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Abstract

Japanese animation, commonly referred to as *anime*, has had major success world-wide (Wahab, Anuar & Farhani, 2012). Its impact is especially apparent in the Middle East where generation after generation of Arab kids grew up watching anime as their main source of entertainment (Tashkandi, 2019). Despite anime's prevalence, there has been little research conducted on its cultural impact on the Middle East. Using Jensen and Arnett's (2012) theory on cultural identity formation as the theoretical framework for my paper, I analyzed the impact of Japanese anime characters on the cultural identity formation of youth growing up in the Middle East. I argue that, based on several cultural dimensions outlined by Dedoussis (2004), the similarities between the Japanese and Middle Eastern cultures contributed to the popularity of anime in the region, while the diverging attributes of the characters helped bring in a different perspective to youth growing up in the Middle East and subsequently introduced new cultural elements which broadened their world view. In accordance with Jensen and Arnett's theory (2012), I argue that such an emerging new perspective likely contributed to positive outcomes, including increased gender equality and increased civic involvement. To assess the outcome of greater gender equality, I examined the Japanese magic girl genre and the anime *Ojamajo Doremi* (Todo, 2002). To assess the outcome of greater civic involvement, I examined the anime *UFO Robot Grendizer* (Nagai, 1975). I conclude that the magic girl genre empowered young girls while still allowing them to embrace their femininity, thereby contributing to the trend of greater gender equality. In addition, I conclude that the anime *UFO Robot Grendizer* contributed to greater civic involvement by creating a shared generational identity which allowed young people to come together and use that very identity as a way to protest. This work was supported by secondary data analysis.

Keywords: Anime, Japan, Middle East, Identity, Cultural Identity Formation, Civic Involvement, Gender Equality

Introduction

Japanese animation, commonly referred to as *anime*, has had major success world-wide (Wahab, Anuar & Farhani, 2012). Its impact is especially apparent in the Arab nations that collectively constitute the Greater Middle East (Tashkandi, 2019).¹ Beginning in the seventies, anime was bought and dubbed into Arabic in response to the high demand for entertainment geared towards younger audiences. Since there were no Arab animation production companies at the time, this was a cheap and easy solution. Ever since then, it has become the norm, and generation after generation of kids grew up watching anime as their main source of entertainment. According to Jensen and Arnett (2012), media is a common vehicle of transmitting cultural information. It is possible then that anime transported cultural information about Japan to the Middle East and correspondingly introduced a foreign perspective to the youth growing up in the region.

The key to anime's long-lasting popularity in the Arab world – despite the introduction of American and European animation later on – may be due to the similarities between the Japanese and Arab cultures (Dedoussis, 2004). According to Dedoussis (2004), Japan is similar to Arab countries on a number of important cultural dimensions, such as their “collectivist orientation, relationships to other people, importance of context and interpersonal space, and patterns of communication” (p. 17). It is likely then that the similarity between the cultures made anime more palatable for Arab audiences. In addition to the aforementioned cultural dimensions,

¹ Even though this paper is talking about the Greater Middle East, I will refer to it simply as the Middle East or the Arab world as that is the commonly understood definition.

Dedoussis discusses the similarity between Japan and the Middle East in terms of traditional masculine and feminine roles.²

While the similarities between the two cultures may have helped promote and maintain anime's popularity throughout the Arab world, there are still some cultural differences that are particularly apparent in the portrayal of the characters. Oftentimes, the characters are portrayed in a way that is in line with Arab culture due to the aforementioned similarities between the Japanese and Middle Eastern societies. However, these characters often have additional characteristics and attributes that also challenge these views (Sugawa-Shimada, 2019). This may have an impact on the young viewers who will have to navigate the different cultural landscapes as they develop their own global cultural identity (Jensen & Arnett, 2012).

In Jensen and Arnett's (2012) work on cultural identity formation, they look at how globalization, which is largely spread through the media, has led to the emergence of a global cultural identity among youth. They go on to examine the positive outcomes of developing a global cultural identity such as civic involvement and gender equality, and the negative outcomes including cultural identity confusion and psychopathology (negative mental health outcomes). Using Jensen and Arnett's work as the theoretical framework for this paper, I will analyze the influence of popular male and female Japanese anime characters on youth in the Middle East. In particular, I will examine the portrayal of the characters' societal roles and expectations, and how they may compare and contrast with the cultural dimensions outlined in Dedoussis work. Through this analysis, I argue that the similarities between the Japanese and Middle Eastern cultures contributed to the popularity of anime, while the diverging attributes of the characters

² It is important to note that while making the comparison between Japan and the Middle East, Dedoussis is aware of the generalization he is making in regard to Arab countries, but still believes that they are largely culturally homogeneous. For the purpose and scope of this paper, this view will be maintained.

helped bring in a foreign perspective to youth growing up in the Middle East and subsequently introduced new cultural elements which broadened their world view. Such an emerging new perspective could lead to positive outcomes, including increased gender equality and increased civic involvement. To analyze the outcome of greater gender equality, I will be discussing the Japanese magic girl genre and the anime *Ojamajo Doremi*. To examine the outcome of greater civic involvement, I will discuss the anime *UFO Robot Grendizer*. I will support my work using data collected from secondary data analysis.

Background

Over the past 50 years, Japanese animation has been a huge phenomenon in the Middle East (Tashkandi, 2019). In the seventies, Japanese anime was first dubbed into Arabic in response to the high demand for entertainment geared towards younger audiences. Ever since then, it has become a staple form of entertainment in the region. Arafat Ali Khan, the event organizer of the popular Middle Eastern anime convention Ani:ME, solidifies this point when he states that “the beauty of anime and the Middle East is that practically everyone who’s grown up in the Middle East has grown up with anime...it’s ingrained into their lives” (Newbould, 2016). The importance of anime in the region is further highlighted by Amer Bitar, the managing director of the anime broadcasting channel Spacetoon International, who stated that the UAE government is financially supporting co-productions between Middle Eastern and Japanese firms (Newbould, 2016). The admiration for anime in the Middle East has inspired many young people to further explore the Japanese culture. According to the Japan International Co-operation Centre, the number of Emirati students studying in Japan has increased by 62 percent from 102 students in 2013 to 166 students in 2018 (Newbould, 2016).

The key to anime's long-lasting popularity in the region may be due to the similarities between the Japanese and Arab cultures. According to Dedoussis (2004), Japan is similar to Arab countries on a number of important cultural dimensions, including collectivist orientation, relationship to other people, importance of context and interpersonal space, and patterns of communication. Collectivist orientation indicates a preference for group decision making and consensus, being motivated by a sense of belonging, being rewarded for loyalty, and placing value on obedience, compliance, and shared responsibility. Relationship to other people is hierarchical and collectivist in both the Middle East and Japan, and seniority and authority are respected. In high context societies, people do not express feelings and thoughts explicitly and rely on context for key info. The pattern of communication in Japan and the Middle East involves building rapport and slightly blurring the line between private and public life. Finally, Dedoussis discusses the similarity between the two cultures that is evident in the perception of traditional masculine and feminine roles. He states that masculine roles include having a good relationship with one's superiors, the ability to cooperate and work well with others, and job security. He affirms that feminine roles involve establishing friendly relationships with people and the fulfillment of social obligations towards family members and others in the community.

Despite the introduction of Western animation and cartoons later on, Japanese anime remained as the main form of entertainment (Shuhail and Koshy, 2017). According to Shuhail and Koshy (2017), this is because anime caters to all age groups, while Western animation mostly targets children. Since anime is more accessible, adolescents and emerging adults are also able to watch it and, therefore, it is more likely to contribute to their cultural identity formation.

Jensen and Arnett's Theory of Cultural Identity Formation

In Jensen and Arnett's article *Going Global: New Pathways for Adolescents and Emerging Adults in a Changing World* (2012), they extend immigrant acculturation theory, which was proposed by Berry in 1997, to discuss the different pathways of identity formation an immigrant may go through, to globalization in order to demonstrate how cultural identity formation follows different pathways among adolescents (10-18) and emerging adults (18-29) living in a globalized world. They go on to discuss how the different pathways can have both positive and negative outcomes.

Jensen and Arnett (2012) argue that people do not grow up only knowing one culture, rather, they experience multiple cultures, either through first-hand interactions with people of different cultural backgrounds or indirect contact through the media.³ They state that this is because cultural identity is formed through adopting practices and beliefs of one or more cultural communities. Some of these include spirituality, notions of autonomy and independence, familial and communal obligations, and so on. They add that the media is a particularly effective way of transmitting cultural information among adolescents and emerging adults, since they are more interested in media and popular culture than other age groups. Due to this increase in cross-cultural contact, developing a cultural identity has become more complicated for young adults. Nowadays, they conclude, young people are having to negotiate multiple cultures as they develop their own cultural identity.

The immigrant acculturation theory has four different pathways which can be applied to the process of cultural identity formation which are assimilation, separation, integration and

³ By culture, Jensen and Arnett are referring to a national vs foreign identity, and they acknowledge that nowadays, even the national identity is influenced to some extent by other cultures. They state that unless one is living in a remote area with no outside contact, there will be some sort of cross-cultural contact and therefore, some influence on identity, whether it is positive or negative.

marginalization (Berry 1997). For this paper, I will be focusing on the integration response which means that young people develop a global identity that they use to engage with the global culture, while still maintaining their local identity (Jensen and Arnett, 2012). According to Jensen and Arnett (2012), since adolescents and emerging adults are more open to other ideas and have not yet settled on their beliefs, they are more likely to be influenced by other cultures, and therefore, will have more diverse cultural identities as they integrate these different aspects into their identity.

As Jensen and Arnett assert, the effects of having a cultural identity that is influenced by various cultures can have positive outcomes including greater civic involvement and greater gender equality, and negative outcomes including cultural identity confusion and psychopathology (negative mental health outcomes). In this paper, I will focus on the positive outcomes which are greater gender equality and greater civic involvement. In the following sections, I will be considering how Japanese anime characters align with and deviate from cultural dimensions outlined by Dedoussis (2004) in order to evaluate how they may contribute to the process of cultural identity formation

Anime, Cultural Identity and Gender Equality

Although gender inequality still persists today worldwide, there is a global movement towards greater equality (Jensen & Arnett, 2012). According to Jensen and Arnett (2012), this is because the global economy, which is made up largely of information, technology, and services, promotes social and cultural change around the world. They add that since gender equality is influenced by globalization, there is positive potential for young people who are developing their

cultural identity.⁴ As they adopt different beliefs and ideas in the process of developing their cultural identity, they will be more likely to follow the global trend and accept a more progressive outlook on gender equality. The way in which young people come into contact with different cultures varies, and in this section, anime will be analyzed as a means of transporting different cultural information and influencing cultural identity formation among adolescents and emerging adults in the Middle East, thereby contributing to the trend of greater gender equality.

Magical girl animation, referred to as *mahoo shoujo* in Japan, is a genre of anime that is marketed towards young female viewers and features an ordinary girl who has the ability to transform into a superhero and protect others (Newsom, 2004). The plot also often revolves around saving people from harm while maintaining her secret identity (Saito, 2014). Newsom (2004) argues that these characters represent a “tough girl” style of feminism that encourages young women to stand up for themselves while still maintaining their feminine identity. She adds that these characters are strongly tied to traditional concepts of femininity and are able to fight in a capacity akin with male superheroes without being perceived as less feminine. She also claims that they represent the concept of “girl power” which is defined as the ability of young women to achieve personal empowerment while maintaining their feminine style. Despite this, she adds that these characters often have trouble balancing their powerful superhero persona and their femininity which parallels the reality that many young women face. This makes it appealing to teen girls who may relate to the struggles of the main characters. Saito (2014) argues that there is a striking gap between the life of real Japanese women and female characters portrayal in the magic girl genre.⁵ She states that in anime, the female characters often surpass men in both

⁴ While Jensen and Arnett site the positive impacts of globalization, they also discuss the negative impacts which include cultural identity confusion and psychopathology (negative mental health outcomes). In this paper, I will be examining the positive impacts of globalization.

⁵ Here, Saito is talking about the societal aspects of female life in Japan.

physical power and social status, which is a contradiction of reality. This may be an empowering message to young girls who live in a patriarchal society.⁶ The following example highlights how characters in a popular magic girl anime may have contributed to cultural identity formation and resulting gender equality.

Ojamajo Doremi (Todo, 2002) is a popular anime in the Middle East that tells the story of Doremi Harukaze, a pretty young girl who always seems to be down on her luck. One day, she stumbles on a magic shop and accidentally discovers that the owner, Majo Rika, is a witch. Due to a curse that is placed on any witch whose identity is discovered by a human, Majo Rika gets turned into a frog. To undo the curse, she trains Doremi as an apprentice until she can reverse the spell. Later on, her two friends and younger sister also become apprentices and they use their powers to help out their friends and family.

This series is a perfect example of the magic girl genre and its characters. Firstly, the characters are ordinary girls who have the same problems a normal kid would have at their age. For instance, Doremi has argumentative parents, an annoying little sister, and she struggles in school. This makes her relatable to the viewers who are likely dealing with similar issues. Next, the appearance of the characters is very feminine and in line with traditional conventions. This is especially apparent when they transform into witches and put on colorful costumes and dresses. Traditionally, witches are seen as scary, ugly, and evil but this show takes the concept and transforms it so that it is feminine and appealing to the young viewers. According to Dedoussis (2004) feminine roles in both Japan and the Middle East involve establishing friendly relationships with people and the fulfillment of social obligations towards others. In addition,

⁶ While this type of character promotes positive messages, there have been critiques regarding how certain characters are oversexualized, which may lead to the audience receiving mixed messages. However, the shows that I will be discussing do not have overly sexualized characters as the Middle East is majority Muslim, and as a result, shows with sexualized portrayals were not broadcast in adherence to Islamic views.

Newsom (2004) states that being nurturing is hyperfeminine character trait that is often associated with this genre. This is apparent when Doremi agrees to become an apprentice because she felt it was her obligation to help the shop owner turn back into a human. It is also evident in the way that Aiko Senoo, one of the other apprentices, takes care of household chores since her parents are divorced and her dad is unable to look after the house on his own. Another example of this is when Doremi witnesses a magical birth of a baby and, as witch law dictates, has to take care of it for a year which highlights her nurturing qualities.

On the other hand, there are many ways in which the characters defy the traditional gender roles outlined by Dedoussis (2004) and Newsom (2004) and contribute to a more open-minded perspective. For example, Aiko Senoo, one of the witch's apprentices is portrayed as being loud, athletic, ill-tempered, and confident. She still looks feminine and cute when she undergoes her transformation, but also has qualities that don't align completely with the societal expectations of the ideal woman. Another case where a character doesn't necessarily fit into the traditional views about femininity is the main character herself, Doremi. While she does have a lot of feminine qualities, mainly ones revolving around societal roles and taking care of others, she is also extremely clumsy, ill-tempered and gets into trouble with authority figures frequently. Lastly, another example where the characters defy the traditional gender roles is when a new witch named Momoko joins the group later on. In the beginning, she got into a lot of conflicts with the other girls, as well as authority figures, like when she refused to take a piercing out after her teacher asked her to. As the show goes on, she maintains this attitude and is confrontational when problems arise. This shows that her relationship with other people is not always friendly and therefore, goes against the gender roles outlined by Dedoussis (2004).

While the similarities with traditional Middle Eastern views about femininity helped make the show appealing to the Arab audiences, the duality the characters have between being feminine and participating in traditionally masculine activities and behaviors help bring a more varied perspective on the traditional gender roles and stereotypes. The show's popularity, coupled with young people's openness to different cultural ideas, beliefs and behaviors is likely to have had an influence on the cultural identity formation process of young people in the Middle East. More specifically, the ideas presented in this show regarding being empowered and occasionally defying traditional views without losing one's femininity likely contributed to the movement towards greater gender equality. This can be analyzed in women's increased participation in sports, as well as the new Middle Eastern animations which feature female characters inspired by the Japanese magic girl genre.

Many young women are taking up Japanese martial arts in the Middle East for various reasons such as self-defense, boosting confidence and protection against bullies (Al-Kinani, 2020). In Kuwait, young women are practicing Kajukenbo, a hybrid martial art form incorporating different martial arts including karate, judo, kenpo, and boxing ("Kuwaiti Girls," 2019). In Cairo, women are taking up karate to fend off unwelcome advances and attacks from men (Fraser, 2009). Nada Al-Mashat, a Saudi Arabian karate player who represented Saudi Arabia at the fifth annual Arab Women Sports Tournament said that her interest in Japanese culture and language was a source of inspiration (Al-Kinani, 2020). She was moved to learn that the meaning of the word karate was empty hand and felt empowered knowing that she depends on her inner power and not on a weapon. Following the global trend towards gender equality, many dojos and training clubs where women can practice martial arts are popping up. According to Hasoon al-Fassi, a Saudi academic who studies women's history, girls have been historically

discouraged from participating in sports in Saudi Arabia due to the fact that it may impact their femininity (Hubbard, 2017). However, despite being a socially restrictive environment for women, Saudi Arabia introduced physical education was to all-girls public schools in 2013. Overall, it is possible that the interest in Japanese martial arts may have been due to empowering female representation in anime and the global trend towards greater gender equality, which together represent a more diverse perspective towards gender roles than those outlined by Dedoussis (2004).

In addition to increased participation in sports, there has been increased representation of female superhero's in Middle Eastern media inspired by Japanese anime. Eating Stars Studio, an Emirati production company came out with an anime style cartoon in 2018 called Emara which “features an adorable female superhero who makes it her mission to fight crime on the streets of the UAE” (Zargari, 2018). The creator of the show Fatma Alheiri, stated that the inspiration behind the show is her childhood and Arab culture, as well as Japanese anime (Zargari, 2018). She adds that “the style, set in place by Art Director Ahmad Beirouthy, is inspired by a lot of retro and iconic anime,” and that “the setup is pretty typical “superhero/magical girl.” As for her reasoning behind creating this show, she expresses that “girls like us haven't been given much of a chance in animation” and so she decided to create the character of Emara who's “fighting costume resembles the Emirati culture; her head is covered with a hijab and she wears an Emirati burqa as a mask” and is still powerful and capable of fighting crime on her own, as her femininity is a source of empowerment – a trope that is often seen in the magic girl anime genre. Many other Middle Eastern artists cite anime as the source of inspiration behind their work, and many “admitted to implementing anime drawing techniques to sketch their own characters” (Shuhail and Koshy, 2017, p. 7). Evidently, anime has had a big impact on the animation

industry in the Middle East, but more importantly, has opened up new avenues for female artists to express their identity and represent themselves, their femininity, and their culture in an empowering way.

Anime, Cultural Identity and Civic Involvement

One of the positive effects of having a diverse cultural identity as discussed by Jensen and Arnett (2012) is civic involvement. They affirm that civic involvement is largely motivated by young people's openness to experiencing other cultures, ideas and values. This openness to other cultures also means that they are less hesitant to act in ways that are outside the norm of their own culture. Subsequently, in times of conflict, they will be more likely to engage in civic actions that bring about social change. The openness to multiple cultures, combined with access to global media, leads to the development of new communities and civic movements. This is demonstrated by Obaid (2019) who states that "with the increasing growth of the internet in Saudi Arabia in the 2000s, Saudis began to learn more about the anime culture, Japanese culture, and language. They created their own communities for anime fans, translated and spread the culture in society..." Jensen and Arnett (2012) expand and add that these online groups and collectives can be used for information-sharing, analysis, and action to promote social change. They assert that this is highlighted by the large-scale political events and protests in the Middle East which began in 2011, known collectively as the "Arab Spring". Beginning in the early stages of the Arab Spring, youth mobilized social media groups and online collectives for information-sharing, analysis, and action in Egypt, Tunisia, Bahrain, Syria, and other countries in the Middle East. Their social media collectives combined with their openness to ideas that differ

from the norm, led to them taking actions and getting involved civically. This is affirmed by Al-Ghazzi (2018) who states:

“the young Tunisians, Egyptians and Yemenis who took to the streets in protest were dubbed by Arab media as ‘the revolutionary generation’ (Arabic: jil al-thawra). The new generation was also associated with the use of social media and new technologies that were credited for enabling what was thought to be impossible prior to 2010—mass Arab demands for political freedoms” (p. 56).

In the following example, I demonstrate how the popular anime *UFO Robot Grendizer* (Nagai, 1975) was a source of inspiration for young people growing up during conflict in the Middle East, and how, later on, it was used as a tool by youth for civic involvement during the Syrian revolution and express their dissatisfaction with the Al-Assad regime and the ISIS (Al-Ghazzi, 2018).

UFO Robot Grendizer, a popular anime originally broadcast in the Arab world 1980’s, tells the story of Duke Fleed (Daisuke in the Japanese version) who is forced to escape his home planet after being attacked by the evil King Vega and his forces (Al-Ghazzi, 2018). He takes his spacecraft that transforms into a giant robot called Grendizer, and escapes to Earth, landing in Japan. He is rescued by a kind professor who begins to look after him. After some time, King Vega attacks Earth and Duke Fleed, along with his Grendizer spaceship and the help of the professor, fights back. Eventually King Vega is defeated, and Earth is saved. It was first broadcast in the early 1980’s on various channels in the Middle East including Tele Liban, Kuwait TV and Saudi Channel 1 where it was an instant hit. It remains popular to this day with merchandise constantly selling out and the image of Grendizer being displayed and celebrated in all sorts of places across the Middle East (Saeed, 2019).

Grendizer was a major hit in the region due to the way it reflected reality and the way that it fit with many cultural dimensions in the Middle East. According to Dedoussis (2004), some of the important values include collectivist orientation, relationship to other people, importance of context and interpersonal space, and patterns of communication. There are many instances in the show where these values are demonstrated. For instance, even though Daisuke was the main character, he still put others first and worked together with other people, reflecting a more collective approach. In another instance, Daisuke's fiancé sacrifices herself to save Daisuke from a blast shot at him. In addition, even though Daisuke is not from earth, he still protected it and cared for the inhabitants and always thought of others first. Perhaps the most reflective of these qualities, however, is the underlying theme of guilt that Daisuke experienced throughout the series due to the fact that he fled his planet after being unable to save anyone. He felt like he abandoned everyone, even though he had no other choice.

While there are many similarities between the characters and the ideals in the Middle East, there were some exceptions. Firstly, the character Maria Fleed who is the sister of Duke Fleed has many attributes that are not in line with traditional views on femininity. As Dedoussis (2004) states, feminine roles in both Japan and the Middle East involve establishing friendly relationships with people and the fulfillment of social obligations towards others. However, she was ill-tempered and did not always act in a way that was feminine even though she fit the ideal from a visual viewpoint. She also became the pilot of the Drill Spazer and fought alongside Daisuke. The main character Daisuke also had some attributes that were not in line with traditional gender roles. He hated fighting unless he had to, and often felt anxious about keeping his identity a secret from other humans. He was also portrayed to have a sensitive side, including

many scenes of him crying. This shows that he was not always secure as outlined by Dedoussis (2004) in terms of expectations for males in the Middle East and Japan.

The Lebanese voice actor Jihad Al-Atrash who voiced the main character Daisuke in the Arabic dub stated that he believes the show was successful due to its high production value and the geopolitical situation in the Middle East in the 1980's (Tashkandi, 2019). At the time, there was a civil war going on in Lebanon which took place from 1975 to 1990, and people all over the Middle East were in dismay over the occupied Palestinian territories during the ongoing Palestine-Israel conflict. This is reinforced by Al-Ghazzi (2018) who believes that the series reflected Levantine culture which celebrates national unity, resistance to occupation, and devotion to land, qualities which would have made it relevant to the issues people were facing at the time. Al-Ghazzi (2018) adds that the series was always broadcast at the same time, so it created a structuralized ritual where people feel like they are part of a national community. He affirms that this led to a generational identity among Syrians who are now using clips of the show and redubbing it to protest the Al-Assad regime and ISIS. He goes on to argue that "Grendizer is an ideal representative of Syrian activists because, as a nostalgically-remembered superhero, he is able to reach out to Syrians from different communities in need of a unifying symbol" (p. 61). When describing the videos, Al-Ghazzi (2018) elaborates:

“...Grendizer-inspired videos are based on activists’ favorite scenes from the cartoons, but reworked as a confrontation between evil forces, which are represented by the regime, and forces of good, represented by the dissidents and rebels. This theme points to another aim, resorting to cartoons for political expression, in order to inspire courage by propagating the idea that the struggle can only end well for the revolutionary movement. For example, one video series is divided into episodes that show a

confrontation between forces loyal to the villain King Vega and Grendizer. Two clips from this series borrow the Grendizer plot about the showdown between good and evil to discuss the Syrian uprising—also communicated as a good versus evil confrontation. The fight is to the death. It is also a fight that, they hope, has an inevitably happy ending, that is, the victory of the good guys” (p. 61).

Al-Ghazzi contends that this is an empowering practice and that the way in which young people are using Japanese anime from their childhood speaks to the fact that they are a part of their generational identity that they are repurposing into a way to project express opinions and dissatisfaction. Overall, *Grendizer* likely empowered young people during times of conflict and showed them different perspectives that they would not have otherwise been introduced to. The young people’s openness and understanding of different cultures and ideas likely contributed to their lack of hesitation to question the dominant political narratives and engage civically through like-minded collectives based on a shared generational identity.

Conclusion

To conclude, it is evident that there is a link between anime characters portrayal and positive effects on young people growing up in the Middle East. According to Jensen and Arnett (2012), globalization has led to increased cross-cultural contact and the resulting contact has led to alternate processes of cultural identity formation. They state that young people have to navigate different cultural information while forming their identities. Anime is very popular in the Middle East (Tashkandi, 2019). Its popularity can be attributed to the similarity between the Japanese and Middle Eastern culture according to the cultural dimensions outlined by Dedoussis (2004), which are collectivist orientation, relationship to other people, importance of context and

interpersonal space, and patterns of communication. In addition, there are traditional male and female roles that are similar. Masculine roles include having a good relationship with one's superiors, the ability to cooperate and work well with others, and job security. Feminine roles involve establishing friendly relationships with people and the fulfillment of social obligations towards family members and others in the community. While there is similarity between the cultures, there are also differences. Firstly, this was demonstrated through the magic girl genre and how it usually portrays a powerful girl as the main character who still keeps and embraces her femininity. The implications of this was a contribution to the trend towards greater gender equality in the Middle East as demonstrated by the increase of women's participation in Japanese martial arts, Saudi Arabia's introduction of physical education classes to girls' public schools, and the emergence of Middle Eastern female animators who are also creating works in this genre. Second of all, the theme of greater civic involvement was explored, and it was evident that there is a connection between the popular anime *UFO Robot Grendizer* and civic participation in the Middle East as seen in the case of the Syrian protestors. The similarity between the values of Japan and the Middle East helped Grendizer be easily adaptable to Middle Eastern culture while the differences helps promote open-mindedness and civic participation through a shared generational identity. Some further research that can be done in this area includes analyzing trends other anime series, the magic girl anime genre and its implications on girls in the Middle East, censorship, and other ways in which Japanese culture compares and contrasts with Middle Eastern culture and how it may influence cultural identity formation. This work aims to inspire further research in Japan-Arab relations and global cultural influence on identity formation.

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