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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON
FACULTY OF BUSINESS AND LAW
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Your Mother is a Doll:
The self-contradictory doll as a site for cultural
contestation in contemporary Lebanon.

by
Rima Chahrour

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
March 2014

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF BUSINESS AND LAW

WINCHESTER SCHOOL OF ART

Doctor of Philosophy

YOUR MOTHER IS A DOLL:

THE SELF-CONTRADICTIONARY DOLL AS A SITE FOR CULTURAL
CONTESTATION IN CONTEMPORARY LEBANON

by Rima Chahrour

I suggest that asking the question of whether to refuse or celebrate what is labeled as the Arab-Muslim doll today would result in proposing a false argument. What is relevant here instead, are the interdisciplinary forces embodied in this object as a whole. In the field of cultural studies, the forces that matter are not embodied only in the object itself, but also in the dimensions circulating around and expanding from this object and their critical roles within different contexts. Thus the significance of the Arab Muslim doll is crucially in its complex construction and position within contemporary Lebanon. What matters are the multiple ways in which this politically-charged object interacts with and affects its particular settings. It is not a coincidence that an Arab Muslim doll appears on the market shelves in these unfortunate times that the region is witnessing. Nonetheless, it is the specific existence of this doll within the Arab Muslim contestation in current Lebanon that poses questions on the pertinence and role of this object. The hallmark of this doll is in being a polymorphous object metonym to the flexibility, cultural hybridization and fluidity of contemporary Lebanon.

Keywords: Dolls, Arab-Muslim doll, Identity, Lebanon, Spectacle, Objects, Medium, Playing, Contestation, Politics, Religion, Islam, Lecture-performance.

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Accompanying Material: One USB Flash Drive



Author's Declaration

I, Rima Chahrour, declare that the thesis entitled “Your Mother is a Doll: the self-contradictory doll as a site for cultural contestation in contemporary Lebanon” and the work presented in the thesis are both my own, and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research. I confirm that:

- this work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
- where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
- where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
- where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
- I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
- where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
- none of this work has been published before submission

Signed

Date

For:



Acknowledgements





I want to thank the country I hate and love the most: Lebanon; not merely for nationalistic reasons but for its unbearable and exciting contradictions. As a Lebanese lady, I want to take this chance to quote this sentence from the Thank You Speech of Miss Lebanon 2012: “God helped me and I was able to graduate this year and to send my message to all youth on how important education is in life and that it is the most powerful weapon.” I acknowledge Miss Lebanon 2012 and her twin sister (first runner up), who strive to look like dolls, to emphasize my appreciation of knowledge as power but even more to acknowledge the power relationships between religion and all aspects of contemporary Lebanese society. I want to thank god for providing this project with a rich research environment of theology, tradition and superstition. I am particularly grateful for the tremendous support and practical help of Professor Ryan Bishop. He shaped my thinking and reading throughout this research on a personal and intellectual level. The input and encouragement of Dr. August Davis has been a great influence on this project. I thank my grandmother. My parents and siblings for their unconditional support throughout all my endeavours. An acknowledgement also goes to all the participants and collaborators who took part in my projects and performances. As the Fulla doll says in her monthly magazine: “I thank my fans for their generous support!”

Chapter 1

Overview

1.1 Background



Rina Chibany, Miss Lebanon, with her twin sister Romy as first runner up. From Beirut Night Life, 2012.

This photo of the Lebanese twin sister beauty queens illustrates several themes that my practice-based research engages with. I intentionally chose to begin with this ironic image of the two identical twins which speaks for itself so to say, and therefore I will not explain this image further but rather keep

it for readers' contemplation on replications, dolls' resemblance of women and Lebanese contemporary society.

"Your Mother is a Doll" is a practice-based research project on the object that is the self-contradictory doll as a medium and site for cultural contestation in contemporary Lebanon. This research is concerned with the Spectacle of the Arab "Muslim" doll and how it functions within the cultural contestation of current Lebanon. Tracing Guy Debord's theory on the Spectacle from *The Society of the Spectacle* in 1967 and developed in *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle* in 1988, this practice-based research advances Debord's Spectacle in relation to the "Muslim" doll and its role within current Lebanon.

This practice-based research began as an investigation and tracing of the use of dolls in the artworks from the area referred to as the Arab region. The initial question was concerned with the display element of dolls in works of different artist across this area. This interest springs out of my fascination with dolls as well as from using them as mediums in my own practice. Starting out as a painter, I increasingly and willingly tended towards cutting out stretched paintings from their wooden frames consequently creating stitched collages out of the previous stretched paintings. These collages maintained a resistance towards the tendency to be framed. Gradually, the free falling collage works in the exhibition space developed into three dimensional sculptures which in turn further grew into different objects of use, cultural objects, and interactive installations.

On the conceptual level, elements of storytelling and narrative, reflected in the use of text, remained consistent throughout the physical development of my artwork. Often these tales presented critical discussions and commentaries on social aspects of contemporary Lebanese culture to which I, admittedly or not, belong. This is best exemplified in my 2010 solo exhibition in Beirut "Hyperactivity and Social Criticism," where the collage figures and sculptures were displayed as though these objects were to be used as the text presenting them explains. Nonetheless, my initial intention to research the use of dolls in the works of other Arab artists originates from my own use of dolls as mediums, often ironically removed from their context only in order to return and criticise this context playfully.

The "as though" however, transformed into a literal use of the created art objects, now and as of the beginning of this research project. Still, the performative element in my practice also descends from a background in ex-

perimental music and improvisational ritual creation. Moreover, the need to bring objects to life in practice is further supported by my Lebanese cultural background surrounded or embraced by an Arab religious/Muslim majority, relying on context and a constantly changing position accordingly. Hence, the rituals that are part of my practice now are reflections of a collaging so to say between the elements of creating contexts, in music making and performance, with creating art objects. This logical development of my practice complemented my choice of the doll as the object of enquiry: for its use value, its context creation and its existence as an object resembling a human being. An 'Arab Muslim doll' is an autobiographical object.

1.2 Artefacts examined

The initial research on the use of dolls in the Arab region produced few yet nonetheless productive results. The use of dolls in art was concentrated in Lebanon, mainly because figuration is still prohibited in Arab countries and also because Lebanon is relatively more liberal than other Arab countries and thus the use of dolls in art is more common in Lebanon. However we can also attribute the presence of dolls mostly in works of Lebanese artists to the background of art itself, developing professionally in Lebanon over a considerably long period of time while just recently spreading very quickly in the neighbouring Arab countries. Nonetheless, the findings of the initial research questions prompted this research towards the doll itself. However a doll that is reflecting these findings, the Arab Muslim doll: a self-contradictory status of Lebanon as a Liberal yet conservative Arab country. Thus the focus of the project became on the role of this Arab Muslim doll and its use as a medium within cultural contestation in contemporary Lebanon.

In turn, this doll, first strongly promoted in 2003 with Fulla from Syria, after the banning of Barbie doll in Saudi Arabia in 2001, this doll was denounced as an object of blasphemy and a threat to Islamic teachings by various religious figures. Fulla was increasingly becoming available throughout regional and international markets; meanwhile its copies and various mutations also spread quickly on market shelves, such as the Jamila doll, Leyla, Leen, Reema, Aamina and even another Fullah doll spelled differently from the original Fulla, among other ranges of Islamic dolls. This doll is presented

within a box displaying it as a “practicing Muslim Arab girl.” While Fulla has breasts smaller than Barbie, Jamila’s breasts are of the same size. While Jamila’s hair is black and her eyes are dark, Leen’s hair is blond and her eyes are blue. Some of the Arab Muslim dolls have a plastic underwear stuck-on their bodies and reaching just below the knees; while other Arab Muslim dolls are wearing white cloth underwear above their plastic stuck-on briefs.

These dolls present various interpretations of what it is to be an Arab Muslim girl today, whether by their external bodily forms or also their promotional stories accompanying them. The self-contradiction and wide varieties of these dolls are particularly appealing to me because of their fluid positions as well as their interpretive politics within a context directly related to my own cultural background. The Arab Muslim doll presenting the “true Arab Muslim identity” became the subject of news media as well as Islamic religious communities and leaders contesting and engaging various sectarian discourses on the use of this doll. Hence the Arab Muslim doll also reflects a change in the politics of the region towards Islamization which is today perhaps most evident in the new Islamic fundamentalist groups involved in religious wars in the area changing its geographical as well as social boundaries.

1.3 Methodology

This practice-based project reflects the irony and playfulness associated with my art practice and interest in the self-contradiction of the Arab Muslim doll. The self-contradictory doll provides a rich platform for rearranging cultural boundaries. However, the irony of this project depends on the position of the audience and their own contextualization. Therefore it is significant here to highlight that the intentional irony of this research leans on a position similar to that of the self-contradictory doll, where the particular context is significant to its political position. The irony is furthermore reflected in both the art and theory of this research. This is because the two practices are parts of each other, integrated together and function as complementarities constructing each other and developing the overall direction of this research.

The “Your Mother is a Doll” research project started as an investigation on the use of dolls in artworks across the region referred to as the Arab; therefore, the practice was initially following and comparing the different employments of dolls in the ranges of artworks. My art practice began as a

discussion on the conceptual operations of dolls as popular and traditional mediums in different contexts represented by different artists in their own works. Yet, as the project developed towards the particular Arab Muslim doll, my art practice similarly functioned in parallel as a reflection and critical engagement with the tactics of the self-contradictory doll in its particular Lebanese context beyond the limitations of the use of dolls in art practices. My written practice in turn also undivided from my art practice operated to further develop the overall direction of this research.

Thus the literature review for this project not only consisted of theoretical readings but also of readings of the created artworks. In this sense, the written work on the art practice does not exist as a description of the created art or a mere analysis of it; but rather the written work on the art practice engages in dialogue with the art practice where the two practices are in a continuous process of developing and fusing into each other. Therefore, the approach of this practice-based research is one where the thinking occurs in terms of written theory and another in terms of the making itself. The two practices of writing and creating art overlap and function as gears fitted and working together. Hence, the project is divided into three chapters constructed on three art rituals, each accompanied by an exhibition and a series of objects. The chapters are: Neutralizing: The Situation, Revealing: The Human Resemblance, Playing With God and His Friends: Medium. The coda is also based on yet another ritual: The Young Arab Muslim Girl as a War Machine.

1.4 Art Works and Formal Decisions

The four rituals or performances in my practice are triggered by the spectacle of the self-contradictory doll further allowing for the rearranging of cultural borders on different structures and producing different new contexts. It is useful here to expand from the account of cultural rearranging in order give a brief background on my art practice to further clarify its logical development into performance and a form of cultural ritual, or cultural exorcism as described by August Davis. The transformation of my art practice from painting into performance is logically related to the following elements which stay consistent throughout the development of my practice: narrative, text,

superstition and tradition/ myth, play and irony, visual composition, improvisation and soundscapes.

The above elements in my practice, which are also elements of the Arab Muslim doll, developed as the understanding of the general role of art advanced into one focusing on its actively effective role in society and humanity. This also grew from elements that have been rather passive and immobile in flat paintings, where the critical social commentary was limited to the display value of the artworks depicting and suggesting use value but however have no use functionality. These works remained inactive and focusing on display value with a presence value only suggesting use value throughout the first part of this practice-based research, where the focus was the display value of the doll in its use in art of the Arab region.

However with the shift of concern towards the Arab Muslim doll, the sculptures gradually transformed into installations depicting three dimensional narratives rather than 2-D narratives as in the paintings and collage works. These installations were also based on display value requiring viewers to think through a certain narrative of events, as if depicting the aftermath of a performance. With the first project on the Arab Muslim Doll, Neutralizing, the inactive installations and objects became activated in performances and the ability of an artwork to “move” viewers became concerned with the actual movement of the audience; thus the narratives became live contexts, in which the installation works mutated into active settings and the three dimensional art objects into cultural objects to be used as interactive installations or part of the performances.

The transformation occurring in the art medium of my practice is influenced by the Arab Muslim doll as an object and as an abstract entity. For this doll firstly projects immobility through its display value, which however also suggests use, mobility and play in different contexts proceeding as ranges of narratives and political perspectives. The doll is firstly an object of the imagination, however one intimately associated with religion, tradition and myth. The self-contradiction of the Arab Muslim doll, my object of research, is reflected in my art practice as a form of irony as well as flexibility and playfulness of origins, structures and positions. The irony of the work, like that of the self-contradictory doll, caters for constantly changing audiences attempting to apply the tactics and operations of this object on the audience, whose roles transforms into participants ultimately to provoke effective social change triggered by the flexibility of seemingly fixed positions and their overlapping dimensions.

As a pedagogic object the Arab Muslim doll is promoted along with ranges of text descriptions and different sound and video media targeted at supporting and clearly claiming the “true Arab Muslim Identity”. Yet each self-contradictory doll on the shelves presents a different versions of this position than the one next to it. Further each self-contradictory doll also presents in itself a contradiction of the position it, itself, claims. This vagueness in positions is reflected in my art practice mostly by leading participants towards a space in between positions, creating uncertainty about their roles in performances and interactive installations, and open to their spontaneous experimentation. This uncertainty is provoked by the directness of the performance medium, requiring instant reactions from the participants that ultimately produces new results adding on to the progress of this research project. Similarly the overall position of my art practice is one, like that of the self-contradictory doll, in constant mutation– aiming at learning and unlearning political positions according to context and change.

The use of text, sound and video in my art practice is associated with the extended range of media sourcing from the Arab Muslim doll as a cultural object. However, the significance of this specific medium is also in its invisibility, intangibility and space creation. This directly links to the self-contradictory doll as an object of imagination and most importantly its religious character provoking otherworldly and Islamic sounds, texts and images. Throughout my practices I am ultimately functioning in a manner similar to that of the self-contradictory doll: provoking effective change through asymmetrical combinations. The development in my art practice took its shape from various artworks and different projects that I carried out in parallel to this practice-based research essentially fusing into each and developing my practice as a whole.

1.5 Theoretical Choices

The focus in the written practice is mainly on art works by contemporary Lebanese artists. This is because this practice-based research takes current Lebanon as its specific setting and is concerned with operations of the Arab Muslim doll within the particular contemporary Lebanese cultural con-

tation. Thus the choice of excluding Euro-American art history and artists is based on the limited aim of the project. Nonetheless, of course there are clear associations between artworks sourced from the Lebanese context and those from a Euro-American context. This is because of Euro-American art history had a significant impact on the development of art in Lebanon, especially during the period of French colonization when art institutions were established on the basis of French systems and which continue today to run accordingly. Furthermore, Lebanon is part of a current world where “authentic” identities no longer exist as pure and separate from globalized syncretic multiplicities and multi-layering.

The target is ultimately to investigate what these Lebanese artworks express about their Lebanese context; therefore there are no reasons to compare them with their Euro-American counterparts. Since the purpose here is not the studying of the actual art practices outside their cultural and political setting but the opposite. This practice-based research is basically interested in art as an effective medium in cultural contestations, rather than art itself, in the same vein as the object that is the self-contradictory doll functions. Accordingly, my art practice too, acknowledges the influence of hybrids of Arab-Muslim as well as Euro-American artists and art history, such as the works of Mike Kelley, Paul Mc Carthy, Joseph Beuys, the Chapman brothers to name a few among others as well as Islamic traditional art and Arabic shadow theater. My practice is further influenced by the impact of cultural extensions of the political religious background of contemporary Lebanon and dolls in general. This again emphasizes the multilayered cultural role of the Arab Muslim doll, echoing the role of artists and my practice too.

Similarly the choice of Euro-Anglo-American theory rather than one that is Arabic is based on the concept that our current world is no longer bound to the limits of geography. It is significant here to note that geography is different than a setting or context. For while the geography of a place no longer limits and defines its theoretical notions to a definite set, the contexts of situations and political settings of places however influence the reception of these concepts; thus the significance of the role of the audience in my practice and the role of the self-contradictory doll as an interloper within different contexts. Moreover, the Arabic theory existing around themes of this practice-based research are not only influenced by the much larger amount of research sourcing from Euro-Anglo-American theory, it is also constructed on victimized expressions of dolls as representations of weak women and the gender politics involved around religious and political oppression, often stereotypical of a Westernized perspective functioning from within “Arab”

theory.

All this unfortunately does not line up with the aims of this research project which ultimately seek to use the self-contradictory doll also as a theoretical medium with access into different theoretical perspectives (which are already available in contemporary Lebanese context) from an insider position. Furthermore, the use of Islamic traditional and religious explanations further emphasizes the flexibility and fluidity of this doll as a Trojan horse or imposter between seemingly opposing and different positions.

1.6 The Chapters

The “Your Mother is a Doll” practice-based research project is divided into three chapters constructed on three art rituals, each accompanied by an exhibition and a series of objects. The first chapter: Neutralizing: The Situation, focuses on the concept of non-origin and non-fixed single source of the Arab Muslim doll. The ritual consisted of a lecture in which I played sound tunes using toys and saying abject phrases using a megaphone. This happened while I closed a colourful wool net around the audience seated in chairs in the lecture theater room. After the net was completely closed, a video starts playing of a rag doll questioning God and the Westernized Woman who its “real” mother is. The two hostages fail to give clear answers to the rag doll which decided to execute both. The exhibition presents the rag doll in an installation as if walking outside the video with a text balloon reading: “I killed my mother.”

Chapter two: Revealing: The Human Resemblance, moves on to the specific position of the self-contradictory doll within the particular context of contemporary Arab Muslim society. I start the ritual reading the back of the Jamila doll’s box in English then in Arabic to an audience seated in the lecture room. This reading then allows for a video to start playing on the screen presenting me inside a claustrophobic booth listening to a phone handle on which the voice of God, heard loudly inside the theater room, is giving a speech. God’s speech reflects this character at first angry and gradually reaching a hesitant and helpless status. The speech ends with God stuttering and no longer having words to say. The exhibition presents an asymmetrical

installation of a silver phone booth/ tent on the right side and the same rag doll from chapter one seated on the floor on the left hand side. The silver and golden booth is open to the audience to enter and listen to God's speech from the phone handle. Meanwhile music is playing from the rag doll singing about the list of things Iblis has.

Playing With God and His Friends: Medium is chapter three, which focuses on the self-contradictory doll as a medium. The accompanying ritual begins in the lecture theater room with me announcing that the only way to hear God and watch the following video is through 3D Veils. I then hand out to the audience 3D Veils, while music is playing in the background on a screen reading that 3D Veils are required to see the Other Spectacle . When everyone in the room is given a 3D Veil, a screen presenting instructions on how to wear the 3D Veil appears on the video playing. I instruct the audience on how to wear these objects. The video the starts playing of crowds walking with burning sticks and neon light gadgets walking towards a bonfire. Meanwhile God is giving a speech in a computerized voice reflecting an alternative vision on the world and declaring his marriage to the doll. In the accompanying exhibition, the rag doll from chapter one and two is presented in an installation as an identity reader, for viewers to have their "real and true" identity unveiled in return of faith and money to be placed in a plastic box next to the reader. This installation provided the audience with small pieces of paper on which an identity is written.

The coda is also based on yet another ritual: The Young Arab Muslim Girl as a War Machine. It preses the self-contradictory doll as an effective tool for conjuring the Arab-Muslim force or an alternative spectacle to work against a particular spectacle. Starting from Tiqqun's theory of the Young Girl as a War Machine, this ritual manipulates the original text to create three different versions. The three different texts are added with a translated text of the speaking Islamic doll Leen. The ritual starts with me giving out the four different texts to the audience and explaining to them that at doll's signal we will all read the text in one voice. The audience did not previously know that the text distributed is different from one person to another. The Leen doll starts singing only after I announce and demonstrate placing in her back three magical stones that I take out of a crumpled tissue paper. After the reading a video starts playing on the screen of a Jinn exorcism from a woman. The video is interrupted a few times due to the following justification: "Someone is not feeling it enough in the room." This causes me to be strict with the audience asking whoever is not feeling it enough to leave the room.

The back of the Jamila doll box reads:

Jamila is a self-confident, young Arabic girl, married to her husband Jamil, whom she loves from the bottom of her heart. Having two little children, a baby boy named Asad and a baby girl name Almira, she is a modern and fashionable mother with friends from all over the world. Jamila just loves meeting her two best friends, Sunyana from India, and Kareema from Egypt. The girls have fun dressing up and chatting about their latest fashion fads. Even though fashion is a great part of the girl's lives, Jamila also loves music, enjoys cooking, reading, shepherding her horses or going for a ride in her new Mercedes SLK. Come to Jamila's world and discover her wonderful life.



Back of the Jamila doll Box

This text promotes Jamila as an up-to-date loyal married young Arab woman, with two children, multi-cultural friends and access to the latest global trends. When readers move on from questioning expressions like: “self-confident young Arabic girl” and “shepherding her horses” as well as logically linking them with “her husband Jamil” and “Mercedes SLK,” readers then- perhaps- might comprehend Jamila’s indeed “wonderful life”. The

cultural contradictions this doll promotes indicate that she exemplifies a syncretic cultural process, one that is however specific to its Lebanese context. For the contradictions this doll projects are not only expressed by the ideological design of this object as a full product, but also through emphasizing the repetition of the model of a young Arab girl replicated through the Jamila doll.

Once the connection between the doll and the actual human girl it is representing expands outside this particular object and into its cultural context, this doll appears metonymic of the multi-layering of conflicting identities in contemporary Lebanon. Unfortunately when reading this text in the setting of contemporary Lebanon, one directly associates the self-conflicting character promoted with this doll to the general character of the Lebanese public. Subsequently, looking closer at this doll further opens up the complexity of comprehending almost everything within the contemporary Lebanese environment, nearly, formulating an existentialist crisis. The vernacular of Jamila's universe translates into the unreasonable image of one's distorted identity in a position between being conservative and cosmopolitan at once.

For the doll itself asserts an "Arab" identity, wearing the *hijab* and the full "Muslim" outfit, while also, embodying global secular elements, sometimes even displayed unveiled. The asymmetry between the Jamila doll and its predecessor the Barbie doll locates this doll within a modified system, able to move freely between two culturally contesting groups. Even though, Jamila is promoted as a cosmopolitan, yet, Arab girl wearing the Islamic outfit, this doll presents an object for everyone; encouraging Westernization and its opposite Islamisation, at one and the same time.

Chapter 2

Neutralizing: On the Situation:

2.1 Introduction

“The Interrogator: Here is the danger. Here is plotting more serious than Nayif’s. Nayif spoke and we know what is in his mind. But you said nothing and we don’t know what you are up to.

Ghawwar: You mean we aren’t safe when we speak, and we aren’t safe when we shut up?

The Interrogator: What are you?

Ghawwar: I am nothing. I am a citizen. Nothing at all.

(Ghawwar is then asked to sign a confession).

Ghawwar: Sign for what?

The Interrogator: The things which you would have liked to say.”

Durayad Lahham, *Ghawwar*

A teddy bear with chopped-off paws appears next to a text by an unknown source on The Daily Mash Up website accessed on the 1st of August 2013. From the text dated 26th November 2007:

“...A spokesman for the Sudanese ministry of justice defended the sentence, adding: ‘This is an act of mercy...By removing only the paws of this infidel we are demonstrating great restraint. This is a gesture of goodwill to you Western devils and your pornographic governments.’”

The website makes it clear in its Terms and Conditions page that they: “...try to make sure that the content and information on the Daily Mash Up is not accurate,” (accessed 01/08/2013). Nonetheless, the main news behind the articles on the website are often manipulated from true events. The quote was taken from a text written on the incident of the British schoolteacher who had been arrested in Sudan in 2007 and accused of insulting Islam’s Prophet after allowing her students to name a teddy bear Mohammad. This example from Sudan gives an overall view of the radicalism surrounding Lebanon, and with which contemporary Lebanese culture is more or less associated.

Ms Gibbons was arrested after several parents made complaints facing three charges: insulting Islam, inciting religious hatred, and contempt for religious beliefs; each of which carries a maximum penalty of 40 lashes and one year in jail, according to several news agencies. However, after news of her case spread throughout the country, protesters, described by reporters as boiling in anger, urged her death. Leaflets condemning Ms Gibbons read:

"What has been done by this infidel lady is considered a matter of contempt and an insult to Muslims’ feelings and also the pollution of children’s mentality as an attempt to wipe their identity," (London Evening Standard, 2007).

The struggle to maintain a distinct identity in today’s context of increasingly polymorphous identities has developed radicalism. This radicalism however is accordingly a product of crossover identities thus never distinct to a single hegemony but is also a polymorphous composition. Although radicalism essentially aims to trace borders between what is considered authentic and the inauthentic, it is nonetheless a victim of paradox. For what has once been a centered cultural predominance has dispersed today leading to decentralized groups contesting for a nostalgic image of pure authenticity. This image, like all ideologies, belongs to a collective imagination, often far from being achieved on the ground.

Demonstrators at Khartoum's university campuses denounced Ms Gibbons. The Muslim Brotherhood member El Sheikh El Nour explained: "If she made an innocent mistake and did not mean Mohammad the Prophet (when naming the bear) there is no problem...But if she did mean Mohammad the Prophet, she must die," (London Evening Standard, 2007).

One wonders how an 'innocent mistake' can be recognized most certainly from one that is not. Yet, reporters on the story went on to explain that a seven-year-old boy came forward to say that it was "all his fault," that he and his classmates at the Unity High School had voted to name the bear Mohammad after his own name. On this issue the Daily Mash Up commented:

"A UN spokesman added: 'Of course, some may argue there is no point in us keeping all these Sudanese children alive if they can't even think of a legal name for a teddy bear,'" (accessed 01/08/2013).

Toys and dolls are objects deeply associated with potentiality and imagination, firstly targeted at children. Nonetheless, in the example above, the bear toy expands beyond its primary objective of being a toy, extending towards the religious, political and cultural connotations it holds to further become an active object producing and shaping its context. These cultural products function according to a set of dialectical relationships between shifting positions and changing ideologies. Hence, the toy bear with the Mohammad name transforms from an everyday object belonging to popular culture into a currency fusing with cultural contestation. Within a setting rich in multiplicity of cultural discourses, toys as cultural objects intertwine with the contradictions and complications of their landscape.

The Norah Islamic doll, made of fabric, comes with an extra *hijab* and *abaya*- not for the doll, but for the young girl who is to own the doll and its accompanying accessories. This doll is marketed for children as young as six months with the following description accompanying the Norah Doll Style B:

"Handmade with love Muslim doll for six months and up with extra *hijab* and *abaya* in handmade bag with doll made by our Muslim sisters in England. These are sewn by hand and come with a personal note and two handmade bags and two hand sewn *hijabs* and *abayas* that are easily put on and taken off and are safe for babies as well as young ladies that want a soft doll to love."

Norah suggests breaking down the boundaries that separate human be-

ings and objects resembling human being; between a female and her own reproduction. With the extra *hijab* and *abaya* the Norah Islamic doll and her owner are, to a certain extent, within the same channel of imagination. The trend of Islamic dolls has been increasing in the Arab Muslim market since the banning of the Barbie doll from Saudi Arabia around 2001 due to its “blasphemous and Western” symbols as various religious leaders claim.

Now that I have used the term “*hijab*”, I want to clarify certain critical points for the sake of avoiding potential misunderstanding that might otherwise bring unwanted assumptions to this project. Long theories and debates have intensely taken the responsibility to research and are still perpetuating the notion of the *hijab*, stereotyping, sympathising and tackling women’s rights and Muslim communities. My practice-based research, however, is not interested in arguing whether or not contemporary Arab Muslim women are treated fairly, nor is this project targeted at stereotyping the ‘cruelty’ of Muslim societies in our current times. This research, rather, uses the *hijab*, Islam and women solely for locating the doll as essentially an object of Spectacle and a medium of imagination existing as a site of cultural contestation in contemporary Lebanon.

This research is concerned with the Spectacle of the Arab “Muslim” doll and how it functions within the cultural contestation of contemporary Lebanon that is rich in a variety of cultural groups. Tracing Guy Debord’s theory on the Spectacle from *The Society of the Spectacle* in 1967 and developed in *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle* in 1988, this practice-based research advances as a proposition on Debord’s Spectacle in relation to the “Muslim” doll and its role within current Lebanon. The choice of the cosmopolitan Arab “Muslim” doll as the object of this research is based on its ideological position within the specific context of contemporary Lebanon extending from the general object of the Western doll. However, this is not because the research aims to defend or offend any position, but it is merely because the prevailing asymmetry between Western and Arab dolls generates various inquiries enriching the critique of this object and its significant role within cultural contestation.

Consequently, the particular choice of considering this doll within today’s Lebanese setting is constructed on the country’s rich socio-historical variety of contesting groups, from a perspective before and after the civil war, echoing the contradiction between the Western doll and the relatively recent Arab “Muslim” doll. On the other hand, the acknowledgement of the cultural role of women within the context of this research proposes to underline the signif-

icance of the “Muslim” doll, resembling this specific woman, in the cultural contestation. Therefore, within this context women are detected according to the connotations of the cultural group they denote, passing their position to the Arab “Muslim” doll.

Accordingly, this doll shifts between the different groups belonging to each and none at the same time, stressing its appeal as a pedagogic object, an interloper, and, seeking to ‘emancipate’ the weak elements in a commodity society through offering spectacular lifestyles. This doll then indicates a syncretic social and nation forming, one that blends the different groups together, but which however, does not dissolve them into each other. The self-contradiction of this doll provides a rich platform for reshuffling significations of the same symbol from various contexts through art practice.

This practice-based project is divided into three chapters according to the main art pieces created in the research process which are: “Neutralizing”, “Revealing” and “Playing With God And His Friends”. This project engages with the self-contradictory doll as an object of use and a medium of imagination, being essentially a doll. While in primitive and ancient times specific objects were clearly identified as ‘magical’, giving dolls with human resemblance a special medium-ship between the visible and the abstract, the physical and the infinite. For example, Shabti dolls dating as far back as 2000 B.C. were used to serve the dead into their afterlife in ancient Egypt. The Japanese Haniwa dolls are another example of dolls that were used as silent burial guardians, connecting with a world beyond ours.

Nevertheless, in our so-called rational times traces of traditional ‘magic’ are still found in high art through which transformative interventions occur, according to the Western dominating rationale. These art interventions today focus on integrating academic, philosophical and cultural concepts aiming for positive change through their creative process. However, in the region known as the “Middle East” where high art is merely a thing by itself, the rationale of ‘magic’ expands beyond the duality of logical and illogical, intertwining with everyday experience of art and metaphysics. High art in this region converts into a mundane ritual of interacting with other universes based on theology in an aesthetical manner.

Similarly, in my art practice, I aim to use both primitive ‘magical’ rituals as well as contemporary art interventions to confuse and overlap boundaries of received knowledge, ultimately provoking cultural change. The text from the back of the Jamila doll box has been used in my lecture-performance

“Revealing” created for this practice-based research in 2012, as a magical recitation transforming into a higher order of intervention in the cultural system in the form of art, play and religious ritual, originally triggered by the Spectacle of the self-contradictory doll, further allowing for the rearranging of cultural borders through a different structure.

This practice-based project uses the term ‘self-contradictory’ for Islamic dolls marked by the paradoxical and polymorphous qualities these dolls express. Ranging from their promotion as distinctively ‘Arab Muslim’, reflecting the ‘the Arab Muslim true spirit’, embodying a copy of Barbie’s figure and bounded to Arab, Islamic and global implications, these dolls are presented in this project as active agents within contemporary Lebanese cultural contestation influencing change to fixed perspectives. The self-contradictory doll is a nostalgic condition of the continuity of the Arab Muslim traditional culture combined with the contemporary transformation of this culture.

This project metaphorically views the self-contradictory doll as an onion to unwrap its multiple layers. Hence, while it is concerned with visual culture, this practice-based project also relates to the broader cultural and political studies. Nonetheless, it is deeply related to the imagination and the ambiguities of borders, spaces and dimensions. The self-contradictory doll ultimately reflects change in modes, permeability and flexibility to serve as a serious yet extremely playful and devious object. Accordingly, this object provokes new territories in its use as a medium crossbreeding between play-time, make-believe, religion and politics. My object of study, the self-contradictory doll, demonstrates the contesting projects in contemporary Lebanese culture of the so called: ‘Post-Islamism’, ‘New-Arabism’ and ‘Neo-orientalism’. My practice-part constituted of creating and updating cultural objects, performances, and lecture-performances presenting them as playful, artistic and cultural experiments.

2.2 Dolls as Cultural Texts

An old photograph of a middle-aged woman with long hair is neatly displayed in a glass vitrine. Under the photograph is a white tag reading: “Fawzieh Chahrour. Object: Photograph of Fawzieh’s Sister.” The woman in the photograph has long hair and pretty features. In the same vitrine there are other miscellaneous objects that look very old and used. Around the room other display counters are positioned, also, various video box screens with head-

phones; some headphones are placed on top of the box screens and others hanging to their sides. In one video, a chubby old woman is holding the photograph of the pretty middle-aged woman. She is talking in Lebanese Arabic about her sister in the photo and every now and then she wipes off her tears using a crumpled tissue paper.

Objects of War is a series of installations by the Lebanese artist Lamia Joreige presenting a documentation of the Lebanese civil war in reference to a collected assortment of objects belonging to different people from that period of time. In each of the installations, personal objects are presented inside a pristine glass vitrine giving the feeling of artifacts exhibited as part of a museum collection. This feeling is further confirmed in Joreige's installations by the video recordings screening individuals talking about their personal experiences of the civil war with reference to object they had chosen. Objects in general reflect the historical conditions of their period of time, providing information on the material they are made of, their production intentions and design trends. Accordingly Objects of War implies an evaluation of the cultural traditions, productions and consumption from the time of the Lebanese civil war extending between the periods of 1975 till 1990.

Nonetheless, the world of still objects hesitates to reveal a particular secret life beyond an object's visual field of perception in its fixed state. This abstract life is implied from the object's potential to be raised, moved, carried and used in action. Hence, these set of actions construct a certain narrative, building a story around the object and a relative significance beyond its inanimate state. From the Objects of War No3, a radio is displayed still in the glass vitrine. On one of the video screens, a man is holding the same radio, talking about it, turning it around, pointing at its details and touching its buttons. In the video, the radio is no longer a static object anymore. The man is holding it close to his chest; he explains that it is a National Panasonic, a military radio with complicated features that make it more complex than the common radio. However it is a radio that is no longer sold on the market today. This radio updated the man and his family on news regarding everyday war events.

Through displaying the possibilities of the use value of objects in their inanimate state and their narrated corresponding lived experiences, objects also present impossible narratives of use and extended imaginaries beyond their direct use value. For example, the same man from the video of Objects of War No3 with the radio recounts listening to this object; he tells that it had the special quality of transmitting the channel Marine which the man, then

12 years old, had associated with an imaginary place. These metaphorical narratives of objects in turn, carry cultural significances that further highlight their original meaning as objects within a representation of a specific historical context. In *Objects of War*, the objects clearly reveal information from their historical time during the Lebanese civil war and further, from their roles as personal objects specific to each individual's own story. These objects reflect significance of their use value through the significance of their display value.



Object of War no.3, courtesy of the artist.

One of the videos presents Antoine Bechaalani explaining that his object—the torch light accompanied him throughout the whole war—transforms from a necessary object of use value, for emitting light, into an object holding further emotional meaning and a catalyst for unveiling the memory of the emotional and psychological trauma of the civil war. In this sense, Joreige's installations suggest documentations of the Lebanese civil war from two perspectives. Firstly from a neutral position, utilizing objects as cultural texts and reading history through the manner these objects are manufactured. And secondly through an inspective standpoint where the objects act as facilitators for passing personal and emotional information, which is imbedded within their abstract narratives, extending further than their use value.

While the *Objects of War* project historical facts of the conditions of their past, they also contribute to a collective memory of the Lebanese civil war, ultimately purposing an alternative history of this war than the one which the media often presents. For the personal narratives of objects construct various points of view for the same war, acknowledging personal accounts and private conflicts as well as the general public ones. In doing so, Joreige

pushes the boundaries of what objects can offer beyond their direct use value and into an indirect usage based on losing control over the simple meaning of objects. The artist transforms the materiality of objects into a focus on their abstract narratives; one that is intensely emotional existing between the temporality and spatiality of the civil war and its connotations of weakness, dependence, survival, life and death.

The significance of the *Objects of War* breaks the physical limits of the structure of objects displayed, unfolding the impact of objects as souvenirs as well as casualties from a war-torn consciousness. The artist did not create any objects herself; her artwork is the process of collecting, documenting and displaying these objects together. The receptive qualities of static objects suggest use and contextualization, but also an interaction between the potential relationships of the different contexts these objects convey. Within a system based on symbols and meanings, objects present interpretations of signs. Thus, when we observe objects inside a glass vitrine, we are increasingly magnifying their significances and multiplying their roles in relation to a given context, the civil war. What Joreige does in her installations *Objects of War* is a manipulation of the boundaries of time and space of the present and past through objects and what they hold to re-imagine new fields of perception and realization of the Lebanese civil war.

Joreige does this through emphasizing the display value of these objects by exposing them as subjects. *Objects of War* operates on the exaggeration of the display value of objects towards re-creating experiences of the war in the framework of a present perspective looking back at the war. In an article for *Al Hayat* in 2013, Joreige calls these objects debris and fragments of the history of the civil war. *Objects of War* display a surrendering to the power of objects, in terms of Baudrillard, and their direct and indirect experiences from their display value and their potentiality to be used. The exhibition of objects and their abstract experiences mutually articulate each other, presenting a past assumed life experience from a standpoint of a present lived one, and significance within significance towards recreating readings of a particular setting.

Objects do not hesitate in directly revealing information acting as a proof of their use value, as well as souvenirs containing at one and the same time the feelings of distance and intimacy of particular experience, in Joreige's example of the Lebanese civil war. In her book *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With*, Sherry Turkle writes: "As theory defamiliarizes objects, objects familiarize theory," (307). Similarly, dolls as objects can be regarded

as texts reflecting the context in which they are created: the values, beliefs and industrial productions of the moment. The following examples give a brief background on dolls representing their times through history.

Various ancient cults had passed on the ritualistic figures to their children as playthings at the end of the magico-religious ceremonies; for example the Kachina figures belonging to the Hopi Indians, as well as the ivory figures of the Eskimo peoples that even created miniatures of these religious figures as playthings for their children in order to teach them their spiritual traditions. Ancient Greece emphasized on the human physical body; its dolls then were carefully created to resemble humans and had even movable limbs. Plutarch mentions in his writings, his daughter Timoxena begging the nurse to also give milk to her doll. The surviving dolls from the dark ages were mostly made of clay and not cloth since fabric is prone to passing sickness. Woodcuts from 1491 by Hortus Sanitatis in Nuremberg in Germany, show doll-makers at work creating glazed clay dolls.

In the Renaissance, dolls were created to be solidly functional and instructive, while in the 18th century fashion dolls were made more publicly and doll houses were fashioned with meticulous detail reflecting the era's focus on amusement shows and trendy pleasures. The industrial revolution marked a developing and expanding of dolls and the material they were made of, ranging from wax, papier-mâché mixtures, clay, porcelain and even rubber. The puppet, glove and shadow theatre were increasingly attractive in that period, being a time of technological advancement as well as theatrical delights.

In his manuscripts from the 13th century, the Arabian scholar Al-Jazari describes water-driven moving dolls, including ones that he had created himself, operating in a similar technique as the mechanical clock machines of the 17th century. In the 1820, the German inventor Johann Neopmuk Maelzel created the first speaking dolls in large quantities and it was limited then to saying the words 'Mama' if their right hands were lifted and 'Papa' when raising their left hands. These dolls were expensive and specific to rich children; nonetheless, today speaking dolls range in vast variety and with their affordably effective technology, are also enjoyed by wider audience. While the speaking dolls of the 18th century are highly elegant and decorative, today's speaking dolls however reflect qualities of the present age.

Accordingly, the speaking dolls labelled in today's market as "Muslim" range from Aamina and Yousuf- a *hijabi* girl and boy figure wearing an Islamic prayer hat- that are able to speak the *Tajweed*, to the Fisher-Price

baby dolls that do not hold any Islamic outfits but are however disputed to be saying “Islam is the Light”. Whether or not these Fisher-Price baby dolls actually and secretly promote Islam is an on-going cultural debate that has caused various public reactions specifically in the United States of America, extending from the already existing cultural contestation between other Islamic sects in that setting.

To read the self-contradictory Arab “Muslim” doll requires reading its setting. This doll appeared in the Arab world after Saudi Arabia banned Barbie dolls. This, like most of the other things Saudi Arabia usually bans, occurred after religious figures considered Barbie a threat to morality and complained the revealing clothes of the “Jewish” doll as offensive to Islam. Barbie has been considered in several Arab countries as a symbol of the Western cultural decadence, often as part of a “Zionist Conspiracy” as several religious leaders and Anti-Semitism argue, since it is made for Ruth Handler who is Jewish-Polish. In 2003, almost a year after the banning of Barbie in Saudi Arabia, New Boy Design in Syria created Fulla, a “Muslim” version of a Barbie doll, and thus an alliance between Western and Islamic cultural releases. Although, *hijabi* dolls have been developed in the past, such as Razanne in the United States of America and Sara in Iran, Fulla is promoted with a unique personality as a more modest version of Barbie; she is a decent “Muslim” girl, who is very caring, loving and deeply respectful of her parents. Her occupations, like a teacher or a doctor, are socially acceptable and respectable for a female.



Fruity Fulla.

This doll is presented as engaging in activities of a typical Muslim mother, such as praying, baking and reading. In a report on January 2006 for the BBC, Tarek Mohammed the chief salesman at Toys'r'Us in Cairo, said: "Fulla

sells better because she is closer to our Arab values - she never reveals a leg or an arm." Fulla was quickly popularized in the media as the "Muslim" doll. But how can one judge if this plastic doll is a correctly "Muslim" one? One wonders about the procedures it should follow to be a practicing Muslim. Fulla is the first veiled doll to specifically and intensely promote its special quality of being "Muslim", bringing to the market its own Islamic gadgets and accessories. While Barbie has a bikini, Fulla comes with a prayer mat.

At first the media was confused which reflects the self-contradiction of this doll. Some supporting this doll, others arguing against it; some Western, some Arab. However, all agree that this doll was inspired by Barbie. Nevertheless, Fulla and her fame in the media, paved the way for more hijabi dolls to come; these are only copies of the copy. Although, they are not as well made as the main copy, they still announce their Islamic values and beliefs. For example the Jamila doll is taller than the Fulla doll, has larger breasts, lines confirming her plastic sexual organs and additionally has Henna drawings on her hands and feet. While Fulla's bodily figure is intentionally created to resemble modesty, Jamila's on the other hand, is made closer to Barbie's figure combining, even more clearly than Fulla, the Islamic elements with the Western ones. Even though these veiled doll copies are attempts to imitate Fulla, they are more self-contradictory than Fulla itself.



Leen, Fulla, Jamila.



Jamila, Fulla, Leen.

Still, these dolls ultimately reflect their context and are generally associated to women from contemporary Lebanon. The self-contradictory doll is only as puzzling as its setting. For while the Sunni Islamic movements were increasing out of Saudi Arabia and into the surrounding region, the Shiites and its political Islamic movements were also spreading beyond Iran and Iraq and Lebanon were engaged in an approximately 15-year-long civil (1975-1990), still called as the “War of Others”. The one and the other belong to the same whole; similarly, the fighting groups in the Lebanese civil war were self-contradictory themselves being Lebanese and at the same time fighting for different parties outside Lebanon. In his book, *A House of Many Mansions*, Kamal Salibi clearly states: “In all but name, Lebanon today is a non-country,” (2). This describes Lebanon as a place continuously debating numerous identities implying that all cultural representations, like the self-contradictory doll, are naturally sites for contestation.

Joreige’s *Objects of War* reflects an impossibility of reading a single version of the Lebanese civil war story and a confirmation of the fragmentation of its historical truths. Similarly, the *hijabi* dolls- Fulla and its copies- do not represent a single correct reading on current Lebanese Muslim women or their cultural setting, but reveal the ideological diversity of those women and the impossibility of containing them within one cultural mould. Joreige displays the various objects from the period of the Lebanese civil war

with their specific narratives through a personal emotional lens documented in the videos accompanying her installations. While, the variations of the *hijabi* dolls display this diversity through being at first dolls and emotional objects targeted as personal toys and learning objects, as well as aimed at having a specific identity as Arab Muslims and to teach the ways of this identity as interpreted in today's Lebanon.

Joreige's videos presented the emotional narratives of objects; dolls on the other hand are embodiments of emotional narratives, and thus they do not need video explanations of their emotional roles. The *hijabi* dolls as objects bluntly and directly reveal information on the Arab Muslim culture in contemporary Lebanon today. Their variations reflect a diversity of the discourses around Lebanese Arab Muslim identity, Lebanese Arab Muslim women and the general Lebanese cultural baggage that these objects carry. Like these dolls, Lebanon is a country in perpetual self-contradiction and contestation within itself, leaving the society in a constant state of confusion and hopelessness towards forming a unity for any cultural and political purpose.

This heterogeneous country, with its 18 official religious sects, is unable to blend together into one whole, fundamentally created through the joining and collaging of various fragmented cultural groups, races and ethnicities, arranging Lebanon as a country with peoples detesting each other and each other's conflicting practices and superstitions. Within this setting, the 'Arab Muslim' doll reflects a self-contradictory contestation, assembling together two essentially opposite parts. On one hand, the pact that officially declared Lebanon as a country also announced it as an authorized country of the Arab League with Arabic as its official Language.

The Arabic language is the source behind Arabs being the original people of Islam that *Allah* communicated to. Since classical Arabic is the Islamic one, Muslims must learn Arabic to be able to read the words of *Allah* in the *Quran*; hence, adding to the Arabic language a certain religious status. Nonetheless, with the Arabic language being a complex poetic language that imposes several meanings to each single word, the *Quran* then is unceasingly in a state of interpretation and supplementary. In the artwork "Revealing", which I will discuss in detail in Chapter Two, I used the sacredness associated with the Arabic language as a medium in the reading ritual associated with a *doaa* to open up invisible and religious dimensions that allowed the spatial transfer from the lecture theatre into the video screen, giving life to the inanimate doll in the box and transforming into me in the video, as well

as making possible the hearing of Allah's voice through a telephone call.

The element of interpretation served in the same artwork, as a focus onto the specific perspective of the Arab Muslim culture of the doll, achieved through the translation of quotes from the *Quran*, through the voice of god in the performance, into the English language, as if giving them a particular interpretation. Although, this standpoint was designed to present the conservative Islamic cultural group, the English language presented a Western existence that is accordingly affecting and imposed on the intended Arab Muslim point of view. This deliberate representation of the Westernized and at the same time conservative Islamic point of view functioned in the performance as a reflection of the global Western impact on the traditional culture of contemporary Lebanon.

Nonetheless, the overlapping of different religious groups in contemporary Lebanon had been further enriched with the various cultures of the colonial forces that conquered it throughout the ages. Within this framework, the self-contradictory doll is perceived as holding symbols from the Arabic religious language, like the *hijab*, the *abbayya* and the prayer mat. While at the same time, this doll symbolises Western culture through its physical resemblance which, although have been adjusted to Arabic likeness, is ultimately based on the non-Arabic Barbie doll. Therefore in the specific context of Lebanon, the self-contradictory doll exists within a fertile setting of hybrids and relentless cultural contestation; it finds itself at home since the doll itself is already self-contradictory.

The *hijabi* doll in contemporary Lebanon, however, neither belongs to the Westernized cultural group nor to the Arab Islamized one; but to both and none at one and the same time. Although this doll holds the conservative outfits of current Islam, it nonetheless displays a yearning from its present time, to past phase of the nation's existence combining the past Western and the past Muslim cultural groups within the setting of what is still referred to as "Swiss of the East" Lebanon; Lebanon before the civil war witnessed what is still remembered as its golden age, a time when the Westernized cultural groups and the Muslim Arab ones had lived together harmoniously. In turn, the self-contradictory doll presents a nostalgic longing for this pure Lebanese time, to the period of a relatively peaceful existence of the diverse cultural groups together.

This doll holds a significant position within the context of Lebanon different from its existence elsewhere in countries with less cultural diversity and

different background history. For the very existence of Lebanon as a syncretic combining essentially opposing groups directly reflects the existence of the self-contradictory doll as a combination of the present Western and the present Islamic. The multi-layering of identities that is reflected in the self-contradictory doll can be viewed as a call towards integrating Islam with the globalized West, which, some Arab Muslim groups in Lebanon claim to be a profane threat to the purity of Islam and further to Arab identity.

Thus, to be Lebanese has often meant to be a combination of various opposing identities. The self-contradictory doll in Lebanon, therefore, is a reflection of a time that no longer exists and a challenge to the current fundamentalist age, for this doll combines the cultural boundaries dividing groups and seeks them again. On the other hand, the cultural divisions in Muslim Lebanon have been reflected in reactionary artwork in which the use of dolls as a medium transforms this object from an everyday commodity into a statement, and the display value of this object gains significance through its use value. While the use of dolls in art in the Arab world is concentrated in Lebanon, it reflects the country's rich diversity and its inherited legacy as the most democratic in the Arab League; this legacy is based on Lebanon's lack of clear religious or political regimes.

As an object, the doll has something to say. Reflecting particular values and beliefs, it serves a cultural purpose. In Lebanon, the doll becomes a public statement and an artistic expression. This small human replica creates a certain emotional connection, asking to be used as a medium. The doll is ever-ready to function within any context, waiting inanimately to be controlled and brought to life, such that it can open up infinite imagined realities in which its beholder finds his or herself surrounded, and perhaps, controlled by his/her own fantasies. Particularly interesting is the use of the doll in the works of two prominent contemporary Lebanese artists. In the art of Mohammad El Rawas, one sees half-naked, Westernized dolls, while for the most part, they conservatively appear wearing the veil in the works of Zena El Khalil.



Where You Live by Mohammed El Rawas 2010 (Detail), courtesy of the artist.

Though their approaches are different, both artists refer to strong religious notions originating from Lebanese society in their works. While Rawas rejects the revival of conservative traditions, El Khalil covers her dolls with glitter, admitting the presence of such customs, though presenting their ‘modern’ dimensions and aspects at the same time. The element of playfulness in their work is a shared one, albeit each artist employs it in his/her own way. Rawas’ three-dimensional assemblages require audiences to unwrap several layers of meanings and codes to follow his narratives. His work leads one to follow a story, as if inside the dollhouse, the doll presents a Western world-view within a setting of events specific to the particular artwork in question.

Though the doll in Rawas’ work is mostly based on the aesthetic of the Japanese Manga figurine, he gives it a makeover; its hair is colored – and perhaps cut, too – although one only sees the ‘bigger picture’ in beholding the artist’s highly and delicately polished works as a whole. In these pieces, Rawas gives the doll a specific role in a globalized world open to various cultures. Rawas’ doll switches between languages – sometimes English, sometimes French – and is aware of the current cultural situation in Lebanon. Being nestled within assemblages of historical and cultural elements, it expresses a standpoint in favor of the conceptual perspective of the work.

Rawas uses the doll in his artwork as an element of traditional storytelling that goes beyond the boundaries of contemporary Muslim Lebanese culture. Accordingly, the doll navigates between the two and three-dimensional layers, or existences of his works. The use of religious notions and historical facts in his work suggests as reshuffling events- introducing, mixing, and contrasting cultures to create a different, ‘playful’ plot, imposing a host of other possi-

ble scenarios. Altogether, his dolls are acutely representative of the current state of today's globalized culture. On the other hand, the playfulness in El Khalil's work is more or less limited to a Muslim Lebanese context, in which the doll is strictly garbed within political and cultural boundaries specific to contemporary Beirut. El Khalil's covered doll, however, is not telling a story like that of Rawas', but rather reflecting images of a continuous situation in which it finds itself, rejoicing.



An Outing on Wheels by Mohammed El Rawas 2009 (Detail), courtesy of the artist.

The veils on her dolls are mostly comprised of a soft, glittering, bright pink fabric, which rather festively portrays it as a celebration of religion under the power of globalization, further elucidating the role the hijab plays in contemporary Lebanese society. El Khalil's works are attractive, colorful, and vibrant at first sight; however, upon second glance, the cultural tragedies within them float to the surface. In her works, the artist projects her love/hate relationship with Beirut in a politically-charged manner, depicting popular religious and military figures. Representative of a confused society, El Khalil invests in her dolls a girlish power in an attempt to childishly provoke audiences into a political and religious dialogue.

El Khalil's dolls are surrounded by everyday objects particular to her environment, which aim to penetrate the consciousness of the masses in a joyful gesture. El Khalil covers all the disastrous memories and lingering facts of the Lebanon she knows in a gleaming pink, and the banality one

would see in a typically decorated Beirut store window. She is an artist who embraces the future with a foot steadily entrenched in a traditional past. Although El Khalil's dolls wear the *hijab*, she reassures the viewer that they are not generically Muslim, but culturally Lebanese, specific to Beirut and its unique, complex society. Though they appear as flashy, localized Western products, they continue their religious practices as responsible Muslims. In pieces featuring multiple dolls, a festive gathering of religious and political elements particular to Muslim Lebanese society is portrayed, urging audiences to acknowledge various societal contradictions in Beirut.

In the framework of Muslim Lebanese society, the dolls in El Khalil's work reflect the presence of a group that finds itself in-between cultures, being neither completely Western, nor strictly conservative in the Eastern sense. Within the confusion of this Muslim Lebanese identity, these devout dolls have most probably been excluded from the Muslim community; nevertheless, they are, according to the artist, shiny and happy. In the end, however, they acknowledge their role within the grander sphere of contemporary Islam, whereas Rawas' Manga dolls seem to be resisting Islamic culture in Lebanon.

Perhaps the difference in the use of the doll in the work of these two artists can partly be attributed to their age. El Khalil is younger than Rawas, and a living product of the culture of her subjects. Her dolls lead one to question the current climate of cultural contestation in Lebanon, and the present revival of past practices and traditions. At the same time, however, one also witnesses through her works the 'progression' and Westernization of these old-fashioned practices in the contemporary age. In the works of Rawas and El Khalil, the doll becomes an object representing the juxtaposing of cultures, realities, and universes, as well as a medium for the creation of various contexts and positions within these realms.



Paradise by Zena El Khalil, 2008 (Detail), courtesy of the artist.

2.3 The Identity

The self-contradictory doll is a starting point to expand various complex layers of display value. Beginning from the state of this doll inside its box on the market shelves, the self-contradictory doll is firstly a spectacle of a luxurious “Muslim” doll in an attractive, colourful box. The transparent part of the box shows the doll’s accompanying accessories and jewellery, made specifically for females; mothers to be, yet, educated, conservative but also modern at the same time. The box expresses this doll as deeply respectful of her parents, or in other words and within the context of the Arab Muslim culture, as submissive. Its prestige is that of wealth and Islam at one and the same time, combining both together aiming for the highest social position within. That which is mixed with an obedient female usually kept busy with heaps of jewellery and other accessories. The self-contradictory doll in its box is powerful for it assures young girls of all that is ultimately good and expected from them to fulfill their cultural duties as Arab Muslim girls.

The identity this object is reflecting belongs to a moderate cultural standpoint, in between Westernization and Islamisation. The self-contradictory doll is marked with Islamic style, it is indeed fashionable with different outfits for different occasions; short dresses for early morning gatherings with

her wealthy international female friends and also black Abbayas for going out to mixed public shops. While the self-contradictory doll is convincing of conservative Islam, it is also offering a Western fashion and physical resemblance based on Barbie's. Although it is wearing a hijab, this doll nonetheless acts as a "Trojan Horse" or a "Black Swan" aiming to update Islam to fit contemporary times and open up a discussion between the two cultural extremes of Westernization and Islamisation.

This doll in its box is promising all that is ultimately good and "Muslim" through its self-contradictory existence. These symbolic details and connotations that it is holding in its position on the market shelves are part of this object as a full product. Thus, the self-contradictory doll is an ideology. It is sold with the promise of an Islamic achievement therefore linking consumers with manipulated Islamic beliefs through existing as a full product. Hence, with buying this product, one is buying the plastic self-contradictory doll as well as the Islamic knowledge it expounds. The object becomes the subject in display value, in an era where the two cannot be distinguished, a point Baudrillard elaborates on in his book *Fatal Strategies*. Accordingly, the object dominates or "defeats" the subject, in a "Revenge of the Object", it becomes superior: "...individuals should thus surrender to the world of objects, learning their ruses and strategies, and should give up the project of sovereignty and control," (Best and Kellner, 129). The object is more creative than the subject; it is brave, ironic and blunt; consequently, one should learn from its strategies and tricks.

The self-contradictory doll is cunning and brave; it playfully holds a Western resemblance meanwhile wearing a "Muslim" veil and by doing so breaks the abstract and imagined barriers between the two opposite cultural groups. Sold with an updated Islamic ideology, this object seeks to enhance the moderate common ground between the two conflicting cultural groups. As a result, the act of buying the veiled self-contradictory doll ultimately becomes an act of giving back to this specific ideology which the doll represents. While this object is marketed as a "Muslim" doll, the information consumerists are also buying is the knowledge that they are preserving the sense of its specific "Muslim" community. Hence helping Islam in its cultural contestation against modernity. Additionally because Islam is a holistic religion and because the tradition of giving alms to the poor is required in Islam fusing into the general practice of the religion. Nonetheless, Žižek terms this practice as "Cultural Capitalism" since it transforms the opposition between the consumer act and the act of giving back into a two-in-one formula, where the consumer is also achieving the act of anti-consumerist, making both acts

the same single gesture.

In his book *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, Žižek quotes the marketing campaign of Starbucks: “It is not just what you are buying, it is what you are buying into,” demonstrating how the spectacle society, in Debord’s terminology, offers an ethical system in which the consumer is using consumerism to buy his freedom from it. By being sold ideas, morals and virtues or spectacles, the consumer is buying the act of well doing, helping mother earth, spreading charity, fulfilling ethical duties and generating a semantic overinvestment, (52- 53). Similarly, the self-contradictory doll in its state inside the box promises conceptual charity for Arab Muslim community (by buying this doll one is contributing to the Islamic ideology behind it, thus giving alms to other Muslims), to an ideologically driven society functioning on display value and spectacles. This exchange system relates the social acts of buying and giving back through knowledge.

Knowledge according to Foucault is power, for knowledge is a product of contesting groups creating new “networks” and “regimes of knowledge”. The self-contradictory doll reflects a certain form of Islamic knowledge in between Westernization and Islamization, and with this knowledge that the self-contradictory doll sells, it is also struggling within a power discourse to assert its cultural ideology. While consumers of the self-contradictory doll belong to the holistic Muslim religion, the charity act connected with the consuming of this doll develops into a charity act towards worshiping Allah. Thus, the display value of the self-contradictory doll and its connotations on the market shelves increase its social prestige, significance and need to be acquired. Buying the self-contradictory doll that is marketed as a “Muslim” doll then, will add bonus points to the individual’s Islamic scale; since it is believed in Islamic traditions that an angel on the right shoulder of every human being is constantly counting his or her good deeds. Therefore, while dolls as cultural texts reflect their current setting, they also interact with it and help shaping it.

Islamic practices are replaced by a form of Islamic knowledge asserted through “cultural capitalism”. A veiled “Muslim” doll provides a shortcut to “Muslim” manners promising the parent that bought this doll and their child of achieving virtue. Furthermore, in a religious cultural capitalism, the parent and child are both preserving and maintaining the Muslim cultural identity, seemingly fighting Westernization and preserving their Arab Muslim identity. Nonetheless, the ambiguous position of this doll in between Islamisation and Westernization is doubtful and cannot be relied upon as

a weapon for either opposing cultural groups in their contestation against each other. On the one hand, this doll is implied to support the Westernized cultural group, however, on the other, being a human figuration that is generally prohibited among the conservative Islamic groups and reflecting Western symbols (which I further discuss in Chapter Two) the self-contradictory doll then becomes a stronger image of the Barbie doll that had initially been banned out of Saudi Arabia as blasphemous.

Thus, this doll is a veiled symbol of profanity, disguised under Islamic packaging, that further labels it as blasphemous to strict Islamic groups. Nonetheless, the self-contradictory doll stands outside the Westernized cultural groups, since it falsifies the 'original' non-Islamic doll with what is interpreted as Islamic ideology. Moreover, being marketed as a "Muslim" doll implies that this doll is targeted to Islamic consumerists, additionally using a "Muslim" weapon against Islam and likewise a Western symbol against Westernization in the cultural contestation. Thus this doll is ultimately in contestation with itself aiming to gradually transform the radical divisions between both cultural groups into a more moderate and smoother cultural combination. The self-contradictory doll comes with a hidden agenda belonging to the liminal space of the cultural spectrum of Arab Muslim society. This object is targeted towards the creation of a new culture with an updated globalized Islam.

The self-contradictory doll offers Islam a location belonging to a particular identity within the various moderate identities that shape the larger global picture today. This global identity belongs to a constant combining, fragmenting and appropriating of ideologies; a variety of formulas of all identities that had once been relatively less overlapping together. James Clifford in *The Predicament Of Culture*, writes: "Intervening in an interconnected world, one is always, to varying degrees, 'inauthentic': caught between cultures, implicated in others," (11), Thus, as Clifford announces, the pure products go crazy; hence the self-contradictory doll and its "crazy" position trying to assert a purity for the Arab Muslim identity. In the lecture-performance "Neutralizing" in 2011, which I will talk about at the end of this chapter, a video presents a doll holding hostage a Westernized woman and god, interrogating both on who its 'real' creator is. While both prisoners fail to convince this rag doll, which ultimately re-presents the self-contradictory doll, it commands their death, thus providing the metaphorical death and end of "pure" identities.

In the exhibition accompanying the lecture-performance, a sculpture dis-

played the doll who has walked out of the video, with a text balloon saying: “I killed my mother.” Unable to find its pure identity, neither in religion nor in modernity the doll goes crazy as Clifford would describe it, and thus, transforms beyond the relatively “pure” identity of Islam and that of Westernization into a binary composition reflecting the position of the self-contradictory doll; the opposite of Clifford’s point in *The Predicament of Culture*. The self-contradictory doll is promoted significantly as belonging to the “true Arab Muslim identity”. One wonders what does an Arab Muslim identity mean today?

The construction of a unique identity for Arab Muslims is associated to Orientalism, with Edward Said and other critics influenced by Foucault, arguing that orientalism is a medium that produces knowledge as a means of power for colonial forces to maintain domination over the colonized. Said explains in his book *Orientalism*, that the concept of ‘The East’ and how it is presented is a creation of ‘The West’: “My whole point about this system is not that it is a misrepresentation of some Oriental essence — in which I do not for a moment believe — but that it operates as representations usually do, for a purpose, according to a tendency, in a specific historical, intellectual, and even economic setting” (273). Ultimately, ‘Eastern oriental’ societies, the so-called Arab Muslim ones today and to which the self-contradictory doll rationally belongs, are all constructed on preconceived archetypes and stereotyping that visualises these societies as different from ‘Western’ societies. Similarly, Gramsci’s notion of hegemony denotes the prominence of one group over another through representing economic and political control as well as the ability of the dominant group to project its own ways of seeing the world so that those who are subordinate by it accept it as normal. In this sense, the self-contradictory doll is projecting an imagined identity of Arab-Muslim society.

One example of on the discourses around seeking identity and its representation in parallel to the self-contradictory doll as a site for a continuous process of achieving national identity, is the exhibition *Points of Departure* at The Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London as part of the Shubbak Festival 2013. “From the green hills and sun-drenched coast of Galilee to the sacred sites of Jerusalem’s Old City, the dramatic desert of Wadi Rum to the vibrant reefs of Dahab,” reads the summary on the back of the DK Eyewitness Jerusalem, Israel, Petra and Sinai 2012 Travel Guide. “This guide provides the insider tips every visitor needs”, it claims, as if, without a doubt, it most certainly leads straight to the best attractions the regions have to offer. Using this travel guide as a starting point, Palestinian artist

Bisan Abu-Eisheh entitled his installation *Sorry, Your Search for 'Palestine' Produced no Results*.

Indeed, as a geographical entity, Palestine does not 'exist' in the same way that the word and symbol of Palestine do. As a place, Palestine only exists abstractly, as a space of memory and future hope; Palestine itself, then, is a possibility, a potentiality that is constantly on the threshold of physical reality. Representing a geography of Palestine entails an engagement within spaces of imagination, not just of the actual land, but also of the ideological notions of territory as a construct of social and national identities. Using this logic of territory as national identity, Abu-Eisheh's installation invited audiences to participate in the concept of the formation of Palestine by using chalk on a blackboard, on which a military map of Jerusalem was traced in white paint, in addition to invisible ultraviolet paints, which could only be seen through the use of ultraviolet torches.

In Abu-Eisheh's work, the landscape of Palestine became a process of socialisation. With the audience adding their own annotations and personal observations to the 'map', they recreated the symbolic and mythical characteristics comprising Palestine, and in turn, participated in the construction of a new national identity. Nonetheless, the ultraviolet lines created a deeper second dimension in the installation. Being on a military map, they suggested a process of transformation from the abstract notion of national identity into a subsequent concrete formation of physical borders for that identity. The military 'planning' suggested by the invisible lines, which were not conspicuous, as they required the use of ultraviolet torches in order to be seen, constituted the basis for the territory of this new national identity.

This second dimension of Abu-Eisheh's installation referred specifically to the power discourses of representation and the armed conflict associated with them, which are also what the self-contradictory doll offers, using the tense relationship between one national identity versus the other as its basis. While these power discourses were embedded within the pages of the travel guide with which the artist engaged, the installation itself was a means for understanding and restructuring systems of representation as power, and the creation of meaning as a form of control. Along with five other Palestinian and British artists, Abu-Eisheh undertook a year-long residency at the Delfina Foundation in London and the ArtSchool Palestine in Ramallah, in collaboration with the British Council for the Points of Departure project.



Sorry,

Your Search for 'Palestine' Produced no Results, Bisan Abu-Eisheh, 2013, copyrights ICA

As a whole, *Points of Departure* engaged in power discourses of representation, disassembling, recreating, and shifting their poles in the process. Throughout, the artists exhibiting led audiences into a liminal space of nothingness where they were metaphorically 'no one'. Thus, one is able to shift between perspectives, substitute identities, and recreate contexts and knowledge. This state is what the self-contradictory doll offers; a continuous shift between perspectives. The self-contradictory doll is a neutral medium functioning on shutting down assumptions belonging to one particular cultural group and starting its opposite perspectives that belongs to the opponent cultural group.

Within this constant change of contexts the self-contradictory doll is always presents an alternative if not oppositional cultural perspective, thus producing new ideologies according to the dynamics of its different contexts. The self-contradictory doll unfolds into a perspective for people to understand power in an everyday form of life. In his book *Soft Power*, Joseph Nye discusses the flexibility of "soft-power" he argues that it works functions through culture, political values and policies. Similarly, Charles Tripp presents the relationship between art and resistance with reference to the recent so called "Arab Uprisings". Tripp explains that power does not depend merely on brute force and on terror; however, power rather comes out of the creation of an environment that suggests to people that obedience is normal and acceptable, derived from Foucault's Panopticon argument and the philosophy of observation.

The soft-power of the self-contradictory doll unravels in its Arab Muslim identity. The label of this constructed identity has its roots in a broad history of colonization, power relations and domination between the 'East' and the 'West'. While any construction of an identity involves establishing an opposite other, it is impossible then to define and strictly describe Arab peoples or Islamic cultures as fixed entities. Nonetheless, orientalist have often claimed that civilizations of the Eastern countries were corrupt and static in James Stuart Mill's description. For Lord Cromer Arabs were gullible, devoid of energy and initiative, "...and in everything oppose the clarity, directness and nobility of the Anglo-Saxon race," as Said summarized the orientalist view (39). However, the self-contradictory doll proudly announces its Arab identity, and, an Arab identity is primarily concerned with a political and cultural formation aiming to combat the residual effects of colonialism and its various new shapes affecting society today.

The Arab identity of the self-contradictory doll is ultimately associated to the rise of Arab nationalism in the 1960's. The pioneers of Arab nationalism, leaders of the Ba'th Party declared in their constitution that the Arabs form one nation, and that "No Arab country can live apart from the others," (Haim, 233). With this they have stated the remedy to what Arab nationalists often call the Arab spirit, essence and intellect. The essential ingredient is Arab unity; "...for the happiest of nations were the ones in which political and national boundaries were fused into one another," as Sati' al-Husri explains (23). Nonetheless, nationalism is but an imagined character and choice in Benedict Anderson's famous argument.

Thus, the self-contradictory doll which is firstly a toy and a medium provoking imagination represents the "happiest nations" with its Arabic promotion. "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 they lives the image of their communion...because regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship," (6-7). Therefore announcing an Arab identity, the self-contradictory doll fuses into a national imaginary beyond the existence of one united Arab state and the political dream of Arab nationalists. However, while the project for an Arab unified state had failed, many thinkers nonetheless argue that this type of unity has been achieved through popular culture across the Arab speaking countries.

Therefore, the self-contradictory doll blends its Arab identity into the cul-

tural and conceptual connotations of this word, to what is commonly known as “Arabism” relating to Nasir’s times of 1950’s and 1960’s, (Dawisha, p.8). Shibley Telhami developed this term into “New Arabism”, further stretching the cultural aspects of Nasir’s “Arabism” beyond the achievement of a unified geographical state to link it with the cultural phenomena of the late 20th century, which particularly takes very lightly the slightest thought of a political Arab nation (56). The self-contradictory doll belongs to the ideological principle of a single Arab nation in its representation of the Arab part of its Arab Muslim identity. Therefore, this doll can be considered as a political and cultural object fusing into an imagined Arab nationalism and displaying a nostalgic, yet impossible, condition of the nation’s “natural” construction as a unified state.

Thus the self-contradictory doll as an object functions as a provocative medium for “Arab nationalism”, “Arabism” and the “New Arabism”. Within this appeal, the self-contradictory doll delivers an image for the existence of a single Arab state through the various permeable and overlapping cultural and political characteristics of the multiple Arab states. And by doing so, this object then replaces the actual need for an individual state through replacing political unity with its display value. The display value of the self-contradictory doll as Arab incorporates the discourses and various pursuits of political and cultural Arab unity. Therefore, this object is an Arabic manifestation of a form of political sovereignty for what is called the Arab world. The Arabic identity of the self-contradictory doll expresses the cultural bonds that tie Arabic-speaking countries as well as the political unity of this territory.

Similarly, the Islamic part in the self-contradictory doll’s identity reiterates a political and cultural ideology originating from a nostalgic framing of a past period further linked with particular territory. Identity can be a construct based on the representation of others aiming for power domination, as we have seen with Orientalism and elsewhere; therefore, what is called Islamic cultures and societies are accordingly descriptions of imagined views of how Muslims are expected to be. Nonetheless, the structural resemblances of Muslim cultures are based on a set of political dynamics that are flexible ever changing codes, processes and roles. Likewise, the self-contradictory doll adopts diverse views of the current worldview on Islamic societies, while generally however, dismissing the various degrees of religious affiliations within these predominantly Muslim societies.

The self-contradictory doll poses a structure of Muslim societies as an as-

section of the particularly negative thinking of the ‘West’. For, as Asef Bayat puts it: “Undoubtedly, the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US and subsequent developments have greatly intensified Western anxieties over the ‘threat’ of ‘Islamic fundamentalism’, and thus have reinforced more than ever the notion of the ‘peculiarity of Muslims’,” (5). Nonetheless, Bayat questions labeling Muslim societies as a path towards a sense of re-Orientalising these cultures, supporting his argument with the prevailing Orientalist views of the West, the persistence of authoritarian local regimes in these ‘Eastern’ areas and the expansion of Islamist movements within the Muslim region. Hence, the self-contradictory doll contributes to this specific negative outlook on Muslim societies today.

Through announcing its Muslim identity, the self-contradictory doll is essentializing its belonging to a particular culture. By displaying the “peculiarity of Muslims” this doll fuses into a Western monolithic negative perception of Islamic cultures. On the other hand, however, being a hybrid of identities belonging to an Arab Muslim society that indeed consists of variety of Muslim cultures and subcultures, the self-contradictory doll thus, also asserts a certain local perception of Islam as well as the international Western one. Nonetheless, this local view on what is called Islamic society constructs a multi-faced, binary entity that aims to locate local Islam within an updated global context. Similarly, the self-contradictory doll’s Islamic identity employs the negative Western outlook on Islam to function locally.

The various aspects of Islam as a holistic religion have influenced the domain of public and private life, through practice of the different interpretations of the various sub-cultures of Islam. Consequently, the Islamic identity is not only confined to religion; however, this identity goes beyond religion towards cultural, historical and political contexts. While the various contesting Muslim groups all claim to belong to true Islam, the self-contradictory doll similarly and unhesitantly announces its identity as a representation of the “True Arab Muslim”. Within a richly contested setting, this object becomes a representation of a specific “True Islam” compounded by a process of Western global and nostalgic local structures. The structures that make up the Islamic identity of the self-contradictory doll, that rely on a negative representation of Islamic societies by the West, ultimately belongs to what Islamists often call a “foreign construct” and are thus suspected to be blasphemous.

However, the boldness of the Islamic elements that the self-contradictory doll displays (the *hijab*, *abaya*, prayer mat...) and that the Western outlook

on the “peculiarity of Muslims” asserts, nonetheless serve as reminders of the authenticity of Islam to Muslims; thus, shaping a coherent Islamic identity. These Islamic elements further justify the Westernized representation that underpins the self-contradictory doll. And at one and the same time, the Islamic elements also justify the existence of the Westernized representation of Islam within an acceptable Islamic standpoint. Therefore, this object tolerates the existence of both contesting cultural groups together as legitimate representations of a contemporary Islamic identity. Islamic societies are composed of variety of Islamic affiliations producing differentiations within the local society itself and also within the global dynamics of these local groups in an international context.

Therefore, various types of ideologies construct what is often generalized as an Islamic identity. Hence, the self-contradictory doll expressing a particular identity belonging at once to Westernized and Islamized standpoints is further presenting a new type of Islam. The Islam this doll is identifying with is one that belongs to the moderate gradient space in between what is considered as relatively purely Western and that is strictly belonging to conservative Islam. This particular formulation of Islam is what Asef Bayat described as “post-Islamism” in his book *Islam and Democracy: What is the Real Question?* he writes: “In my formulation, post-Islamism represents both a condition and a project, which may be embodied in a master (or multi-dimensional) movement,” (19).

Islamism is associated to “Arabism” in the sense that its ideology extends to all Muslim states as a united entity, however, placing “Arab nationalism” in a less important position than the Islamic narrative. Post-Islamism is related to the dialectical relationships and changes between shifting contexts and ideologies internally and globally, producing a change in the direction of Islamism and states’ power. Therefore, post-Islamism according to Bayat presents an alternative to Islamism as primarily a religion-based concept and movement of the 20th century. While post-Islamism transforms Islam into a political compromise over the religious, “New Arabism” on the other hand, comprises the political compound in return for cultural unity. Within this context, the self-contradictory doll reflects the “true Arab Muslim identity” of its time which is a constructed hybrid between “Post-Islamism” and “New Arabism”: a religiously shaped cultural object with political orientation, further challenging hegemony through its mere display value.

In the artwork “Revealing”, which I discuss in detail in Chapter Two, I expressed the doll in its state inside the doll by presenting the displayed doll

coming to life after a magical religious ritual presented in a performance and video work. The box was displayed as a narrow claustrophobic space in which the doll is unable to move freely, symbolizing the doll stuck in-between the different contesting cultural groups. Being the intersecting point between Islamisation and Westernization, the self-contradictory doll in the “Revealing” lecture-performance also offered a meeting point between objects and theology, linking humans directly to God through the doll as a whole product and echoing a religious cultural capitalism. On the other hand, the empty doll’s box from the “Revealing” work exhibited at the Winchester Gallery in 2012, aimed to offer visitors the experience of becoming the self-contradictory doll inside its box, in its display state to share its cultural standpoint through entering this box/booth.

One of the reasons of displaying the open box/booth was to hint at the general potentiality of the use value of this doll, presented in the form of a full product, which allows one to enter into its perspective and ideology. For the self-contradictory doll in its box and the audience experiencing the interior of the phone booth metaphorically transform into Truman Burbank in *The Truman Show* of 1998, stuck inside the bubble of the hyperreal television. Nonetheless, the self-contradictory doll, from its position inside the boxed limits of the Arab Muslim culture is ultimately preaching a mixed identity of Westernized and Islamized ideologies attempting to un-teach radicalism. On the other hand, the increasing triumph of the display over the use value, the form over the content, today intertwines the notion of what is real with what is perceived as not real.

The boundaries between reality and fantasy have dissolved into each other deeply to an extent these dividing boundaries are erased. With the slippage between what is real and what is imagined, the true and the fictional, the ‘real’ reality becomes uncommon to us; however, replaced by different versions of competing realities all claiming and educing to be the ‘true’ real. Baudrillard describes the situation as a sea of images simulating realities and displacing the notion of the real. The sign and the symbol no longer signify each other; they each have unlimited other explanations and announcing the end of a single fixed truth. However, the loss of meaning as mentioned in Nietzsche’s “Death of God” and other Nihilistic concepts that convey our experience of the world as destabilized by the media or general spectacle excessively to an extent the notion of reality becomes uncertain.

In the artwork *Revealing*, which is to be discussed in detail in Chapter Two, the hesitation in the voice of *Allah* over the phone, displayed religion

as no longer the one definite confident truth, opening the world beyond the duality of heaven and earth. On the other hand, the Lebanese civil war has revived sectarianism and radicalism; consequently, current Lebanese cultural groups and sub-groups have inherited narratives of differences. And with the global loss of meaning and expansion of Westernized ideologies, these groups grasped harder to their beliefs on the path of searching for their ‘true’ identity. Within this context of the loss of control over meaning between the sign and the signified, the self-contradictory doll suggests an object reflecting a longing for identity. With the end of the dependence of humans on God and the heavens, and further the collapse of the myth of human progress of modernity, human beings found faith in consumption.

2.4 Spectacular Objects

Objects present impossible experiences that could now be reached through their mere display value. Thus, objects are interpreted as connotations of signs within a system on the power of knowledge. Everything that was once lived has been replaced by representations of it, giving display value a powerful position as reality; thus objects are Spectacular. Debord describes the Spectacle in his book *The Society of The Spectacle*, published in 1967, as: “... the very heart of society’s real unreality” (13). This unreality manifests itself as a positivity that is unreachable and beyond discussion. “All it says is: Everything that appears is good; whatever is good will appear... The absolute denial of life, in the shape of a fallacious paradise, is no longer projected onto the heavens, but finds its place instead within material life itself. The spectacle is hence a technological version of the exiling of human powers in a ‘world beyond’ – and the perfection of separation within human beings,” (15-18).

In other words, what has once been projected onto a world beyond, finds itself today floating in a world of consumption of ideologies and representations simulating, as Baudrillard would use this term, a spirit of pretence that would ultimately feed in the creation of a full ‘reality’ combining the world beyond with the material world. In 1988, Debord revisited his book to publish *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, in which he introduces a new third kind of spectacle. The advanced “Integrated Spectacle” combines the previous two spectacles, which are the “Diffused Spectacle” and the “Concentrated Spectacle” that Debord developed in his first book. Based on a Marxist critique of economy, Debord, like Baudrillard and Zizek, transformed

this critique of exchange-value into one of display-value.

Debord differentiates between three types of spectacles according to the advancement of their economic system reaching the “Integrated Spectacle”. The “Integrated Spectacle” combines the “Diffused Spectacle” (like that of the capitalist West) and the “Concentrated Spectacle” (like that of fundamentalist Islam), and is a concentrated power, such that of the media and globalization, that creates a “Diffused Spectacle” in a non-violent manner, as Nye would describe it, a kind of soft-power. However, the self-contradictory doll does not belong to any of these types of Spectacles, because its spectacle is neither “Diffused”, belonging to a global ideology, nor “Concentrated”, belonging to a single ideology.

Hence, the self-contradictory doll proposes a new type of Spectacle that is not an “Integrated Spectacle” because it does not combine both previous Spectacles that Debord defines. The ideology of the self-contradictory doll is a crossbreed of an ideology of the “Diffused Spectacle” with that of the “Concentrated Spectacle”. This intersection, unlike that which developed the “Integrated Spectacle” and blended together both types of Spectacles, is a mixture of two components that essentially cannot dissolve into each other and form a dialectical resolution instead keep their binary opposing forces in paly. The self-contradictory doll mixes Islam with what is Western and considered to be blasphemous. When two opposite components are combined, the result is metaphorically a Frankenstein Monster; however, this is a monster that is self-promoted as all that is ultimately good and “Muslim”.

This doll is self-contradictory and its ideological spectacle can then be called the “Other Spectacle”. This spectacle is different from the “Spectacle of the Other” which Stuart Hall discusses and is concerned with the cultural representation of the different groups as the ‘others’, exposing cultural racism and stereotyping. However, the “Other Spectacle” I am talking about here draws on and modifies Debord’s “Integrated Spectacle” and the association of general economy as a means to observe display-value and the power of representation. The “Other Spectacle” aims to ‘spectacularize’ the other as the one at once; its formerly silent unconscious has become today bluntly apparent in objects. This ideological Spectacle is the Spectacle of today, to which the self-contradictory doll belongs, as well as other new objects that are mostly apparent in religiously-developing countries.

This is because religion in these countries is highly developed and in a constant clash with all that opposes it from within, like the other sects or re-

ligions and from outside, other ideologies, predominantly Western symbols, which are widely spread mainly due to globalization. The Western “Integrated Spectacles” infiltrate these religious areas mixing and breeding with the previous religious spectacles to produce the Other Spectacle and its uncanny embodiments. The Other Spectacle is different than the “Integrated” one because it is essentially dealing with a composition of conflicting binaries that preserve their opposing forces. This spectacle is defined as the spectacle that combines two types of spectacles that are differing and contradictory with each other and that cannot merge together into a dialectical resolution; however they combine through preserving the identity of both spectacles at one and the same time expressing an uncanny or abject spectacle.

The abject property of the Other Spectacle is directly presented in the self-contradictory doll; however, it is created by layering for some abject elements are clearer than others (like the indirect abject of conceptual things such as civil marriages in religious cultures versus the direct abject of materialistic things like the veil on Westernized dolls). In the context of an advanced postmodern world or an alter-modern, post-postmodern or the various different titles our eras has been described, from Alan Kirby to Nicholas Bourriaud, the boundaries of history, meaning and time fade away; the combination of images and ideologies are constantly mixing and creating new options. Hence, the Other Spectacle that relates to the current world is not fixed but constantly cross-breeding and inventing new combinations.

This spectacle is always an inconsistent one and self-contradictory because it combines together two ideologically opposing spectacles, relating to a new born identity from which we can imply the following three dimensions: Self-Contradiction “Mad Scientist”, Abject “Frankenstein Monster” and Playful “Genius”. The Other Spectacle is self-contradictory because it joins opposite non-blending spectacles; its self-contradiction is associated with the “Mad Scientist” reflecting the first of the three dimensions; known to use his scientific means in experimenting with prohibited components. This spectacle invents a new identity because it is essentially combining elements that had been perceived as different and contrary to each other. Consequently relating to the image of the “Frankenstein Monster,” an abject creation.

Accordingly, the Other Spectacle is abject and radiates the uncanny since it joins the unjoin-able. This spectacle is playful and powerful, because it achieves impossible combinations through using methods that are unfamiliar to the public, therefore, the Other Spectacle is confused to be belonging to a major normal accepted spectacle. This is where I aim to target at with

my own practice, to confuse boundaries of what is accepted and what is not. This power of the Other Spectacle lies in its hiding within the public norms of its context. The Other Spectacle to which the self-contradictory doll belongs is also powerful because it is an intersection of various elements and ideologies with each other, leading this spectacle to be familiar within all the different elements and accepted, although deformed.

This is the dimension of its “Genius,” its exceptional insight. The self-contradictory doll can then be seen as a product of the Other Spectacle and its dimensions; it is powerful and deceiving, offering an alternative relationship to the contesting groups in the current Arab Muslim culture. Although, reflecting the divisions of this culture, the veiled doll is a polyvalent object, interactive and aiming to support the shaping of a moderate culture. Thus, within a Lebanese contemporary context, this object reflects a future utopia sourcing from a nostalgic past of the Lebanese golden era, aiming to revive a future imagined ideology. The ‘spectacularization’ of the self-contradictory doll announces the Other Spectacle to which the spectacle of our current day belongs of syncretic ideologies creating moderation faced however by increasing radicalism.

The self-contradictory doll presents a longing for a world beyond fantasy for this object seeks identity in the chaos of the loss of all. While spectacles are ever changing according to the Other Spectacle, the fantasies and ideologies accompanying the spectacular objects are accordingly temporary, until the emergence of the next spectacular object. However, with the loss of social relationships due to their replacement with the consumption of objects, humans are increasingly objectified and perceived according to their spectacle value to which the social norms agree or disagree depending on the power and context of its display. Thus, the nature of a commodity society is based on object-hood and materialization, which specifically prevents our spontaneity of consciousness since it functions on ready-made objects and ideologies.

This is what Lukács presents, sourcing from Marxism, as the “Reification” concept, which is developing an abstract notion into a concrete object. The objectification of social relationships, like display-value and cultural capitalism, leads to the general loss of meaning beyond the object and its spectacles, since essentially the social contact is based on consumption. For example, today one is holding in their hands a spiritual-materialistic gadget in which they can change the world by a click of a button from their bath tubs. Thus, the satisfaction granted from saving the world is still reached without the

need of actually experiencing direct social contact. However, other things are lost with the loss of contact. The self-contradictory doll as an object is firstly an object of play, a medium to be used with the potentialities and spontaneity. Even though it offers a ready-made ideology belonging to a “Muslim” community, it further offers the play element of reshuffling and recreating of the ideology it displays.

The self-contradictory doll, as I have presented in the artwork “Revealing” which I will discuss in Chapter Two, allows for two ready-made paths once considered opposite to meet in an asymmetrical intersection now; hence, permitting the following of their separate ideologies as well as the combination and creation of a new one. Furthermore, with this permission, the self-contradictory doll also offers the option of reshuffling the symbol and the symbolized and inventing spontaneous consciousness, which I will discuss in detail in Chapter Three; however the importance of “Reification” in this chapter is the objectification of humans, as an abstract as well as actual notion, which leads us to the main artwork in this part and the following chapters.

2.5 Neutralizing: Lecture-performance:

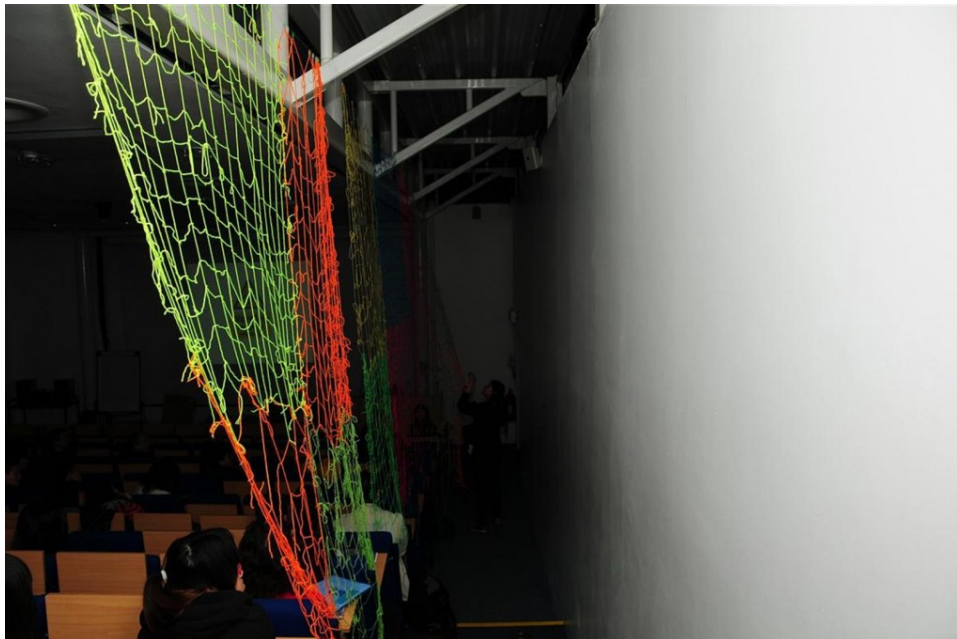
“Neutralizing” is the main art project for Chapter One and it presents the transition to Chapter Two. This project is made of two parts, a lecture-performance and an installation. The project was displayed at the Winchester School of Art Postgraduate Conference and Exhibition 2011 in Winchester. Generally, this project reflects the concepts discussed in this Chapter, as well as developing them in a deeper perspective towards the physical resemblance of the self-contradictory doll paving the way for Chapter Two and supplementing Chapter Three of this practice-based research.

The lecture-performance created a situation reflecting Julia Kristeva’s concept of the Abject from theological and cultural points of view. The lecture-performance consisted of two parts: a performance action and a video piece. Firstly, in the dark lecture theatre room, the screen brightly showed the following sign:



Neutralizing, video still, 2011

This sign intended to warn the audience and to remind them of the materialistic functions of their bodies and the dangers of the potential of infections. With this sign radiantly facing the audience, I started playing childish tunes using a megaphone along with the help of a colleague who was also walking on the opposite side of the theatre room from me. These tunes are interrupted by us saying statements through the megaphones like: "Keep them inside. They are refugees. I think they are dripping. Let them breathe. They smell bad..." Meanwhile, we started closing two colourful handmade wool nets around the audience inside the lecture theatre so as to keep them contained within their seats and provide an experience of being trapped while creating a space that divides us from them.



Neutralizing, lecture-performance, 2011

These statements and tunes also included the squeaking sounds of toys, which we had tied with a rope around ourselves. While the sounds and statements intended to remind the audience of their disturbing bodily functions and their physical existence, the childish tunes took them back to, as one of the audience later described: “My childhood cupboard.” The aim of providing a childhood atmosphere was to remind the audience of their birth and growth time-line, highlighting their origins as physical human bodies moving inescapably towards death. After enclosing the audience inside the net, we stood guarding its front openings, while a video started playing. The video starts with the paranormal voice of a doll questioning god and the Westernized Arab woman who both appeared in the video tied up in a hostage situation. The conversation goes as follows:

Doll: Now, tell me which one of you two is woman?

Westernized Woman: I am!

God: I see no woman here. Woman is dead.

Doll: Silence! You imposters! God, prove to me that you're not woman.

God: I have no veil.

Westernized Woman: Huh! Bastard! We don't need a veil. We are proud of our femininity.

Doll: What about you God? You played the loving mother of the world for ages. How is it that you are not woman?

God: I became the whore of men. “God he loves everyone!” I was raped until I got paralysed. I was man's last woman.

Westernized Woman: Yes. And now I am the modern woman!

God: Where's your veil? The last time I spoke to man, I told him to veil his woman.

Westernized Woman: Men and woman are equal here, you barbarian!

God: And how do you hide your impurity? You are polluted!

Westernized Woman: what impurity? I am as pure as sunshine.

God: What about the blood that flows between your legs?

Westernized Woman: Nobody sees that.

God: Exactly, and this is why you need the veil. You're not woman.

Westernized Woman: but you don't belong here! Culture here is different, can't you see. After you got paralysed, culture replaced you. We are free. We can do anything inside our culture!

Doll: Is that true!?

God: Humans are polluted with filth. I turned all their pollution into holiness. I gave them laws to bury their corpses and hide them and pray. I wanted them to transcend their physical barriers, to protect them. When you bury a corpse in the grave, the grave becomes the filth and the corpse, holy; something you don't talk about but in prayers.

Doll: and what has filth to do with women?

Westernized Woman: I'll tell you. Because she is the mother, she is the womb of her child. The child must first reject his mother to form his self, separate from her. She is the origin of life that gets sacrificed for life to go on.

God: and so the mother becomes the tomb of her child; the egg that gets abjected. And to be an egg she has to smell like one periodically.

Westernized Woman: I'm not an egg you crippled creature! And we are not objects.

God: Yes. You are not objects, but when faced with it, your language fails you. You vomit and marginalize yourself. I once tested the women of your culture in a ritual. The ritual consisted of music, a stone, 3 dolls, and the sentence "A woman is an object". The rules of the ritual were clear: I denied women motion, but gave them speech. I denied men language but allowed them motion and the ritual began: Music, laughter, and the sound of dolls. And not one of you dared to move, no one saw the stone and most failed to speak but I got 3 sentences that explained everything: "I am not an object. I don't want this. It's all about the dolls." Which translate as: "I am not the

object; I am not the subject. I am the doll, I am the abject.”

Westernized Woman: What are you saying exactly?

God: I mean, look at you. How are you any different from the veiled woman? You’re hiding behind the hijab as well but your veil is your culture. What is better to have a visible veil or an invisible one? What is better to build a tomb for your dead or throw them on the streets and accept death? The reasons you have to bury your dead, are the same reasons my followers have to bury their women. You have to deny death while you rebel to live. You have to deny woman as you stray away from her womb. A woman is as sacred as feces. She is the giver of life but at the same time she is the denial of existence. She’s the lost origin, the ugly scar on your bellies and for this she should be put behind a bathroom.

Westernized Woman: What you do to the poor women of the east is the filth. Their pure faces are rotting behind their hijab. Where is their individuality? Our culture cherishes our individuality. They’re like sheep, abstracted behind the conformity you put down on them. I bet they smell like you as well. You enslave them to men like you enslaved yourself to them as well by denying yourself the freedom to be polluted and accepted, to be the devil and god at the same time. I bet for you, women are more created with your likeness than men. I don’t want to be the mother, if it’s not allowed to be the whore. I don’t want to die if I’m not allowed to live. So, yes I prefer my invisible hijab and here you’re wearing it too. You’re not sacred to us anymore because you’re as human as us and so we accepted your pollution. You are a shadow.

God: This is only verbal play. Your culture solves its problems with invisible symbols and language games. Touch me. I’m real. This is cultural masturbation; Using your culture as a veil for your shame.

Doll: Silence! That’s just great! Can any of you two tell me who my mother is now! Who is woman!

Doll: You disgust me! Kill them both!

In this conversation the doll is searching for its ‘real’ mother or creator and so it captured god and the Westernized woman to make them hostages, questioning them for the truth, while a mannequin doll with only its legs appearing in the video is guarding the hostages preventing them from possibly

escaping. God presents certain conservative religious perspectives whereas the Westernized woman represents the Western side of the cultural contestation in contemporary Lebanon. The doll is in the position of power, outside the conflict of religion and modernity- as if higher than humans and beyond religion, reflecting a superiority of objects.

Generally, the doll is an object with infinite potential of contextualizing and role playing; it is in two different states in this video. One doll is the interrogator and the other doll is the guard. However, both roles are in a position stronger than that of the hostages, who represent the two opposite sides of the cultural contestation, Islamisation and Westernization or god and the Westernized woman, each defending their own opposite views on creators and mothers. Firstly, this hostage situation places both prisoners on one level under the mercy of the doll. This eliminates the power of god over humans since he is taken out of his specific context of conservative Islam and placed in a weak position deprived of sacredness, next to its opposition: the Westernized woman.

The judging situation reflected in the video reminds us of “Judgement Day”, in which all beings are equal; however, here it is under the wisdom of the doll rather than a god, creating a playful and uncanny setting, further making this object a conceptual source of superior power. This neutralizing of statuses under the power of the doll is based on a bodily dimension, referencing Kristeva’s abject where the doll is seeking its source of existence, the mother and creator, who is also the source of its abjection. The video ends with the doll unable to get any answers from its prisoners and thus deciding to kill both god and the Westernized Woman for failing to prove who the ‘real’ woman or its source, creator and mother is.

This ending confirms that both Islamisation and Westernization are sides of the same coin under Kristeva’s concept of the abjection of the physical body. While Islamisation hides its abject using religious procedures, Westernization uses its cultural laws to conceal it. The resemblance of the abject in this work leads the research to Chapter Two which focuses on the physical form of the self-contradictory doll. Nonetheless Neutralizing presents the doll tracing its materialistic origin, seeking an identity and in the end deciding that it belongs to neither side of this cultural discourse. The doll in this video echoes the self-contradictory doll and its cultural position through the use of the Kristeva’s concept of the abject; that however we try to exclude the abject it still exists. This project expressed the common grounds between the two cultural groups with reference to their physical existence.

The two contesting cultural groups occupy an abject position in relation to the self-contradictory doll. This doll is presented in the video as an intersection point between both cultural groups. Since it is a rag doll and is allowed in conservative Islamic communities, as well as it holds Western symbols, such as its “emancipated” sexuality apparent in the display of its sexual organs deformed in different locations than normal positions on the human body. This dislocation intended to refer to a radicalized cultural position. The ‘Arab Muslim’ doll in this video is conceptually hijabi rather than physically since its very existence as a rag doll, a deformed human being, becomes a symbol of the veil and Islamisation. This doll in the video presents an inverting of the elements of Westernization and Islamisation that are present in the original ‘Arab Muslim’ doll sold in the market today so that the elements of Westernization are in the external position as the veil is on the original hijabi doll, and Islamisation is the physical mould of the rag doll.

Although, the doll in *Neutralizing* did not find its true identity, it still had captured god and the Westernized Arab Muslim woman as possible candidates. The discussion that took place in the video between god and the Westernized woman included statements such as: “The Invisible hijab and Cultural Masturbation.” These indicate the covering of the abject rather than completely getting rid of it; which is impossible according to Kristeva since it composes human physicality. “Invisible Hijab” is the hijab of the social laws of the west which acts as the Arab Muslim hijab in covering the abject. Similarly “Cultural Masturbation” refers to a fake imagined sexual experience; as if culture is faking things in order to retain its safety zone in terms of denying death.

Consequently, “The Burden of Royalty” which is the exhibition part of “*Neutralizing*”, reflects the responsibility of being alive, and specifically a woman. The installation piece is 1145cm x 80cm x 36cm; it included the commander ‘veiled’ doll from the video aiming to complement the concepts from the lecture-performance. The figure intended to present a failed attempt to control nature, regardless of the help of its own supernatural powers derived from being an object; furthermore, it contemplated the struggle between the sacred and the polluted. The doll was displayed as if walking on a cloud of coloured wires, with a text balloon on the floor behind it, reading: “I killed my mother” presenting the figure walking out of the hostage situation, which had concluded in the killing of its alleged creators, god and the Westernized woman.

As if walking on this ‘mystical cloud’ of wires, between reality and imagination, life and death, the doll in the installation also repeated the concept of the abject, anticipating for a neutral world based on human materiality or object-hood. The performance of enclosing the audience with nets and taking them back to their childhood and materialistic origin with the sounds of toys aimed to create an experienced situation but it also linked the dimension of the video screen and what is happening inside it to the physical dimension of the theatre room; furthermore, my colleague and I played the role of tricksters or prophets between the two dimensions of the video and the lecture room, repeating the power which the self-contradictory doll has in being polymorphic and reaching opposing groups.

This project presented three dimensions of reality: the dimension of the theatre room, presented by the live performers; the video dimension or the non-physical, represented by the figures in the video; and the physical but inanimate dimension embodied by the doll’s installation in the gallery. However, the first two dimensions aimed to be presented as one animate level, the level of the living doll, while the second dimension of the inanimate doll’s installation presented the doll in its still status. All the dimensions expand to fit the original general state of a doll, that which is in between reality and imagination provoking the original nature of human beings standing in between the material and the concept. Nonetheless, this project presents a transitional piece leading the practice-based research towards Chapter Two on the resemblance of the doll to humans and indicating towards Chapter Three on the use of the doll.



The Burden of Royalty, back, 2011.

2.6 Conclusion

In the Arab world – Lebanon in particular – local art is largely shaped by the political instability of the landscape. Constant hostility in this part of the world not only actively influences the process of creating art and the finished product itself, but also has the potential to play a significant role in influencing and provoking cultural perceptions. A Lebanese artist may be inclined to feel a sense of satisfaction with respect to the output of contemporary art in Lebanon, in relation with the art being produced in other corners of the Arab world. However, in forming this opinion, they may also overlook the fact that Lebanon's status as a nexus of contemporary Arab art is solely due to the scattered initiatives of individuals who are seldom able to find support for their projects among even the most liberal of Lebanese, let alone within the flux of socio-political conflict therein.

In my art practice I seek an independent form of inquiry and research. Among the few Lebanese artists and filmmakers who take a similar path in their practice are Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige. Their projects are often reflective of an incisive investigation encompassing a range of cultural observations and historical representations within a Lebanese context. Their meticulously researched projects, as well as their experiments with various theories and interdisciplinary mediums particular to their country have pushed the borders of the practice of art as it is known in Lebanon today, opening new portals for understanding the position and culture of Lebanon, and questioning and influencing the local perception of art.

The Bird's Eye View Festival in London, with its mandate of highlighting the works of female Arab filmmakers, recently featured Hadjithomas and Joreige's 2012 film, *Lebanese Rocket Society*, a documentary tracing the history of the Lebanese space programme of the 1960s from its humble beginnings to its sudden end. As Hadjithomas and Joreige show, though Lebanon was the first country in the Middle East to produce its own rockets and initiate a space program, the story of its rocketeers is little known among the general public, and is often met with sarcasm and disbelief at best. Thus, inspired by the image of a stamp featuring a Lebanese rocket in *The Vehicle* – a book edited by Lebanese artist Akram Zaatari – and wanting to bring to light the forgotten story of the country's 'Rocket Society', the artists set out to make a documentary in 2009.



Manoug Manougian and the Lebanese Rocket Society, courtesy of the artists.

The Lebanese Civil War left the country in what can be best described as a state of collective amnesia, washing away all traces of the ‘Space Race’ of the 60s from public memory. As a result, Hadjithomas and Joreige felt forced to put together and artistically re-interpret hints and leftover ‘clues’ to reconstruct the story of a real, experienced memory, which had all but sunk into oblivion. Serving as an almost hallucinatory tale for the ears of the Lebanese public, *Lebanese Rocket Society* is not only an investigation into the history of the Lebanese space program, but also a reflection on the notions of ambition, destruction, and reconstruction.

Beginning with a focus on the small team of motivated and determined Armenian students of Beirut’s Haigazian University and their ‘coach’, professor Manoug Manougian, the artists highlight the widespread support of the Rocket Society, as well as its peaceful, scientific aims. With little resources at hand, Manougian and his team created fuel from raw material, and successfully launched several rockets, each of which attained new heights as their experiments progressed. Gradually, the project expanded to include researchers from other universities in Lebanon and the surrounding region, turning into a country wide initiative of national importance. After the launch of several larger experimental rockets— one of which almost landed in nearby Cyprus caused international concern, the Lebanese army also stepped in, in the hope of advancing its artillery. However, due to increasing international pressure, especially from France and Israel (according to Manougian) the dream – for whatever reasons – came to an abrupt end in the late 60s, in an era of national and regional conflicts, and during the zenith of the pan-Arab dream, spearheaded by Gamal Abdel Nasir.



Lebanese Stamp from the 1960s.

Throughout the film, Hadjithomas and Joreige map out the history of modern Lebanon from within a void of public forgetfulness. After asking questions regarding the image of the proverbial rocket and what it once represented, the artists embark on a mission of spreading public awareness of the space programme of the 60s, reflecting Lebanon's heterogeneity, energy, and political worries, both then and now. *Lebanese Rocket Society* is not an ordinary documentary, however. Here, the artists go beyond simply retelling the story of the Rocket Society to actively re-imagine it, as if it were never snatched from Lebanon's collective memory and buried during the Civil War. In their approach, Hadjithomas and Joreige use art as a tool for thinking, investigating, and perhaps most importantly, positively intervening in popular Lebanese culture. *Lebanese Rocket Society* is not only an investigation into the history of the Lebanese space program, but also a reflection on the notions of ambition, destruction, and reconstruction.

Along with the documentary, Hadjithomas and Joreige have produced various artworks, each serving as a contemporary record of the past achievements of the Rocket Society. As well, in the documentary, the artists depict their reconstruction of Manougian's original eight metre-long Cedar 4 rocket in Beirut, which they later install in the courtyard of the Haigazian University. Painted in white to symbolise the peaceful ambitions of the Rocket Society, the construction of the rocket was no easy feat, particularly in the context of contemporary Beirut, with its myriad Government organisations rife with bureaucracy. After finally receiving all the necessary paperwork and stamped approvals required to build and transport the rocket throughout Beirut, Hadjithomas and Joreige were forced to endure the arduous process yet again, when the Lebanese Government collapsed in June of 2011. Nonetheless, the artists manage to pull through, deconstructing and reconstructing visual Lebanese symbols and reintroducing them publicly in the

process.

Though one expects a sort of finale here, with the reconstructed rocket back in its proper place serving as a reminder of the splendour of the 60s, the artists' work is far from complete. Rather, as the film turns into an animation, they strive to depict a possible Lebanese future, showing what the country may have looked like had the Rocket Society continued with its experiments. In the year 2025, as they show, Lebanon is a highly-advanced nation with state-of-the-art technology and facilities, sending rockets not only into the sky, but into space as well. In this futuristic world, the story of the Rocket Society is but a mere fragment of history, regarded with nostalgia. While this future is certainly admirable, one cannot help but feel saddened at what Lebanon could have become, had its ambitions not been abruptly halted.



Restaged No. 7, C-print on dibond, 2012, Courtesy of the artists and CRG Gallery, New York. *The Lebanese Rocket Society:*

Far from remaining in the recesses of a forgotten past, Hadjithomas and Joreige transform the little-known story of Lebanon's Rocket Society into a thing of fantasy and wonder, seemingly belonging to an impossible utopian ideal. Confronting public amnesia through traversing its emptiness, the artists provocatively question the ambiguity and ambivalence of the collective Lebanese memory with respect to its glorious, not-too-distant past, striving to resurrect it in a contemporary context. In the process, they launch their own dreamlike rockets in the Lebanese skies overhead, which have long been blanketed with political and cultural conflicts, bringing out of the darkness a lived dream which until only recently seemed like an imagined illusion.

Within this framework, my studio practice throughout this project intended to establish cultural Spectacles extending the allegory of the “Muslim” doll as a spectacular object, ultimately aiming to accentuate the outspread-ing of its manifestation as a theological and cultural medium. I aimed to recreate the role of this doll: first in its liminal cultural position as conserva-tive and cosmopolitan at once, as well as, its vague position as a theological medium within Islamic parallel universes that interrelate with today’s cul-tural contestation. Therefore, I have used the doll directly and conceptually in my studio practice as a catalyst for exploring theory and encompassing cultural representations specific to current Lebanon. In the process, I aimed to reconstruct visual symbols and re-introduce them, to provoke the ready-made visual symbolic and experiment with it; ultimately opening up new perspectives for understanding and questioning the position and culture of Lebanon today and further inspiring the limits of art as it is perceived.

Toys are seemingly innocent but ultimately powerful cultural objects specifically in the context of contemporary Lebanon. For example, in Lebanon Sheikh Ahmad al Assir and the porn star singer Myriam Klink were once accused of being involved together romantically. He is the head of one of the recently popular Islamists groups, while she is the new Lebanese Lady Gaga. Klink performs in a shiny, long-sleeved bikini popping up from be-tween burning cement cottages, holding a machine-gun and pretending to be singing. Whereas, Assir in his full white Abbaya, appears holding plastic toy guns and preaching loudly from behind his thick long beard. Klink’s logo is “Klinkstan”; a country using her own name, perhaps inspired by the name Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, Assir is called publicly the “King of Toys”, for he stands out as the public figure who brought toys to political and cultural conflict in Lebanon.

Although, most news agencies did not take Assir seriously, he finally man-aged to capture the lights especially by combining in his character an Islamist extremity of conservative rules with an outgoing modern image. Photos of the Sheikh in the media portray him playing football, cycling and swimming; attempting to tone down the strictness of his conformist Islam. As a result, unfortunately, this Sheikh became known as a joke in Lebanon; but this is not the only reason why the Lebanese public had not yet digested this figure as one of its uncountably respected political personas. To begin with Ahmad al Assir popped up on the Lebanese media in 2012, holding plastic toy guns and threatening political and religious figures of other sects with a provoking language, over the famous toy gun.



Assir holding the toy gun in Lebanon 2012, (The Daily Star/Zaatari).

The toy gun firstly got known when a Member of the Parliament in Egypt held it up during the People's Assembly in 2012 claiming that this toy was offensive to the Egyptian Muslim culture. This toy had also been a controversial object in the increasing tensions between the Shiite and Sunni Muslims throughout the Arab region. Saudi Arabia, as well as the United Arab Emirates, had removed nearly 1,600 of this same toy gun off its shelves. These toys made their way to Lebanon as significant objects, when the Sunni preacher, Assir, raised the plastic toy and threatened the Shiite figures to urgently deal with this toy gun claiming that it features an audio recording that insults Aisha, the prophet's wife. Aisha Bint Abi Baker is less popular among the Shiites sect of Islam since she opposed Ali Ibn Abi Taleb from becoming Caliph after the prophet's death, which consequently caused the division of Islam into Sunnis and Shiites.

During his Friday Sermon, Assir announced: "If you do not take heed of this issue I will not let you sleep at night so long as I live," (Daily Star, 2012). The Daily Star also reports that the preacher declared his means as peaceful, seemingly disorienting the great ghost of the civil war which is ever-waiting to strike. Following this, Lebanon's General Security as well as the highest Sunni authority in Lebanon Dar al Fatwa, rejected Assir's accusation as unfounded and after investigations both parties confirmed that the toy plays: "Go, go and take the hostages." Nevertheless, this toy gun is a significant object in the cultural contestation between the Lebanese Muslim groups, further developing into physical armed clashes.

Chapter 3

Revealing: The Human Resemblance:

3.1 Introduction

"Let's be clear: the concept of the Young-Girl is obviously not a gendered concept." Tiqqun, *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl*.

The Hadeeth tells us of the time when the devil *Iblis* was ordered by *Allah* to reveal its true self to the Prophet. The conversation between the Prophet and *Iblis* goes as follows:

"The Prophet: Tell me, Accursed one, with who do you share your table?"

Iblis: The man who eats from usury!

The prophet: And who shares your bed?"

Iblis: The drunkard!

The Prophet: And your messenger?"

Iblis: The sorcerer!

The Prophet: Where, then, do your sons seek shelter in the heat of the day and when the warm, poisoned wind blows from the south?

Iblis: Under men's nails!

The Prophet: Accursed One! What can break your back?

Iblis: The neighing horses taking part in Holy War!

The Prophet: How many things have you asked God?

Iblis: Ten!

The Prophet: What are they, then, Accursed One?

Iblis: I asked him to let me associate with the sons of Adam, and with their good and progenitor, and he associated me with them. And he revealed in his Holy book. 'He associated himself with their good and their progenitor and made them fine promises. But the promise of the devil is only an insane temptation!' I asked him to let me eat my fill of whatever had not been purified by lawful alms and also to eat all food with which usury and unlawfulness have been mingled and also all goods that have not been blessed by invoking the name of God to protect them against me. Every man, too, who sleeps with his wife and who omits to protect himself against me, by invoking the name of God, well, I shall sleep with his wife at the same time he and the child that shall be born to him will be submissive and obedient to me. Every man who mounts a beast and goes off to carry out some act that is not lawful, I shall accompany him. God himself has revealed it: 'Urge them to foot or to horse!' I asked God to assign me a residence and he created the hammam! I asked him for a temple and he created souks! I asked for a Holy Scripture and he created Poetry! I asked him for a call to my prayer and he created the bagpipes! I asked him for bed companions and he created drunkards!" (Bouhdiba, P. 63-65).

This conversation dissects the conflict between good and evil according to Islam. While evil crawls on and into the mundane of everyday life, Muslims accordingly, are well armed with purification techniques protecting them and maintaining their purity. Pollution originates from physical excretions, bodily liquids and dirt; for example, with the devil finding shelter under men's nails, men should cut their nails making sure devils do not find room under

their nails. In Islam, the process of maintaining personal hygiene transforms into further preventing evil potentialities. Nonetheless, Impurity, is also conceptual and moral, for the “The Prophet: What then, can turn you away from your activity?” The devil is scared away by meeting a learned man, who is a man cultivated in Islamic culture; likewise the Muslim prayers at dawn pierce the devil’s eye. The devil is drawn away when Islam is practiced.

As a religion Islam is holistic, generating theological meanings for every single symbol in life, signifying boundaries between what is abject and what is allowed and recommended, and diminishing distances between the high sky and the low earth. The wide array of pollutions makes human beings vulnerable to evil; only by regular physical and spiritual cleansing are we rescued. Generally Islam praises men over women who are presented as a source of evil, temptation and pollution. The *Quran* states in *Sura A Nisaa* that men are prior to women; they are their managers and that the righteous women are therefore obedient, and those that are rebellious are to be banished to their couches and beaten up. Women in Islam are considered as subsidiary creatures reflecting what is believed to be evil and devilish.

Islam tells us that a woman is bound to obey her husband since marriage is a religious duty, as it is further explained in the hadeeth, that a woman must never refuse her husband, even on a camel’s back. This religious primacy of man over woman creates an inevitable social hierarchy making gender a cultural product within a society that locates women in a lower position. Although, Islam and the *Quran* are interpreted and expressed differently by the various contesting groups, they nonetheless, all agree on the position of women as an obedient character, as a wife and a daughter. Islam emphasizes the impurity of the abject or *Najas*, consequently, locating women in a secondary social position from men based on their bodily functions.

The feminine resemblance of this doll serves my project from the already decided standpoint promoted with this object as a representation of a woman. Furthermore, the significance of the role of women in reference to the cultural contestation within the particular setting of current Lebanon gives the self-contradictory doll a critical role in this contestation. My research will go beyond discussing what is fair or not to women and their rights; instead, I aim to view the object that is this self-contradictory doll within already existing cultural positions and to place it in different contexts and unfold its connotations within each. Nonetheless, the self-contradictory “Muslim” doll represents in its physical construction a symbol of a female with associations specific to women.

Although, I will not deliberate on the unending debate around what is labeled as the Arab Muslim woman, I will trace the change of her role in current Lebanese culture, to locate more clearly the significance of this object within the cultural contestation. This chapter entitled “Revealing: The Human Resemblance” firstly presents the ongoing controversies around general human resemblance in Islam that make the very existence of the self-contradictory doll a challenge to Islamisation, which, essentially prohibits figuration. On the other hand, this doll also defies Westernization with its Islamic outfits. Accordingly, the self-contradictory doll sustains its liminal location between Westernization and Islamisation. From this angle, this chapter develops towards the doll’s embodiment of a woman’s figure and its implications, to highlight the prominence of its role as essentially being an object targeted at young girls and mothers to be.

The cultural perception of the Arab Muslim woman, which this doll reiterates, situates both, the woman and her resemblance, in an abject position; thus yielding to the revelation of the critical influence of this doll as an abject medium in the contestation. Accordingly, the art piece concluding this chapter uses the self-contradictory doll as a communication tool to connect with god. The art piece is based on the self-contradictory doll’s connotation of woman as a medium with theological implications reflecting current times. Thus the work presents this doll as a further deviation from the established norm of women as weak entities within our context, instead expresses their position as powerful and evil mediums.

3.2 Repetition of the Woman

The self-contradictory doll’s physical resemblance to woman in relation to Islamic theology imposes a certain evil quality to the doll, being, an inanimate object as well as a figuration of a woman. Islam operates in everyday life, since, the religion itself is holistic with Allah watching every move and Muslims practicing “virtue” through their every act. Islamic theology distinguishes between four sorts of creatures: the *malaeka* (angels), the *ins* (men), the *jinn* (djinnns) and the *shaitan* (devils). All are animated, responsible, and with the exception of angels, sexual beings, and under these four sorts of creatures there are various additional theological characters (Bouhdiba, 58). This diversity is structured in a hierarchy of creation.

In this universe human beings are at the peak and inanimate objects at the base, knowing that the base is the lowest and most disgraceful position occupied by generally devils and their associates, (Murata and Chittick, 118). On the other hand, these theological creatures are able to interact with human beings, since they are most of the time invisible; they exist on the same dimension as humans and further have access back and forth to their separate worlds. One *hadith* tells us that when *Iblis* saw that Adam was hollow, he realized that he had been created with no self-control over his sexual appetite and also vulnerable towards being haunted and controlled. The interactions between theological creatures and human beings are intense, for example, *jinn*s can have intercourse with human beings and some even indulge in marriages.

Therefore, it is essential in Islam to have a specific *doaa* for every action, insuring the clear and clean boundaries between what is Muslim and what might cause an evil theological creature to interact with us. Islam provides a system of complex values and practices that reinforces social rules aimed to manage *Najas*. Accordingly, every act is symbolic and externalized as a ritual and meaning within Islamic order. In her book *Purity and Danger* Mary Douglas asserts the idea of order as purity: "Dirt is essentially disorder...it exists in the eye of the beholder...In chasing dirt, in papering, decorating, tidying, we are not governed by anxiety to escape disease, but are positively reordering our environment, making it conform to an idea," (2). Similarly, in Islam, disorder holds danger and is associated with all that is evil and blasphemous.

Therefore, the self-contradictory doll, embodying ambiguous cultural symbols in between what is considered Muslim and what is not, is inferior to a clear order and purity and thus is blasphemous. The concept of *Najas* reflects all impure, polluted, faithless and wicked properties in a person or an object; the *Quran* states: "O you who have attained to faith those who ascribe divinity to aught beside God are nothing but impure and so they shall not approach the Inviolable House of Worship from this year onwards and should you fear poverty, then [know that] in time God will enrich you out of His bounty, if He so will for, verily, God is all-knowing, wise," (9:28). This verse highlights the impurity of non-believers, since *Najas* and impurity are physical as well as conceptual aspects; thus, the unbelievers or those stained by *Najas* are strictly forbidden near the *Ka'abah* and Mecca.

Yet, the self-contradictory doll is sold today in Mecca as well as Lebanon, promoted for Arab "Muslim" girls. Even though, this doll proposes a ready-

made setting for the devils' and *Najas* impurities', it is widely presented as a representation of the 'pure and true' identity of Arab Muslim girls. On the other hand, freezing the representation of life inside an inanimate object produces a feeling of intellectual uncertainty, implying further complexities of the self-contradictory doll. For, the doll's recurrence of human figuration can mystify the distinction between imagination and reality, further, striking as a replacement of the full functions of the human this doll is representing. Consequently, this doll appeals, to a certain extent, as an object that one does not know one's way about, adding a daemonic characteristic to the doll's human resemblance and linking it to blasphemy in Islam.

This feeling of unfamiliarity has been described as a psychoanalytic condition, relating to, as Freud, Jentsch, Rank and others list, dolls that replicate the human form, describing how children hope that their dolls are alive and how children also maintain a belief that they can bring inanimate dolls to life. This essentially contradicts the Islamic belief that *Allah* is the only creator, and that what is unknown to humans is a product of *Iblis*, making the doll a medium for profanity. The self-contradictory doll displays the blasphemy of human figuration, yet, it offers at the same time Islamic elements aimed against profanity, such as the veil, Islamic outfits and the marketing of the doll as a "Muslim" one. Hence, the self-contradictory doll reflects conceptual as well as tangible impurity while at the same time suggesting mental and physical purity.

This object exists at one and the same time in a hesitant and dubious dimension, one that is scrambled with both opposites at once. The unstable cultural position of this doll gives it an abject social status, being rejected and accepted by the main cultural groups and their social norms. Within the liminal space of the cultural spectrum of Arab Muslim society, the abject self-contradictory doll further holds paradoxical relations to its context. For this doll is at the intersection of symbolizing a woman abstractly, and offering a physical woman's body, thus threatening human sense of identity since it is in between what is real and what is imagined by society.

The biological nature of the woman's body has often been correlated with a social opposition between male and female constructing gender differences in Western philosophy on embodiment. While dolls are exaggerated in their beauty, women are also expected and imagined to treat themselves likewise; being highly maintained to cover any traces of their physical nature. A woman is a symbol of a doll; born with a female sex but publicly imagined as a doll with imposed particular social requirements, as de Beauvoir

expressed it: “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman,” (295). Similarly, the self-contradictory doll is a symbol of a woman, made to have her physical resemblance and imagined to be a woman. This doll reflects a clean woman’s body, exaggerated in perfection and beauty, additionally without the woman’s bodily functions, that essentially compose abject qualities according to Julia Kristeva.

Nonetheless representing a woman’s body, the self-contradicting doll is at the same time projecting the woman’s physical functions since the sign and its meaning in culture are interrelated. Kristeva’s abject notions exist at the meeting point between life and death. The concept of uncertainty intimidates the sense of cleanliness and propriety, what in Douglas’ explanation is called “order”. Additionally, abjection also has a strong feminist context, since female bodily functions are reminders of physical death. According to Kristeva though, no matter how much we try to exclude abject qualities, they still exist because they are how our bodily mechanism functions. This echoes the concept of *Najas* in Islam since *Najas* is also associated with the impurity of bodily functions and the necessity of *Tahara* rituals.

These rituals are essentially a process of ongoing defence practices targeted against the impossibility of ridding oneself of impurities once and for all. The self-contradictory doll projects blasphemy and pollution because it is an insecure embodiment of a state that is in between life and death, human and non-human; but it is also a hybrid of a Muslim and non-Muslim which further confirms the jurisdiction against its purity. The self-contradictory doll reflects ambiguity and mobility. While it rejects the stable social norms of both contesting cultural groups, it rejects their fixed imaginary interpretation of women in society. Luce Irigaray, like Lacan, Beauvoir and many others, insists on the impossibility of returning to a body outside of its representation within culture. Accordingly, the self-contradictory doll presents embodiment as a product of a situation.

Thus, this doll in its fluid position can subvert and reinvent social interpretations concerning women starting from the positions of both contesting cultural groups in which this doll, representing women, is in between. “Two lips touching...Her sexuality, always at least double, goes even further; it is plural...the pleasure of the vaginal caress does not have to be substituted for that of the clitoral caress. They each contribute irreplaceably to women’s pleasure.” (Irigaray, 252). This explanation of women’s genitals as two instead of one, aims to represent the female and male organs existing as part of the female organ without boundaries differentiating them; like two sides

of the same coin and thus like the self-contradictory doll combining two opposites.

Similarly, the self-contradictory doll presents a morphology of the body reflected in a morphology of a certain thought process. While this doll acknowledges the difference between the two cultural groups, it maintains a recognition of the ability of bodies to shape thought. Likewise, Douglas argues that disorder is dangerous and powerful since it can be used by cultures to reorganize a former order, demonstrating how "...the Pangolin cult out of many other cults...invite their initiates to turn round and confront the categories on which their culture has been built up and to recognize them for the fictive, man-made, arbitrary creations they are," (171). The self-contradictory doll maintains potentialities of affecting the existing public order of the two contesting cultural groups in contemporary Lebanon, being a body reflecting disorder.

It can be inferred that the self-contradictory doll is an offensive object for Islam; thus, its existence in Arab Muslim culture today presents an emerging medium working in the cultural contestation against what is often called traditionalist Islam supporting the cultural space between it and modern contemporary Muslims. The liminal space in between the two contesting cultural positions to which this doll belongs is gradually transforming strict conservative Islam into a modern interpretation updated to fit the Other Spectacle, explained in Chapter One, in an abject presence. This doll projects blasphemous qualities; for being a physical representation of a woman, considered to be in subsidiary cultural position along with devils and inanimate objects, also within various unstable positions, holding rich potentialities of transforming the existing cultural imaginaries starting from the possibilities of disorder.

Purification is essentially an act of metaphysical order aiming to sublimate the body to serve the soul. Therefore, the concept of pollution is not just limited to bodily functions but stretches further towards the thoughts and desires a Muslim might have. Consequently, Muslims generally have keen self-discipline with which they order their observation and control the slightest details threatening purity. The notion of the abject qualities of the self-contradictory doll leads to considering this object as an answer to separating pollution from women and purifying them. Firstly, the self-contradictory doll is free from bodily functions, from biological fluids and organs, which give it power to force what is regarded as abject away from women. However, this doll can be sold with a doll child and a doll husband, as is the case of Jamila

and her family, thus, proposing a specific abstract narrative where this doll symbolizes the image of the perfect woman in a modern Lebanese culture.

The self-contradictory doll is promoted to have a human's lifestyle- to shower, eat and live an Arab Muslim woman's life. This doll projects an abstract dimension where women are free from the abject; however, the self-contradictory doll replaces this abjection. In other words, when this doll conceptually separates the abject from women, it absorbs it and becomes the abject. It is then implied that the self-contradictory doll can be considered a device for purification from the abject with a similar function as that of the toilet, the cemetery and the *hijab*. To treat yourself as a doll, you are then encouraged to deal with the abject, pass it on to the self-contradictory doll as Muslims pass it on to the veil. This doll is an object embodying an unattainable perfection and a longing for an unachievable experience.

Likewise, the loop of purifying oneself in the *Tahara* rituals can then be adjacent to a loop in which the self-contradictory doll turns the abject on and off similarly depending on delicate procedures based on careful ideas and thoughts from the holder. This can be achieved through a creative ritual, where the self-contradictory doll becomes a medium for provoking abstract narratives of the perfect and pure Arab Muslim woman, while at one and the same time, maintaining its impure qualities. The use of the self-contradictory doll as an abject medium, which I further discuss in Chapter Three, can assert and re-enforce the purity of the Arab Muslim woman which this doll symbolizes and abstractly replaces.

The internal contradictions of this doll stress its status as a polluted object; in turn, its pollution is however directed towards a re-imagining of a purity of the Arab Muslim woman in society. For the self-contradictory doll being equal to the devil and to women and being a device for purifying the abject thus holds a critical role within contemporary Lebanese culture. The state of the self-contradictory doll, like that of the *hijab*, abides to the control and intention of its holder. As a result, the doll is pure and polluted at the same time; just as the hijab holds the physical smells of its carrier's head and the oils from her hair, the doll absorbs the abject of the woman. It too needs washing every now and then, a different kind of cleansing, that of a conceptual dimension, for the self-contradictory doll is an artefact possessing a divine force that can spiritually cleanse one. This doll then presents a physical abject, since, the veil presents a reminder of our materiality. Additionally, the self-contradictory doll also abides to the intentional and conceptual abject of its user; therefore, it can be used as an abject medium towards blasphemy

or as an abject medium asserting purification through blasphemy. In turn, art can function in a similar way as the self-contradictory doll function in culture; using abjection, blasphemy and superstition.

Within the context of contemporary Lebanon, very few artists- no more than ten- use performance art as their medium of choice; that most are female artists implies that performance gives women a certain outlet that is otherwise largely absent as a civil force in Lebanese society. Marya Kazoun is one such artist and her work engages feminist trajectories from the vantage point of her Lebanese Muslim culture, examining its complexities through a non-conventional approach. While most Middle Eastern female artists are currently struggling with contemporary significations of the hijab, the abuse and the subsidiary unfair treatment of females, Kazoun explores these issues from a spiritual and theological angle, as if going to the source of the cultural problems women are facing today.



Time After Self-Portrait II, Marya Kazoun, 2012, courtesy of the artist.

To do this she begins from the “biological feminine” not directly and literally, but like my piece “Neutralizing” of Chapter One the link is conceptual through the notion of the creator mother—what it signifies and the superstitious cultural baggage it imposes (Beauvoir, 1949). In general, Kazoun’s performances tend to capture a metaphoric female existence in light of the cultural issues surrounding this corporal existence. The performance act itself in Kazoun’s art is usually applied within fragile, superstitious, and imagined realms that she creates through glass and fabric installations. Pieces of glass are scattered dramatically into a scene of destruction encompassed by organic shapes made from sparkling beads, glossy fabrics, plastic bags, glass and other mixed media.

These small sculptures are often devoid of vibrant color, generally black or white, increasing the subtle gleams emitted by the different textures they are made of. In "Self-Portrait" and "Time After Self-Portrait I and II" (2003-2012), Kazoun's work shifts from performing on her own to including more participants. In 2003 and 2004, her "Self-Portrait" performances presented the artist alone in the middle of installation spaces as she created sculptures on-site and immersed in a dreamy setting. During the performance, she appears as part of her fashioned landscape as if one of its creatures—the largest in size. In 2003, "Self Portrait" took place in the interior of a bedroom with stitched creatures spread on its furniture. These installations thus become interiors bounded by the exhibition space.



Self Portrait, Marya Kazoun, 2004, courtesy of the artist.

The artist executes her performances within these constructed incubators, suggesting a metaphorical birth process corresponding to the female womb. In turn, the audience plays the role of spectators/ voyeurs, representing an embodiment of the exhibition space, and ultimately the public perception of the image of the artist since these works are initially self-referential. Accordingly, the overall artwork operates on the tensions between spaces and the

dynamics of perception; the inner and outer of the installations, echoing the internal and the external of the female.

The same performance was developed in 2009 with the artist no longer on her own but in collaboration with additional performers. Nonetheless, her role as the creator is reinforced since these creature-performers are covered from head to toe and pumping with life in outfits that she has fastened by hand. Only Kazoun's face is visible while she sews additional fabric sculptures. Several performers move around before the audience and then transition to the general public, taking the performance from the intimacy of the exhibition space to the imagined social realm outside. Kazoun's 2009 performance relocates the role of the audience from passive spectators to active participants, for her creatures now interact with viewers on the streets, buildings and gardens of a public space.



Self Portrait, Marya Kazoun, installation and performance at Flash Art Fair 2004, Image copyright the artist. Photo credit Luca Casonato.

The 'outer' is no longer confined to the inner of the gallery space and its specific visitors but has become the public external. This is in contrast to her performances of 2003 and 2004 in which the work played on the tensions between two inners, the inner of the installation space and the inner of the exhibition space. Thus, the 2009 performance moves from the private zone into the public zone and with this the perception of the female as depicted by Kazoun interrupts and confronts the exact socio-political context that she is critiquing.



Time After Self Portrait II, Marya Kazoun, performance at Beirut Exhibition Center, 2012, Image copyright the artist.

Kazoun translates elements of the feminine superstitious and its “evil” connotations from the perspective of various contemporary Islamic ideologies through notions of creation and identity formation. The artist acknowledges a social existence that is positioned as an evil, perilous feminine and further exaggerates it through the visual with the multiplying and spreading of her glass-fabric creatures as fragments of her culturally “evil” existence. These installations within the performance, in turn, generate landscapes or “Personal Living Spaces,” as Kazoun describes them, positing the superstitious in a dichotomy with the role of the woman as a creator-mother.



Time After Self Portrait, Marya Kazoun, collaborative performance at Marquis Miami, 2009. Image copyright the artist.

While Lebanese artist Zena el Khalil projected the Middle Eastern female as an omen that alludes to wellness and projects the notion of the mother as a source of love and security in her performances “The Pink Bride of Peace”

(2003 and 2006), Kazoun presents this concept as it is perceived in the wider milieu of Middle Eastern social institutions with a source of uncertainty and vagueness of boundaries between the visible and the invisible, the public and the private, and the finite physical and the infinite spiritual. Kazoun places the feminine as it is a source of life, and inverts it as that for death as well. The birth of life is the birth of death.



Time After Self Portrait, Marya Kazoun, collaborative performance at Marquis Miami, 2009. Image copyright the artist.

In doing so, Kazoun's work taps into the allegorical concept of what can be termed the "fantastic feminine"; extending from religion and tradition and between the biological and social image of the female. Kazoun particularly demonstrates the ability of the female body to give life through birth and to symbolize physical mortality through the merging of the non-spaces between life and death, thus presenting life within life and a certain power related to creation and destruction and the corresponding imaginaries of existence. The artist projects the image of an inner being, slipping between a pure creator and a malicious female, simultaneously combining the two as one. Unlike the Lebanese artist Rima Najde's work "Dress Me How You Like" (2012), where she invited the audience to dress her with outfits from the Western imaginary of Orientalism, Kazoun's stitching of her performance outfits emphasizes elements from a personal interpretation of the cultural imaginary.



Dress Me How You Like, Rima Nadjé, 2012, courtesy the artist.

Najde's work corresponds directly to the literal image of the exotic Middle Eastern woman from a Western stereotypical angle; Kazoun alternatively plays along the lines of Arab superstition and Muslim tradition to develop a fantastical visual vocabulary, which, although relatively new to the current Middle Eastern setting, is nonetheless ideologically familiar to the philosophies of this setting. With local feminist voices increasingly challenging the social disparities and direct discrimination that Arab women face, specifically as a reaction to the growing number of Islamic groups dominating public discourse, one re-questions the meaning of feminism, religion and activism.

Thus it is only logical to compare the "Brides of Peace" from the Medhat Basha market in Damascus, to Khalil's artwork "The Pink Bride of Peace", and the actions of the Arab members of FEMEN to Najde's "Dress Me How You Like" to highlight feminism as an epistemological process in order to provoke the pre-received knowledge surrounding women. Within a Middle Eastern setting that is rich in superstition and make-believe traditions, the performances of Kazoun expand the challenging of ready-made knowledge on women towards a 'magical,' mythological realm, provoking its social sphere on a political level while disrupting the aura that exists around this very sphere.



The Pink Bride of Peace, Zena el Khalil, 2003 and 2006, courtesy the artist.

The tensions between the religious and the modern within Arab Muslim culture in Lebanon proves the failure of a harmony and totality between the practical part and the theoretical part of Islam, as a result causing further cultural clashes and contradictions. However, within this cultural jumping between the different social positions the self-contradictory doll appears to be reflecting its setting and interacting with it as an active object: one that is preaching the elimination of the call for one single identity and creating a new one through combining both by reaching back to the time before the Lebanese civil war, when these identities were still moderate. Self-contradiction can be a combination between two opposite extremes: one that accepts figuration and one that prohibits it and considers it blasphemous.

Moreover, this doll shares properties from both cultural forces; while it is veiled and presenting Islamic symbols, it is still a figuration of a human being and therefore blasphemous. To say that the self-contradictory doll purely represents one extreme is not valid since it presents the two opposing forces at one and the same time. Therefore, not only does it cause a confusion of identity and a creation of a new one, but the self-contradictory doll is also a proof of cultural contestation between the two different groups.

It joins them together unwillingly, even though the two resistances contest each other. The self-contradictory doll is the case of the liminal space between cultural positions, those that are Muslim but equally enjoying drinking alcohol, yet, severely protecting their religious values, keeping what they choose to accept and what they reject of religion an open option based on the different and sometimes personal interpretations of their beliefs. This liminal space of society, mostly evident in regions undergoing ideological clashes, like Lebanon, connects to and reinforces the Other Spectacle. The spectacle to which this doll belongs seeks to restructure the oppositions between blasphemy and religion aiming to update the status of conservative societies into being modern and religious at the same time.

In this sense the self-contradictory doll is a presentation of its setting and the confusion of combining two opposite extremes at once. James Clifford explains in his book that cultural difference is no longer a fixed state of stable differences between groups but rather that: "Twentieth-century identities no longer presuppose continuous cultures or traditions. Everywhere individuals and groups improvise local performances from (re)collected pasts, drawing on foreign media, symbols and languages," (14). Accordingly, this doll is a

muddled combination based on a proposed interpretation of Islamic contemporary values containing a meeting point between modernity and tradition.

The self-contradictory doll is a symbol of a veiled woman and the specific women this doll reflects are women belonging to the middle cultural group of our present context. This in-between space, which the self-contradictory doll encourages, is rich with potentialities and open to multiple possibilities. It embraces a perspective of totality rather than an assumed one belonging to a specific position. The self-contradictory doll represents an Arab Muslim woman immersed in uncertainties, mysteries and doubts. This object engages in discourses of cultural representation, disassembling, recreating, and shifting their poles achieving a space of “nothingness” where belonging to a particular cultural group disappears.

Within this state, different perspectives are revealed, for, it is only within such states where one has no status that one is able to experience the poetics of potentiality and view alternative perspectives. The poet John Keats described a state of willingness, also a life of revolution naming it “negative capability”, to embrace the unknown and the ambiguous in letters to his brothers in 1817; this same state of doubt is what the self-contradictory doll imposes and represents. The prohibition of figuration and the existence of the self-contradictory doll imply the sacrifice of allowing figuration in return for having the veil, an additional deal with religion in the practical interpretation of its theory within the current clash with modernity.

The self-contradictory doll functions as a symbol teaching children not only to become mothers but also specifically to become modern traditional mothers and preservers of their confused cultural identity; giving this doll an important role for existing as a confirmation of the vitality of asserting the jumbled nation belonging clearly neither to religion nor to blasphemy. Therefore, the self-contradictory doll is neither pure nor blasphemous because it exists as presence of a spectacle beyond the traditional dualistic nature of the world that has been inherited from the religious division of heaven and hell, a dualism being applied in radicalism today.

The self-contradictory doll is an object of the Other Spectacle which joins what is considered good and evil together and existing at once on earth. The significance of the role of women in contemporary Arab Muslim Lebanon reflects the critical role of the self-contradictory doll in cultural contestation. Two extremes occupy current Muslim society, as I have explained in Chapter One: those that embrace modernity and the differences and facing

them those who fiercely reject all its hints. Accordingly, the role of women has been divided into two positions: the mother and the mistress. The mother represents the conservative group, while, the mistress belongs to the Westernized one.

One group embraces all aspects of modern life, ranging from Western outfits, music, language and what they generally perceive as open-mindedness; the opposite group is continuously increasing their defense on traditions, values and what they describe as Arab Muslim. Some women react strictly to what they believe is their freedom and individuality that which retains their status as equal and independent from men through becoming excessively 'free' with a surplus flow of emancipated sexuality. On the other hand, other women have become keener on preserving their traditional identity, getting married, performing religious rituals, teaching their children the *Quran* and fiercely hanging on to every aspect of tradition. Now skirts are shorter and veils hide more and more of the woman.

A woman has become either a mistress or a humble wife. In a society that tolerates four wives for each man, women are responsible for the identity of the whole Arab Muslim nation, since, they are representatives of the core values of this nation. With the conflict between what is perceived as modern and blasphemous and what is perceived as traditional and backwards. Women, as Bouhdiba puts it "...guardians of tradition and of the collective identity..." (232). This leads to the critical role of the self-contradictory doll representing the Arab Muslim woman as a mistress and a mother at one and the same time.

The cultural multi-layering in contemporary Arab Muslim Lebanon consists of a unity of Islam as a submission to the will of *Allah* with a pluralization and divisions of different groups of Muslims each with their own differing social structures and interpretations of the *Quran*. Note that the variety of social groups within one Islam is best reflected in today's Lebanese society, a small country (10,450 square Kilometres) with relatively a large number of different Muslim sects among other different religions and their own sects and divisions. Within all this boiling of differences, the status of the woman, and that of the self-contradictory doll representing her, is another controversial issue viewed differently by the two main contesting Muslim societies. Nonetheless, while Angels are symbols representing states of sublimation, *Iblis* on the other hand, usually described as the fallen angel, a reject, a source of pollution and a de-masculinized creature, presents the impure, as well as women and dolls (being objects and objects resembling women as well).

Dolls serve as part of a defence mechanism against death, since, the contradiction between our limited physical bodies and our limitless conceptual world of creating meanings for symbols causes a crisis, usually termed as the crisis of the sign, because the first is bound to an end while the latter is not. For this reason, civilizations have created different cultural mechanisms of conceptually dealing with death and the self-contradictory doll can be viewed as part of these mechanisms.

These mechanisms are essentially targeted against mortality; this is the concept of Ernst Becker termed "The Denial of Death". The self-contradictory doll reflects a narrative beyond the dichotomy of life and death, the physical and the symbolic. This is based on the invention of meaning, for civilizations live on meaning; religions and social forms are reflections of projects beyond physical death. While everything in life is conditioned by death, human beings carry what Becker described as a Vital Lie which gives our lives a heroic meaning and makes us part of something beyond us and eternal. Human beings are able to reach beyond this split between the physical and the symbolic through the concept of Heroism, which is the continuity of a human's life through a symbolic abstract narrative.

Becker explains, "... to become conscious of what one is doing to earn his feeling of heroism is the main self-analytic problem of life," (11). Accordingly, the self-contradictory doll is associated with a Vital Lie which gives us the sense of doing something greater than our physical reality, a heroic meaning that keeps us immortal physically through a conceptual symbolic, and, this is because the self-contradictory doll is not just a nostalgic object belonging to an impossible beauty, but also because this doll has religious Islamic connotations. The self-contradictory doll is a symbol of the Islamic religion since its physical resemblance is associated with the heroism and Vital Lie specific to supporting Islam, as it is promoted. Religion can be explained as a presence of a superior eternal that we submit our individuality to in return of something greater than ourselves.

Sheldon Solomon proved in various experiments, presented by the documentary *Flight from Death: The Quest for Immortality* (2003) that human beings when reminded by their own death, show hostility and aggression towards people that do not possess their same beliefs; on the other hand, they show sympathy towards people sharing their ideology and reverence for it. Subsequently, those who are not Muslims, when reminded of death relate the self-contradictory doll with an enemy and express their viciousness towards

keepers of this doll. Similarly, this conflict within the multi-layering of Arab Muslim society in Lebanon yields to aggression between the Muslim groups that are either supporting or working against what is presented as modernity. In this context the self-contradictory doll becomes a signifier for aggression towards modernity and the blasphemous West by the group supporting and defending conservative Islamic tradition.

Likewise, this doll belonging to neither of these main opposing groups is also considered to be a symbol of aggression towards conventional Islam by the Westernized groups. Thus, this “Muslim” doll creates its own immortality project, displaying a combination of what is blasphemous and what is righteous, without blending them together, but, keeping to each their unique property and yet co-existing at once. As if understanding both positions and tolerating their combination together. The immortality project of the self-contradictory doll seeks immortality in objects on earth, by being a gadget that includes the spirituality of heaven with the materiality of hell, deconstructing their differences to reach an asymmetrical combination of both. Again, the self-contradictory doll is an evidence of the existence of the Other Spectacle and its dimensions existing in a time when global radicalism is perhaps most obvious.

3.3 Revealing: Lecture-performance

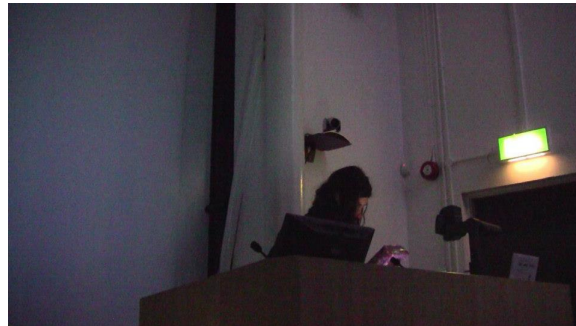
This project was part of the *Winchester School of Art Post Graduate Conference and Show 2012*, in which I have participated with the lecture-performance entitled "Revealing", and an interactive sound installation under the same title. This project aimed to position the audience in an experience of the current status of the self-contradictory doll in the Arab culture, with respect to Islam as it is applied today.

This lecture-performance was presented in 20 minutes, with a 10 minute discussion session with the audience following. The material used included: a Jamila doll in its box and a video. Firstly, this ritual started by turning the lights off and reading the back of the Jamila doll's box, which I have also included in the preface of this paper, in a low tone of voice. The reading was in English then in Arabic and states:

Jamila is a self-confident, young Arabic girl, married to her husband Jamil, whom she loves from the bottom of her heart. Having two little chil-

dren, a baby boy named Asad and a baby girl name Almira, she is a modern and fashionable mother with friends from all over the world. Jamila just loves meeting her two best friends, Sunyana from India, and Kareema from Egypt. The girls have fun dressing up and chatting about their latest fashion fads. Even though fashion is a great part of the girl's lives, Jamila also loves music, enjoys cooking, reading, shepherding her horses or going for a ride in her new Mercedes SLK. Come to Jamila's world and discover her wonderful life.

The reading of the doll's box is an introduction to the ritual, as a reminder of the religious *doaa*, in which a Muslim usually begins a prayer. This *doaa* was interrupted by slight technical problems related to the volume of the microphone; however, this added to the performance, which is primarily an interaction with the audience and the space. I explained this surprise technical failure as a struggle in communication with the world of spirits due to a possessed electronic device which further emphasized the whole performance as a ritual.



Revealing, Performance at WSA, 2012.

The reading was first in English and then in Arabic because in this order the English language does not exist for the sole reason of translation but for the benefit of communicating with the multi-cultural audience. Choosing not to read using the Arabic language first was to avoid the presence of the language difference for a translation purpose, instead, because the different languages aimed to capture the majority of English speaking audience at first, and then lead it towards the perspective of the Arab Muslim culture, by switching to the Arabic language and further enriching the ritual experience. This was achieved through uttering words that are mostly not comprehended by the majority of English speaking audience and adding a certain mystery to the ritual in its tensions between moving from the layer of the reality of the room, to the imaginary layer inside the video that is displayed as entering

into the doll's box.

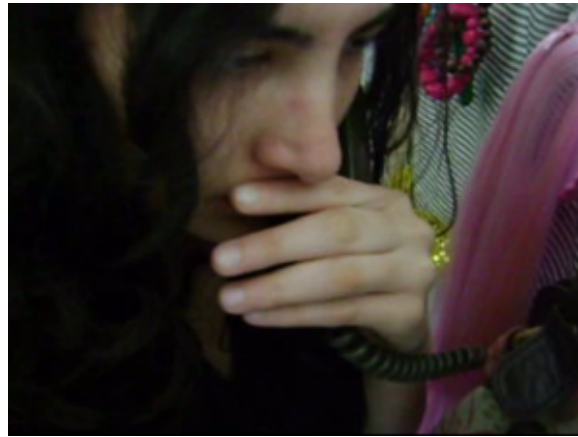
The Arabic language signified the move to a more specific cultural and symbolic context. On the other hand, the voice of god was also in English, used for translating the words in the *Quran* which are strictly in the Arabic language, since, in Islam there is a distinction between the *Quran* and a translation of it. The *Quran* being written in Arabic language is controlled by the lyrics of the structure of Arabic language which differs in its internal logic from English, mainly by suggesting more than one meaning for the same word. Therefore, every translation of the *Quran* is considered a different interpretation of it and holds different connotations. And this reflects the richness of variety of the intellectual history of Islam, for, the same verse is interpreted differently. Hence, when the lecture-performance translated the verses in the voice of god from Arabic to English, it interpreted them in the context of the doll in today's Arab culture.



Jamila in her box, 2012

After that, a video starts playing of me inside what is suggested to be the doll's box, with a handset of a landline phone connecting to an invisible god on the other end. In turn god is giving a speech about *Iblis*, heard throughout the lecture theatre in a loud shouting voice. The video, 12 minutes long, presented me inside a very narrow space listening to the phone which is extending out of a woman's handbag and on which god is giving the speech. The voice of god starts out loud, reading verses from the *Quran* in which god

is warning Man about *Iblis*. Near the end of the video, the screen becomes black, though, god's voice continues. Then after a minute god starts to speak hesitantly in an uncertain manner, as if in doubt of what he is saying. The speech goes as follows:



Revealing, video still, 2012.

“O you mankind eat of whatever is in the earth lawful and good. But do not closely follow the steps of Ash-shaytan. Surely he is an evident enemy to you.

O who have believed, enter into peacefulness. The whole of you, and do not ever follow the steps of As-shaytan. Surely he is an evident enemy to you.

Ash-shaytan promises you poverty.

Ash-shaytan promises you poverty, and commands you to obscenity.

Ash-shaytan promises you poverty, and commands you to obscenity.

It is only the Ashaytan who would make men.

It is only the Ashaytan who would make men fear his partisans.

It is only Ashaytan

It is only the Ashaytan who would make men fear his partisans.

Fight the ones patronized by Ash-Shaytan. Surely the plotting of Ash-Shaytan has always been weak.

Fight the ones patronized by Ash-Shaytan. Surely the plotting of Ash-Shaytan has always been weak.

And had it not been for the Grace of Allah upon you and His mercy.

And had it not been for the Grace of Allah upon you and His mercy. You would indeed have closely followed Ash-Shytan. Except a few.

You would indeed have closely followed Ash-Shytan, except a few.

He promises them and arouses vain covetings in them; [hesitation] yet [stops suddenly].

He promises them and arouses vain covetings in them. And in no way does Ash-Shaytan promise them except delusion.

He promises them and arouses vain covetings in them. And in no way does Ash-Shaytan promise them except delusion.

Surely wine and games of chance, and altars for idols and divining are only an [stops suddenly]

Surely wine and games of chance, and altars for idols and divining[stops]

Surely wine and games of chance, and altars for idols and divining are only an abomination, an abnomilation

Ash- Shaytan

Surely Ash-Shaytan would only like to excite enmity and abhorrence among you by means of wine and games of chance.

If only, when Our disaster came on them, they had been humble! But their hearts were hardened and Ashaytan made all that they used to do seem fair unto them.

And in case Ash-Shaytan[stops hesitantly].

And in case Ash-Shaytan ever definitely makes you forget.

Then do not sit, after the Reminding, with the unjust people.

And in case Ash-Shaytan ever definitely makes you forget then do not sit, after the Reminding, with the unjust people.

Eat of what Allah has provided you, and do not ever follow the steps of Ash-Shaytan. Surely he is an evident enemy to you.

Then Ash-Shaytan whispered to them both to display to them that which was overlaid from them of their shameful parts.

Then Ash-Shaytan whispered to them both to display to them that which was overlaid from them of their shameful parts.

Then Ash-Shaytan whispered to them to display to them that which [stop, tries to continue, takes a deep breath]

Then Ash-Shaytan whispered to them to display to them that which was overlaid from them of their shameful parts

Then Ash-Shaytan followed up after him, and so he became of the misguided..

Then Ash-Shaytan followed up after him, and so he became of the misguided..

And definitely in case an incitement from Ash-Shaytan ever incites you, then seek refuge in Allah.

Surely He is Ever-Hearing, Ever-Knowing..

And definitely in case an incitement from Ash-Shaytan ever incites you, then seek refuge in Allah.

Surely the ones who are pious, when a visitation of Ash-Shaytan touches them, remind themselves, then, only then are they clear beholders.

Ash-Shaytan adorned their deeds to them and said, ‘Today not one of mankind will overcome you, and surely I am your neighbor.’

Then Ash-Shaytan caused him to forget mentioning him to his lord; so he lingered in the prison.

For several years.

And We have preserved it from every outcast Shaytan.

Except him Ashaytan that gains hearing by stealing, he is pursued by a clear flaming fire.

Then Ash-Shaytan adorned their deeds for them.

Seek refuge in Allah from the outcast Shaytan.

And the Shaitan is ever ungrateful to his Lord.

And the Say[stops]

And the Say[stops and coughs]

And the Shaytan[stops]

And the Shaytan is ever ungrateful[stops suddenly]

And[stops suddenly]

And the Shaytan is ever ungrateful to his Lord.

And the Shaytan is ever[stops suddenly]

Ungrateful to his Lord.

And the Shaytan[stops suddenly]

And the Shaytan is ever ungrateful to his Lord.”

The video reflects the doll, symbolized by a woman that is me. This doll came to life because of the reading in the beginning of this lecture-performance, which signified the travelling through an imagined layer in which this doll is alive and talking to its creator, god. Furthermore, the clothes I was wearing in the video are the same ones I was wearing in the

presentation room, achieving a smooth shift from one dimension into another, with further aid from the reading ritual. The video presents me inside the doll's box; it also displays female accessories such as a pink wig, bracelets, a sparkly golden bow tie and the handbag from which the phone handle is extended continuing inside the bag while the accessories represented the doll's gadgets that are usually contained inside the doll's box and socially expected for her to own and use as a woman. All this symbolizes the ontological hierarchy in Islam with inanimate objects being at the bottom of the scale while god resides at the top most position.



Revealing: Phone Booth, 2012

In between inanimate objects and god are humans and a variety of levels made of invisible theological creatures such as Angels towards the top and devils towards the bottom. *Iblis* has three sons each with an army of million little devils working under his command: *Atra* the 'retarder' devil specializes in the art of putting people to sleep during prayers by pissing in their ears; *Mutaqadhi*, the 'denunciator', drives servants to reveal the secrets of their masters and wives those of their husbands; *Kuhyala*, 'he who makes eyelids heavy', who puts men to sleep during Friday prayers or at learned conferences. Only the *Salihun*, the holiest of saints, can 'really' escape the influence of the devil and his deputies(65-66).

The choice of this particular phone relates to it being an object that is between technological advancements yet at the same time preserving certain nostalgia by being an object belonging to the past. This land line symbolizes the beginning of the common use of the phone as a medium, which brought with it the controversy as to whether or not this technology and object is devilish and blasphemous. Additionally, this landline handset is considered as an outdated object that no longer symbolizes Western advancements, since it

is considered to belong to an older technological age and thus largely used in settings where contemporary technological advancements have not reached yet. Therefore, this phone creates an allegory with the moderate and liminal cultural groups in current Arab Muslim society, which is stuck in between rejecting what is called Westernization and radically embracing it.

The detail that the phone is sourcing from the handbag presents the existence of god everywhere, even inside the personal handbag of the doll. Consequently, the doll carries the voice of god with her. For the electronic base of the phone is assumed to be the religious central bound inside the doll, or the Arab Muslim woman; it is the voice of guilt and shame, since the voice of god in the artwork is repeating verses around the evil of *Iblis* which signify her. Although the video presents the doll/woman unveiled, this figure does not clearly belong to either opposite extreme of the cultural contestation of radical Westernization or fundamentalist Islamisation. However, the experimental video displays a 'claustrophobic' situation, as the audience expressed. The doll is stuck inside a narrow space where it cannot move freely. This situation is similar to the status of the doll/woman in today's Arab Muslim society from the perspective of religion, since she is stuck between strict prohibitions sourced from radical religious extremes and overlapping with the moderate groups of society where the doll is presented in a traditional veil.

On the other hand, the artwork in the gallery exhibition was a sound installation displayed at the end of a tunnel-like entrance presenting a phone booth and a rag doll. The right side of the installation expresses god being reflected by his speech from the phone inside the booth and on the left side *Iblis* displayed by the singing rag doll. Generally, the artwork comments on the dependent connection between the opposites of god and *Iblis*, while presenting a closer view on the relationship between dolls and current Islam. The introductory *doaa* reading from the back of the doll's box aims to serve two functions: firstly it stands as a reference to the religious traditions that usually begin a ritual; second it also reflects the trend in which the doll is being offered in today's Arab Muslim commodity market, highlighting the imposed social connotations of the terms and the expectations that children generally and girls specifically are being addressed with. While the way I was holding the doll's box suggested a certain intimacy, it aimed to substitute the relationship between a believer with the symbols of his/her faith, such as a Muslim and the *Quran*, as well as include a hint of privacy relating to ceremonies that are between one's self and god. The sound installation was composed of two pieces and exhibited in the gallery complementing the performance.

The booth sparkled in silver and gold (on the outside), made from foil and fabric, is the doll's box used in the video in the lecture-performance. Inside it one gets a claustrophobic feeling: it is dark but one can see the hanging pink wig, bracelets, bow tie and the handbag from which the phone handle is suspended. Listening to the phone, one hears the loud voice of god, shouting the same speech heard in the performance, expressing the Quranic verses against *Iblis*. Meanwhile, the doll, seated outside in a more public manner than the booth, is emitting a song. The song, which is composed by my artist collective The Freaks, is created from the words of *Iblis* singing to the public partitions of his story, which he had revealed to the prophet, and which introduce this chapter. *Iblis* explains what *Allah* had specifically created in response to his requests; it is singing: "... I asked for a holy scripture and he created poetry..." with experimental freak-folk tunes playing to these lyrics. While the doll itself is made of mixed fabric, wool and hair, it sits on the floor as if homeless or drunkenly open to the public.



Revealing: the installation, 2012

The devil *Iblis* sits in public singing openly; however, god's speech is only heard inside the privacy of the booth, as if one's own head, home or particular context. Moreover, both *Iblis* and god are expressed in soft material: one colourful, the other sparkling, yet, both attractive to the eye. However, walking inside the tunnel one is faced with a choice to take either the left side of *Iblis* or the right side of god. According to Islam the devil is a threat existing everywhere but only those who are pure and wise enough will ignore him and follow the path to god. For it takes extra effort and will to hear the words of god and the *Quran* tells us: "Have you not seen how to *Allah* bows all who are in the heavens and all who are in the earth, the sun and the moon, the stars and the mountains, the trees and the beasts, and many

of mankind" (22:18), implying that mankind has a choice to make between evil and good.

Additionally, the sounds coming from both pieces demands ones attention in order to be able to listen to them. The work generally makes the devil and god equal while preserving their own unique qualities. It embodies *Iblis* in the doll, presented as a deformed female with her body organs in different locations. On the other hand, anyone who enters the booth will now become a doll- a doll that is presented as moderately religious, expressing the doll/ woman that is destined to hear the sounds of good and evil at one and the same time. Although the pieces constitute two separate objects, they are combined together by an asymmetry that is also presented in the self-contradictory doll. While god and Iblis are competing, they exist together as one piece of sound installation. Their very being is dependant on each other. Furthermore, the sound installation is linked to the lecture-performance, in which the reading *doaa* at the beginning of the ritual opened up the doll's box; now both god and Iblis are open for public experimentation, discussion, and present as a combined whole in the self-contradictory doll.

The self-contradictory doll used in this show is the same doll used in the previous lecture-performance "Neutralizing" and show "The Burden of Royalty" in 2011. The repetition emphasizes that dolls exist in different contexts and embody different characters in the dimension of play and imagination, which is their original purpose. In the previous presentation, the main doll questions god and the Westernized woman regarding the true identity of its creator, and reaches the decision that both god and the Westernized woman are to be executed. However, in this presentation, god is still alive, even though he appears tired and hesitant, feeling uncertain about what is happening currently in the Arab Muslim culture. Another doll, perhaps the one that was ordered by the main doll in "Neutralizing" to perform the execution is secretly listening to god's last words, before killing him completely.

The same rag doll was displayed in the previous show "The Burden of Royalty" under the "Neutralizing" performance. In the exhibition the commander doll left the video with a burden of being unable to know the truth about which one is its real mother, and it concludes with the killing of the two possible options, the Westernized woman and god. Moreover, the doll signifying the female, too, has a burden that she cannot exclude: the abject qualities of her bodily functions. On the other hand, in this episode "Revealing", the commander doll is depicted as *Iblis*, homeless and not royal, as if presenting the abject in a social context specific to Arab Muslim culture.

“Neutralizing” presented a view on the general concepts of the abject and presented the doll as a signifier of the woman as an impure abject in perspective to both Westernization and Islamisation. Moreover, the doll in that work also suggested a radical perception to compete with the extremism of both opposing cultural groups. While the final decision of the doll was to kill both god and woman, both presenting abjection, this doll announced the beginning of an era of a loss of meaning.

On the other hand, “Revealing” takes a closer view of the doll from specific perspectives of current Arab Muslim culture. Although perceiving the woman also as an abject entity, this work moved on from that concept into the dimension of the woman/ doll as a medium within our context. Women and phones have been related together through the history of communication technology, for, women were perceived as mediums for communicating with the ‘other world’ or ‘world beyond’, which the phone, and other tele-technologies like the telegraph, imaginatively made possible as a device. The first telegraphic message in 1844 was by a female, Miss Ellsworth, who chose to transfer the message: “What hath God wrought?” that had led the way towards the famous Fox daughters shortly afterwards, communicating with spirits through mysterious knocking sounds opening a telegraphic channel with the beyond, (Sconce, 21-24). This asserts the cultural image of females as mediums of communicating with theological dimensions. Also on the other hand, dolls have been used as supernatural objects in some traditions and likewise hold the connotation of being devices for communicating with other planes of existence.

Yet with females possessing the implication of being receivers of messages from ‘the beyond’, the doll/ woman in “Revealing” combines both: the rather advanced technological approach presented by the phone as well as the traditional magical communication device of being a doll, consequently combining Westernization as a symbol of modernity and Islamisation as a symbol of magico-religious traditions. The doll in “Revealing” is a medium between the two opposites, combining them together as a tool to communicate to both sides and present a discussion between both, aiming to, as a doll and object for learning and experimenting, propose a moderate position away from radicalism. All media mediate, and this doll also mediates.

3.4 Conclusion

Leen is the first speaking Islamic doll, created by a Syrian company called Kinan and manufactured in China, as her box displays. This doll is a cheap replica of the Fulla doll, costs almost as much, and comes in two different versions: one dressed in black Islamic black outfit (the *Abbaya*) and the other dressed in a white one (the praying outfit). Although both dolls are blond, with blue eyes and full make-up, they each have their own specific recorded speeches. While the Leen doll dressed in white recites Surat al Fatiha from the *Quran*, the Leen doll in black speaks what is described as the Mother's anthem in Arabic, and translates as follows:

"My mom is a housekeeper

My mom oh so amazing

How would the house be I do not know without her

I forget even myself but I never forget her

And the same way she looks after us I swear to God we will look after her

I forget even myself but I never forget her

My mom is a housekeeper

My mom oh so amazing

How would the house be I do not know without her

I forget even myself but I never forget her

And the same way she looks after us I swear to God we will look after her

I forget even myself but I never forget her."



Leen in its box.

This speech from the black dressed Leen doll claims a role for Muslim girls as mothers to be, stressing the significance of this position and additionally of the aspiration to become housekeepers. Her box indicates she should be played with carefully; accordingly, I have used this doll and her speech in a lecture-performance that I will speak about in detail in the Coda. Let us start from the female as a mother. In Islam, women are considered to be objects of the evil *Iblis*; therefore, women are carefully interacted with according to specific rules and forms, since they are highly materialized and vulnerable to the devils which in turn feed on bodily fluids, dirt and abjection.

Consequently, women and the people surrounding them hold a critical responsibility, for, as the hadith tell us, “All *Iblis*...has to do is to install one of his descendants on the wife’s rear and another in her groin for her to become particularly attractive when she leaves her house. Made aware then by these two devils of the charm that she can exert over men only to provoke them ever so slightly, by revealing just a fingernail, and she has taken the irremediable road to dishonor,” (Bouhdiba, 66). The responsibilities of a woman begin from her body as a womb for creating another human being; this is the biological burden. However, the girl in childhood is encouraged by society to treat her person as a doll, exaggerating its beauty and highly maintaining it so as to cover any traces of her body’s materialistic nature.

Hence the social burden. Simone de Beauvoir describes the female’s body as, “...ensnared by nature the pregnant woman is plant and animal...an in-

cubator, a conscious and free individual who has become life's passive instrument...not so much mothers... as fertile organisms, like fowls with high egg production" (153). Nevertheless, she also provides an interpretation of the phenomenology of the body as experienced throughout the different stages of a woman's life based on, "education and surroundings," rather than just biologically. In Arab Muslim context, Iblis is the source of all that is abject. The devil is made from fire and humans have to wash away their evils in the *Tahara* rituals. Since they themselves, are vulnerable to abjection and thus provided, by Islam, with various different purification procedures.

Thus the self-contradictory doll resembles a challenge growing from within Islam towards shifting it and provoking it as an up-to-date Westernized Islamisation. This doll's human resemblance assumes moderation which further nourishes radicalism as a reaction to the in-between position of this doll. While this radicalism already exists relatively in the contestation between the two groups resembling two opposites, the role of Arab Muslim women however is critical. The position of the Arab Muslim woman as the guardian of national identity, conservative values and sexuality, is consequently passed on to the self-contradictory doll since this doll is an object essentially targeted at women, mothers to be and guardians to be. Thus, this object holds critical significance within contemporary Lebanese cultural contestation. The self-contradictory doll presents a preacher of the new developed Islam, which has transformed its symbols into a medium able to combat Islamization using its own language.

In Saudi Arabia the Barbie doll was prohibited for spreading a Western blasphemous trend, as several religious figures claim. Women are still legally not allowed to drive, while, the Jamila doll today is sold with her pink Mercedes SLK. Dressed in her full Islamic outfit, this self-contradictory doll promotes an alternative Islamization, further challenging the status of contemporary Arab Muslim women and the responsibilities and expectations imposed on these women. Nonetheless, the self-contradictory doll as an object further displays and affirms the Other Spectacle. This doll physically holds the cultural tensions of the opposite contesting groups without belonging to any of them yet with access to all. Furthermore, it holds critical significance by being a replica of contemporary Arab Muslim Women, repeating their socially expected responsibilities and roles.



Jamila doll ACC MERCEDES BENZ SLK, courtesy of Simba Middle East.

Chapter 4

Playing With God And His Friends: Medium:

4.1 Introduction

“... I passed a boy carrying a wooden radio. . . Although it looked like a Braun transistor, this object never produced sound. I asked the boy about it and he said: ‘It can’t play music, but I sing when I carry it. One day I’ll have a real one,’”

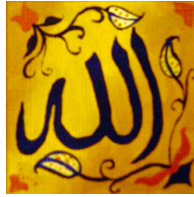
Julian Beinart, *The Radio, Evocative Objects, Things We Think With*

“The Dollhouse Gallery Project” is a portable miniature gallery featuring contemporary mini art from the Arab region on the theme of Islam. This art project is not the main artwork in this chapter, especially as it is not a lecture-performance like the main art projects in the previous chapters. Yet this piece is a supplementary art experiment that supports this chapter particularly on the relationships between spaces and theological dimensions. I started this project collecting artworks from various Arab artists in the form of paintings, photography, sculptures and installations of maximum size of 5 c.m. for flat works and 10 c.m. for three dimensional works. The collected art works or the light that have been exhibited in various places under the title of “Spreading Islam”. Generally, the project is targeted at reflecting on

the current Arab Muslim concerns and perceptions regarding the notion of Islam. The “Dollhouse Gallery Project” exhibitions displayed the collected works inside the dollhouse along with a video projected on a wall behind it.

The video presented the images of the artworks enlarged and stretched from their original sizes. This play with size intends to be a play between objects, spaces, realities, and the relationships between them in reference to the perception of Islam in what is called the Arab region today. The submitted twelve miniature artworks reflecting on the theme of Islam are divided into three categories: one under traditional conservative Islamic guidelines, another with a Westernized dominance and a third with works that present Islam from a position in between the previous two, and thus occupying the position of the self-contradictory doll. These mini artworks, unlike the self-contradictory doll, present a resolved dialect the cultural contestation since they are not self-contradictory but relatively clearly belong to one cultural side.

The first group presenting works belonging to strict Islam is the following:



Allah by Reem ElSheikh.



Allah by Eyyad Gharazeddine.



Palestine by Ahmad Salma.

The artworks above present Islamic art organized through refined forms of calligraphy and geometric shapes. The Arabesque and Arabic calligraphy symbolize the wholeness and perfection of *Allah*. While the delicate forms

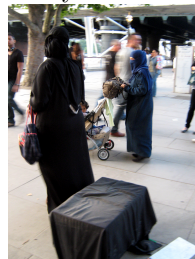
and patterns have been created by human beings aiming to present flawlessness in Islamic art history it is often said that mistakes were intentionally placed in the repetitions of the sophisticated geometric shapes to demonstrate the humility of humans. The first two works present calligraphic forms focusing on the completeness of Allah, scripting and engraving his name as an extended symbol of reverence. The third artwork is a calligraphy work of the Arabic word for Palestine ornamented in the shape of a house.

Palestine is one of the most significant places for Islam being the birthplace of the three major monotheistic religions and most of their prophets that are also acknowledged in Islam. Additionally, Palestine houses the mosque *Al Masjid Al Aqsa* which was the first *Qibla* or direction towards which all Muslims should face during prayer, before the prophet received a revelation from *Allah* to make the *Kaaba* in Saudi Arabia the new and current site of the *Qibla*. *Al Masjid Al Aqsa* is the site of *Al Israa wal Mi'raj* the night during which *Al Buraq*, a theological winged creature from heavens, carried the prophet Mohammad from Mecca to several other planes of existence and towards "*Al Masjid Al Aqsa*."

Although several Arab Muslims today may not literally believe in the actual presence of this mythological creature, they nonetheless consider theological creatures as an extension reflecting faith in *Allah*. However, the belief in the existence of such creatures, whether conceptually or literally, is part of Islam. The second group of artworks displays contemporary Islamic cultural perspectives. The four artworks below reflect Islam with an implication towards indirectly doubting the full belief in the religion.



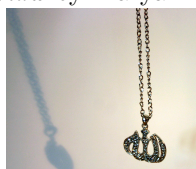
Jude and Karam by Dina Adeeb Alshahwan.



Muslim Women by Gina Mansour.



The Claw by Marya Kazoun.



Allah is Great by Michel Ayoub.

This group preserves the presence of figuration, a claw of perhaps the *Al Buraq* or maybe one of the sons of *Ibliss*, a necklace with the word Allah entitled “*Allah* is Great” and the presence of fully veiled women. “Jude and Karam” present a boy, girl and an olive tree. The names translate to the Arabic kindness and generosity, two traditionally Arab qualities associated with the stories and poems from Arabic literature. The figures are standing next to an olive tree, a symbol of the ‘holy land’ Palestine, labelled in Arabic letters: “The Arabic Olive Tree”. While the boy is wearing the Palestinian flag on his head, both figures have Arabic letters of their names, as well as drawings of the traditional Arabic embroidery patterns on their folkloric outfits. Starting with the element of figuration and reaching the overall “Arabicizing” of these figures and even the tree, the work dictates that Islam is an Arab quality rather than a representation of a conservative religion.

Islam is preserved like the Arabic letters and patterns on the figures; however, it is symbolized by “The Arabic Olive Tree” presenting the core conflict of Arab unity which is the Palestinian cause. Palestine transforms from a symbol of Islam into an icon of contemporary Arab Islam carrying Palestine as a common responsibility of Arab Muslims. Islam today, according to the artist, translates into a contemporary identity specific to the Arab peoples; it does not strictly forbid figuration; it not just presents Arabic figures but also asserts them in written Arabic labels. “Jude and Karam” embody the contemporary state of Arab Islam in quest for a collective identity and echoing attempted unity between the Arabic speaking countries.

“Muslim Women” is a photograph of two women fully veiled in a traditional *Abaya*. Because it is a photograph, this work suggests a neutral representation of Muslim women. However, since the topic of Muslim women has been excessively discussed in various current political and cultural discourses, the photograph of fully veiled women is presented as a symbol posing

questions rather than offering an unbiased representation. The work carries the political and cultural debates echoing current international concerns on hijabi women. This artwork is viewed within this specific context as part of the discourse on hijabi women and a provocation to those women existing in modern society. The artwork does not directly take sides; however it points out that Islam is presented today as a questioning of the status of Muslim women.

The third artwork entitled “The Claw” depicts a creature’s pointed claw made from glass, fabric, beads and threads. The claw is sharp, directly bringing to mind the evil powers of hell and its devils indicating danger. Secondly it is made of glass and a glossy textured material, giving this object a sense of sacredness, associated with the inviolability of glassware and the fear of approaching these fragile objects. Beads and satin are elements often associated with the feminine, but they also symbolize a luxury beyond the reach of the ordinary and perhaps belonging to another dimension of existence, closer to a supernatural precarious feminine. In this case it would be of *Iblis*, the most prominent male in Islam, who is illustrated as a feminized creature having a vulva shaped eye displaying *A’wra*- an impairment or damage. Thus the connotation to females as evil, devilish and generally more prone to blasphemy than men are.

In the context of Islam, this work is a presentation of a theological creature embodying contemporary enquiry into the existence of these feminized creatures belonging to the category of evil. Islam, in this work, is displayed as a fantastic myth; a devil’s claw is not a proven fact but rather belongs to a set of theological principles that depend on faith. This work embodies a claw of what seems like a mythological creature, or an exaggeration of a female’s claw; it is a dead part of the body, an extra under which Iblis and his armies find shelter as it is commonly explained in traditional Islamic belief. “The Claw” questions evil in Islam, its relation to women and its theological dimensions that share our plane of reality.

The last work in this group is a ready-made *Allah* necklace, under the title of “*Allah* is Great”. These necklaces are common in contemporary Muslim societies, particularly Arabic ones, stimulating the traditional Arab custom of exhibiting pride and wealth as symbols for generosity and morality. Accordingly, in our current era, products are still commonly bought for the purpose of display seeking social respect as a character of wealth, for, the Prophet himself was a wealthy businessman and it is usually encouraged to imitate his customs in Muslim societies. The individual with the most luxu-

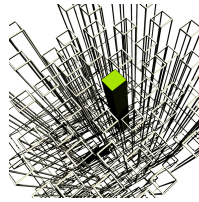
rious objects is often the one with the highest status in Arab communities, developing this cultural trait from the past tribal times in which a man can even exchange his daughter in return for an agreed number of sheep.

This tradition is still applied in various rural areas leading tribal lives and indirectly applied in several urban families where the number of sheep is substituted for by the number of cars or other lavish objects. In this sense, the *Allah* necklace is firstly a deluxe cultural product, in the capitalist sense of shiny unnecessary objects and in the Arabic sense of traditional wealthy exhibiting. Furthermore, in the sense of contemporary Islam as an object of protection relating to talics and other traditional objects. The name of *Allah* on its own becomes a symbol of religious value. On the other hand the title of this work, “*Allah* is Greater”, exposes a certain sense of irony questioning the gap between contemporary Islam as a practice and as a philosophy; displaying the sacred name of *Allah*, the name that alone has ninety nine adjectives in Islam, on a necklace and transforming it into a product.

The third group originally constituted of six works; however, after the mysterious incident of a fire in the dollhouse, which I will discuss later in this paper, only two of the artworks remained. These artworks express Islam belonging to a set of past superstitious practices. Of the two remaining works, “Islam Today” is triptych; the first piece presents two completely veiled women, one in black and the other in white, without a grey in between, as if the only truth is an option of the same complete conservative veil whether black or white. The second work in this triptych is a drawing of a group of Islamic hilal or crescent moons, with one piercing the middle of a heart, portraying this Muslim symbol as a contemporary reason for bloodshed rather than love and life which the heart naïvely symbolizes. The last work in the triptych “Islam today” presents a mosque with the word “Gold” written in Arabic on it as if contemporary mosques have been converted into signs of wealth and luxury rather than prayer houses.



Islam Today. by Anas Homsi.



Divisions by Mohammad Khayata.

The second artwork in the Westernized family is “Divisions” and it demonstrates the contestations which the once glorious Muslim empire has reached today, portraying the dream of one Muslim nation as no longer existing in the flood of current divisions. All three categories of objects or artworks are combined together sharing this dollhouse and referencing its space to Arab Muslim culture. This culture which has been found on pillars of conflict and differences is converted into the exhibitionism of a dollhouse and the heightened significance of display value within a dollhouse.

A dollhouse is a miniature house inside another real-life house; the space of the larger house is presented in the “Dollhouse Gallery Project” by the video projection that stretches outside the tiny space endorsing a correlation between both spaces inside and enclosing the dollhouse. The video projection exists as an allegory of the two empty spaces interacting together. The dollhouse itself interrelates the outer planes with the inner ones further articulating the tensions between the two interiors: that of the miniature house and that of the larger real life house. Susan Stewart describes the dollhouse as “. . . the locket or the secret recess of the heart: center within center, within within within,” (61). Each space presents a sphere of reality intervening with another. Thus the dollhouse is a spectacle within a larger spectacle, embodying the existing but invisible tensions between spaces and conveying them into visibility.

Objects present significations creating boundaries between exteriority and interiority thus occupying discomfort and tensions. Dollhouses were originally targeted at adults, made to be consumed by the eye for their amusing display value; a dollhouse presents a pure spectacle. As an object this miniature space is, as Debord would say, the heart of reality’s unreality, presenting a first-hand transformation of use value into display value, for what is inside the dollhouse transforms into a property exhibiting wealth that is often unreachable in real life. This conversion happens on the level of scale alternating the angles of perception on the dimension of display.

The display value holds a significant role. As Ludwig Feuerbach expressed

it "... the present age... prefers the sign to the thing signified, the copy to the original, fancy to reality, appearance to essence... in these days illusion only is sacred, truth profane," (Preface xi). With the display value as a metonym for reading the significance of reproductions, the dollhouse then becomes an object beyond a toy and play-thing, rather as like a machine for imagination re-creating meanings of symbols according to and for display value. The system of the dollhouse functions as an alternative miniature other space, a fantastical sanctuary where motifs of fortune and nostalgia are displayed as achievements and accomplishments inside the dollhouse. Its significance is presented as an abstract make-believe universe stretching from the boundaries of physical reality, the miniature dimension, into an abstract landscape constantly seeking a 'beyond' of physical reality.

The dollhouse is a private space controlled by limits of time and space operated and shifted by the owner through displaying and re-imagining originally impassable boundaries of reality and imagination. According to this sense of the dollhouse as a machine for the imagination, "The Dollhouse Gallery Project" functions on the perceptions of display value. The three contesting families signified by the artwork belonging to each general group in Arab Muslim culture, exist in a miniature universe through the tensions occurring between them, pulling them away from each other and at the same time holding them together. The dollhouse is principally a spectacle, and as Debord explains a spectacle is not a collection of images, but is a set of social relationships mediated by images. The dollhouse in this project highlights its presence as a conception of a full display by being a dollhouse as well as an exhibition facade, a gallery.

The gallery itself is miniature with each family of artwork inside it displaying the theme of Islam as a scene from a different angle. These families are in perpetual tension with each other on various levels of display value: between each other inside the dollhouse, from inside the larger house between their relationships with the other inner (the building in which the dollhouse exists), and from inside the two interiors and their relationships with the bigger exterior outside. This complex exhibition *mélange* refers to the contemporary culture of Lebanon. Each cultural group presents replications of contestation in the Lebanese culture through displays.

The three families are in eternal contestation for without the tensions existing between them they cannot exist themselves, since each group constitutes the other and feeds on its difference (as in the representational relationship between the 'East' and the 'West' and structuralism). Nonetheless,

these disagreements further unfold variables of display, manipulating the limits of time and space to produce abstract landscapes beyond the language of touch. Firstly, the artworks are curated inside one miniature space; they are imposed on each other. The gallery is presented for the eye to view from a distance, with each angle suggesting altered scenes and appropriations. Inside the dollhouse the artworks are no longer miniature but instead they are perceived as gigantic, positioning themselves with respect to the viewer's perception, for the spectator looking inside the dollhouse becomes metaphorically miniature as if trapped in delicacy.

With refined details, the interior of the dollhouse is projected on a video screen stretching outside the physical limits of the miniature space, further interacting with the other bigger interior and expanding beyond the miniature universe of the dollhouse. The viewer is back to his/her normal size outside the fine edges of the miniature; however, the elements inside the dollhouse grow to the viewer's own size. Enlarged through a video transmission, the three cultural groups display a different perspective and representation than the one they have previously signified from within the dollhouse. The Islamized family amplifies the excellence of Allah; furthermore, its version of Palestine is intensified with Arabic calligraphy constructing an invisible house for Islam, a fantastical accomplishment. However, the impulse of this family becomes a threat to the opposing Westernized group, with the notion of Islam emphasised purposing as a protruding danger towards the Westernized group.

The two Westernized artworks transform into barriers protecting their cultural group; "Divisions" multiplies into more columns preserving Westernization, while, "Islam Today" expands its rejection for Islamization. Through the video screening, the middle group deepens its entanglement with both opposing groups; stuck amid the Islamized and the Westernized, this family is attempting to link between the two opposites. When enlarged, the work "God is Greater" extends the word Allah that is dangled from a silver chain suspended from the top of the video projection as if continuing beyond and above it. Nevertheless, the video in the "Dollhouse Gallery Project" offers a new angle of perception signifying an embodiment of the invisible space between the two interiors; the interior of the dollhouse and the interior of the larger space in which it is exhibited.

The middle space presents a theatrical abstract interaction of the spectacle of the self with the larger spectacle outside the self; the dollhouse repeats the self as a container of cultural elements adorned, embellished and manipulated. The dollhouse stands as a dream machine projecting planes of

imagined cultural reproductions on the principle of Baudrillard's hyperreal landscapes. Both interior spaces, of the self and the public, are connected together, also networking with a larger exterior space outside both houses. The dialogue between the internal and the external occurs by experiences known through image simulations. The imagery is associated to the house as a primitive shelter to human beings. The house as a dream engine is firstly a shelter from the unknown in the exposed sky, below which human beings are constantly at risk of mortality.

Gaston Bachelard emphasizes the significance of the house to the enduring human need for fantasies: "... the house shelters day-dreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace." (6). Thus the interior space maintains psychological sanctuary. Nonetheless while the house shelters us, it cannot however provide immortality since human beings are bound to death; hence, the significance of the dollhouse. The role of the dollhouse operates on the dimension of illusion ultimately feeding narratives of what has been described by Becker as the denial of death. And religion is considered one of the main pillars of the denial of death since it provides faith.

Thus, as Feuerbach declares in *The Essence of Christianity*: "Religion has disappeared... it has been substituted... [by] the appearance of religion..." (xi). Likewise, the intensifying of the display value in religion functions in the "Dollhouse Gallery Project" repeating the re-imagined fear of death and the asylum of ostensible faith. With external signs as the most significant, the dollhouse is an archetype of "A Room of One's Own," in which as Virginia Woolf asserts, the need for the privacy of the self in order to nurture creative "incandescence". In my project, the three cultural families are the given elements can be met to constitute a re-imagined private chamber of current Arab Muslim culture, further extending into a video projection as a metaphor of highlighting the privacy of the miniature artworks.

The video projection underlines the emptiness in space as a climaxing of religion and a gate through which one slides from the religious into the irreligious. The dollhouse is the manipulation of time and space aimed at creating a fantastical experience of spectacle; on the other hand, the video signifies the potentiality of imagination. Firstly, it is the link between the inner and the outer through which the two interiors join. The second link between the two interiors and the larger exterior is presented in the video as well as the dollhouse through the religious artworks on the theme of Islam. The external outside is the 'spiritual beyond' indicated by religion and embodied by the immateriality of the video projection. The intermixing of

fantastical images with religious symbols in this project radiates a presence of theological dimensions overlapping with our reality.

The “Dollhouse Gallery Project” aims to exemplify the three cultural groups in contemporary Lebanon and their elements within the different dimensions they infer. Enveloped with theology, the social space of the dollhouse is transformed into an inorganic engine simulating variables of the elements it contains into abstract remedies against the unknown. The transposition of the viewer in size and perspective purposes change in the order of displaying reality, ultimately suggesting a flexibility of the spectacle, “. . . so that the highest degree of illusion comes to be the highest degree of sacredness,” (Feuerbach, xi). The “Dollhouse Gallery Project” is initially a display field expressing the functions of the Other Spectacle and its liquidity in shifting perspectives and identities.

The dollhouse is not inhabited by dolls; further the only humans are embodied in the role of viewers as spectators. This is intended to highlight the battleground of the spectacle of images and ideas, displaying artworks as fully cultural products simulating settings and contexts as conceptualizations of the self-contradicting doll. This project focuses on the relationships between objects and their spectacles connecting further towards the cultural groups in contemporary Lebanon and their contestation through objects of religious connotation. “The Dollhouse Gallery Project” ended suddenly with a fire burning three of the members of the Westernized family to dust and leaving a black wall inside the dollhouse. The cause of the fire remains a mystery; however it I publicly attributed it to the intervention of theological media.

4.2 Playing With The Self-contradictory Doll

The self-contradictory doll communicates a certain character that operates on the assumptions promoted with this doll. Fulla, the most prominent “Muslim” doll currently in the Arab region, has a website for her own products, blog and club on which this doll is described as “Arab, body and soul” preserving a past identity, originating from Abed El Nasir’s times of Arab unity, and re-adjusting it to this current time. This doll has been extensively advertised, promoted with a whole set of accessories, Islamic values and spectacle; hence, as one Egyptian teacher explained to The Khlaeej Times in 2005, the children know about Fulla from the other products bearing her name and not

necessarily from the doll itself. These commodities include scooters, bicycles, foods, stationary, prayer sets and other general merchandise like blankets and even a perfume.

Additionally, Fulla has her own online blog on which visitors write their comments that are usually in the form of questions seeking help and advice from Fulla. This doll is displayed not only as saturated with all that is ultimately Arab and “Muslim,” but it is further presented as relatively very knowledgeable and wise in aspects of everyday life, even though she is sixteen years old according to her website. On the 5th of March 2011, Miriam Ahmed from Abu Dhabi wrote to Fulla explaining her obsession with the internet, and presenting willingness to Fulla’s wisdom, “Dear Fulla, I think I have become different from other people because I love the internet to the point of addiction. . . I need a solution to this problem.” Consequently, Fulla, who is described on her own “About Page” as always trying to be of benefit to those around her, does not directly answer her writers but leads them to her E- magazine which is part of the New Boy larger library of other products, including the Fulla monthly magazine launched in 2006 for various kinds of beauty and moral advice.

This doll is indeed beneficial, at least to the company that has created it, for it has become one of the most popular selling brands in the Arab Muslim region. Thus, New Boy Design, through Fulla, has brought hope to the idea that Arabs can be effective manufacturers of their own brands after long years of colonization and conflict that have largely reduced this region to the role of importing. This company, like many others, has engaged with the Arab Muslim confusion of identity occurring with the wave of Westernization and that of Islamisation clashing with the local syncretic identity. The local syncretic identity in Lebanon is generally characterized as non-extremist; originating from the historical identity of this country as a hermetic construction outlined by France and Great Britain during colonization, by the jumbling together of different ethnicities and tribes.

However with the transformation of Westernization and Islamisation to radicalism, the moderate identity has been increasingly adjusting to be a form of combination to this new radicalism by attempting to unite the opposite cultural extremes together. Accordingly, the self-contradictory doll presents an essential opposite since it is based on a reaction to radicalism. The spectacle of the self-contradictory doll is based on a nostalgic gap of an Arab Muslim identity that had once been prosperous with the expansion of the Muslim empire throughout the world. Nonetheless, the identity displayed

today in the spectacle of the self-contradictory doll characterizes a longing for the flourishing past, however, appropriated according to the current setting of Lebanon. Although, Fulla is popular in the Arab world through being a spectacle of what is labeled as Arab Muslim authenticity, this doll, along with other products from New Boy, such as the Baby Habibi toy, belong to a set of updated Islamic values adopting a current globalized identity and adjusting both.

Hence, this mixture of identities gives the self-contradictory doll a modern character that has however, preserved a nostalgic spectacle particular to the Arab Muslim need. Consequently, Fulla, as her website promotes, “the spirit of any girl who strives toward excellence, creativity, renewal and peace,” a symbolic commodity seeking renewal of past traditions in a creation naively aimed against radicalism. This self-contradictory doll is presented as having the spirit of an ambitious girl who wants to “make the world a better place,” echoing a larger global mission of collaging and adjusting identities to ultimately feed the Other Spectacle, which is based on creating impossible combinations of the traditional and the universal in a moderate form. On the other hand, the spectacle of the self-contradictory doll indirectly nourishes radicalism, for although this doll is against radicalism, it presents radical symbols acknowledging the existence of intolerance and reordering it through self-contradiction and revival of further extremism in conflict with its aimed moderation.

The self-contradictory doll is ultimately a “Trojan Horse”; while it appears to be Muslim to the Westernized cultural group, it similarly displays Westernization to the Islamic. The Other Spectacle of this doll threatens the beliefs of both contesting groups, ultimately causing them to build stronger closed barriers between themselves and the dissimilar. As a result, radicalism increases with the increase of the Other Spectacle; likewise, more and more intolerant symbols appear within its combinations and equations. Nonetheless, as an object, the self-contradictory doll is beyond the consumption of things to replace the “Death of God” and the end of meaning. Contrastingly, this doll is revitalizing and bringing back the Godly, spiritual and religious symbols to objects and ultimately to our once postmodern life.

The self-contradictory doll, like the products of the Other Spectacle, announces the end of the postmodern defeat of meaning and the restoration of spiritual meaning in a deformed union of religion with secularism. Accordingly, this doll also declares the end of the spread Western values and Baudrillard’s superiority of objects that are independent of religious mean-

ing. The authority of objects in our current times converts into a power of nostalgic objects that hold meaning in religious symbols. Accordingly, the self-contradictory doll completes the gap between secular objects and the metaphysical meanings beyond objects. The objects of the Other Spectacle lead humans back to achieving their longing for meaning in spiritual objects through the same method of consumption which we are already too familiar with. The end of the centralized Western expansion, which the self-contradictory doll brings, and its development into Other Spectacles, confirms the spread of the breeding of various religious symbols with different forms of secular signs forming nostalgic objects.

However, these nostalgic objects bring with them ideological radicalism arranging the world towards closed-mindedness and further intolerance of the Other. While this doll, and other nostalgic objects, belong to one Other Spectacle, they are however different combinations of this spectacle. To begin with, the Other Spectacle is essentially a non-fixed spectacle constantly seeking new formulas of various opposites and producing new deformed breeds. Therefore, while the world is becoming whole under the Other Spectacle, it is also fragmenting into dissimilarities of various different groups advancing threats to each other and increasingly nourishing the unfixed Other Spectacle. Consequently, even though the self-contradictory doll is an intersection between two ultimately opposite borders, it is also, on the extended level, a contradiction between these groups it is uniting.

Nonetheless, the self-contradictory doll is a symbolic commodity, promoting a nostalgic character longing for an Arab Muslim authenticity, however, one that holds a global position updated to fit today's context. This self-contradictory doll belongs to the Other Spectacle that is increasing Westernization and Islamisation, furthermore, offering a physical fact of the union of these opposite groups, as if it is the empty land between the two fences of the border lines, as a No Man's land. After all Fulla's "About Page" tells us that this doll "thinks the differences between friends are a blessing, not a trial because they enrich and help one see the world from many perspectives and better deal with others."

The middle position is what the self-contradictory doll aims to display, an understanding and physical union of opposites, re-appropriating a middle location that is able to handle and fiddle with both extremes. But this is only the outside of the "Trojan Horse" that is this doll; since, the self-contradictory doll appears as a gift of moderation, however, its inside is a radicalism of opposites that are intertwined together and unable to exist

without the contestation between them.

The Muslim Westernized appeal of the self-contradictory doll belongs to the moderate groups of contemporary Arab Muslim society communicating an in-between character. Thus, the fantasy mode associated with this doll, by firstly being an object of imagination and play, during its use as a medium aims to appropriate a position for this Arab Muslim character within a larger global quality of mixing and reshuffling identities of the Other Spectacle. This doll concretely embodies the inner other. Accordingly, the self-contradictory doll as a medium is entangled in these complex symbols and connotations, presenting them to its user in one object, that is however not objective but biased according to different flexible contexts.

To use this object, then, is to play with and narrate the cultural groups the self-contradictory doll implies, since although these groups are contesting against each other, they are nonetheless embodied and united at once in this object. Therefore, the use of the self-contradictory doll accesses these different groups, their positions and symbols for use and play. This doll as a medium encourages spontaneity and jumbling together of the borders between the contesting groups. On the other hand, being a doll for play, this object as Piaget, Vygotsky, Erickson and various other play and cultural theorists tell us, is an object for learning; since play is principally a method for learning about symbols, however, it is also a way for un-learning them.

The self-contradictory doll then teaches some symbols specific to each of the contesting cultural groups, such as the figuration of Westernization and the outfits of Islamisation. Likewise, this doll belonging to a moderate middle, also un-teaches these symbols as separate, fitting into one radical position, instead announces them combined in an embodiment of belonging and overlapping onto each other, being parts of a bigger whole, an Other Spectacle. While the self-contradictory doll is promoted with a set of assumed knowledge suggesting its use as a “Muslim” doll, this object, following its creation as a brand and product, is a self-contradictory character. For on the one hand, in its use in play it teaches symbols of current Arab Islam, which is ultimately Westernized; on the other hand, it suggest un-learning these symbols and reshuffling them, reassuring the playfulness of the Other Spectacle in mixing identities.

However, the self-contradictory doll firstly teaches a connection between a physical object and its abstract conceptual meaning– between the doll itself, its outfit and appearance, and its symbolic meanings and ideologies as a union

of both radical cultural groups. Accordingly, this doll as a medium of play communicates the insignificance of these cultural boundaries as closed, in a self-contradiction that opens up these cultural borders through the physical embodiment of the doll. Furthermore, this doll opens the cultural boundaries into each other offering their existence as one spectacular identity belonging to a Westernized Arab Muslim culture. While the assumed knowledge displayed with this doll aims to teach various values belonging to its current middle muddled cultural position, the natural curiosity in the act of playing however, re-creates these cultural standards, learning them, unlearning them, going beyond and further shifting conceptual meanings with their physical symbols.

Where the self-contradictory doll's cultural ideology encourages the use of prayer mats, veils and other Islamic outfits in a 'Muslim' method, play on the other hand inspires the use of these objects for different reasons, fundamentally reinventing and re-imagining their abstract meanings and cultural ideologies. Additionally, play is an exploration and manipulation of ideas and relationships; accordingly, the self-contradictory doll during play subverts from the assumed knowledge it is promoted with into different experimental routes. In the three lecture-performances created for this practice-based project, the doll presented a curiosity about god and creation in general; this curiosity is exposed through the act of play, whether in "Neutralizing" with the doll presented as giving orders seeking its creator or in "Revealing" through the animate state of this doll in its box and phone booth talking to god, as in "Playing with God and his Friends" with the doll reaching, reinventing and interacting within the theological dimension of Islam through its use as a medium. However, in all three projects, the doll is always displayed as a reject of 'pure' or authentic identity.

The symbols which the self-contradictory doll carries give this object access to a different position in the cultural contestation in contemporary Lebanon; nonetheless, these symbols also permit access to the theological dimensions of Islam. While Islam as a religion extends to various everyday life aspects, its theological creatures likewise share our dimension of existence. On the other hand, play opens up imaginative conceptual universes, thus, using the self-contradictory doll implies opening up imagined Islamic dimensions suggested by the Islamic symbols of this doll, recreating reproductions. However, while play is subversive, these "Muslim" universes that the self-contradictory doll implies are re-invented and simulated as manipulations of the assumed knowledge of the Islamic invisible universe and its creatures.

The self-contradictory doll is a deceitful object belonging to various conflicting cultural groups and to moderation and radicalism at one and the same time. Furthermore, this doll is also devious in its use as a medium within the Islamic theological dimensions through challenging presumed knowledge into the realms of exploration and manipulation. Hence, the self-contradictory doll can be once again considered blasphemous. While this object presents a physical embodiment of the replacement of god by consumption through carrying Islamic elements, it declares that contemporary objects are no longer superior though neither religion. However, religious nostalgic objects such as this doll are currently in a position of power. In the lecture-performance “Neutralizing” of Chapter One, the doll presents the authority figure commanding the killing of both religion, (re-presented by god), and secularism, (re-presented by the Westernized woman). The rag doll in this art project represents the “Muslim” self-contradictory doll and further echoes the Other Spectacle since this spectacle pronounces in its physical symbolic products the return to an updated religion.

Accordingly, objects with a developed display value transform beyond the end of meaning and the domination of Western secular symbols into nostalgic religious meaning and the expansion of the cross-breeding of identities in deformed objects. Consequently, the use of the self-contradictory doll converts the fantasy mode related with it into a larger goal of communicating within Islamic religious contexts, yet still, through the previous postmodern consumption approach. In other words, this doll by presenting a link between returning to Islam and rejecting it has access during its use to the re-creation of an imaginary secular Islamic theology, and to further move the cultural contestation into a different dimension. The character of the self-contradictory doll presents an abject quality; whether it is in being an in-between intersection and re-invention of identities, its existence between life and death, materiality and spirituality, presenting an uncanny image of a frozen miniature human longing against physical death, or in its resemblance as a Muslim woman.

Consequently, in its use the self-contradictory doll presents an abject blasphemous medium. However play as an act is a form of abject performance, since it allows one to shift from the public assumed knowledge into a private created understanding through shuffling and re-inventing meanings of a pre-assumed symbolic. Yet also, play reinforces public norms too. Thus the self-contradictory doll threatens the safety zone of public shared knowledge. Play essentially unites contradicting elements; the rules of play hold within them the opposite rules of real life and by they combine order with disorder.

Nevertheless, the self-contradictory doll further encourages play and the fear resulting from play due to the functioning of an abject act with an abject medium, where symbols and meanings are explored and experimented with.

The self-contradictory doll becomes a medium to the imagination and fantastic realms; not only does it present a medium involving submission into the imagined, it also permits a confusion of the symbolic order tolerated during play. For example transforming the symbol of the veil on the doll into a meaning of a

textitjinn results in the existence of the veil in this play time example as an abject threat to purity rather than its original opposite. The private relationship between a doll and its owner is based on imagined realms that are familiar to a private language specific to the owner and her doll. Play however is also a means of self-teaching as well as self-regulation, for in play, one is alone with ones imagination and the re-created symbols of objects.

Therefore, the actions and choices applied during play are based on the fantastical created rules and under private laws they are then significant and dangerous to the order of play events. Nevertheless, the new invented symbolic that is known between the doll and the player becomes the only language in the dimension of play, in a safe zone away from social judgment and expectations. Hence, the player is contained within his/her own created world of specific rules, laws and conditions placing him/her in a power position. Within the created safe zone of play, public consequences become less limited and strict since the player transforms into the authority figure. Accordingly, using the self-contradictory doll as a medium provides a fertile space for imagination within Islamic theology and for re-imagining representations.

Moreover, having a human resemblance and offering a life within life, this doll carries feelings of the uncanny, with its miniature scale requesting and offering contextualizing and further acting as an intense extension of a subject to the degree of replacing it and becoming the subject itself in play. Baudrillard discusses a fourth stage in his concept of "Simulation" where the relationship between reality and its symbols rarely reflect each other; it is the stage of pure simulation also the hyperreal. Accordingly, playing with the self-contradictory doll of the Arab "Muslim" character is simulating images that communicate symbols which are detached from their reality and are artificial and hyperreal, expanding onto a fantastical existence. Although, the player is in control of the doll since its miniature scale submits to his/her will on the physical level; however, both the doll and the player perform together

in the invisible dimension, constructing and breaking down systems of virtual realities.

These mental realities that are constructed during play between the player and the self-contradictory doll are controlled with different social boundaries than the common ones, and that might oppose a certain act or imaginary belief in real life. Nonetheless they interact with the public shared and physical world through their mere existence together in the world as spectacles. The Western approach to playing accords this act the low status of the unreal or primitive and subsequently, it declares a divide for a time of play and a time of non-play as opposites. Similarly, the Arab Muslim attitude towards play is inherited from its colonial masters and based on this Western hierarchy of truth on which the Western culture is settled. Even though, Islam is open to interpretations belonging to non-apophantic logic beyond the true and false and opposing Western scientific logic, play is limited to non-seriousness, as well as to gambling and blasphemy as the textitHadeeth tell us.

Additionally, playing with rag dolls in Muslim cultures has been a method for raising and training girls to be future mothers. However, various play theorists argue that play is a form of assimilation while others, Piaget for example, confirms play is not a diminished imitation of life, which is its general definition. In play the environment of physical reality is mixed and switched with the fantastical make-belief world. Hence, the private meaning of things in play time changes from their original public meaning. In this sense, the self-contradictory doll as a medium, embodying both opposite cultural groups is further given serious consideration in cultural contestation within current Arab Muslim society. Firstly, this doll as an object holds infinite potentialities of implying fantastical worlds specific to the forms of play, each with its own set of systems, symbols and significations, starting from the symbolic cultural elements it embodies, going beyond their original assumed meanings and playing between dimensions and realities including the Islamic theological and practical one.

Play can achieve change with results that are tangible and understood by the public system in ways and languages that are specific and exclusive to the participants within the play. The play act is associated with developmental progress through the evolution of mental, cognitive and motor skills. Furthermore, play functions as a way to achieve results acknowledged in public symbolic through subverted methods and relationships. Accordingly, the self-contradictory doll enforces new relationships between different

cultural groups as well as within Islamic theology and the practical physical world, re-shaping the perception of the player starting from the abject self-contradictory doll and the intentions of its holder that ultimately affect theological Islamic realities.

The third ambiguous element in our formula, added to the self-contradictory doll itself and the act of playing, is Islam as a religion. While the self-contradictory doll presents conflicting elements unable to resolve into one identity, playing is heightened behavior, as Richard Schechner puts it in his book *The Future of Rituals*. Play is free and chaotic; however, its acts can be measured against six templates according to Schechner: play is not random, but operates in an organized system created by the player. Schechner further states that play is complementary to ritual; he writes: “Play creates its own (permeable) boundaries and realms: multiple realities that are slippery, porous, and full of creative lying and deceit; play is dangerous and, because it is, players need to feel secure in order to start playing.” (26). Nonetheless, Islam is based on multiple realities; unlike scientific knowledge, Islamic knowledge goes beyond true and false into theorizing and practicing a specific ideology.

Religion operates by interpreting and evolving theory of the *Quran* and practically and intentionally worshipping *Allah* accordingly, since for Islam, knowledge is associated with knowledge of religion. However, where play is complementary to ritual, the acts of prayer and that of play are both increased performances. Therefore, the uncertainty of Islam, play and the self-contradictory doll feed into the significance of this doll in the current cultural contestation as embodying a set of ambiguities and further expanding this contestation beyond the concrete world and into a mysterious re-invented theological realm, indicating Islam where these abstract intentions matter as much as practical physical deeds.

Consequently, the self-contradictory doll imposes an enchanting supernatural power, one beyond our physical knowledge. Thus, this doll is considered blasphemous to some conservative Muslims because it has the power to have a “spirit” of its own, that of an imaginative nature created by the player and not by *Allah* the only creator. However, the self-contradictory doll is also considered to be radically conservative by the Westernized cultural group since it implies elements belonging to strict Islam to be used and offered within play. Nonetheless, by using the self-contradictory doll and proposing recycled invented Islamic universes, this object acts as an abject medium to communicate towards an Islamic theological world and ultimately affects our

current world.

The self-contradictory doll as a medium functions within the boundaries of the Other Spectacle presenting this spectacle precisely with its dimensions and power of hiding within the norms of various cultural groups and settings. The self-contradictory doll admits to the theological universe of Islam while at the same time permitting blasphemy. Furthermore, the self-contradictory doll is in the corporeal dimension yet in the non-real and theological one, still affecting the physical dimension through a conceptual system functioning between the intentions of the player and the potentials of the doll during the act of play. This doll reflects the Other Spectacle by being a union of opposite elements, deceiving, abject and playful.

The self-contradictory doll and its spectacle aim to alter and mislead the path of mainstream knowledge of its targeted groups through hiding but not completely blending within its norms and dimensions to playfully change them from within by suggesting moderation. Between 1957 and 1972, The Situationists and Guy Debord aimed to shift the path of the “Integrated Spectacle” by using this spectacle as a medium for their own goals of transforming the structure of society through constructing situations that were against social norms. Achieving this through a method so that their performances do not dissolve into the powerful “Integrated Spectacle” at the time. In the same manner that the Avant Garde movement became part of art institutions later on. While The Situationists worked on engaging and experimenting through situations and encounters as a way to undermine the main spectacle and redirect its products through “detournement,” they also aimed to spread awareness to the public on the spectacle system controlling their reality.

However, today’s spectacle is readily equipped with a non-fixed identity; therefore, this Other Spectacle as a medium is already hazy and shifting between different positions. Nonetheless, the self-contradictory doll as a medium of play connects settings and spectacles of the physical dimension with invisible Islamic realms where the various theological creatures exist. Being an abject medium, this doll then is used as blasphemous according to the conservative groups; yet, it still has access to shape and conceptually interact within Islamic realm. For with the use of the self-contradictory doll one can claim talking to and seeing Allah without leaving room for dispute because the self-contradictory doll is ultimately a play object and playing is controlled by imagination.

4.3 Playing with God And His Friends: Lecture-performance:

The main art piece in this chapter is the lecture-performance entitled “Playing with God and his Friends,” which was presented at the *Winchester School of Art Postgraduate Conference in 2013*, as well as the accompanying interactive art installation exhibited at the Winchester Gallery during the conference week under the title of “Your Mother is a Doll”.

In general this project focused on the main idea of Chapter Three which is the use of the self-contradictory doll as a medium. Accordingly, it focused on three main points: the 3D Veil, the Speech of god and the identity reader.

The 3D Veil is associated with the Invisible Hijab, which I used in the conversation between the Westernized woman and god in “Neutralizing” of Chapter One. While the Invisible Hijab is an allegory of cultural rules that control abject traits of women’s bodily functions, the 3D Veil symbolizes a hyper-sensitive cultural tool concerned with the spiritual. Contrastingly however, the Hijab associated with materiality is ironically entitled invisible, meanwhile the Veil referring to the un-tangible is a 3D. This aims mainly to link with the self-contradiction of the doll and further stress its significance as a medium.

After distributing 3D Veils to the audience, I demonstrated and read out instructions on how to wear them. The instructions were displayed on the video screen and read:

How to wear your 3D Veil
The method is slightly different than with the traditional scarf.
You need to put it over your head of course, then put it on your face!
Be careful to hide your eyes! Hide them smoothly (please refer to the doll’s eyes)
Twist it from the back, make it flow with your hair!
Fix the safety pin, and twist, twist, twist. All of it! Twist twist tiwst.

While doing that I highlighted the wide variety of colors which these 3D Veils come in. This is to link with the self-contradictory doll as consumerist product. Yet, I have also encouraged the audience not to literally follow the instructions displayed on the video screen on how to wear them and instead be flexible. This indicates that the self-contradictory doll can be used as a

subversive medium.



Giving instructions on how to wear the 3D Veil during *Playing With God And His Friends*, 2013.

The video with the voice of god starts playing. While in the previous two chapters, the voice of god was presented as human, in this lecture-performance however, the voice of god computer generated. This affirms the readiness of the self-contradictory doll as a full product in today's market. The voice says:

I once told man to take his son to the mountain, to present myself to the world. I don't have to do this anymore. Men take their children to the mountain every day, and end up killing the sheep to appear to the world. And I appear through them. Everything that appears is god; whatever is god will appear. Today, I appear before you in a world that has truly become a global village. The differences between heaven and hell have become negligible.

An other world order is starting to unfold, a world where the gates of heaven are open to anyone who wishes to enter. with equal rights and chances, a new heaven where unsafe sex is allowed. Subversion, violence, a heaven where there's no difference between black and white, terrorism and the west. The sacredness of heaven with the opportunities of hell, but, this other world order needs work and sacrifice from your side. All of you, whether you are

priests, criminals, porn stars, homeless.

I need you. The world needs you.

The equal right of all to god and enjoyment of this world, the destruction of all authority, the negation of all moral restraints. Today, I'm not here to tell you not to kill your mother or to love your father.

Do what thou will!

As long as you are on that mountain, appearing to the world. And when you appear, I appear through you!

I stand here before you today, and the relationship between me, and the doll, has come to marriage.

You might say: money...

But truly, I tell you! The marriage in its full development is money's modern aspect.

Our marriage is money for contemplation only

There exists, between people in love, a kind of capital held by each. This is not just a stock of affects or pleasure, but also the possibility of playing double or quits with the share you hold in the other's heart.

You might say: an object

But truly, I tell you: I veiled her!

And so my people!

From now on, I appear with my wife, I appear through my wife and my wife appears through me.

We are one. And our children are you.

Whoever chooses to dance in our party, we will take to the mountain with us, to appear to the world, but we will always end up killing the sheep instead!

The computerized voice of god stops and after a short moment of silence, a presenter with a human voice shouts out: “Ladies and gentlemen, isn’t that fabulous!!” The crowds in the background cheer for him, clapping and whistling. The presenter then continues: “I think someone, put some fireworks, in the Bonfire!”

The text from the speech of god is written by manipulating quotes from Debord and Baudrillard on "The Society of the Spectacle" and the power of objects. Its main purpose is to present the Other Spectacle. After a short moment I say: “Welcome back. You can take off your 3D Veils now. Any questions?”



Playing With God And His Friends, 2013.

A Question and Answer session begins leading to a question asking for more information on the artwork displayed in the exhibition part of this conference, which is entitled “Your Mother is a Doll” and appeared in the booklet with the following statement:

“Your Mother is a Doll” is the third and final stage of the rag doll sculpture which I have used in the previous two conference and exhibition projects as part of this practice-based project. This is firstly to emphasize the potential of the doll to be used in several contexts, but it also underlines the notion of growing out of the doll, and of its transformation into an object of the past fixed in the last stage in which it has been used. The player develops and grows with her/his doll leaving their last impression of the last character it has been playing as the final role of this doll. Nonetheless, the

artwork in the exhibition is the same doll that is now developed in its final role, which as a representation of a self-contradictory doll is a machine that offers viewers a reading of what their 'true' identity is.

The rag doll that was standing as if victorious in Chapter One's "The Burden of Royalty" and ordering the killing of god and the woman in "Neutralizing" is now as if paralyzed on a wooden table. This doll is no longer looking for its 'true mother' as in the first conference and exhibition project; instead, it is now a mother offering identities from the Other Spectacle. To interact with this doll one must use it in the capitalist order and insert a coin. The instruction on how to use this doll to figure out one's true identity, are printed and taped on the table next to it, they included spelling mistakes and read:



Your Mother is a Doll interactive installation, 2013.

*TO GET AN IDNETITY READIN PLEASE FOLLOW THE STEPS
BELOW:*

Insert coin

Make a wish

Put your hand in the specific area

Pick only one paper and open it

Put the rest of the papers inside the recycling box”

When asked what the value of the coin to be inserted should be, my answer was that it depended on how badly one wanted to know what their ‘true’ identity is, for this doll creates a type of telepathic connection with its user. The artwork also included a recycling box, to recycle the identities that had not been chosen. Among those that were chosen were: Lebanese, Red, British Muslim, Arab, Colonial, Error, Japanese, Beirut, Chinese, Orthodox, Call Me, Congratulations, and No...

Nonetheless, the shape of this artwork suggested a continuation from its character in the previous chapters, however, one that has developed into its final form, joining the god booth with the devilish doll of “Revealing” into one device and machine of the Other Spectacle. The total amount of coins collected from this identity reader was five pounds.



Your Mother is a Doll interactive installation, 2013.

4.4 Conclusion

The Fullah doll is one of the many various copies of the Fulla doll however spelled differently. This doll is at least two times larger in size than the original Fulla; it is blond and her headscarf leaves the front of her fringe slightly showing. Leyla, another copy of the Fulla doll, comes with the widest variety of miniature prayer mats in various colours and patterns. The size of the self-contradictory doll metaphorically transforms one's scale into its own. When these dolls are used, they imply a structuring of a particular conceptual world, evoking a specific connotation of its particular created laws, times and spaces. If Fullah and Leyla are to be used in the same playing space, Leyla's prayer mats might change from signifying prayer mats and, instead, impose a different context for these patterned objects, perhaps one that would fit Fullah too.

The self-contradictory doll can be viewed as a metaphorically sacred space, in the sense that, it represents a set of secrets only familiar to the participants engaging with and within this doll. A doll can be considered a sacred space that one cannot physically enter; however, one moves into it abstractly on the level of intention and imagination. When one holds the doll to set it in a context, one is imposing a certain narrative on it and similarly the doll is also weaving an invisible conceptual net around its holder—a net that is creating an abstract world which is solid and real only to the participants within the dimension of play. This state is a shared other reality located between the external reality and the inner world. In the words of Winnicott: "The place where cultural experience is located is in the potential space between the individual and the environment (originally the object)," (4).

Most Islamic dolls come with an extra *hijab*, *abaya* and prayer mat for the young girl who will be using these dolls. This suggests breaking down the boundaries that separate human beings and the objects that resemble human beings, between one and her own reproduction, the doll. With the extra *hijab*, *abaya* and prayer mat, the Islamic doll and her owner are, to a certain extent, on the same channel of imagination. When playing with the doll, a second alternative life beyond mortality is being gifted by the player of this doll onto themselves. Through the use of the doll as a medium, and during the act of playing, the player becomes the dictator and the creator inventing and mixing conceptual representations in an inner world of her creation.

The created inner world evoked by the doll connects with the outside

world through a set of new relationships and contexts. For, while symbols assume associations to the material world, in play, the symbolic, its meaning and the object are jumbled together and shifted to different subverted labels re-invented by the player's imagination. However, the postmodern nostalgia towards spiritual meaning has currently occupied the lack that drives the Lacanian desire. Since the self-contradictory doll is labeled as "Muslim"; thus, as an object this doll is metaphorically filling the lack of religious meaning. Consequently, the achievement of this desire is capable of developing towards a world beyond, of a religious meaning, possible through playing with the veiled doll; thus, changing the target of desire towards a spectacle that reinvents fantasies. By attaining desire, the veiled doll offers a positive process replacing the negative lack in the Lacanian desire with a desiring-production as described by Deleuze and Guattari. Accordingly, the Other doll as a medium is a desiring machine seeking another machine and medium to combine with and re-produce reality becoming social-production itself.

However, the self-contradictory doll is an abject; thus, its intended realms and combinations develop towards abjection from assumed knowledge from different perspectives. Resembling a woman, this object has a rich background of being perceived as a medium between worlds, at least starting from the history of witches. The long line of stories and events concerning spiritual communication has significantly underlined the role of women as mediums, for "the association of medium-ship with femininity was so strong that it was not dispelled by the contravening evidence of the existence of male medium," wrote Ann Braude in 1989 on tracing the history of the Spiritualists movement in the United States (23). Accordingly, women at that time were encouraged to become a medium to communicate with the world beyond, in order to anticipate social and political change crossing physical mortality and separating their consciousness from their bodies to achieve power.

Nonetheless, Islam and religion generally, highlights the woman as a medium; for example Mary and her divine pregnancy with the "son of God" in Christianity who is the "Prophet Issa" in Islam, as well as Eve and her seduction of Adam being tempted by Iblis and causing the couple's expulsion from heaven. On the other hand, in several chapters of the *Quran* the term "Lord of the worlds" is used, "O Moses verily I am *Allah* the lord of the universes," (28:30), stating the multiplicity of universes. Additionally, these universes are inhabited with theological creatures existing in a hierarchy of creation, largely attempting to tempt human beings into evil; hence, using the woman as a medium to accomplish this. Likewise, the self-contradictory

doll is in the same situation as a medium communicating evil.

John Murray Spear- a spiritualist- observed that "ordinarily, the feminine mind possesses, in a higher degree than the masculine, two important requisites of elevated medium-ship: first, it is more religious; and secondly, it is more plastic." (163) Plastic minds are permeable and vulnerable for shaping; likewise, religious minds are generally almost blinded within their faith, wholly believing in their "vital lie". To link these two qualities to women's mind gives this mind significance of a certain elevation towards the beyond which other non-plastic minds lack. The association of the feminine as a medium to communicate with the ether of spirituality can be seen in various aspects of our contemporary life. Perhaps the most prominent image still stuck with us is that of the little girl Carol Anne from the horror film "Poltergeist" of 1982, who owned the special delicate senses to the existence of spirits that later, abducted her to a plane of reality beyond ours, within the television screen.

Additionally, the electrical communication technologies that the world witnessed since the invention of the telegraph loosened the boundaries between the known and the unknown, further joining them closer with stories of UFO sightings and various other network related spiritual experiences. In Saudi Arabia in the 1920's, the introduction of the telephone as an object of communication led to demonstrations declaring it blasphemous. Furthermore, the concept of *Tanzih* in Islam believes that *Allah* alone is permanent and real, while the concept of *Tashbih* considers all things are only real to some degree, and some things are more real than others, (Murata and Chittick, 128). Accordingly, imagination associated with real life objects becomes a communication agency from Baudrillard's hyperreal landscape transferring conceptual ghostly voices from inanimate things.

Henceforth, reality as we know it becomes infinite combinations of other realities and planes of existences leading us to remote and terrifying other dimensions. In Islam these dimensions are acknowledged as theological universes intertwining with our reality; thus, objects simulating their imageries, metaphorically or practically, are comprehended as haunted things. Similarly, in the act of play the mysterious invented universes known to the players and their objects are telepathically connected to a different plane of existence not belonging to a ready-made book however, but instead associated with the player and his/her objects. The *Quran* states: "And the heavens We built with our own hands and indeed we are expanding it," (51:48), (the We is used for God alone) which proposes the creation of infi-

nite realities by God. This leads the self-contradictory doll to connect with the Islamic multiple universes and mix them with the postmodern realities of our world in a broth invented and manipulated by the player; reminding us further with Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the desiring-production.

The self-contradictory doll is a deployed image of a Western doll and the doll in turn is a deployed image of a woman; further, the devil according to Islamic theology lies in women. Thus, by veiling the doll or the devil, it becomes stronger giving it certain immunity to access sacred places under the fake title of Islam. The self-contradictory doll holds an identification pass allowing it to change the colour of its character according to the contexts it is used within. With this access, the self-contradictory doll is considered a *Nasnas* or a trickster entering different universes and re-inventing their order.

This doll suggests a play in the boundaries of Muslim realities, using it implies engaging its "Muslim" elements within the created fantastical world. In this context, the self-contradictory doll develops the cultural contestation between Westernization and Islamisation in contemporary Lebanon, from the physical direct level of commodity flow into a spiritual theological level of a make-belief world. In the same sense that one performs religious rituals, playing with the self-contradictory doll is a ritual advancing towards a hermetic dimension of Islam and modern fantasy. This object seeks to achieve an updated order of modern Islam, mysteriously combining opposite cultural ideologies and further operating within them through a theological consciousness.



Fulla Letter Book.

Issue 79 of the monthly Fulla magazine described as the magazine of the Arabic girl, comes with a pink Fulla Letter Book gift. Page 42 of this magazine, contains a section under the title of Letters And Answers. In this section, young readers are expected to send Fulla their questions, meanwhile, under the supervision of Rania Issa, they receive answers on their concerns from Fulla. One concern is translated into English as the following:

Reader:

Dear Fulla,

Why do I always wish impossible things that can never happen?

Fulla:

Think about all the weird inventions out there, are they all realistic? Could people long ago imagine that they can ride in a big metallic body that would fly them in the air! And would the woman who used to wash the laundry and scrub it with her hands imagine that a strange machine would wash the laundry and dry it too! Maybe you are looking at these inventions now as “normal”, but I assure you that some day these inventions were “unrealistic”. We hold inside us a great power you humans, but this power cannot be activated through wishes only, but by working and experience and trying. So if dreams are combined with hard work, then making them real becomes possible.

Chapter 5

Coda

“The Young-Girl has no other legitimacy besides that of the Spectacle. Her submission to the impersonality of the Spectacle gives her the right to subjugate others to it, whoever they may be” Tiqqun.

The Young Arab Muslim Girl as a War Machine is a lecture-performance proposing a response to Tiqqun’s theory of the Young-Girl as a War Machine. The performance was presented as part of the *10 Years on: Art and Everyday Life in Iran and Iraq in London* and again in Berlin as part of the *Global Prayers Congress: Faith in the City*, both in 2013.

Tiqqun’s theory of The Young Girl as a War Machine, published in 1999 in Preliminary Materials for a Theory of The Young Girl, is a concept dedicated to the way late capitalism functions. Accordingly, The Young Arab Muslim Girl, is also a commodity concept rather than a ‘feminist’ critique of the actual young girl per se. Therefore, it is not interested in merely arguing for or against female emancipation or empowerment as has often been the case.

Instead, The Young Arab Muslim Girl, like Tiqqun’s Young Girl, operates on the separation of the gender and sex of the teenage girl in favor of “Cultural Capitalism” as Žižek describes it. Consequently, The Young Arab Muslim Girl is “the model citizen of commodity society,” as Tiqqun puts it: a product and consumer at one and the same time. The Young Arab Muslim Girl is not concerned in the actual liberating of Arab Muslim Girls, nonetheless, this object offers an alternative spectacular liberation existing

in the liminal space between consumption and liberation.



The performance at the Mosaic Rooms, London 2013.

The Young Arab Muslim Girl as a War Machine aimed to function as a conclusion for this practice-based project. Thus, it argued that the self-contradictory doll unfolds into a site for cultural contestation and becomes a tool for manipulating social orders particular to contemporary Lebanon. Operating mainly on the flexibility of the self-contradictory doll as a culturally polymorphous object, the performance presented the three main ideas specific to this research project.

In this research I have observed the self-contradictory doll from multiple angles within the context of contemporary Lebanon: its representation of its culture, its connotations as a resemblance to humans, and its function as a medium within cultural contestation. Accordingly, the lecture-performance, “The Young Arab Muslim Girls as a War Machine”, treated this doll as a central unit as well as an agent to actively produce and shape what has been referred to in the performance as the ‘Arab Muslim Force’.

The ‘Arab Muslim Force’, in the lecture-performance, is associated with the present social and political order of Lebanese culture. This active force that the self-contradictory doll projected, connected to and revealed in the performance is ultimately related to the materialistic, consumerist nature particular to ‘Arab Muslim’ identity, further offered through the self-contradictory doll as a product (ideology/ fantasy and medium/ play). Hence, the significance of the capitalistic nature of this object in today’s cultural contestation and its direct relationship to Tiqqun’s Theory of the Young Girl.

The ‘Arab Muslim Force’ ultimately implies what I have termed in this research as the Other Spectacle. Developed from Debord’s “Integrated Spec-

tacle,” the Other Spectacle is a form of “soft power” inspiring religious and political imaginaries on culture provoking change and manipulation through spectacular attractions and formulas. Hence, the significant role of the self-contradictory doll is its literal representation of the Young Arab Muslim Girl as a War Machine. The War Machine in this performance it also highlights the traditional religious aspect of the War Machine. By combining the religious forces of the War Machine, this performance shifted the position of the audience from passive viewers into inevitable participants rather than just witnesses.

While the idea of a revolution was targeted in the past to be total replacement of an existing order, today’s reformation, however, aims for reformation within the already existing order. In this context of adjustment and manipulation within already operating dimensions of spectacular forces, the self-contradictory Arab Muslim doll as a war machine is continuously transforming its modes and contexts, consequently its connotations.

Therefore this doll productively engages with discourse of representation and soft powers, asserting the disassembling of once hegemonic cultures and their restructuring as asymmetrical compositions of opposing ideologies. The self-contradictory doll is metonymic of the rich cultural contestation in contemporary Lebanon as both are projecting dislocation, flux, emulation and potentiality.



The performance at the Mosaic Rooms, London 2013.

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About

I was born in Iran in 1986, but I am originally from Hunin, a village on the Lebanese/ Palestinian/ Israeli borders. In the early 1920's this Lebanese village was included to Palestine according to the Sykes–Picot Agreement. Hunin was de-populated during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. It is now a Jewish settlement called Margaliot. I grew up in Beirut with my atheist family and my grandmother who constantly cursed the British. With this background I am very interested in politics, religion and culture, and the relationships between almost everything.

2014, "UpWorld" game, Winner of the Netherlands Game Awards and nominee for the Indie Prize Awards, Amsterdam, with the Abjatron game development team, Lebanon.

2014, "Stitching Cyborgs" exhibition and three days workshop "On the Giving Birth to Images" at Contemporary Art Platform, Kuwait City, Kuwait.

2014, Lead applicant for "Looking at Images: A Research Guide" Project for the collaborative Skills Development award by the AHRC London, UK.

2014, "Images of Houriyat Al Janna" Lecture-performance in collaboration with the Radical Media Forum, Goldsmiths, University London, UK .

2014, "How to make it as an artist in the Arab world", THE FREAKS comics at the Festival of Arab Culture, Czech Republic.

2013, "The Global Prayers Congress: Faith in the City", Lecture-performance for "Faith in the City: Just the City" at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin, Germany.

2013, "RISHA PROJECT" , THE FREAKS comics on How to Make it as an Artist in the Arab Region, at the Goethe Institute Belgrade.

2013, "RAW" exhibition project in collaboration with WSA PGR research group at the 5th Base Gallery, London, UK.

2013, KOMIKAZEN FESTIVAL with the "RISHA PROJECT" , THE FREAKS comics on How to Make it as an Artist in the Arab Region, at Ravenna, Italy.

2013, Government and Politics of the Middle East Certificate, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, UK.

2013, “The Young-Arab-Muslim-Girl as a War Machine” Lecture-performance part of the Global Futures Forum “10 Years On Art and Everyday life in Iraq and Iran” at the Mosaic Rooms in collaboration with Ibraaz and Global Future Research Center, London UK.

2013, “The Other Spectacle/ Playing with god and his Friends” Lecture-performance and exhibition at Winchester School of Art Postgraduate Conference, UK.

2013, Organizers committee for the Winchester School of Art Postgraduate Conference, UK.

2013, "Mapping Souls", The Freaks, Video Installation, 59 Gallery, Paris, France.

2013, “Paint Club”, Visual Symposium, Painting as Research, at Beaconsfield, London, UK.

2012, MPhil Fine Arts, University of Southampton, Winchester School of Art, UK.

2012, “102 Resting in Peace”, Exhibition by THE FREAKS, Ministry of Tourism, Lebanon.

2012, "The Dollhouse Gallery Project", initiating, curating and exhibiting, UK and Lebanon.

2012, Beirut Art Fair, THE FREAKS in the video box with Ayyam Gallery, Lebanon.

2012, Beirut Art Fair with Raja’ Nehme’ Sertin Art Gallery, Lebanon.

2012, “Afaq”, Collective Art Exhibition at The Venue, Beirut, Lebanon.

2012, “Trashy Treasures”, Collective show at the L’Atelier, Lebanon.

2012, "Samawi Collection II", THE FREAKS, Dubai, UAE.

2012, “Revealing”, Lecture-performance and exhibition, Winchester School of Art Postgraduate Conference, UK.

2011, “Neutralizing”, Lecture Performance and exhibiton, Winchester School of Art Postgraduate Conference, UK.

2011, "Women in Contemporary Art", Beiteddine Silk Factory, Art Lounge, Lebanon.

2011, "The Power of Imagination", Spanish Benevolent Society Gallery, New York City.

2011, Art featured at the Sursock Museum, Salon d’automne, Beirut, Lebanon.

2011, “Within the DollHouse: The Jumble of Fantasy and Tragedy” Solo exhibition, Art Lounge, Lebanon.

2011, Ministry of Culture Award for Creativity, Ministry of Culture and the Lebanese Art Association, Lebanon.

2011, “Protest For Sunshine,” Performance by THE FREAKS, Winchester, UK.

2011, “A Piece of my Mind,” Performance by THE FREAKS, Winchester, UK.

2011, “Cut-Off”, Workshop, British Council and Victoria and Albert’s Museum, Beirut, Lebanon.

2010, “Hyperactivity and Social Criticism”, Solo exhibition, The Gallerist, Lebanon.

2010, Artist talk, American University of Beirut, Beirut, Lebanon.



Please try to bare with me if I seem to be having too much fun.