

Don't call it "dolly". The geo-political revolution of fashion dolls

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Abstract

In an essay first published in 1967, Donald W. Winnicott finds in playing «the location of the cultural experience». Therefore, the toy (or the transitional object) positions itself as expression of the prevailing culture and the social codes that mould the different educational structures each time. According to the historian Maria Rumi, ever since mass production, dolls is overall one of the best selling toys in the male tradition and in the female world. This contribution aims to analyse the present changes within the production of fashion dolls in a three-way visual viewpoint: the revolution of the bodily stereotype of Barbie, which after representing the initial male fetish, becomes the embodiment of female identity; the cultural model of the Islamic dolls, which in opposition to western culture, propose female models which are milder and are subject to the dominant theo-political dictates; finally, we find the strange case of the widely unknown doll of Hugo Chávez, which became symbol of a popular revolution (for some, populist) to the point of being a great success among adult supporters of the then President of Venezuela. In this way, the doll becomes an instrument of inclusion or exclusion, according to the specific way to approach it. The *fashion doll* ceases to be an inanimate object and takes shape in the social imaginary and educates, not always intentionally, the consciences of adults and children.

Keywords: inclusion, society, education, politics

A toy as “toy for children” is an adult and adult-centred thought. Playful and recreational objects of all kinds are conceived by adult minds that, while investigating the specificities of child psyche for commercial purposes, cannot entirely freeze the (adult) view on infancy. To the point of projecting adult desires on the children. Who do not change, sedimented somewhere in a hidden corner of our conscience and who, to prove the abovementioned, reverberates in the not entirely grown-up desire to have back the toys of our childhood. This is the birth of the toys and games collections, which are remarkably fruitful and reveal how much is hidden in the production of objects apparently dedicated to the children world. Not by chance, an article by Davide Turrini investigates the phenomenon of «crazy shopping on eBay» well off nostalgic collectors... (<http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2015/08/08/spese-pazze-su-ebay-ecco-i-giocattoli-piu-cari-per-eterni-e-danarosi-peter-pan/1944023/>). Vintage toys may be used or

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worn out, yet very expensive, which, as explained by Peter Jenkinson, constitute a kind of socially acceptable placebo against the “loss” inherent to assuming increasingly mature responsibilities: «(...) our link to these objects, which we owned as children, or that we wanted to possess, allows us to connect with happy memories (...)» (*Ibid.*). Or finding, in dealing with the uneasiness of reality, a part of ourselves which is actually “adult” – as consequence the aesthetics of the plaything is mediated by emancipated subjects – and «cultural» ever since its inception, (Winnicott, 1967, p. 160 Italian trans. 2006), but still less demanding (and involved). *Fashion dolls* (like Barbie) are examples of this shift of the adult desire upon the childhood world while following the canons of inclusion or exclusion according to common imagery and market rules. They are “ready-made products” on which multinationals always invested the highest stakes, because they have always been best sellers among all possible types of mass produced toys (Rumi, 1972, p. 89). Barbie’s generous breast (the first doll appeared in 1959) disappears with the arrival of her junior sister Skipper, in 1964, under the pressure of the righteous American mothers; however, at the end of the Sixties Skipper, with the arrival of counterculture, begins to emancipate herself. Finally, around 1975, she starts growing, not only in height. A hand crank makes small breasts grow in the doll. How could we ignore, in the light of a post-childhood adult memory, Mami the mother doll? End of the Eighties. Girls continue to favour Barbie to traditional dolls. But, who is going to teach them the traditional role of being mother? Here comes a doll who looks like Barbie but it is little bigger (“dollified”) and... pregnant. A model with northern-European features with an extractable womb and baby boy/girl as applicable (or the chosen package). The big tummy reminds entirely the typical chocolate Easter egg with the present inside (boy or girl?). Which role do society, culture, adults play in relation to girls who were induced to a “Caesarean section” at an early stage? In a paper of 1989, Enrico Bonerandi questions if children, «after playing with the window-belly, will not (...) be curious to see eggs and seeds too (...). Parents would be back at the starting point, unless a Mami two full of eggs and a Papi with his good seeds placed somewhere appear on the scene» (<http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/1989/11/04/ecco-mami-la-bambola-incinta.html>). This is a further confirmation that toys are real device handed by “adults to children” (= *for young and old*). Therefore, sexualised.

1. Barbie: from male fetish to emblem of a plural femininity

At the beginning, the most famous *fashion doll*, Barbara Millicent Roberts (better known as Barbie) finds a male fetish that many consider «an amusing gift for gentlemen, a naughty gadget to buy in traditionally male shops like the

tobacconists» (Bazzano, 2008, p. 9), for others it is a risqué trinket «for stag parties» (Motta, 2016, p. 177). It was the German Lilli, very curvy and sexual protagonist of comics that date to 1952 (Germano, 2000, p. 57). At the end of the Fifties, Mattel bought the copyrights, the American multinational began the production of a moderate version of the prosperous plastic *pin up*. The doll that we call Barbie today. Whom does not effectively correspond to the canons of the usual femininity, but the spectacular stereotypes that *ipso facto* correspond to male lust: curvy breasts and hips, long legs, neat features, extended eye cut and big “carnal lips”? After the efforts used for a big downsizing the lust of her older sister Lilli, Barbie results as a full icon of the perfect femininity: the one desired by men. To the point that today, we find literature that insist on the personage intrinsic sexualisation, and investigations that discuss not only, or especially, the abstract model of adulthood of gender that it proposes to girls, but the residual of male chauvinism and fetishism that seems to be hidden in the whitened and mild smile of Barbie, with her naive semblance. To mention some of the most inventive critics, the comedienne Alessandra Faiella consecrates an entire volume to her childhood relationship with the hated doll, whom, in her eyes, is an anorexic girl interested only in playing with Ken, her fiancé. Actually, according the brilliant actress and interpreter, not only Ken.

I could not understand what was so fascinating in this horrifying little doll with a surgically re-done nose, boobs and the IQ of a gnu (with all respect for the gnus). Barbie did nothing but dressing or taking off clothes and flirting with Ken, her disco dance fiancé, total boredom. One day following my mother’s suggestion (...), I accepted a class-mate’s invitation to play with the hated plastic monster. The program was to have fun as hell playing “Barbie and fashion magic”, a delirious catwalk of anorexic models. Look, it is not by chance that I talk about anorexia: if Barbie was a real person, proportionally, she would be 1.75 m, weight 50 kg, breast waist to hip measurement 100, 45, 85 cm. pathologically anorexic. (...) A legion of variously clad Barbie’s parade before my astonished eyes, among them: Barbie Model (tautological), Barbie Nurse, Barbie Olympic athlete, Barbie Surgeon, Barbie Teacher and Barbie Hostess. Only Barbie Bitch is missing, although this would be tautological too (Faiella, 2013, pp. 13, 15).

In Dalila Curiazi’s foreword to the work of Asteria Casadio, *A tua figlia non regalerò bambole* (I will not by dolls for your daughter), Barbie is described as an icon of an ideal-typical femininity to complement the male role, not really autonomous and independent (self-poietic). Almost as if feminine identity could be measured only in relation to the other’s gender (the male one), and not in itself as such:

(...) the fact that Barbie too, or femininity dollified, has a fiancé, speaks volumes on the judgement that society makes on, and instigates on girls, single women: there is no female fulfilment apart from having a male companion (Curiazi, 2011, p. 12).

The male association doll-fetish is explained in an essay by Natasha Walter, in it the prevailing educational model is accused of a pernicious moulding of girls towards the canons of adaptation and affectation. In the view of the journalist, avoiding to play with Barbie is one method to raise female childhoods from the scheme of a complacent affectation to a one of free expression of personal and human identity.

It seems that dolls run away from the shops to take over the lives of the girls: we do not only expect them to play with the dolls, but also to mould their lives on them. Nowadays, their glittering aesthetics extends to most aspects of a girl's lives (...), (who may) be going to school all geared up with Barbie's gadgets (...), from the panties to hairpins, to the schoolbag (...). Brilliant marketing strategies (...) manage to blend dolls and girls in such a manner that was unthinkable only a generation ago. This strange fusion of dolls and girls can continue after childhood. Living like a doll seems to be the ideal of many girls, who leave childhood behind only to embark on a project set to take care of their looks, with diets, shopping that aim to achieve the bleached, waxed and made-up look of a Barbie (Walter, 2010, p. 4 Italian trans. 2012).

I grew up in a family that tended to subscribe – like many families in the Seventies – the idea expressed by Simone de Beauvoir in 1949: «one is not born, but rather, becomes a Woman». This is why my mother refused to buy Barbies for her daughters (...). The battle against sexual stereotypes started in the family (*Ibid.*, p. 175).

However, the clearest, and most direct and poignant example on the fetishist and eroticist value of the *fashion dolls* comes from the novel of the awards winner Amy Michael Homes, professor at the Columbia University of New York. It is a series of stories about characters who find shelter in material goods to forget the meaninglessness of their lives. In *the safety of objects*, the last chapter is dedicated to the relationship between a boy and one of his younger sister's Barbies, which becomes (not only metaphorically) a mere masturbatory object with which he can even dialogue, on the intra-psychic correspondence penis=boy=doll.

I decided to buy a present for Barbie. I reached at that strange point in which I was ready to do anything for her. I took two buses and walked two kilometres to reach Toys "R" Us. Barbie's row was 14c. I was shattered. I imagined one million Barbie and to buy them all. I imagined screwing one of them, throw it away, take another immediately, screw her, throw her in an increasingly bigger heap in a corner of my room. An endless task. I saw myself becoming a Barbie slave. I asked myself how many Barbie Tropical were made every year. I felt fainting. Shelves crammed with Kens, Barbies and Skippers. Barbie Fun Time, Ken Jewel Secrets, Barbie Rocker "to unleash at the rhythm of rock – and dances for real!". I saw Barbie Magic Moves, and found myself studying it carefully, with a seducing look, wondering if her legs could be

spread. The box said “Press the button and Barbie moves”. While I was reading, she winked to me (Homes, 1990, pp. 157-158 Italian trans. 2010).

Nevertheless, we look for a part of ourselves in the fetish. For a teenager, the cult object does not position itself as a relationship-with, but as introspection. Ken becomes favourite over Barbie, with his little «chin», for the boys, he becomes the compensation of his penis: a silent sinner, immediately redeemed.

I looked at Ken. Keeping it in my left hand, holding it around the waist. I kept my thumb pressed against Ken’s pelvis when I realised it I had an automatic erection, one of those that you do not understand where they come from, you have them, that’s all. I started stroking Ken’s chin and look at my thumb as if it was the showing of a porno on screen. “What are you doing?” asked Barbie’s head. (...) I was rubbing my thumb against Ken’s thumb, under his swimming trunk. I was in my sister’s room, pants down. (...) a moment before coming I stood in front of the hole of Ken’s neck. I kept Ken head down above my dick and I came in a way that never managed with Barbie. I came inside Ken and when I finished I wanted to start it all over again. I wanted to fill Ken and seal his head (...). I wanted Ken to be my secret reserve. I came inside Ken, then I remember it was not mine. It did not belong to them. I took it to the bathroom and washed it with hot water and dishwashing detergent (*Ibid.*, p. 163).

In brief, Barbie is Lilli’s *direct inheritor*, a fetish (erotic, even if this wording may sound rather pleonastic) for: men (1) adults (2) heterosexuals (3). It is possible to distinguish more sub-categories within the above categories, like:

1. Men:
 - a) Heterosexuals,
 - b) Homosexuals etc.
2. Adults:
 - a) In transitional phase toward adulthood (adolescents),
 - b) Women;
3. Heterosexuals:
 - a) Who perceive the doll as object of desire;
 - b) who perceive the doll as a miniature self (penis): we reflect, for exemplification, on *action figures* cases, which embody the “heroic” part of the self, or of Barbie, who represents the ideal self – «femininity made doll», as put down by Dalila Curiazi.

This explains the phenomenon of *fashion doll* adult collectibles of Barbies, “for the adult collector” – as it appears on the boxes of the fetish dolls. Like « (...) fair and blonde Lilli, (who), with askew gaze and red lips shaped as a heart, it envelopes a concentration of sexuality, which is totally inadequate for children

imagination» (Bazzano, 2008, p. 8). Returning to the theme of crazy adult (not necessarily erotomaniacs, but adults) shopping as recently described by Davide Turrini, «some of these Barbies are exchanged among collectors for thousands of dollars» (Calefato, 1999, p. 72). The *Silkstone* series (a material halfway between plastic and porcelain) includes also a series of Barbie Lingerie, persuasive and teasing, with lace and garters. In tune with Alessandra Faiella, «Barbie bitch» did not miss the call. If we want to be even more irreverent, the «bitch» has always been the object of male (chauvinist) collectibles. The woman reduced to be the object of pleasure/complacency is corresponding of the so-called «*gadget-cure*» highlighted by Piero Feliciotti within the theme of the post-modern economy of «pleasure satisfaction» (Feliciotti, 2005, p. 14). Barbie is “the aesthetical cure”:

- against the nostalgia of childhood (mythologised, therefore “beautiful”; or not lived, to be “embellished” for the future);
- the perceived femininity (repressed, missed or marked, and “exasperated” in any case);
- a placebo effect for unattainable ideal of a “plastic life”.

However, the peaceful *politically-correct* revolution of the *fashion dolls* had to come.

Especially after Mattel recorded a drop in the sales of its top product caused by the success of other toys of other brands which became popular among young consumers – who remain the main target of any producers of toys, since expensive Barbies are self-confined to a wealthy public of aficionados.

The first protester against the male chauvinist origins of Barbie is a *fashion doll* with “normal” body proportions: Lammily, a “proportioned” doll with regular clothes, ordinary features and regular curves, purposely conceived to make girls accept their real bodies, not “impossible” or stereotyped (<http://lammily.com/>). It seems that Lammily’s “normal” fiancé is about to appear: a little man with average features.

It had to happen, even the most normal girl in the world of dolls – Barbie’s rival called Lammily, who made children and parents go crazy a couple of years ago, with her features coming from the real world – should, sooner or later, find a fiancé. A guy in casual clothing, in the style of the Nineties, with a little belly like a real “dadbod”, so distant from Ken the heartbreaker, with tuxedos, muscles, windsurf and sport cabriolets. A male version of Lammily, the “normal Barbie”, just made its début in a new campaign of *crowdfunding* started by the inventor of the real dolls, the designer Nickolay Lamm, to accompany the “guy” on the market. Exactly like the manner in which, in 2014, his doll without the waistline of a wasp and giraffe’s legs that involved over thirteen thousand people and obtain more than twenty thousand orders thanks to its normality (Clerici, http://www.corriere.it/moda/news/16_marzo_13/con-pancetta-non-palestrato-ecco-fidanzato-barbie-normale-0bc3c84c-e941-11e5-af8a-2fda60e0b7ae.shtml).

Mattel, which pioneered the revolution of the world of dolls, answered the provocation with a range of Barbies that includes approximately the plurality of female types existing on the planet: the «perfect woman» criticised by Nicoletta Bazzano becomes more curvy (with a little cellulite that does not do any harm) can be shorter or taller according to the woman that it represents in plastic. Not only: this new range of dolls includes individuals from different cultures and classical hairstyles as well as ultra-modern ones even in blue colour.

Conclusively, Barbie, in her present state, is for everyone: petite, tall, curvy, thin, blonde or brunette.

Tall, Petite or Curvy. The best is to like ourselves. In the name of the market: if in 2014 Lammily climbed the list of wishes, in 2016 Barbie cannot but accept the standards of the “common feelings”. The wishes of adults or children is not known.

Besides the body, the collection *Fashionistas* includes also 30 hair colours, 22 eye types, 24 hairstyles, 14 facial features and 7 complexions. (...) Kim Culmone, head of the creative office of Mattel, asked his team to re-imagine Barbie today. The result is 33 different models, with less make-up and jointed ankles to climb down from the heels (Motta, 2016, p. 177).

Conversely, we could expect a further counter-action by Mattel: an obese Ken, short, bearded or anorexic. Hopefully, it will not happen: the doll should remain, as it always was, the useless male complement of Barbie (Carullo, 2007, p. 97). Who has been cheated by her (she favoured the mighty Blain to his mediocrity and «chin»), and returned on his knees to the cheater to have his place back among the other exposed toys. Barbie multiplies and makes (why not?) herself ugly, with her develop the thoughts on women and femininity. The *plural, inclusive and divergent* one: «it is essential», says Alberto Pellai, «that adults help girls to widen their “zoom” on the ideal beauty, including many types of beauty» (Pellai, 2016, p. 40). And, ken’s empty head can persevere in pleasing the immature and phallogentric minds like the character narrated by Amy Michael Homes.

The preconditions of a new pedagogy are laid down, happy and irreverent, linked with music and cinema, theatre, experimentation and art. The pop pedagogy hypothesised by Massimiliano Stramaglia. A soft pedagogy in the style of Rodari, even capable to overturn the consumerist logic, in a great toy revolt; toys that feel much chill in the heart, bound, as they are, to profit. Those toys of Gianni Rodari, which are well aware that to warm the heart you need more than “stoves and radiators”; but “gentle words” (Trinci and Sarti, 2014, p. 132).

2. “Glocal” games: a doll for each culture

Concerning market logics, it is worth to signal that dolls, along with other consumers’ goods like food and cigarettes, are among the most counterfeited products abroad and illegally imported to Italy. Here, they often combat an unfair fight with the better known Babies. A documentary, brainchild of Paolo Butturini directed by Mimmo Calopresti tells the story of the so-called «ghost factories», starting from a very affectionate dialogue between daddy Mimmo and his daughter Clio. It culminates in the quest for Barbie originality and in a visit to the Museum of the Cultures in Milan to tell the daughter, using the exposition dedicated to the toy until 23 March 2016, the «truth about her doll» (Calopresti, Italia, 2016). In this context, the *fashion doll* becomes the emblem of the criminal power that uses a low cost labour force (often children) totally bereft of safety norms for the “worker” and even for the child-consumer. Calopresti narrates that the dolls are made at the border between Hungary and the Ukraine and come to Italy via the port of Naples. From there, they spread on the national territory, avoiding the very meticulous controls of the local police. Looking like Barbie; they have a much inferior quality. These dolls are produced with materials that could even harm the health of the children, should they put them in their mouths, biting, as they usually do, feet and hands. The plastic fetish, smuggled and devoid of its potential educating qualities, ends up showing the elements of a non-cultured pedagogy, where easy profits are attained in total disregard of children fantasies. Adult collectors focus exclusively on the originality of the collectables: the different Barbies, that attract the dreaming reality of men and women, are guaranteed by well known totally legal brands in line with the applicable norms. In rare cases, a collector boasts the possession of a *fake*: at the origin of the desire is, in fact, the uniqueness and *origin* of the acquired piece – especially if very expensive. Illegal dolls, cheaper and aesthetically poor, represent a real attempt against the infancy and humanity of the people who produce them.

If the mafia-like non-culture raised the “fake” to be the seal of its globalism, Barbies, and her similar, associated themselves with “glocalism” to attain the market. Each land, which has its educational model, obtained its doll. In short and historically speaking, Barbie had many difficulties to be accepted by Japanese girls (and especially mothers). Too “western-like”, not suitable to the Nipponese model of femininity. After all, even the few remaining *geishas* please the other sex through culture, art and seriousness. However, Barbie can be available and accommodating (excuse us for the *kitsch* diversion, but, again, Homes character illustrates the point). She knows exactly how to be loved by everyone. Anne Allison and Giovanni Carullo provide enlightenment on the matter.

The preference for the childish image in Japan explains (...) the failure of Barbie on the Japanese market when it first appeared during the Sixties. Despite a scrupulous restyling to meet the Japanese taste (dreamy round-shaped eyes, shorter height, less protruding curves), Barbie was still considered too sexy by many Japanese mothers. Furthermore, she was too career minded in the way she was packaged and presented (Allison, 1999, pp. 152-153 Italian trans. 2001).

Therefore, Mattel had to adapt the product to a milder expression, barely perceivable smile, less prosperous breast and paler complexion (Carullo, 2007, p. 93).

Despite her remarkable “glocalism”, Barbie had the limit of being refused by, at least, one culture: the Islamic one. The case of the Islamic Barbies effectively opens a new chapter in the relationship plaything-culture or in the equivalence plaything=culture. To understand the reasons is useful to start from the present possibilities of «buying» (not so «crazily» as in other instances) on eBay. The user’s advertisement, an Italian resident in Italy, recites: *Fulla Doll with Her Indoor Fashion – Islamic Culture – New Boy – Barbie Style* (<http://www.ebay.it/itm/Fulla-Doll-with-her-Indoor-Fashion-Islamic-Culture-New-Boy-Barbie-style-/131716716328?hash=item1eaed9728:g:2okAAOSwX~dWk7mm>). A step by step analysis will reveal that the Fulla doll is a kind of Islamic Barbie. She has olive complexion, long raven hair, dark eyes and a long pink dress in western style. So far, apart from the ethnic changes (Barbie’s stereotypes is a woman with North-European features: blonde, blue eyes), nothing new. Fulla has also a clutch, is fashionable and does not differ from any other *fashion doll* present on the global markets. The dress itself is pink, the colour traditionally associated to Barbie. But, we need to concentrate on the specification: «*With Her Indoor Fashion*» (as in the caption of Fulla’s package) to understand the level of westernisation (the *mélange*, hybridation, miscegenation, mixing) apparently allowed to the girl. What sort of meaning could this kind of specification have? European and American women usually go around with long dresses and clutches. The hair is perfectly done with a raven tail. The high heels are in wisteria colour in perfect accordance with the polished *ensemble*.

In the meanwhile, the advertising says that the doll belongs to the Islamic culture and (strangely enough) produced by New Boy in Barbie’s style.

Where is the arcane secret? Barbie does not have the right to access the Islamic countries.

The Saudi religious police staged a real campaign against the doll. She is dangerous because, after playing with it, girls make strange requests, “Mom, can you buy me jeans, T-shirts and swimming costumes like Barbie?”. So that the ministers (...) warn: “(...) Barbie dolls with their clothes that let see the body, obscene positions, different styles and accessories represent the decay and perversion of the Western world. We

must identify the danger and be vigilant". In Iran they go further: "Each Barbie is more dangerous than an American missile" (Bazzano, 2008, p. 119).

To stop the hated dollified icon, Razanne appeared, produced in USA in 1996 by the brand Noorart and in 2003, this time in Syria, Fulla. The former is the favourite toy by the immigrated Islamic families, the latter is mostly diffused in the Middle East.

Which are the characteristics of these dolls?

(...) Fulla, (*ergo*) "jasmine" (...) has a sober wardrobe and has a beautiful silken pink rug for the daily prayers. Fulla has no fiancé, but she is happy to follow her parents' advices, showing honesty, sweet and considerate. It is said that soon Fulla, who likes cooking and reading, will become a career woman, but as teacher or doctor, the only respectable jobs (for women, author's note) according to the *ulemas* (the great experts of the Koran, author's note). In the United States and Great Britain the girls in Islamic families play with Razanne, whose name effectively remind of that "shining modesty", which must be the irreplaceable treasure of a Muslim woman. Razanne reads and respects the Koran too, she wears the chador with immaculate grace (*Ibid.*, p. 120).

Fulla's personage is honest, loving, and respectful of mother and father. We can find her while she prays, cooks a cake for her friend Yasmeen, or reads a book before going to bed (Carullo, 2007, p. 103).

Fulla (...) (is) caring, modest and in God's awe (...) (*Ibid.*, p. 108).

Nothing could be more different from classic Barbie. But, why the advertisement on eBay shows a doll surely "covered" – the dress let only the forearms and ankles to be seen –, yet, after all she is quite «Barbie-like» (Germano, 2000, p. 21)? Is it a *fake*? No. Unfortunately, not. And, Razanne, like Fulla, «barbiologise herself» according to the circumstances.

Nowadays, we can find on the market seven different models of the doll Razanne, among them the model "in and out", that shows the doll at home with blonde hair ("the fact of showing blonde hair is only apparently irrelevant, in reality it represents a cultural element: at home, the Islamic woman can show what she cannot show outside, where her behaviour should be inspired by modesty and discretion, *Author's note*), and the one ready to go out with the traditional veil, the *jilbāb*. (...) The "in and out" model is especially revealing in explaining the success of this doll, she can conciliate attachment to tradition (represented by the veil) and the desire to experiment fashion when at home (Carullo, 2007, pp. 100-101).

The item found on the *e-commerce* site is the "in" version of Fulla. On the other hand, many other editions present Fulla in traditional clothes (for

example, Fulla Traditions is the most suitable version to be presented to the girls during the month of Ramadan).

The doll's clothes are not only black, there are also flashing fashion colours like shocking pink and gold. However, none of the clothes shows more than some millimetres of skin (*Ibid.*, p. 103).

Education-indoctrination in Islamic manner begins very early, from early infancy. It finds explicit correlations in adult (or for adult) dictations. Considering that this is pop culture, it becomes unavoidable to mention the recent investigation of the journalist Lili Gruber on the reality of Islam and the Islamic vision about the female gender. For a better understanding if Razanne and Fulla are truly faithful to their belief. The famous journalist went to the temple of Islamic cult at Centocelle in Rome. She reports that in that occasion she received a booklet, which she mentions in some parts of her recent book.

The question is serious. On the one side the booklet keeps repeating “do not use violence”, but the overall message is exactly the opposite. It calls to consider women inferior. The first stage is “only” paternalistic, the second is psychological violence and the third is physical violence. The prescription “do not harm or provoke damage” is absurd, three lines down there are instructions on how to beat a person (a woman *Author's note*). What is the precise meaning “physical correction”? What should an “educational process” be? In a confusing message, it appears clearly that a potentially violent individual may feel free to proceed. And a woman is obliged to suffer it. Who published this booklet in Italy? Why its diffusion is allowed among people who come from different cultural backgrounds, who sometimes are poorly educated and risk to take it seriously? (Gruber, 2016, p. 294).

All respect is due to all good Muslims. As well as to good Catholics, but not the conformist ones. At any rate, Fulla and Razanne obey their creed. They defend their flesh from a Ken on fire. In their humble and modest privacy. They do not let any man touch them. Full respect to Fulla and Razanne.

3. The doll of Hugo Chávez

To finish the geo-political odyssey of the fashion dolls, we cannot avoid to consider among the rebels the popular-populist fetish of Hugo Chávez, who inspired democratic or demagogic revolts according to the individual viewpoint and the ideology of those who were inspired by it. Since this is an unusual intertwining of play, sport and politics; Chávez, with his dark and tenor-like voice, was not only a military, proponent of a coup d'état, prisoner, President of Venezuela, powerful TV star and also a promising baseball player. It almost

reminds the opening song of a cartoon (*Jenny the tennis player*), by Nico Fidenco in distant 1981, which like all childish *leitmotifs*, contains a message that goes beyond childhood fantasies of omnipotence: «Right left, left right, the crowds shout and protest, then following the law of the barbed wire, it unscrews the neck and removes the head! Right left, left right» (Fidenco, Scardelletti and Fidenco, 1981). At the end of the reading of this contribution, this musical quotation will become even clearer.

In the historical reconstructions by Roberto Massari or by Rory Carroll, Hugo Rafael Chávez Frias (1954-2013) appears, on one side, as a revolutionary, like a Christ redeemer and saviour; on the other as a dictator who exploited his popularity to delude too many poor devils, in a no-man-land, about the possibility to get free from American imperialism (as it happened, in Spanish colonialism with Simón Bolívar in the nineteenth century). Here, nevertheless, we are concerned with dolls. We will see how the doll of the President will promote the image of a pseudo-fascist taming or socialist emancipation in the view of those who will use from it (not the children, but the adults, who kiss, stroke and use it in popular rallies if they are Chavistas, or as a “voodoo” puppet or caricature for the anti-Chavistats).

In final synthesis, fluctuating between Massari and Carroll, the government of Carlos Andrés Pérez (liberal and right-wing liberalist) brought indeed Venezuela to high levels of competitiveness (Carroll, 2013, p. 10 Italian trans. 2013). However, to do that – to stay on level with rich and developed countries – Pérez forced the people to lower living standards, favouring in this manner the rich elites over the huge poor masses «(from cutting public expenditure to privatisations, further opening to foreign investments and the growing debt with IMF [International Monetary Fund])» (Massari, 2005, p. 32). Ironically, Pérez himself “baptised” his future replacement, giving him the sword during his consecration as lieutenant in 1975 (*Ibid.*, p. 21). In fact, in the name of Bolivarian anti-colonialism the now Lieutenant Chávez staged a coup d’état during the night between 3 and 4 February 1992, which ended with his incarceration. But, Chávez had the chance to talk to his comrades in a «short televised speech» (*Ibid.*, p. 38) and managed to announce that the revolution is only postponed «before the eyes, which we imagine dreamy, of the population that, in the early morning news, (...) learns that somebody (...) risked (his) life to free them from an unpopular and apparently immovable government» (*Ibid.*, pp. 38-39). It is the foretaste of a career as TV star: slowly, Chávez will become ever present for the spectators, through the Sunday broadcast *¡Aló, Presidente!* (Carroll, 2013, p. 17 Italian trans. 2013), and with a huge increase of the state TV channels, which go from one to eight (*Ibid.*, p. 32). Chávez stays very little time in prison («from February 1992 to March 1994») (Massari, 2005, p. 42), meanwhile he stirs up, using his prestige within the walls of the prison, the Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement.

Out of jail Chávez paves the path that will lead him to triumph at the presidential elections of 1998: Pérez is accused of corruption and his successor, Rafael Caldera, concedes amnesty to the putshists of 1992, to keep the Left quiet. The people falls viscerally in love with that *Comandante* who was incarcerated for his love for the country. His democratic socialism, jointly with his declared left wing nationalism, persuade the poor people to trust him, on 6 December 1998 Chávez is democratically elected President of Venezuela (*Ibid.*, p. 58). Several actions describe Chávez's beginnings as President of Venezuela: the project of a «new constitution, oil sold at higher prices, rural investments, inclusive lexicon» (Carroll, 2013, p. 65 Italian trans. 2013). Intentions are worthy, but in fact Chávez's communicating style – like his numerous TV presences show – is rather demagogic and irritating: «His critics are simply vermin, bandits, hypocrites, spoiled brats, manure. And so on, a relentless machine gun of offences and denigrations (...))» (*Ibid.*, p. 71). It is true that «in the years after Chávez election, Venezuela will break any previous records of the frequency with which the population was called to express its opinion in the ballot box, often to decide on questions of vital importance» (Massari, 2005, p. 59). In fact: the people loves Huguito, but not the centres of power – «the Venezuelan Industrialist association (...), unionist bureaucracy (...), the Catholic Church hierarchy (...) and the vast majority of the media» –, which stage a coup, this time against Chávez, who is arrested 11 April 2002 and dismissed from presidency in favour of Pedro Carmona Estanga, leader of the Venezuelan Industrialist association (*Ibid.*, pp. 76-77).

However, something not forecast by Washington strategists happens immediately after the news of the coup (...): the population backs Chávez, in majority without hesitation. It appears evident when after few hours masses of protesters march from the peripheries to the centre and from nearby cities to Caracas: an unstoppable flux. (...) within 48 hours the putschists have to let the prisoner free. The world, astonished, learns that for once the people won over the power of the military and the plots of Washington. Triumphantly, Chávez comes back to the presidency, with a growing charisma and to his opponents' desperation (*Ibid.*, pp. 78-79).

Apparently, after the attempt against the constituted order, the «gap between Chavistas and anti-chavistas» becomes «much deeper» (*Ibid.*, p. 81). However, according to Carroll not in ideological terms: a sort of “secret observatory” establishes itself on the territory against real or potential conspirators, whom are not beheaded – after all, Chávez was democratically elected –, they simply lose (without a right cause) their job. Among them, there were not only common people, but also the political rivals of the *Comandante* (Carroll, 2013, pp. 113-114 Italian trans. 2013). The signature campaign against the President produces a referendum (15 August 2004) that, one more time, confirms

Chávez, beloved by the people (Massari, 2005, p. 87). However, when Massari publishes his book (October 2005), the cult phenomenon generated by Hugo's doll is only beginning. Meanwhile,

[...] Chávez says that Venezuela should manufacture toys that reflect the region's history. He suggests, for example, that children play with Simón Bolívar dolls rather than with Barbies or Superman action figures. During the Christmas 2005 season, there weren't many Simón Bolívar dolls to be found in Caracas store, but 18-inch Hugo Chávez dolls were extremely popular among adults. Pull a string and it says "It's your dream, it's your hope, and it's your job to be free and equal" and "I arrived here to do all that is humanly possible to help all the Venezuelan people". The dolls were made in China, not Venezuela, and were often bought as joke presents for Chávez haters (Levin, 2007, pp. 111-112).

In December 2006, «Chávez wins another six-year» (Carroll, 2013, p. 122 Italian trans. 2013), but in December 2007 loses the referendum that would ratify «sixty-nine articles to modify the constitution» (*Ibid.*, p. 154). Since it is not possible to run for presidency for more than twice, Chávez plans, for February 2009, «a new constitutional referendum to eliminate the limits of mandate» which expired in 2012 (*Ibid.*, p. 170).

Legions of red shirts give away mattresses, fans, fridges and ovens. They distribute pamphlets with ten reasons to vote yes. Number one: "Chávez loves us and love is exchanged with love". Number two: "Chávez is incapable to harm us". Chávez wins the referendum with 55 percent of the votes. He blows his voice from the Miraflores Palace and swear to govern until 2030, when he will be seventy-five. The crowd exult (*Ibid.*, pp. 170-171).

It will not happen. In the spring of 2011, the President feels the early symptoms of an incurable disease, which will bring his death on March 5 2013. His surgical interventions and relative hospital stays are accompanied by crowds who despair and horrify at the simple thought of losing the beloved Comandante. «"I want to see my president", says Alicia Morroy, a seamstress on the brink of crying, to a journalist. "I miss him hugely, because Chávez is the spirit of the poor"» (*Ibid.*, p. 312). Chávez's heritage will be the memory in the people, the doubts of the intellectuals on the rightfulness his methods of government, his heir Nicolás Maduro and... a *fashion doll*. Which, from 2005 onward, becomes a true icon of the popular soul... an adult. Not a child. No reminiscence of "combing dolls". The one of Hugo Chávez, born to substitute Barbie and Superman, his hair cannot be styled, it is made in plastic. It differs greatly from the original target considering that most of its costumers were adults (of both sexes). Almost all meaningful periods of Chávez government, from 2005 to today, are "marked" by images of common people who proudly shows the doll. These images are available online, which we cannot publish here for a question of *royalties*. However, its captions can

be mentioned, this leaves the reader with the task (like a game) to verify the assertions sustained here. It is a long series of photograph captions, which, for editorial reasons, we decided to reduce to the total number of nine, chosen among the most suggestive and poignant ones in chronological order.

«Douglas Bustamante holds a doll of Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez at his store in Caracas Friday. The doll repeats revolutionary phrases. Photo: Fernando Llano, Associated Press». C. Toothaker, *Backers and foes alike are buying Chávez dolls*, Sunday, Nov. 20 2015 12:00 AM (<http://www.deseretnews.com/article/635162596/Backers-and-foes-alike-are-buying-Chavez-dolls.html?pg=all>).

«The Hugo Chávez action figure: GI Joe for Latin America». Spiegel Online International, *The Hugo Doll: Venezuela's Cult Phenomenon. A toy doll of the oil-loving, America-dissing, South America power-consolidating Venezuelan leader Hugo Chávez is selling like hotcakes on the streets of Caracas*, September 14, 2006, 3:55 PM (<http://www.spiegel.de/international/the-hugo-doll-venezuela-s-cult-phenomenon-a-437091.html>).

«A supporter of Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez holds a Chávez doll during a rally in favour of the “yes” option in the upcoming referendum in Maracaibo February 8, 2009. Photo: Reuters». IBT Staff Report (on 06/29/11 at 12:02 PM), *Kate Middleton and Anthony Weiner have one thing in common* (<http://www.ibtimes.com/kate-middleton-anthony-weiner-have-one-thing-common-551992>).

«A woman kisses a doll depicting Venezuela's President Hugo Chávez during a march in Caracas. Thousands of Venezuelans marched for the country's bicentennial celebrations and also to show support for their president, who remains in Cuba recovering from surgery. Picture: AP». The Telegraph, *Pictures of the day: 4 July 2011* (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/picturegalleries/picturesoftheday/8615251/Pictures-of-the-day-4-July-2011.html?image=26>).

«A Hugo Chávez supporter caresses a Hugo Chávez doll at a rally outside Miraflores, the presidential palace, on Friday, April 13, 2012, in Caracas to celebrate Chávez's return to the presidency on April 13, 2002 after a failed coup attempt». S. Steinmann (Photojournalist), *Chávez Mania: Venezuela* (http://www.sharonsteinmann.com/venezuela/chavez-mania/_DSC0350_2/).

«A woman holds a Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez doll, as she attends a Mass to pray for Chavez's health in Caracas on Tuesday (Dec 13, 2012). Photo: Reuters». AP, Caracas, *Chávez recovering after cancer surgery: VP*, Dec 13, 2012 (<http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/world/archives/2012/12/13/2003550066>).

«A doll of Venezuela's late President Hugo Chávez is held by a supporter during a rally in his honour in Bogota, Colombia, Wednesday. Photo: Fernando Vergara/Associated Press». National Post, *“Please don't let me die”: Venezuela's*

Hugo Chávez died from massive heart attack, general says, March 7, 2013, 2:05 AM (<http://news.nationalpost.com/news/please-dont-let-me-die-venezuelas-hugo-chavez-died-from-massive-heart-attack-general-says>).

«A supporter of Venezuela's late President Hugo Chávez holds a doll of him as she stands outside a military academy where the funeral ceremony for Chávez is held, in Caracas March 8, 2013. Picture: Reuters/Jorge Dan Lopez». T. Wade e P. Velez, *In slum of Chávez's political birth, a tomb and baseball diamond*, Friday March 8, 2013, 7:30 PM (<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-chavez-grassroots-idUSBRE92800H20130309>).

«Supporters of Chávez say their lives improved under his leadership with inequality, poverty and malnutrition dropping markedly». BBC NEWS, *In pictures: Venezuela split on Chávez's death anniversary* (March 6, 2014) (<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-26464836>).

But they call them “dollies”. When we see that a doll can establish aesthetic standards (to the point that it was re-visited for commercial reasons and to re-educate to realistic and healthy body shapes), we “build” with them cultures and religions (from early age, for a sudden assimilation of the Islamic belief and its ideology about the “female”), we can even feed the smuggling of counterfeit goods and generate political consensus/indoctrination of the masses. From one end of the world to the other. «Right left, left right». From the adult collector to the boys/girls of secular, Catholic or Islamic families.

No one should be forgotten, from the girl with disabilities (Becky, Barbie's paraplegic friend, commercialised at the end of the Nineties) to the adult Drag Queen (the doll produced by Arsenic & Apple Pie in 1999, which warns: «Contains small parts and extreme sarcasm»).

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