

'MUSLIM BARBIE' FIGHTS FOR VALUES

INTRODUCTION

The term 'Muslim Barbie' might seem to many of us as an oxymoron. Basic associations with the word 'Muslim' often lead to such concepts as 'religious, modest, conservative' and for 'Barbie': 'provocative, materialistic, vain'. Thus, the question arises: how is a 'Muslim Barbie' possible? How does this plastic body assimilate such contradictions? Surprisingly enough, it seems that it is not only possible but also profitable. For several years, Mattel's Barbie has not been the only Barbie in the world – in many parts of the world it has been dethroned by its Muslim counterparts.

The article investigates the successful conquest of the of Barbie-style doll market by the 'Muslim Barbie'. The text will concentrate on the ideas that stand behind the success of Fulla, Razanne or Salma – to name just a few dolls that were created to displace or replace the original Barbie on the toy market. The analysis will introduce the cultural and economic conditions that were favourable to promote the 'Muslim Barbie' dolls. What will also be addressed is the question whether under the catchword of 'learning good Islamic values through fun and play'¹⁾ the producers and salespeople of 'Muslim Toys and Dolls' promote the values and ideas important for Muslims, or maybe the trademark 'Islam' just sells the product better.

¹⁾ The slogan advertises the toys and dolls on the website 'Muslim Toys and Dolls'.

BARBIE – THE ORIGINAL ONE

Barbie was launched onto the toy market in March 1959. Barbie herself was not an original idea but was created to resemble another doll, Bild Lilli, that had first appeared in 1955. Bild Lilli was the embodiment of a prostitute from a German adult cartoon²⁾ and as a doll she was not targeted at children but men in bars (see: 'Doll Reference' website). When Ruth Handler bought Lilli in 1956, she did not know the story behind the doll. She bought three dolls: one for her daughter and two for the Mattel company. Thanks to the prosperity of the 1950s, increased leisure time and the postwar baby-boom, Barbie – despite the reluctance of most of the industry buyers – turned out to be a huge success. Mattel's idea of introducing a woman-like doll instead of a doll that was designated for cuddling conquered the American market. Later on, she conquered most of countries in the world.³⁾

But the success was not without accusations or criticism. The very often repeated allegation is the promotion of an unrealistic body image. Girls playing with the Barbie doll are exposed to the image of a plastic body that has nothing to do with reality. The standard Barbie doll has a bust girth of 11,6 cm, a waist girth of 8,9 cm and a hip girth of 12,7 cm. BBC reporter, Denise Winterman, compared in her article the measurements of Barbie and of a real woman, Libby. Barbie's dimensions had nothing in common with Libby's look⁴⁾.

Although Barbie's body is a distorted version of a real body, her makers never stated that she was to reflect real-life measurements. But some of the 'users' of Barbie – from little girls to adult women desire the doll's body, which sometimes results in anorexia or in the urge for surgical improvements to their bodies. Journalists reported that there are plastic surgeons who confirm that it

²⁾ Lilli was created by a German cartoonist Reinhard Beuthien in 1952 for Bild-Zeitung in Hamburg, Germany.

³⁾ *Doll Power...* (2008).

⁴⁾ Denise Winterman's comparison is as follows: 'If Libby's waist size of 28ins (71.1cm) were to remain unchanged, then applying Barbie's proportions to her would mean Libby shoots up in height, to an Amazonian at 7ft 6ins (2.28m) tall. That's just two inches shorter than the world's tallest woman, Yao Defen. She would also have hips measuring 40ins (101.6cm) and a bust of 37ins (83.9cm). But what if, instead, Libby's height of 5ft 6ins (1.68m) was to remain unchanged. Doing the maths, Libby would have an extraordinarily tight waist of just 20ins (50.8cm), while her bust would be 27ins (68.5cm) and her hips 29ins (73.6cm). Even the famously slight Victoria Beckham reportedly only has a 23ins (58.4cm) waist. But neither are they unheard of - Brigitte Bardot was famous for her 20ins (50.8cm) waist' (Winterman 2009).

is possible to create Barbie's figure out of a real woman's body.⁵⁾ On the other hand, a plus-size model Katie Halschischik presented on a photograph her naked body covered with lines that showed how her face and body would to be 'improved' to achieve the Barbie-ideal. The photograph shows how far away Katie's appearance is from the one promoted by Barbie.⁶⁾

Apart from being accused of promoting a distorted body image, Barbie is also attacked for her lifestyle that could be summarised in one word: materialistic. Barbie is a symbol of consumerism: surrounded by pretty objects, fashionable clothes, collections of cars etc. Professor Marilyn Motz describes it: "The whole point of the Barbie doll is that she owns things and buys things."⁷⁾ Although Mattel introduced to the market Barbie dolls of diverse occupations, it is difficult to defend the stand that it's aim was to introduce the world of careers and the possibilities of self-development to girls (for example, there was a teacher, a nurse, a doctor, or an astronaut Barbie doll). It is much easier to advocate the notion that the genius idea behind the Barbie doll was to invent the personality and – first and foremost – to dress the doll in different outfits.

Nevertheless, little girls wanted to play with Barbie, probably completely unaware of the accusations directed at the doll. The appeal of having an adult-like Barbie was irresistible. Throughout many years, even if other companies tried to imitate Barbie, Mattel and its lawyers have defended the original Barbie and it seems that in most cases they were extremely successful. Among the countries that sold Barbie dolls were also Muslim countries. But the situation changed after the 11th September 2001 – and the change in the political situation in the world has also influenced Barbie. Muslim countries started to boycott Barbie – as one of the toy sellers said, the image of Barbie as buxom, blonde and wearing revealing clothing was "more harmful than an American missile."⁸⁾

'MUSLIM BARBIE'

Due to the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York in 2001 the political connections between the US and many Muslim countries became more strained than ever. One of the effects of this situation was the boycott-

⁵⁾ *Figura jak...* (2011).

⁶⁾ *Beautiful Imperfection...* (2011).

⁷⁾ *Barbie: Doll...* (1987).

⁸⁾ Bailey (2008).

ing of American products available on Muslim markets, among others – toys. A product that was boycotted (or even banned – as in Iran in 2002 and in Saudi Arabia in 2003) was also the Barbie doll – the symbol of American dream but also of rampant consumerism and of shallow materialism.⁹⁾ But the charm of an adult-like doll was irresistible and soon different versions of ‘Muslim Barbie’ appeared (for example, Fulla, Jamila) or strengthened their position (for example, Razanne). The Muslim version of Barbie got accepted by parents of little girls because of values consistent with the Islamic faith.

The term ‘Muslim Barbie’ refers generally to dolls that resemble Barbie doll in measurements but are dressed in a way that is acceptable in Muslim countries. The examples described below show the motivation of the designers of Mattel’s Barbie counterparts labeled as ‘Muslim.’ The analysis concentrates on three dolls: Razanne, Fulla and Salma, and is supplemented by Mattel’s attempts to fill in the niche in the market with their own offers of Barbie that would represent ‘Muslim’¹⁰⁾ interest in the product.

RAZANNE (1996)

The Razanne doll was created for the Muslim community in the US as early as in 1996 by an American couple, Noor and Ammar Saadeh.¹¹⁾ NoorArt, their company, is based in the suburb of Livonia, Michigan. She was the first version of a ‘Muslim Barbie’ to appear on the American market.

The doll is a direct response to the skimpily dressed Barbie. Ammar Saadeh said:

The main message we try to put forward through the doll is that what matters is what’s inside you, not how you look. It doesn’t matter if you’re tall or short, thin or fat, beautiful or not, the real beauty seen by God and fellow Muslims is what’s in your soul.¹²⁾

⁹⁾ Ebrahimzadeh (2009).

¹⁰⁾ The ‘Muslim’ word is put in inverted commas on purpose in this place as we will see in the further part of the article, Mattel’s ideas concerning creating ‘Muslim’ Barbie were either stereotypical or evoked some controversies.

¹¹⁾ Yaquin (2007: 180).

¹²⁾ Osorio (2003).

Nevertheless, Razanne's body does resemble Barbie's body with slight alterations – it is a preteen's body, her bust is smaller than Barbie's – this body shape is more acceptable among Muslim parents. NoorArt created Razanne with different complexions (white, olive or black skin) and different hair colour (black or blonde). The producers acknowledge the diversity of Muslim believers and thus can reach broader target group including Eastern European Muslims or white North American converts¹³).

The Razanne line reflects a range of roles for Muslim women. Each doll is accompanied by a short description of her behaviour, interests or the values she represents: a schoolgirl¹⁴), a scout¹⁵) and a teacher¹⁶).

The doll appeared also as 'Praying Razanne'¹⁷), 'Eid Mubarak Razanne'¹⁸), 'In and Out Razanne'¹⁹) and 'Playday Razanne'²⁰).

The distinction between the 'in' outfit worn at home and the 'out' outfit worn at the workplace or while playing is made very clearly. Fashionable clothes are allowed (and Razanne is depicted as a person who *loves to dress in all the latest fashions*²¹) but outside home and while praying, modesty is the most important value.

¹³) See: "Noorart" website.

¹⁴) "Razanne loves school and is all ready with her bright red book bag to join her friends in class" (see: "Noorart" website).

¹⁵) *"I'm honest, kind and trustworthy.* Muslim Scouts' organizations all over the world help build character and skills for success in this life and the next. Razanne wears her merit badges and awards earned for community service, Islamic behaviour and Qur'an memorization. Respect for Allah, parents and all members of the community are a top priority with Razanne" (see: "Noorart" website).

¹⁶) "What is a more honorable and specialized career than education? Our teacher Razanne comes full equipped with laptop computer, briefcase and all the necessary items for school" (see: "Noorart" website).

¹⁷) "Allahu Akbar! God is the Greatest! It's time to pray and Razanne is ready! When it's time for prayer, many Muslim girls cover their everyday clothes with these traditional two-piece garments and stand to pray on colourful prayer rugs" (see: "Noorart" website).

¹⁸) "Razanne is all ready to celebrate the Muslim holiday. Dressed in her new floral fashions of pink or blue, Razanne has Eid cards addressed to all her friends and is ready to decorate the party with balloons" (see: "Noorart" website).

¹⁹) "In and Out Razanne comes with a two-piece fashion set for Razanne to wear inside and outside the home. At home, Razanne loves to dress in all the latest fashions. In a minute she can be ready to go out with this traditional jilbaab coat. Razanne helps Muslim girls understand that in the home they can be the ultimate fashion statement yet still have attractive attire while dressing modestly outside the home" (see: "Noorart" website).

²⁰) "Dressing modestly doesn't keep Razanne from having fun! On the playground, Razanne plays in her scarf and a loose fitting jumper that gives her lots of room to run and jump" (see: "Noorart" website).

²¹) See footnote no. 18.

FULLA (2003)

Fulla doll was introduced into the market in November 2003 by a Syrian company NewBoy Design Studio. Manar Tarabichi, President and CEO in NewBoy, says in a BBC interview, that the idea of Fulla came when he was talking with his partner and wondered about creating an Arab doll. Later on he was talking with other women who also expressed their urge to buy a doll that would reflect Muslim values – this confirmed Tarabichi’s intuition that such a doll is desirable.²²⁾ Fawaz Abidin, the brand manager in the company, in the following words described the idea behind creating Fulla:

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, and caring, and she respects her father and mother.²³⁾

In Cairo, the chief salesperson at Toys’r’Us, Tarek Mohammed said: “Fulla sells better because she is closer to our Arab values – she never reveals a leg or an arm.”²⁴⁾ In other words, the creators of Fulla wanted to create a doll that would reflect Muslim values.

The name ‘Fulla’ means a type of jasmine that grows in the Middle East. She has dark skin and big dark eyes. She wears an abaya (a robe-like dress) and a matching head scarf. On the Egyptian market her wardrobe is extended and she also wears jeans and has many colourful headscarves. Fulla is much more modestly dressed than Barbie and she wears skirts that cover her knees and her shirts cover her shoulders. In Saudi Arabia she also wears a veil. “She is wearing a modest outfit”²⁵⁾ – the slogan appears by many Fulla models on the webpage selling Muslim Toys and Dolls (see: ‘Muslim Toys and Dolls’ website) and the word ‘modest’ seems to be synonymous with the ‘Islamic values’ that children are supposed to learn through fun and play (as advertised on the webpage).

²²⁾ *Muslim Barbie Doll...* (2010).

²³⁾ Zoepf (2005).

²⁴⁾ *Barbie loses...* (2006).

²⁵⁾ For example, by the models titled ‘Fulla Doll W(ith) Hijab/Abaya/Bangles/Shoes’, ‘Fulla Doll W(ith) Modest Indoor Fashion’, ‘Fulla Indoor fashion W(ith) Extra’, ‘Fulla Indoor Fashion w(ith) Hairband 4 you’, ‘Fulla Indoor Fashion W(ith) pretty Belt 4 you’ or ‘Fulla W(ith) Jewelry in Cone’ (Muslim Toys and Dolls,

The colour of the package that Fulla is sold in is pink, 'Fulla pink' is already established as a well-known trademark.²⁶⁾ It is not only the package that is pink, but also a whole range of products accompanying the doll and a well developed range of gadgets for girls that are supposed to identify with the doll. Fulla has a broad choice of clothes to wear indoors, a separate outfit for morning and evening prayer²⁷⁾, and she can sing²⁸⁾. The creators introduced also two role-models of the Fulla doll: a teacher and a dentist, as "these two life choices are two respected careers for women that we would like to encourage small girls to follow", according to Fawaz Abidin.²⁹⁾ But looking at the product range in the online shop Muslim Toys and Dolls, one could ask if these paths of career are to be followed by small girls then why are the teacher and the dentist set limited editions³⁰⁾? The career-lines are not particularly developed and it seems that Fulla willingly conforms to a comfortable, domestic life.

What is unlimited on sale for the little girls is the pink schoolbook bag, 'Fulla backpack with drink bottle', 'Fulla 4-piece prayer sets for girls with soft satin prayer rug', 'book of 478 Fulla stickers with hijab in every modest outfit imaginable' or accessories for girls like 'Fulla fashion pink purse handbag', 'Fulla pencils with her wearing her hijab', or 'Fulla lunchbox with drink bottle.'³¹⁾ The outfits are always 'modest' – even if there are 478 of them like the book of stickers suggests. With the 'prayer set' that includes a headscarf girls are supposed to learn how to pray properly – the product is targeted at girls aged 6–12 years old although the Quran does not expect such young girls to cover their hair.

In the television advertisement we see Fulla who starts her day with a prayer, makes her bed, talks to her female friend, cooks, and in the evening she goes to bed and falls asleep alone³²⁾ – as the producers do not want to introduce a boyfriend for Fulla.³³⁾

To explain the success, one needs to consider the socio-economic factors. The timing of launching Fulla onto the market was very favourable: the backlash against Western products after 9/11 motivated parents to look for toys that

²⁶⁾ Zoepf (2005).

²⁷⁾ See: 'Fulla Morning Prayers Talking Doll'

²⁸⁾ See: 'Fulla Singing Doll with Microphone #1 BEST SELLER!'

²⁹⁾ Zoepf (2005).

³⁰⁾ See: 'Fulla Teacher W(ith) Two Students' and 'Fulla Dentist Doll W(ith) Patient'

³¹⁾ See: 'Muslim Toys and Dolls' website.

³²⁾ *Fulla Arabic Song...* (2012).

³³⁾ A counterpart for Barbie's Ken; Zoepf (2005).

would reflect Muslim values and they could also afford to buy such new toys because the economy in 2003 was doing well. The initial price of Fulla was about \$16 (when the average income per capita was around \$100 per month) whereas the price of Barbie was twice as high.³⁴⁾ Today the price for a standard Fulla set is \$39,99.³⁵⁾

On the one hand, parents seem to be satisfied with Fulla as she conveys important values derived from Islam. On the other hand, Maan Abdul Salam, a Syrian women's rights advocate, commented that Fulla reflects the turn toward conservatism that was more and more prevalent in the Middle East³⁶⁾. He stated that if Fulla had appeared ten years earlier, she would not have been so popular. In his opinion, the percentage of young women who wear the hijab was rising but it was difficult to state whether they did this from their own choice or if they were forced to do so.³⁷⁾

In 2007 Fulla made her debut at the American toy fair in New York – the same place as Barbie almost fifty years earlier.³⁸⁾ In the US she was not the first 'Muslim Barbie' since 1996 Razanne was already there but it was the Fulla doll that in the late 2000s outsold Razanne on global markets.³⁹⁾

SALMA (2006)

The last example of 'Muslim Barbie' comes from Indonesia – the largest Muslim country in the world. Similarly like in the Fulla doll example, Sukmawati Suryaman observed her niece playing with her Barbie and this inspired her to create in 2006 the 'Muslim Barbie' – Salma. Salma is not the first 'Muslim Barbie' in Indonesia – in 2005 Arrosa appeared on the market but it is Salma who received more attention in the mass media and arose more interest among journalists.⁴⁰⁾ Salma's name means 'peaceful' in Arabic. All her outfits have long sleeves and the robes are ankle-length. Each set is accompanied by a colour-matching headscarf. The dolls are imported from China but the outfits and accessories are created

³⁴⁾ Zoepf (2005); Ebrahimzadeh (2009).

³⁵⁾ 'Muslim Toys and Dolls' website.

³⁶⁾ A brief summary on recent Syrian history see: Terrebonne 2008.

³⁷⁾ Zoepf (2005).

³⁸⁾ Ebrahimzadeh (2009).

³⁹⁾ Mitchell et al. (2007: 442).

⁴⁰⁾ *Muslim Dolls To Represent...* (2012).

at home by Mrs Suryaman herself with some help from her two neighbours.⁴¹⁾ Reuters quotes an Indonesian mother who bought Salma dolls for her daughter because she thought Salma could be a role model, an alternative to Barbie. In her opinion, Barbie wears skimpy clothes and Salma dresses modestly and she covers her hair with a headscarf.⁴²⁾

Salma dolls are also available on the website www.bonekasalma.com and the average price for a doll is \$5.5 (incl. shipping) – but when you buy it via 'Muslim Toys&Dolls' the price is almost five times higher: \$24.99.

MATTEL'S IDEAS – MOROCCAN BARBIE (1999) AND 'BURKHA BARBIE'

One could ask if the idea of a 'Muslim Barbie' really did not occur to the original Barbie creators. How did Mattel try to acknowledge the existence of their 'non-western' clients in general and Muslim clients in particular? The two most striking examples are Barbie dolls called 'Moroccan Barbie' and 'Burkha Barbie'.

In 1999 Mattel introduced 'Moroccan Barbie' in a Collectors Edition for the series: 'Dolls of the World – Africa':

She was dressed in a beautiful authentically styled Moroccan orange and fuchsia dress. She wears a fuchsia chiffon veil and a headdress accented with a golden coin in the centre. Her lovely accessories include a golden necklace with one large coin, a golden hand ring and earrings and pink slipper-style shoes.⁴³⁾

The doll was very opulently dressed, which, as the description suggests, reflected the traditional Moroccan outfit. The one and only characteristic that appealed to 'Moroccan-ness' was the dress. On the website of 'Muslim Shopping Center', the Moroccan Barbie is described as a "Muslim princess."⁴⁴⁾

⁴¹⁾ Sulthani (2007).

⁴²⁾ See: 'Boneka Salma' website.

⁴³⁾ 'Barbie Collector' website.

⁴⁴⁾ 'Muslim Shopping Center' website.

Mattel also tried to include other ‘Muslim’ dolls in 2003 by introducing Leyla, a 1720s Turkish Muslim slave girl.⁴⁵⁾ Ammar Saadeh, the creator of Razanne, commented upon this in the following way: “It’s no surprise that they’d try to portray a Middle Eastern Barbie either as a belly dancer or a concubine.”⁴⁶⁾

In 2009, to celebrate Barbie’s 50th anniversary, Mattel introduced a ‘Burkha Barbie’⁴⁷⁾ that was put up for a charity auction at Sotheby’s. All the proceeds from the auction went to the Save the Children campaign.⁴⁸⁾ The goal of the campaign was to help children who live in the regions affected by conflicts.⁴⁹⁾ The ‘Burkha Barbie’ is one of 500 models designed to represent different international outfits for Barbie’s anniversary.⁵⁰⁾ The designer of the dolls in multicultural outfits is Eliana Lorena, who said: “This is really important for girls, wherever they are from. They should have the opportunity to play with a Barbie that they feel represents them.”⁵¹⁾ What is interesting in the case of ‘Burkha Barbie’ is that this model evoked so much interest in the press – and the rest 499 dolls did not. Neither kimono nor sari, that are also included in the collection, raised so many questions like the vermilion and lime green burkhas did⁵²⁾.

CONCLUSIONS

COMMODIFICATION OF RELIGION

When an object is commodified it means that something is turned into or treated as a mere commodity. This refers to a situation when an idea, value, piece of art, or religious symbol becomes a commodity that aims to generate income – the presented example refers to Barbie-like dolls that are associated with Islam.

In the case of ‘Muslim Barbie’ what ‘sells’ the product is the trademark ‘Islamic’ or ‘Muslim’ and it is this religious factor that encourages parents to buy the doll and the accessories connected with it. The mechanisms which sell

⁴⁵⁾ Mitchell et al. (2007: 441).

⁴⁶⁾ Osorio (2003).

⁴⁷⁾ The Barbie is not actually called ‘Burkha Barbie’ but – as Mona Eltahawy notices - *what else to conclude from two dolls covered from head to toe, just their eyes showing?* (Eltahawy 2009).

⁴⁸⁾ Eltahawy (2009).

⁴⁹⁾ *It’s Barbie...* (2009).

⁵⁰⁾ Eltahawy (2009).

⁵¹⁾ Bland (2009).

⁵²⁾ Mrs. Morena did not design the burkhas in forbidding black but in very vivid colours.

the Barbie-like doll are (particularly when you look at the marketing for Fulla) almost directly copied from Mattel's campaigns. The accusation towards Barbie that she is materialistic and embodies a consumerist lifestyle loses its power when one sees the book with stickers representing Fulla "in every modest outfit imaginable", i.e. in 478 outfits.⁵³⁾ One may well debate: when an outfit is modest then even the huge amount of such outfits is not materialistic, or maybe the modesty does not refer to how many outfits the doll possesses but only to the point that she covers some parts of her body? And what with the idea of Fulla's producers that on the one hand promotes a modest outfit for the doll but simultaneously advertises the doll as equipped with the accessories 'for you': a hairband, a pretty belt, different types of jewellery ("beautiful bracelet, ring and hairpin and necklace and more for you" – 'Muslim Toys and Dolls' website) or extra surprises. The Fulla doll is always modest and the jewellery for little girls seems not to interfere with the image of a modest doll – and all this is sold under the slogan 'Learning good Islamic values through fun and play.'⁵⁴⁾ It also seems that conservatism and consumerism, however surprising it might seem at first glance, can go hand in hand together.

'MUSLIM BARBIE' VS THE PROMOTED IMAGE OF 'MUSLIM WOMAN'

"She embodies the image of a proper Muslim woman" – this argument briefly summarises the idea behind Fulla.⁵⁵⁾ "She's popular because she's one of us. She's my sister. She's my mother. She's my wife. So as a parent, I'd like Fulla for my daughter" – the argumentation follows.⁵⁶⁾ Fulla in particular and other 'Muslim Barbies' in general are supposed to represent the image of a Muslim woman, the image that girls playing with the dolls should learn, internalise and later repeat in their real lives.

But there is also a problem with the stereotypical representation of a Muslim woman in the media that equals "Muslim" and "woman" with "Covered in Black Muslim Woman. She's seen, never heard. Visible only in her invisibility under that black burka, niqab, chador (...)" – simply a woman hidden in a black robe. Indeed, there are women who dress that way but not all of them.⁵⁷⁾ Dolls donned in black abayas also represent only a section of Islamic society around the world.

⁵³⁾ See: 'Muslim Toys and Dolls' website.

⁵⁴⁾ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁵⁾ Nelson (2005).

⁵⁶⁾ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁷⁾ Eltahawy (2009).

Amina Yaquin, who analysed the phenomenon of Razanne and Fulla, raised the following doubts “whether the dolls break stereotypes of Muslim women, or reinforce them through constructing a universal female Muslim subject.”⁵⁸⁾

Then there is always the question of little girls getting used to wearing a headscarf. One commentator approved the idea of a doll who teaches girls to cover their hair:

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.⁵⁹⁾

It would be difficult to disagree with the statement that when girls learn through play that a woman is expected to hide her head under a veil then when the time comes to really do so, it is easier for them to put on the hijab. On the other hand, playing that way also leaves no choice for those girls who would like to act differently and keep their heads uncovered. This refers not only to Fulla, but to all the dolls that are sold with headscarfs. Nelson summarises the existence of Fulla “as a bulwark against a fast-changing world in which traditional social controls are weakening.”⁶⁰⁾ When the influence on young women is weakening to convince them to wear a hijab, the fight for the soul is supposed to start much earlier and in a much more pleasant way, no longer through obligations but through fun and play.

When considering the beauty ideal that is promoted via ‘Muslim Barbies’ it is not different from the one represented by Mattel’s Barbie. It is the Barbie doll that is a model, a prototype that is reproduced. Even if in the case of Razanne the bust is smaller, the body proportions remain identical. Both the ‘Muslim Barbie’ and Mattel’s Barbie reinforce the unattainable standard of ‘white beauty’ and reduce the cultural differences to dress and skin colour. Farah Banihali commented on this idea in the following way: “The ethnic dolls themselves are caricatures of Eastern women translated through the plastic femininity of Barbie.”⁶¹⁾ Then putting the hijab on a Barbie doll does not change anything. The

⁵⁸⁾ Banihali (2009).

⁵⁹⁾ Nelson (2005).

⁶⁰⁾ Ibidem.

⁶¹⁾ Banihali (2009).

doll just sells better in Islamic countries when she is donned in a traditional Muslim dress.

Nevertheless, looking at Barbie doll and her Muslim counterparts, it is difficult to argue against the idea that what matters is the dress: it is the dress that represents what producers and sellers call "Islamic values" and it is the dress that differentiates the 'bad' Barbie doll from the 'good' Razanne, Fulla or Salma. The doll with or without a hijab points to the role of a woman's body: either the doll uses it and emphasises her bust, waist and legs or hides it under layers of textiles. Girls play with the dolls, scholars reflect upon the phenomenon and the media get their news. If the fight for the souls starts already in the kindergarten, when does the reflection come? What will come (if at all) the effects of playing with a 'Muslim Barbie' when little girls grow up? Will they accept covering their heads with ease? Will they follow the professional career promoted by the dolls or will they desire the bodies of their plastic toys? What idea of a perfect body will they have in their minds? The results of introducing a toy that is so strongly associated with religion are still in front of us, but maybe it is worth perceiving this product as a start for a cross-cultural dialogue in terms of using children as a target group for religious products?

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