010; Rudnyckyj 2009; Sandikci and Ger 2010; Thomas 2009). However, as religious and market logics interpenetrate, the everyday spaces of consumption also become sites of contestation in which ethical dilemmas and negotiations over faith and profit play out.

I explore the place of religion in everyday consumption ethics through a study of the controversy over the so-called halal nail polish. As I discuss in detail, the nail polish case provides a fertile empirical context to explore how an ordinary object becomes an ethical problem amid changing relations between religion and the market. The debate about the product's appropriateness for Muslim women draws attention to the complex relations between collective hegemonic moral frameworks and individual interests and sensibilities and the ways these interactions shape the ethical evaluations of an object. Mapping out and analysing the linkages between daily practices and institutional dynamics necessitate an interdisciplinary perspective that allows for studying everyday ethics from multiple vantage points. The moral economy framework, with its emphasis on the interactions between the microsocial and the macrosocial, provides a suitable analytical tool to study such linkages.

While it has been long accepted that there is a moral underpinning to all economic activity (Granovetter 1985; Polanyi 1957[1944]; Smith 2010[1759]; Weber 1976), the concept of moral economy is commonly attributed to the British historian Edward P. Thompson. In his seminal 1971 article on the food riots in eighteenth-century England, Thompson used the notion to designate the set of social norms and obligations that justified in the eyes of the poor people their protest against what they deemed as unfair market prices. Thompson's conceptualization emphasized the breach of shared understandings of how an economy

should work and the subsequent social mobilization that sought to restore previous proper economic arrangements. As such, it has provided a productive framework to investigate the dynamic relations between norms, values, obligations and economic practices at the moments of crises and transitions. However, despite its potential, the moral economy approach has remained underutilized in the study of consumption ethics (e.g., Berndt and Boeckler 2011; Goodman 2004; Jackson, Ward and Russell 2009; Trentmann 2007; Wheeler 2014, 2017a,b). In these rare applications, the analytical attention has focused on understanding how moralities shape and are shaped by economic practices rather than the clash between different conceptualizations of what constitute proper, fair and legitimate economic practices. In this study, I draw from the recent debates in anthropology and sociology regarding the epistemic potential of the moral economy framework and discuss ethical problematization of the nail polish as a manifestation of the contestation between different moral economies shaped by conflicting understandings of religiously appropriate economic practices. As I demonstrate, different perceptions of what constitutes just, legitimate and proper economic practices construe the nail polish simultaneously as morally problematic and acceptable.

In the remaining of the article, I first briefly discuss the original conceptualization of moral economy, its subsequent uses, and the debates over its theoretical boundaries. I then review the recently introduced framework of moral economies of consumption and evaluate its potential and limitations. Next, I explain the research setting and the methodological procedures followed in data collection and analysis. After I present the findings, I discuss the contributions the study makes to the research on everyday consumption ethics and moral economies of consumption. I conclude by highlighting the potential of interdisciplinary approaches in providing a holistic understanding of the ethical and moral dimensions of consumption.

## **Moral Economy**

The term ‘moral economy’, which first appeared in the eighteenth century (Götz 2015), became popular after the publication of E. P. Thompson’s 1971 essay ‘The Moral Economy of the English Crowd’. Thompson developed the concept to make sense of the social strife in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Britain. He criticized the historical accounts that explained the food riots of the period as reactions of hungry masses to unemployment and increasing food prices. Instead, he argued that the riots were responses of poor people to what they saw as a violation of shared social norms and values by the government and intermediaries (i.e., bakers, millers). According to Thompson, the actions of the rioters were informed by a:

“popular consensus as to what were legitimate and what were illegitimate practices in marketing, milling, baking, etc. This in its turn was grounded upon a consistent traditional view of social norms and obligations, of the proper economic functions of several parties within the community, which, taken together, can be said to constitute the moral economy of the poor.” (1971, p.79)

In Thompson’s original use, the concept of moral economy is concerned with people’s reactions toward the transition from a system of provision shaped by paternalist institutions to an emerging political economy defined by free market policies. The historically contingent customs, which are tied together by a consensus of entitlements and fair practices, connect communities of people and foster social and ethical ties. Hence, the development and expansion of an economic system that is perceived as threatening existing values, relationships and shared understandings of proper market activities can trigger counter-movements that aim to defend traditional customs, obligations and rights.

Following Thompson, the moral economy approach was initially used to explore resistance against oppressive and unjust economic arrangements (Scott 1976). However, in the coming decades, two additional applications have emerged. First, the concept has been

utilized to describe ‘alternative’ or ‘informal’ provisioning systems, such as fair trade, organic food or just tourism, that develop as a reaction to the capitalist market (e.g., Hultsman 1995; Maye, Holloway, Kneafsey 2007; De Sardan 1999; Fridell, 2006; Goodman, 2004; Trentmann, 2007). Second, the growing interest in values and norms has led to a focus on the relationship between morals and markets in general. From this perspective, moral economy is understood as “the study of the ways in which economic activities ... are influenced by moral-political norms and sentiments, and how, conversely, those norms are compromised by economic forces” (Sayer 2000, p.80).

In this later use, the concept of moral economy becomes an approximate synonym of Polanyian embeddedness (Hann 2018). That is, it serves as a heuristic tool to understand the ways in which different economies are more or less embedded in moral systems (Palomera and Vetta 2016). However, many scholars criticize the reorientation of the domain of moral economy to a study of morality of markets (e.g., Carrier 2018; Edelman 2005; Fassin 2009). Thompson (1991) himself cautions against equating the concept simply with values without due emphasis to the political culture or ‘mentalité’ connected to it. Reminding that the original thrust of the concept rests on the dialectics of control and rebellion, Thompson underlines the moments of transition that ruptures the popular consensus about legitimate and illegitimate practices of exchange. Hence, if taken out of the context of a particular historical formation with its unique configuration of socio-political dynamics, the concept of moral economy loses its specificity (Götz 2015).

In line with these observations, recent scholarship in anthropology and sociology aims to revive the overlooked dimensions of Thompson’s original conceptualization and link popular understandings of social justice, moral obligations, rights and entitlements, and changes therein, to structural inequalities generated by particular forms of capital accumulation (e.g., Kofti 2016; Kuever 2019; Simoni 2016). This reorientation suggests that



the analysis of moral economy “advocates a grounded understanding of the more abstract and global political-economy processes” and at the same time “historicizes the everyday realm of observation by accounting for class-informed dispositions in a particular time and space” (Palomera and Vetta 2016, p. 415). This double mission allows for exploring individuals’ daily struggles over the boundaries of good and acceptable practices as well as the power relationships and institutional structures that might inform them.

Overall, by linking the microsocial and the macrosocial, the moral economy approach provides a framework to explore how perceptions, sensibilities and sentiments that inform ‘proper’ economic behaviour are intertwined with larger social, historical and political issues. The focus on consensus as well as confrontation and resistance allows for studying processes of continuity and change. The strength of the framework lies in its capacity to account for the norms, values, obligations that guide and sustain everyday exchange practices by looking at “the dynamic fields of struggle around the boundaries of what is good and acceptable, their power hierarchies and the political projects they might inform” (Palomera and Vetta 2016, p. 415). As such, it constitutes a useful analytical lens to explore how institutional dynamics interact with everyday meanings and sensibilities and shape the ethical evaluations of ordinary consumption objects and practices.

### **Moral Economies of Consumption**

Despite its potential, the moral economy concept remains mostly overlooked in the marketing and business fields (for exceptions, Bolton et al. 2012; Bolton and Laaser 2013; Vallejo and Langa 2010; Wheeler 2017a). Bolton and her colleagues formulate a moral economy approach to workplace research based on the works of Polanyi, Thompson and Sayer, (Bolton et al. 2012; Bolton and Laaser 2013). As they explain, Polanyi’s (1957[1944]) work “captures the ubiquitous tension between a stable, moral and human society and the

economic practices of self-regulating markets” (Bolton and Laaser 2013, p. 509).

Thompson’s (1971) focus on collective consciousness enables studying people’s shared understandings. And, Sayer’s notion of lay normativities – questions about “what is of value, how to live, what is worth striving for and what is not” (Sayer 2005, p.6) – allows for accounting individuals’ everyday ethical dilemmas. According to the authors, bringing these three analytical strands together creates a holistic moral economy framework “within which state and organization policies can be examined, revealing their institutional and normative dimensions and the individual lives, relationships and communities that are created, supported or destroyed” (ibid. p. 520).

Wheeler adopts Bolton et al.’s framework to the consumption domain (Wheeler 2014, 2017a, b). She proposes a three-layered analysis that explores the ways state regulation of the economy, collective customs and discourses, and lay normativities of consumers shape moral economies of consumption within a distinct institutional system of provision. The framework seeks to account for how “moralities of consumption are both formatted through institutional frameworks and shaped everyday by actors from within” (Wheeler 2017a, pp.1-2). For example, in her analysis of the moral economy of recycling, she discusses the ways moralities about environment influence state policies and devices about recycling, and how these, in turn, incentivize environmental moralities. She then shows how communities, professionals and expert voices enforce and challenge state regulation and mobilize new understandings and moralities. She also demonstrates that consumers’ own moral evaluations can meet or run up against moral agendas and policies pursued by the state and other organizations. Hence, the moral economy framework reveals the series of interactions and interdependencies between individuals, communities and political-economic structures through which new moralities and visions of appropriate consumption practices emerge.

Overall, Wheeler's framework, with its focus on the macro, meso and micro level actors and negotiations, offers many important insights into understanding "how morals and markets are co-constituted" (Wheeler 2017b, p.17). However, in conceptualizing moral economy as the interactions between moral-political norms and sentiments and economic activities and arrangements (Sayer 2000), Wheeler aligns with the stream of research that treats the concept as a heuristic tool to explore how moral principles intertwine and interact with economic practices. Hence, despite its potential as a systematic way to study "the place of morality within the economy" (Wheeler 2017b, 19), the framework also raises a number of issues.

First, in Thompson's conceptualization, the analysis of moral economy emphasizes the breach of shared understandings in moments of transition and the ensuing social mobilization to restore the norms, customary duties and communal solidarities that are perceived to be threatened by an emerging moral economy. In Wheeler's approach, on the other hand, the analytical attention shifts from exploring disruption of consensus to connecting practices to moral norms and evaluations. However, while morality is always embedded in the market and, analytically, all economies are moral economies (Sayer 2000), "the epistemic value of the concept [moral economy] becomes conspicuous in times of crises" (Zitko 2018, p.74). The attention to moments of transition can reveal the ways multiple moral economies coexist with and contest each other and how social actors coalesce and form alliances to mobilize norms and moral evaluations for attainment of a particular consensus.

Second, Wheeler positions the state as the supreme actor in "upholding moral principles and distributing benefits and sanctions based on law and citizenship" (Wheeler 2017a, p.5). However, while state plays an important role in organizing society through rationalization and regulation of activities, there are other institutional orders that shape

individual and societal interests and preferences (Alford and Friedland 1985). As Alford and Friedland explain, society can be understood as an inter-institutional system comprising theoretically distinct normative structures, such as state, market, religion, family. Each of these provides material and symbolic resources “by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their daily activity” (Thornton, Ocasio and Lounsbury 2012, p. 51). Incorporating different institutional orders into the analyses of moral economies can allow for understanding how normative structures are implicated in moral evaluations.

Third, in Wheeler’s framework, meso level actors, such as communities, movements and professionals, play an important role in mobilizing collective customs and critical discourses. However, because her interest lies in understanding the ways collective and organized actors moralize the market, how such actors emerge in the first place and assume authority in shaping moralities remain overlooked. Recently, scholars have drawn attention to diverse ways in which expertise is mobilized and articulated in moral economies (Newmann and Clarke 2018; Stubbs 2018; Stubbs and Zitko 2018). Highlighting the shifting, unstable and flexible nature of expertise, these studies call for “a conjunctural understanding of expertise” that attends to “the ways in which formations of expertise become stabilized and de-stabilized, vulnerable to challenge and contestation and comes to appear as neutral” (Newmann and Clarke 2018, p. 40). As such, exploring which actors emerge as experts and why can enrich existing understandings of how perceptions of legitimate and illegitimate practices are assembled and reassembled in moral economies.

In sum, Wheeler’s framework offers an important contribution to understanding how moralities of consumption develop through the interactions of different actors. However, as the analytical focus falls on the effects of morals on markets, the contestations between different moral frameworks remain overlooked. In other words, we learn how consumption

practices change as moralities change but we do not know why a consumption practice becomes morally contested at a particular point in time. In this study, I propose a moral economy approach to everyday consumption ethics that is attentive to the dimensions of Thompson's original conceptualization. Specifically, I focus my attention on the moments of conflict between different moral economies and trace the ways objects/consumption practices get entangled in opposing views of what constitute appropriate economic practices at a particular socio-temporal context.

## **Methodology**

### ***Research Setting***

The empirical context of the study is the controversy over the so-called halal nail polish. Halal refers to goods/acts that are allowed for Muslims according to the Islamic law. Wearing nail enamel is a contentious issue for pious Muslim women due its effect on performing *wudu* (ablution) – a ritualized body cleansing process that every Muslim should undertake before prayer. Because nail polish sets a permanent barrier between water and nail preventing water reach every part of the hand, it has to be removed before ablution. This severely limits the use of the product. Many practicing Muslim women never wear nail polish; some wear it only during their menstrual period when they are not required to pray. Others use it in between praying times; put it on only to take it off in a couple of hours.

Recently, an innovative nail polish that allows water permeability became available. Although not developed with the Muslim consumer segment in mind, the product captured the attention of Muslims. Soon after, several other brands using similar technology entered the market. Among the prominent so-called halal nail polish brands are the UK based Nailberry, Canada based Tuesday in Love, USA based Acquarella, Orly, Maya, Amara and 786, UAE based Hand Lyn, and Malaysia based Modern Inai. The proliferation of brands has

signalled addition of nail polish to the growing halal cosmetics industry. However, the emerging product category has also generated a lively online debate, suggesting the existence of multiple, contradictory and shifting moral frameworks.

### ***Data Collection***

Data were collected through a combination of archival and netnographic methods. Data collection began in May 2016 and continued intermittently until April 2019. Table 1 provides a list of data sources and examples for each source type. Given the interest in understanding both individuals' perceptions and opinions and the macrosocial dynamics shaping the market for halal offerings, a wide variety of data sources were utilized (Table 1).

--- Insert Table 1 about here ---

To better understand the broader context, I first reviewed books and reports on the emergence and development of the halal market. These included academic as well as trade publications. Among the key texts that provided a historically and economically situated understanding of the halal market are Johan Fischer's (2011) *The Halal Frontier: Muslim Consumers in a Globalized Market*, Abdullahi Ayan's (2013) *Accessing the Global Halal Market*, Florence Bergeaud-Blackler, Johan Fischer and John B. Lever's (2016) *Halal Matters: Islam, Politics and Markets in Global Perspective*, and Faegheh Shirazi's (2016) *Brand Islam: The Marketing and Commodification of Piety*. Industry reports, on the other hand, offered insights into key trends and players shaping the halal and statistics on market size and growth rates. Examples include A.T. Kearney's (2007) *Addressing the Muslim Market*, Ogilvy and Mather's (2010) *Brands, Islam and the New Muslim Consumer*, Economist Intelligence Unit's (2012) *The Sharia-Conscious Consumer: Driving Demand*, and Thomson Reuter's (2018/2019) *State of the Global Islamic Economy*.

The archival data collected also included articles drawn from newspapers and fashion magazines. Online search was conducted using terms such as “halal nail polish”, “breathable nail polish”, “water permeable nail polish”, “halal cosmetics”, “halal makeup”. The search yielded hundreds of potentially relevant articles. After scanning, the most relevant ones were saved for further analysis. As search and scanning processes continued, several brand names emerged. The online search was expanded to include terms such as “Inglot”, “Tuesday in Love”, “Acqueralla”, “Maya”, “Orly” and “786”. The articles emerged during this second stage were also scanned and the relevant ones were saved for analysis. Lastly, archival data were amassed by visiting the websites of the brands identified in the previous research. The websites provided insights about the brands’ and/or founders’ origins, history and aspirations.

In order to understand the nature of the controversy surrounding the product and identify different frames that underlie the debate over its appropriateness, I complemented archival data with netnographic analysis. I conducted an observational netnography (Kozinets 2010). That is, I collected data by recording online interactions that have already occurred and did not participate in the conversations. In line with Kozinets’ (2010) guidelines, I sought online contexts that related to my research focus, had a flow of communications between different participants, and were data-rich. Archival material and further online searches directed towards potential forums, blogs and videos that met these criteria. After screening several sites, 6 forums, 9 blogs, and 7 videos that contained relevant and ample conversations and threads were selected to be included in the data set.

### ***Research Ethics***

The availability of digital online technologies has brought new challenges to research ethics (Sugiura, Wiles and Pope, 2017). New data spaces, such as forums, blogs, webpages and social network sites, require rethinking of the established ethical principles of informed

consent, privacy, and anonymity. In general, scholars differentiate between private and public online sites and suggest that if content is available with open access, then it is acceptable to proceed without getting permission from the author/commentator (Kozinets, 2015; Wu and Pearce, 2014). While it might not always be possible to determine if people are aware of the public status of their contributions, the changing meanings and expectations of privacy suggest that people may be more open to the possibility of being observed online (Frankel and Siang, 1999). However, although content might be publicly available, existing guidelines emphasize that the original authors are not clearly identifiable in the final write-up of the research. These insights and recommendations have informed my data collection, analysis and reporting processes. Specifically, all data were collected from publicly available and manually accessed online sites. None of these sites required registration to access content. I only used data that existed online and did not engage in any intervention to generate new data. In my write-up, I provided information about the sites from which quotes were obtained but omitted any reference to authors.

### ***Data Analysis***

Data analysis followed the principles of grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin 1990). I began by qualitatively analysing the archival dataset. Using open coding, I analysed data by going back and forth between parts and the whole of each text and between each text and the entire dataset. The themes produced were categorized using axial coding. This stage helped identify an initial set of social and institutional dynamics that appeared to shape marketplace interactions. The same procedure was applied for the netnographic data, as a result of which an initial set of themes framing the debate over the nail polish was identified. This was followed by an iterative process of moving back and forth between broader dynamics and personal experiences until a holistic understanding emerged. The systematic



process of constant comparison enabled identification of patterns and relationships among different sources of data and across data and literature.

In presenting the findings, I first explain how the nail polish has emerged as a contested object and, then, discuss the key frames that underlie the debate. In order to stay true to the emic nature of the data, spelling errors and grammatical mistakes remain uncorrected.

## **Findings**

### *The Nail Polish Fatwa*

In fall 2009, the Polish cosmetics company Inglot launched O2M, a revolutionary breathable line of nail polish. According to the company website, the product was created specifically for health reasons and designed as a better alternative to standard nail polish. O2M captured Muslims consumers' interest after Mustafa Umar, an Islamic scholar and director of education and outreach at the Islamic Institute of Orange County, California, published the results of a test conducted by one of his students to assess water permeability of the product on his blog on November 2012:

One of my students decided to perform a test to see whether or not water actually seeped through when using the Inglot O2M nail polish. As a test case, she applied standard pink nail polish and purple O2M on a coffee filter and allowed both to dry. She then placed another coffee filter below the painted one, squeezed two drops of water over the polish, and applied some pressure with her finger. After about ten seconds it was clear that the water was prevented from seeping through [even to the back side of the first filter] on the standard polish but clearly went through the O2M and even wet the second filter. This is sufficient to show that the claims made by the manufacturer are correct and water does indeed permeate through to the nail.  
(<http://mustafaumar.com/2012/11/is-breathable-nail-polish-sufficient-for-wu%E1%B8%8Du/>)

Mr. Umar explained that he decided to study the matter because of the uncertainty among Muslim women over the product's effect on wudu. As he further elaborated, his focus was

“analysing the *fiqh* [Islamic legal reasoning] behind the nail polish issue” and “his conclusion was specific to the O2M brand” (Ansari 2012).

Soon after, replications of the coffee filter test appeared on several blogs and forums. The results, however, were inconclusive. Some reported similar observations while several others documented failure. In response to the increasing number of queries to his verdict, Mr. Umar posted an update on February 2013 and explained that “permeability may be affected by wearing more than one layer [e.g. a base coat, top coat, etc.]” ([www.virtualmosque.com/islam-studies/hot-topics/is-breathable-nail-polish-sufficient-for-wudu/](http://www.virtualmosque.com/islam-studies/hot-topics/is-breathable-nail-polish-sufficient-for-wudu/); February 7, 2013). In the coming months, he posted five more updates and shared further information on water permeability, provided links to other blogs that featured similar experiments, and referred to the website of Tuesday in Love, another brand that was recently introduced, for more explanation on the workings of the new technology.

In his final post published on August 2013, Mr. Umar shared the video of the lab test Inglot conducted and declared that “the results should clear up most misconceptions that people may have had” ([www.virtualmosque.com/islam-studies/hot-topics/is-breathable-nail-polish-sufficient-for-wudu/](http://www.virtualmosque.com/islam-studies/hot-topics/is-breathable-nail-polish-sufficient-for-wudu/); August 22, 2013). Apparently, he had been pressuring the company “to perform a professional experiment” and confirm the product’s water permeable nature (*ibid.*). The company-run experiment provided a more ‘scientific’ version of the original coffee filter test, using a hygrometer, and claimed that not only water vapour but even a droplet can permeate a single layer of O2M polish (Inglot Cosmetics USA, 2013).

Mr. Umar’s blog entry, which came to be known as ‘the nail polish fatwa’, did not only increase the visibility of the product but also triggered an intense online debate. The analysis of Google Trends documents the emergence of halal nail polish as a topic of inquiry. Figure 1 shows the number of searches for the term ‘halal nail polish’ between January 2009 and April 2019. Despite the introduction of O2M in fall 2009, there is little search until the

end of 2012. Shortly after the publication of the blog entry, the interest rises rapidly and, since then, has steadily grown.

--- Insert Figure 1 about here ---

The discussion initially revolved around the meaning of water permeability technology and its implications for wudu. However, as the analysis indicates, the conversation quickly shifted from a dispute over the technical features of the product into a debate about what constitutes proper ways of being and living as a Muslim in a consumption-driven world. The ongoing and multifaceted nature of the debate suggests that, similar to the food riots that Thompson analysed, the controversy over the nail polish cannot be fully understood without recourse to rights, responsibilities and relations that separate what is perceived as appropriate and inappropriate economic behaviour at a particular point in time.

### ***Contestations over Rights, Responsibilities and Relations***

Three key frames characterize the debate over the nail polish. First, the entrepreneurial motivation behind the introduction of the so-called halal products, including the nail polish, becomes contested. Such commercial initiatives can be construed as contributing to commodification as well as promotion of the Islamic values. The second pertains to the role of market in shaping Muslim subjectivity and addresses the tension between collectively and individually driven religious identities. Third, there is polarization of opinions regarding Islamic modesty and the impact of consumption on extending the boundaries of acceptable expressions of aesthetics and beauty. Implicated in each of these frames are two conflicting views of Islam-market interaction and their associated set of values, norms and expectations.

One view portrays Muslims as individuals who abstain from participating in forms of consumption associated with Western decadence and pursue commercial activities to advance societal prosperity (Tripp 2006; Zaman 2008). Another view privileges globally-informed

ways of consumption as instrumental for constructing and communicating modern and faithful Muslim identities and inscribes the individual pursuit of material wealth in the rhetoric of common good (Rudnycky 2009; Sandikci 2018). As I elaborate next, these two distinct views relate to two different moral economies in the sense Thompson uses the term. While Islamic injunctions take precedence in the organization and functioning of economy in the Orthodox Islamic moral economy, hybridization of the religious and market logics characterizes the neoliberal Islamic moral economy (see Figure 2). The nail polish controversy manifests the clash between these moral economies and their opposing understandings of what counts as a proper, fair and legitimate economic practice.

--- Insert Figure 2 about here ---

*Entrepreneurial Motivation...* Most of the halal nail polish brands are owned by Muslim entrepreneurs located at different parts of the world. In the company websites and media interviews, the founders of these brands emphasize being proactive and entrepreneurial both as a religious right and duty. They assert that, as business people, it is their responsibility to adopt innovative technologies and offer new products that help Muslims better fulfil their roles as modern and faithful individuals. Common in their narratives is the view that Muslims everywhere enjoy fashion and search for products that allow them construct aesthetically pleasing and religiously appropriate looks: “We believe women of all cultures, faiths and backgrounds should have safe, healthy and ethical options to express their personal style” (Maya Cosmetics website; <https://www.maya-cosmetics.com/about/>). They perceive their responsibility as responding to the needs of modern Muslim women and providing solutions that satisfy the requirements of both Islam and the market.

Islamic references, such as Arabic calligraphy and religious insignia often feature on the packaging and corporate communication of these brands. According to their owners,

offering halal products with visible and recognizable symbols of the Islamic culture helps expand the boundaries of the halal market and propagate Islamic values across the world. For example, the founder of the brand 786, Ibrahim Ali, explains that “the colors of the nail polish were all inspired by Muslim cities or cities with Islamic history. Granada was named after the lavender flowers of the Alhambra Palace, Fez was named for the turquoise tilework of Moroccan artwork” ([https://themusl\\_mv\\_be.com/western-musl\\_m-culture/fash\\_on/a-cosmet\\_cs-brand-has-made-halal-na\\_l-pol\\_sh-just-for-you](https://themusl_mv_be.com/western-musl_m-culture/fash_on/a-cosmet_cs-brand-has-made-halal-na_l-pol_sh-just-for-you)). Such choices justify marketing of halal nail polish not only as a proper but also responsible and dutiful economic practice, driven by concern for the wellbeing of fellow Muslims.

The discourses and practices of the marketers of halal nail polish suggest an entrepreneurial orientation that seeks to blend Islamic norms and principles with capitalist values and practices. Scholars relate the emergence of this new form of Islamic entrepreneurship to the contemporary political economy (Adas, 2006; Osella and Osella, 2009) and in particular to a new form of “pious neoliberalism” (Atia 2012). Drawing on a globalized religious discourse and combining it with entrepreneurship, pious neoliberalism cultivates subjects who are driven toward material success in the present life and spiritual success in the afterlife. The emphasis on prosperity in this and other world encourages Muslims to pursue economic success and reframes a proactive and entrepreneurial engagement with the market as a religiously appropriate endeavour.

The view that a good Muslim should be an entrepreneurial Muslim echoes in the online discussions. For example, Imam Omar Suleiman, the Founder and President of the Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research and a Professor of Islamic Studies at Southern Methodist University, USA, states in a Facebook post that he is “a strong believer in creating halal alternatives to things” and endorses the nail polish as a promising innovation (<https://www.facebook.com/imamomarsuleiman/posts/many-times-sisters-ask-me-about-nail-polish->

and-wudu-and-it-pains-me-to-say-that/417030021713177/). Similarly, there are abundance of comments that praise the new technology: “This [new polish is] a huge breakthrough for me. We are supposed to cover up, but nowhere does it say ‘don’t be fashionable’” (<https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2013/02/27/breathable-nail-polish-muslims/1951627/>). “I am excited. I feel more feminine and I just love it.” (<https://www.nbcnews.com/business/business-news/breathable-nail-polish-surprise-hit-muslims-flna1C8592674>). “I think this is a \*brilliant\* idea” (<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2285544/How-new-breathable-nail-polish-Muslim-women-flying-shelves--death-creator-means-live-success.html>). Such affirmative reactions help reinforce the growing entrepreneurial interest in the product category.

However, as much as the nail polish marks successful integration of the Muslim business people to the global market it also symbolizes commodification of the Islamic values. While religious norms and values demarcate the sacred and the profane, the expansion of market logic to every domain of life blur these boundaries and turn “every human interaction into a transient market exchange” (Ciscel and Heath 2001, p. 401). Thus, far from a legitimate and customary economic behaviour, introduction of halal nail polish represents an ‘idiotic’, ‘absurd’ and ‘trivial’ act. A ‘joke’ that brings ‘no good to the ummah [Islamic community]’ and ‘ridicules Islam’.

This is the biggest joke ever.... Pray in "Style" u say.... Interesting how humans think and distort everything to their profit or liking....  
(Halal Nail Polish Allows Muslim Women to Pray in Style You Tube video comments; [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCY6bos7og60FW7bgb\\_CKcAQ](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCY6bos7og60FW7bgb_CKcAQ); 2014)

i m waiting for the day they make halal Champagne...  
(Inglot releases halal nail polish; Jan 29, 2013; <https://blogs.tribune.com.pk/tag/religion/page/17/>)

Evident in the urge to create Islamic version of every product, from halal nail polish to halal champagne, is the capitalist greed to generate more profit:

But it irks me to no end when the very aspect of perfection that is Islam, is adjusted to suit the needs of a modern day Muslim. And I too am guilty of this transgression. For, in our constant desire for instantaneous gratification, acceptance and the need for inclusion we're unwittingly demoralising our religion to make it appealing for the general public. ... Continuous media pulverization makes us view everything as a product, and as such, Islam has become a product that needs to be sold.

[<http://www.ciibroadcasting.com/2014/11/16/winenailpolishandourhankeringtoohalaaliseeverything/>; November 2014]

For the critics of the nail polish, the proliferation of the halal-coded products indicates Muslims' submission to the demands of the capitalist ideology and their growing distance from the essence of Islam. In their objection, opponents adhere to a traditional Islamic moral economy that privileges justice, beneficence and equality over greed and materialism. From this perspective, adoption of Western capitalism and its associated value system causes damaging effects on the spiritual and material wellbeing of the Islamic societies (Chapra 2000; Khan 1995; Muhawar 1995). In contrast, when the economy is governed by Islamic norms and values, the entrepreneurial attention falls on engaging practices that do not only enhance material prosperity but reinstate social justice and amplify spiritual fulfilment (Tripp 2006; Zaman 2008). Failing to observe an interest toward contributing to socio-economic justice and beneficence in the motivations of the marketers of nail polish, critics accuse them of compromising Islamic principles and submitting to the capitalist domination.

*Muslim Subjectivity...* In judging the nail polish as unsuitable, participants of the debate often refer to the obligations of being a proper Muslim, and in particular, refraining from imitating 'disbelievers': "We grow up been taught never to imitate the non Muslims, our religion is so perfect, so pure, why would we want to imitate another?" [The Haute Muslimah Blog, March 2013]. As much as the peasants in Thompson's study revolt against what they see as a threat to the paternalistic system that assured their livelihood, opponents of the nail polish object to the infiltration of Western consumer culture and cast it as a threat to

the Muslim identity. In this framing, what counts as a proper Muslim is the one that resists the temptations of the devil and follows the ‘authentic’ and untimely principles of Islam even in the face of changing social and economic arrangements. They urge each other to ‘go back to our roots’ and reflect upon the true meaning of being a believer:

whose fashion are we following? i am not talking about kafir vs muslim. i am talking about pious and authentic expressions of feminine beauty vs. those created by people or shayateen [devil] who don't have in mind our best interests when they convince us to deck ourselves out.

[[www.suhaibwebb.com/personaldvlp/worship/prayer/is-breathable-nail-polish-sufficient-for-wudu/comment-page-1/#comments](http://www.suhaibwebb.com/personaldvlp/worship/prayer/is-breathable-nail-polish-sufficient-for-wudu/comment-page-1/#comments); December 2012]

Honestly, all these beautifications such as nail polish, make-up and tight fitting clothes are all unnecessary. I can't say for the majority but we have to always go back to our roots. Reflect and ask ourselves what is the true purpose of life in this world especially for the Muslims.

[Dina Tokio You Tube video comments;

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCpzDcHHXoX0pO7EEA6Egdrw>; 2014]

However, the negative moral connotations of imitating an undesirable other are mediated by a belief in the cognitive capacity of human beings. In the long treads of debate, participants often end up acknowledging that Allah has given people abilities to judge the pros and cons of engaging in a particular behaviour; hence, each woman should herself decide whether it is appropriate or not to use a product. Those who feel comfortable wearing nail polish should not be dismayed by the criticism of ‘narrow minded people’ and enjoy the benefits of the breakthrough product without turning nail care into a religious issue:

If you like nail polish, just wear it. Living life will turn into a painful tedious task if you decide to base even the smallest of decisions on religion. Religion does not evolve with time but human beings should.

[[blogs.tribune.com.pk/story/15815/halal-nail-polish-say-what/](http://blogs.tribune.com.pk/story/15815/halal-nail-polish-say-what/), January 2013]

Relax people please!!! There is no contradiction in the Quran however there is so much contradiction in most human beings. If you not sure polish and remove after every pray. If you sure your good to go. Control your own flesh and bones and leave the next person alone!!!

[Halal Nail Polish Allows Muslim Women to Pray in Style You Tube video comments;<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCqrRM9aQoTEW6shgt2g66BA>; 2015]

The emphasis on the competences and capabilities of Muslim women in making



everyday choices is reminiscent of the view of a sovereign consumer. The concept of consumer sovereignty encapsulates the relationship between consumer and market structure and rests on the idea that consumers know what is good for them and exercise their right to choose by accepting or rejecting products (Schwarzkopf 2011). Similarly, the pro-nail polish discourse constructs the question of the appropriateness of the product as a consumption problem that requires an individual solution driven by women's personal interests rather than the hegemonic dictates of collective norms.

At a broader level, the tension between following communal norms and individual decision making points to different understandings of Islamic normativity and Muslim subjectivity. From the traditional Islamic moral economy perspective, economic behaviour is expected to be in complete harmony with Islamic principles (Arif 1985; Khan 1995). In other words, when conducting their everyday lives individuals should refrain from engaging practices that would jeopardize their religious obligations. If confronted with an unfamiliar situation then they should consult religious authorities and follow their instructions. However, as the debate indicates the notion of authority itself can become problematic, leading to ambiguity over whose advice one should seek. First, religious leaders diverge in their views regarding the appropriateness of the nail polish and propagate contrary interpretations of 'authentic' normative Islamic doctrines in regard to its usage. Second, new experts equipped with different set of competencies emerge and promote a form of subjectivity that is driven less by conformity but more with individualized interpretations of religious norms.

Following Mr. Umar's verdict regarding the product, traditional authority figures, such as imams and sheiks, have become involved in the debate. In many Islamic Q&A sites, religious scholars express views against using the nail polish on the grounds of its dubious effect on wudu:

“Wudhu’ is the basic requirement for one of the mightiest worship in Islam, the salah [prayer]. If one is not cautious in securing one’s wudhu’, one would jeopardize this pillar of Islam. The issue of breathable nail-polish directly affects the validity of one’s wudhu’ and salah.  
([http://www.askimam.org/public/question\\_detail/25327](http://www.askimam.org/public/question_detail/25327); May 3, 2013)

However, such authoritarian rulings are not far from contestation. For example, Dr. Shabir Ally, President of Islamic Information Centre, Canada talking in an episode of *Let the Quran Speak*, emphasizes that Muslim women had used henna in the earlier times and the issue of water permeability was not an issue back then. Regarding the dispute over the use of nail polish as ‘nit-picking’, he calls for looking at the broader picture and not creating new restrictions (Using Permeable Nail Polish, June 2013, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aOpXO\\_ISJQ4&t=127s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aOpXO_ISJQ4&t=127s)). Such opposing views do not only lead to different recommendations in regard to product usage but articulate different notions of religiously appropriate consumption behaviour. Furthermore, the acknowledgment that different products will be available at different points in time suggests a religious normativity that is responsive to the market dynamics.

In discussing the changing nature of the relation between religion and market scholars refer to the emergence of a new Muslim consumer subjectivity that is shaped by globalized neoliberalism as well as Islam (Gökarıksel and Secor 2009; Rudnyckyj, 2009; Sandikci 2018). Such subjectivity attends to the forms of personhood that privilege making choices in the marketplace and consuming freely as anchors of selfhood (Miller and Rose 1997). The neoliberal subject is understood as a free, individualized, self-regulating actor who does not only pursue self-interest but becomes an entrepreneur of herself (Gershon 2011). While rejecting the traditional expert knowledge as ‘too literal’ and restrictive interpretations of Islam, the new forms of religious subjectivity creates its own expert discourses and imaginations. Bloggers, in particular, become key figures in propagating the suitability of the nail polish.

As the number of halal nail polish brand increased, tests comparing different options were conducted and shared by prominent modest fashion bloggers, such as Dina Tokio and Nour Kaiss. Typically, these enterprising bloggers run a version of the original coffee filter test and disclose their verdict regarding the suitability of a particular brand of nail polish. However as much as praise and appreciation, the bloggers face condemnation and resentment. The critics accuse them of disseminating “pseudo-science” and lacking ‘true’ knowledge of Islam:

And you're a scientist right ??? Pffffffffffffff

[Dina Tokio You Tube video comments; <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC335AH93oikUFQhz1yFThhw>; 2014]

More often than not, the issue of taqwa [God-consciousness or God-fearing piety] versus fatwa remains unclear to the average man. After all, what is clear and what is not clear demands a level of knowledge and depth of exposure to the Islamic primary sources that not every man possesses. It becomes therefore necessary upon the laymen to attach himself to a scholar who possess such knowledge and whom he trusts with his religion. Such an approach is not only an explicit Quranic injunction, but also a rational and logistical necessity. The one, then, who is not equipped with the ability to understand the deductive process of Islamic law and relies solely on their personal opinion, preferring one verse or narration while dismissing other verses and narrations, risks falling prey to entering the hima [forbidden]. And Allah knows best.

[Dina Tokio You Tube video comments; <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCoMKmXyFzA3nmcFUeXctJqA>; 2014]

For those who object the nail polish, lay people, such as Dina Tokio and Nour Kaiss, lack legitimacy and mislead women by “making up own rules for Islam” and “giving false fatwas”. Instead, they urge women to consult real experts – imams and sheiks – and trust only their opinion on matters related to Islam. Yet, the boundaries of ‘experts’ and non-experts’ are “regularly contested and reimagined” (Pfister and Horvath 2014, p.312) and the legitimacy of knowledge is partially determined by the response of different publics. In defending the bloggers, participants refer to a notion of Islamic piety as expressed through individualized practices and interpretations in the context of the everyday (Jeldtoft 2011).

From this perspective, as one cannot know the intentions underlying a behaviour, she also cannot judge the authenticity of the person recommending that behaviour:

... I admire this young lady on showing the halal nail polish. I'm definitely going to buy it:)... Above all she could be someone who has an excellent heart and God loves her so much for it. We don't know. This is part of ISLAMIC TEACHINGS.....DO NOT BE JUDGEMENTAL. May Allah guide us all to the straight path. Ameen.

[Dina Tokio You Tube video comments; <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCoMKmXyFzA3nmcFUeXctJqA>; 2016]

The word 'haram' is so casually used that honestly it loses it's significance. I really don't think Allah is worried about a bit of colour on your nails surely it's your good deeds and pure intentions of your heart that are going to take you to the doors of heaven Inshaallah.

[Dina Tokio You Tube video comments; <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCoMKmXyFzA3nmcFUeXctJqA>; 2014]

Overall, the indeterminacy about what constitutes legitimate knowledge and authority in religious matters provides further evidence for the clash between the opposing moral frameworks. The opponents of the nail polish, similar to the farmers that Thompson studied, adhere to a traditional Islamic moral economy that emphasizes normative authority and collective compliance to established norms and customs. Those who are in favour of the nail polish, on the other hand, align with an alternative moral economy that privileges individuality and freewill and fosters a form of personhood that is informed by piety as well as neoliberal subjectivity.

*Islamic Modesty...* The debate over the nail polish also reveals the gendered nature of the perceptions of proper economic activity. In objecting or endorsing the use of nail polish, participants often refer to Islamic modesty and discuss the boundaries of religiously acceptable and unacceptable forms of appearance. According to Islam, modesty entails refraining from indecent, vane and obscene behaviours and pursuing humility and moderation in speech, attitude, and appearance. While modesty requirement applies to both men and women, it is the female body that modesty becomes embodied, most prominently in the form

of Islamic veiling (El Guindi 1999; Mahmood 2005). However, different interpretations of religious texts lead to radically different views on the content of modest appearance.

As the Quran does not specifically address the issue of nail polish, the scriptural verdict on its use remains indeterminate. Those who believe that it is not acceptable for Muslim women to beautify themselves for the admiration of strangers oppose the use of nail polish. As one participant argues, “in Islam, as Muslimah, we should dress modestly and for the sake of Allah and not to attract others attention” ([www.virtualmosque.com/islam-studies/hot-topics/is-breathable-nail-polish-sufficient-for-wudu](http://www.virtualmosque.com/islam-studies/hot-topics/is-breathable-nail-polish-sufficient-for-wudu), January 2013). Similarly, another commentator claims that a Muslim woman’s duty is foremost for her husband; hence, beautifying herself for others negates centuries old customs and norms:

Why is there a need for nail polish in the first place? Is it to beautify herself for her husband or for herself? I’m asking because I’ve always thought that a woman’s beauty is for her husband.

[[www.suhaibwebb.com/personaldvlp/worship/prayer/is-breathable-nail-polish-sufficient-for-wudu/comment-page-1/#comments](http://www.suhaibwebb.com/personaldvlp/worship/prayer/is-breathable-nail-polish-sufficient-for-wudu/comment-page-1/#comments); December 2012]

As Sayer observes, within a moral economy, “social groups often distinguish themselves from others in terms of moral differences, claiming for themselves certain virtues which others are held to lack” (2005, p.953). Reframing the use of nail polish as a question of female virtue, opponents justify their contempt for the product by constituting a moral hierarchy of ‘us and them’. As they claim their position to be the correct interpretation of the Islamic commands on appearance, they blame those that deviate from the established understandings of a virtuous, modest Muslim woman. Yet, a different interpretation of modesty, one that emphasises aesthetics as much as ethics, produces a contradictory reading about the suitability of wearing nail polish:

I’m not convinced that nail polish is immodest.

Is the issue that the nail polish is attractive? Or is the issue that it brings attention to the hands which could be seen as attractive? Surely we are beyond discussing whether a woman’s hands can be shown, right? If a women’s hands are showing, so would any jewelry she is wearing, and those are adornments too. Did people not wear jewelry in the Prophet’s (SAW)

time? So, quite frankly, if a guy is aroused by a woman's nail polish, he'd probably be aroused by her rings, or by her naked hands. I would consider him to be the one with the problem that needs to be fixed, and not prohibit women from yet another thing because some weird guy is finding it attractive or it is bringing attention to something that is permissibly shown.

[[www.virtualmosque.com/islam-studies/hot-topics/is-breathable-nail-polish-sufficient-for-wudu/](http://www.virtualmosque.com/islam-studies/hot-topics/is-breathable-nail-polish-sufficient-for-wudu/), November 2012]

Problematizing the gendered nature of the modesty requirement, proponents locate the discussion of nail polish within the broader issue of the patriarchal power relations and the male gaze (Kandiyoti 1988). Claiming that it is both the right and duty of a pious Muslim woman to beautify herself, they cite religious references and examples and argue that Islam encourages people to craft a pleasant image that appeals to both believers and non-believers. As the quote below shows, rather than objecting to new products, one should question social norms, customs and traditions that limit women's behaviour. Changing times require adjustments to the dominant modes of thinking and acting:

Do you think that the mothers of Islam did not do things to make themselves feel beautiful? We may have different cultures now, as I'm sure Allah did not intend for Muslims to be caught in a time warp, but women want to feel good about themselves in any era. Did women living during the time of the prophet (saw) wear henna? Did they wear silk or jewelry? Did they darken their eyes with kajal? What makes you think they would not have worn nail polish had it existed? I've grown tired of all the Muslims who seem to think a woman must be completely plain and nonexistent to be modest. This culture of scrubbing the earth of femininity is wrought with absurdity and leads to a great burden being placed on women that I don't think is required by Allah so much as it is by men. Stop worrying about women's modesty and start worrying about why women's behaviors are limited to any reaction by men.

[[www.suhaibwebb.com/personaldv1pt/worship/prayer/is-breathable-nail-polish-sufficient-for-wudu/comment-page-1/#comments](http://www.suhaibwebb.com/personaldv1pt/worship/prayer/is-breathable-nail-polish-sufficient-for-wudu/comment-page-1/#comments); January, 2013]

In their objection to equating the use of nail polish with immodesty and indecency, supporters emphasize a notion of rights, obligations and customs pertaining to female beauty that opposes the doctrines of an orthodox Islamic moral economy. In contrast to a traditional view that clearly defines and demarcates acceptable and unacceptable forms of gendered appearance, they advocate a view of modesty that reconciles the demands of faith and beauty (Gökarıksel and Secor 2010; Sandıkcı and

Ger 2010). The emphasis on the aesthetics as well as the ethics of Islamic modesty does not only attest the suitability of the nail polish for Muslim women but also highlights the significant role market resources play in the construction of Islamic femininity.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

This study has been concerned with understanding the ways in which religion is implicated in everyday consumption ethics. Specifically, I explore how an ordinary object, such as nail polish, becomes an ethical problem amid changing relations between market and religion. As the analysis indicates, multiple and entangled moral repertoires, informed by conflicting conceptualizations of market-religion interaction, provide actors – consumers, entrepreneurs, religious figures, and the media – with justifications to confirm or refute the suitability of the product. Through invocation of different understandings of just, legitimate and appropriate economic practices, the nail polish becomes construed both as problematic and acceptable. The ongoing and inconclusive state of the debate draws attention to the contingent nature of the signifier ‘ethical’ and suggests that everyday moral problems are anything but ordinary. Understanding such dilemmas and their shifting connotations requires utilization of approaches that can capture how “moral webs of meaning” are negotiated, reproduced and negated within distinct socio-historical contexts (Goodman, Maye and Holloway 2010, p.1784).

The controversy over the nail polish illustrates a case of ethical problematization framed predominantly by religion. As the religious and market logics intersect, new practices and products emerge, complicating and transforming the shared meanings of proper economic behaviour. Yet, existing research on consumption ethics mostly overlooks such structuring influence of religion. The tendency to treat religion as an individual trait (e.g., Shaw and Clarke, 1999; Vitell and Paolillo 2003; Vitell, Paolillo and Singh 2005) directs the scholarly attention to measuring and explaining the effect of religiosity on ethical attitudes,

beliefs and behaviour. However, as the findings of this study show, beyond indicating an orientation or commitment toward certain beliefs, religion is implicated in everyday consumption ethics as an institutional force interacting with the cultural, social and economic sensibilities of the time. As everyday articulations of religion become increasingly manifested through the domain of consumption, religion gets firmly embedded in everyday ethics, contributing to problematization as well as deproblematization of ordinary consumption objects and practices.

The moral economy approach, by linking the micro-social with the macro-social, offers a useful analytical lens to study the ways religion, as an institutional structure, informs everyday ethical struggles. Furthermore, rather than merely reiterating that all economies have social, political and moral conditions and consequences, the epistemological power of the moral economy approach, as reflected in Thompson's original formulation, lies in rendering visible the moral struggles and contestations that emerge at the moments of transition. The emphasis on the clash between existing and emerging shared understandings of what constitutes proper economic practices helps construct a temporally and socio-politically situated understanding of the conditions that render a product morally contested. In the nail polish case, the controversy over the product derives not so much from the ambiguity over its water permeability but its capacity to materialize the clash between a moral economy that views adoption of Western consumption behaviours as a threat to the essence of Islamic ontology and subjectivity and another one that regards new economic practices as proper and productive expressions and experiences of being and living as a Muslim in the globally-connected world.

More so than showing how moralities are constructed at different levels (e.g., Bolton et al. 2012; Wheeler 2017a,b), the analytical potential of the moral economy framework derives from revealing the inextricably linked nature of the individual, collective and social.



By grounding fine-grained analysis of individuals' daily ethical struggles within the larger social, political, economic, and historical dynamics, studies of moral economy offer a fresh perspective to conceptualizing social reproduction and resistance in consumption. Sayer (2005) introduces the concept of lay normativities to correct what he sees as an omission in the moral economy approach, the agency of individuals. As he rightly argues, humans are capable of embracing or rejecting community norms and choosing to participate in economic practices or not. However, while lay normativities draw attention to people's everyday reflective capabilities, the tendency to treat them as if they just exist engenders a false sense of agency.

As findings show, rejection does not necessarily mean break from normative influence; while opposing some norms and obligations, individuals align with others. Consumers who embrace the nail polish reject what they see as a strict reading of religious principles and compliance to patriarchal understandings of modesty and, instead, support a set of expectations and obligations shaped by market-friendly interpretations of Islam. Those who dispute the relevance of the product, on the other hand, oppose the consumerist ideology imposed by Western capitalism and follow what they regard as the definitive Islamic principles and responsibilities. Hence, what appears as an individual ethical evaluation reflects, at a deeper level, an assessment informed by a consensual view of proper economic actions shaped by a particular moral economy.

Finally, the moral economy framework contributes to the work on consumption ethics by drawing attention to the significant yet shifting and unstable influence of expertise and authority in shaping individuals' ethical evaluations. As the findings indicate, multiple authorities, self-appointed or otherwise, become involved in the debate by claiming religious, technical and/or user expertise. Yet, because "claims to expertise are ... determined and constrained by the response of diverse 'publics' and the rational interrogation of the

legitimacy of knowledge” (Stubbs and Zitko 2018, p.3), a consensus about the ethical status of the product fails to emerge. As, for example, the divergence of opinions regarding the validity of Mr. Umar’s verdict illustrates, different views of how a moral economy should work challenge the legitimacy of even those who are conventionally accepted as authorities.

Furthermore, the clash between opposing moral frameworks mobilizes new assemblages of expertise. For example, bloggers emerge as key figures, seeking to establish authority by translating their knowledge and expertise into a religiously and socially informed consensus. Digital information and communication technologies make possible creation and sharing of knowledge by connecting globally-dispersed audiences and experts (McQuarrie, Miller, and Phillips 2013; Stubbs 2018). However, such digitally enabled modes of authority also seem to be contingent and contested. The legitimacy of bloggers, whether they confirm or refute the appropriateness of the nail polish, become momentarily stabilized or challenged as they traverse transnational publics who are aligned with opposing or supporting moral frameworks. It is precisely this flexible and shifting nature of expertise and the different ways it is mobilized that the moral economy framework helps reveal.

In conclusion, the ethical and moral dimensions of consumption continue to attract increasing research attention from multiple disciplines. However, as different disciplinary lenses remain relatively separated, analyses tend to focus either on the individual or the social/structural dimensions rather than bring them together. As the editors of the special issue remind, by approaching a phenomenon from multiple vantage points, interdisciplinary perspectives help develop a more holistic and connected view of a phenomenon. This study shows that combining moral economy framework with research on everyday ethics allows for an analytical engagement with the interaction between micro and macro dynamics and generates a more comprehensive understanding of the nature and implications of ethical problematizations occurring in the context of everyday life. It is hoped that the study

motivates further interdisciplinary inquiries of the place of religion in everyday consumption ethics as well as moral economies of consumption.

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**Table 1: Data Sources**

<b>ARCHIVAL DATA</b>		
<b>Type</b>	<b>Exemplary Sources</b>	<b>Data Set</b>
Books on the halal market	The Halal Frontier; Accessing the Global Halal Market; Halal Matters	9 books
Industry reports	Thomson Reuters, Euromonitor, A.T. Kearney, Ogilvy and Mather, The Economist	12 reports
Newspapers	New York Times, USA Today, Huffington Post (USA), Financial Times, Daily Mail, The Guardian, The Independent (UK), The Japan Times, The National (UAE), Times of Israel	23 articles
Fashion Magazines	Vogue, Glamour Magazine UK, Muslim Girl	7 articles
Company websites	www.tuesdayinlove.com; https://www.maya-cosmetics.com; https://amaracosmetics.com; https://www.786cosmetics.com	8 companies
<b>NETNOGRAPHIC DATA</b>		
<b>Type</b>	<b>Exemplary Sources</b>	<b>Data Set</b>
Forums	ummah.com; virtualmosque.com; muftisays.com; suhaibwebb.com	6 forums/~550 comments
Blogs	Mustafaumar.com; expresstibune.com; hautemuslimah.com; modeststyleguide; ummahsonic.com; hijablijious.com	9 blogs/~750 comments (views/comments)
Videos	Muslimah2MuslimahTV, Inglot O2M Breathable Polish: Full Review + Application (March 7, 2013)	13.920/41
	VOA News Halal Nail Polish Allows Muslim Women to Pray in Style, (May 21, 2013)	53.115/130
	Let the Quran Speak Using Permeable Nail Polish? (Jun 5, 2013)	96.980/181
	Dina Tokio, Halal Nail Polish?, (July 5, 2013)	375.108/690
	Nour Kaiss, Pray With Nailpolish On??? (Jan 17, 2017)	106.814/187
	Hashima Watts, Orly Breathable Nail Polish Review - Halal Certified? (April 14, 2017)	26.810/97
	Hashima Watts, Halal Nail Polish-9 Brands-Wudu Ready? (Jun 4, 2018)	8.801/46

**Figure 1:**  
**Google Trends (worldwide) for the key term of 'halal nail polish' from January, 2009 to April 2019**



**Figure 2: Ethical Problematization and Deproblematization of the Nail Polish**

