



Barbie: A Tool in a Capitalist Society

The Barbie movie has just been released at the box office, and the news and discussion around it has been substantial. People are discussing the plot, the choice of costume designs, the subtext, the political implications, the societal commentary, the historical objectives, and the use of Barbie; and the list goes on.

What people are missing is that Barbie is just a doll- a toy that only has meaning because we, as a society give it to her.

“Barbie was founded in 1959 by Ruth Handler, whose inspiration for Barbie came from watching her daughter project her dreams and aspirations onto paper dolls. Recognizing a gap in the market, which only offered baby dolls for girls to imagine themselves as caregivers, Ruth invented the fashion doll category with a three-dimensional doll that girls could use to imagine their future selves. Ruth’s philosophy behind Barbie was that through the doll a little girl could be anything she wanted to be and that she has choices” (Source: [Barbie Media](#))

The Barbie doll was a huge success, with young girls everywhere enjoying the various accessories. The company was very good at marketing, and ensuring that the young girls always had something new to add to their Barbie collection.

The doll has been a source of much debate – with some showing concern about the image it presents to young girls about how they should look, and others focusing on the positive impact that it can have on a young girl’s understanding of their role in society. Either way, this doesn’t change the fact that the doll’s interpretation has been dependent on the underlying ideas that exist within society.

The movie has led to discussions around Barbie dominating the media. But today, Barbie’s meaning is influenced by two things; the creator’s perspectives which influenced the marketing of the doll, and society’s interpretations.

When trying to understand the Barbie movie’s plot and message, it’s easy to get lost in all of the perspectives within the media. There are an array of theories and opinions, with each group in society using aspects of the movie to support their argument or make a societal statement. But those theories are based on an interpretation, the actual messages in the movie were decided by the ones who produced it.

In an interview, the producer and actress of the Barbie movie said:

“We had some big lofty questions to ask, like what is the meaning of life? What is true happiness? Why is life worth living? If you could have perfect controlled Barbie land, what would make you ever choose anything else? Those questions led to some pretty deep answers and conversations and not even answers because there isn’t really an answer. That’s what we kept coming back to as like, I can’t sum up the meaning of life in a neat little sentence. (Margot Robbie: Actress & Producer, Barbie Movie)

We know that the answers to these questions are given to us in Islam. Its society’s lack of belief in Allah (swt) which has pushed them to shape the story of Barbie along these lines, as they attempt to answer the fundamental question about life. And they explore the question using the ideas that exist in society, the ideas which they believe in.

As the creators developed the plot, they integrated this idea into the storyline. I haven’t watched the movie so I cannot say how prominently they focused on answering these

questions within the movie. Though the promotional material suggests that it did have an impact on the story's development and the jokes that were told.

What's interesting is that the media, with all the advertising, and social media, with their various interpretations of the movie, did not highlight this aspect of the movie. The focus is on current trending topics like anti-male rhetoric, diversity, female empowerment, and of course, fashion.

When the media encourages such conversations, are we affected by them?

Of course, especially young children who are incredibly impressionable, but that doesn't mean the rest of society is safe. If something is repeated enough, it becomes an accepted opinion, almost a fact. And facts have a way of making an impression on us all.

But this won't change, until society changes. And society will not change until the ideas within it change – whether these ideas are answers to questions as fundamental as where did I come from and where will I go? Or if they are as basic as an answer to the simple question, what do I want to wear today?

“The problem is Barbie stands for a beauty standard that can put pressure on young girls—who then starve themselves in order not to become fat, and to look as beautiful and perfect as their Barbie doll.” (Source)

The issue with such things is that it isn't the toy that puts such pressures on young girls, it's society. The Barbie franchise may decide to market the doll in a certain way but these ideas are reinforced and supported by the media, the fashion industry, and even the education system.

I'd even go as far as to say that they are all benefiting from it – exploiting girls, and influencing the ideas in their minds, in order to ensure that they have a continuous flow of profit – through cosmetics, clothes, surgery, and so on.

But until we change society, and change the way we approach life, we will not be able to limit the power and influence that such industries have over us.

Islam rejects all western and eastern perspectives of beauty that are generated and used by the beauty, fashion and other industries to exploit women and girls into buying their products to make huge sales and profits. Islam values a woman on her Taqwa, Islamic personality, conduct and what good she brings to the society and humanity. It also prohibits any form of objectification of women or the exploitation of their body and beauty for financial gain. All this helps to maintain a high status of respect for women within society and protect them from harm. However, these Islamic views and principles related to women and society cannot be implemented correctly or comprehensively without the presence of an Islamic system and state. And that is why we need to re-establish the Khilafah (Caliphate) according to the method of the Prophet (saw) in our Muslim lands to bring these Islamic principles to life within a state and to show humanity how women should be viewed and treated.

Written for the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir by

Fatima Musab

Member of the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir