University of Alberta

Boxes Fulla Fun: The Fulla Doll, Identity, and Consumption in a Globalizing Arab World

by

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For *Ummi* and *Abbi*:
I love you both.

ABSTRACT: This thesis uses the case study of the Arab-Islamic Fulla doll to examine the relationships among globalization, consumption and cultural identities. Beginning with the question of how cultural products like the Fulla doll come to exist, I argue that the Fulla doll serves as an example of the process of creolization whereby non-Western peoples mobilize local customs and beliefs to transform globally-distributted consumer goods, thus re-contextualizing and assigning new meanings to these goods. Through an analysis of thirteen animated Fulla doll advertisements, I argue that the Barbie doll's ethnic, religious and gendered identity has been re-contextualized to transform her into an Arab-Muslim woman, the Fulla doll. The final chapter of this thesis discusses the socio-political significance of dolls and their participation in processes of socialization and identity-formation in children. The thesis concludes with a brief discussion of the Fulla doll's challenge to Samuel Huntington's Clash of Civilizaions theory.

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Introduction: An Arab Coup de Toys

A revolution has been underway in Middle Eastern toy stores for the past decade. In what can be characterized as a *coup de toys*, Mattel's Barbie doll has been forced to relinquish control of much of her precious toy store shelf space. The leader of this *coup*, Fulla, a brown-eyed doll with Muslim values, now stands victorious atop those very same shelves. Launched in 2003 after four years of design, the Fulla doll is the creation of the Dubai-based NewBoy Design Studio. Sharing her name with a jasmine-like flower indigenous to the Levant, Fulla's manufacturers claim that the doll offers Arab consumers a more modest alternative to the American Barbie doll (Zoepf 2005).

Designed with two outdoor outfits, the Fulla doll wears either a black robe-like garment known as an *abaya* paired with a matching black headscarf known as a *hijab* when she is sold in the more *conservative* Arab-Islamic countries of the Persian Gulf; or the doll wears a white or pale blue trench coat and a matching white *hijab* when she is sold in more *liberal* countries in the Mediterranean. Underneath her outdoor fashions, however, Fulla can wear a wide array of Western-style clothing, including t-shirts and denim jeans. Most versions of the doll also include a miniature pink prayer mat and prayer book (Campbell 2006).

NewBoy's Fulla doll, however, was not the first attempt to package and market an Islamic doll. The Islamic Republic of Iran, for example, has long sought to curtail the Barbie doll's success and has even resorted to banning the doll entirely (Reilly 2012). In her stead, the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, in consultation with the Ministry of Education, introduced the Sara and Dara dolls in 2002. Sara and Dara were designed to represent eight-year-old fraternal twin siblings. They

wear modest and conservative dress and Sara wears a white scarf covering her hair (Yaqin 2007, 175). Masoumeh Rahimi, an Iranian toy seller, spoke positively about the dolls and noted that they offered a much-needed intervention against Mattel's "wanton" Barbie doll, whom she believed to be "more harmful than an American missile" (Quoted in BBC 2002a). The Razanne doll, launched in 1996, is another Islamic lifestyle doll being marketed across the world. Created by a Muslim couple residing in the United States and sold through their website, *Noorart*, Razanne wears a *hijab* and an *abaya* and comes with a miniature prayer mat. While the Razanne doll is available for purchase over the Internet, her marketing is aimed at Muslim parents in the West who wish to provide their young daughters with an Islamic role model (Yaquin 2007, 174). Even Barbie's creators, Mattel, have sought to capitalize on this trend and market their own veiled dolls. Mattel once produced a "Moroccan Barbie" and a doll called "Leila" who (in true Orientalist fashion) was meant to be a Muslim slave girl in an Ottoman court (Campbell 2006).

None of these dolls, however, have been able to compete with Fulla's popular plastic piety in the Middle East and around the world. According to NewBoy's official website (newboy.com), the Fulla doll is now the number one fashion doll in the Middle East. Fulla has outsold her Western competitor, Barbie, in numerous Arab countries including Egypt, Jordan and Qatar (Campbell 2006). This impressive Fulla-fandom has led to an expansion of the brand. Arab consumers can now purchase an array of Fulla-branded products, including foodstuffs (breakfast cereals, cookies, chewing gum, beverages), children's bicycles, knapsacks, bed linens, stationary, sporting equipment, and even child-sized Islamic prayer clothes so young girls can dress in their doll's image

(Fulla.com – products). The Fulla brand has also ventured into the world of designer fragrances and NewBoy now markets an *eau du toilette* aptly named *Fulla Pink* (Fulla.com – products). But what explains this popularity?

According to Fulla's manufacturers, the explanation is rather simple: they understood the Arab toy market in a way that their competitors (namely Mattel) had not (Zoepf 2005). Fulla, with her religiously appropriate garb and accessories, offers young girls in the Middle East a more Islamic character to emulate. More conservative parents across the region, who would never dream of buying their daughters Barbie dolls, seem happy to buy an Arab-Islamic alternative, even with Fulla's somewhat steep price of approximately $20.00 USD (O'Laughlin 2005). While NewBoy's explanation is a valid one, it reduces the Fulla doll's popularity to clever marketing and detaches the doll's success from a number of exterior contextual factors that have also served to bolster sales.

Indeed, some have argued that companies such as NewBoy have profited greatly from the September 11th, 2001 attacks in New York City. As a large number of Muslims around the world find themselves at odds with American foreign policy towards Islamic countries, such as Iraq and Afghanistan, consumption has offered a site where they can act on these beliefs as they shun American consumer goods in protest (Yaqin 2007, 174). Indeed, a report by the Chicago branch of *Reuters* suggests that many Muslims have turned to Muslim-branded products as a way of reasserting their Islamic identities in the face of pervasive international stereotypes that link Islam to acts of violence and terrorism (Stern 2007). In this context, Fulla's popularity becomes a more complex phenomenon than NewBoy's explanation would allow. Fulla, as an Arab-designed

Islamic product, offers Arab-Muslim consumers an *authentic* alternative to the American Barbie doll and a site where they can express their disagreement with American foreign policy and reassert their Arab-Islamic identities via consumption.

The Fulla doll was also given another boost by the Saudi Arabian government. Nearly a year before the Fulla doll arrived on toy store shelves across the Middle East, Saudi religious authorities banned the Barbie doll (USAtoday 2003). The Saudi religious police listed the doll on their website as an item "offensive" to the Saudi interpretation of Islam. The site noted: "Jewish[1] Barbie dolls, with their revealing clothes and shameful postures, accessories and tools are a symbol of decadence to the perverted West" (USAtoday 2003). By labeling the Barbie doll as a 'Jewish toy,' the Saudi Arabian government effectively re-inscribed Islam as 'correct and moral,' while Judaism became 'incorrect and immoral.' The Fulla doll, as an Islamic toy, received 'instant religious legitimacy' that facilitated her smooth entry into Saudi Arabia and helped her establish a de facto monopoly over the country's doll market after her competitor's ouster.

It is clear from these various explanations of Fulla's popularity that people do not consume indiscriminately. Why some goods sell better than others actually speaks to issues of culture, identity, subjectivity (Grewal 1999, 800). Indeed, inherent in Arab consumers' selection of the Fulla doll over the Barbie doll is an understanding of who they are, who they are not, who they want to be, and who they do not want to be. Fulla, therefore, appears to resonate with Arab consumers in a way that Barbie, as a non-Islamic, non-Arab American consumer good simply cannot. As one Syrian toy store manager stated: "Fulla is one of us. She's my sister, she's my mother, she's my wife.

[1] Barbie's creator, Ruth Handler, was Jewish. It is likely that the Saudis considered the Barbie doll to be Jewish by association, although her religious convictions are unremarked in any marketing materials (See Terrebonne 2008, 2).

She's all the traditional things of Syria and the Middle East" (Quoted in Yaqin 2007, 175).

But what form does this resonation take? After all, both dolls are roughly the same size and shape and stare out at the world with their excessively made-up faces. In fact, very few discernable differences exist between the two dolls. Unlike her blue-eyed, flaxen haired counterpart, Fulla has long dark-brown locks with copper highlights and brown eyes. It has also been noted that Fulla's bust is moderately smaller than Barbie's (Campbell 2006). It is likely that the reason for these similarities is that both NewBoy and Mattel employ the same subcontractor in China to manufacture their respective dolls (O'Laughlin 2005).

It appears, then, that the *real* difference between the Fulla doll and the Barbie doll must go beyond their plastic forms. The real difference is, I believe, their radically different identities. Fulla is "one of us", and Barbie is not. Thus, while NewBoy may have simply repackaged a Barbie-lookalike, they have *filled* her plastic body with the identity of an entirely different person. Put another way, the Barbie doll has not only been given a (minor) physical makeover, but an identity makeover as well; she became "Arab, body and soul" (Fulla.com – about Fulla).

Fulla's connection to Arab-Islamic identity and the various transformations the Barbie doll has undergone to become the Fulla doll are of particular interest to me in this thesis. Guided by the simple question of *how* cultural products like Fulla come to exist, I endeavor to better understand the relationship between globalization, mass-consumption and cultural identities in the Arab world. In answering these guiding questions, the central argument of this thesis will be that the Fulla doll can be understood as an example

of the process of creolization. Through processes of creolization, local or indigenous (often non-Western) cultures are able to consume foreign-made (often Western) consumer goods, but in doing so, they transform these items into new products more hospitable to their own local or indigenous customs and practices. Put differently, I argue that the Fulla doll serves as an example of this process of transformation; she is a *transformed* Barbie doll. Through an examination of a series of animated Fulla doll advertisements, I argue that the transformations made to the Barbie doll relate primarily to her ethno-religious and gendered identity. Noting that this process of recontextualization does not exist independently of the Fulla doll's consumers, I further argue that the Fulla doll and her advertisements participate in processes of identity building and socialization (of children) across the Arab world. As a final observation, I also point out that Fulla's articulation of Arab-Muslim identity, despite being constructed in opposition to Barbie's mass-produced Western, non-Arab, non-Muslim identity, is not inherently hostile or violent towards 'Western culture.' Fulla, therefore, offers an interesting case study of the complex intertwining of identity and cross-cultural mass-consumption, and of course, the processes of globalization which have facilitated the diffusion of mass-produced (often Western) goods around the world.

My study will also demonstrate that the Fulla doll has much to say about political issues and political identities that, on the surface, may seem completely unrelated to a children's toy. Indeed, as Erica Rand notes, cultural products need political attention because political battles are fought over and through the manipulation of cultural symbols. "People use them to signal political beliefs and connections that have come to seem natural" (1995, 5). The Fulla doll, as I will demonstrate in this thesis, not only

offers us an invaluable articulation of Arab-Muslim feminine identity within mass-consumption, but also speaks to highly politicized issues, such as veiling, Israel/Palestine, Sunni-Shia relations, notions of pan-Arab political unity, and even race.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I situate my case study within the broader literature on globalization and cross-cultural consumption. I discuss the two dominant streams of thought – McWorld (Barber 1995) and creolization (Howes 1996) – and continue by detailing my methodological approach to understanding Barbie's recontextualized identity. In the second chapter, I critically engage with Fulla's animated advertisements and discuss her ethno-religious and gendered identity. The third and final chapter seeks to answer the 'so what?' question by noting that Fulla's identity does not exist independently of her consumers. Consumed as both a television character and as a plastic doll, Fulla's engagement with children in the Middle East, therefore, exists in two forms allowing the doll to socialize children in two different ways as well. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of how Fulla's articulation of Arab-Muslim identity presents an interesting counter-example to socio-political theories, which argue for the inherent incompatibility and unavoidable conflict between 'Islam' and 'the West' (see Huntington 1993).

Chapter 1: Globalization, Homogenization, and Cross-Cultural Consumption

> The Ayatollah was right...America is the Great Satan, American culture is vulgar rubbish, the free-market is killing literature, tasteless youth culture rules all and civilization as we know it must be protected against the barbaric businessman.
>
> *–Rudy Kousbroek (Quoted in Hebron and Stack 2009, 92).*

Introduction

Having introduced the reader to Fulla and her 'superstar' status amongst the various Islamic dolls available in Europe, North America and the Middle East, this largely theoretical chapter will explore Fulla's unique place within the contemporary socio-political debates characterizing the relationships among mass-consumption, globalization and cultural identities. Beginning with the question of what happens when mass-produced commodities cross cultural boundaries, I endeavor to understand the relationship between cultures and various consumer goods and how globalization – as a process that has facilitated the "availability and affordability of a broad spectrum of differentiated and ever-changing commodities far exceeding the consumers' basic needs both in substance and in variety" (Pink 2009, ix) – has altered this relationship.

Indeed, social science and humanities scholars widely accept the view that cultures and commodities relate to one another in various and complex ways (Howes 1996, 1). Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, in the *The Social Life of Things,* states that commodities are "the stuff of 'material culture' […]" (1986, 5). Grant McCracken elaborates on this connection and observes that "[all objects] are created according to the blueprint of culture and to this extent they make the categories of this blueprint material" (1988, 94). Mary Douglas also concurs with Appadurai and McCracken: "[Goods are needed for] making visible and stable the categories of culture" (Douglas and Isherwood 1979, 59). Goods afford us – as individuals, consumers, and members of our respective

cultures – a set of markers by which we can structure our understandings of cultures and facilitate our social interactions with other people (Howes 1996, 2). Note, for example, our tendency to make a range of assumptions about people based on the clothes they wear, the vehicles they choose to drive, and how they choose to furnish their homes. In short, we often judge one another on the basis of the meanings attached to the various 'visible' objects of culture and how we have chosen to assemble them (Howes 1996, 2). As Douglas notes, "goods in their assemblage present a set of meanings, more or less coherent, more or less intentional. They are read by those who know the code and scan them for information" (1979, 5).

If various consumer goods constitute the 'stuff' of material culture and serve as a 'blueprint' and 'code' for understanding the order of culture and the peoples who belong to various cultures, what are we to do when goods cross borders? After all, when goods travel, the culture in which they are consumed is no longer the culture whose blueprint they contain. Do the goods still serve as a 'code' and 'blueprint'? If so, whose code? Whose blueprint? Further, given the accelerated rate of global trade, this crossing of borders currently happens at a pace that is unprecedented in human history. The constant displacement of consumer goods around the world needs be to be examined – how are various consumer goods received, understood, and employed in different societies?

In attempting to answer this question, I will begin with an exploration of the two streams of thought on the subject that appear to have dominated much of the contemporary literature: The first maintains that the spreading of (often Western) mass-produced goods and products – Coca-Cola, denim jeans, McDonald's hamburgers, Disney films, and of course, Barbie dolls – around the world is a deeply problematic and

homogenizing process that threatens local/indigenous cultures and practices. It is, in short, creating a world that thinks and behaves in the same way and is corroding the world's cultural/national/regional diversity (see Barber 1995, 3-20; Hebron and Stack 2009, 86-93; Howes 1996, 3-5; Tomlinson 1999, 1991). The second stream of thought acknowledges that various (Western) mass-produced 'global' goods – such as Coca-Cola – have indeed displaced local products in some contexts, but maintains that this process does not *prima facie* guarantee a 'homogenization' of the world's plethora of cultures. Rather, adherents of this view question the assumption that such goods, on entering a culture, will inevitably retain and communicate the values they are accorded by their culture of origin and argue that (non-Western) cultures have actually demonstrated remarkable resilience and creativity in the face of globalization (see Abaza 2006; Howes 1996, 5-8; Kuppinger 2009, 189). After having examined these perspectives in greater detail, I will argue that the Fulla doll – despite her physical similarities to the Barbie doll – presents us with an example of the argument concerning cultural re-framings of Western goods, and in fact demonstrates the 'resiliency' of Arab culture and identity in the face of globalization. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a discussion of my methodological approach to demonstrating this 'resiliency.'

The McWorld Monster

Amongst historians, political scientists, sociologists, anthropologists and economists, few terms are as hotly contested and as diversely defined as 'globalization.' To be sure, in the minds of many the term evokes images of Molotov cocktails and the 'Battle in Seattle' during the 1999 WTO meetings, Subcomandante Marcos and the Zapatista movement, or even simply an individual in the global south dressed in Nike-

branded apparel while consuming a Coca-Cola and eating at Kentucky Fried Chicken. Given these seemingly disparate images, I believe that it would be fruitful to pause our discussion briefly and clarify what I mean by this term and what aspects of this massive global phenomenon are of interest to me here.

Numerous scholars (see Hebron and Stack 2009, 2; Keohane and Nye 2000, 104-119; Wiarda 2007, 2-9) have pointed out that globalization is not a new phenomenon. While it is indeed a 'condition of the modern world' (Tomlinson 1999, 1), it did not spring-up overnight. Keohane and Nye (2000), for example, argue that the process of globalization actually has ancient roots. They distinguish between what they call 'globalism' and 'globalization' (2000, 105). Globalism, they note, "is a state of the world involving networks of interdependence at multi-continental distances" and is fuelled by the "linkages" emerging from "flows and influences of capital and goods, information and ideas, and people and forces, as well as environmentally relevant substances (such as acid rain or pathogens) (105). They believe that these sorts of interactions between peoples and societies have been taking place for centuries through trade, expansion, exploration, conquest, migration, colonization, and even evangelization. As an early example of these 'linkages,' Keohane and Nye cite the ancient silk trade, but note that its effects were only felt by a small and elite group of merchants and individuals.

Globalization, for Keohane and Nye, therefore, is not a new phenomenon at all. Rather, it is an extension of globalism. As global ties have 'thickened' and become more 'dense' as a result of technological developments – the steamship, the telegraph, the Internet, and Boeing 747 airplanes – globalism has eventually given way to globalization. In this sense, they believe that globalization refers to the "shrinkage of distance on a large

scale" – an individual can board a plane in New York and land in Seoul on the very same day, for example – but also the weight and influence of the contact between societies (2000, 105). In short, the 'heavier,' 'thicker,' and 'denser' the contacts become – that is, the greater the capacity to transform transcontinental interactions – the more globalism gives way to globalization (2000, 105-109). As such, globalization is based on the weight and ultimately power of the levels of interdependence and transnational connections across the globe (105-109).

The notions of increased global 'connectivity,' 'linkages' and a 'shrinking world' noted by Keohane and Nye are commonplace in many (if not most) of the accounts and definitions of globalization. John Tomlinson, for example, understands globalization as simply "the rapidly developing and ever-densening network of interconnections and interdependences that characterize modern social life" (1999, 2). Howard Wiarda also notes, "Globalization may be defined as the increasing scale, extent, variety, speed, and magnitude of international cross-border, social, economic, military, political, and cultural interrelations" (2007, 3). "Globalization", he continues, "means we are all part of a steadily shrinking and interdependent world" (3). Further, Anthony McGrew, in one of his earlier works on globalization, defines it as "simply the intensification of global interconnectedness" (1992, 65). McGrew goes on to stress that this interconnectedness exists in many forms and contexts: "Nowadays, goods, capital, people, knowledge, images, crime, pollutants, drugs, fashions and beliefs all readily flow across territorial boundaries. Transnational networks, social movements, and relationships are extensive in virtually all areas from the academic to the sexual" (1992, 67). What is important to take from these aforementioned understandings of globalization is that globalization has

facilitated the binding of our practices, our experiences and our political, economic and environmental fates together across the contemporary world (Tomlinson 1999, 2). Globalization, therefore, exists in many forms.

An in-depth analysis of these 'linkages' and the seemingly endless list of contexts in which they exist would be, I believe, far beyond the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, a very brief discussion of the economic and political implications of globalization will provide a useful introduction to the discussion of the remainder of this section. Economically, more and more countries around the world have been (and are being) integrated into a globalized market economy (Wiarda 2007, 4). National market economies are now increasingly 'networked' into a single, tightly interconnected global political economy whose methods of accumulation and distribution of resources are largely governed by the principles of neo-liberalism – that is, emphasizing the role of the market and decreasing governmental regulatory control over economic matters (Hebron and Stack 2009, 19). Politically, more and more questions are being raised about the changing role of states and globalization's impact on the state system at regional and international levels (Hebron and Stack 2009, 21). Numerous scholars have expressed concern that the changes to international economics brought about by globalization have restricted the power of national governments. Linda Weiss, for example, believes that the increasing internationalization of economics has actually restricted states' abilities to create policy and have forced policy shifts that please global investors and multinational corporations, instead of catering to the needs of their respective citizens (2003, 3). Governments, according to some scholars, have actually begun to lose the control they once held over their national populations and economies, and even their ability to

influence events (See Barber 1995, 12; Giddens 2003, 26; Strange 2000, 3). Still, others take this view further and argue that the 'borderless economy' has begun to render nation-states irrelevant (see Ohmae 1999).

Discussions of the political and economic implications of globalization, however, only tell a portion of the story. They do little, I believe, to articulate how this phenomenon is actually changing the way people across the world behave and view themselves and the cultures to which they belong. In a world so closely interconnected, how can different cultures and groups of people maintain a sense of uniqueness? Or, is maintaining this uniqueness even possible?

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, one stream of thought maintains that globalization has become the vehicle for destroying the rich diversity of regional, national and local cultures. This destruction comes in the form of cultural homogeneity (See Hannerz 1992, 217; Howes 1996, 3-6; Tomlinson 1991, 1-33; 1999, 6). As societies face the pressure to conform to Western capitalism, lifestyle choices, and values, they sacrifice the very traditions, customs and languages that once characterized their uniqueness.

To be sure, some scholars view these developments positively and have predicted the establishment of a global order guided by the worldwide acceptance and adoption of economic and political liberalism through the proliferation of market-democracies (see Fukuyama 1992). Other scholars, however, have interpreted this phenomenon negatively and predicted a serious and hostile clash of values. Samuel Huntington, for example, maintains that a violent 'clash of civilizations' between the 'West' and Islam (along with other civilizations) is inevitable (1993). In a similar vein, Benjamin Barber described

what he believed to be a fundamental (and also violent) conflict between what he terms 'McWorld' and forces of ethno-national and cultural fragmentation – what he calls 'jihad' (1995). What concerns me here, however, is not the validity of Fukuyama's, Huntington's or even Barber's claims *per se*. Rather, I am interested in the belief that globalization, driven by rampaging world capitalism – or 'McWorld' to use Barber's term – will result in the further development of a culture of consumerism oriented toward materialism, indulgent personal values and ultimately the destruction of once vibrant local cultures. As such, it would be useful to explore this concept in greater detail.

For Barber, this rampaging world capitalism can be characterized as follows:

> McWorld is a product of popular culture driven by expansionist commerce. *Its template is American*, *its form style*. Its goods are as much images as matériel, an aesthetic as well as product line. It is about culture as commodity, apparel as ideology. Its symbols are Harley-Davidson motorcycles and Cadillac motorcars hoisted from the roadways, where they once represented a mode of transportation, to the marquees of global market cafes like Harley-Davidson's and the Hard Rock where they become icons of lifestyle. *You don't drive them, you feel their vibes and rock to the images they conjure up* from old movies and new celebrities […]. Music, video, theater, books, and theme parks – the new churches of a commercial civilization in which malls are the public squares and suburbs the neighborless neighborhoods – are all constructed as image exports *creating a common world taste around common logos, advertising slogans, stars, songs, brand names, jingles, and trademarks* (1995, 17; emphasis added).

It is clear from this quotation that McWorld's homogenizing effects – 'the common world' – are often equated with the 'Americanization' of the world. Indeed, even the very moniker McWorld is a reference to the American McDonald's corporation and their global dominance within the fast-food industry. Barber's view is shared, with Hebron and Stack arguing, for example that the 'prevailing' view of contemporary global culture maintains that American commercial and popular culture occupies an almost

hegemonic presence on the world (2009, 89). But what do we mean by 'cultural hegemony'?

Ulf Hannerz, also playing off the name of a large American corporation – Coca-Cola – describes this 'American hegemony' as a 'Coca-colonization' (1992, 217). Writing slightly earlier than both Barber and Hannerz, John Tomlinson characterizes the dominance of American consumer goods in the international market as a form of 'imperialism' (1991, 4). What is important here, however, is that both Hannerz and Tomlinson separate what they see as a twentieth century development – the emergence of 'McWorld' so to speak – from the nineteenth century system of colonial rule. American imperialism, therefore, refers primarily to the economic domination associated with the global reach of capitalism, but without the political form of 'colonialism' (1991, 4). For our purposes here, however, the simple definition provided by Tunstall will suffice:

> Cultural imperialism […] claims that authentic, traditional and local culture in many parts of the world is being battered out of existence by the indiscriminate dumping of large qualities of slick commercial and media products, mainly from the United States (Quoted in Tomlinson 1991, 8).

The assumption implicit in this definition of cultural imperialism, I believe, should be fairly clear. Not only do American goods – aspects of McWorld – enter other local markets and displace traditional products, but the values encoded within them are also adopted in place of pre-existing ones. As Barber notes, people 'feel the vibes' and 'rock to the images they conjure up.' To be sure, there can be no denying that Western (read: American) products have, in fact, displaced local products. It has been noted, for example, that Coca-Cola has actually displaced fruit juices, coconut milk, and even water in some regions around the world (Barnet and Cavanagh 1994, 246). Others go further, arguing that McWorld's power is not simply limited to displacing tangible goods, but has

also extended itself onto the human body and has begun changing how the world defines 'beauty' (see Pieterse 2000, 387-8). That is, people around the world are beginning to 'look the same' because they are 'feeling the vibes' of an American physical ideal. By this, however, I do not mean that people all across the world are donning the latest pair of slimming Levi's jeans – although they are – but that physical body modifications are now commonplace in the global south. Iran, for example, is now the 'nose job capital of the world' (Holguin 2009). It is not simply that Iranians are lining up to change themselves, but that they want to change themselves in a specific way - a 'Western' way. One woman explains: "A Western nose is more beautiful" (Quoted in Holquin 2009). An Iranian cosmetic surgeon further explains that the 'hot look' is inspired by Hollywood and women look to American celebrities such as Jennifer Lopez for inspiration (Quoted in Holguin 2009). Another quote from Iranian photographer Newsha Tavakolian is telling: "Everyone saw how the Western women, they have very small nose and look almost like Barbie, and the Iranian women, they see them and they say, 'Oh, I want to look like them.' They want to make their nose small" (Quoted in Holguin 2009). The pervasiveness of this sort of surgery has even been the subject of study. The Rhinology Research Society of Iran, in cooperation with Johns Hopkins University in the United States, conducted a study that revealed the rate of nose jobs per capita in Iran is seven times that in the United States (see The Guardian 2013).

My point here is that even a country with strict Islamic norms – compulsory veiling for women, for example – is not immune to the values transmitted through (cultural) globalization. Through satellite television, the Internet and Hollywood films, the American cultural 'vibes' are felt and acted upon around the world. As British

photographer Zed Nelson observed, "Globalization hasn't just given us Starbucks in Beijing and shopping malls in Africa. It is also creating an eerily homogenized look" (Quoted in Sussman 2010).

The ABCs: Arabs, Barbies, and Creolization

To be sure, the fact that Iranians are now lining up by the hundreds of thousands to modify themselves in the image of Jennifer Lopez and that fruit juices are being swept aside and replaced by Coca-Cola appear to provide strong evidence for the assertion that American culture – or an image of American culture when viewed from the outside – is homogenizing the world and has changed what Raymond Williams calls the 'signifying practices' of cultures – language that tracks through the arts and philosophy to journalism, fashion and advertising (Quoted in Tomlinson 1991, 4). That these signifying practices appear to have changed in non-Western countries, in short, offers support for the assertion that Coca-Cola and Hollywood films have retained the meanings imbued within them by their culture of origin and have successfully communicated these values after being transferred to a different cultural (and geographical) context.

While I acknowledge that this process is taking place, I aim to demonstrate that claims of local cultural eradication in the face of globalization are hyperbolic and negligent. This view is summed up neatly in the observations of Egyptian sociologist Mona Abaz upon returning home to Egypt after time abroad:

> I returned to Cairo in 1998 after a long absence […]. The flow of cash had increased among certain classes, and along with it conspicuous consumption. […] Today Cairenes can order local fast food to be home delivered […]. With increasing consumer appetites, shopping malls […] had proliferated in various areas of Cairo. I was fascinated by how youngsters, both poor and rich, had conquered these spaces of consumption and how these are turning into specifically gendered spaces at specific times of the day. […] *If we take into*

> *account phenomena such as the spread of McDonald's, ATMs, mobile phones, condominiums, email usage, and gated communities, then Egypt has indeed entered the age of globalization. But to jump from that premise to the conclusion that these types of phenomena are leading to a homogenization in lifestyle is too simplistic* (2006, 2-3; emphasis added).

Within consumption practices, spaces exist that afford local consumers the ability to display their creativity through processes of re-contextualization (Howes 1996, 5). Foreign goods – Coca-Cola, McDonald's, Barbie dolls, etc. – are taken in, but assigned new meanings and uses. This process has been described as 'hybridization,' but its more common and contemporary label is 'creolization' (Howes 1996, 5). Local consumers are not merely passive victims of global consumerism and McWorld does not always 'eat up' local practices and goods. They are not, as Robert S. Lynd observed nearly eighty years ago, 'noiseless servants of demand…bled white of all personality and urgency' (Quoted in Trentmann 2006, 20). In fact, today's consumers, all over the world, are able to choose between countless brands and varieties of products and their decisions tend to correlate with their lifestyles – 'I am what I buy.' Further, many aspects of 'lived culture', as Clifford Geertz calls them, - personal relationships, religious or political affiliations, sexual orientations, sense of national or ethnic identity, attachments to 'local' practices and contexts, etc. – cannot always be accounted for and commodified by Western produced goods (Quoted in Tomlinson 1999, 88). It is in these small, localized spaces that different cultures are fortified (or 'thickened' to use Tomlinson's word) and chafe against the smooth advance of a uniform capitalist McWorld. They are, in short, the sites where the contradictory tendency against homogenization creates new distinctions (see Levi-Strauss 1979, 20).

Local companies are often better able to 'tease out' and recognize these 'fortified' aspects of culture and regularly seek to attach their products to them in an effort to enhance their selling power. In fact, these added cultural, religious, or ethical features frequently become the best selling feature of a product and resonate so strongly with local consumers that they are cited as the primary reason consumers have chosen one product over another (Pink 2009, xi). This process of attaching cultural meaning to a consumer good to improve its selling power is what is known as the construction of 'commodity signs' (Goldman and Papson 2000, 81). Brand-name commodities are attached to various dimensions of 'fortified' culture, and commodity signs are created. The consumer good then serves as a 'signifier' of religion, ethnicity, gender, etc. and invites consumers to create these new equivalencies that link products to culture and culture to products. In a world where, as noted above, consumers are presented with a variety of goods and consumption choices, commodity signs become incredibly important dimensions of how goods are created, bought, sold, and for our purposes here, transformed (Goldman and Papson 2000, 82).

In the Middle East, Islam serves as a powerful aspect of lived culture that cannot always be accommodated in mass-produced Western goods. It also serves as a powerful branding tool as local companies (more familiar with local customs and preferences) transform Western-style consumer products into 'Islamic products.' Islam, in short, has become an important dimension of commodity signs in the Middle East. Indeed, in recent years, numerous examples of 're-branded' (or re-contextualized) Western-style goods have emerged in the Middle East and link themselves to Islam. 'Made in the United States' becomes 'Re-made in the Middle East.' Mecca Cola, for example, is a Coca-Cola

style beverage with an Islamic twist. Originally launched in 2002 in France by Tawfik Mathlouthi, an Algerian immigrant, the Mecca Cola World Company is now headquartered in Dubai. On its bottles, which are now 'flying off shelves' in the Middle East and Europe, Mecca Cola urges its consumers to stop 'drinking stupid' and start 'drinking with commitment' (Murphy 2003). The commitment, according to Mecca Cola's official website (mecca-cola.com), is Mecca Cola's pledge to donate twenty percent of the price of each bottle sold to local non-governmental organizations and to assist the peoples within the Palestinian territories, primarily through efforts to promote children's education. The Iranian Zam-Zam Cola is another example of an Islamic twist on Coca-Cola, which is marketed across the Middle East. Like Mecca Cola, Zam-Zam Cola takes its name from an Islamic holy site in Saudi Arabia, the Well of Zamzam in Mecca. Zam-Zam Cola, moreover, has also met with great success across the Middle East (BBC 2002b). The popularity of such products suggests that Muslims in the Middle East are increasingly seeking to define and express their distinct identities not simply through consumption, but through 'Islamic consumption' (Pink 2009, xi).

The Fulla doll provides another example of this process of re-contextualization. Just as Mecca Cola and Zam-Zam Cola are virtually indistinguishable from their Western counterpart, but have been 're-contextualized' through a connection to Islam, the Islamic Fulla doll, too, shares numerous similarities to the Barbie doll. Fulla, hair and eye color notwithstanding, is virtually indistinguishable from her Western counterpart as both dolls are approximately the same size and shape. Additionally, both dolls share the same 'passion for fashion' and are available with extensive and beautiful wardrobes, although Barbie's wardrobe does not include a *hijab* and *abaya* like Fulla's does (Zoepf 2005). But

it would be an over-simplification, indeed, a mistake, to describe Fulla as a *hijab*-wearing Barbie and declare our analytical work complete. As Fawaz Abidin, Fulla's brand manager for NewBoy Design Studios, explains:

> This isn't just about putting the hijab on a Barbie doll. You have to create a character that parents and children will want to relate to. Our advertising is full of positive messages about Fulla's character. She's honest, loving, caring, and she respects her father and mother (Quoted in Zoepf 2005).

Abidin's comment suggests that Fulla's connection to Islam is deeper than simply re-dressing the Barbie doll in the accouterments of the female Islamic believer. That is, her connection to the 'lived culture' in the Middle East does not simply exist because she wears religiously appropriate clothing, but that her personality and character tap into 'relatable' features of the lived culture of her Arab consumers in a way that Barbie, as a Western-produced good, cannot. It is, therefore, my contention that in addition to being 're-contextualized' (superficially) by being given brown hair and brown eyes, Fulla effectively re-contextualizes the Barbie doll to accommodate both her new ethnicity and her new religion. It is these latter changes that are of primary interest to me here. Fulla presents us with a case study of not only how a Western consumer good – the Barbie doll – can be physically transformed to accommodate the 'lived culture' of her new consumers (by donning the *hijab* and an *abaya*) but she has also had her personality – or her 'character' as Abidin called it – re-contextualized as well. Barbie, in short, has not simply changed her outfit; she has also adopted an entirely new ethnic and gendered identity as an Arab, Muslim woman. NewBoy, through the Fulla doll, has articulated a particular conception of what it 'means' to be an Arab Muslim woman.

Methodology

But how are we to study the identity of a doll and how can 'she' tell us about Arab Muslim women? After all, it is doubtful that Fulla, as an inanimate object, would consent to a series of in-depth interviews. Rather, I maintain that the Fulla doll's 'personality' is shown to her potential consumers through her advertisements, which in turn, promote her consumption.

The Fulla doll is incessantly advertised on children's satellite channels in the Arab Middle East (most notably, a channel called *SpaceToon,* roughly equivalent to *Cartoon Network* or *Nickelodeon* in North America) (see Zoepf 2005). The Fulla advertising campaign also makes creative use of the Internet as Fulla is the proud owner of her very own Facebook page, YouTube account, and website. In her advertisements, the Fulla character is transformed from a mere plastic object into an actual living being. Interestingly, Fulla's advertisements exist in two forms: first, there are what I call 'explicit' commercials. These commercials exist to 'sell' the doll itself and various Fulla-branded products, such as blankets, sporting goods, and even prayer clothing and mats for little girls (see Fulla.com – media – ads). Second, there are what NewBoy calls 'Fulla songs.' In these songs, the Fulla character becomes the star of short, animated clips. I do not consider these clips to be 'explicit' commercials per se because they do not advertise the Fulla-branded objects that are available for purchase at toy stores across the Arab Middle East. Rather, the purpose of these short 'songs' is to simply advertise the Fulla character and to educate small children on various Arab-Islamic cultural norms, while simultaneously familiarizing them with the Fulla brand.

It is this latter group of advertisements, her songs, that are my primary interest within this thesis. These songs are where the Fulla character 'comes to life' and they are

also the sites where 'non-physical' modifications to the Barbie doll actually take place. That is, they are where Barbie earns her Arab-Muslim credentials by not only engaging in various Islamic activities – praying, reading the Quran, wearing the veil – but also by becoming an 'authority' on these matters by instructing her young viewers on preforming these activities. In one song, for example, an animated Fulla character instructs her animated siblings, Bader and Nour, and the real-life children viewing the song on television or the Internet, on performing *al-woodoo*, the ritualistic washing before prayer in Islam (see NewBoy 2008b). The doll's explicit commercials, rarely (if ever) make specific mention of her Arab-Islamic identity, save for references to the 'clothing' included with the various dolls or a commercial for Fulla-branded prayer clothes (for example, see Fulla.com – media – ads).

Cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard argues that advertisements can be seen as a language or a code by which societies speak of and to themselves (1997, 465). Similarly, sociologist Erving Goffman argues that advertisements endeavor to be recognizable and familiar to those who view them and manipulate preexisting cultural norms to indicate how men and women ought to act, and therefore, what they ought to consume (1979, 84). He notes: "[a]dvertisers conventionalize our conventions, stylize what is already a stylization, make frivolous use of what is already something considerably cut off from contextual controls. Their hype is hyper-ritualization" (1979, 84). Goffman believed that advertisements take scenes from 'real life' and standardize, exaggerate, and simplify them for their audience. As one of the most obvious and easily understood scenes of real life, advertisements specifically manipulate and exaggerate gender norms (1979, 8). Thus, the characters/actors shown in advertisements are 'on display,' but not in the

narrow sense of the term. Rather, all of an individual's behavior and appearance serves to inform those who witness him/her of something about his/her social identity, about his/her mood, intent, and expectations and about the state of his/her relation to them (1979, 1). Further, within every culture, a unique range of these behaviors and appearances become specialized allowing them to more routinely and effectively perform this informing role (1979, 1).

Advertisements, by tapping into and exploiting these indicative behaviors and communicating with their audience through them, appear to be the 'language of culture.' If advertisements are the language of culture, then we must consider that there is a discursive interaction between those who view advertisements and the representation of culture offered back to us through advertisements (Tomlinson 1991, 61). What each of us makes of a television advertisement or a novel or a newspaper article will always be influenced by whatever else is unfolding in our lives at that moment. "But, equally, our lives are lived as representations to ourselves in terms of the representations present in our culture: our biographies are, partly, 'intertextual'" (Tomlinson 1991, 61). Simply put, our present realities are always partly a function of our past experiences, which often include experiences with media-based texts, including advertisements (Tomlinson 1991, 63).

Some scholars have considered the implications of these 'conversations' and, as such, have come to view advertisements themselves as a form of discourse. Indeed, Guy Cook notes "advertising is not a remote and specialized discourse, but a prominent discourse type in contemporary society" (1992, 4). Advertisements include both text (written or spoken language) and context (the function of the advertisements, its creators

and recipients, what society and situation in which the communication takes place). Discourse, therefore, is the text and context taken together (Cook 1992, 4). If advertisements are discourse, then it appears that discourse analysis would be a useful approach for examining the processes by which the Barbie character is transformed into Fulla – or, the processes by which a female Arab-Islamic identity is being constructed and 'sold' back to Arab-Muslims in the Middle East. Brian Paltridge defines discourse analysis as follows:

> Discourse analysis focuses on knowledge about language beyond the word, clause, phrase and sentence that is needed for successful communication. It looks at patterns of language across texts and considers the relationship between language and the social and cultural contexts in which it is used…It examines how the use of language is influenced by relationships between participants as well as the effects the use of language has upon social identities and relations. It also considers how views of the world, and identities, are constructed through the use of discourse […] (2006, 2).

Palridge's definition of discourse analysis is useful for our purposes here because he highlights the importance of the relationship between identities and discourse. While verbal communication may be the most important means to display who we are and regulate how we want people to see us, our social identities are also controlled through a host of other factors as well. As noted above, the way we dress and the gestures we use, for example, also influence how we display our social identities (Goffman 1979, 1-4; Paltridge 2006, 11). James Gee also argues that the ways we make visible and recognizable who we are and what we are doing always involves more than spoken language (2005, 1). It involves acting, interacting and thinking in certain ways. It also involves valuing and speaking in appropriate ways with appropriate 'props', at appropriate times, in appropriate places (Gee 2005, 20-2). In the case of Fulla's animated clips, this means that we must consider what is being verbally communicated by the

soundtrack or sung by the Fulla character, as well as the actions of the characters, the setting, and other visual cues that enhance the meaning of the advertisement. Guy Cook elaborates on this point, noting that "[w]hen music and pictures combine with language to alter or add to [the advertisement's] meaning, then discourse analysis must consider these modes of communication too" (1992, 1). Language and context must be examined 'holistically' (1992, 1).

For my analysis, I have chosen to examine thirteen animated Fulla clips produced by NewBoy Animation between 2002 and 2011: 'Alaa Wa'den' (2002); 'Zahratul Bustan' (2005); 'The Dentist' (2007a); 'Omsiko Forshatee' (2007b); 'Ramadan' (2007c); 'Samrao'n' (2007d); 'Toshriquo' (2007e); 'Ismah Fulla' (2007f); 'Salah' (2008a); 'Al-Woodoo' (2008b); 'Watan Arabi' (2009); 'Eid' (2011a); 'Latasalini' (2011b). This list includes all of the material available to me in Canada on the Internet. These clips have been uploaded to *YouTube* by Fulla's manufacturers, NewBoy, and can be found on her official *YouTube* page. Additionally, each clip bears a watermark stamp containing the company's trademark and the year of its production at the bottom. Further, the more recent clips from 2009 and 2011 are also available for viewing on the official Fulla website, *Fulla.com*, and online through Fulla's official Facebook page, *Facebook.com/Fulla.page*.

As noted above, Goffman (1979, 23) argues that advertisements often manipulate easily recognizable cultural norms. Advertisements draw on the discursive cultural knowledge in which consumers have been immersed since childhood – the association of the Islamic veil with female modesty and piousness is an obvious example (Hirschman, Scott and Wells 1998, 37). After a thorough review of all thirteen Fulla advertisements –

the animations and the song lyrics together – I believe that the modifications that the Barbie doll character has undergone to become Fulla have taken place on two distinct, but related, fronts: ethno-religious lines and gendered lines.[2] Further, I maintain that these animated advertisements can be treated as texts and 'read,' 'quoted' and 'cited' as such. Therefore, in addition to including the translated scripts for each advertisement in the appendix, I will also insert 'screen captions' taken from the various advertisements throughout this thesis, as I believe they serve to enhance the 'verbal' language of the advertisement by showing us (the viewers) what various actions/events actually 'look like.'

Conclusion

Consumer goods and culture relate to one another in very complex ways. Consumer goods constitute the 'stuff of material culture' (Appadurai 1986, 5) and as such, are also created according to the 'blueprint' of culture (McCracken 1988, 94). This relationship, however, becomes even more complex when one considers the processes of globalization that have facilitated the acceleration of global trade to unprecedented levels. Various mass-produced goods are now being consumed all across the world by cultures and societies that did not originally manufacture them. When this happens, do consumer goods still serve as blueprints? How are imported consumer goods received, employed and understood in different societies around the world?

In answering these questions, I began my discussion by situating my research within the existing literature on globalization. Understanding globalization as a multi-

[2] The 'cultural norms' exploited by the Fulla doll vis-à-vis gender are closely tied to Islam. However, not all references to Fulla's religion are explicitly tied to her gender and vice-versa. Therefore, for purposes of clarity, I have chosen to separate them as distinct categories.

facetted process that has served to increase global economic, political, military, and environmental interconnectedness, I asked if it were possible for different cultures to maintain a sense of uniqueness and individuality.

One stream of thought, the McWorld paradigm (Barber 1995), maintains that globalization, driven by rampaging world capitalism, will result in the further degradation of local cultures. Globalization is creating a "common world taste around common logos, advertising slogans, stars, songs, brand names, jingles, and trademarks" (Barber 1995, 17). A second stream of thought, however, maintains that the conclusions of the McWorld paradigm are somewhat over-blown and notes that within consumption, spaces exist where local consumers are afforded the ability to display their creativity through processes of re-contextualization. Foreign goods, such as the Barbie doll, Coca-Cola, etc. are taken in, but transformed and assigned new meanings and uses more hospitable to pre-existing local customs and practices. This process of re-contextualization is known as 'creolization' (Howes 1996, 5).

In the Middle East, numerous examples of creolization can be found that transform Western consumer goods into new products that take into account various aspects of Middle Eastern culture, namely the region's majority religion, Islam. I argued that the Islamic Fulla doll serves as an example of this process of re-contextualization along religious lines. Virtually identical in size and shape to her Western counterpart, Barbie, the Fulla doll includes a *hijab* and *abaya*. Fulla's manufacturers, however, have not simply dressed the Barbie doll in the garb of an Arab-Islamic woman. Rather, I maintain that they have actually re-contextualized the Barbie doll along identity-based lines.

This identity, moreover, is made visible to us (and Fulla's consumers) through a series of animated television advertisements aired on children's cartoon stations in the Arabic-speaking world. Noting that a discursive relationship exists between advertisements and their viewers, I have chosen to adopt discourse analysis as my methodological approach for examining the nature of the Arab-Islamic identity constructed for the Barbie doll. After a thorough review of thirteen Fulla advertisements, I argue that the identity-based modifications made to Barbie's identity have taken place on two fronts: ethno-religious lines and gendered lines. In the next chapter of this thesis, I critically engage with these advertisements and discuss these ethnic, religious and gendered modifications in greater detail.

Chapter 2: Transforming the Transnational and Consuming the Local

> Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes it before it can speak. But there is another sense in which seeing comes before words. It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it.
>
> *- John Berger (1972, 7).*

Introduction

As noted in the previous chapter, the central concern of this thesis is how non-Western peoples have been able to import a Western mass-produced good – the Barbie doll – and transform it into something new, the Fulla doll. I noted that while Fulla and Barbie are strikingly similar physically, save small differences in hair and eye color, the transformations that actually concern me here have been made to Barbie's ethnicity, religion, and femininity. These modifications, I argue, are made visible (and audible) to us through a set of Fulla's advertisements known as Fulla's 'songs.' Further, I noted that scholars of advertising and media studies have argued that advertisements can be considered 'the language of culture' and have studied the discursive relationship between the messages communicated by advertisements and the peoples (that is, consumers) who receive and interpret these messages in accordance with the pre-existing cultural norms and practices in which they have been brought up.

In this chapter, therefore, I will engage with Fulla's songs and examine how Barbie's identity has been modified to become more 'hospitable' to her new environment – the Arabic-speaking Middle East – and her new consumers – Arabic-speaking Muslims. I begin my discussion in this chapter with an examination of how we are shown (and told) that Barbie has become an 'Arab Muslim.' That is, how Barbie proceeds to earn her ethno-religious credentials through descriptions of her physical 'Arab appearance,' her 'Arab actions,' and even her 'Arab political thoughts.' I also endeavor not simply to

explain and detail this process, but critically engage with the Arab-Islamic identity created for the Fulla doll and problematize this identity through a discussion of 'Arab' as a linguistic descriptor, not a racial or religious one. Second, following Mary Rogers (1999), I will proceed to examine the modifications that have been made to Barbie's 'fantastic femininity' on the basis of her social and familial bonds, her demeanor and finally, her wardrobe. I argue that while the Barbie character is the 'center of her own Barbie world,' the Fulla character strives to place others – family, friends, etc. – at the center of her world. Further, I argue that while both Fulla and Barbie must 'look' and 'act' their idealized feminine parts, Fulla's femininity must also take her religion into consideration. I conclude my discussion by attempting to situate and problematize Fulla's femininity vis-a-vis colonial and Orientalist discourses pertaining to the allegedly oppressive nature of Islam and the legitimacy of the practice of veiling in Islam.

Ethno-Religiosity: From Malibu to the Arab Middle East

In a 2010 interview with BBC News, Manar Tarabichi, President and CEO of NewBoy, stated that the impetus behind the creation of the Fulla doll was a desire to have an 'Arabic doll' that 'looked and dressed like us' because the Barbie doll did not (BBC 2010). Tarabichi's comments appear to have been sincere. Fulla's advertisements are replete with references to her Arabness and the Arabic-speaking Middle East. One of the doll's earlier commercials, for example, refers to her as "The dream of every Arab girl" (see figure 1). Indeed, of the thirteen advertisements examined within this thesis, seven contain references to Fulla's Arab identity. The advertisements tell us that Fulla looks like an Arab, behaves like an Arab, and even has an awareness of the Middle East's contemporary political situation vis-à-vis the Arab-Israeli conflict. This manufactured

Arab identity, while serving to recontextualize the Barbie doll and turn her into an Arab, also presents us with a somewhat problematic handling of racial, sectarian, and cultural/national diversity within the Arab world.

Figure 1: "The Dream of every Arab girl" (NewBoy 2002).

As a useful starting point, let us now turn our attentions to the descriptions offered of Arab phenotypical characteristics. Some descriptions of Fulla's appearance are explicit and straightforward, while others are subtler and require more thought and explanation. We are told that "You can tell she is an Arab simply by looking at her" and simultaneously shown an image of the Fulla character striking a 'look at me' pose (NewBoy 2005). We are also told that "She looks as if she is from the Arab Gulf" as an image of the Kuwait Towers (as a reference to an Arab Gulf country) can be seen behind Fulla in the commercial (NewBoy 2009). But how can we tell she is an Arab simply by looking at her? How do the advertisements describe the visible markers of Arabness?

In addition to overt references connecting Fulla to various Arab countries - "Her eyes are like coffee from Yemen; Her hair is like the night in Najd [a region within Saudi Arabia]; She walks like a Libyan Gazelle; Her cheeks are like flowers from Damascus" (NewBoy 2009) – we are also told that skin color is another marker of Arabness. Numerous references are made to Fulla's skin tone, which is described *only* as 'tanned.'

One commercial, for example, explains that Fulla's skin color is actually one of the features that makes her beautiful: "A beautiful young lady; Tanned [skin] and well behaved; Fulla, Fulla; How beautiful she is" (NewBoy 2007f). While her behavior also serves to 'make her beautiful,' it is significant that the lyrics connect a particular skin tone to beauty. In doing so, a particular phenotypical characteristic is both idealized as a requirement for beauty and established as a boundary that serves to exclude those who are not 'tanned' from being beautiful.

This notion of exclusion on the basis on skin tone is further emphasized in other Fulla advertisements. In fact, her (allegedly) Arab skin color is of such importance that one of the commercials – "Samrao'n" – is entirely dedicated to describing it, as suggested by the title, which roughly translates as "Tanned" (NewBoy 2007d). We are told: "Fulla, Fulla; She is tanned like my homeland; And so are all her friends" (NewBoy 2007d). These lines are significant for two reasons. First, within the short clip they are repeated three separate times. When words or phrases are repeated in written or spoken communication it is often to stress their importance and ensure that their message has been properly communicated and understood by the audience (Paltridge 2006, 166). It would seem then that 'being tanned like my homeland' is an important visible marker of not only Fulla's Arab identity, but also the identity of 'all her friends.' Interestingly enough, in no Fulla advertisement is she shown interacting with anyone of different racial/ethnic backgrounds. All her friends are, indeed, just like her, save small differences in hair color (see figure 2).

Figure 2: Nada and Yasmeen - Fulla's Friends (NewBoy 2007f).

Second, the advertisement's comparison of Fulla's skin color to 'my homeland' is also significant. Fulla's Arabian homeland, it seems, is imagined as a place where *all* people are 'tanned.' Thus, it is not that Fulla chooses to interact only with people who look like her, but that it is not actually a choice at all because everyone in the Arab world has a skin color just like Fulla's. Indeed, this point is further demonstrated in another Fulla advertisement, "Zahratul Bustan" [Flower in the Garden] (NewBoy 2005). In the advertisement, a little girl sings: "She is the dream doll and my best friend" (NewBoy 2005). As the lyrics are sung, however, we are shown an image of two girls sitting on a bench smiling at one another (see figure 3). The context suggests that it is not two Fulla dolls sitting beside one another, but Fulla sitting beside the type of girl that would call Fulla her best friend: another Arab girl.

Figure 3: Fulla and her Arab friend (NewBoy 2005).

That both the Fulla character [in purple] and the Arab girl beside her [in blue] are wearing the *hijab* also serves to reinforce a connection between being an Arab and being a Muslim as well. This connection was also noted in the advertisement, “Fulla Samrao’n” (NewBoy 2007d). As the lyric “She is tanned like my homeland” is sung, the viewer is simultaneously shown an image of the Fulla doll engaging in prayer (see figure 4). Thus, to be an Arab, it seems, requires one not only to share Fulla’s skin tone, but also follow her religion as well.

Figure 4: "She is tanned like my homeland..." (NewBoy 2007d).

It is also certainly worth mentioning that Fulla herself is not simply *Muslim.* She is, in fact, a Sunni Muslim (NewBoy 2008a). This is discernable from the manner in which Fulla engages in her prayers. Many Shia Muslims tend to keep their arms parallel to their torsos as they pray and use a small clay tablet known as a *turbah* upon which they touch their foreheads. Many Sunni Muslims, however, tend to fold their arms over their abdomens/chests as they pray and touch their foreheads directly to the ground. The Fulla character, interestingly enough, folds her arms over her chest as she prays and does not use a *turbah* (see figures 5 and 6).

Figure 5: Fulla is shown folding her arms over her chest during prayer (NewBoy 2008a).

Figure 6: Fulla is shown touching her forehead directly to the ground during prayer (NewBoy 2008a).

These aforementioned descriptions of Fulla's Arab characteristics are not only significant because they serve to re-contextualize the Barbie doll as an Arab Muslim. They are also significant because they endeavor to shift the meaning of the term, Arab, from a linguistic descriptor to a religious/sectarian and racial one. Indeed, numerous definitions of the term 'Arab' note that it is, in fact, not a racial or religious category at all. In his now classic work, *The Arab Awakening*, George Antonius describes the Arabs as follows:

> The connotation of the word Arab has changed accordingly. It is no longer used solely to denote a member of the nomad tribes who peopled the Arabian Peninsula. It gradually came to mean a citizen of that extensive Arab world – not only an inhabitant of it, but that great majority whose racial descent, even when it was not of pure Arab lineage, had become submerged in the tide of Arabisation; whose manners and traditions had been shaped in an Arab mould; and, most decisive of all, *whose mother tongue is Arabic*. *The term applies to Christians as well as Moslems, and to the off-shoots of each of those creeds, the criterion being not Islamisation, but the degree of Arabisation* (1965, 18; emphasis added).

Lebanese scholar Charles Malik concurs with Antonius:

> The word "Arab" denotes neither a race nor a religion. For the most part, its connotation today is "Arabic-speaking." The overwhelming majority of the Arabic-speaking peoples (or Arabs) are Moslem, just as the overwhelming majority of the Moslems are non-Arabs; so the two terms do not coincide (Quoted in Chalala 1987, 21).

Indeed, within the Arabic-speaking countries where Fulla is sold, primarily within Northern Africa, there are sizeable Black populations. Countries such as Sudan and Somalia (while not in North Africa) are also members of the Arab League, signifying their linguistic, political and cultural connections to other Middle Eastern and North African countries. Yet, in Fulla's imaginary Arab homeland these people are not only *excluded* from 'being Arab' on the basis of their skin colors, they simply do not exist.

The above definitions also point out that 'Arab' is not a religious label either. Arabs, in fact, adhere to an array of religious creeds ranging from a host of Islamic and Christian sects and even Judaism. To be an Arab is, in fact, *not* necessarily to be a Muslim as well. By articulating an Arab identity that *requires* one to be Muslim, Christian and Jewish Arabs are automatically excluded. That Fulla's own sectarian alliances are not left ambiguous further serves to limit the group of individuals capable of claiming Arab identity by excluding non-Sunni Muslims. Moreover, considering that the Fulla doll is sold in countries with significant Shia populations, like Lebanon and Bahrain, and that her advertisements are aired via satellite across the Arabic-speaking world, it appears that Fulla's depiction of 'Arabness' reproduces the historical socio-political marginalization and oppression of Arab-Shia Muslims by Arab-Sunni Muslims. Indeed, Shias constitute nearly three quarters of the population in Bahrain, yet are subjected to Sunni rule (Fuller and Franck 1999). Saddam Hussein's government, prior to

2003, had virtually no Shia representation, Saudi Arabia has prohibited and marginalized its Shia population and prevented Shia adherents from performing various religious ceremonies, and even Shias in Lebanon have been marginalized politically and economically relative to their Sunni and Christian counterparts (Haji-Yousefi 2009, 115-6; Saad-Ghorayeb 2002, 7). That the Fulla character is assigned an Islamic sect and that she is never shown interacting with any discernibly Shia characters serve to normalize Sunni Islam as the Islam of the Arabs, to the detriment of not only other religions, but also other sects.

While Fulla's articulation of Arab identity is both 'racialized' (Black Arabs do not exist) and 'religion-ized' (Arabs are [Sunni] Muslim), it also requires being physically situated in the Arab world. In other words, the Barbie doll – as an easily recognizable symbol of the United States and 'American culture' – has been relocated from Malibu Beach to *al-watan al-Arabi*, the Arab world. In doing so, however, the Fulla character has been given a somewhat peculiar pan-Arab citizenship. She is not an Iraqi or Lebanese, nor is she Jordanian or Saudi Arabian. Instead, she has been connected to nearly fourteen different Arab countries. In addition to the aforementioned similes that connect her (through her appearance) to Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Libya and Syria, the Fulla doll, we are told, wears a Moroccan shawl and a Tunisian dress made of Iraqi threads (NewBoy 2009). Further, we are also shown that she is able to visit Kuwait, Algeria, Oman, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Israel/Palestine (NewBoy 2009; see figures 7; 8; 9; 10).

Figure 7: Fulla is shown standing in front of the Minaret of Samarra in Iraq (NewBoy 2009).

Figure 8: Fulla is shown riding past the Great Temple at Petra, Jordan (NewBoy 2009).

Figure 9: Fulla is shown riding in front of the Great Sphinx of Giza in Egypt (NewBoy 2009).

Figure 10: Fulla is shown standing in front of the Martyrs' Memorial in Algeria (NewBoy 2009).

Fulla's *al-watan al-Arabi,* therefore, is imagined as a place where national borders exist, but do not separate the Arab peoples. In the advertisement, "Watan Arabi", the Fulla character is able to travel all over the Middle East and Northern Africa (NewBoy 2009). That she is not stopped at borders or hindered by regional conflicts is significant as it stresses the connectedness of the Arab peoples in those countries. Arabness, therefore, transcends particular national state borders. In this regard, Fulla's Arab identity becomes reminiscent of the Arab nationalist discourse of the mid-late twentieth century, which culminated in the political union of Egypt and Syria into the United Arab Republic between 1958-1961. Walid Khalidi characterized this sentiment in his description of the Arab System:

> The Arab System is first and foremost a 'Pan' system. It postulates the existence of a single Arab Nation behind the façade of a multiplicity of sovereign states. In pan-Arab ideology, this nation is actual, not potential. […] From this perspective, the individual Arab states are deviant and transient entities; their frontiers illusory; their rulers interim caretakers or obstacles to be removed (Quoted in Chalala 1987, 34).

Fulla's Arabia, it seems, is a kind of "imagined community" (Anderson 2006, 6). Algerians and Moroccans may not *know* the people in Oman and Yemen, but in Fulla's Arab world – the borders of which stretch from Morocco to the Arabian Sea – they are turned into co-nationals. Further, the borders of Fulla's Arab world are strengthened by her claim to Arab ownership of famous Middle Eastern and North African architecture and monuments. The Great Temple at Petra, the Great Pyramids at Giza, the Martyrs' Memorial in Algiers, and even the Hassan II Mosque in Casablanca exist within their national borders, but are the collective property of the peoples of the Arab world.

But it is not enough simply to look like an Arab and hold a particular pan-Arab citizenship; Fulla also demonstrates an awareness of contemporary Middle Eastern

politics vis-à-vis the ongoing situation in Israel/Palestine. In this regard, Fulla's advertisement, "Watan Arabi" [Arab World], is telling (NewBoy 2009). The advertisement begins with the Fulla character emerging from a tent in an unnamed Arabian desert. Upon seeing a flower in the ground, Fulla is inspired to travel around the Arab world. On her world tour, Fulla collects flowers from each of the Arab countries she visits (see figure 11). The final stop Fulla makes is at the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. Upon entering the Mosque's grounds, Fulla becomes overwhelmed with emotion and begins to cry (see figure 12). Fulla then proceeds to plant her 'pan-Arab' bouquet of flowers in the ground and begins to pray to God. She asks Him to keep the *Arabian* al-Quds (the city of Jerusalem) safe as an image of the al-Aqsa Mosque is shown behind her (see figure 13).

Figure 11: Fulla is shown collecting flowers for her bouquet (NewBoy 2009).

Figure 12: Fulla cries upon entering the grounds of the al-Aqsa Mosque (NewBoy 2009).

Figure 13: Fulla prays beside her flowers in front of the al-Aqsa Mosque (NewBoy 2009).

The plotline of this advertisement is significant for several reasons. First, Fulla asks God to keep the *Arab* al-Quds safe. In doing so, Fulla claims Arab ownership over the city of Jerusalem. Additionally, the only parts of Jerusalem we are shown are Islamic, namely the grounds of the al-Aqsa Mosque. In doing so, the Arab city of Jerusalem is also connected to Islam, effectively making it the Arab-Islamic city of Jerusalem. While this serves to reinforce the previously mentioned connection Fulla articulates between Arab identity and Islam, it also *denies* the claims made by both Jews and Christians who also revere the city of Jerusalem and the grounds around the al-Aqsa Mosque.

Second, by using her pan-Arab citizenship and travelling around the Middle East and Northern Africa to assemble a bouquet of flowers from every nation, Fulla positions herself as the feature (or glue?) that brings together Arab lands. Fulla brings together disparate 'flowers' (individual Arabic-speaking countries) and creates a colorful 'bouquet' (the Arab nation). This unity, again, is reminiscent of the claims made by twentieth century Arab nationalists who argued that the Arabic-speaking lands constituted a single Arab nation behind a 'façade' of individual nation states. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we are shown how this Arab unity manifests itself. Fulla took her pan-Arab bouquet and planted it in front of the al-Aqsa Mosque as she proceeded to

ask God to keep the *Arab* al-Quds safe. The context here suggests that Fulla is not asking God to protect Jerusalem or the Mosque per se, but rather what they symbolize. That is, Jerusalem and the al-Aqsa Mosque are transformed into symbols of Palestine – an Islamic Palestine that belongs to the Arab peoples.

Further significance is given to this symbolism when one considers the arguments of Erica Rand vis-à-vis the Barbie doll. Rand argues that Mattel has chosen to connect Barbie to various popular, but largely uncontroversial forms of political consciousness such as environmental awareness or world peace to further popularize the doll and add 'brand value' (1995, 87). This brand value entails promoting infinite possibilities that are not offensive to the consumer, but must be compelling to as many people as possible (1995, 86). The *majority* of Barbie's consumers, for example, are unlikely to suggest that Barbie's advocacy of world peace or tree hugging are inherently *bad* things.

Within Fulla's "Watan Arabi" advertisement, NewBoy endeavors to follow in Mattel's footsteps by connecting Fulla to the "Palestine disaster," known as *al-nakba*. "The Palestine Disaster", explains historian Eugene Rogan, "stands as the most important turning point in twentieth century Arab history" (2009, 275). It is not simply, however, that the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 radically altered Arab history, but also the contemporary organization of Arab political and social life. Rather, the Palestinian refugees scattered throughout Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, the Gaza Strip, Egypt and elsewhere in the Arab-speaking Middle East have come to symbolize the collective failure of Arab states to protect their borders from encroachment and the humiliation experienced by powerful Arabic-speaking nations – Egypt, Syria, Jordan, etc. – during the 1948, 1956, 1967, and 1973 wars/conflicts with Israel. That various Arab states even

engaged in armed conflict with Israel is also significant and suggests that the experiences and feelings of loss amongst the Palestinian peoples are not remote and isolated, but mutually felt and experienced across the Arabic-speaking Middle East. Indeed, the Palestine question can even be differentiated from other national emancipation or liberation causes in Africa and Latin America on that basis (Pearlman 2012, 127). A process of mutual interaction between Palestinians and their other Arab co-nationals has marked the struggle for the liberation of the Palestinian peoples across the Arabic-speaking world. This mutual interaction has led to the Palestinian peoples becoming, what scholar William Brown describes as, 'symbols of the Arab nation' (Quoted in Chalala 1987, 47). Palestinians and their struggle for national liberation from the state of Israel, therefore, occupy an important position in the collective Arab imagination. That is, the struggle of the Palestinians is also an *Arab* struggle.

Fulla's creators appear to be aware of this collective struggle. The Fulla doll asks God to keep the Arab-Islamic city of Jerusalem safe. Jerusalem and the al-Aqsa Mosque are turned into symbols of Palestine. In doing so, Palestine becomes connected to a greater collective Arab identity as the struggle of the Palestinians becomes *Arabized* and transformed into a collective Arab struggle. This is also demonstrated by her planting of the pan-Arab bouquet of flowers in front of the Mosque. The peoples in Fulla's Arab world may not be able to support the Palestinian cause *physically*, but Fulla shows us that they support it in *spirit.* The Palestinian cause is framed as a cause that is shared by *all* Arab peoples across the Middle East. Further, Fulla not only demonstrates an awareness of the Palestinian struggle, but she apparently has chosen a side. Why would Fulla require God's assistance protecting al-Quds unless she already perceived it to be threatened in

some way? The implication here is that Israel is the threat, and the message implicitly expresses the Arabs' inability (at least on a psychological level) to reconcile themselves with the existence of Israel.

Certainly, from our position as outside observers, support for the Palestinian cause and the perception that the state of Israel is a 'threat' are controversial positions. However, these views are commonly held by residents of the Arabic-speaking Middle East and are unlikely to generate opposition or controversy amongst many of Fulla's potential consumers – Arabic-speaking Muslim peoples in the Middle East and Northern Africa. In this regard then, NewBoy has co-opted a marketing strategy developed by Mattel, but modified it in such a way as to connect Fulla to a very important part of Arab collective identity and history – the Palestinian cause.

The Barbie character, it seems, has not only been removed from her American environment and transplanted into the Arabic-speaking world, she has been changed so that we can 'tell she is an Arab by looking at her' because of her skin tone and religious beliefs which are presented as requirements for Arabness. Further, these changes extend beyond being made to 'look Arab.' Barbie has also been given a set of political beliefs that are likely to resonate positively with her potential consumers in the Arabic-speaking Middle East.

Fantastical Femininity: Bye-Bye Bikini, Hello Hijab

In 1997, the pop-music group *Aqua* released a song parodying the Barbie doll. "I'm a Barbie girl, in the Barbie world. Life in plastic," they sang, "it's fantastic!" Being a 'Barbie girl' is certainly 'fantastic' because it is, of course, an unsustainable feminine fantasy. Nothing about the Barbie doll – from her pink packaging and form-fitting

clothing to her shapely figure – gives off the slightest impression of masculinity or even gender neutrality (Rogers 1999, 15). But what does this 'fantastic femininity' entail? Sociologist Mary Rogers argues that femininity is premised on specific social bonds, a proper demeanor centered on being well-mannered, and an appropriate appearance that entails wearing the right outfit for any occasion (1999, 14-20). An in-depth analysis of the Fulla doll's representation of femininity in the Arabic-speaking Middle East, however, while likely to yield fruitful and interesting results, would far exceed the ambitions and scope of this thesis. Therefore, given my limited focus here, Rogers' work provides a useful framework by which Barbie's femininity can be compared to Fulla's and several important differences can be pointed out and discussed – namely the importance of family, Islam and veiling.

i) Full-a Family Time: Fulla's Social Bonds

Rogers argues that femininity entails specific sorts of social bonds and on this ground, Barbie's femininity is 'less certain' (1999, 15). Mattel's Barbie has a boyfriend, Ken, a younger sister, Skipper, and other characters that exist within her *Barbie world,* but Barbie has no doll parents nor has she ever married or had a child of her own. "Barbie is the center of Barbie's world" (Rogers 1999, 15). Barbie spends her time with family and friends *only* when she chooses to. She is not, as Rogers puts it, a "self-sacrificing, other-oriented woman who puts her own dreams on hold for the sake of a wedding band, a diaper bag, or anything else connected with marriage and motherhood" (15-6).

While it can be argued that Barbie, as a perpetual teenager, can be excused for her *misbehavior* in this regard, she has already become a doctor, an astronaut, and even a police officer. The Barbie character, therefore, is able to transcend the boundaries of her

age in some regards, but does not in others. Her femininity here appears to be less certain and more ambiguous. The Fulla character, too, is able to transcend the boundaries of her age. Her biography on the official Fulla website describes Fulla as a sixteen year old girl. Fulla is unmarried, will *never* have a boyfriend (as pre-marital relations are discouraged in Islam) and still lives in her parents' home (although her mother and father are never shown), yet she has been able to transcend these hindrances and enter the public sphere as a teacher and doctor because those are 'respected careers for women' (NewBoy 2007a; Zoepf 2005). While both Fulla and Barbie are able to transcend the limits placed on them by their youth and enter the workforce, the professional credentials of both characters are not really taken seriously. Police officer Barbie, for example, included a nightstick and walkie-talkie, but no gun or handcuffs. She also included a 'glittery evening dress' to wear to a police awards gala (Rogers 1999, 14). In Fulla's thirteen commercials, her appearance in the workforce only happens once.

Fulla is shown to us as a dentist (a career noted by her manufacturers to be a 'respected career for women'). The advertisement, "Fulla Dentist", begins in the private sphere with Fulla's younger brother, Bader, complaining about a toothache and then shifts to the dental office as the Fulla character speaks to him and instructs Bader to "brush [his] teeth after meals" (NewBoy 2007a). Her status as a dentist, a university educated professional, however, only permits the Fulla character to have authority over children (see figure 14). In her professional capacity, she does not interact with other adults, or even her teenage friends, Yasmeen and Nada. Further, we are told that her "ultimate goal is to make [Bader] smile" suggesting that her 'ultimate goal' is to care for and entertain children (NewBoy 2007a; see figure 15). As the video concludes, however,

we are again transported back to Fulla's home where she continues to interact with the children. If, as Fulla's creators have noted, doctor and teacher are appropriate careers for women, and careers they would "like to encourage small girls to follow" (Zoepf 2005), what is the message being communicated to small girls when the Fulla character, even when she becomes a doctor, *only* interacts with children and explicitly says that making small children smile is her 'ultimate goal'? It seems, therefore, that the message here is that female participation in the public sphere and the workforce is encouraged, but only as long as the woman keeps her home life – and role as a mother figure and caregiver to children – as her primary concern.

Figure 14: Fulla enters the professional world, but only to interact with children (NewBoy 2007a).

Figure 15: Fulla's "ultimate goal" is to make children smile (NewBoy 2007a).

While Fulla, as an unmarried, young Arab girl still lives at home with her mother and father, it is she who often acts as a mother figure to her younger siblings. Fulla

teaches Bader and Nour basic life lessons like brushing their teeth, not their mother or father who are both notably absent from all of the commercials. In the "Ramadan" advertisement, for example, it is Fulla, not Bader and Nour's mother, who wakes them for breakfast and the morning prayers (NewBoy 2007c; see figure 16). In addition to rousing the children, Fulla also instructs her siblings in how to perform the ritualistic washing before prayer in Islam (NewBoy 2008b; see figure 17). That children occupy a central position in Fulla's world is further stressed in the song, "Ismah Fulla" [Her Name is Fulla] (NewBoy 2007f). The Fulla character, along with her backup singers, Yasmeen and Nada, sing about the personality of 'the girl named Fulla', but at the end of the advertisement we find out that the entire performance – which was all about the Fulla character – was actually done to entertain her siblings, as Bader and Nour are shown sitting on the sofa in front of Fulla (see figure 18). So, while Barbie is a Barbie girl in a Barbie world, Fulla is a Fulla girl in a world where children are Fulla's focus, not Fulla herself. She is, in other words, other-oriented and not as *narcissistic* as Barbie. We are even told that Fulla "deserves the best kisses" from children – whose love she *strives* to earn by making them the center of her world (see figure 19). But Fulla does not deserve the 'best kisses' solely because she cares for children. She also devotes a significant amount of her energy towards ensuring that her parents are "respected", "appreciated" and "pleased" (NewBoy 2007f). We are also told explicitly "she is close with her family and visits often." (NewBoy 2007f; also see NewBoy 2011a).

Figure 16: Fulla is shown waking up her younger siblings for the morning prayers (NewBoy 2007c).

Figure 17: Fulla is shown standing by an easel instructing her siblings on the ritualistic washing before prayer in Islam (NewBoy 2008b).

Figure 18: Fulla is shown entertaining her younger siblings (NewBoy 2007f).

Figure 19: Fulla deserves the "best kisses" - *ahla qubla* - from children (NewBoy 2007f).

ii) Full-a Kindness: Fulla's Behavior and Demeanor

> Femininity entails […] a proper demeanor centered on being *nice* – softspoken, polite, helpful and sensitive. Nice girls like Barbie are neither combative nor strident; they are neither loud nor critical; they are good-mannered and respectable" (Rogers 1999, 15).

In this regard, Fulla does not differ much from the Barbie doll. However, while the Barbie character must only concern herself with behaving *properly* to those people around her, the Fulla character must also act in a manner deemed *proper* by her religion. That is, Fulla must not only remember to say 'please' and 'thank-you', she must also remember to act in a manner that *pleases* her God.

The advertisements present us with numerous examples of Fulla's 'niceness.' Her voice, we are told, is "as soft as a canary's" and her words are "sweet like sugar" (NewBoy 2011b, 2007e). Her words always 'bring smiles' to the faces of those around her and have the ability to erase any traces of 'sadness' and 'pain' (NewBoy 2011a). She 'lights up the world around her' and makes even the 'littlest lamb gentler' (2007b, 2011a; see figure 20). Fulla also has the 'best morals' because she 'respects everyone, young and old alike', 'holds her tongue' and 'never speaks ill of anyone' (NewBoy 2007b, 2007d). Fulla does everything 'in the light' and does nothing in the shadows. That is, she has nothing to hide or be ashamed about (NewBoy 2011b; see figure 21). Fulla is the way she is because she 'strives to be the best' at everything she does (NewBoy 2011a). Fulla also 'keeps all the promises she makes' and never gossips because she 'keeps secrets safe' (NewBoy 2002, 2007d; see figure 22). Fulla 'smiles even when she is sad' and 'never complains' (NewBoy 2007b, 2007f). Fulla is also 'never lazy' and is actually *glad* to engage in various forms of domestic labor, such as ironing clothes, gardening and caring

for children, as suggested by the smile on her face as she undertakes these various activities (NewBoy 2007f; see figure 23).

Figure 20: "My light lights up the world around me; I try and try and never give up; I smile even when I am sad" (NewBoy 2007b).

Figure 21: "In the light, my secrets are happy" (NewBoy 2011b).

Figure 22: "I tell her my secrets; and she keeps them safe" (NewBoy 2002).

Figure 23: "She never complains, and she is never lazy" (NewBoy 2007f).

Fulla not only *gladly* engages in domestic labor, but also strives to act in a manner deemed proper by her religion. Thus, while the Barbie character must only concern herself with being nice and polite to those around her, Fulla must also 'please' her God. We are told, for example, that "she pleases her God" as an image of the Fulla doll reading the Quran is shown (see figure 24). Aside from reading the Quran, Fulla also 'pleases' her God by performing her daily prayers – one of the Five Pillars of Islam. Indeed, so significant is prayer to Fulla's character that numerous advertisements show her engaging in prayer or discussing the ritualistic washing before prayer (see for example NewBoy 2007c, 2007d, 2007f, 2008b, 2009). The importance of 'pleasing her God' is further evidenced in the advertisement, "Salah", which solely concerns itself with discussing prayer and informing the viewer that Fulla correctly performs it: "I pray to God in the Sky; I worship Him so he will answer my prayers. I do the *fajr* [early morning], *dhuhr* [noon], *asr* [afternoon], *maghrib* [after sunset], and *isha* [nightfall] prayers" (NewBoy 2008a). The prayer times and the number of *rakat* (the required phrases and movements for Islamic prayers), we are told, "are set" and the Fulla character does not deviate from this standard (2008a).

Figure 24: "She pleases her God" (NewBoy 2007f).

iii) Full-a Passion for Fashion

As noted in the introduction to this section, nothing about the Barbie doll looks masculine or even androgynous. Everything about her 'shouts feminine' (Rogers 1999, 15-20). Both Barbie and Fulla may enter the public sphere and become first-rate doctors, academics or some other type of professional, but what really matters is *how they look.* In short, appearances, for both dolls, are everything. These appearances, moreover, include long flowing hair (which both Barbie and Fulla have), but most importantly, having the appropriate outfit for any occasion. In this regard, the Fulla character and Barbie share numerous similarities. Fulla shares Barbie's 'passion for fashion', albeit a passion limited or checked by Islamic dress codes.

Fulla, we are told, "is beautiful, but her clothing makes her more beautiful" (NewBoy 2002). What is interesting here, however, is that as this line is being sung, we are shown images of the Fulla doll transforming from her 'indoor' clothing – Western-style garb and no-*hijab* – to her 'outdoor' clothing – the *abaya* and *hijab*. The implication here is that wearing the *hijab* and an *abaya* is 'beautiful' and actually enhances a woman's beauty (see figure 25). The connection between 'being beautiful' and Fulla's wardrobe is also found in other advertisements. "We have made her beautiful; we have

given her jewelry; we dress her up in the best clothes" (NewBoy 2007f; see figures 26 and 27). We are also told that Fulla is "well-dressed, good-looking" and that "everything is better with her around" (NewBoy 2007e). Which again connects 'looking good' to what the character is wearing.

Figure 25: "Even though she is beautiful, her clothing makes her more beautiful" (NewBoy 2002).

Figure 26: "We have given her jewelry" (NewBoy 2007f).

Figure 27: "We dress her up in the best clothes" (NewBoy 2007f).

Further, it is not just that the Fulla character 'wears the best clothes' but that she actively pursues this state of perfection. We are told that Fulla "strives to be the best" as

we are simultaneously shown images of her character standing in a clothing store trying on new dresses (NewBoy 2011a; see figure 28). But in 'trying to be the best' Fulla's wardrobe must always be in accordance with her religion – a concern that Barbie does not share.

Figure 28: "She strives to be the best" (NewBoy 2011a).

Fulla is permitted, if not encouraged, to wear 'the best' clothing, but all of it is fairly conservative. Fulla *never* leaves her home without her *hijab* and *abaya* and does not have any pink polka-dot bikinis hanging in her closet. Even inside her home where she is permitted to wear Western-style clothing, Fulla never reveals anything above her knees, her shoulders, or her chest. This is a stark contrast to the Barbie doll whose revealing clothing has been described as "offensive" to Islam by the Saudi Arabian Committee for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, as the Saudi Arabian religious police are formally known (USAToday 2003).

Further, while we are told explicitly that Fulla has male figures in her life – "she pleases her mother and *father*" (NewBoy 2007f) – they are largely absent. Fulla's adherence to these dress codes is her own choice. Much to the chagrin of (primarily Western) feminists who have, since colonial times, railed against the supposed oppressive and patriarchal nature of the *hijab* and practice of veiling in Islam, Fulla is *not* forced to

wear the *hijab* by an older brother, her father, her husband, or even her mother. Indeed, in her now authoritative work, *Women and Gender in Islam*, Leila Ahmed explains:

> Colonized societies […] were alike in that they were inferior [to the societies of the colonizers] but differed as to their specific inferiority. Colonial feminisms, or feminism as used against other cultures in the service of colonialism, was shaped into a variety of similar constructs, each tailored to fit the particular culture that was the immediate target of domination. […] Veiling – to *Western* eyes, the most visible marker of the differentness and inferiority of Islamic societies – became the symbol now of both the oppression of women (of, in the language of the day, Islam's degradation of women) and the backwardness of Islam, and it became the open target of colonial attack and the spearhead of the assault on Muslim societies (1992, 151-2).

Even after de-colonization and the independence movements of the twentieth century, the treatment of women in Islamic societies reemerged vis-à-vis the 'War on Terror.' American foreign policy was shaped as an 'us-them' dichotomy between the 'civilized' Western countries and the 'barbaric/uncivilized' Islamic countries (Jarmakani 2008, 9-13). Once again, the status of women became the standard measurement for barbarism. "Afghan women know what the rest of the world is discovering", argued former American First Lady Laura Bush, "the brutal oppression of women is the *central goal* of the terrorists" (Quoted in Jarmakani 2008, 13, emphasis added). The Fulla doll presents an example of an Arab Islamic woman, the problems associated with her Arab Islamic identity notwithstanding, who 'speaks back' to colonial and Orientalist discourses such as those mentioned above which categorically represent Muslim and Arab women as 'invisible' and 'powerless' (Ahmed 1992, 151; Jarmakani 2008, 149). In that regard, Fulla can be seen as a sort of Arab-Islamic feminist character who behaves the way she does because she *chooses* to, not because her religion or her male family members *force* her to. We are not told, for example, that the Fulla character 'wears the *hijab* to please her father.' Rather, we are only shown that she, even when alone, chooses to wear it, perhaps

as an act of 'solidarity' with the wives of the Prophet Mohammad who veiled themselves and were amongst the first female converts to Islam (Ahmed 1992, 55-56).

That said, it does not mean Fulla's representation of Islamic female dress codes – namely, the veil – should be applauded and uncritically admired. Fulla does not engage with debates surrounding the practice amongst Muslim women. Indeed, the Quran, for example, does not explicitly prescribe veiling – to cover a woman's hair. In fact, according to Leila Ahmed, the practice of veiling in the Middle East predates the advent of Islam and was practiced by Iranians, Assyrians, Jews, and even Greeks and Romans (1992, 55). She further notes that when the Quran does mention the practice of veiling, it is in reference to the wives of the Prophet Mohammad who were kept in seclusion and veiled themselves to maintain their purity and privacy (54; see also Sura 33:54). It is unclear how the practice came to be adopted by the greater Islamic community, but some possible explanations include the Islamic conquests of lands where veiling was already practiced amongst upper classes, the influx of wealth amongst Muslims through conquest, the uplifted status of Arab peoples as founders of Islam, and the Prophet Mohammad's wives becoming 'the mothers of the Islamic community' and amongst the first female converts to Islam probably all combined to spread the practice (Ahmed 1992, 56-7). Further, regarding female dress codes, the Quran stipulates that women only need to cover their private parts - their bosoms (Ahmed 1992, 55; see also Sura 24: 31-2). By not engaging in the veiling debate, Fulla's advertisements serve to normalize the practice amongst Muslim women. Veiling is presented as something Muslim women 'just do', not something they 'debate.' Indeed, all the female characters in Fulla's advertisements – save small children – cover their hair. Therefore, on one hand Fulla presents a challenge

to discourses postulating the oppressive nature of the veil and the patriarchy that supposedly underlies the practice by *choosing* to wear it. But the fact that no female character in her world goes without it serves to normalize the practice and takes for granted that *all* Muslim women choose to cover their hair. In this uniform presentation of veiling, Fulla evades the debate surrounding the practice's actual requirement in Islam, and not only excludes those women who do not choose to veil themselves, but also denies their existence.

Conclusion

As discussed in the previous chapter, some scholars have argued that globalization, as a process that has facilitated the opening of markets and the easy transport and consumption of Western-produced goods and commodities all over the planet, has begun to erase the globe's cultural diversity. People in Africa, they argue, are drinking Starbucks, while people in Beijing are eating McDonald's hamburgers to the detriment of their own indigenous customs and practices. The world is, in essence, becoming Americanized (See Barber 1995; Hannerz 1992, 217; Tomlinson 1991, 4). I noted, however, that such a sweeping conclusion is both hyperbolic and negligent. When Western consumer goods cross cultural borders, they can be transformed, reshaped and imbued with new meanings that make them more hospitable to the real, lived cultures and experiences of their non-Western consumers. The Fulla doll is one example of this process of recontextualization. I have argued that this process, while manifesting itself in the physical appearance of the doll – Fulla has long brown hair and brown eyes and of course, an *abaya* and *hijab* – has also been undertaken by modifying the doll's identity. Fulla's creators have *manufactured* an entirely new ethnic, religious and gendered

identity for the Barbie doll that appears to resonate with Arab consumers in a way that the original Barbie doll does not.

First, the Barbie doll has been given an entirely new ethnic identity. She has been transformed from the 'all-American' girl into an 'Arab.' We are both told and shown in Fulla's advertisements that Fulla is discernably Arab – "You can tell that she is an Arab simply by looking at her." But what does it mean to *look Arab*? Fulla's manufacturers go to great lengths to explain this to her viewers. *Looking Arab* entails both a particular skin tone – 'She is tanned like my homeland and so are all her friends' (NewBoy 2007d) – and also a particular religion as verbal descriptions of the doll's skin color are paired with images of the doll engaging in Islamic prayers. In this regard, the produced 'Arab identity' given to the Fulla doll is highly limited and serves to shift the meaning of *being Arab* from a linguistic category describing those peoples who speak the Arabic language to a racial and religious one. Fulla's definition of 'Arab', in other words, does not include non-Caucasian Arabic-speaking peoples, such as those populations in Somalia or Sudan, both Arab League countries. Nor does it include the significant non-Muslim and non-Sunni populations scattered throughout the Arabic-speaking world. That the only other characters Fulla interacts with are Caucasian-Arabs and Muslim serves not only to exclude these other groups, but also to *deny* their very existence. In short, being (Sunni) Muslim and being 'tanned' like Fulla are both presented to us as requirements for *being an Arab*.

Being Muslim and looking like Fulla are not the only requirements for Arabness, however. The Barbie character has also been transplanted into an entirely new environment. She has been taken from her home in the United States (Malibu Beach, I

assume) and placed in the Arabic-speaking Middle East. Fulla has been given a peculiar pan-Arab citizenship that connects her to numerous Arabic-speaking countries through descriptions of her looks, clothing, and her travels – "Her eyes are like coffee from Yemen […] She has visited Wahran [Algeria]" (NewBoy 2009). That the Fulla character is able to roam across the Middle East without hindrance is also significant. Fulla's Arab world is imagined as a place where national borders exist, but do not divide the Arab peoples. Being Arab, therefore, is an identity that transcends loyalties to individual nation states. In this regard, the Fulla doll's conception of 'Arabness' becomes reminiscent of the Arab nationalist discourse of the twentieth century, which stressed the connectedness of Arab peoples and the artificiality of the national state borders between them.

Further, in an effort to recreate Mattel's branding efforts, Fulla's manufacturers have also given the doll a degree of political consciousness that taps into the important position occupied by the Palestinian struggle for liberation in the Arab imagination. Fulla weeps for the al-Aqsa Mosque in the *Arab* al-Quds, as a symbol of Palestine, and asks God to keep it safe. In doing so, Fulla simultaneously 'Arabizes' the Palestinian struggle, framing it as a struggle of not only Palestinians themselves, but also Arab peoples more broadly, and frames the state of Israel as a perceived *threat* to the security of the Arab Palestine symbolized by the al-Aqsa Mosque in the *Arab* city of Jerusalem.

Second, I maintain that modifications have also been made to the Barbie character along gendered lines. Following Rogers (1999), I examine Fulla and Barbie's femininities on three fronts: familial and social bonds; behavior and demeanor; and wardrobe and clothing. The Barbie character is constructed as the center of her own Barbie world. She is not self-sacrificing or other-oriented. The characters in Barbie's

world are mere accessories with whom she associates *when she wants to.* Fulla, however, does everything for others. She is incredibly other-oriented and selfless. Her 'ultimate goal' we are told, 'is to make children smile' (NewBoy 2007a). Fulla is a mother figure to children – even though she does not have her own. Indeed, it is not her own mother who teachers her siblings basic life-lessons like brushing their teeth or how to wash before prayer, but the Fulla character. Even in the song describing Fulla's personality – supposedly making the Fulla character the center of attention – we find out at the end that the entire performance was simply to entertain Fulla's younger siblings (NewBoy 2007f). In short, unlike Barbie who treats the people in her Barbie world as *accessories*, Fulla strives to make them the center of her life.

Despite these differences, Fulla and Barbie also share similar behaviors. Barbie's personality is centered on her *niceness*. She is softspoken, polite, helpful and sensitive (Rogers 1999, 15). Fulla's advertisements, too, contain *numerous* examples of her niceness. Fulla, we are told is 'polite' and her words, spoken in her 'canary soft' voice, are 'sweet like sugar' (NewBoy 2007d, 2007e; 2011b). She is 'well behaved' and 'never complains' (NewBoy 2007f). Nice girls like Fulla also do not hide things from their parents and have nothing to be ashamed about because they do 'everything in the light' (NewBoy 2011b). However, unlike Barbie, Fulla must also 'be nice' to her God and act in a manner deemed appropriate by her religion. Fulla, therefore, prays when she is supposed to – five times a day at 'set' times (NewBoy 2008a).

Further, nothing about the Barbie doll says 'masculine' or 'androgynous.' Her femininity is fantastical and takes feminine appearances to unsustainable extremes. Barbie wears the right outfit for every occasion. Even when she enters the workforce and

becomes a police officer or any other sort of professional, what really counts is how Barbie looks. Fulla shares Barbie's passion for fashion, but Fulla must also obey Islamic clothing norms. Fulla, we are told, 'is beautiful, but her clothing serves to enhance her beauty' (NewBoy 2002). Being beautiful, for Fulla, is linked to what the character wears: "We have made her beautiful; we have given her jewelry; we dress her up in the best clothes" (NewBoy 2007f). While Barbie may be permitted to wear somewhat revealing clothing, Fulla never shows a shoulder, a thigh or her chest and *never* leaves her home without her *hijab* and *abaya*. What is interesting about Fulla's adoption of the *hijab*, however, is that she *chooses* to wear it. While we are told that Fulla has parents, they are totally absent from her fantastical life and therefore, do not *force* her to wear the *hijab*. Everything Fulla wears is her own choice. She is fashionable, but still *chooses* to cover up. In this regard, Fulla presents a challenge to (primarily Western) discourses about the practice of veiling in Islam. In Fulla's depiction, veiling is not *oppressive*, but a normalized practice Islamic women *just do.* So, on one hand Fulla serves to 'speak back' to Western notions of the Islamic oppression of women via the practice of veiling, but on the other, Fulla's presentation of the practice as *normal* dismisses the fact that not all Muslim women believe the practice is even required by the religion, as it is not explicitly required in the Quran. By normalizing the practice of veiling, however, Fulla's Islamic feminine identity serves to *deny* the existence of Muslim women who do not wear the *hijab*. That every single female character in Fulla's world, save small children, wears the *hijab* serves to further demonstrate this point.

But why does all of this matter? So what if Fulla is a recontextualized Barbie doll? The simple answer is that it matters because this process does not exist independent

of its consumers. Little children across the Arabic-speaking Middle East sit, holding Fulla dolls in their arms, as they watch an animated Fulla character dance across their television screens and while telling them who the Arabs are and what Arab women look like. Fulla, therefore, is a peculiar kind of cultural product. She does what *Mecca Cola* cannot – She reaches right into the home, hearts, and minds of children. Children glean a sense of self-worth and understanding of the world around them partly from the cultural objects with which they interact (Rand 1995, 5). As Ann DuCille argues: "More than simple instruments of pleasure and amusement, toys and games play crucial roles in helping children determine what is valuable in and around them. Dolls in particular invite children to replicate them, to imagine themselves in their dolls' images" (1996, 17). The following chapter, therefore, will explore the socio-political implications of these processes in greater detail.

Chapter Three: Fulla Matters: Identity, Television and Doll-Play

The battle for the hearts and minds in the Middle East is being fought not only on the streets of Baghdad but also on the newscasts and talk shows of *Al Jazeera.*

-- Phillip Seib (2008, ix)

Introduction

In the final lines of the previous chapter, I noted that the Fulla doll is a peculiar sort of cultural product. While Fulla, like Mecca Cola and Zam-Zam Cola, can be bought and sold in toy stores across the Middle East, Fulla is able to do more than even the *most pious* of carbonated beverages. Fulla not only reaches into the arms of young children as she is plucked off toy shelves, but also into their hearts and minds as an animated television character who offers them guidance and instruction on various Arab-Islamic cultural norms. The Fulla doll's character and personality, therefore, is consumed by Arab peoples in the Middle East both when they purchase the physical doll itself and when they view her incessantly aired television commercials.

In this chapter, I will examine the relationship between Fulla's consumption and processes of identity-formation and socialization in the Arabic-speaking Middle East. In the first section, I build upon contemporary social science literature exploring satellite television news channels in the Arab world and how they have contributed to a strengthening of Arab identity. I argue that Fulla's advertisements, too, can be understood as part and parcel of this identity-based project. In the second section, I explore the socio-political significance of dolls and doll-play for the growth and social development of children. In viewing dolls as cultural artifacts, I argue that they offer children a means through which they can explore and learn about their bodies, the bodies of others, and the social world in which they live. After pausing briefly to discuss the problematic representation of the female form and handling of racial/cultural diversity within the

Fulla and Barbie dolls, I argue that doll-play, mediated by the objects and accessories accompanying them, can function as a form of 'gender training' for young girls that essentially *prepares* them for their future roles as feminized subjects. As a final word, I also argue that the Fulla doll and the identity, beliefs and values she promotes through her consumption are not hostile and inherently anti-Western. The noticeable lack of anti-Western sentiment, combined with Fulla's regional mass-popularity and origins, offer valuable insight into Arab-Islamic understandings of and feelings towards 'the West' that serve to challenge Huntington's Clash of Civilizations thesis (1993).

Part 1: Identity and Satellite Television News

Scholars of nationalism have long argued that forms of mass communication were crucial for the formation and dissemination of group/collective identities. Karl W. Deutsch, for example, argued that the transmission of ideas is crucial in the formation of a "people," which he defined as a "larger group of persons linked by […] complementary habits and facilities of communication" (Quoted in Pintak 2009, 193). Historian Eric Hobsbawm, pointing to such examples as Nazi propaganda and the British monarchy's annual Christmas broadcasts, argues that it is through the press, cinema and radio that "popular ideologies could be both standardized, homogenized and transformed" (1990, 141-2).

Among these scholars, however, it is perhaps political scientist Benedict Anderson who has most famously articulated the connection between group/collective identities and forms of mass communication. In his now seminal book, *Imagined Communities*, Anderson characterizes the nation as an 'imagined political community':

> It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion (2006, 6).

The ability to communicate with one another served as the glue that has traditionally held nations together. Quranic Arabic, the Latin of the Catholic Church, and even classical Chinese "were the media through which the great global communities of the past were imagined" (2006, 18). Anderson argued that it was the gradual replacement of Latin with vernacular languages, combined with changing economic structures and increasingly rapid methods of communication that laid the foundations upon which 16th century European nationalism was built:

> Nothing perhaps more precipitated this search [for national identity], nor made it more fruitful, than print-capitalism, which made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways (2006, 36).

Interestingly, many contemporary commentators have observed that Arabic-language satellite television has not only facilitated a similar process in the Middle East, but has also revolutionized Arab media as well (see Bishara 2012; Lynch 2006; Phillips 2013; Pintak 2009; Valbjorn 2009; Zayani and Sahraoui 2007).

Through most of the twentieth century, Arab governments have exercised near total control over mass media – newspapers, television, radio broadcasts, etc.[3] As largely state-run operations, media in many Arab countries has tended to be dull and superficial. These governmental media monopolies have typically been used to promote the legitimacy of rulers and ruling families and to encourage Arab publics to adopt various

[3] The Lebanese press serves as a unique exception to this phenomenon. Amongst Arab countries, Lebanon has traditionally been more accepting and tolerant of a free and critical press. The Lebanese press, however, reflects the country's ethno-religious and political diversity with each prominent political and religious group broadcasting on their own satellite channel (Zayani and Sahraoui 2007, 19). Additionally, the Lebanese press has largely avoided sensitive communal issues that might upset the fragile state of peace established after the Civil War in 1989 (Lynch 2006, 39).

political/ideological values in line with those of the government. A typical newscast on a state-run channel in the Arab world, for example, consisted mainly of footage showing Arab leaders and other prominent politicians interacting with international dignitaries and diplomats, stepping on or off airplanes and waving to their (supposedly) adoring publics (Zayani and Sahraoui 2007, 14). State-run media in the Arab world, in other words, operated to meet the needs of the state, not its public.

In efforts to control populations by controlling the means of communication, these state monopolies often existed in tandem with strict censorship policies. One scholar characterizes the communication policies of Arab Gulf countries as follows:

> [T]he communication policies of the Gulf countries tend to be authoritarian, prohibiting the press from criticizing the rulers, the Gulf governments, members of the ruling families, the Arab heads of state, or states considered friendly to the Gulf countries. Furthermore, Gulf media are discouraged from propagating any ideas or principles that might be conceived, by Gulf ruling elites as being destabilizing to the Gulf states' established orders or as being harmful to the interests of Gulf states' governments (Kazan 1993, 92-3).

Such tight governmental control over the media has not only hindered Arabs' ability to access objective information about the world around them, but also their ability to engage in dialogue with those who hold opposing socio-political views. In this sense, media in much of the Arab Middle East was reduced to near propaganda, hostile to dissent and existing solely to reproduce and disseminate pro-government discourses.

In the 1990s, however, Arab governments, like their counterparts elsewhere in the world, began fighting a losing battle in their attempts to censor various forms of transnational media. A key element of processes of globalization, as discussed in chapter one, this new media, including satellite television and the internet, involved the "free flow of information, the increasing consumption of mass media, and the emergence of a

global media society and the pervasiveness of global communication" (Zayani and Sahraoui 2007, 16). In a shrinking world where information began to cross oceans and leap over national borders almost instantaneously, Arab governments' tight control over media operations began to weaken (Valbjorn 2009, 163). As Mohamed Zayani and Sofaine Sahraoui note:

> The proliferation of satellite dishes enhances and is enhanced by the proliferation of satellite channels and the teeming of broadcasters in the Middle East and the Gulf region. The diversity of television stations and range of programs that are becoming available to audiences are indeed phenomenal. The widespread use of information is becoming unlimited, making it increasingly hard for governments to control images, screen information, black out satellite-beamed programs or enforce a ban on satellite dishes (2007, 17).

Plunging prices for satellite dishes in the Middle East in the 1990s made access to satellite television more affordable for many in the region. As more and more satellite dishes sprouted on Arab rooftops, people's ability to access information increased as well. Indeed, there are now approximately 400 free-to-air Arabic-language satellite channels in the Middle East with content ranging from cooking programs and soccer matches to soap operas and twenty-four hour news programs (Pinktak 2009, 191; Rinnawi 2006, 43). While scholars acknowledge that obtaining precise figures on satellite penetration in the Middle East is difficult because no one organization exists to record data in the region, it is estimated that rates have reached nearly twenty-seven percent in the Levant, fifty-six percent in the Arab Gulf, and twenty-one percent in Northern Africa (Rinnawi 2006, 43). These low percentages, however, are somewhat misleading as the audiences are still quite substantial. Indeed, some popular stations and programs in the region can reach over one hundred million viewers (Rinnawi 2006, 42).

That millions of people in the Arab world are now tuning in to satellite television is a fact that has not gone unnoticed by scholars and journalists. Of primary concern to both groups has been how this far-reaching medium has "impacted and changed conceptions of Arab-Muslim identity in the region" (Lynch 2006). Christopher Phillips, for example, argues "the presence of a new and popular regional media led by *Al Jazeera* in recent years has served to magnify and reproduce the sense of solidarity [amongst Arabs]" (2013, 8). Similarly, Lawrence Pintak argues that the "pervasive influence of Arab satellite television […] is fueling the rise of a new common Arab consciousness" (2009, 191). Even American journalist Thomas Friedman recognizes the power of satellite television: "Arab satellite TV and Internet […] are taking the horrific images from the Intifada and beaming them directly to the new Arab-Muslim generation. If 100 million Arab-Muslims are brought up with these images, Israel won't survive" (2002, 197-8). Thus, it seems that this common Arab story, according to both academics and journalists, is actually the common Arab *news* story.[4]

Primary among these news outlets is the Qatar-based *Al Jazeera*. As a commercial, profit-driven enterprise, *Al Jazeera* seeks to sell its television product to the widest-possible Arabic-speaking audience. Recognizing the unpopularity of both state-run and Western media networks (CNN, BBC, etc.), *Al Jazeera* sought to position itself as an authentic and free Arab voice speaking out against Western hegemony and corrupt Arab regimes. *Al Jazeera* also understood that its viewers were primarily Arab Muslims, and as such, began its coverage from an Arab-Islamic worldview (Lynch 2006, 25). As one Al Jazeera employee put it: "Our target is public opinion, the masses… to win the

[4] A number of other scholars have also articulated similar arguments (Bishara 2012; Chouikha 2007; Nisbet and Myers 2011; Rinnawi 2006, 2009; Seib 2008, 2012; Valbjorn 2009; Zayani and Sahraoui 2007).

confidence of the people in this station, even at the expense of the anger of the official Arab institutions and the United States" (Quoted in Lynch 2006, 25).

In adopting this worldview and 'targeting public opinion', *Al Jazeera* also devotes significant attention to several political issues with mass Arab appeal. Issues like the Arab-Israeli conflict and the American invasion of Iraq receive a significant amount of coverage, while more local political happenings are often swept aside. Interestingly, when local events are covered, they tend to be re-framed as issues of grander Arab importance, so a Saudi sweep against political dissidents or a Jordanian clampdown on journalists become expressions of the absence of *Arab* freedom and *Arab* democracy (Lynch 2006, 35; Valbjorn 2009, 163). By framing local issues in this way, and devoting significant attention to issues with mass Arab appeal, *Al Jazeera*'s coverage serves to reinforce and strengthen a shared political consciousness amongst their viewers.

However, as noted above, *Al Jazeera* recognizes that its viewers are not only primarily Arabs, but also Arab *Muslims.* As such, Islam is also brought to the forefront of the network's coverage, woven seamlessly into Arab identity. "The satellite media," writes Christopher Phillips, "has linked together Arab and Muslim identity […]" (2013, 16). Indeed, Islamists are often shown on the broadcasts of *Al Jazeera* participating in political debates with staunch secularists, offering their opinions on political happenings, or answering questions posed by viewers. Further, *Al Jazeera* offered positive support for Islamist groups, Hezbollah and Hamas, during their various conflicts with Israel.

Al Jazeera's news coverage, therefore, becomes an identity discourse serving to reinforce its own Arabness and the Arab identities of its viewers. Distant events are woven together to form a common Arab narrative, united by a common language and

marked by a shared collective identity through which speakers and listeners conceive of themselves as taking part in a single, common political project (Valbjorn 2009, 163). As Marc Lynch notes: "When Arabs appear on *Al Jazeera*, they understand themselves to be speaking as Arabs, to Arabs, and about Arab issues" (2006, 55).

This identity discourse is given its transformative power by its near universal consumption across the Middle East. Traditional state-run media outlets, debates in Egyptian and Lebanese coffee houses, conversations in Yemeni khat chews, and Kuwaiti *dewaniyas* (traditional gathering places) are now all supplemented by the *same* identity discourse of popular transnational satellite news channels, like *Al Jazeera*, which Arabs across the region consume simultaneously. This serves to homogenize the type of identity discourse Arabs consume and helps reinforce a shared identity and a common set of political arguments and concerns (Phillips 2013, 17). In other words, exposure to Arab news, with its preoccupation with Arab-Islamic identity and 'Arab issues', is making it *easier* for Arabs across the Middle East to form the "image of their communion", despite never knowing or meeting one another (Anderson 2006, 6). Indeed, in his 2001 study, Shibley Telhami found that watching Arab television news actually made forty-six percent of Saudis, eighty-seven percent of Emiratis, and seventy-five percent of Kuwaitis *more* sympathetic to Arabs in other countries (cited in Lynch 2006, 4).

Yet, by focusing almost exclusively on Arabic-language satellite news channels, much of the contemporary literature forgets that satellite television has now reached directly into the Arab home and penetrated the shared world of the Arab family. Families not only include adults, who are likely to be the primary consumers of satellite news, but they also include *children* and many of these children (across the Middle East) are

watching Fulla's animated television advertisements. In the words of a Syrian toy store clerk: "If you've got a TV in the house, it's Fulla all the time" (Quoted in Zoepf 2005).

It is my contention, therefore, that parallels can be drawn between *Al Jazeera's* homogenized Arab identity discourse and Fulla's advertisements. Put simply, Fulla's advertisements offer children what *Al Jazeera's* programming offers adults: The ability to better form the "image of their communion" by presenting Arabs across the region with a common story and common representation of Arab identity (Anderson 2006, 6).

Bringing Children into Fulla's Televised Arab Fold

Just as *Al Jazeera* strives to present itself as an authentically Arab alternative to state-run and Western news media outlets, notions of Arab authenticity are integral dimensions of Fulla's advertising and marketing. The Barbie doll, as a mass-produced Western consumer good, was unable to account for various aspects of the 'lived culture' of many people in the Arab world. Barbie is categorically *not* Arab. Beginning with an understanding of Barbie's inability to account for the ethnic identity of many in the Arab world, NewBoy introduced the Fulla doll and marketed her as an Arab doll that "looked and dressed like *us"* (BBC 2010). Indeed, as noted in the previous chapter, Fulla's manufacturers have gone to great lengths to establish that Fulla is, in fact, "Arab, body and soul" (Fulla.com – about Fulla). From the outset, therefore, the Fulla doll was an identity-based project catering specifically to Arab consumers by offering them an *authentic* alternative to the Western Barbie doll.

Ethnicity was not the only aspect of the Middle East's lived culture for which the Barbie doll could not account. Fulla's manufacturers understood that they were not only catering to Arab consumers, but Arabs who were primarily Muslim as well. Thus, Islam

has been granted a privileged position within the representation of Arab identity being articulated within the doll's advertisements. As noted in the previous chapter, Fulla's advertisements seek to connect her Arab identity to her Islamic identity; being an Arab in Fulla's imaginary *watan* also entails being Muslim and performing the various cultural/religious requirements of that creed. Interestingly, while both Fulla's advertisements and *Al Jazeera* are aware that the majority of their Arab consumers are Muslim, Fulla's manufacturers have chosen to clarify which Muslims they are speaking to. That is, Fulla's advertisements appear to be addressing the Sunni Muslim majority, thereby reproducing the marginalization of Shia populations in the Arab world. This qualification notwithstanding, the Islamic faith is still a central component of the Arab identity discourse within both Fulla's advertisements and *Al Jazeera's* newscasts.

Arab identity, however, is not simply about ethnicity and religion. It also includes a number of shared political concerns, which serve to unite the Arab peoples by acting as rallying points. In their efforts to articulate an Arab identity for their doll, NewBoy has strived to project dimensions of this shared Arab political consciousness in Fulla's marketing. Chief among these shared concerns is the Arab-Israeli conflict (See NewBoy 2009). By expressing a shared filiation to the disaster, Fulla is simultaneously made more authentic and genuine because unlike Barbie, Fulla 'weeps for Palestine.' In expressing these political beliefs, Fulla's claim for membership in the Arab nation is also strengthened. 'Fulla not only looks and dresses like the Arabs, but thinks and feels like an Arab too. Ergo she is an Arab and one of you.'

The Arab identity discourse being shown to viewers across the Middle East in Fulla's animated advertisements, I believe, serves two functions. First, the

advertisements' bright pastel colors, cheery music and simplistic language may suggest that they were designed with a primarily juvenile audience in mind. Yet, parents/guardians and other adults often supervise children and are also likely to view these advertisements, especially if Fulla is on the television "all the time" (Zoepf 2005). The emphasis on Fulla's Arab-Islamic identity, therefore, also allows NewBoy to tap into the very same 'public opinion' that *Al Jazeera* does. In its efforts to sell its television product to the widest possible audience, *Al Jazeera* strives to position itself as an authentic Arab voice speaking to and for the Arabs. Similarly, by stressing the Arab-Islamic authenticity and identity of their doll, NewBoy endeavors to present the Fulla doll in a way that would appeal to the widest possible group of consumers, namely Arab parents/guardians who are most likely to purchase Fulla dolls and Fulla-branded products. In short, the advertisements' appeals to Arab-Islamic identity also serve to show Arab parents/guardians why Fulla is the *better* choice for their children (over the Barbie doll), just like *Al Jazeera* endeavors to show Arab consumers that they offer a more authentic take on the news than the BBC or CNN.

Second, in their efforts to "create a character that parents and children will want to relate to," NewBoy did not simply create an Arab-Islamic doll that could be *one of us* (Zoepf 2005). Rather, NewBoy created a doll that represents the *best one of us.* This status transforms the Fulla character into a veritable authority on Arab-Islamic identity and qualifies her to instruct others on performing various cultural and religious practices. Indeed, several advertisements actually turn Fulla into an educator as she provides her young viewers with step-by-step instructions on performing the *woodoo* (NewBoy

2008b) and the daily prayers (NewBoy 2008a). These 'instructional videos' also transform Fulla into an agent of primary socialization.

Primary socialization is the process by which children acquire the "capacities for social interaction that enable [them] to function in [their given] society" (Handel 2006, 1). Through primary socialization, children are taught how to "establish and maintain relations with others, to become an accepted member of society-at-large, to regulate [their] behavior according to society's codes and standards, and generally to get along well with other people" (Damon 2006, 3). Further, parents/guardians are often cited as amongst the most important agents (or enforcers) of primary socialization. Parents/guardians often spend a significant amount of time attempting to transmit their society's respective social and behavioral norms to their children. They often, for example, reward or punish various behaviors and arrange their children's lives in ways that expose them to certain experiences and keep them away from others (Damon 2006, 7). In doing so, parents effectively *teach* their children to become functioning and accepted members of their respective socio-cultural environments.

A similar process, I believe, is taking place within Fulla's televised advertisements. Like a parent, Fulla also instructs Arab children on performing various socio-cultural activities, such as the *woodoo*. As noted previously, Fulla's advertisements strive to connect Arab identity to Islamic identity. The instruction Fulla offers children on various Islamic cultural norms, therefore, can also be understood as simultaneous instruction in *being Arab* as well. Children watch Fulla on television and are, in turn, socialized by her. As they learn to perform the daily prayers and the *woodoo properly*, they are also learning how to become accepted members of the Arab nation as Fulla

brings them into the Arab-Islamic fold. Additionally, Fulla's advertisements are aired via satellite across the Arabic-speaking world. Thus, Fulla teaches children across the region not only how to be an Arab, but how to be *one kind* of Arab, as practices like *woodoo*, prayer and even veiling are framed as things *all* Arabs just do. Fulla's advertisements, in short, present children across the region with a homogenized, singular representation of Arab identity. This Arab identity discourse supplements the primary socialization children experience in their respective countries/homes/families, etc., and reinforces the development of a shared Arab identity in children as dimensions of their socialization become similar.

By articulating an Arab identity discourse to her primarily juvenile audience, Fulla's advertisements become part and parcel of the very same identity-based project in which *Al Jazeera* participates. In their respective efforts to reach the widest possible Arab-Islamic audiences in the Middle East, both make appeals to the shared ethnicity, common language, common religion, and shared political concerns of their Arab consumers. By devoting significant attention to political issues with mass Arab appeal, *Al Jazeera* is not only widening its audience, but also strengthening and reinforcing the Arab identity that initially gave these political issues their mass appeal. Similarly, Fulla's advertisements also serve to strengthen the Arab identities of her young viewers. Fulla offers children across the Middle East a common representation of Arab-Islamic identity that, in turn, supplements the varying articulations of Arab identity children may acquire from their unique social environments (their country, their family, etc.). Thus, just as satellite television news has given Arabs across the Middle East the ability to better form the "image of their communion" with one another, Fulla's advertisements offer young

consumers a similar opportunity while simultaneously *instructing* children that certain practices are also intrinsic parts of what it means to *be an Arab* (Anderson 2006, 6).

Part 2: Plastic People, Plastic Selves

A central theme woven throughout this thesis has been that a complex relationship exists between culture and consumption. All objects, according to Grant McCraken, are created according to the 'blueprint' of culture (1988, 94). Objects make visible and stable the categories of culture (Douglas and Isherwood 1979, 59). They offer us a set of markers by which we are able to structure our own cultural identities and regulate our interactions with the people around us (Howes 1996, 2). The cars we drive, the houses we reside in, and the clothes we wear combine to *say something* about identities. As products of our respective social and cultural environments, we understand what these goods are saying, because we understand the blueprint according to which they were made. We are able to scan goods for cultural information about their consumers and, by association, ourselves.

As a type of consumer good, children's toys also enjoy a complex relationship to culture. Toys offer children invaluable resources through which they can explore the social world that surrounds them by "reading" them as "texts" (Nelson 2011, 72). Put another way, toys can sometimes serve as children's 'how to guides' for learning the value systems of their respective cultures. Given the sheer expanse of beliefs and practices that 'culture' encompasses, it is no surprise that children's toys representing nearly everything with a material existence have been manufactured. Perhaps most interesting of all, however, are toys representing human beings.

In fact, dolls are amongst oldest type of toys. The British Museum (britishmuseum.org), for example, notes that painted wooden paddle-dolls have been found in ancient Egyptian tombs and date from 1750 BCE. With the porcelain-faced Parisian fashion dolls of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Peers 2004, ch.3), the German *Bild Lilli* doll of the 1950s, and *Lilli's* famous American descendant, *Barbie*, and the host of other dolls available today, it seems that humankind's interest in dolls has only expanded over the past 3500 years.

Like all human action, the creation of a doll involves processes of reasoning, imagination and creativity. Put differently, parts of ourselves go into the various projects we undertake. So, just as this thesis is a reflection of the creativity and imagination of its author, dolls are representations of their creators as well. They are extensions of the human imagination, manmade representations of human beings (Nelson 2011, 73). During the process of creation, dolls are imagined as having the attributes its creator has, aspires to have, admires, or even dislikes. Thus, dolls are capable of representing a wide range of identities: some people are tall, some are short, some are young, some are old, some are Muslim, some are not, etc. In serving as vessels for these various identities, dolls effectively become representations of social actors. That is, dolls are representations of *us*, real-life human beings. Yet, dolls are not *true* representations of us. After all, how could any inanimate object fully account for infinite complexity of human identity? Rather, dolls ought to be thought of and understood as representations of socially constructed ideas about these varying roles and identities (Nelson 2011, 73).

Gender is a primary category amongst the socially constructed identities represented within dolls. That children as young as two years old are able to self-identify

as “boys” and “girls” suggests that the construction of our understandings of gender begins almost immediately after we are born (Freeman 2007, 358). It seems *natural* to many of us for eager parents to swaddle their newborn female and male babies in pink and blue attire in efforts to signify their child’s gender to all who behold him or her. We often assume that such behaviors are *traditional* and have a long-standing connection to cultural practices. Yet, the sexual color-coding of children’s attire was not actually common practice until the 1920s; prior to the First World War, male and female children were actually often dressed in identical white gowns (Paoletti 1987, 136). What this example suggests, moreover, is that the various content, which defines and makes visible the categories of gender (i.e. pink and blue clothing) actually change over time. However, while physical/visible representations of gender may change, it is also certainly worth noting that a number of behavioral traits have tended to remain rigid and unchanged. Caring, nurturance, gentleness, and empathy, for example, are all traits that have remained feminine; while traits such as independence, aggression, confidence, and strength have tended to remain in the domain of masculinity.

Our attachment to these various practices and behaviors is well known to toy retailers who seek to capitalize from this gendered consciousness through the manipulation, reproduction, and even exploitation of gender stereotypes. Toy stores, toy catalogues and even various forms of toy advertising are all divided along gendered lines with “boys’ toys” and “girls’ toys.” While boys’ toy sections offer consumers an array of tools, vehicles, weapons, and male action figures available in various shades of blue and black, girls’ toys sections offer consumers a variety of baby and female dolls and household items (toy vacuum cleaners, cooking implements, etc.) in various shades of

pink and other pastel colors (Nelson 2011, 73). It is no coincidence, therefore, that Fulla's fantasy feminine world is noticeably devoid of men/boys – save her younger brother, Bader.[5] Boys are discouraged from playing with fashion/female dolls like Fulla and Barbie. Indeed, while it is true that some boys' toys may qualify as dolls, it is interesting that they are often not described as such. They are 'masculinized' and referred to as '*action* figures.'

This knowledge of "what girls do" and "what boys do" comes to us at an early age. As toddlers, children begin learning gender-related characteristics and self-identify as members of a particular gender – "I am a boy; I am a girl." By the age of five, children's knowledge of gender becomes consolidated in a strict 'either-or' fashion, whereby *only* boys or *only* girls can do this or be that (Martin and Rubble 2004, 67-8). Studies have also shown that this 'either-or' knowledge of gender in children manifests in their selection of toys. Ragg and Rackliff (1998), for example, have shown that preschool aged children can reliably apply gender stereotypes in the sorts of play they are expected to engage in by parents, teachers, babysitters, etc. Girls know they ought to play with dish sets and female dolls, while boys know they ought to play with trucks and cars.

Through various forms of play and interaction with toys, children find meaning in the social world that surrounds them as they "absorb messages from toys through all stages of their growth" (Auerbach 1998, 3). For many young girls, dolls are where young girls 'first see themselves' and in seeing themselves, come to learn about themselves (Auerbach 1999, 43). Dolls are "companions for discovery" (43). The designs of dolls, however, impacts the kinds of play children can engage in, and therefore, also impacts

[5] The Bader character, interestingly, is never shown engaging in the same sort of feminine activities that Fulla and her sister, Nour, perform. He never cooks, cleans, prepares gifts for small children, etc. (see NewBoy 2011a). He does, however, play sports (see NewBoy 2007a).

the sorts of *discoveries* children can make. Female fashion dolls, for example, (Barbie and Fulla included) often lack the ability to hold objects in their hands. Their feet are so small and angled that the dolls cannot stand on their own. Female dolls also tend to have large, colored eyes; recall Barbie's perennially blue eyes or Fulla's Yemeni coffee-colored eyes (NewBoy 2009). In contrast, male *action* figures, intended for young boys, often have hands designed specifically to hold tools or weapons, larger feet enabling them to stand upright unassisted, and very small or covered eyes (Nelson 2011, 74). There are also various lines of action figures, which require young boys to assemble them and arrange their pieces in various ways, such as *Power Rangers* or *Transformers.* These differences, in addition to being manifestations of cultural and gender stereotypes about what women and men can do and should be, – men are strong, aggressive, active, and independent, while women are weak, passive, and dependent (Nelson 2011, 74) – serve to influence the kinds of doll-play that emerges when young children interact with their toys.

While it is true that play is ultimately an exercise of imagination and children are able to play with Barbie and Fulla in unique and creative ways, they are still building upon and exploring the intentions, values, knowledge and discourses that have already been *built into* their toys. Simply by virtue of their design, some forms of play become sanctioned and possible, while other are constrained. Dolls, therefore, are not a raw material given to children.

Understanding this, critics have expressed a number of concerns about dolls. While many of these critiques have been written about the Barbie doll, a number of them are also applicable to the Fulla doll and serve to raise a number of important questions

about race and gender. It would be fruitful, therefore, to discuss them in greater detail before proceeding to examine the relationship between Fulla doll-play and 'gender training.'

Skinny Dolls, Skinny Selves

Chief amongst the concerns expressed by critics of the Barbie doll has been her representation of the female form. Indeed, so pervasive is this critique of the Barbie doll that it has, perhaps, become something of a cultural cliché. The standard narrative condemns Barbie for beckoning young girls to join her in the 'Waistland' – the land where "if you're a woman, you have to have a tiny waist in order to not feel like something the cat dug out of the garbage bin" – as her slender plastic body shows them the physical features their own bodies lack (Cunningham 1993, 79).

Even a cursory search of a library database will reveal a host of articles and books examining various aspects of the Barbie body and its impact on women's and young girls' self-esteem, body image, and even their food intake. Norton et al. have found that the Barbie body is so rare that fewer than one in 100,000 women are actually able to achieve it (1996, 287). Indeed, Ann DuCille argues that at life-size the Barbie doll would have a thirty-six inch bust, an eighteen inch waist and thirty-three inch hips, making her too thin to menstruate regularly (1996, 22). Building on this understanding of Barbie's unrealistic proportions, one study found that while Barbie-play did not actually dissuade young girls from eating (to stay thin), play with dolls displaying more realistic female bodily proportions correlated with increased food consumption (Anschutz and Engles 2010). Another study found that exposure to the Barbie doll correlates with young girls reporting lower rates of body esteem and a greater desire for a thinner body shape

(Dittmar, Halliwell and Eve 2006). Interestingly, some women have actually acted upon this desire to have the Barbie body, and sought to transform themselves into living Barbie dolls. Most recently, model Valeria Lukyanova has achieved a degree of international notoriety for claiming to be a living representation of the famous plastic doll (Krupnick 2012).

Interestingly, Lukyanova is not American. That she is actually from Ukraine speaks to the arguments made in chapter one of this thesis. I noted that the human body has actually become a site of global congruence. American ideals of beauty – according to many (partially) exemplified by Barbie's slender figure – have manifested around the world in various ways. (Recall that Iran is now the 'nose job capital of the world.') If the Barbie doll's slender figure represents an idealized female form, the fact that the Fulla doll's body is virtually indistinguishable from Barbie's raises further questions about the globalization of American beauty ideals.

While it is true that both NewBoy and Mattel use the same subcontractor in China to manufacture their respective dolls and that this may in fact explain the dolls' physical similarities, the fact still remains: young girls in the Arabic-speaking world are still engaging with Fulla's unrealistic representation of the female form. Whereas the impact of Barbie's slender figure on women and girls in the global north has received a significant amount of scholarly attention, Fulla's impact on girls and women in the Middle East has received little (if any) attention. This dearth of literature not only hinders my ability to discuss how Fulla's body may (or may not) impact the self-esteem and body image of young girls and women in the Arab world, it also suggests the need for greater social science research to be undertaken on the Fulla doll and her impact on her Middle

Eastern consumers. This limitation notwithstanding, I believe it is also worth noting that the Fulla doll is not marketed with any references to thinness, nor is her beauty derived from her slender figure. Fulla, we are told, is beautiful because she displays a 'correct' skin tone (NewBoy 2007d), wears high-end clothing (NewBoy 2002), and behaves in culturally appropriate ways (NewBoy 2007f). This is somewhat different than the Barbie doll. Indeed, as recently as 1965, Mattel sold a "Slumber Party" Barbie that included a bathroom scale pre-set at 110 pounds and a book entitled "How to Lose Weight." The book's advice was simple: "Don't eat" (Lord 1994, 229).

Diverse Dolls, Diverse Selves

If I were to ask you, my reader, to pause for a moment and form an image of the Barbie doll in your mind, what would that image look like? Odds are that you have just imagined an amazingly thin woman, but that is not the entire picture, is it? She is also blonde, blue-eyed, and of course, *white.* Interestingly, the Barbie doll has had 'friends of color' since the introduction of the 'Colored Francie' doll in 1967 (DuCille 1996, 32). Barbie herself has even been transformed into African American, Asian, and Latino women (Rogers 1999, 47). Despite these transformations, the Barbie character has remained stubbornly white. Indeed, when Barbie is featured on billboards, in various forms of print media, in video games and movies, and even when real-life actresses are hired to play her during special events on Broadway or at Disneyland, she is *always* white (Ducille 1996, 47; Rand 1995, 79-80). It is this unwavering whiteness that has prompted Mary Rogers to claim that Barbie has *little credibility* as a Black, Asian, Indigenous, or Latino woman (1999, 47).

This lack of credibility stems largely from what Ann DuCille characterizes as these non-White Barbies' commodification of racial and cultural diversity (1994, 48). Recognizing the increasing spending power of Latino and Black populations in the United States in the 1980s and 1990s, Mattel began a number of campaigns offering young girls "dolls who look like them" (DuCille 1996, 37). Yet, in creating non-white Barbie dolls, Mattel has (perhaps inadvertently) simply produced dye-dipped versions of white American femininity and reinforced a number of racial and ethnic stereotypes.

This reproduction of white femininity not only stems from Mattel's (re)use of the white Barbie plastic mold during the manufacture of both its first Black and Latin American dolls, but also from the normalization of the white, blonde Barbie doll as *the real* Barbie doll. In many instances, for example, the only available version of a particular Barbie is the white, blonde one (Rogers 1999, 48). In instances when non-white Barbies are available, however, Mattel presents only stereotyped markers of differences. The Teresa doll, for example, is one of Barbie's friends. Teresa supposedly represents a young Latin American woman. The "All American" Teresa doll, for instance, came dressed in denim coveralls and a peach-colored bandana, an outfit reminiscent of images of Latin Americans as agricultural workers (Rogers 1999, 52). Mattel fared no better in its Dolls of the World collection in which they endeavored to represent world's ethno-cultural diversity. (Recall the Ottoman harem girl, Leila, discussed in the introduction to this thesis.) In 1980, Mattel introduced "Oriental" Barbie. Her packaging invited (primarily Western) consumers to "[c]ome visit the Orient" and assured them that they would "find it exotic and interesting" (Rogers 1999, 54). "India" Barbie, launched a mere two years later, also came in a box that stated most Indians "don't have running water so

they go to the village well for water" (54). Another (cringe-worthy) example, "Native American" Barbie, launched in 1992, attempted to educate her consumers on the social organization of Indigenous peoples: "Long ago, Native Americans each belonged to a tribe" (54). What these examples demonstrate is that within the various forms of the Barbie doll, Mattel has sought to produce diversity, but only by mass-producing discursively familiar (and visible) ethno-cultural stereotypes – Latin Americans as agricultural workers, *exotic* Orientals, and Indigenous peoples as members of tribes (DuCille 1996, 37).

This problematic handling of racial and cultural diversity is not exclusive to Mattel. Fulla's manufacturer, NewBoy, has also been engaged in a similar process with its articulation of ethno-cultural diversity in the Arab world. As noted in the previous chapter, Fulla's articulation of Arabness is also racialized. Black and non-Caucasian Arabs are excluded from Fulla's imaginary Arab world. Indeed, this exclusion not only manifests in the doll's advertisements, but in the physical dolls themselves. The Fulla doll can only be purchased in *one* 'skin color' – Fulla 'tanned.' Thus, while Mattel may offer its consumers an essentialist handling of racial diversity by reducing race to the shade dye used in the same plastic Barbie mold, NewBoy does not even endeavor to cater to non-Caucasian populations in the Arab world. NewBoy does acknowledge a degree of cultural diversity amongst Arab peoples, however. Indeed, NewBoy has recently launched a line of Fulla dolls costumed in the traditional clothing of several Arab

countries.[6] The line of dolls is aptly called: "Fulla Traditions" (NewBoy 2012; Fulla.com – products). With dolls costumed in the 'traditional' clothing of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Morocco and the Emirates, NewBoy effectively reduces the (national) diversity of Arab peoples across the region to clothing.

To be sure, such a representation is certainly in accordance with Fulla's articulation of the Arab world as a place where national borders exist, but ultimately do not separate the Arab peoples (see chapter two of this thesis; also see NewBoy 2009). Yet, by reducing Egyptian/Saudi/Moroccan/Emirati identity to a costume, NewBoy ignores the unique socio-political and historical factors that have cooperated to create these various national identities. Put another way, NewBoy's logic is that costumes make the people. Thus, just as a change of dye transforms the Barbie doll into a Black woman, a mere change of outfit transforms the Fulla doll's national identity.

These dolls' representations of racial and cultural diversity raise numerous questions. Ann DuCille, for example, asks if any doll manufacturer could properly attend to human diversity:

> What would it take to produce a line of dolls that would more fully reflect the wide variety of sizes, shapes, colors, hairstyles, occupations, abilities, and disabilities that […] all people […] come in? In other words: what price difference (1996, 37-8).

Answering her own question, DuCille concludes that the cost "would be far greater than either corporation or consumer would be willing to pay" (1996, 38). She believes that Mattel (and other like-minded toy manufacturers) have managed to circumvent this

[6] As part of the "Fulla Traditions" line, NewBoy also created an "Indian Touch" Fulla doll (NewBoy 2012; Fulla.com – products). Given the attention Fulla's Arab identity receives in her marketing, I am not entirely sure why this doll was included. If I were to speculate, however, I imagine NewBoy wishes to broaden the appeal of the Fulla doll. Significant numbers of foreign workers from the Indian subcontinent currently reside in numerous Arab Gulf countries. This "Indian Touch" doll may be NewBoy's effort to attract these people as new consumers of the Fulla doll.

problem by simultaneously producing and denying difference (38). Made as Barbie-lookalikes from the *very same* plastic mold used to create the white Barbie doll, Mattel's 'ethnic' Barbie dolls reduce ethnicity and race to costumes and plastic dyes. Similarly, the Fulla doll's creators have reduced the diversity amongst Arab peoples to their clothing and completely denied the existence of any phenotypical differences amongst them.

In both cases, difference is produced, but not in a way that actually upsets the status quo of their respective environments. *White* Barbie is the norm and it is through her mold that difference is produced. Asian, Latin American and Black Barbie dolls exist in Barbie's *white* world, but they are never really fully included. Teresa is *still* an agricultural worker and 'Orientals' are *still* 'exotic and interesting.' They are never *real* Barbie dolls. Likewise, Fulla's imaginary Arab *watan* is a place only inhabited by Arab peoples who *all* look exactly the same, save small differences in clothing. In this way, both dolls can be seen to reflect the marginalization of non-white peoples in their respective societies. Indeed, Fulla's noticeable *exclusion* of Black Arabs can be seen as a manifestation of anti-Black racism in the across the Arab world. A 2008 article published in the *New York Times,* for example, referred to anti-Black racism as the Arab world's "dirty secret" and argued that a long-standing double standard exists in the region between Arab-Caucasians and Arab-Blacks (Eltahawy 2008).

Fulla's handling (or lack thereof) of Arab racial diversity raises a number of important questions. How, for example, do non-Caucasian (Black) Arabs view the Fulla doll? Do they read her as a manifestation of anti-Black racism as well? Given the problems associated with Mattel's ethnic Barbie dolls, would a dye-dipped version of the

Fulla doll representing Black Arabs be desirable? To be sure, these sorts of questions require in-depth socio-political study of the Arab world and far exceed the scope of this thesis. By mentioning them here, however, I simply wish to point out that the Fulla doll, like the Barbie doll, raises a number of important questions that go beyond its status as children's plaything. As noted previously, dolls are not simply raw material given to children to do with as they please.

Control the Doll, Control the Self

As the previous two sections have pointed out, both Barbie and Fulla are sites where various socio-cultural norms and ideologies (such as those relating to thinness or race) are recorded, contained, and even reinforced. When children play with Fulla and Barbie dolls, they are not only interacting with miniature plastic women, but the entire identity inserted into the dolls by their respective creators. In the case of Fulla, children engage with her Arab Muslim feminine identity. Fulla's advertisements, and even her packaging encourage her young consumers to *be like Fulla* because she is (apparently) the "dream of every Arab girl" (NewBoy 2002). They are encouraged to identify with the doll and to "dream" of being like her. But *how* can children go about *being like Fulla* and what does this "dream" look like?

When children open-up Fulla's pink box, they find not only a plastic person with a pre-determined Arab-Islamic feminine identity, but also a miniature *hijab*, an *abaya*, a prayer mat, and even a matching pink prayer book. Achieving the "Fulla dream" therefore, appears to require interaction with these items. (There is, after all, no "Arab Politician Fulla" or "Human Rights Lawyer Fulla" that includes a miniature copy of the United Nations' *Declaration of Human Rights*.) That those particular objects are included

with the Fulla doll suggests very specific things about culture and identity. The *hijab*, for example, is not simply a piece of fabric, but an obvious and visible symbol of Islamic femininity. In turn, these objects serve to impact how children play and interact with the Fulla doll. They act as a sort of check or regulator on their play (Nelson 2011, 74-5). In this sense, the Fulla doll does not offer children a site for the free exercise of self-expression and imagination. Rather, she offers them an opportunity to interact with a very particular articulation of what it means to be an Arab-Muslim woman, and to "dream" of aligning themselves with it.

By encouraging young girls to "dream" of becoming like Fulla, Fulla-play simultaneously cultivates self-examination and self-improvement in children. She is the standard to which their behavior is compared, the "dream" to which they ought to aspire. Keeping in mind that dolls are often where many young girls first see and learn about themselves, the "Fulla dream" becomes part of the discourse children internalize through doll-play (Auerbach 1999, 43). Put differently, young girls "see themselves" in Fulla, and proceed to learn about themselves (as females, as Arabs, as Muslims, etc.) through their Fulla doll-play.

This process can be seen as a form of what Michel Foucault has called "technologies of the self." According to Foucault, these technologies are discourses which allow "individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality" (1988, 18). Underpinning these technologies are disciplinary regimes, which seek complete control over the activities of bodies (or

people). The power exercised by such regimes seeks to make bodies "more obedient as [they] become more useful" (1979, 138). The "chief function" of this power, according to Foucault, is to "train," but not through the creation of a "single, uniform mass" (1980, 188). Rather, disciplinary power creates individuals by rendering bodies different from one another, thereby producing individuality (Hoffman 2011, 29).

Thinking about Fulla and Fulla doll-play in this way is useful as it offers us a framework by which we can understand how the Fulla doll serves as a "training device" for young (Arab) girls. As Markee et al. have shown, when young girls play with fashion dolls (like Barbie), their play focuses on dressing and grooming the dolls in various ways (1994, 190). They further note that doll-play took the form of vicarious role-playing and that children were not directly interacting with their dolls, but living through them (190). During their interviews with mothers, moreover, they also uncovered that fashion dolls appeared "to hold little play value without their many accessories, and play experiences were often dictated by accessories available for the doll" and that these accessories "provide strong elements of socialization" for young girls (190). These findings suggest that as young girls play with dolls, and their various accessories, they are simultaneously internalizing the values inserted into the doll by its manufacturers. In doing so, young girls develop an understanding of themselves (their gender, race, ethnicity, religion). The Fulla doll, therefore, becomes a vehicle by which gender discipline is delivered to girls through the inclusion of a *hijab* and a prayer mat. They not only learn that certain clothing and certain behaviors are appropriate and sanctioned in the world of Arab girls, but internalize these lessons and apply them in their own lives as well. This is a form of 'training' through which young girls are taught to 'obey' and follow culturally defined

gender norms, such as veiling and prayer. It is, perhaps, this reason that compelled one Syrian woman to observe:

> If the girls put scarves on their dolls when they're young, it might make it easier when their time comes. Sometimes it is difficult for girls to put on the *hijab*. They feel it is the end of childhood. Fulla shows girls that the hijab is a normal part of a woman's life […] (Quoted in Zoepf 2005).

Thus, just as Fulla's television advertisements offer young children an identity discourse that serves to *make* them Arab by offering instruction on various Arab-Islamic cultural norms that frames these practices as *things Arabs just do*, the inclusion of a *hijab* and prayer mat with the Fulla doll serves to *instruct* and train children (girls in particular) that the *hijab* and prayer are 'normal parts of women lives.'

Conclusion

In this chapter, I endeavored to demonstrate that Fulla's manufactured Arab-Islamic identity does not exist independently of her consumers. I argued that the Fulla doll, through her televised advertisements and through physical doll-play, participates in various processes of socialization. Beginning with a discussion of *Al Jazeera's* news coverage and its role in strengthening the Arab-Islamic identities of its viewers, I argued that Fulla's advertisements, too, make appeals to the Arab-Islamic identities of their viewers. These appeals, while serving to transform Fulla's advertisements into an identity-based discourse, also enhance Fulla's credibility as an Arab. In doing so, however, Fulla is transformed into the *perfect* Arab, or the 'best one of us.' This superior status, moreover, qualifies the Fulla doll to offer her viewers instruction on "becoming Arab." Further, by offering this sort of tutelage to children, the Fulla character becomes

an agent of primary socialization who, like a parent, seeks to teach children to become functioning and accepted members of their respective socio-cultural environments.

While this thesis has primarily concerned itself with Fulla's advertisements, she is, first and foremost, a plastic doll. Through doll-play children glean information about themselves and the social world surrounding them (Auerbach 1998, 3; Nelson 2011, 72). Understanding this, numerous scholars have examined the sort of information communicated to children through doll-play. Mattel's Barbie doll, as one of the world's most popular dolls, has been the recipient of much of this attention. However, given the numerous similarities between Fulla and Barbie, a number of these concerns are also applicable to Fulla as well.

One of the primary concerns scholars have expressed about the Barbie doll has been her representation of the female body. Noting that Barbie has a body type achievable by fewer than one in 100,000 women (Norton et al. 1996), scholars have asked how engagement and play with the Barbie doll impacts the self-esteem, body image, and even food intake of young girls. Studies have actually found a correlation between Barbie-play and young girls' desires for a thinner body shape. The Fulla doll, as a near Barbie-clone, shares Barbie's (unachievable) body shape. However, unlike Barbie, Fulla's impact on the self-esteem and body image of young girls in the Arab world has received little (if any) scholarly attention.

Scholars have also been highly critical of Mattel's representation of ethno-cultural and racial diversity within their various lines of Barbie dolls. The Barbie character, they note, is *stubbornly* white and lacks any real credibility as a woman of color (Rogers 1999, 47). In their efforts to market "dolls who look like them" to America's various ethnic and

racial minorities, Mattel has simply produced dye-dipped versions of their *classic*, white Barbie doll (DuCille 1996, 37). These dye-dipped dolls, moreover, also reproduce various ethnic and racial stereotypes, such as the association of Latin Americans with agricultural work in the United States. The Fulla doll also presents a similar slipshod handling of diversity. First, NewBoy does not manufacture a Black Fulla doll, thereby avoiding any acknowledgement of racial diversity in the Arab world. When diversity is acknowledged, however, it is reduced to the costumes worn by dolls in the "Fulla Traditions" collection. In doing so, Fulla effectively ignores the unique socio-political and historical factors that have cooperated to create various Arab national identities.

By articulating racial and cultural diversity in this way, both NewBoy and Mattel become complicit in the maintenance of pre-existing hierarchies of inequalities in their respective geographic locales. Non-white Barbie dolls exist on the fringes of white Barbie's world, just as non-Caucasian Arabs experience marginalization and racism in the Arabic-speaking world.

After elaborating on these various 'plastic problems,' I proceeded to discuss the Fulla doll as a tool of gender discipline and training for young girls. Fulla's advertisements, her packaging, and even through doll-play, young girls are encouraged to identify with the Fulla character and her Arab-Islamic identity. Fulla, they are told, is the "dream of every Arab girl" and the standard to which they ought to aspire. By including a doll-sized *hijab* and *abaya* and prayer mat with (most) Fulla dolls, Arab consumers are shown exactly what achieving this so-called Arab dream looks like: it requires dressing like Fulla and fulfilling the requirements of Fulla's religion (prayer, etc.).

Simply by virtue of being included inside Fulla's boxes, these objects serve to control and regulate the sort of play that young children can engage in. The *hijab* and *abaya* are part of what make Fulla who she is, and therefore, they also become part of the dream to which Arab girls ought to aspire. Understanding that dolls are often the sites where young girls first see and learn about themselves, these 'aspirations' begin to cultivate self-reflection and self-improvement in children. Thus, the Fulla doll (and her religiously sanctioned accessories) can be understood as forms of what Michel Foucault (1988) has called, "technologies of the self," discourses which seek to *train* individuals to obey various norms, practices, ideologies, etc. Thinking about the Fulla doll in this way allows us to see how she functions as a vehicle for the delivery of gender discipline to young girls.

Fulla Finale

In the years since her release in 2003, the Fulla doll has not only managed to usurp much of the Barbie doll's Middle Eastern toy store shelf space, but has, in fact, become the best selling fashion doll in the region (NewBoy.com). Fulla *fan-demonium* appears to have reached epic proportions in the Arab world with a seemingly endless list of Fulla-branded products available for purchase. Indeed, Arab consumers can not only purchase Fulla dolls, but also dress like Fulla, ride Fulla bicycles and even douse themselves in Fulla's signature *eau du toilette* (NewBoy.com – products). It is this same popularity that serves to connect the Fulla doll to socio-political and cultural issues extending far beyond her *dolly dispute* with the Barbie doll.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I sought to contextualize the Fulla doll as, essentially, a product of globalization. Had the accelerated pace of worldwide mass-

consumption and mass-production not brought the Barbie doll to the Arab world, it is unlikely that Fulla would be with us today (in her current form) as there would have been no inspiration to a create a fashion doll that "looked and dressed like us" because the blonde, American doll on toy store shelves did not (BBC 2010). In the chapter that followed, I proceeded to examine the Fulla doll's Arab-Islamic identity in greater detail and how an imported consumer good, the Barbie doll, could be transformed into something (and someone) else. My final chapter argued that the Fulla doll also participates in the socialization of children and seeks to *educate* and *train* them on various Arab-Islamic cultural norms. Yet, Fulla's identity discourse has broader implications.

In his oft-cited 1993 *Foreign Affairs* article, Samuel Huntington predicted that in the post-Cold War era, the "great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural" (22). He believed that cultural contact along the 'fault lines' of cultural civilizations would serve as the "flashpoints for crisis and bloodshed" (29). In a world where "the velvet curtain of culture" had replaced "the iron curtain of ideology" and people were increasingly defining their identities in ethnic and religious terms, people were more likely to understand the world in "us" versus "them" terms (29-31). "Islam" and the "West" both constituted cultural civilizations for Huntington. The borders of the Islamic civilizations were "bloody" as violent clashes have occurred (or continue to occur) between Muslims and Orthodox Serbs, Jews in Israel, Hindus in India, Buddhists in Burma, and Catholics in the Philippines (35). The centuries-old violent clashes between the "West" and Islam was also unlikely to decline. It could, according to Huntington, become "more virulent" (32).

The events of September 11th, 2001 were widely interpreted as evidence of the cultural fault lines Huntington identified nearly eight years prior. These two great civilizations both appeared to be at odds with one another, destined to continue playing out the hostility and violence that had characterized their relationship for the past 1300 years in "us" versus "them" terms. Indeed, such was the language used by former American President George W. Bush in his now famous speech given to the American Congress in September 2001: "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists."[7]

The circumstances of Fulla's emergence and her subsequent popularity undermine Huntington's thesis and the "us" versus "them" dichotomy between the "West" and "Islam." While Fulla demonstrates that dimensions of Western culture are being challenged in the Islamic world, this challenge did not spawn the sort of hostility and violence predicted by Huntington. Released only two years after September 11th and the very same year as the American Invasion of Iraq in 2003, the articulation of Arab-Islamic identity within the Fulla doll, (its aforementioned problems pertaining to religious sect and race notwithstanding) is not inherently anti-Western and does not require the *putting-down* of other cultural identities.

Fulla's articulation of Arab-Islamic identity required the existence of the Barbie doll in the Arab world. Yet, Fulla is not marketed as the *anti-Barbie* doll, nor is Fulla's ethnic identity framed as a sort of ethnocentrism vis-à-vis Barbie's non-Arab, Western identity. Even when promoting the Palestinian cause and framing Israel as a 'threat,' Fulla does not simultaneously promote the destruction of the state of Israel or encourage the hatred of Jewish peoples (NewBoy 2009). Fulla's identity discourse is simply a

[7] The entire transcript of President Bush's speech can be found on the website of the American White House: http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html. (Accessed July 13, 2013).

discourse of difference. It is a discourse that is not marked by notions of cultural superiority or feelings of anger/hostility towards non-Arab, non-Islamic cultures, namely "the West." By articulating cultural differences in this way, the Arab-Islamic identity discourse Fulla promotes though her consumption does not contribute to the "bloodying of borders."

As a final word, I feel that it is Fulla's discourse of difference that truly makes her a fascinating cultural object. Existing on the fault line between two very different cultures brought together by globalization and mass-consumption, Fulla's existence requires *both* the West and the Arab world. Fulla simultaneously accepts and rejects dimensions of Western culture – Fulla adopts Barbie's passion for fashion, but transforms it by never showing a thigh or her midriff. In rejecting dimensions of Western culture, however, Fulla does not reproduce an "us" versus "them" dichotomy, even though her creation required an understanding of who "we are" and who "they are." Fulla simply states emphatically and clearly who the Arabs are. But Fulla not only articulates an identity, she actively encourages its adoption. She is, therefore, a manufactured Arab-Muslim who, in turn, seeks to manufacture Arab-Muslims as her pre-packaged identity discourse is disseminated across the Middle East on satellite television and in her pretty pink boxes.

Conclusion: What Were Fulla's Boxes Full-a?

Launched in 2003, the Fulla doll has skyrocketed to superstar status in the Arab Middle East. As the bestselling fashion doll in the region, Fulla has all but caused the Barbie doll to disappear from toy stores across the region. As virtual lookalikes, however, Fulla appears to be nothing more than *hijab*- and *abaya*-wearing Barbie doll. Yet, as Fulla's manufacturers have explained, the doll's wardrobe is not the only factor contributing to her success: Fulla is also a *character* that consumers in the Arab world want to relate to. Fulla, therefore, is not simply a re-dressed Barbie doll, but also an entirely different person with her own unique cultural identity.

Beginning with the question of how it is that cultural products like the Fulla doll come to exist, I sought to explain her emergence within the contexts of globalization and mass-consumption. Understanding globalization as a number of processes that have facilitated the greater economic, political, and social interconnectedness of people all around the world, I explored the relevant social science literature discussing how this greater interconnectedness has impacted individuals' abilities to maintain their unique cultural identities. One stream of thought, the McWorld paradigm (Barber 1995) argues that globalization, driven by rampaging world capitalism, will result in the further development of a culture of consumerism oriented towards materialism and will ultimately destroy vibrant indigenous/local cultures. As peoples around the world consume similar commercial and media products (often American in origin), they simultaneously abandon dimensions of their traditional cultures. This process is effectively creating a common world culture: one big McWorld. Another stream of thought, the creolization paradigm, acknowledges that examples of cultural

homogenization can be found, but maintains that within mass-consumption, spaces exist where local consumers can display their attachment to local culture and practices through processes of re-contextualization. Through these processes, foreign goods are taken in, transformed, and assigned new meanings and uses which serve to connect them to local culture and identities in ways that mass-produced (often Western) goods typically cannot.

The Fulla doll is also an example of this process of recontextualization. In creating the Fulla doll, Fulla's manufacturers have made a number of modifications to the Barbie doll. Unlike Barbie, Fulla wears the *hijab*, an *abaya,* and has long brown hair. Yet these are not the only transformations that have been made to the Barbie doll. She has also been given an entirely new gendered, ethnic, and religious identity that has served to transform her into an Arab Muslim woman. Through a discourse analysis of thirteen different Fulla doll advertisements, I argued that the identity-based modifications made to the Barbie doll have taken place on two distinct, but related fronts: ethno-religious lines and gendered lines.

First, the Fulla doll's Arab identity can be discerned "simply by looking at her." Looking Arab, according to the advertisements, entails both a particular skin tone – "[Fulla] is tanned like my homeland and so are all her friends" – and also a particular religious affiliation, as descriptions of Fulla's skin tone are paired with images of the doll engaging in prayer. Interestingly, the advertisements display the Fulla character engaging in prayer in a manner aligning itself with Sunni Islam, suggesting that the Fulla character herself is Sunni. By articulating an Arab identity in this way and connecting it to a particular skin tone and religious affiliation (further qualified by sect), Fulla's advertisements serve to shift the meaning of 'Arab' from a linguistic category describing

all Arabic-speaking peoples to a racial and religious one. In this regard, Fulla's articulation of Arab identity becomes highly exclusionary as non-Caucasian Arabs and Shia Muslims are excluded from being Arab.

Having a particular skin tone and following a particular religion are not the only requirements for Arabness, however. The advertisements also serve to transplant the Barbie character into an entirely new geographic environment. The Fulla character has been given a peculiar pan-Arab citizenship that connects her to a host of Arabic-speaking countries and allows her to roam across the Middle East without hindrance. Fulla's Arab world is imagined as a place where national borders exist but do not separate the Arab peoples. In this regard, Fulla's Arabness becomes reminiscent of the Arab nationalist discourse of the twentieth century, which stressed the connectedness of Arab peoples and the artificiality of the national borders that separated them.

Further, Fulla's manufacturers have also given their doll a degree of political consciousness that taps into the important position occupied by the Palestinian cause in the Arab imagination. Fulla weeps for the Arab-Islamic Jerusalem and the al-Aqsa Mosque, as symbols of the Palestinian struggle, and asks God to keep them safe. In doing so, Fulla not only Arabizes the struggles of the Palestinians, but also frames the state of Israel as a perceived threat to the security of *Arab* Palestine.

Second, I examined how the Barbie doll has been transformed along gendered lines. Following Mary Rogers (1999), I compared Barbie and Fulla's femininity on three fronts: familial and social bonds; behavior and demeanor; and wardrobe and clothing. The Barbie character is constructed as the center of her own Barbie world. The other characters in Barbie's fantasy world are treated as accessories that Barbie associates with

when and only when she wants to. Unlike Barbie, however, everything the Fulla character does is in the service of others. Fulla's "ultimate goal," we are told, is to make children smile. She acts as a mother figure to her younger siblings, Bader and Nour, and teaches them basic life lessons, like brushing their teeth.

The Barbie doll and Fulla also share similar personality traits. Both Fulla and Barbie must be nice to those around them at all times. Fulla, we are told, is polite and all her words are 'sweet like sugar.' Unlike Barbie whose religion is never explicitly made clear by her manufacturers, the Fulla character must also 'be nice' to her God and act in religious appropriate ways. As such, Fulla always prepares for her prayer properly, prays at the set times, and reads the Quran.

Finally, neither doll exudes any hint of masculinity. In fact, both dolls manage to take feminine appearances to unsustainable (even impossible) extremes. Fulla shares Barbie's passion for fashion, but unlike Barbie who is permitted to show her thighs or midriff, Fulla must also obey Islamic clothing norms. She never leaves her home without her *hijab* and *abaya*. Interestingly, Fulla wears the *hijab* (and somewhat conservative dress) because she chooses to. She does not dress the way she does because the adults in her life compel her to. Fulla is fashion forward, but still *chooses* to cover her hair and skin. In this regard, Fulla speaks back to (primarily Western) discourses, which maintain that the practice of veiling is inherently oppressive. Fulla normalizes the practice of veiling by presenting it as something all Islamic women *just do.* Yet, by presenting veiling in this way Fulla dismisses the fact that not all Muslim women choose to wear the veil or even believe it is a religious requirement. In doing so, Fulla denies the existence of Islamic women who choose to not wear the *hijab*. That every single female character in

Fulla's imaginary world (save young girls) wears the *hijab* further demonstrates this point.

In the third chapter of this thesis, I discussed the implications of this process of recontextualization. I argued that the Fulla doll was a peculiar sort of cultural product because she can reach directly into the hearts, minds and arms of small children in the Arab world, thereby transforming her into an agent of socialization and a tool of gender training. Through a comparison of *Al Jazeera's* news coverage, I argued that Fulla's television advertisements make appeals to the shared ethnicity, language, religious beliefs and political concerns of the Arabs. These appeals serve to transform Fulla's advertisements into an identity-based discourse and reinforce Fulla's Arab 'credentials' by presenting her as the "best one of us." This status allows the Fulla doll to become an expert on various Arab-Islamic cultural norms and qualifies her to *teach* her viewers "how to be Arab." In offering this sort of tutelage to children, Fulla fulfills a role similar to that of a parent who seeks to guide his/her child towards becoming a functioning and accepted member of their respective socio-cultural environment.

Yet the Fulla doll does not only interact with her consumers through her television advertisements. She is, first and foremost, a doll. Through play and interaction with dolls and toys, children glean information about the social world that surrounds them. The designs of their toys, however, impact the sort of play children can engage in and therefore, also alters the sorts of lessons children learn from their toys. By including a miniature *hijab* and *abaya* in Fulla's box, children's play with the doll is regulated and checked. By regulating and controlling children's behavior and play, Fulla (and her religiously sanctioned accessories) can be characterized as what Michel Foucault has

called “technologies of the self,” discourses which seek to *train* individuals to obey various norms, practices, ideologies, etc. In thinking about the Fulla doll in this way, we can better understand how she operates as a vehicle for the delivery of gender discipline to young girls.

As a final word, I sought to broaden the implications of the identity discourse Fulla promotes to her Arab-Islamic consumers. I pointed out that Fulla offers an interesting counterexample to Samuel Huntington’s Clash of Civilizations thesis which maintained that the fault lines between different cultures, namely the West and Islam, would be sites of conflict and hostility. Born out of cultural contact between the West and the Arab-Islamic world facilitated by globalization, Fulla exists on the fault lines between these two cultures. Yet, Fulla’s identity discourse, while rejecting and transforming dimensions of Western culture embodied within the Barbie doll, does not articulate an “us” versus “them” discourse predicted by the clash of civilizations. Fulla’s identity discourse is simply a discourse of difference that is not inherently anti-Western or even anti-Israeli. Fulla, therefore, is not merely a children’s toy. She is a peculiar cultural object whose articulation of cultural identity speaks to a number of socio-political issues that extend far beyond her plastic shell and into the realm of international relations.

In pointing out Fulla’s broader implications, I am also demonstrating an awareness of the limitations of my research in this thesis. In speaking about cultures and their relationship(s) with one another, Fulla also speaks about the people who identify with those cultures. Time constraints and geography have prevented me from examining Fulla in her indigenous context and from undertaking the sort of rigorous interpersonal research a cultural object like Fulla both demands and deserves. Thus, while the research

presented here on the Fulla doll has remained primarily theoretical and somewhat abstract, numerous opportunities exist for the Fulla doll to be used as a case study for the examination of other social phenomena. Indeed, as noted in the third chapter, the Fulla doll shares Barbie's unrealistic proportions, yet very little (if any) scholarship exists examining the impact Fulla's body has on the self-esteem and body image of young girls in the Middle East. Additionally, the Fulla doll is only available for purchase in one race/skin color and in doing so, appears to reproduce racial hierarchies and anti-Black racism in the Arab world. This problematic handling (or lack thereof) of racial diversity in the Arab world also demands further social science research that endeavors to understand how non-Caucasian Arab minorities understand the Fulla doll and, more broadly, race-relations in the Arab world.

While the research presented in this thesis has primarily sought to contextualize Fulla's origins as a product of globalization and elaborate on her articulation of Arab-Islamic identity, I have also endeavored to demonstrate that Fulla's bright pink boxes are actually *full-a* more than just plastic. The Fulla doll's socio-political significance, I believe, demonstrates the need for the sort of research mentioned above to be undertaken and it is my sincere hope that my work here will be of use to those future projects.

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Appendix A: Translated Advertisements

The thirteen Fulla doll advertisements discussed throughout this thesis are all aired in the Arabic language. Each of these advertisements has been translated from Arabic into English by the author. The following are the translated scripts of each advertisement arranged by date of production.

Alaa Wa'den [The Promise] (2002)

I was promised that she is coming.
In anticipation, I tossed the flowers into the basket,
And I did not tell anyone but my sister.
My sister is waiting for Fulla too.

[Repeat above]

Tomorrow she will be in my house.
She will sit beside my flowers.
I tell her my secrets,
And she keeps them safe.

Fulla, Fulla, Fulla,
She keeps my secrets safe.

Even though she is beautiful, her clothing makes her more beautiful.
The color of flowers and drenched in perfume,
Fulla brings sunshine when the sun has set.

My doll, Fulla.

[In Text] "The dream of every Arab girl."

Zahratul Bustan [Flower in the Garden] (2005)

She is a flower in my room that does not wilt.
I am 'all smiles' because I am going to see/play with her.

Fulla is a flower in the garden.
You can tell she's Arab simply by looking at her.
Her dress is even more beautiful because she is wearing it.

She is the dream doll and my best friend.
She is my doll, Fulla.
Fulla, Fulla, Fulla.
My doll, Fulla.

The Dentist (2007a)

Bader: Ouch! My teeth are hurting and the horrible pain is killing me! I have tried to sleep, but it is as if my entire body is hurting.

[Repeat above]

Fulla: Hold your tooth bush and learn to brush your teeth. Remember to brush your teeth after meals and remain committed.
I am Fulla.
I am a dentist.
I am passionate about my job.
My ultimate goal is to make you smile.
How great is dentistry?
How great is dentistry?

Omsiko Forshatee [Holding my Brushes] (2007b)

I grab my brush and my paints.
My paintings make life more beautiful.

I dream of flowers,
And my ambitions are ahead of my time.
I respect everyone, young and old alike.
I hold my tongue and never speak ill of others.

I am Fulla, Fulla.
Come let us sing together.

My light lights up the world around me.
I try and try and never give up.
I smile even when I am sad.

I am Fulla, Fulla.
Come let us sing together.
My light spreads joy and happiness wherever I go.

Every strand of wheat on my land stands tall and proud
And I overcome adversity with love.

Ramadan (2007c)

The month is upon us, my sister.
Ramadan comes bearing goodwill.
My house smells of incense to greet Ramadan.

[Repeat above]

One year has past since we have last seen Ramadan.
How beautiful it is to see Ramadan again.

Welcome Ramadan!
Welcome Ramadan!

The morning call to prayer is such a sweet sound.
The call warns me to begin my fast.

My heart is filled with happiness and my mind is at peace
And things are well.

Ramadan came back.
How beautiful it is.
It has been a year since we were last together.

Samrao'n [Tanned] (2007d)

Fulla, Fulla
She is tanned like my homeland
And so are all her friends.

She is from the land of lilacs,
the valley of jasmine,
And the flower pots on peoples' balconies.
She is tanned like my homeland
And so are all her friends

She is from the land of lilacs,
The valley of jasmine,
And the flower pots on peoples' balconies
She is tanned like my homeland
And so are all her friends

She is from the land of lilacs,
The valley of jasmine,
And the flower pots on peoples' balconies

The best thing I have is Fulla.
She is polite when she speaks.
She keeps all the promises she makes.

The best thing I have is Fulla
She is polite when she speaks

She keeps all the promises she makes.

Fulla, Fulla, Fulla.
She is more precious than diamonds,
I promise this to everyone.

Toshriquo [Sharing] (2007e)

Fulla is well-dressed, good-looking, and everything is better with her around.
She tells us stories before bedtime.
Her words are sweet like sugar.
Fulla.

She stays close to me all day to inspire me.
We read together.
We play together.
Or we take a stroll together.

How beautiful my trip is when she is with me.
Fulla.

When I succeed, she is happy for me
She shares my happiness.

When I succeed, she is happy for me.
She shares my happiness.

She gives me perfume, and I give her flowers.

Ismah Fulla [Her Name is Fulla] (2007f)

Her name is Fulla;
A beautiful young lady;
Tanned [skin] and well behaved.
Fulla, Fulla,
How beautiful she is.
We love her so much.
For her humility,
She deserves the best kisses.
She is loving.

She never complains,
And she is never lazy.
She never complains,
And she is never lazy.

She lights up our hearts with hope.
We have made her beautiful.
We have given her jewelry.
We dress her up in the best clothes.
Fulla, Fulla.

She pleases her God
And her mother and father.
She is loving.
She respects and appreciates her parents.
She is close with her family and visits often.
She is so beautiful.
We love her so much,
For the way that she looks.
The best kisses [for her]
Oh you, Fulla.
Fulla, Fulla.

Salah (2008a)

I pray to God in the sky.
I worship him so he will answer my prayers.

I do the fajr, dhuhr, asr, maghrib, and isha prayers.
I bend down and say God is great and repeat it.

Then I place my head on the ground,
And say God is great and repeat it.

I wish peace upon the Prophet Mohammad
I finish by saying that you [God] are benevolent and glorious.

The prayers are set: two in the fajr, four in the dhuhr, four for the asr, three for maghrib, and four for the isha.

Al-Woodoo (2008b)

We wash our hands up to the wrist,
And then we rinse out our mouths and our noses.

We start with our face by washing it three times.
Then we start with our right arm and wash it to our elbows.
Then we wash our left arm up to the elbow as well.

Then we wipe our head and behind our ears,
And now we have our legs left to do.

We start with the right leg and wash our entire foot,
And then we wash our left foot as well.

Watan Arabi [Arab World] (2009)

Her eyes are like coffee from Yemen.
Her hair is like the night in Najd [Saudi Arabia].
She walks like a Libyan gazelle.
Her cheeks are like flowers from Damascus.

[Repeat above]

Her eyes are like coffee from Yemen.
Her hair is like the night in Najd [Saudi Arabia].

I have made a dress for her from Tunisia.
The dress's threads are from Iraq.
Her shawl is from al-Dar al-Bayda [Casablanca, Morocco].
She looks as if she is from the Arab Gulf

[Repeat previous four lines]

Her eyes are like coffee from Yemen.
Her hair is like the night in Najd [Saudi Arabia].

She has visited Wahran [Algeria],
And in Oman she found Egyptian horses.

[Repeat previous two lines]
And then she continued to Jordan to look for a poem written in Nabatiye [Lebanon].

She prays to God

[Repeat previous line four times]
And asks Him to keep the Arabian Al-Quds safe.

Eid (2011a)

I bring good news in the morning.
Beautiful butterflies pave the road of plenty.

[Repeat previous two lines]

She sends a gentle breeze,
She brings a smile.

She strives to be the best.
She makes a melody.
She makes pain go away.
She paints a dream for me.

[Repeat previous six lines]

She makes pain go away.
She makes even a little lamb gentler.
Her morals are the best.
And her empathy is sincere

She smells of flowers.
They call me Fulla.
Fulla, Fulla, Fulla.
They call me Fulla.

She wakes up as fresh as morning flowers.
She sings softly to celebrate Eid.

When she visits [family/friends],
She is as beautiful as a full moon.
She adheres to Arab traditions.

She cares
She is always nice.
My friend,
Fulla, Fulla, Fulla, Fulla; Fulla.
My friend, Fulla.

Latasalini [Do Not Ask Me] (2011b)

Do not ask me who I am.
The sea, sky, stars and universe tell my story.
Do not ask me who I am in the summer and in the winter.

In the light,
My secrets are happy.

In my heart there is plenty of love.
My voice is an honest melody.
My life is a river that flows across all the land.

My voice is as soft as a canary's.
I throw flowers in streams.
And all my words are fragrant.

Fulla, Fulla, Fulla.

Do you know who I am now?

I like to fly across my big world,
And collect the dew in the morning.

Do you know who I am now?

I am the friend of the hills,
And the flowers,
And the children.

I am, I am Fulla.