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## **1. Introduction**

*Miki*, an Arabic translated version of Mickey Mouse comics was introduced to Egyptian readers in 1959 in regular magazine format and has become part of Egyptian popular culture ever since. This study attempts to understand how a global media text such as Disney comics is received in a local context such as Egypt through an empirically focused qualitative reception analysis.

The research was carried out against the theoretical backdrop of theories and debates of media imperialism and cultural globalization which will be discussed in the literature review in the next section. Followed by a section explaining in detail the methodological approach and research strategy, including sampling and the research design. The fourth section begins with a brief introduction to *Miki* and the research participants followed by the presentation and analysis of the research findings.

## **2. Literature Review**

The following review will engage with the debates often incited by the discussion of local reception of global media. These debates involve a body of literature that crosses over more than one field; from international communication and global media studies to cultural studies and more recently, media anthropology. More specifically, when the ‘global media’ in question refers to Western media in origin and the ‘local’ in question is located in the non-Western world , it is even more necessary to enter into debates over media / cultural imperialism, cultural globalization, modernization, and the possible effects on cultural / national identity. There is a problematic inherent in each of these

concepts worthy of discussion, beginning from the ‘local’ as a unit of analysis and its relationship with the ‘national’, what we mean by modernity and the intersections between the spheres of media and culture. Due to the nature of this study, I will give special focus to the doubtful contribution of audience research in the debate over media imperialism and cultural globalization, especially within the cultural studies qualitative approach to audience and reception analysis.

## **2.1. The media/ cultural imperialism debate and the role of audience research**

Overviews of international media studies present an almost linear development of its dominant perspectives or models beginning generally with the modernization perspective in the 50s and 60s, followed by media imperialism and dependency school theories in the late 60s and 70s, up to cultural globalization theories developed in the 90s onward (Tomlinson, 1991, Curran and Park, 2000). Sometimes viewed in terms of extreme paradigm shifts, from optimism about the power of the Western media to modernize developing countries to pessimism about its negative influence over local cultural and national identities and back to optimism due to audience power and cultural pluralism in the age global flows (Rantanen, 2005). Yet, other accounts have also showed that the ascension of a new perspective does not completely replace the former<sup>1</sup>, with media imperialism theorists reformulating their positions (Boyd-Barrett, 1998, Curran and Park

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<sup>1</sup> Marking each paradigm with the decade(s) in which it was most popular may be helpful in understanding the development of thought within the scientific community, however when studying actual cases all these perspectives can be concurrently at play at once. For example, in Egypt, despite the increase in commercial media, the state and other development agencies continue to use the media for their development and modernization projects (Abu-Lughod, 2005), while old war-time propaganda projects reemerged with the US State department recently launching several media programs in the region: Radio *Sawa*, *Al-Hurra* TV and *Hi!* magazine.

2000) and worries from cultural homogenisation growing due to the increase in the size and power of a handful of global media giants. Rather an ongoing debate has taken shape between the two views regarding both the distribution of media power in the world and its cultural consequences.

According to Schiller's early definition, 'cultural imperialism proposes that a society is brought into the modern world system when its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced, and sometimes bribed into shaping its social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating center of the system'. (Schiller, 1976: 9 as cited in Livingstone, A., 2001). This definition stems from a center-periphery view of the world system with a one-way flow of capital, goods and ideas from the developed Eurocentric West to the developing countries in the Third World which continue to be bound in a relationship of political, economic and cultural dependency with their former colonial powers. In many cases the center was specifically identified to be the United States, and the values exported being the ideology of capitalism. A famous study illustrating the early thesis of cultural imperialism was "*How To Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic*" (Dorfman and Mattelart 1971), which applied a textual analysis using a Marxist critique of the ideological message encoded in the worldwide famous American comics.

The center-periphery view of the world became contested by later globalisation theorists such as Arjun Appadurai (1990) who proposed a framework of scapes of global cultural flows that takes into account multidirectional flows and the relative influence of regional centers of media production such as Brazil and Mexico, India and Egypt. Yet the most contested assumption in the media imperialism thesis was its hypodermic model of media

effects which disregards media audiences as one homogenous lump of passive dupes that are subject to harmful ideological injections from foreign media that threaten their identities (Rantanen,2005). From this point, audience studies with emphasis on active audience and empirical research provided a strong critical platform to cultural imperialism claims.

The ‘new’ audience research developing in the 80s within British cultural studies reemphasized the role of active audience which was declared earlier by the proponents of the uses and gratifications approach who famously questioned ‘what people do with the media, rather than what the media do to them’. Yet, the new approach influenced by Stuart Hall’s encoding /decoding model went beyond the individualistic functional approach of uses and gratifications with a more sociological perspective combined with literary criticism and semiotics (Jensen and Rosengren, 1990). According to Hall (1980), the preferred reading of a media text is encoded by producers, but the intended effect depends upon the audience’s reading or decoding of this message which may agree with the preferred reading encoded by dominant ideology of the text, or negotiate with it , or entirely oppose the text and go against it.

One of the most cited studies on the issue of the reception of US television soap operas by non-American audiences from different ethnic backgrounds was the large study conducted by Elihu Katz and Tamar Liebes on the show *Dallas* (1990), in which they applied the decoding model combined with qualitative and quantitative research methods, and presented their findings of differentiated readings and interpretations of the show as a direct challenge to cultural imperialism theories.

In response to active audience theorists, Schiller attacked their methodology by questioning "how can one propose to extract one TV show, film, book, .. from the now nearly seamless media-cultural environment and examine it for specific effects?". Moreover, how can a researcher specify the individual source of an idea, value, perspective, or reaction? According to him, an individual's response, for example, to "*Dallas*" may be the result of "half-forgotten images from a dozen peripheral encounters in the cultural supermarket" (Schiller, 1991: 24).

Interestingly, Tomlinson (1991) raised similar criticisms to the *Dallas* study by Liebes and Katz despite calling it "the most ambitious attempt so far to examine the media imperialism argument empirically from the perspective of audience response", (Tomlinson, 1991: p 47-8) and demonstrating the findings of the study at length to emphasize that the impact of the imperialist text on the lives and human relations of audiences "has been seriously overstated in the polemics of writers like Schiller, Dorfman and the Mattelarts." (ibid: p50). Nevertheless, Tomlinson was in concurrence with Schiller in pointing to the inherent limitations of empirical studies of media imperialism although being one of the most systematic and comprehensive critics of cultural imperialism theorists. For example, he pointed to problems of group dynamics and to the fact that to be asked to consider an episode in a critical way requires more activity and reflection than the normal everyday distracted watching. According to him, the value of this study and similar ones is limited to *problematising* the stronger versions of the cultural imperialism argument and that they cannot actually *refute* it, since problems of evidence ultimately defeat them (ibid: p51-6, emphasis in the original).

Hence, the new qualitative audience research became associated with one side of the debate on international communication. Janet Wasko (2001:10) writes that “it often seems that research has been undertaken specifically to refute the cultural imperialism thesis while further research is needed to sort out the complexities of the cultural imperialism argument.” More general criticism was delivered to the approach, which despite being inspired by the critical tradition seemed to devalue the importance of the structures of power behind media content and organization, reflecting a conservative free-market line of thinking, such that James Curran commented that “reception analysis as a whole is not very revisionist.. it is a pluralist dish reheated and presented as new cuisine.”(Curran, 1990: 150)

Thus, as much as the new audience studies have been convincing in indicating that the negative effects argument is too strongly defined by the dependency paradigm, they do not say anything about material dependency and the structural mechanisms behind it. However, defending the approach against these criticisms while clarifying its aims and limits with regards to the question of cultural imperialism, Daniel Biltereyst explains that reception studies are explicitly not interested in analyzing the broader structural context or the study of larger, long-term influences or effects on a macro-level, focusing instead on the analysis of the concrete consumption of specific programs on a micro-level, and as a result they cannot be criticized for legitimizing material dependency or dominance (Biltereyst ,1996).

One may conclude that cultural imperialism and the transfer of cultural values is a complex, long-term process occurring at a macro-level and involving economic and material structures of power. Therefore, its cultural effect cannot be quantified or ‘tested’

through a ‘one-shot’ reception analyses on the micro-level. But how do we surpass this impasse? How do we combine an awareness with structural inequalities in economic and political power with a desire to study cultural processes and understand the agency of people?

## **2.2. A culturalist approach beyond media-centrism**

Making a distinction between the spheres of media and culture can be crucial in both defining the aim and scope of audience research within cultural studies as well as in clarifying a position in the media imperialism debate. Audience research from a cultural studies approach differs from the media-centric approach to audience. Following James Carey’s (1989) characterization, communication studies as based in American studies are grounded in a view of communication as a process of transmitting messages at a distance for the purpose of control, therefore they study influence, attitude change, or in case of individual choice what to read or view. By contrast, cultural studies conceive of communication as a ritual or process through which a shared culture is created, modified and transformed. Such a view is “directed not toward the extension of messages in space, but the maintenance of society in time; not the act of imparting information or influence but the creation, representation, and celebration of shared even if illusory beliefs.” (Carey, 1989: p 42 ).

In terms of the agenda of audience research, Livingstone (1998) further explains that instead of asking what texts mean or what people do with texts, research should ask how texts are located and understood as part of the practices of people’s daily lives. The audience becomes then a shorthand way of pointing to ways in which people stand in relationship to each other, and the task for audience research becomes that of charting

the possibilities and problems for communication or relations among people in so far as these are undermined or facilitated, managed or reconstituted by the media. (Livingstone, 1998: p251). With this understanding of what qualitative reception research should be looking at, we can approach empirical study without falling in the pitfalls both Tomlinson and Schiller pointed to in the abovementioned criticisms to previous research.

As for the question of media imperialism, we might as well achieve a more balanced position again by distinguishing between media and culture. In this case, we can accept the concept of “media imperialism” to acknowledge structural inequalities in the world system that is analyzed through the political economy approach, while searching for a more subtle concept than “cultural imperialism” to understand and analyze the cultural effects or cultural processes that take place when people experience global media.

In his reformulation of the concept, Boyd –Barrett (1998) limits his argument to media imperialism and not cultural imperialism, focusing on the inequality of international media activity in terms of ownership, regulation, distribution and content in the media industries . As such, media imperialism becomes an objective empirical phenomena that must be acknowledged in any study of global media, yet is best studied using a political economy approach that focuses on the media industry, one medium at a time.

On the other hand, the assumption that media imperialism is the same as cultural imperialism, or that media is at the center of cultural processes playing a central role in the creation of culture, makes us overlook the fact that media messages are mediated by other cultural experiences since people bring in other cultural resources into dealing with the media (Tomlinson, 1991). According to Tomlinson, we are in front of a process of constant mediation where how we make sense of the media and media representations is

influenced by our life and what is going on it, yet at the same time our life is influenced by representations in the media. Therefore, I agree with Tomlinson inasmuch as that cultural imperialism is actually “cultural change” that involves media among other things, (Tomlinson, 1991) However, I do not see that the concept of cultural globalization as anymore helpful than the concept of cultural imperialism in this respect.

One of the problems with the concept of cultural globalization is that it is usually used as if describing a new phenomenon, when there has always been a long history of global cultural encounters, acknowledging of course that the interconnectivity has intensified due to technological advancement. Walter Armbrust (2000) who has done cultural anthropology in Egypt, calls this global ahistoricism, and for him it is one reason why he rejects the framework of globalization. He illustrates this point using an example from Egyptian popular culture, where a famous Egyptian dancer Tahiyya Kariyuka got her name from the Brazilian carioca dance which swept the world in 1933. The carioca dance was created in the Hollywood movie *Flying down to Rio* and has nothing to do with Brazil and much with America. Current generations know nothing about that link, she is only remembered for local Egyptian films not for *Rio*. Armbrust concludes that such global flow occurring sixty years ago suggests that the link between globalization and electronic media is overhyped (Armbrust, 2000:22-23) . Similarly, Morley and Robins note that in this respect, the postmodern condition may be new to the West while in all the countries colonized by the West the experience of immediate destabilising contact with an alien culture has a very long historical resonance. (Morley and Robbins, 1995: 217).

Therefore, cultural change seems to be a simple concept yet open enough to include other sophisticated formulations that aim to describe transnational or global/local cultural

processes, without being as ideologically predetermining as cultural globalization seems to be due to its recognizable position as a successor or alternative to media imperialism. That said, there is no doubt that many cultural studies theorists, globalization theorists and anthropologists who have studied and analyzed global cultural flows have contributed useful concepts that describe the different forms of cultural change taking place in the world at this accelerated level of global activity.

Concepts like glocalisation (Robertson, 1990), indigenization (Miller, 1995), and appropriation have been used to explain possible outcomes of the local consumption of global media, and the subtle ways in which they may affect identities, traditions and the daily lives of the people around the world.

### **2.3. Local or national? The question of the unit of analysis**

One of the questions that makes the study of the role of the media in bringing about cultural change in the age of globalisation challenging and complex is the question of the unit of analysis. The inclusion or exclusion of the nation as a unit of analysis in the study of global cultural flows is in many ways a contested issue. On one hand it is sometimes predicted that the juxtaposition between national and international is coming to an end as the single point of departure in any research (ibid,:157), but on the other hand, some case by case studies especially in the non western countries (Curran and Park : 2000) suggest that globalization is an ongoing process which has not yet undermined the existence or the power of the nation and, in practical terms, many phenomena are still defined in national terms.

For example when focusing on the cultural consequences of globalization a parallel debate is usually framed in terms of a fear from cultural homogenization or sameness (Hamelink, 1983) as opposed to a celebration of cultural heterogenization or global cultural mix (Lull,2000). Homogenization, as Rantanten (2005: p79) points can be especially useful because it allows the inclusion of the national as well as the global as a source of homogenization that might be equally oppressive.

However the important thing to keep in mind is that the ‘analysis of cultural impact of any form of domination, must always be differentiated, concerned to establish which groups in which places, are receptive to it or not ’(Morley and Robbins: 1995 : 62). For example, Lila Abu Lughod’s research in rural villages in Egypt, suggests that there is a center- periphery relationship within the one nation as well (Abu-Lughod, 2005). In addition, Couldry points to the criticism directed to the element of “sharing” in the early understanding of the concept of culture since in ‘contemporary culture we actually observe division rather unity; non sharing rather than sharing’ (Couldry , p101).

Similarly, the term local and its derivatives: locality and localism within the sociological tradition have generally been associated with the notion of a particular place with its set of close-knit social relationships, yet we should be careful not to presume a stable homogenous community and integrated cultural identity that is both enduring and unique (Featherstone,1996 :47). With respect to cultural identity, Clifford argues that “one is always, to varying degrees, "inauthentic": caught between cultures, implicated in others”, and that considered ethnographically, identity must always be mixed, relational and inventive” (Clifford: 1988, p10). Therefore , nationality becomes only one dimension of

people's identities, and not necessarily the most significant one in their daily life, if not conflicting with other spheres of identity such as religion, ideology, tribe or other forms of ethnicity.

When it comes to identity and the media in the age of globalization, Appadurai (1990, 1996) applies Benedict Anderson's (1991) notion of the role of national media in creating 'imagined political communities' to his global scapes framework, arguing that the contemporary mass-mediated world is characterized by rampant cultural boundary crossing where imagination is seen as central in shaping the identity of the audience, therefore he speaks of the role of the media in creating 'imagined worlds' that transcend imagined nations. In another way, building on Stuart Hall's conception of identity as a 'a matter of becoming as well as being, belonging to the future as well as the past,' Shohat and Stam see that multicultural media could provide a nurturing space where the secret hopes of social life are played out, a laboratory for safe articulations of identity oppressions and utopias, a space of community fantasies and imagined alliances (Shohat and Stam, 1994:166-7).

#### **2.4. Conscious or Unconscious Change ?**

Theorizing about the possible cultural outcomes from the contact between global media and local context has produced conceptual formulations such as glocalisation, indigenization, hybridization and transculturation. Rantanen (2005: 99) maintains that the problem with the concept of indigenization and transculturation is the passive forms that they take and that it is not entirely clear who is the agent of either. In terms of media and communications she points to three alternatives: that global media indigenize their own products, or that national media companies indigenize global products, or finally

that audience indigenize cultural products. Similarly, hybrid media texts reflect the media industry's imperatives for targeting several markets at once with the same program within post-fordists practices (Kraidy, 2005: p114). Thus in a globalised world of sophisticated marketing and advertising strategies we must always ask : on whose terms , for what purposes, and to whose benefit do cultural hybrids develop? (Lull, 2000: p252).

It has also been suggested that global media is actually spreading the culture of modernity (Tomlinson, 1991) to the rest of the world. Yet it has to be argued why is it assumed that there is only one modernity, and that being of the West . It is more accurate to speak of modernities in the plural as the modern was not produced from within Europe alone (Pieterse, 1995, Mitchell 2000) . On the other hand the process of globalization cannot be perceived as reducible to the ideas generated from western modernity as there is a range of different national cultural responses which continue in various ways to deform and reform, bend syncretize and transform the alleged master processes of modernity (Featherstone, 1996: p58).

Taking the position of the 'local' receiving end in this process of cultural change, the question that matters is whether this change is consciously and reflectively chosen, or unconsciously and inevitably occurring ? Are local people unconsciously absorbing global media and culture or are they consciously adopting and adapting to what they perceive as modern culture?

There is always the positive view of appropriation, where 'the people creatively modify and "appropriate" the messages they are given from the media and elsewhere to fit their own ways of thinking and living (Lull , 2000: 64). However, there are viewpoints that

would challenge this ‘it’s alright, they’ve appropriated it’ school of thought as Richard Wilk (1995) calls it, inviting us to look at the hegemony of form not content, or what he calls the structures of common difference.

There is a symbolic axis of globalised diffusion and localized appropriation, but there are times where localized appropriation can be a source of tension and potential conflict when the different values clash. (Thompson, 1995). And there are other times when appropriation is nothing but subordinated mimicry as a result of the colonial impact (Bhaba, 1984). Therefore, it is difficult to understand or assess cultural change on the level of theoretical abstractions alone especially when we are concerned with what people want for themselves. It becomes necessary to turn towards empirical study to understand how people think and feel about the cultural stresses involved in the everyday mixing of tradition and modernity and how they achieve their stability or maybe instability. How people in a local context make sense of global media and how *they* articulate their experience.

### **3. Research Design and Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Strategy**

Aiming to explore what it might mean for people in Egypt to read the Disney comic “*Miki*”, I chose the qualitative reception analysis approach. It is generally maintained that what distinguishes reception studies perhaps most of all in comparison with the majority of quantitative methods of audience research is their focus on the statements and actions of audiences which serve as evidence about their experiences and uses of media

(Jensen, 2000: 169) . In other words “audience reception studies focus on the interpretative relation between audience and medium, where this relation is understood within a broadly ethnographic context.” (Livingstone, 1998: 239) This can be achieved through different levels of depth according to the research objective and practical limits, from qualitative interviewing, to participant observation, or full ethnographies. Strategies are also divide in terms of how much focus is given to the decoding or interpretation of the media text itself , the everyday context of use, or audiences uses of this content as a resource in other social contexts. Yet, what unites them is the emphasis on the imbeddedness of media reception in social, historical and cultural context (Jensen, 2000).

In this study there was no focus on the immediate use of the media text. Meaning that I did not carry issues of the comics or ask participants to discuss a particular text or image on spot . The reason being twofold , first as Jensen (2000) notes, the investigation of print media use can rarely be studied on site because of its characteristics as transportable and adaptable to different social circumstance, and more obviously because of the solitary experience of reading. Secondly, I agree with Hermes (1995) that too much emphasis on the text lifts it from the stream of daily life and media use and gives it special status (in addition to the criticisms directed to media-centric studies noted in the review of literature above). In fact, assuming attentive and meaningful reading of a text such as a comic magazine would be unreasonable, or in Hermes’s expression a “fallacy of meaningfulness”, explaining in her case of women’s magazines that one of the salient characteristics of the magazines seemed to be that they were easily “put-downable”. (Hermes, 1995 :15-16).

Therefore, the suitable method of data collection was qualitative interviewing of groups and individuals, bearing in mind that interview methodologies depend on the respondents' introspection, retrospection and verbal recollection of their actions, which necessarily reproduce past events from a current perspective (Jensen 2000: 61). I was mostly interested in how the participants articulated their thoughts, feelings and views that were brought up by these recollections, confident that as Couldry (2000: maintains "all agents can think the social and the cultural through the self." In relationship to interview participants, my position was influenced Oakley's (1997) ethical and ideological principal, in being oriented towards the validation of the participants' subjective experiences as people.

The decision to interview families rather than individuals was based on the general view of the family as a natural social and cultural unit in society and an interface between the public and the private. As Rantanen puts it "families build a bridge between the macro- and micro-levels" ( Rantanen 2005: 155) adding that at the same time, every family is unique , similar to but different than the other , and each based on certain relationships. Moreover, many of the ideological struggles are fought within families where traditions are both broken and maintained (ibid). Another reason I chose families, was to be as close as possible to gaining a long- term perspective, not a one shot analysis since I am essentially interested in cultural continuity and cultural change. Therefore, I thought that a cross-generational sample would be helpful and illuminating in this respect, given that critics have detected and criticized the bias towards studies of youth culture and the insistence on researching the contemporary in much cultural research (Couldry, 2000: 59) .As if the experiences of the old are not worth studying, and furthermore it suggests too

much celebration of the globalised youth culture which as shown in the literature review is theoretically a-historic and unhelpful.

Accordingly, I conducted qualitative interviewing of two Egyptian families in Cairo, in addition to a focus group of four 13 year old children from a local school. Lunt and Livingstone (1996) have noted a revival of the focus group in audience reception studies, as a particularly useful method when researchers seek to discover participants' meanings and ways of understanding, arguing that focus group discussions should be regarded as a socially situated communication. Focus group participants responded to specific media texts on varying topics in Liebes and Katz's (1990) , Radaway's (1984) and other reception studies. Yet , I would like to briefly note both the strengths and weaknesses of this group approach pointing to a fundamental difference between the family group interview and the school children focus group.

Group interviewing can be defined to be "...limited to those situations where the assembled group is small enough to permit genuine discussion among all its members" (Smith, 1954, p59 cited in Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990: 10) noting that smaller groups (4-6 people) are preferable when the participants have a great deal to share about the topic or have had intense or lengthy experiences with the topic of discussion , adding that some topics are better discussed by a small group of people who know each other. All this was especially true in the case of the family interviews in this study, where the group was a naturally assembled unit, and where many of the strengths of the group approach was manifest . On the other hand, the school children focus group was more artificial, and witnessed many of the limitations of the approach .

Generally, “focus groups offer a unique occasion to both collectively interview participants as well as observe them interacting while discussing the object of selection”. (Morgan and Spanish ,1984, p. 260 quoted in Suter 2000) In essence, the strengths of focus groups come from a compromise between the strengths found in other qualitative methods. Like participant observation, they allow access to a process that qualitative researchers are often centrally interested in: “interaction”. And like in-depth interviewing, they allow access to the attitudes and experiences of our informants. (Suter 2000). The emphasis is on interactions between participants rather than between the researcher and participants, and researcher adopts a role that is more like a moderator than a questioner, the purpose being to explore people's ideas in a setting so that the interviewer can observe how they react to each other's ideas, when they challenge each others views, and how their opinions are formed. Moreover, a focus group interview widens the range of responses due to the increase in the number of respondents allowing the researcher to observe a large amount of interaction on a specific topic of interest in a limited amount of time without a sizeable increase in time commitment..

The limitations on the other hand include the possible decrease in the quality of the data when the group has highly different characteristics. Individuals will tend to censor their ideas in the presence of people who differ greatly from them in power, status, job, income, education, or personal characteristics. Also groups are often dominated by strong personalities; they can generate more emotion than any one individual might feel about the issue; and groups often appear more consistent than they are because individuals who do not agree do not want to disturb the peace (Stewart, D.W., & Shamdasani, P.N.,1990). These limitations were more manifest in the school focus group as I will elaborate in the next section on sampling.

### 3.2. Sampling

The selection of participants in this research was based on a consciousness of the power relations inherent in any research. Ann Oakley maintains that “in most cases the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical” (Oakley,1997:41 ). With this in mind I chose the two families from a similar middle class social background as myself, and I was well acquainted with the families and close to at least one of its members. I was invited to the home in both cases which provided a naturalistic setting for family interaction. Initially, my intention was to find a family that is multigenerational and mixed in terms of males and females with current readers of *Miki* as well as older fans. However, this proved to be difficult to find within the tie limits, and I preferred the criteria of familiarity with the participants over their internal diversity. This was a fortunate choice due to the depth and richness of the data obtained from these interviews in comparison with the school children focus group, whom I was much less familiar with.

I approached the school children as a population of potentially current readers of comic magazines in general. I took permission from a school teacher and the principal of a middle class private school in Cairo to access a classroom of thirty four 13 year old boys and girls . As a “captive sample” ( Gilham 2000: 9) I was able to get responses from all of them to the pilot questionnaire which allowed me to select participants for the focus group. However, the setting of the school was oppressive, unlike the family setting. My position was hierarchical and linked with the institution, and had there been more time I

would have needed more than one meeting to familiarize myself with the children and ideally interview one individually outside the institutional setting with his/her own family.

### **3.3 Design of Research Tools**

In preparing for the interviews, I designed a simple questionnaire as a pilot procedure for the school classroom in order to collect preliminary data on the popularity of *Miki* among other comics and popular serialized publications . There was one closed question of naming 10 such titles and leaving 3 spaces for other unmentioned titles for the respondent to add. Following that were four open ended question on which titles are favorites and why , and which characters are favorites and why. The focus group discussion that followed lasted for about 30 minutes was tape recorded, transcribed and translated.

The in-depth family interviews were semi-structured each lasting from 50 to 90 minutes. Starting with descriptive and memory questions about describing the experience of reading *Miki*, favorite characters and reasons for liking them. Then following to a question whether *Miki* is perceived as foreign (American) or Egyptian. Then moving into more evaluation questions on positive or negative values, or perceived effects. All interviews were conducted in the Arabic language, tape recorded, transcribed and translated by myself into the English language. Surely, I'm aware that translation can be problematic, where I am co-authoring meaning and adding a layer just by putting it in another language. There are meanings and feelings associated with certain expressions that are inevitably betrayed by trying to translate the untranslatable. However, I tried to

present a literal translation that is as faithful as possible to the original utterances and at the same time comprehensible in English.

## **4. Analysis**

### **4.1. Introduction**

I will structure the interview material around two main axes of analysis: First, accounts of the experience of reading *Miki* in the lives of its readers. These include the way it became for some part of a weekly ritual, a resource for play and other activities , in addition to the feelings associated with the comics and its characters; pleasure, laughter or even pity for some characters and identification with others. It is here that we see the peaceful and empowering forms of appropriation or indigenization of a Disney comic book in the daily lives and structures of feelings of Egyptian readers. The second part of the analysis revolves around the question of the foreignness or (Americanness) of *Miki* and the various positions that were expressed and issues raised in discussing it. It is here that a process of negotiation with conflicting values and multiple identities come into play, and where the different strategies of reconciliation appear. A process that involves more ambiguities and more stony forms of indigenization . Throughout the analysis , I will also try to relay some of the dynamics and interactions taking place between the family members as they were talking about *Miki* .

Before directly entering into the analysis , the following subsections will give necessary background on *Miki* and the major change it has undergone in recent years, in addition to a brief introduction to the participants.

#### **4.1.1. Background on *Miki***

In 1959 , Disney executives approached the Cairo-based publishing house Dar Al-Hilal hoping to launch an Arabic version of Disney comics. The deal won Dar Al-Hilal the rights to publish a translated version of Mickey Mouse comics in a regular magazine format. By the 1990s, even as the number of competitors grew, Mickey remained the top-selling selling children's magazine in Egypt .(Salama,2005). The question is to what extent do we consider *Miki* a global text? The question of language is important since we cannot separate language from culture because they are intimately connected through meaning. (Lull, 2000). With the comic strips being translated into Arabic language and the characters given Egyptian names in addition to few inserted pages of puzzles and games that are produced indigenously, one may consider *Miki* a hybrid media text, or a glocalised media text.

Had there been more available space, it would have been worth presenting an analysis of the different strategies of the glocalisation of *Miki* in Egypt , both on the level of the global Disney company's changing conditions of licensing and on the level of the local producers, especially since it had undergone a recent major shift. In early 2003, Disney decided not to renew its Arab-world licensing agreement with Egyptian publisher Dar Al-Hilal, citing quality issues and a lack of creative plans to take the franchise forward.

After a nine-month hiatus, the Egyptian publishing house Nahdet Misr launched a new, revamped *Miki* under license from Disney. The flimsy newsprint paper on which it was printed before was replaced by a pricey facelift with glossy, smear- and odor-free pages. Artists use bolder, more advanced methods of illustration, much of it computer-aided and costs LE 2.50 on newsstands, up from LE 1.50. (Salama, 2005).

The transition from a state run publishing house (nationalized in the 60s) to a private publisher entailed several important changes besides the improved visual presentation. For one thing, the publisher decided to change the Egyptian simple colloquial dialogue to standard classic Arabic language which is more formal. Second, according to Amal Farah the current editor (based on an individual interview) a stricter editing strategy is being followed to ‘ensure that it conforms with the morals in our society’. She gives a few examples, one of them was that they decided to avoid giving a name to the relationship between Batoot (Donald Duck) and Zizi (Daisy Duck) because they do not want to shock society! Another example was editing what they saw as impolite remarks made by the nephews towards their uncle in the stories in accordance with their duty of ‘preserving family values’. The significance here is not only that the publisher’s conservative ideas reflect a trend towards more conservatism in Egyptian society , but the rationale of practicing more censorship in this age of mediated globalisation.

#### **4.1.2. Introducing participants**

What follows is a short contextualization of each family and interview :

##### **Moshira’s Family:**

Moshira is a 55 years old doctor in a national medical research center, a widow and the mother of two grown daughters. The eldest daughter Eman, is a 31 years old housewife and mother of a 5 year old child. The younger daughter Radwa (Roody), is 27, also a housewife and the mother of two children, a 4 year old boy and a baby girl. The interview was conducted at Moshira's living room and lasted for over an hour, with many interruptions caused by the three very young grandchildren. It was not intended to be an all-female interview, yet it's a reflection of the everyday life of this family, with one husband working overseas in an oil-rich Gulf country, and the other running an agricultural business in a distant farm from Cairo. Although each daughter has her own home, Eman continues to live with her mother, while Radwa spends many days there too.

All three women wear an Islamic headscarf, and identify themselves as Egyptians and Muslims. They were all born, raised and educated in Cairo schools and universities. Moshira started travelling abroad recently attending workshops and conferences through her work. Eman never left Egypt, while Radwa travelled to Japan twice during the time she was studying Japanese in Cairo University. They have all read "*Miki*" magazine at some point in their childhood or adolescence.

### **Hesham's Family:**

Hesham is a 34 year old medical doctor married to his colleague Hala, 35 who still works with him in the same hospital. His sister, Shahinaz is 29, single, and studying for a PhD in economics while working as a teaching assistant in Cairo University. She lives with their mother Nour, who is a 58 year old government employee, and a widow. The interview took place in the living room of Nour's house and lasted for about 90 minutes.

Hesham and Shahinaz both were born and brought up in Cairo where they attended an English language school. Neither they nor their mother ever travelled abroad. Hala's childhood was spent between Cairo, Connecticut (US) and Dubai. All four identify themselves as Egyptians and Muslims. Nour wears an Islamic headscarf unlike her daughter and her daughter-in-law. Both Hesham and Shahinaz were avid readers of "Miki" as children and continue to buy it from time to time, while Hala knows the magazine but does not share their keenness.

### **The schoolchildren:**

The focus group consisted of four 13 year olds. Two girls; Salma and Nermine, and two boys; Mohamed and Ahmed. It is worth noting that the pilot questionnaire distributed to the thirty four classroom children showed that 73.5% of them read *Miki*.

## **4.2. The Experience of Reading *Miki***

### **4.2.1. The ritual:**

**Moshira:** Mama got all the magazines every week and the serialized books. The newspaper man brought them all the time. *Sinbad* was Wednesday , *Samir* was Sunday and *Miki* on Thursday. They have to arrive with the serialized weekly books...

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**Hesham** : We knew the dates: *Miki* every Thursday, *SuperMiki* every two weeks and *Pocket Miki* every month .They just have to come to the house as a prerequisite. All issues have to come , we cannot miss an issue.

Although I never asked any of the participants when or what day of the week did *Miki* come out or how frequently they read it, it was notable how the first thing to remember about the experience of reading *Miki* was the days of the week. While Hesham was remembering a family and media ritual occurring in the 80s in one interview, Moshira was actually remembering the details of her family’s “domestic media calendar” back in the early 60s. The significance is not how far back they can remember, but because it was unprompted and the first thing that came to mind, shows how they located *Miki* in their memory in the context of a weekly calendar or a ritual of their family’s daily life. This is comparable to what Paddy Scannel (1988) wrote on the role of the media in the ‘temporal arrangements of modern societies’ though he was basically talking about broadcast media.

#### **4.2.2. The structure of feeling:**

**Roody** : I used to like Batoot (Donald Duck) and Bondok (Goofy). I felt sorry for him. I pitied Bondok, (they all laugh). But I used to feel that Batoot was a little angry. He reminded me of myself when I get angry. I feel I am like Batoot now with my kids (they all laugh) when I’m mad at them. I’m like Batoot when he gets mad at his nephews.

**Moshira**: Yes frankly you have to stop screaming at Ali because he’s beginning to scream like you . You have to stop that.

**Roody** : No, but Ali screams so as to catch everyone’s attention.

.....

**Mohamed** : ‘Am Dahab (Uncle Scrooge), he’s the funniest. When I read the magazine I forget my sorrows and I forget this whole world.

.....

**Hesham**...Dahab was tough, but he was kind too, to the nephews. It was a rich character . And he had a strange relationship with El-Gidda Batta (Grandma Duck)..she was the sign of goodness, everybody turns to her. She belonged to everyone. She used to bake for them.

**Shahinaz**: (testing her brother's memory) What did she bake? Can you remember?

**Hesham**: Yes, cake ! ... Bread?

**Shahinaz**: No. Apple pie.

**Hesham** . Oh yes... apple pie.

On popular culture and emotion, James Lull (2000) criticizes mass communication theorists and semioticians who might suggest that people just watch or read television. “More than anything else , audiences feel television and other popular media , often quite deeply.” (Lull 2000 : 170) He further explains that people don’t just ask themselves who am I , or who are we, they also want to know how do I feel? Emotion passion, fear, pleasure, and pain are foundational elements of culture too...they constitute the “structure of feeling” (ibid: 137-8). It is clear from the excerpt above how much Roody uses her “feelings” towards the characters to describe her evaluation or her involvement with the magazine, and even identifying with one of the character’s traits from her current position as a mother. The degree of involvement here differs from a more distanced criticism of the characters, for example in terms of how well they are written.

In case of Mohamed, the 13 year old boy participating in the focus group describes the pleasure he derives from reading the funny strips in *Miki* , and how that makes him escape “the world” and forget his “sorrows”. It is worth noting here that Mohamed was

not the only child using such expressions, since there were two other written responses to the questionnaires by the school children mentioning expressions like 'my only escape', 'makes me smile and forget my sorrows' . (Not being acquainted with child psychology I cannot attempt to interpret the interpretation of the children. It might be in the nature of children to speak more honestly about their emotions than adults, or maybe they exaggerate emotions . Either way it was unsettling to see those 13 year olds carrying the weight of the world, and from a single visit, it was obvious how much oppression they were experiencing in the classroom alone). In other utterances , reading *Miki* was likened to other magazines and media activities providing a 'time on my own'. I will not elaborate much on that since it is not exclusively pertaining to *Miki* , but it resonated with accounts of the 'relational uses of media' i.e. avoiding or facilitating contact with family members. (Radaway : 1984 )

In the third excerpt, Hesham is describing the cartoon characters as if they were real people. Something that Ang (1985) saw as a necessary precondition for the involvement of viewers of *Dallas* , though in all cases it is clear that they are well aware they were dealing with fictional characters. Finally, it would be worth mentioning the dynamics going on between the participants of the group interview, when for example, Moshira practices authority as a mother and grandmother to criticize her daughter's parenting skills, or Hesham and Shahinaz engage in remembering shared childhood passions.

#### 4.2.3. A resource for living

**Hala:** .. .When me and my brothers and sisters asked our father to bring us *Miki* the Egyptian version , he refused saying it was vulgar.

And he decided to buy us *Maged*. He was buying it for us even before it became widely popular. It teaches something.

**Hesham:** But that is not completely true, because remember when you were looking for something to clean silver with and I told you toothpaste? I got this from *pocket Miki*. There was always a page or two of general information, facts and ‘a believe it or not’ section.

**Shaihanz:** but I never read *Miki* as a source of information. It is entertainment .

**Hesham.** Yes, it’s not meant to be that way since we used to read other books alongside.

.....

**Roody:** ..its both educational and fun. I think Walt Disney started it .

He was great because he understood children’s language and what they like. When I tell my son Ali : “Allaaah see how Winnie the Pooh likes his honey? Eat like Winnie”. Then he would actually eat!

In the excerpts above, *Miki* is being discussed and presented as a resource for living in other social contexts. Something else was happening here too. Hala who was not brought up in Egypt, was not a reader of *Miki* like her husband and her sister –in- law. She mentions her father’s objection to *Miki* because of its crude colloquial language, preferring the more educational *Maged* which is published in Dubai where they lived. This is why Hesham defends his favorite comic by showing it was no less educational, and from there on throughout the discussion, a kind of competition surfaced between husband and wife, especially whenever she would mention media she read or watched while growing up in the United States, Hesham would then demonstrate that he was never less knowledgeable or competent being brought up in Cairo.

Roody, in her positive evaluation of Walt Disney refers to his understanding of 'children's language' , thus confirming her belief in the 'universality' of a children's language and media that is not culture-specific. This belief echoes one of the conclusions of the cross cultural study carried out by Katz and Liebes (1990) when they explained *Dallas*'s popularity in terms of its universality and the primordiarity of its themes and formulae which makes it psychologically accessible. Such view deny the possibility or the importance of any cultural difference.

#### **4.2.4. Play**

**Moshira:** ....we used to make belief and reenact the adventures of the scouts in our living room with my brothers and sisters. we would bring a sheet and put it over my grandmother's walking cane and make a make-believe tent in our balcony . And we go inside and play and bring inside the Ramadan lanterns then act out the stories in the magazines....

.....

**Shahinaz :** ..we made something else in the corner of Hesham's room. We made a bed sheet into a camp , which was actually influenced by the scouts in *Miki*.. we made a lot of tents .. and I got *la vache qui rit* triangles to store as provisions.

Roger Silverstone mentions that we can see the media as being sites for play, both in their texts and in the responses that those texts engender (Silverstone,1999 :60). This could be understood partly as a metaphor , but John Fiske (1987) offers the example of children's satirical re-enactment of television shows, and asserts that "children's play may be more productive than adult criticism." According to him, playing the text involves the freedom of making and controlling meanings (p. 230-1). According to him it is a form of

empowerment because it transfers the final stage of the process of representation to the subordinate.

With that ‘playful production and control of meaning’ we conclude this section in which evidence of the peaceful appropriation of *Miki* in the daily lives of Egyptian readers was illustrated. The next section will explore more ambiguous areas and tensions.

### **4.3. The Question of *Miki*’s Foreignness**

#### **4.3.1. ‘It does not matter’**

**Q :** Did the characters in *Miki* seem foreign, or different to you?

**Moshira:** Of course they were different. The adventures were different. For example Dahab had a gold mine and an oil well.. he represented American imperialism (said in a sarcastic voice then laughing) but I still liked it .

.....

**Salma:** They are foreign characters. And that is fine. I would like it to be Egyptian but I don’t care. No difference.

Moshira said the words ‘ he represented American imperialism’ in an artificial ironic voice as if reciting an old and tired slogan that is just too serious or irrelevant for a discussion about a comic magazine. Yet Moshira was probably the only one who had ever heard the expression before because I did not use it. Her daughters were puzzled. Ien Ang (1985) wrote about watching *Dallas* that her respondents adopted an ‘ironical viewing attitude’ in order to resolve the paradox of enjoying the show while condemning the ideology of the American entertainment culture industry. However in the case of *Miki*, none of my respondents mentioned ‘ideology’ , ‘capitalism’, ‘consumerism’ or condemned Disney in any of the ways that were reported in the Global Disney Project

(Buckingham , 2001). Of course my sample was limited in number and diversity, but this might also have to do with the diminishing influence of the nationalist and leftist discourse in Egyptian political life in comparison to the strengthening Islamic discourse .

**Hesham :** You know, I never felt that I was lacking in Islamic or Arab culture just because I went to a language school . Father bought me *Miki* but also we read the Quraan together before Friday prayers . This existed side by side. And books about the prophets .

Almost all respondents displayed this confidence of their ability to enjoy Disney and other global cultural goods without feeling that this has any negative effects. In this last excerpt Hesham asserts that his exposure to foreign education and culture was not discounted from his Islamic and Arab culture. It is notable of course the way he puts these ‘cultures’ in a certain order in opposition to ‘foreign’ culture and the absence of national identity or Egyptianness as a distinctive culture in his comparison. Later, Hesham’s response to the only explicit question on identity triggered a political rather than a cultural stance:

**Q:** Since your childhood you seem to have been close followers of foreign media.. did you ever feel this affected your identity?

**Hesham:** Actually no. On the contrary .. I am anti-American . I have nothing against the Americans or American culture but I’m against American policies .

**Hala:** But these things we watched and read made us feel the gap in the progress between the two worlds

For Hesham, there is a clear separation between his attachment to American culture and his political opposition to American policies. He does not feel the need to reconcile the two sentiments, nor does he feel guilty as some Korean respondents in the Global Disney Project had expressed (Kim and Lee, 2001).

More than anything, he identifies himself as Anti –American, to assert that his political or national loyalty is unaffected by consuming American culture. In fact, for many of the respondents foreign culture is considered positive, and even desired as *modern* culture that many are keen to show their competence in. Hala's statement is a clear indication of this point when she mentions 'progress' and the 'gap' and the 'two worlds'. The following comment, further illustrates how the knowledge about foreign pop music is admired and even compared to education:

**Hesham:** My cousin Hazem he also read the same things. He's even not from Cairo but Asiyout too (southern Egypt). Hazem was more knowledgeable than me with foreign songs and pop music charts, we would be in competition over these things . This generation was different . They taught themselves.

While gaining competence in Western popular culture is desired and considered as a sign of modern education, the threat to Egyptian national identity was seen to be caused by the neighboring Arabic dialects that are reaching to Egyptian children through the new satellite media. Egypt has traditionally been the center of media production in the Arab country, and remains so in the movie industry, but recently, several Gulf and Lebanese satellite television channels became increasingly popular , and this is what has become a matter for concern among Shahinaz's friends :

**Shahinaz:** My friends who are new mothers now complain from what their children watch. They watch cartoons that are translated in the Gulf countries, so they are now saying words in the Gulf dialect . And some Disney movies are now dubbed in the Levant dialect .

It is most likely that had the children picked up words in English or French language their parents would have been proud instead of complaining.

#### 4.3.2. Negotiation and censorship

In terms of ideology, national or cultural identity, the foreignness of *Miki* seemed not to be a reason for concern to most participants. What really mattered was morality, and more specifically; Islamic moral values.

**Q:** Do you ever think that because Disney is American that it can have different values than ours?

**Roody:** No . On the contrary. I actually see a shortcoming in cartoons here. They dub it in Arabic but they use foul language that I don't want my kids to hear. For example, I bought *Toy Story* dubbed in Arabic ..but they were calling each other names and it was like a fight and I didn't like the language they used. So I stopped bringing Arabic. Even if he wont understand he will start learning English and he can ask me . And even if he wont understand the words at all he will know the story from the scenes and that's better than picking up bad words.

Hisham and Shahinaz were particularly familiar with the recent changes that came about *Miki* , being published by a more conservative company that has introduced changes to the magazine in order to make it more tuned to what they perceive as the values of Egyptian society . The devoted *Miki* fans set out to defend the magazine against such changes, not because they disagree with these values or see them as unnecessary to be represented in a comic magazine, but because they never noticed these moral inconsistencies in the first place. More significantly, Hesham defended his favorite old comic magazine using the same (apparently gaining hegemony) moral discourse, as he was trying to prove *Miki*'s compatibility with Islam !

**Hesham:** I never felt that *Miki* was foreign until I was told so. The first time I took notice when I was asked what is the relationship between Batoot and Zizi (Daisy Duck) ? And then why don't the nephews have parents? Only nowadays this kind of talk.

**Shahinaz:** I read *Miki* all the time until 4 or 5 years ago ..and I never thought of this talk at all. And I never thought that Batoot was in love with Zizi.

**Hesham:** They were just friends. So what? Not in the bad sense. And maybe the nephews their parents are dead and they live with their uncle. It doesn't mean a shattered dysfunctional family or immorality ? On the contrary, it is like “ *kafalet el-yateem* ”. (the Islamic principle of financially supporting an orphan.)

In Moshira's family, a process of negotiation or forum took place over the consistency of the values in the comics with the values they hold . In this case, it were my initial questions that spurred the discussion, but it was clear that they had never sought to reconcile or even compare their values to what they saw in the media. For them, media world is fantasy world and they engaged with what they chose, and disengaged from the rest. Lila Abu Lughod (1995) described this as ‘suspension of judgment’ or ‘compartmentalization’ when she was observing Egyptian women watching an American soap opera; they focused on the family dynamics in the story and ignored what is removed from their experiences. What they experience through western television does not displace whatever else exists.

However, it is worth noting that the 13 year old Ahmed mentioned that his favorite cartoon character was *Folla* (from an Arabic publication) *because* ‘she is veiled and

encourages the little girls to wear the veil ”. Ahmed is not a fan of *Miki*, and in the focus group he stressed that he likes to read books about the Prophets ‘but only the trustworthy ones’ he said. For the little boy, it seemed hard to make a compartmentalization , or practice Hesham’s easy cultural mix of Western pop and Islamic books existing side by side. Yet as much as Ahmed expressed an inclination towards a one-dimensional homogenous culture, his colleague Nermene, who is a 13 year old veiled girl expressed liberal pluralist view when I asked if her she would prefer female cartoon characters to be veiled like her. Her answer was ‘ it is personal freedom, the don’t have to be veiled like me.. they are all imaginary anyway ’.

But then again for the young mother Eman,, there was no need even for cultural negotiation, her solution was similar to that of the new conservative publisher: censorship.<sup>2</sup>

**Eman:** The important thing for a parent like me is to make “control” (said in English) meaning that what I don’t like.. you see I should read the thing first and what I don’t like I wont give to my kids...

#### **4.3.3. : Black skin, white dolls: internalizing imperialism**

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<sup>2</sup> It is worth quoting here the comment made by Mahmoud Salem, the 78 year old editor of the very first issues of *Miki* in the late 50s, “ You cannot stop the air or the wind from entering , it comes carrying words and images how can you stop it , this is nonsense.. its like the man who locks his wife and tells her not to go out how come? She should go out ..leave her if you trust her. She and her honor and her cleverness. We want to lock the world of ideas like we lock the woman. She will get seductive phone calls even if you lock her.” (individual interview)

Frantz Fanon wrote once supposing that a young negro attended a showing of a Tarzan film in the Antilles or in Europe. In either case he writes, the young negro would identify himself de facto with Tarzan against the negroes, but it would be more difficult in the European theatre since the rest of the white audience would automatically identify him with the savages on the screen (Fanon, 1952). Fanon was illustrating how racism generates harmful psychological constructs that both blind the black man to his subjection to a universalized white norm and alienate his consciousness. In the postcolonial media-saturated world, the dominant Euro centric media have long disseminated the hegemonic esthetic inherited from colonialist discourse, an esthetic which exiled people of color from their own bodies (Shohat and Stam, 1994:322) Shohat and Stam call it the ‘paradigm of looks’, where the mythical norms of Eurocentric esthetics come to inhabit the intimacy of self-consciousness, leaving severe psychic wounds.

**Shahinaz:** ..I kept the old issues of *Miki* but got rid of the old *Maged* and *Samir* issues. This magazine falsely proclaiming Arabness I gave to the janitor’s son. It’s not funny . Too instructive in a direct way : ‘wash your feet before going to bed or else you will die.’ ( Laughter ) Especially Maged, he doesn’t do anything wrong. And I didn’t like him wearing the *galabiyyah*. (traditional caftan) I didn’t like that at all. I didn’t like these ideas. Maybe I was influenced by Western thought and culture. Because I still remember that once the Zakiyya character suggested we should have an Arabian doll that is dark and with black hair. I didn’t like that . I was against that.

Because all my dolls were blond I don't want them dark . I was complicated (laughs) . Those were my beauty standards.

.....

**Q:** For example, why wouldn't the female characters be wearing headscarves like you?

**Roody:** Is our society all veiled women? No .

**Moshira:** Of course not . I think it would be very strange for a child to see these small characters like that.

The way that Shahinaz intelligently criticizes Maged magazine, mocking it for being too instructive signifies what that like most other readers, she wants a funny interesting magazine, and that 'falsely proclaiming Arabness' is not an excuse for failing to deliver that. In other words, nobody wants to read a boring magazine just because it claims to represent authentic cultural identity which is natural and reasonable. But it is something else to strongly dislike cartoon characters because they wear traditional 'galabiyya' . One explanation may be because it was just too unfamiliar, since the default for comics is Western which still means a pathologic estrangement from one's own culture. Another would be because, she sees herself as a modern girl who would not wear a galabiyyah and therefore she has more in common with European culture than Arab (especially Gulf) culture as many Egyptians would claim. But then again, why would her idea of being modern be incompatible with wearing a galabiyyah?

That Shahinaz is consciously reflecting about being influenced by Western culture and even describing herself as 'complicated' because as a dark skinned girl she only wanted

white dolls, then laughing about it , demonstrates a healthy reflexivity and awareness . But the dilemma is even more complex with Moshira, who started wearing the veil when she was in her 30s as it began to spread in Egypt in the late 1970s, yet finds it very difficult to imagine cartoon characters wearing headscarves. Why would it be strange when her daughters began wearing the veil in their early teens, and a majority of Muslim women in Egypt are now wearing it? This division and separation between ‘media world’ and ‘ real world’ is further institutionalized in the Egyptian state television, where no female broadcasters are allowed to be veiled

Finally, if according to Shohat and Stam the hegemonic esthetic in the Eurocentric paradigm of looks ‘exiled’ people of color from their own bodies (ibid, p322), the following excerpt shows another form of exile and estrangement , not from the body but from one’s spatial locality.

**Q.** Now when you reflect on the images in the *Miki* comics. The forest, the way the houses looked , the surrounding nature drawn in the background ?

**Hesham:** I’m a city boy so I thought maybe all villages and country side look like that . I didn’t feel that El-Gidda Batta’s (Gradmother Duck) farm would be foreign land. I only saw the countryside in medicine school in our practical community training when each had to be doctor for a while in a real village countryside ..It was a shocking and miserable experience. For the first time I see a real countryside. Except from the movies, I didn’t have an alternative image.

So despite the fact that Disney comics can be translated and adapted into Arabic and and similarly dubbed in case of the movies, the visual elements cannot be translated. Does it

matter that adventures take place in forests instead of deserts? A visitor to the new affluent suburbs around Cairo may be surprised to see houses built in the vicinity of the desert with mock fireplaces , slanted rooftops, and green lawns that consume massive amounts of the scarce water. Their owners are modern and rich, but why does that have to have a European ‘look’? I am not saying of course that this is directly related to reading *Miki*, but it is certainly related to the general pervasiveness of Western ‘paradigm of looks’ that is disseminated by global media and setting the standards.

Hesham’s story points to another problem aside from esthetic standards, that is the possibilities for civic awareness and citizenship in the age of global media. Hesham who has lived all his life in Egypt, did not have a single image in his head about what a poor Egyptian village might look like and was shocked to find out that it did not resemble all the images of the countryside he had seen all his life from the media. When as a member of the educated middle classes living in the capital, he can become so separated from the ‘miserable’ reality of the rest of the country, simply because it is not represented in the media, what can that say about the prospects of citizenship ?

## **5. Conclusion**

This study was an attempt to understand how a global media product such as Disney’s comic magazine *Miki* was experienced by readers in a local context such as Egypt. An attempt to see how people from a non-western audience made sense out of an American media text and articulated this experience instead of being theorized about by rival

theories of cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenisation. First of all it was recognized that we are actually dealing with a hybrid media text or a glocalised product, due to the vital role of language in the process of naturalization and local appropriation. Second, the popularity of *Miki* among Egyptian readers was in itself a local fanhood phenomena that has much to do with being shared with friends and family members and passed along as part of a childhood ritual from one generation to another across more than forty years. The case of Hala illustrates this point, who as an Egyptian brought up in the United States - the homeland of Mickey - did not have *Miki* as part of her childhood experience because 'Disney comics were not that big in the States and my friends read other...'. Thus the significance of the social context in the mediation process.

On the other hand we should not overlook the unequal structural economic factors behind this phenomena. For example, Moshira spoke of the indigenous *Sindbad* and *Samir* comic magazines that were published in the 1950s with the same passion she showed for *Miki*. Yet, *Sindbad* had to close down, and *Samir* deteriorated with the deterioration of its publisher, while *Miki* endured for more than four decades, and when the Disney company noticed the deterioration of the publisher, it quickly passed the license to a more efficient one.

In some ways, the experience of the Egyptian readers who participated in this study with the Disney comics was no different than that of Disney audiences in other parts of the world; enjoying the fun and the escape, loving the characters and laughing at the jokes. It is this 'universality' of themes and feelings they generate that made the foreignness of the magazine unnoticed or irrelevant to most participants.

But there are other parts and themes in *Miki* that are not so universal and that cannot be easily localized by the local editors. When pointing to specific themes where there were obvious cultural differences between the Western representations in *Miki* and the lives of its readers in Egypt , the participants began to express with different degrees of reflexivity their forms of cultural negotiation in dealing with these differences. For one it was ignoring that which is different, or compartmentalize it as belonging to ‘fantasy world’ or ‘media world’ . For another, the solution was to ‘censor’ that which is not suitable. While another accepts that difference as natural , inevitable and non-threatening. However, when the foreign/global/Western becomes intertwined or conflated with the modern, its appropriation actually becomes desirable , something to seek and show competence in as we have seen, while at the same time demanding a more strenuous process of reconciliation with the existing tradition.

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## **6. Appendix : transcriptions**

**Moshira's family:**

**Moshira:** Miki ?! I used to love very much el3m Dahab (uncle scrooge)

**Q:** When did u start reading it?

I think I started it about 8 , but before miki I used to read Sinbad: I used to love 3ma moshira , the boy was basem, the adventures of the scouts “elkashafa” ..we used to make belief and reenact the adventures of the scouts in our living room with my brothers and sisters. we would bring a sheet and put it over my grandmothers walking cane and make a make-believe tent in our balcony . And we go inside and play and bring inside the Ramadan lanterns.. and act out the stories in the magazines. There were other funny characters like dada fatma a fat lady ..who used to baby sit zuzu , the bald boy with just one hair in his head who would do naughty things. I loved it

**Q:** what about miki ?

**Moshira:** Miki was a little different. Batoot and 3am Dahab . they were different AND there was Pluto and filfil

**Roody:** who was filfil ?. there was no filfil in my days ..you mean dungol?

**Moshira :** Yes dongol the robber !

(Both Laughing)

**Moshira:** Mama got all the magazines every week and serialized books,. the newspaper man brought them all the time . Sinbad was Wednesday ..Samir was Sunday and Mickey on Thursday. They have to arrive with the serialized weekly books. But then Sinbad stopped and.. I continued to read Mickey till I was 12 years old. I was interested in it . Then I went to the moghamereen elkamsa those I liked very much (enid blyton’s famous five)

**Roody :** me too.

**Moshira :** I think read the famous five it with my children. I read it with them during summer vacations.

**Q :** did the characters in mickey seem foreign, or different to you?

**Moshira:** Of course they were different. The adventures were different. For example dahab (uncle scrooge) had a gold mine and an oil well.. he represented “American imperialism” (said in an artificial voice) hahahaha ..but I still liked it . but he used to always win over poor batoot

**Eman:** he’s so greedy and I didnt like him . mean, and greedy.

**Roody :** I used to like batoot and and bondok. I pity bondok (goofy). I used to feel sorry for him. hahahaha .

But I used to feel that batoot was a little angry. He reminded me of myself when I get angry. I feel I am like batoot now with my kids. Hahahaha (the all laugh) when I feel when I’m mad at them , I’m like batoot when he gets mad at his nephews

**Moshira:** yes frankly you have to stop screaming at Ali because he’s beginning to scream like you . you have to stop that.

**Roody** : No, but ali screams so as to catch everyone's attention.

**Moshira**: why ? cant we hear ?

**Roody** : yes when we are talking he wants us to stop and pay attention to him, so he starts screaming .

**Moshira**: Still you have to take care

**Q**: You said you liked Disney and always bought Disney products for your children. Why? Do you think because its American that it can have different values than ours?

**Roody**: No . On the contrary. I actually see a shortcoming in cartoons here. They dub it in Arabic but they use foul language that I don't want my kids to hear. For example I bought Toy Story dubbed in Arabic ..but they were calling each other names and it was like a fight and I didn't like the language they used. So I stopped bringing Arabic even if they wont understand he will start learning English and he can ask me . and even if he wont understand the words at all he will understand from the story and the scenes and that's better than picking up bad words.

But they actually love Disney animals . I feel its very close to them. Especially the little bears Bears .Simba lion king makes them very happy and attracts them.

**Moshira**: did u remember to ask Mohamed to buy the dvds for the children?

(interruption)

**Q**: So you don't see any danger in American cartoons on the children's values or identity.

**Roody**: They love Bakkar too who is Egyptian. Children's stuff talk to the child with the childrens language whether its Egyptian or not.

**Q**: Do you think there was any negative values in Miki

**Roody**: on the contrary.

**Moshira**: not at all . they were always positive things. even if the story started with something negative the ending will always be good

**Roody**: its both educational and fun. I think walt Disney started it . he was great because he understood childrens language and what they like. When I tell my son Ali : "Allaaah see how Winnie the Pooh likes his honey? Eat like Winnie " Then he would actually eat

**Q**: What about the Miki /Mimi , Batoot / Zizi friendship? and the way they are drawn with their costumes and western style dress.

**Moshira:** I don't think there's anything wrong with that.

**Roody :** I don't see it as western dress.

**Moshira:** No not at all. we dress like that too. No difference.

**Eman:** Our children dress like them.

**Q:** For example, why wouldn't the female characters be wearing headscarf like you?

**Roody:** is our society all veiled women? No .

**Moshira:** Of course not . I think it would be very strange for a child to see these small characters like that.

(Interruption)

**Roody:** the five mughamereen and ragul mustahil was also Arabic and Egyptian .

**Roody:** Ragul mostahil : I liked it Egyptian like mission impossible. Didn't like malaf ul mustakbal.

**Mushira:** I used to read stories and books mama brought in the house. I would sit quietly away from everything and read.

(Interruption)

**Q:** Are you satisfied with the comics available for you children?

**Roody :** yes I am. I think they are doing a lot of good stuff.

**Eman:** I don't remember mickey. I would like my children to read them. It was funny I don't remember. Mickey characters I love them all.

**Eman:** The important thing for a parent like me is to make "control" (said in English) meaning that what I don't like.. you see I should read the thing first and what I don't like I wont give to my kids...As for Miki I don't there's anything wrong with it. And then they are only children and naïve nothing in their head so its no problem if " Mimi" wears a short skirt.

**Roody:** The problem is that even if we tell them that Minnie is wrong to wear a mini skirt when they go in the street they will see that girls wearing like that .

**Eman :** Exactly. The important thing is what they learn at home.

**Q:** but if they love those characters, wouldn't they consider them as role models?

**Moshira:** We used to love these characters but when by the age of maturity we came to understand...

**Roody:** What if her teacher wears a miniskirt , she shouldn't dislike her because of that or judge her as a bad person. Just because she wears a miniskirt doesn't mean you shouldn't know her or love her as a good person. She may be good in something and not committed to all her religious duties. So it shouldn't matter too much. There is a variety and they all exist next to each other.

**Moshira:** I think we don't have this problem in Egypt, maybe in more closed countries

**Q:** What about when Miki is courting Mimi and taking her out?

**Moshira :** I think it is nice and these are natural things in life

**Eman :** Especially in kids as they don't understand what they are seeing

**Moshira:** I think its nice and natural and kids should understand this as natural for they might see there parents kissing.

**Roody:** however I wont deny that I was very bothered when I was watching Tom and Jerry with my son ..and there was this episode called (Casanova) and then (talking in English so her kids wont understand) Tom was flirting with this new cat and he kissed her I didn't like it and Ali shouted mama he is kissing her from her mouth .and I said well it is wrong you shouldn't kiss anybody from the mouth . I was embarrassed and I don't know how they would show this , I don't know but he's still a kid .

**Moshira:** But you can explain that it's okay if they are married

**Roody :** Yes but he is not in the age to recognize or understand the difference between married and unmarried or the meaning of marriage. It is not proper for their age. It was a mistake in that episode, he is still too young to explain.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **2- Hisham's Family:**

**Hisham:** I started reading Miki since I was six and that was in the late seventies..

**Shahinaz:** We still have them

**Hisham :** I still read them from time to time but I don't like the new issues .I would rather read an old issue than the new. It's curious. There's something wrong about the new ones ..either it's different or talking to different kids and maybe it's fine for them.

**Q:** What is the difference you noticed?

**Hisham:** I don't find it funny . it doesn't bring me pleasure those new ones. Something is wrong and the translation. Before the translator seemed to be living with us. (talking to sister) Remember Shahy "*dongol danagel fedehto bigalagel*" ( a phrase in slang Egyptian by Dongol the villain in Miki that is made to rhyme with his name, and means he's in deep trouble )

This phrase definitely wasn't in the foreign original because its so us. We used to remember such phrases because they're funny and use in our talking to make fun and deliver sharp comments with it . The characters were speaking our language now its dryer.

**Shahninaz:** Maybe they are now more committed to the original text. They don't make that spirited writing anymore .Before it was Egyptianising now its just translation. This literal translation is not nice.

**Hisham :** We knew the dates: Miki every Thursday, Super Miki every two weeks and pocket Miki every month ..they just have to come to the house as a prerequisite. All issues have to come , we cannot miss an issue . But after a while it was embarrassing to be seen with a Miki because we got older. I would say its not or me its for my little sister! And now when you find one you read it but I don't go buy them on purpose.

**Hala:** We had Archie ..I was in the US until I was 13 years old then I came to Egypt and then went to the Emirates. I didn't have access to the Arabic version and Mickey in the US wasn't that great ..it didn't come out regularly and not that popular. My friends read things about cars trains and animals in nature. I used to have a lot of scientific books . Anyhow, there was a bigger range ..Miki was only one of the comics not the only one. I remember a friend asking me surprisingly how come you've never read Miki ..like there isn't any Egyptian child who missed out on reading Miki ..well maybe because I wasn't brought up here. Actually when we went to the Emirates we started reading Maged.

**Hisham :** That also came here lately . It was a mode or a fashion at one time . all of a sudden everybody started reading Maged.

**Shahninaz;** Yes . But also the nice parts or characters were translated like Moza. I saw the foreign original.

**Hala:** Actually when me and my brothers and sisters asked our father to bring us Miki the Egyptian version , he refused saying it was vulgar. And he decided to buy us Maged. He was buying it for us even before it became widely popular. It teaches something.

**Hisham:** but that is not completely true because remember when you were looking for something to clean silver with and I told you toothpaste? I got this from *pocket Miki*. There was always a page or two of general information, facts and a believe it or not section.

**Shaihanz:** but I never read Miki as a source of information. It is entertainment .

**Hisham**. Yes, it's not meant to be that way since we used to read other books besides.

**Shahinaz**: I used to skip these pages.

**Hisham**: sometimes you need this shift . to go from a story of (Donald duck) Batoot to a story about (Goofy ) Bondok you need a break. A puzzle , interesting fact.

**Hala**: Knowledge abroad in the US is more important . Kids used to brag about what they know. For example I didn't know about car types and brands and they used to tease me because of my lack of such knowledge . that's wow. The name of the car the dinosaur , the breed the of cat or the dog.

**Hisham** : But these we didn't know from periodicals we got to know them from books. My parents bought me once an encyclopedia for children of 14 volumes. Species of all animals. What is characteristic of each ..I still brag about these tidbits ..was telling my wife do you know how fast a cheetah is ? and she didn't know I picked it up from a children book...And that was also in *miki* such interesting facts.

**Q**: Who were your favorite characters?

**Shahinaz**: Donald Duck "Batoot". Because he was foolish or silly. He thought he knows everything and he doesn't . and he was very funny . I didn't like Mickey I thought he was too serious. And Goofy was too silly and dumb.

**Hisham**; No one liked Miki as a character . We liked other characters. I used to like 'Am Dahab or Uncle Scrooge. He was shrewd and rich and mean about money . and he used to win . Batoot is the loser and uncle scrooge always won. Miki was not funny so whether or not he wins doesn't matter he was too bland,. ..I didn't like super goofy either. Dahab was tough but he was kind too,, to the nephews. And he had a strange relationship with with grandma Batta. It was a rich character. And Grandmother Batta: she was the sign of goodness ..everybody turns to her. She belonged to everyone. She used to bake for them.

**Shahinaz**: (testing her brother's memory) What did she bake? remember?

**Hisham**; yes. cake ! . bread?

**Shainaz**: no. apple pie.

**Hisham** . oh yes. apple pie.

**Hisham**: I never felt that miki was foreign until I was told so. The first time I took notice when I was asked what is the relationship between batoot and zizi? And then why aren't the nephews have parents? Only nowadays this kind of talk.

**Shainaz**; I read miki all the time until 4 or five years ago ..and I never thought of this talk at all. And I never thought that batoot was in love with zizi.

**Hisham**: They were just friends. So what? Not in the bad sense. And maybe the nephews their parents are dead and they live with their uncle. It doesn't mean shattered

dysfunctional family or immorality ? On the contrary its like “ kafalet elyateem” or looking after an orphan which is an Islamic principle.

**Hala:** Especially that they were the wise kids who used to save him not the other way around.

**Shahinaz:** they are not human ..they are ducks and dogs and mice. So its imaginary world that you don't pass judgment on using human society norms. I think its very easy for a duck and duck to be friends. It's not inappropriate. They wont get married and I don't judge them according to our human values.

**Hala:** even if they were humans. would you have thought this way at that time?

**Q.** Now when u reflect on the images in the comics. The forest, the way the houses looked , the surrounding nature drawn in the background ?

**Hisham:** I'm a city boy so I thought maybe all villages and country side look like that . I didn't feel that grandmother (duck) Batta's farm would be foreign land. I only saw the country side in medicine school in our practical community training when each had to be doctor for a while in a real village countryside ..It was a shocking and miserable experience. For the first time I see a real countryside. Except from the movies, I didn't have an alternative image. I don't remember there was focus on the houses from outside, usually from inside and it was simple a chair at table a fireplace and universal .. not national or specific culture.

**Hala:** Many of our childhood stories took place in forests though we never saw one in Egypt

**Hisham;** The three bears and snow white. It's a scary story. No one ever questioned that she was in the forest in these stories.

**Q:** did ever read Egyptian comics?

**Hisham** ; We brought Samir . but it was bothersome. I don't even remember the characters.

**Shahinaz:** : Yes, Samir and Samira, her hair was in braids and I didnt like the way they looked . their looks.. because they were human probably. There was also Tahtah..

**Hisham** : Tahtah was the Goofy character in Samir. I didn't like Samir.

**Q :** wasn't it funny ?

**Hisham** . well sometimes Miki wasn't funny but interesting Samir : nothing.

**Q :** so why did u buy it?

**Hisham** : my parents bought it for me.

**Shainaz:** it was because it was Egyptian, that father brought it. Miki was too imaginary. Samir was human.

**Nour:** their father liked them to read so he bought everything . All the magazines just to make them like reading. Hisham you were in preparatory school when you bought the book about the Caliph Omar El Farook. We took them to the book fair. He read things advanced than his age. Yet up until now he comes back to read Samir and Maged

**Shainaz;** It signifies something that I kept the old issues of Miki but got rid of the old Maged and Samir issues. This magazine falsely proclaiming Arabness. I gave to the janitor's son. It's not funny . Too instructive in a direct way : Wash your feet before going to bed or else you will die. ( Laughter ) Especially Maged , he doesn't do anything wrong . and I didn't like him wearing the *galabiyyah*. (traditional caftan) I didn't like that at all. I didn't like these ideas. Maybe I was influenced by Western thought and culture. Because I still remember that once the Zakiyya character suggested we should have an Arabian doll that is dark and with black hair. I didn't like that . I was against that. Because all my dolls were blond I don't want them dark . I was complicated. Hahahaha (laughs) . Those were my beauty standards.

**Hisham:** I don't remember Maged at all now , though I read it.

**Hisham:** As a teenagers ; I read the 13 devils ..or maybe I was younger 8 years ,9 years old

**Shahinaz :** I didn't like it .

**Hisham:** It was about Arabness and also nationalistic ..because "Number 1" in the Devils was always Ahmed from Egypt. He was always the hero .there were always 4 or 5 devils from other Arab countries in each mystery but Ahmed was always a constant. Besides "Number 0" the "mysterious leader that no one knows his name" (citing the exact phrase used in the mysteries series of 13 devils).

**Shainaz :** we know by heart the introduction phrase of "ragul elmustaheel" (The impossible Man series) ..and we once made it into a movie ..directed and produced it . And we made something else in the corner of Hisham's room we made a bedsheet into a camp , which was actually influenced by the scouts in Miki.. we made a lot of tents . and I got *la vache qui rit* slices to store provisions.

**Shahinaz:** I used to like "ragul al mustaheel". But it was a bit more expensive. It was periodical.

**Hisham :** he started at 35 years old. He doesn't get old. He is the Egyptian version of all the global spy intelligence heroes ...a bit of Rambo and a bit of 007. And he is unbeatable. And Sonia the officer in the Israeli Mossad fell in love with him . Egyptian intelligence does everything here. Solves a problem between America and Russia. Not Egypt . Just him: Adham Sabry! (hahaha) He saves the world from a nuclear explosion.

He destroys someone who made a germ bomb. He is super natural ..fights the Mafia all alone. Speaks all languages and can do anything .

**Q:** So how is he different as an Egyptian than all the other heroes?

**Hisham:** He's not funny . too somber ... Hahaha. All women like him. Sonia won't kill him when she gets the chance because she loves him. Adham was annoying .. (recalling) "his 4 limbs moved and he struck four men with his four limbs" u start thinking is he a circus clown or what?

**Shahinaz:** And he jumps from the roof a building . but still I loved him because you are always attached with the hero who is never beaten. I don't think it was political though not because he's Egyptian .

**Hisham:** but yes there was some politics in the sense that there was Egypt and Israel. And the Jews don't want good to us and the Mosad is evil . It wasn't not direct. Most of the time if he's not saving the world he's fighting Israeli intelligence.

**Shahinaz:** Yes there was always Mossad in the background.

**Hisham** ; When we acted it out it was with toys ..

**Shainaz:** Barbie doll was Sonia

**Hisham**; her teddy bear was Adham Sabry ..I was the director and that was the *titre*. And location and light.

(Reciting the opening *titre* and laughing ..)

**Q:** When you bring children, would you mind what they read ?

**Hala:** I don't think I'll ever mind what they read.. maybe I will watch out for TV more than reading . This generation are more cultured than us . Kids today talk about deeper things.. They talk about marriage and divorce and their thinking is older compared to us in their age they have of knowledge from watching TV. No culture.

**Hala:** In the US there were other characters from Disney that came on TV .not just Mickey .. There was bambi and so on ..we were saturated on TV. We didn't need comics.

**Hisham;** Mama took me to the cinema every week Sunday we went to the 10: 00 am show she took me to see these movies. Bambi and Dumbo. And snow white.

**Shahinaz:** my friends who are new mothers now complain from what their children watch. They watch cartoons that are translated in the Gulf countries .. so they are now saying words in the Gulf dialect .And some Disney movies are now dubbed in the Levant dialect .

**Hesham** : You know..I never felt that I was lacking in Islamic or Arab culture just because I went to a language school . Father bought me Miki but also we read the Quraan together before Friday prayers . This existed side by side. And books about the

prophets . My first book was a religious biography, Omar . I felt I loved him as a historic hero .

**Shahinaz:** We didn't have in our generations this religious fanaticism you see around you now. The veil in advertisements is a new phenomena.

**Hesham :** Me and my friend Ahmed used to share and exchange comics .We loved Lucky Luke ..American cowboy and the stupid dog. We still use terms and words and phrases from theses stories. Once he became smart after a shock after analysis (they recall the phrase and laugh )

Al Dantons brothers.. the tall one saying .. “I feel emptiness between snacks”.. that means hunger he didn't understand. hahaha I didn't feel it was American.. how come when the dog's name was Kalboush.

**Shahinaz :** We never felt it was American.

**Q:** What about when you compare yourselves to other peers in regular Arabic school?

**Hisham:** My cousin Hazem he also read the same things. he's even not from Cairo at but Asiyout too (southern Egypt). Hazem was more knowledgeable than me with foreign songs and pop music charts, we would be in competition over these things . this generation was different . they taught themselves. While I used to only understand English accent because of the school, now I understand American accent which I thought was too fast and couldn't understand before. Now I have a hard time understanding Hugh Grant for example.

**Hala:** the british movies are just more boring.. its not the accent as much as the slowness. Americans are more smart and fun . you can know if its American or British from the rythm.

**Q:** since your childhood u seem to have been close followers of foreign media..did u ever feel this affected your identity?

**Hesham:** actually no. on the contrary .. I am anti American . I have nothing against the Americans or American culture but I'm against American policies .

**Hala:** But these things we watched and read made us feel the gap in the progress between the two worlds

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**Amal Farah (Miki's editor )**

Q. What is new about the new Miki?

Amal: The new Miki is different in 2 aspects : first of all the layout and presentation we want visual pleasure. The global not the traditional size . Second: the content became classic Arabic.. We decided to make it classic Arabic because we are interested in identity yet with full respect of the other. We know we make full use from visual culture of that great product ..“ visually” . yet we know that we belong to a different social reality we don’t want to lose the “fun” and this visual enjoyment but we still don’t want to lose our identity. So we don’t want to be just translators. Therefore we do editing to the product.

Q. Didn’t they edit before in the early issues?

Amal: No . it was almost literal translation.

Q. But Mahmoud Salem said he used to edit it too.

Amal : very light editing . just to make it funny in the Egyptian way. But we do something besides that , things that are not in harmony or too consistent with our reality ..for example glorifying the robbers or the name calling and swearing : “ damn , hell , contemptuous” we put instead : “you are very silly ..very rude.” So we make it softer. “in my opinion you are bothersome” so here is the moral dimension we are keen on without putting the text in a straightjacket.

On the other hand, there are moral behaviors. I will tell you an example. You know they can make fun of everything and anything . for example the nephews would say about their uncle Donald that he is very crazy or mad “why are we living with someone mad like him?” On our part we have a duty to preserve our values regarding elder family members and ways of addressing them.

And then politically too: Mickey goes to the land of legends where half the inhabitants are fighting with the other half for a piece of land. One people go to the other people for a piece of very little land because their own land is being eaten away by the river. The people respond by giving them the land when they know about their problem . I cannot publish this or else I will be categorized. What I did is I omitted this sentence and put instead that original inhabitants told the newcomers you have your land on the other side go build on it. I’m not messing with the text but one has to be aware and cautious.

Then you have Zizi (Daisy ) and Donald duck: we want to avoid the naming of the relationship , fiancée or girlfriend . We don’t want to spoil the world of Disney . but what is happening is we don’t want to implement it exactly like it is and shock our society nor do we want to lose the taste of Disney world and spoil it. Just like Tobelino the Italian Miki and the French. We do the same by Egyptianising it.

Q. Where does the content come from?

Amal: In pocket Mickey, we use the Italian content . In the weekly magazine we use the Dutch and the Finnish . Sometime we buy from England and France. We just open the

website and we choose the funniest . The Italian is a bit violent. The Dutch and the Finnish is best.

Then we have the translator then the editor (what is similar or not similar) then copy editor than editing manager.

The important thing is that we are not touching the spirit of the text but at the same time we are not selling out our spirit. And what I discovered is that they don't care to be against or to destruct other peoples identities. There is no politics here. Nor policies in that sense in Disney . There are other media institutions that do this like Rambo or Rand. Such media money is being paid for aims and objectives. But Disney from the start was only for children . Their children. And succeeded in its own society that why it was exported . It was not intended for the other. It made its own logic for itself not to destroy others unlike *Superman* and the other things.

Q. But I know that Nahdet Masr is also publishing Superman and Batman comics.

Amal : Yes. Superman and Batman we do as well, but I am not the editor of those . They are for teenagers . They include conflict, good and bad. We just insert moral remarks and that's it. In the final analysis, a foreign product becomes popular for either one of two reasons : too much advertisement which cultures bad taste or because it is really a good product.

Q: Did you receive letters about the moral content of the stories?

Amal: I'll tell you . Once Donald decided to see the ice maker ..he was tired of cold weather, he found out that the ice maker forgot the fridge open over Duck town while he went away on summer vacation . I thought it was fun and fantasy. But a mother sent me a letter saying how can you publish this ? God is the creator of the weather.

Now the child knows it's a duck that is talking so its an alternative world. That's how I replied to the mother saying : "this is not your world of human beings that we live in and you have to stop looking at it this way. Even in the Koraan you can be as powerful as prophets and angels. You should look at your religion differently" She became our friend. The magazine is playing a social role by replying to the letters. Before in Dar El-Hilal , They would do anything to make things funny. For example saying that the Monalisa was painted by Harafanshi instead of Davinci. We don't put wrong information just because it's funny.

We are more popular ..they went to 25,000 as the highest circulation . We have reached 58 thousand at the least although we are more expensive. And we distribute in Egypt. Dar El -Hilal included North Africa and Sudan.

Another example of a situation where I had to interfere editorially, was when Noona was making fun of the Egyptian sphinx. We cannot accept that, but on the other hand there are other issues where they make fun of their presidents and of Greek gods. So this is their logic. It is we who are too sensitive when it comes to our culture. If a joke on an Italian painter was made, the Italian editor would not remove it, he will make it funny in the Italian way. Europeans don't have this hyper sensitivity that we have, always feeling that

we are being targeted. I feel in my own personal opinion that a lot of what's said is normal and nothing wrong with it but as a public intellectual, my role in the Gramsci sense is to look at how it would be understood in society .

Disney is not global. It's local but because it became very successful it became translocal. Just like the Arabian nights. And then international is not global we have to make the difference. Disney is international, it is not global . We are the ones who enlarged the American project inside it . There is no Mickey magazine in America, the highest distribution number is Germany , 600,000 weekly. And they are known for their national sentiments.

**Q:** What about the characters are drawn, their dress and the environment drawn in the background ?

Amal : It is local I know, they write to themselves. Success is not a bad thing. Not a fault. This is our own crisis. That we were unable to picture our desert environment or country side visually ..this is our problem not theirs. Why didn't we have a problem with Miki in the sixties? Because we had a national project and a beautiful reality and confidence of our character in relation to the other. Now we see everything as a threat because we are shaken. The same is happening to the Americans they have fear from Islamists or Chinese because they are having confidence and internal problems. They fear India and its technology , Iran and its nuclear energy, China and its economy ! We have to work on the soul and the self.

Q: In a recent issue Miki went to a health spa for a weekend with his friends, how does that resonate with a developing country like Egypt where most people are poor. Would such representations encourage capitalism and consumerism ?

Amal : First of all we have to understand that Miki is about three things: First: Fun and pleasure and entertainment. Second : Knowledge and information . Third: concepts and values . Miki is not an educator and we cannot violate the stories , there may be messages sent but its not primary . Besides our society now has these types of people. If the kid pays two pounds for the magazine then his mother will be going to a spa as well . And then the market has always been the center of our historic cities, so what's wrong with people going to the malls now? Nothing is new.

Q. Why did the old issues include drawings of Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck in a galabiyya (traditional dress) and the new issues do not have that ?

Amal: Disney now is different. They wouldn't allow you to make Mickey wear a galabiya and celebrate Ramadan. Their commercial awareness has risen . They are cautious and alert for their characters. They have specific demands and conditions of using colors and print . The character should not be lost. If Zizi (Daisy) wears like an Egyptian peasant I'm destroying the character. Would you like someone to make Aladdin wear jeans ?

