

Childhood Identity Between the Cumulative Influence of the Western Image and the Specificity of Arab Reception Miraculous Series as a Case Study

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Abstract:

Today, Arab children are experiencing rapid changes as a result of media and digital openness. Their educational environment is no longer confined to family and school, but is increasingly influenced by a wide range of images and symbols from multiple cultures. In the absence of recreational activities that draw on the child's intellectual and physical capacities — owing to parents' preoccupations or a lack of outdoor spaces dedicated to channelling the child's energies — the child spends most of their time moving between digital devices and exploring virtual worlds without ever truly leaving home.

This study is based on the hypothesis that cumulative exposure to cartoons in the absence of serious family support capable of developing children's analytical and critical viewing skills may accelerate the adoption of foreign cultures that conflict with our religious beliefs and social customs.

Problem Statement

The central issue of this research is guided by the following fundamental question:

How is the identity of the Arab child constructed in light of the increasing number of hours spent watching cartoons, alongside a decline in religious commitment and family guidance?

Sub-questions:

How does the child's unconscious work during the act of watching?

How can the family provide a child with a proper religious, intellectual and cultural upbringing in the face of the dominance of visual media?

Is it possible today to speak of audio-visual media that can support a sound Islamic education?

Hypothesis

The study assumes that every external input inconsistent with the child's future values constitutes a threat to their identity, gradually erasing those values in the absence of mature awareness. Nevertheless, such inputs may permit the child to analyse and critique the information and filter it, thereby fostering their awareness and encouraging innovation rather than assimilation and dissolution into another culture.

Methodology

The study relies on a semiotic approach, analysing selected narrative sequences from the animated series *Miraculous: Tales of Ladybug & Cat Noir* to uncover implicit messages and latent structures that gradually influence the child recipient's constants and beliefs.

Keywords: Identity, Religion, Digital Media, The Child, Cultural Imprinting.

Introduction

The concept of identity is one of the most prominent ideas, continuing to expand and intersect with new meanings related to human relationships with themselves and with the various forms of life around them. This means that identity is in a state of ongoing expansion, developing in parallel with the material, social and economic evolution of societies.

As a fertile stage in this complex human experience, children are beings in the process of building psychological strength and consolidating religious, ideological and cultural convictions — convictions that shape their various existential manifestations and influence the decisions and behaviours that emerge within cultural and identity frameworks.

Attempting to establish a theoretical grounding for the duality of culture and identity reveals a recurring theme, despite differing contexts, due to their shared process of horizontal expansion in the search for new areas capable of absorbing their depth and complexity.

“The truth is that culture is a subject of very great importance.” Our expression of Arab culture takes on broad and varied horizons. It is therefore necessary to identify characteristics that can be summarised by the values of movement and stability in Islamic thought and culture. We also need to define what is constant and what is variable in Islamic thought and culture. We must not leave our Arab and Muslim audiences trapped in a state of duality, with one group hostile towards the past and another hostile towards the future.¹

Under no circumstances should one side be favoured at the expense of the other. At a previous stage, our Arab-Islamic culture was characterised by a robust system of values, with the centrality of the family and the importance of active engagement in life's various experiences being paramount. Within this framework, children were fully integrated into social life, learning, education, work and service to the surrounding community. During school holidays, children would devote most of their time to their family and peers.

During periods of study, time was divided between academic achievement, leisure and revision. Watching animated cartoons used to be limited to the occasional break between physical, mental and social activities experienced within a real environment. However, this scene has changed radically today: many Arab and Western channels now broadcast around the clock without interruption. This has led to children being exposed to digital media for much longer periods, which in turn drives them towards excessive consumption of visual content, bypassing the boundaries of place and time. This includes personal devices within the privacy of the home and far from any genuine form of family oversight.

This stage is a decisive turning point in the formation of the identities of future generations. The identity system is undergoing rapid erosion that affects its essential features and civilisational constants. This negatively impacts individuals' understanding of their existential role and function in the human experience. We will not be able to overcome this problem unless we critically engage with the specifics of this stage and offer an effective civilisational alternative to the cultural models targeting young people.

¹- Mohamad Salim al-Awa, *The Landmarks of Arab-Islamic Civilisation*. A lecture series (lecture 3) from the book *'Characteristics of Arab and Islamic Culture: Under Cultural Dialogue*. Dar al-Salam, 1st edition, 2006, p. 77.

In this context, religious references emerge as a comprehensive system of thought. Offering a universal discourse with an encompassing human dimension, it is characterised by scientific i'jāz (miraculousness), providing a foundation for a sound rational vision. Religious reference accounts for the nature of the human being, addressing both the mind and the heart to break down the barriers of fear, despair and laziness. It awakens the innate, pure disposition within a person — the disposition that carries the seed of faith in the Creator — and guides them towards achievement, construction and moral self-improvement, as well as the refinement of inner desires and appetites charged with vice. It also corrects distorted concepts associated with technological 'progress', dismantling misleading ideological frameworks that hide behind the discourse of openness and modernity.

Ultimately, this religious reference aims to reconnect people with their original nature and unique identity within a civilisational vision where genuine development is a path to human upliftment and alleviating the burdens and challenges of life.

1. Islam as an Ethical and Behavioural Reference

In Western narratives, Islam has been associated with everything that is degrading to humanity, and with violations of the human rights recognised within their framework. The West has sought to implant new ideas in the collective consciousness that are hostile to the noble values Islam brought to humanity, by framing it within fragile categories such as terrorism, extremism and violence against women and children.

Consequently, the marginalisation of all things Islamic paves the way for the implantation of alternative cultures that gradually infiltrate Muslim societies. This is a desperate attempt to break their stable and solid values, targeting the Muslim child in particular. After experiencing a shortage — or even a near absence — of entertainment and creative spaces in their environment, the child becomes easy prey, exposed and penetrated by various direct and encoded negative inputs received on mobile and fixed devices. This makes it easier for children to escape self-monitoring and family oversight, even though the latter strives to provide the maximum possible level of psychological and moral protection.

'They see us as a group of human beings extending from the Gulf to the Maghreb — capable, if a renaissance were to awaken on the basis of our cultural and civilisational foundations, of being an equal counterpart, a peer and an alternative.' The world's dominant rulers do not want peers, equals or alternatives; they want obedient, subjugated followers. This includes Europe, which possesses nuclear bombs like them, and whose peoples and origins tie them to that. They went from there to the New World and built the state that rules the world.²

A person's presence in this earthly experience is linked to their recognition of the value of their existence within it and the creative spaces inherent in them and their surroundings. The decisive dividing point between creating a new reality guided by a distinctive vision and remaining in the status quo lies in whether that vision is rooted in authentic values or severed from them. The latter stretches towards new, firmly grounded horizons with multiple purposes oriented towards dismantling our mistaken beliefs about the origin of our formation. This occurs by denying our

²- Mohamad Salim al-Awa, 'Characteristics of Arab and Islamic Culture'. Lecture series: Dialogue of Civilisations 3. Prepared and presented by Nadiya Mahmoud Mostafa. Dar al-Salam Printing and Publishing House, 1st edition, 2006, p. 69.

creative selfhood and innate inspiration, and surrendering our free will to the West after entertaining the illusory belief that the West is the origin of civilisation, development and human justice, while Arabs are merely an unstable branch, vulnerable to collapse at any moment.

Situations of general waste include the waste of energies, awareness and thought, all of which generate profound existential predicaments that are difficult for human beings to bear, given the anxiety and panic involved in confronting the consequences. Yet it is easier for a person to endure a hell in which they do not exist. This is because human existence is governed by value — and by the other's recognition of our intrinsic values — as an essential condition for our own recognition of our status, worth and the significance of what we possess. Here, a group of individuals whose thought, energies and awareness have been squandered intervene: people living in existential suffering.³

The systematic wasting of human potential has reached broad segments of active youth and the people who shape them within our Arab societies. This has been accomplished by convincing them of the false materiality of life, leading them to develop an addiction to consumption—consuming everything that the West offers in terms of supposedly liberating ideas and luxurious living, away from the voice of the human conscience, which is awakened by wisdom, resolve, and the spark of innovation and change.

General waste may also affect human awareness itself, among both the materially deprived and the well-off or affluent. This is precisely what globalisation seeks to do: by immersing a generation of young people in a world of excitement and sensory gratification, along with manifestations of immediate consumption presented as the ultimate goal in achieving existence, filling the self, and giving it meaning. In this process, it reduces the value of being and belonging to a culture and homeland to numbers in a bank account and outward signs of comfortable living, which are embellished by the media for people, and youth in particular⁴.

If waste has affected the youth of the Islamic nation, then Western cultural imprinting is even more dangerous for the future of our nation, especially when it targets our children who grow up in an environment that is open to all forms of audio-visual media. In such a context, passive consumption cancels out any process of constructing moral, faith-based and educational values that the child's environment seeks to instil during the early years in particular. This period constitutes the foundation upon which all cultural learning, educational behaviours, religious values and the consolidation of Islamic identity will be built. In the presence of any external factor that does not reflect this vision, the process of building a conscious human being who understands their limits and horizons is doomed to failure.

2. Cultural Imprinting (Cultural Seedings)

The image—by virtue of what it provides in terms of audio-visual stimuli—works to produce clear shifts in the nature of a passive recipient's perception of their reality, and even of their beliefs and ideas, over the long term. However, when we speak of the child, cultural imprinting becomes far more ruthless and deadly to the being of this small creature whose tools for analysis and

³- Mostafa Hijazi: *The Wasted/The Sacrificed Human*. 1st edition, 2005. Arab Cultural Centre, Casablanca, Morocco, p. 32.

⁴- Mary Winn, *Children and Television Addiction*. Translated by Abd al-Fattah al-Sobhi. World of Knowledge series no. 248. National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters, Kuwait, 1999, p. 70.

discernment have not yet fully developed. The child's curiosity and the specificity of their intellectually formative stage—together with the building of their nervous system—open up many possibilities for cultural imprinting, especially in light of the shrinking authority of the family and the decline of internal monitoring and conscious “filtering,” which we usually find among adults. ‘Non-verbal cognitive activity for adults bears the meaning of relaxation from ordinary logical thinking and suggests achieving a certain kind of security and calm. But for children passing through the years of formation and learning language, any cumulative viewing of diverse media must be considered a possible setback.’⁵”

This means that the process of cultural⁶ imprinting seeks to plant cognitive and psychological inputs through experiences of immersion and simulation of visual and audio experiences, directly or indirectly. These inputs operate at deep levels within the future child's unconscious.

Cultural imprinting is also defined as the effect that culture has when emerging from the medium. Although culture is the primary medium through which people live and learn, imprinting rarely produces change except across generations and lifestyles. The contributions that accompany the symbolic pathway conveyed by images and forms transmitted through television lead to complex processes of socialisation and the acquisition of other cultures. In other words, imprinting describes how television and other media shape the viewer's understanding of social reality⁷.

Supporters of this theory believe that frequent television viewing leads audiences to adopt the stereotypes and specific viewpoints presented in various programmes. George Gerbner, the founder of the theory, says: ‘Cultivation theory is concerned with explaining and justifying the long-term perceptions, beliefs and concepts that audiences around the world adopt as a result of receiving media messages.’⁸

The United States witnessed the emergence of the first factors that contributed to the development of cultivation theory. During the 1960s, the public linked the rise in crime and violence rates, as well as a shift in values, to the spread of television viewing at that time. This led to popular pressure on the U.S. Congress to take action. Some American national institutions and research centres provided necessary funding to support studies examining the effects of television on areas such as health and education. Around 60 studies were published in a series of volumes in 1971 under the title *Television and Social Behavior*⁹.

Cultivation theory assumes that the direct experience that viewers gain from watching television or other digital media replaces the real experiences that people acquire through genuine, practical experience. Therefore, the more time children spend watching television, for example, the more likely they are to adopt new ideas and beliefs. Heavy viewers are therefore more likely to perceive the social reality around them as it is presented in digital and visual media.

⁵- Gerbner, G. C.: *Cultural Indicators: The Case of Violence in Television Drama*. Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1970, pp. 69–81.

⁶- Mirvat al-Tarabiichi, Abd al-Aziz al-Sayyid, *Communication Theories*. Dar al-Nahda al-Arabiya, Cairo, 2006, p. 304.

⁷- Hicham Rachdi Khair Allah, *Lectures on Media Theories*. Faculty of Specific Education, Department of Social Sciences and Media, University of Menoufia, p. 177.

⁸- Hicham Rachdi Khair Allah, *Lectures on Media Theories*, p. 178.

⁹- Potter, W. J.: ‘Perceived Reality in Television Effects Research’. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 32(1), 1988, pp. 23–41.

Perceiving the content as 'real' includes three sub-dimensions introduced by James Potter¹⁰, namely:

A. The Magic Window: This refers to the degree to which the viewer believes that the content of a television programme is real and accurately reflects social life. This concept has become common in research on children, as they generally have less ability than adults to distinguish between reality and imagination. Consequently, they believe that television offers them a 'magic window' through which they can view the world around them.

B. Learning: This dimension concerns viewers' belief that television is an educational tool that increases their knowledge and broadens their experience of things they cannot access through real-life methods.

C. Identification (unification): This refers to the degree to which the viewer identifies with the characters and situations presented on television compared to their everyday life. It also reflects the extent to which viewers feel that television characters can serve as role models — people who 'live among others' in their daily lives.

H. Adopting a Shared Ideology

Heavy television viewers tend to perceive social reality in a way that reflects the dominant trend presented on television, which portrays the world as a dangerous place filled with exaggerated levels of violence and crime compared to real life. Television also depicts many political and social leaders as corrupt, and presents teenage crime at extremely exaggerated rates, alongside other unrealistic images¹¹.

Cultivation theory tries to answer the deeper cultural questions raised by the human sciences. However, the theory has also been criticised for its field study findings on this phenomenon. Perhaps the most important points raised by critics are:

1. The impact of demographic factors: Critics have noted that George Gerbner's portrayal of the audience treats them as passive recipients of violent content. In other words, there is no distinction between the extent to which the audience is absorbed in watching, and the extent to which they receive and are influenced by the message. What role, then, do variables such as age, gender, race, socioeconomic status and health play in how viewers are affected by violent content?

This criticism is supported by many studies, such as Paul Hirsch's¹², which showed that even when controlling for several demographic variables and levels of exposure to visual content, the likelihood of attributing the cultivation process to other factors increases.

2. Specific interests (qualitative preferences):

Cultivation theory has also been criticised for not always being helpful in explaining how people's qualitative interests are formed and how they see the world around them. Horace Newcomb¹³ explains that the violence present in the real world is not organised in the same way as it is presented on television. Therefore, we cannot consider television solely responsible for shaping the reality of all viewers.

¹⁰- Hicham Rachdi Khair Allah, Lectures on Media Theories, p. 194.

¹¹- Hicham Rachdi Khair Allah, Lectures on Media Theories, p. 194.

¹²- Hirsch, P. M.: 'The Scary World of the Non-Viewer and Other Anomalies: A Reanalysis of Gerbner's Findings of Cultivation Analysis'. *Communication Research*, 7, 1980, pp. 403–456.

¹³- Newcomb, H.: *Assessing Violence: Profile of Gerbner and Gross*. *A Humanistic Critique and Suggestion**. *Communication Research*, pp. 267–273.

3. Medium viewing (moderate viewing):

In addition to the above, Griffin adds that a certain level of ambiguity affects George Gerbner's analyses because he disregards the group with a moderate viewing rate. Consequently, he disregards a significant proportion of individuals who may or may not be influenced by television programme content.

Supporters of cultivation theory respond by explaining that the specificity and 'ritual nature' of viewing matter: if media messages are uniform and consistent, then the media becomes omnipresent. In that case, even moderate or light viewers can be influenced in a shared environment with heavy viewers. Therefore, it can be said that most viewing habits are ritualistic, meaning they are based on the desire to watch at a certain time of day rather than on the desire to watch a particular type of programme. Consequently, heavy viewers are generally exposed to the dominant mental and symbolic images presented by television screens, even if they have many options available to them.

In reality, while some of these criticisms of cultivation theory may be accurate to a certain extent, they cannot be relied upon when dealing with a child audience. In that case, all the conditions that would normally support or mitigate the effects of cultivation processes are absent, leaving room for the gradual erosion of the core values that underpin their upbringing. The media "occupies a significant portion of the environment surrounding individuals and plays a substantial role in shaping their cognitive development; consequently, it influences their behaviour and lifestyle. The greater the alignment in planning between media and other institutions of socialisation, the greater the ability of the media or media-related political institution to instil the desired attitudes."¹⁴

This theory emerged at a time when the cumulative effect was limited to television viewing. Today, however, children in particular have continuous access to digital media, allowing them to seek out any content that sparks their curiosity or satisfies their interests at any time of day, often in isolation from adults.

3. Identity, and Psychological and Social Construction

Even placing a child in a visual experience that contains messages suitable for their upbringing often leads to them becoming fully immersed while watching. This transports them to different spaces and times, flooding them with conflicting feelings and new ideas that contradict their simple real-world experiences.

In contrast, children are often excessively drawn to the attractive aesthetic of the imaginary experiences provided by digital media. These experiences are characterised by elements of amazement and suspense, which align with the fragmented imagination's hunger for novel experiences and the perpetual desire to discover the new. This gradually contributes to the fragmentation of identity structures, pulling children towards new spaces that peel away their identity and alienate them from their original environment.

As the concept of identity formation suggests, part of the process depends on emotional perception, triggering a highly complex neurophysiological event. This organises our experiences and enables us to feel "I" and act appropriately in reality. One could also speak of an unconscious identity process that protects our individuality day and night, shielding us from external dangers and

¹⁴- Abd al-Razzaq Mohammad al-Delaimi, 'Globalization of Television'. 1st edition, 2005. Dar Jarir Publishing and Distribution, Amman, Jordan, p. 79.

adapting our behaviour to the conditions of the outside world. As long as this process functions, we feel in harmony with ourselves and the sense of identity remains unconscious or preconscious — just as natural and obvious as the air we breathe.

For Erikson, the individual is not an isolated or essentially self-centred entity. Without a social framework, human life is unimaginable. Without information from outside sources, a person cannot recognise themselves. Without actively influencing the world, they cannot experience their own identity. Therefore, if we consider the social aspect of identity according to Erikson...

From birth, human beings grow up in a specific geographical environment, sharing a way of life, language and religious beliefs with their family and cultural group. All of these factors shape what can be understood as a kind of ‘place-time’ (lived context).¹⁵

According to Erikson, identity formation involves finding one’s place in society, gaining social status, taking on roles and performing them responsibly. This process also involves extracting and organising a person’s independent vision and value orientations from their various relationships and experiences. At the same time, groups must continuously prove their identity because their members change and history transforms them¹⁶.

Families seek to preserve their cohesion, churches strive to ensure the continuity of their religious beliefs, economic institutions struggle to maintain economic stability, minorities defend their traditions, and states resist internal independence movements or external threats. The way an individual organises their inner world can be compared to the efforts of social organisation within groups, institutions, or societies as a whole.

Before a child can think independently about themselves and their surroundings, they must grow up in a social environment that protects their life and awakens their abilities. The identity of the ‘self’ emerges in youth, and this personal autonomy is what makes self-identity more than just belonging. Erikson’s concept of identity comes into play here, redefining the interaction between individuality and social belonging¹⁷.

For adults, the challenge lies in building a social identity by entering the world of others’ ideas and accepting the group’s rules, while simultaneously developing a sense of self as an independent core. This also involves considering social demands and requirements.

This approach reinforces the media theory of television, which focuses intensely on the duality of resistance and negotiation with any unfamiliar input that seeks to change the layers of identity and their internal connections at both individual and collective levels. Therefore, we can affirm that resistance to identity alienation differs from child to child. The type of upbringing and environment a child experiences is the primary factor controlling the degree of fusion and integration into auditory and visual projections¹⁸.

The more open the child’s mechanisms of comparison, questioning and careful observation are — because of the presence of supportive family and educational institutions — the less likely they are to engage in passive, uncritical consumption. Conversely, the absence of family support,

¹⁵- Erik Erikson, *Searching for Identity*. Translated by Samir Jamil Rudwan. Dar al-Kitab al-Jami‘i (University Book House) (no date/edition given), p. 98.

¹⁶- Erik Erikson, *Searching for Identity*. pp. 110.

¹⁷- Erik Erikson, *Searching for Identity*. pp. 111.

¹⁸- Erik Erikson, *Searching for Identity*. pp. 112.

educational institutions and religious guidance accelerates the programming process and the gradual erasure of the child's identity imprint.

Identity formation is not a cold calculation of personal interests, narcissistic preservation of the self-image or introspective reflection. According to Erikson, individual identity is only achieved by people who respond to commitment and do not avoid it. Even great historical figures such as Christ, Francis of Assisi and Mahatma Gandhi had to accept a social identity before they could transcend the lifestyle of their cultural environment and develop values such as brotherhood and global tolerance¹⁹.

Talking about intellectual, social, and economic backwardness leads our Arab societies toward a severe disturbance in their way of thinking on the one hand, and a weakness in dialectical thinking on the other. This imbalance results in a serious inability to cope with what appears to be confusion and entanglement in the phenomena of life and society—things that seem more powerful than their capacity to understand them, and also beyond their ability to make decisions²⁰.

Thus, Western narratives find fertile ground within communities that import their culture. Instead of spending huge sums to plant their destructive ideas, the path becomes easier: minds—especially those of children eager to experience the enchanting world of imaginative simulation—are simply made ready to receive it.

The Applied Study

Introduction

The images in animated cartoons are distinguished from other visual forms by a set of structural characteristics that make them a highly influential tool in shaping children's awareness and value systems. As the saying goes: "The image is a language without rules; it is a storehouse of impulses, part of an imagination inhabited by stories and myths — everything built outside the mind and its constraints"²¹.

The image is like a window that leads from the visible to the invisible. Perhaps its most prominent feature is its ability to combine sensory enjoyment with implicit instruction simultaneously. In this case, the image is not innocent with regard to its cultural and ideological content, even when it appears in an educational or entertaining form.

Therefore, the image can become a tool through which children can discover subjects that are strange to their cultural context. In this way, it can be used to diagnose cultural practices that seem unfamiliar to the child, making them feel familiar through visual presentation that provides a sense of universality. This applies to some of the beings/characters shown.

Understanding the specificity of the image and its relationship with the child viewer is crucial. At this stage, a semiotic reading of the image is not enough; the highly important issue of the nature of the audiovisual image mechanism must also be addressed. This mechanism is responsible for activating positive or negative effects in the child's unconscious during the act of watching²².

¹⁹- Also: Identity and Its Dispersion in the Life of Erik Erikson and His Works. Translated by Salim Jamil Ridwan. Dar al-Kitab al-Jami'i, pp. 113–114.

²⁰- Mostafa Hijazi: Social Backwardness: An Introduction to the Psychology of the Underdeveloped Person (9th edition). 9th edition. Casablanca, 2005, p. 60.

²¹- Said Bankrad, Manifestations of the Image: Semiotics of Visual Systems. 1st edition, 2019. Casablanca, Morocco, p. 219.

²²- Said Bankrad, Manifestations of the Image: Semiotics of Visual Systems, p. 222.

As mentioned above, each age group has its own specific characteristics. Therefore, we can begin by stating that children have a high capacity to absorb new information because their nervous and cognitive systems are still developing. This makes them eager to try new experiences without considering the consequences. Television programmes require minimal effort from viewers; they allow children to distinguish, imagine and understand. This means that the physical world of the television programme is immediately accessible, as the visual material fills the eyes and ears completely, leaving no room for the mind to wander or lose interest²³.

To test our initial hypothesis that the visual image has a special mode of operation enabling the gradual ‘cultivation/implantation’ of ideas that may be inconsistent with the religious and cultural background of a Muslim child and thus shape their identity, we examined a set of narrative sequences in animated cartoons such as *Miraculous: Tales of Ladybug & Cat Noir*, using semiotic and artistic-aesthetic mechanisms²⁴. We then identified four main mechanisms inherent in the image that increase the chances of identity alienation in the short and long term.

1) The Golden Square:

The cartoon image is based on visual simplification and colour harmony, with the main characters intersecting with the points of the golden²⁵ square within the screen frame. Although these techniques are simple, they establish an immediate connection between the child viewer and the characters, which is designed from the outset. They introduce new ideas that may seem simple, but which actually represent a complex symbolic structure. This often leads the viewer to identify fully with the main character, who usually embodies high values such as love and helping others. However, this can be dangerous as the process of ‘breaking down’ occurs through a false emotional sense of fulfilment and visual appeal, which weakens a child’s bonds to their beliefs and cultural identity.



If we divide the rectangle into four equal parts using two vertical and two horizontal lines, we get four points and three horizontal and vertical segments. In film editing, these are called ‘power points’. In this image, they correspond to the power of the main heroine’s (Lady Baaq) gaze, along

²³- Mary Winn, *Children and Television Addiction*. Translated by Abd al-Fattah al-Subhi. World of Knowledge series no. 247. Kuwait, 1999, p. 87.

²⁴- A cartoon produced and directed by the French director Thomas Astruc for the Zagto company. It is based on the idea of transforming the two main characters from ordinary children into heroes who fight the evil Hok Doeth (the falcon), who is charged with negativity and destruction.

²⁵- Franco Ventura, *The Cinematic Discourse: The Language of the Image*. Translated by Alaa Shannana. Publications of the Ministry of Culture, General Establishment of Cinema. Seventh Art series no. 217. Damascus, 2019, pp. 24–25.

with a background shading that forms a golden halo around her body, a colour traditionally associated with holiness and spirituality. Close-up shots of this kind, with halos and strong colours, stay in a child's memory and contribute to the development of an intense emotional attachment among viewers. We have seen many children who follow this cartoon buy everything related to the characters, such as clothes, masks and accessories. They may even imitate everything these characters do, including their movements, words and 'incantations' during the transformation.

2) Invoking emotions:

Animated drawings rely on deliberate exaggeration to depict emotions, heroism and high-stakes situations — situations that the cartoon characters face in a planned way. This is intended to encourage children to form attachments to these characters and adopt their ideas and dreams. This leads the child to accept the characters' individuality and their ability to shape their destiny using supernatural powers. This undermines a Muslim's belief in relying on God and entrusting one's affairs to the Creator.

Building the character within carefully designed frames—as we will explain later—instills in the child a sense of complete integration and full compatibility with her.



This encourages the child to accept all her behaviours, even those that feel strange to them, as can be seen in the process of 'summoning the kami'²⁶. In the scene, the heroine stands at the centre of the circle while small creatures gather around her. This ritual-like scene appears repeatedly throughout the cartoon and raises questions about the relationship between the circle and the child's psychological and emotional makeup.

Elsewhere in the series, the duality of good and evil is depicted through the character Gabriel-Hook Moth (Gabriel-موث-هوك), who repeatedly appears as a suffering, loving figure — someone who loves his deceased wife and strives to bring her back to life by battling the heroine relentlessly. Here, evil becomes equivalent to good in the eyes of the child viewer as long as the goal is rescue,

²⁶- (Plot description): Small creatures with supernatural powers help the hero to transform and fight the evil represented by Hok Doeth.

such as saving the kind mother Emily and returning her to life — the mother of the heroine's favourite character, Adrian. At this point, a constantly repeating narrative sequence emerges: Hook Moth's desire to obtain all the kami in order to return Emily's soul to her body. To an adult viewer, this idea may seem simple or even naïve, but we are talking about a young age group whose cognitive system is not yet fully developed.

A large, close-up shot of Hook Moth fills the screen, capturing the child's attention and making him feel as if the character is close to him. Very close-up shots break down the barrier between the screen and reality. The 'third dimension', as Molz calls it, is the size of the image. This dimension may be interpreted differently by a technician, a psychologist or a film critic because it relates to how the image is received, the visual environment it occupies and the viewer's position within it. There is no doubt that this dimension is designed to influence, guide and attract the viewer.

The gaze of the Hook Moth can be distinguished by the way it carries a sense of brokenness within a repetitive sequence of images that are retrieved and then alternated with other images. In the first image, he is shown wearing his wedding ring next to Emily, his dead wife, who is lying in her coffin. In a parallel scene, he sits beside her, sharing a romantic moment that reveals his emotional side. Exposing the child viewer to this narrative sequence of death and life, good and evil, peace and war within such a short time span puts them into a state of mental confusion, visual blur and emotional disorientation²⁷.



²⁷- Mohamad Nouredine Afaya, *Image and Meaning*. Cultural Centre for the Book, 1st edition, 2019. Casablanca, Morocco, p. 68.



In this case, the sender relies on indirection and insinuation, presenting what is ‘unsaid’ at a level that is difficult to think through directly. In other words, it is a highly intelligent rhetorical game that creates a contrast which deepens the longer the misunderstanding continues. This is used to shape the future through an apparent duality, manifested by a ‘split’ within the insinuations scattered across the narrative sequences. However, this apparent duality does not amount to true contradiction. Rather, it ensures the delivery of a message saturated with symbols and clues.

This act of violation does not hesitate to present itself as contradiction. This creates a deceptive duality, exposing the value system that is meant to be violated. Then, a new value system emerges in its place — one that is consistent with the hidden value patterns embedded within the original fabric of the story. The danger here is not merely the presence of intertwining symbols alongside the density of life and the branching of its paths²⁸. It goes further: the narrative implies the existence of two worlds — one possible, and one impossible. It is here that the real danger of meaning takes shape, becoming fixed in the mind of the recipient and clinging to it.

3) Audiovisual Aesthetics

When discussing the image, it is difficult not to consider its aesthetic dimensions, both visual and auditory. The most important elements and symbols are used to create endless possibilities of meaning and interpretation, connecting the sender and the receiver.

In the animated series *The Miraculous*, the image operates at the intersection of visual and sound rhythms within a precise time-based mechanism. Narrative sequences, each with cultural meaning, are repeated across closely spaced time jumps. In these sequences, the main characters are presented in a clear way that engages the child, using large frames, close-ups or high angles. This is accompanied by a strong audio element in which certain phrases are repeated. While these phrases may initially appear simple, they can sometimes convey ideas that may be harmful to a child’s beliefs. Repetition creates familiarity and immersion in the scenes shown. It also enables repeated phrases to be memorised, even when the child does not understand their meaning. Rather than

trying to understand the significance of all the words, the child becomes attached to the pleasure and enjoyment produced by the highly concentrated visual language of colours, movements and attractive characters — a language that creates a fascinating world and nourishes his vivid imagination.

Image elements cannot have an effective impact on the viewer unless they are subject to certain aesthetic controls that frame them, ensure their harmony and guarantee their integration within a solid structural framework. This structure communicates meaning artistically, slipping into the viewer and persuading them of the importance of the message conveyed. The most important of these controls are:

A. Rhythm: Rhythm is connected to the regular recurrence of movement in a stable pattern that combines unity and difference simultaneously. It is achieved through the repetition of forms or spaces. This creates what can be called ‘units’, which may be identical or different, close or far apart. The intervals between each unit are known as such²⁹.

A.1 Repetition of scenes

The Miraculous series follows a specific pattern of escalating scenes in a circular form. Hook Moth selects his victims with great care, choosing those who are sad or frustrated as the ideal ‘charge’ for negative emotions. He then sends these emotions through the Akuma butterfly³⁰, which takes over the victim’s body — or something connected to them. In the culture of the Muslim child, this act of possession is similar to something in our Islamic religion and popular beliefs³¹. Children grow up hearing phrases like: ‘Don’t get angry or cry in the bathroom,’ because, according to their beliefs, bathrooms are places where devils and jinn reside and seek out weak souls to harm and possess.

The child stores these beliefs in their mind until they are unconsciously summoned during viewing, at a time when the body’s natural resistance mechanisms are absent — especially when there is an underlying popular memory and deeply rooted religious beliefs in the unconscious mind. The body does not naturally resist inputs that resemble its internal resources and does not treat them as a threat to its survival.

Once again, we must emphasise the important role of the family in breaking patterns or beliefs from the West that could undermine a child’s ability to analyse, critique and understand the world around them. We do not doubt our noble religion or the Holy Quran — the eternal, miraculous speech of God. To God belongs the highest example. However, we are trying to shift the angle of vision towards the hidden causes behind cultural ‘implanting’ processes that many researchers may have overlooked.

This requires us to strengthen the correct doctrine in the minds of our children. They must understand that God created humans strong through faith and the free will that makes it easier to

²⁸- See: Abdullah Ibrahim: Reception and Cultural Contexts. Difference Publications, 2nd edition, 2005, p. 20.

²⁹- Hatim al-Hilo, Line as a Basic Element for Training in Contemporary Graphic Art. Master's thesis in Graphic Art, Faculty of Fine Arts, Helwan University, p. 111.

³⁰- (Plot description): The villain Hok Doeth imbues white butterflies with his negative feelings. They fly through his window towards the victim, piercing her body or anything associated with her. Afterwards, the character becomes a compliant servant of Hok Doeth.

³¹- <https://kabbos.com> Al-Amin Please refer to the following references: Al-Amin Ismail Bukhari: Jinn and Mental Illness, June 6, 2010

choose the straight path. Many religious sources based on the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet emphasise the need to reinforce belief in the oneness of God and to combat all Western ideas and philosophies that combine Taoism, Gnosticism and atheism³².

2. Repetition of phrases

The plot of the animated series Miraculous is based on the concepts of ‘miracle’ and ‘transformation’, in which good and evil become stronger after transformation. For this process to occur, certain basic conditions must be met, represented by:

- the magic phrase,
- the transformation space;
- an accidental event that triggers intervention.

Throughout the series, we noted down the most important lines that were repeated across its six seasons.

A) Transformation phrases:

Marinette says, “Tikki!” Spots appear and she transforms into Ladybug.

Adrien says, ‘Bla-g!’ — claws come out and he transforms into a cat.

B) Phrases for returning to the normal state:

Marinette says, “Tikki!” — the spots disappear.

- Adrien says, ‘Bla-g!’ — the claws disappear.

C) Phrase for restoring damage to the city:

Marinette says, “The Miraculous Ladybug!”

D) Phrase for purifying the victim of Akuma possession.

Marinette says this before freeing the Akuma and returning it to its original state.

“No more evil for you, little Akuma. It’s time to purify.”

E) Phrases for charging the victim with evil (spoken by Hawk Moth):

Hawk Moth says:

“I am Hawk Moth, and today I grant you the power to get your revenge.”

“Fly, my little Akuma! Charge yourself with evil and bring me Miraculous Ladybug and the dark cat...”

Significant	Significer
Tikki spots appear	Signification (intended meaning): calling upon the unknown creatures of a child’s imagination that have the power to alter a character’s form functions as an invitation to change God’s creation through magical means.
Plagg's claws emerge	//
Tikki spots disappear	//
Plagg's claws disappear	//
The miraculous	Linking the concept of divine miracles with

³²- <https://asjp.cerist.dz/en/article/92131> Please refer to Nadia Belkhaladi: Demonic Possession in Islamic Society, Journal of Anthropology of Religions, Issue 7 No. 1, pp. 257-266, 15/01/2011.

Ladybug”	creatures in the unconscious mind of a child.
“No more evils for you—little Akuma. It’s time for purification.	Deviating from the concept of Islamic purification associated with performing minor and major ablutions . Shifting away from the idea of purification from sin through seeking forgiveness and repentance.
I am Hook Moth (Monarch of the moth). And today I give you the power so that you can have your revenge.	Undermining the belief in the oneness of God and His ability to give and withhold, which manifests in the child’s unconscious mind.
Come, little Akuma. Charge yourself with evil — and bring me MiraCulous Ladybug and the Black Cat.”	Embedding a Gnostic philosophy involving the reincarnation of souls and negating free will, which God granted to human beings after charging them with fulfilling their responsibilities.

B. Unity

By unity, we mean the way the parts of the image connect with one another to form an integrated structure that carries meaning as a whole. This applies not only to the main elements, but also to the small details that viewers may consider to be insignificant. The image’s coherence allows the intended messages to be conveyed more clearly, whatever form it takes. This means less effort and time for the viewer.

While the artistic elements of a work may vary and become complex, each part must still be linked to the whole in some way. Some parts complete others, strengthen their significance in the work and help to achieve unity. This aesthetic value is important because it both entertains the viewer and persuades them of the content being presented³³.



³³-Ibrahim Ait El Mekki, In the Narrative of the Image: A Semiotic Approach to the Message of Caricature, Dar Kunooz Al Maarefa for Publishing and Distribution, Amman, 1st edition, 2022, p. 83.

One clear example of unity in this image is the integration of light and darkness. A window of light opens deep within a dark space filled with luminous butterflies. Despite their differing natures, these elements merge to create a single meaning: the transformation of light into darkness via a central ‘charging’ process. The villain is positioned at the intersection point of circles corresponding to the centre of the image frame and the centre of the luminous opening, where the charging and transformation take place.

Proportion

Proportion is defined as the relationship in size, quantity, or degree between one thing and another. Scott believes that proportion exists in all elements of nature because it represents ‘inevitable changes in growth’. He also emphasises that relationships of proportion must be felt if the goal is to use them in visual work. Proportion helps us to shape our understanding of things, yet there will always be something that we sense but cannot fully explain. This is what gives work vitality and radiance³⁴.

This image contains three symbols, or ‘masks’, arranged proportionally within the frame: the butterfly, the black cat and the ladybird. They are integral to the series’ plot because they represent the masks worn by Marinette, Adrien and Gabriel before they transform into Ladybug, Cat Noir and Hawk Moth. The overall context of the conflict among these characters can only be understood through the presence of these three masks, which are arranged according to the rules of hierarchy and time — within proportional and complementary order³⁵.



This can be seen in our reading of the image. The glowing butterfly mask is in the centre, functioning as the ‘centre of weight’, especially because of the direct gaze towards the viewer and the tightly clenched hand, which symbolises complete control. This hand controls the other two masks by preventing them from joining together, thereby increasing their power and allowing evil to gain the upper hand over good.

³⁴- Scott Robert Gillam Scope, *Foundations of Design*, trans. Abdel Baqi Muhammad Ibrahim and Muhammad Mahmoud Youssef, Dar Al Nahda Egypt for Printing and Publishing: n.d., p. 44.

³⁵- Ibrahim Ait El Mekki: *In the Narrative of the Image*, p. 87.

The positioning of these symbols, their true function and the repetition of specific scenes across the seasons of the cartoon all work together to produce meaning and influence the viewer. This occurs through aesthetic and artistic values such as proportion, distinction and contrast, which capture the child viewer's attention and lead them to believe the strange ideas repeatedly presented on their screen.

Significant	Position	Size	Signifier
hawk moth sparrowhawk moth	centre	large	In Japanese culture, the sparrowhawk moth is a symbol of death, representing negative feelings and exploiting its victims to steal the symbol of immortality from the ladybird and the black cat.
black cat	left	small	In Japanese culture, the black cat is a symbol of luck.
ladybug	right.	small	The ladybird is considered a bringer of luck and a bearer of other people's sorrows.

Our choice of these three symbols was not random; it is directly linked to the idea of good struggling with evil, upon which the drama of the series was built. The child becomes connected to the bigger picture, particularly with images that carry a discernible radiance. A case in point is the character 'Hook Moth', whose outward appearance resembles an innocent butterfly. Yet it remains in a constant state of glow, poised to reveal its true nature, which is embedded in the symbolism of death and decay. This is in contrast to the hope embodied by 'Shannovar' and the 'ladybug'. The dominance of evil in the series, through its centrality and large scale, perhaps left the counter-programme, represented by the confrontation between the black cat and the ladybird, with the opportunity to turn towards Hook Moth and thwart its renewed plans, episode after episode, across the six seasons of the animated series.

Conclusion

This study produced a set of results, summarised as follows:

1. The moving image has a unique ability to influence child viewers through the use of various aesthetic and artistic elements. The most significant of these are the framing, shot size, and the appropriateness of colours and shapes.
2. Rhythm in animated series is considered one of the most important tools for cultural indoctrination, through the systematic repetition of audio-visual sequences throughout the series. These sequences function as codes that initiate reception processes in the child viewer.
3. A lack of critical awareness within the family can lead to children who are unable to resist external temptations. Consequently, their innate instincts for discovery and constructive critique are transformed into an endless pursuit of immediate gratification.
4. A religious upbringing plays the greatest role in establishing Islamic values and a balanced creed in young minds. The early stages of childhood are fundamental to constructing the child's identity and enabling them to withstand the temptations of other cultures.
5. Given the accelerating pace of technological development and its pervasive presence across all digital media platforms, it is imperative for Arab states to keep pace by providing a wide range of entertainment spaces for children. Spending long hours at home is no longer feasible without at least minimal use of these media. We are currently at a pivotal stage in terms of future generations,

so it is crucial for religious, social and cultural centres of influence to support young people and embrace their hopes and aspirations. This will help create a real world in which genuine experiences can be had, combining entertainment and learning.

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