

# **Globalization's Impact on Identity through Billboard Advertisements**

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## Introduction

When one walks down the main streets of Tunis it is clear that the faces represented in billboards do not match the faces of those walking along the streets. Why is this? Are the ads representative of the layering of civilizations that Tunisia has undergone? Are the ads from another source, such as the French, and just implementing their system on top of Tunisians expecting it to be successful? Moreover, what are the implications of these advertisements on the Tunisian identity? W.E.B. DuBois discusses the phenomenon of a “double consciousness” that has developed in African-Americans due to the portrayal of African-Americans by the dominant White American system (DuBois:1987). Is there a form of a “double consciousness” occurring in Tunisia right now?

Perhaps the advertisements are a result of the phenomenon of globalization. Due to an increasing connectedness of people around the world, scholars have claimed implications on individual cultures. Regarding these implications, three main theories have been created. First, one of homogenization, which is a convergence of culture meaning that due to the dominance of a strong nation, most likely the United States, this culture will overtake all others (Holton 2000:140). The result of this hypothesis is that all other systems are wiped out and the world is left with one dominant, standard culture (Holton 2000:140). The second hypothesis is known as polarization. Edward Said describes this phenomenon in depth through his novel, *Orientalism*. Polarization is the hypothesis that two dominant, but contrasting, cultural stereotypes will emerge: the Western and the non-Western (Holton 2000:146). The last theory is hybridization. Hybridization is the blending of all cultures through cross-border exchange (Holton 2000:140). Under this theory, it is claimed that due to the exchanging of ideas in an increasingly connected world, one mixed culture will emerge. According to all of these theories, globalization has

severe effects on culture. Due to the process of socialization, alterations in culture translate to alterations in one's identity. Therefore, as cultures are being shifted due to globalization, what is the affect on one's identity? How does one define himself, where does the origin of influence for his identity reside and why? I specially explore the answers to these questions through the minds of Tunisians.

In order to understand the answers to these questions, I explain the phenomenon of globalization in the context of advertising. I show that through advertising, globalization has created a consumer culture around the world. In this sense, I use advertisements to represent globalization. My research uses advertisements as instruments to understand globalization's effects on individuals' identities within Tunisia. To start to uncover whether any of the three theories of globalization discussed above can be found within Tunisians, I ask Tunisians to interpret popular billboard advertisements found throughout Tunis. Next, I ask Tunisians about their identity. When explaining their identity, are hints of homogenization, polarization or hybridization present? Overall, I attempt uncover whether advertisements affect Tunisians' identity. From this investigation, I realize a strong Tunisian pride remains, but that this pride is not demonstrated through the images of advertisements in Tunisia.

### **Key Terms**

Before I go further into this subject and my research, I want to make sure that I have a clear definition of potentially ambiguous terms. Although some of the terms may not appear frequently in my paper, the concepts behind each of the terms are important to distinguish.

#### Identity

This term refers to how an individual would describe himself. Generally, this definition is relative to the individual. There are countless layers to individuals' identities. The layer that I am most interested in is that of nationality and geographical affiliation. I am seeking to find specific loyalties to countries or given geographical areas within Tunisians' individual identities. One's geographical location is not limited to his physical birthplace or current location. Instead, one's affiliation can be determined by his mentality or system of beliefs. For example, if he had to align his mindset with that of one affiliated with a geographical location, what would that be? This is the aspect of one's identity that I am trying to uncover.

### Culture

Similar to identity, this term also has many different possibilities of definition. When I refer to culture in this paper, I am referring to the habitual way of life within a given nation or civilization.

### Nationality

One's affiliation to a specific geographical location. In this paper, an individual's nationality does not directly address his birth or physical location. Instead, it refers to the geographical country that one feels the strongest alliance or loyalty toward.

### Civilization

In this paper, the term civilization pertains to older organized groups of people with a similar geographic origin. These people can be classified within the same civilization because they share similar habits in terms of their everyday lives and are under a common ruler.

### Society

A collection of humans who share a system of organization, most likely a government, and a routine to their every day lives.

## Globalization

Globalization refers to the phenomenon of interconnectedness around the globe. This interconnectedness is achieved through an increased information flow which has resulted from frequent world travel and instantaneous communication across the globe. People are no longer limited to location and neither are ideas. As a result, ideas from around the world are easily spread throughout the globe.

### **Literature Review in Tunisian Context**

Globalization is the spreading of ideas and resources throughout the world. This spreading has created a world that is interconnected. The capability to travel has increased and ideas are no longer restricted to a single setting. As Bauman states, “in the world we inhabit, distance does not seem to matter much. Sometimes it seems that it exists solely in order to be cancelled; as if space was but a constant invitation to slight it, refute and deny. Space stopped being an obstacle – one needs just a split second to conquer it...“there are no ‘natural borders’ any more” (Bauman 1998:77). People, ideas and resources float freely around the world. This interconnectedness due to globalization has also produced a global market. If one is a player in the economy of today, he must cater to a global market in order to win. The concept of capitalism is no longer contained within the Western world. Saatchi and Saatchi, a worldwide advertising agency, states, “there is no doubt that the world is becoming one marketplace” (Saatchi and Saatchi: 1991). Capitalists have expanded their market to a global level in a mission to accumulate the most wealth and be the frontrunner in the world economy of today. As another business leader explains, “To be a global marketing leader today, you must fill a need that exists in other markets. You must be a multinational marketer-not just a company that ships

excess goods to other countries” (Leslie 1995:404). Due to the phenomenon of globalization and therefore the breakdown of physical space, focusing on the domestic market is no longer sufficient. In order to be competitive, one must compete on the true market of today: the global market.

But how does the capitalist communicate to people who live in an environment he has never even seen? How does the capitalist connect with the consumer? Advertising is the middle man between the capitalist and the people. Advertisements indirectly connect the consumer to the capitalist. The advertising industry is “Located in a pivotal position between production and consumption...[it] plays a key role in constituting the geographic boundaries of markets and in the internationalization of consumer culture. Similar to many other industries today, the cultural and economic roles of advertising cannot be separated” (Leslie 1995:204). Advertisements expose a product and illustrate to the consumers why this product will enhance their lives. This connection is what makes the economic and cultural role of advertisements ambiguous. The meaning of a product is no longer purely functional and people do not need to buy products purely for their functional purpose. Buying a product is now beyond consumption, it is on a new level known as consumerism. The purchasing of a product is not only for its fundamental purpose; instead it is to create a lifestyle, “products...are also symbols conveying meaning” (Sack 1988:643). Advertisements are the tool which takes the purpose of products to this stage. “Advertising...can be thought of as the language of consumption. It presents commodities as devices enabling individuals to create their own contexts, their own worlds” (Sack 1988:643). Items, whether they are clothes, foods or cars, now indicate a lifestyle.

According to Danette, yogurt will bring the family together [Appendix i: Figure 5], and with President cheese, children have the power to control the world [Appendix i: Figure 2].

People do not need yogurt or cheese purely for tasteful purposes or nutritious fulfillment, they need these products in order to create a tight-knit family or empower their children. With the help of products, people can enhance their lifestyle. And advertising shows the consumers how products can provide this self-centered empowerment (Sack 1988:656). Advertisements show that, “through each act of consumption, products provide the consumer a new definition and meaning...In this way, the pattern of advertising reveals how the consumer can weave together material of the natural realm, the social realm, and the realm of meaning to form an accessible, ever-expanding fabric” (Sack 1988:56). The consumer is the one with the power. He can control his place through his power of purchasing products. When individuals invest in this attempt to design their world they are no longer individuals simply partaking in consumption. Through this act, people become consumers, an integral player in the world of consumerism. Regardless of their location, consumers can have the lifestyle that they prefer and they have the power to create this lifestyle with a small investment of a simple product.

How do consumers know which product will give them certain lifestyles? Why does yogurt bring the family together and the purchasing of Major cookies make you a part of a group? The advertisements illustrate these ideas. Advertisements show these lifestyles and create the context for the consumer. According to a billboard in Tunis, when you buy President cheese, your child can win a race [Appendix i: Figure 2]. Right next to the President ad is one for Vademecum. With Vademecum toothpaste you can be the healthiest [Appendix i: Figure 3]. All of these signals, the illustrations of achieved lifestyles, are a form of communication. The capitalists, those who are benefiting from people buying the items, communicate with the consumers through advertisements to show the consumers why the purchase of a specific product will enhance their life. In order for an advertisement to be successful, “consumers must be



persuaded that the meanings embedded in commodities will enhance their individual identities” (Sack 1988:412). The capitalists must get through to the consumers through advertisements. And if this form of communication is successful, the capitalists penetrate from stores into the everyday lives of their consumers.

Due to their constant presence, advertisements are not images people can ignore. Walking along the street one is bombarded with advertisements; taking the train, ads line the walls along the train stops. Advertisements are unavoidable in day to day life. The capitalists are constantly penetrating into the life of the consumer. Due to this overwhelming invasion, the capitalists begin to control how people see their own world and interact with it. The images of advertisements paint pictures showing individuals how to live their life and the worlds portrayed in these advertisements become the norm. Through their purchasing power, consumers can become a part of this world. This purchase makes the capitalist happy because they are making money. The capitalists, who manage the composition of the ad, have control over the consumer through these advertisements. People look at ads, are persuaded by the lifestyle illustration, and are unconsciously persuaded that they need the product, it will enhance their life. If the capitalist finds another product attractive, or more importantly he wants to sell a certain product, he can create an advertisement illustrating the next product’s ability to improve people’s lives. Soon enough, the message will get through to the consumer through the power of advertising and shortly the consumer will be investing in the capitalist’s product. This phenomenon has created the world of consumerism.

Advertisements have the power to control what people think and shape what the consumer believes he needs. They illustrate fun, care-free lifestyles, and show that products can improve both the way you live and how you feel about yourself. If you, as the consumer, buy

these products then you can feel positive. You can improve your life, your sense of who you are. You can enhance your identity. Regardless of where you are, or how you feel, advertisements reassure you that with your power as a consumer you can invest in these products and improve your way of life. The catch though, is that you are not the one originally composing these beliefs- the capitalists are. As Bauman describes, “the market might already have selected them as consumers and so taken away their freedom to ignore its blandishments; but on every successive visit to a market-place consumers have every reason to feel that it is they – perhaps even they alone – who are in command. They are the judges, the critics and the choosers. They can, after all, refuse their allegiance to any one of the infinite choices on display. Except the choice of choosing between them, that is – but the choice does not appear to be a choice.” (Bauman 1998:84). The consumers feel that they are in command, but the fact that they are in the market in the first place, that they are negotiating their identity in their mind between a variety of products shows that they are ultimately being controlled by the capitalists. All around the world, people are consumers in a consumer society.

Capitalists control consumers’ thoughts and identity through the power of advertising. Due to globalization, capitalists have expanded this control beyond the Western world and have extended around the globe. The phenomenon of consumerism, the capitalists’ control over the individual’s mind and persuasion to become a consumer, is around the world. Consumer culture is not restricted to a given location. Instead, a global consumer culture has developed. Advertising “thins out the meanings of place and distorts them. The case of global advertisements illustrates the role of advertising images in reconstituting notions of identity and place and in constructing a mythical or imagined global village” (Leslie 1995:413). No matter any individual’s place in the world, he can still develop his ideal and care-free world he

witnessed in advertisements. The agencies have the power to “mediate changes and indirectly participate in the formation of new geographies of consumption. Advertisers have begun to separate cultural differences theoretically from fixed spatial concepts and to recognize the formation of common identities across space” (Leslie 1995:423). Individual’s identity and place is no longer culturally specific. Instead, it is related to advertisements. Consumer culture has transcended spatial culture. This produces a feeling of having the world at their fingertips for consumers; varieties available for consumers to choose from are infinite (Sack 1988:660). The variety for the world however, has diminished (Sack 1988:660). Through globalization and advertisements, capitalists have created a global monoculture: consumerism.

### **Methods**

In order to begin researching advertisements in Tunisia within my given time frame, I needed to compose a sample of advertisements in Tunisia. In order to do this I walked down the main street in the capital of Tunis. I took pictures of all of the billboards that contained images of people [see appendix i]. Because Tunis is the capital of Tunisia and one of the country’s most densely populated areas, I was confident that these billboard advertisements were true to the billboards found throughout Tunisia.

Next, I began to interview Tunisian families. I chose to interview families rather than groups of individuals because a family allowed me to capture the opinions of different generations of people. Rather than just hearing from university students or adults I heard opinions of individuals. I was limited by my networking within Tunisia and my lack of language skills. Because some of the questions of my interview were personal [see appendix x ii: Questions for Families’ Interviews] I tried to interview families with which I already had a

personal connection. I also tried to create a trusting environment and show that I was respectful of their responses. To collect the most accurate account of information from my interview I recorded our discussion. After the interview, I transcribed the recording and coded the transcriptions [see appendixes iii, iv]. During the process of transcribing the recording I was able to further evaluate the discussion and draw from it the most information. The questions that were asked during the interviews related to the advertisements, the individuals' perceptions of their identity and of being Tunisian. The questions were structured [see appendix ii: Questions for Families' Interviews] but conversation also flowed as other factors became relevant, a comfortable environment was created, and some side conversation developed due to the group size. I used the same advertisements to base my questions during all of my interviews and I showed the advertisements using my computer. All of my interviews with Tunisian families gave me an important perspective on the Tunisian identity and Tunisian's impression of advertisements found in main street Tunis.

Due to a miscommunication, I also interviewed a middle-aged single Tunisian mother and her originally-French senior-aged neighbor. For this interview, I tried to create the same trusting environment. I did not record this interview, but I did take notes throughout our conversations and then typed these notes [see appendix v]. Reorganizing the notes allowed me to sort out the information that I collected from the interview and further analyze the conversation. The questions of this interview were structured but flowed more freely as the women interpreted advertising differently than the families. The women provided interesting insights regarding the history of advertising in Tunisia. They talked about their beliefs about the broader system of advertising rather than the individual ads themselves. This interview gave me

a different perspective on advertising in Tunisia and allowed me to think about the creation of advertisements in Tunisia under a different light.

Another type of interview that I conducted was with an individual who worked in an advertising agency in Tunis. Like the other interviews, I strove to create a comfortable and trusting environment. This interview was less structured as I did not have specific questions, but was just looking to learn about any insights that the individual could provide about the organization of advertising agencies in Tunisia. In order to collect accurate information from the interview, I took notes and then later organized these notes in a typed format [see appendix v]. Reorganizing allowed me to further analyze the information that we discussed. The interview with the advertising employee taught me about the structure of advertising agencies and how the ads that I was studying were created.

Through all of these interviews I was able to produce a foundation of understanding regarding how the ads within Tunisia were produced and the Tunisians' perceptions of these ads. The interviews with the families allowed me to find trends within Tunisians' perceptions and develop a basis of what it meant to be "Tunisian". Overall, all of these interviews contributed to the conclusion of my research.

## **Analysis**

### Background: Advertising in Tunisia [Appendix v, a]

Through interviewing an individual in the advertising industry who has worked for a handful of agencies in the country, I learned that there are six major advertising companies in Tunisia. The names of the six agencies are Impact, Publicis, Ogily, McCain, Kairoun and Karioun, and JWT. One of these agencies, Karioun and Karioun is originally Tunisian. Impact

comes from France but has a branch in Tunisia. The four other agencies, Publicis, Ogily, McCain and JWT are offspring of American agencies.

The primary structure of operation within the agencies that have main offices in France and the United States are the same. The first agency of the company was established in France or America, respectively. Then, this agency spread its marketing around the world. With this spread, a variety of offices were established. One office may be located in Europe for European clients, another in Japan for Asian and then Japanese clients, etc. In relation to the agencies located in Tunisia, one branch was established for North Africa and a subdivision of this branch is the agency in Tunisia. The directors of the Tunisian branches are located at the North African office. For the agency of the individual I interviewed, the directors of the North African branch were Lebanese. This is an important detail because this shows that the directly supervising minds are not American. Within the division of Tunisia, the employees are Tunisian. The creative ideas for the ads and the account executives negotiating the meaning production of the advertisements are all Tunisian. This discovery defied my belief, and some of the beliefs of the families that I interviewed, that the ads were being created by a foreigner. From my interview with an account manager of an advertising company in Tunisia I learned that the advertisements found on the streets of Tunisia were being created by Tunisians.

### Interviews

I have organized the data I gathered from the interviews into different sections pertaining to each advertisement. This separation allows the opinions of the families to come together and articulate the opinions of Tunisians.

*Major Cookie Ad [Appendix i, a: Figure 1]*

The Major cookie company is a Tunisian company and the product is created in Tunisia. The families were sure that the boy pictured in the ad was Tunisian. However, the way that the boy was portrayed was said to be more American and represented a hip-hop culture that is more dominant in the United States or Europe rather than in Tunisia. For example, when talking about the boy, one interviewee stated, “He is Tunisian for sure...but um, the way he is dressed, of course...it’s the American way” (04/26/09:2). Across the families, the individuals agreed that this ad would most likely be more successful in France but was not as directed to a Tunisian audience. One individual sums it up perfectly saying, “it is not a success at all...it can be a good success in France, but not in Tunisia” (05/03/09:1). One individual even pointed out that the company chose to use French letters in order to write an Arabic phrase. (05/01/09: 2) None of the families were satisfied with this ad as it did not really connect with the product: cookies.

However, the families recognized the ad was most likely directed towards a teenage audience due to the hip-hop portrayal and the phrase “HAYYA M3ANA” which translates to mean, “come with us”. Once one of the individuals made this connection she began to see the reasoning of the ad stating, “they are just concentrating on teenagers and I think it’s very logical because who is going to consume such a product, they are...now I understand why the man is wearing all that” (05/01/09:2). A member of a different family made the same connection, “For youth... you know, the thing, the way the guy is dressed, and “Haya m3ana” “let’s go”... it’s for teenagers. And even the signs for the American gangs, you know, these kinds of things” (04/26/09: 2). Another member elaborates explaining, “We think it’s for teenagers...because ...teenagers...watch American videos and, songs, and ah, you see people dressed like that...that’s maybe why teenagers when teenagers say “ooh, it might be oh this singer, so yeahhh... I might also be thinking of buying this biscuit [Major]”” (04/26/09:2). This individual took the

connection between Tunisian teenagers and the hip-hop character to the next level. She connected the desire to buy a product with the aspiration of identifying with the hip-hop portrayal. Although this marketing tactic does not have to do with the content of the cookie itself, it is successful because it entices individuals to buy the product. The girl realized that the teenagers' motivation to buy the product was irrelevant to the product itself, but instead related to their identity and desire to associate with the boy representing hip-hop.

*Prèsident Cheese Ad [Appendix i, a : Figure 2]*

Prèsident cheese is originally a French product but is made in Tunisia. The families found both the setting of the picture and the nationality of the boy portrayed in this ad to be more ambiguous than those of the Major billboard. Some family members thought that the setting could have been in the United States in California, others believed it was in the European Pyrenees and many were convinced it was in the northwest of Tunisia. As one individual pointed out in relation to the location of Tunisia, "you know the place, the place is so familiar that you can't think about another place" (05/01/09:4). Perhaps this connection is why Tunisians overwhelmingly consider this advertisement to be set in Tunisia. When asked what they would like to change about the ad, the individuals who thought that it was taken in another location wanted to advertisement to be set in Tunisia. Due to this feeling, it is clear that Tunisians, whether they originally envision the setting of the ad to be in Tunisia or not, would like the advertisement to be set in Tunisia.

The boy's nationality was just as questionable as the location. While most thought he was Tunisian, others thought he was from the Mediterranean region, Turkey, Russia or France. However, this uncertainty did not bother any of the participants. As one individual stated, "he can be accepted by everybody" (05/01/09:3). The positive feeling is reinforced by the Arabic



written on the billboard. The ad states, “children have their worlds” and another individual interprets it as, “you should have the right to choose your own thoughts” (04/26/09:4). The boy is seen as representing this phrase and as a mother points out, a kid will say to their parents, “I want to be like that...I want to be strong” (04/26/09:8). Another individual takes the interpretation to the next level saying that the ad represents the “strong, beautiful, perfect kid...everyone wants to be the perfect kid” (04/26/09:8). People looking at this ad connect with this child; they desire to be the perfect kid who is portrayed. This representation encourages parents to buy this product for their children and attracts kids to the President cheese. Despite the ambiguity of both the boy’s nationality and the advertisement’s setting, the positive feeling regarding the ad prevails and encourages onlookers to buy the product.

Vademecum Toothpaste Ad [Appendix i, b : Figure 3]

Vademecum toothpaste is a Tunisian product. The print on the billboard is all in French and catches some of the onlookers’ attention with an opening line that translates to, “do you know?” (04/26/09:8). However, despite the voiced attraction, all families suggest that the advertisement also be in Arabic, Tunisian dialect, as this would talk to “all the Tunisian types...for the bottom to the top” (04/26/09:10). Using Tunisian dialect would connect with a fuller audience of Tunisians.

Others’ attention is grabbed by the girl on the billboard who has fresh white teeth. The nationality of the girl is debated between families and no agreement is reached. Some think she is American, others European, and more specifically, Mediterranean. Although the image of the woman does attract some individual’s attention, they admit it does not directly encourage them to buy the product. As one individual stated, “the girl smiling with white teeth, there is nothing new” (05/01/09:6). Instead they suggest that more attention be drawn to the product itself.

Vademecum toothpaste is supposed to be all natural. The focus of the ad should be on the toothpaste itself and its beneficial ingredients. For example, one sibling voices the idea of his parent stating that Vademecum is “somehow famous for containing natural products so if they better concentrate saying how this product contains real, natural products, they may encourage some people to buy this product and not another one” (05/01/09:9). As the father points out, “we should show something, something highlighting the nature, what is, what you are presenting, or what you are using within that product” (05/01/09:8). There is an overwhelming concern among participants to focus on the product itself and its ingredients educating the consumers as to why this product is different from its competitors. The families also voiced that the most efficient method for this communication would be writing in a language the entire audience of Tunisians could understand: Tunisian dialect.

*Lilas Bebe Diaper Ad [Appendix i, b: Figure 4]*

The Lilas diapers are originally from France but are now made in Tunisia and found throughout the country. There is a familiarity with Lilas ads among the observers and a fondness of the different babies and methods of advertising the company creates. Each time the billboard image is shown, a positive initial reaction from the participants always occurs. For example, one individual states, “babies are, babies are always positive” (05/01/09:9) and this proves true from the reactions of all of the members of the different families. The first reaction from another family is, “what’s cute in there, you know baby...really cute babies” (04/26/09:12). An individual points out that, “even if we don’t need it, you feel like you want to buy it...because you want the baby. You just want to have a baby after seeing that” (04/26/09:12). The advertisement is so successful that it makes people who do not even need the product want to buy the product. Then a parent points out that the advertisement also convinces people who need

the product that it is better than its competitors, “it says for the product...it absorbs more and that you pay less” (05/01/09:9).

The Lilas company also attempts to directly connect with the Tunisian audience as it uses Tunisian dialect saying “<sup>C</sup>aishek” which translates to a deeper version of ‘thank you’. An individual explains the translation as “‘halleluiah’...its like “Lilas halleluiah” or “Jesus halleluiah”” (04/26/09:17). The family notices the attempt to connect but sees it as “manipulation” (04/26/09:16) and explains that saying “<sup>C</sup>aishek” is like writing “God bless Lilas” on a billboard, it is not appropriate (04/26/09:16). Although they appreciate the connection to Tunisians they believe a more effective way to connect with the audience would be to feature a better representative of a Tunisian baby. The nationality of the baby is unclear but it is agreed that “it’s not representing Tunisian boys, they are not all like that one” (05/01/09:10). There is a consensus that “you tend to think he is from Europe” (05/01/09:10). However, when the families thought about it further, they voiced that, “the first impression, he is not Tunisian. But because he is a baby, I don’t think that his parents came from Europe, from France, from Italy, just to take this picture so yeah, I am sure that he is Tunisian, okay. But he is not representative...” (05/01/09:10). All of the families agreed that he does not originally appear as Tunisian but it is simply impractical to bring a baby from another country. As one individual states, “they don’t need to go somewhere else to find a baby” (05/03/09:5).

Overall, the families supported the Lilas ad. However, they wish that the company could make a deeper connection with Tunisians. This could be achieved through using more appropriate language as “<sup>C</sup>aishek” was not a fitting phrase for the billboard. Also, they loved the baby, but wished that the product’s representation was closer to the babies throughout Tunisia.

Even though the company created an ad specific to Tunisia, it needed to be more accurate to the Tunisian audience in order to establish a successful connection with the consumers.

Danette Yogurt Ad [Appendix i, c : Figure 5]

Danette yogurt is affiliated with Dannon and is originally French from the company, Delice. The Tunisian Danette products are made in Tunisia. Even though the product is made in Tunisia, and Tunisians are sure to voice this, they also point out the French origins when asked to describe the billboard image. As one individual pointed out, “you know that the big thing is that okay, watching TV... they see Danette and they see the advertising in French TV so they, when they look at it coming to Tunisia, okay it is Tunisian. But this is adaptation of French product to Tunisian society” (05/01/09:17). Through his description it is clear that he thinks the product is Tunisian, but is also conscious that the roots of the product are in France. As another family stated, “this is French...representative...French logo, French product...Danette is made in France” (05/03/09:6). The French origin of the product is not forgotten. However, when asked whether they thought the advertisement for Dannon was the same in France, someone pointed out that “it’s not the same. We watch French TV, and the advertisement, it is not the same” (05/03/09:7). The family agreed that Tunisians created the ad (05/03/09:7).

The most popular critique of the ad was the disconnect between the Arabic phrase on the billboard that translates to, “bringing the family together”. This phrase implies that the Danette yogurt has the capability to bring the family portrayed in the advertisement together. However, when the individuals looked at the ad they voiced that the family members did not look like they were together. One father pointed out that if you cover the yogurt on the advertisement, the people on the ad do not resemble a family (04/26/09:24). Someone states that, “the family mustn’t be like that. The family have a house, have a I don’t know, dinner room or something

like that to eat, or kitchen to show that there's really a family, a relation, connection between persons. Or they don't talk about family, they just talk about persons" (05/01/09:25). All individuals were very adamant that the advertisement did not represent a family.

Another person stated that whoever is creating the ad "can't take something individual and make it something for everyone, for the whole family... the poster, what is written there... "gather the families together" and it's not true, it's not true you know" (04/26/09:24). One person elaborates and points out that the error lies in the fundamental presentation of the product. The yogurt that is depicted is an individual packet; an individual packet is not designed for an entire family to eat together. He states, "what's wrong is the family...the concept is that to gather the family together which is not because the product...is aimed for one person, not for group" (04/26/09:23).

When the individuals continued to examine the ad they began to point out that if each person within the advertisement is isolated, it is clear that their attention is somewhere else. Their focus is not on the yogurt nor is it toward other family members. Someone says, "you know...the first thought that crossed my mind, when you see her [the mother in the billboard representation], she might be thinking you know "what might I cook for dinner" (04/26/09:24). All of the thought processes associated with people within the billboard image are independent of the Dannon yogurt. The focus within the advertisement is not on the product.

All of the families agree that the family represented on the billboard is Tunisian. However, they had a problem with the fact that the image of the people represented a family. One person states, "I just want to add something here. The people are Tunisian, but it is not a family. They can't make a family, when you look at them, doesn't match" (04/26/09:25). As a father believes, the individuals in the ad are Tunisian, but the concept is not (04/26/09:25). In

order to improve the ad, everyone simply suggested that the family be actually gathered together eating the yogurt. One person describes, “they have to be around the table...to show that they are really together, that they are together, related to the same thing, that they just, even if they want to, if they want to leave only one product, so four spoons, to show that they are all, the whole family, to pass the message [gathering the family together], exactly, but right now, I don’t see it, really the message” (05/01/09:18).

Every family interviewed was frustrated with the disconnect between the message written on the billboard and the images of the family members depicting this message. One individual analyzes this disconnect on a new level stating that, “they make it a French concept with a Tunisian reality, do not work” (04/26/09:21). Due to the overwhelming sense of frustration about the advertisement’s representation of the Tunisian family, it is clear that the advertisers are not in connection with Tunisian families.

*Elissa [Appendix i, c : Figure 6]*

Elissa is a Tunisian company, under the broader operator of Tunisia Telecom. Elissa is aimed at students from 11-25 years old. The service is only available for people between 11 and 25 and offers a discounted rate.

When asked about the nationality of the individuals pictured on the billboard, all family members are confident that the people are Tunisian. One individual describes this reassurance, “when I saw these people I can say that they have the Tunisian attitude for sure, especially for you know, for the one who are going to university, I can admire that, they are, for real, and that ah, what they have succeeded in, you know, that ah, how can I say that, they are making you curious you know” (04/26/09:26). This individual describes her connection to the advertisement

saying that the accuracy of the company's portrayal of Tunisians intrigues her and attracted her to the product.

All of the comments about the billboard are positive towards the portrayal of the individuals within the image. All families recognize the target population of the product and note the aspects of the ad that speak to this target. For example, one individual mentions that the colors are more modern and therefore are directed to grab the attention of a younger audience (05/01/09:19-20). The way the images are shown even reminds another individual of Facebook which is an online social networking website that is extremely popular among younger generations which the Elissa product is marketing towards. The company is successful in appealing to their target audience.

The only criticism families had was that they felt there was not enough information regarding the actual product. For example, mentioning the exact price and service of the product. However, now that the product is more popular, the details are common knowledge throughout the population. Elissa has been successful in communicating their service to the Tunisian student population.

### Tunisian Identity

The last section of my interviews with the families involved questions about their identity as Tunisian and their definition of "Tunisian". Essentially, I was searching for what Tunisians perceived as Tunisian. Yes, the individuals I interviewed were Tunisian, but what did this mean to them? Initially I was searching for an alliance to certain countries within the Tunisian's identity but I realized that the roots of Tunisians are much deeper in their own country than in others.

The most common topic when discussing their identity was the history of Tunisia. Tunisians are extremely proud of the fact that Tunisia and Tunisians are a mixture of many different civilizations that all came to Tunisia and then left. A phrase that all Tunisians learn starting from primary school is that Tunisia has a strategic position (05/01/09:22). As one individual describes Tunisia's location, "when you see the map, it's on the top of Africa, it's in the center of the Mediterranean, it's close to Europe so for the other civilization it's really good place to be yours" (05/01/09:22). This prime location is why Tunisia has hosted so many different civilizations starting with the Berbers, and the last ending with French colonization. When the families were asked to define their identity as Tunisian, each father recited a mini-history lesson of the many different civilizations that have come and went through Tunisia (04/26/09:34-5, 05/01/09:28-9, 05/03/09:8-9).

The families explained that the appearance of the many different civilizations in Tunisia resulted in a mixture of cultures for Tunisians. As one daughter translates for her father, "that is why the Tunisian identity is the unity of all this diversity" (04/26/09:35). Tunisians "have high capacity of changing, of adaptation to other cultures" (05/01/09:23) and this high capacity translates to a tolerance of different cultures. One person describes that she is proud that "we [Tunisians] have a good capacity of integration" (05/01/09:23). The mixtures of civilizations throughout the centuries have contributed to a tolerant and adaptive Tunisian character. One family member voices that "yes, certainly, Tunisia is an Arabic country of course and it is a Muslim country, but the main specification of Tunisia is that um, that tolerance and that acceptance of difference and this is very important" (05/01/09:29). This statement speaks volumes about Tunisians and how the families I spoke to attempted to define themselves. It was common to casually align with different countries, and bring up religion, but the strongest



statements about their identity were ones describing their characteristics. A strong pride emerged from all of the individuals when they spoke of their Tunisian nationality. A few examples that the individuals used to show this pride was the fact that they always returned home quickly after they finished their purpose in another country or the fact that they gave up opportunities in other countries because they needed to stay in Tunisia. The Tunisians have learned that their country is the best. They have learned about other civilizations coming and going and fighting for the ownership of Tunisia. This proves to Tunisians that their location is the best and that their culture is the richest. It is safe and accepting. That is what it means to be Tunisian.

Some individuals relied on an analysis of their language and different commonalities with other languages in order to explain the Tunisian identity. Despite the Arab foundation, Tunisian dialect is much different than the dialects in other Arab countries. Vocabulary within the dialect can be traced back to the primary inhabitants of Tunisia, the Berbers. Some of these words are found in Tunisian dialect but not in other Arabic dialects or Modern Standard Arabic (04/26/09:34, 35). Other languages, such as Malta's, have similar sounds and vocabulary (05/09/09:31). There are also similarities between Tunisian dialect and Spanish. (05/09/31). As one individual describes when she speaks about Tunisian dialect, "Berber, French, Roman, Italian is Tunisian, it's a mixture. It's our definition" (04/26/09:35).

Tunisia has been an independent nation for only 50 years. It is a nation that has been established in top of a foundation of the mixing of many different civilizations. Despite the many different civilizations that have passed through and the potential alliances for Tunisians to claim, the real alliance is to Tunisia. It is clear that Tunisian pride runs deep.

## Conclusion:

### Advertisement Reactions Linked to Tunisian Identity

The main critique of the billboard advertisements found in Tunis was the way the advertisement was created. The families interviewed pointed out that the advertisements were not completely applicable to a Tunisian audience. What I mean by this is that the ad's capacity to be completely Tunisian in its illustration and potential to appeal to a Tunisian audience was not completely fulfilled. For example, the families believed that the script should have been in Arabic with Tunisian dialect vocabulary. Also, the families believed that advertisements where the nationality of the person portrayed was ambiguous, such as the Lilas baby ad, that the person should have been a more accurate representation of Tunisians. The setting of the ads should also be clearly Tunisian, such as that of the President ad. After learning about the families' pride in being Tunisian and their strong feelings regarding their nationality, one begins to understand why the Tunisians are adamant about keeping the advertisements true to Tunisian representations. And after talking with families, Tunisian is not French, it is not Mediterranean, it is not African, it is not Arab; it is purely Tunisian.

### Advertisements, Identity and Globalization

The Tunisians interviewed are not going through an identity crisis. The individuals were confident in defining who they are, what they stand for, and from where they have come. A questioning of identity due to globalization was not present in the Tunisians themselves. Instead, the cultural implications due to globalization laid in the portrayal of the Tunisians on the billboard ads.

For example, the theory of homogenization is illustrated through the Major cookie ad. It says, "come with us" and displays a hip-hop artist. This suggests conversion. Converge to this

culture that is represented in the illustration. This is not hybridization because according to the individuals, hip-hop is not connected to Tunisia. The ad encourages the consumers to converge, take on this homogenous identity.

There is also a dominant ambiguity regarding the nationality of the people in the ads and the locations in which the ads were placed. The interviewees presented various nationalities for one person and worldwide locations for the settings. The Prèsideint boy, the Vademecum girl, and the Lilas baby were all absent of a nationality. The Prèsideint ad could have been set in the United States, Europe or Tunisia. Nothing was clear. This uncertainty could be due either homogenization or hybridization. With homogenization, all cultures would converge and therefore nationality also. Hybridization is the blending of cultures and therefore suggests the same result: a mix of nationalities within one person. This ambiguity frustrates the Tunisians because it is not accurate to an identity that they see clearly: Tunisian.

The Danette ad and an individual's reaction represent the theory of hybridization. One individual claims, "they make it a French concept with a Tunisian reality, do not work (04/26/09:21). This statement is a direct recognition of the blending of cultures that is present in the advertisement. The individual's irritation with this advertisement represents Tunisians' disapproval for both this advertising tactic and the theory of hybridization.

Instead, the interviewees recommended definition and connection to Tunisian culture for the advertisements. For example, in the Vademecum ad it is agreed that it would be better in Tunisian dialect, not French. Also, the advertisement that received no negative feedback regarding the people represented was the Elissa ad because as one individual stated about the people in the ad, "they have the Tunisian attitude for sure" (04/26/09:26). All of the disapproval voiced about the advertisements was regarding an inaccurate portrayal of Tunisian identity. This

conveys Tunisians' certainty of who they are. There are no signs of homogenization, polarization, or hybridization within their identity or perception of Tunisians as whole. However, where these theories can be found, are in the advertisements that Tunisians see every day. Currently, these ads do not seem to have strong effects on the Tunisians' identity. Nonetheless, with the strengthening of globalization, and increasing frequency of advertisements, these ads are what upcoming generations are most likely to use to define their identity.

### **Discussion**

Although there were clear trends within the families I interviewed, there are also many limitations and sources of error to my research. First of all, my understanding of what each family member said was limited by linguistic abilities. However, I am confident this potential source of error did not affect my data on a grand scheme.

Second of all, even with a common language there is a strong possibility that some of the ideas communicated are lost in translation. I have lived in Tunisia for less than three months and although I have grown more comfortable in the country I am still an outsider. Due to my outsider status, I am not able to fully understand what being "Tunisian" means or feels like. Also, concepts that are completely familiar to Tunisians may be foreign to me. Therefore, certain ideas that have a different intercultural meaning in Tunisia could be lost in translation. However, due the short time that I have been in Tunisia, my level of comfort with the families that I interviewed and their recognition of my outsider status, I am assured that the trends uncovered within my data were not inaccurate due to ideas that could have lost in translation.

Also due to my status of an outsider, I went in with a perspective of my own that is a product of the way I have grown. I believe that this viewpoint allowed me to analyze some aspects of Tunisian identity and advertisements in unique ways. However, I also understand that this view hinders my ability to understand a Tunisian's perspective completely. But due to the personal connections that I had with most of the interviewees' as well as my ability to communicate, I believe that the data I collected represents a Tunisian's perspective.

The families I chose to interview were not a statistically accurate representation of Tunisian families. The families were all middle class to upper-middle class Tunisian families. All of the families lived within an hour's drive of Tunis in a type of suburb. The parents of the families were still married and both the mother and father were present for the interview. One family consisted of four girls from thirteen to twenty-four years old. Another was only two children, a male and female, who were in their early twenties. The last had three kids, a male and female in their mid to late-twenties and a boy who was twelve years old. The parents' ages ranged from fifty to late sixties. Although one twelve and one thirteen year old were included in the interviews, the answers were largely from individuals in their early twenties or mid-fifties. I interviewed families that I had a personal connection with and who spoke English. The three Tunisian families I interviewed merely provided an insight into a Tunisian's perspective. And although these families do not accurately represent the demographic makeup of Tunisia, their perspectives are Tunisian and this provides an insight into the society.

Despite these potential sources of error, I believe that my research speaks accurately to the data that I gathered from the given families. This representation, although not applicable to all of Tunisia, provides an insight to the opinions of Tunisians.

## **Conclusion**

### Prevailing Feeling from Interviews

From the interviews it is apparent that there is an immense pride in being Tunisian. When describing their identity there was no tendency to align with other nations, instead the individuals were convinced of their identity as uniquely Tunisian, the mixture of many different civilizations. This mixture of civilization resulted in the prevailing culture that they are privileged to call their own: Tunisian.

There were not any especially strong feelings from the families regarding the advertisements. However, there was a common trend in the individuals' desire to change the billboards to be more accurate representations of Tunisia and Tunisians. The underlying feeling in this belief was closer to one of logic rather than one which strove to achieve reassurance of identity through advertising. In other words, the families thought that changing the billboards to be more accurate representations of Tunisia would just be logical. More accurate representations of Tunisia would attract a larger audience and would be less effort for the advertising companies because they would not have to travel.

These prevailing feelings show that although globalization's affect on identity is prevalent through the advertisements it has not affected the Tunisian individuals and their identity.

### Potential Follow-Up Studies

I had both a limited time frame to conduct my research and accessibility to individuals due to my language barrier. A follow-up study could continue this same research but on a broader scale. Trends within social distinctions could be examined. Maybe there is a difference in the feelings toward advertising and Tunisian identity across generations, social classes, or

genders. Due to my limitations I could only produce a study that generalized the feelings I collected to an overall Tunisian perspective.

Billboard advertisements are a relatively new presence in Tunisia. Perhaps, in later years a more in-depth study could be conducted assessing the effects of these advertisements on Tunisians. Although there did not appear to be any feelings of a “double consciousness” among the family members, perhaps a more through study of Tunisians and the phenomenon of advertising would reveal a related crisis of identity.

A study that was more specific to consumerism could also be developed. Have advertisements severely increased rates of consumption? What are other driving factors? Advertisements are now unavoidable across the city of Tunis. Are these efforts of the advertising agencies truly making a difference?

A cross-cultural study of advertising in Tunisia and advertising could be conducted. Have advertisements in Tunisia impacted consumer spending? How does this impact compare to the impact that advertising has made in other countries around the world? After conducting these comparisons what kind of environment is more conducive to consumer spending? What factors create obstacles for advertisements to get through to consumers? This type of cross-cultural study could show advertising agencies what type of environment would be best to advertise in and show consumers how to avoid their temptations to become a member of the global consumer society.

#### Application to Greater Sociology

After studying how advertising has produced a consumer society around the globe it is clear that there is an overwhelming influence of capitalism throughout the world. This consumer society is run by the capitalists and therefore the capitalists control individuals' desires and

thoughts. Dauntingly, this relationship has some rings of colonization. As Cèsaire states, “capitalist society, at its present stage, is incapable of establishing a concept of the rights of all men, just as it has proved incapable of establishing a system of individual ethics” (Cèsaire 2000:37). The capitalists, the controllers of this society, are merely considering their own profit when communicating with the consumers and penetrating into the consumers’ everyday life. They are so caught up in this endeavor, that they see no restraint and push t inhabit the consumer’s thought processes. The capitalists, the generators of the capitalist system, have colonized the minds of the consumers and exploited the individuals in a venture for profit. In colonization there are “no human relations but of domination and submission” (Cèsaire 2000:42). This description carries a haunting resemblance to the relation between the capitalist and the consumer. Cèsaire does not come out and say it, but capitalism is a neo-colonialism. The capitalists control the consumers and dominate individuals’ thought processes for their selfish profit.

To what extent have capitalists already succeeded in the colonization of the minds of consumers? Answering questions like this one, and producing studies analyzing these effects, is the first step to expose the system in its exploitative nature. Then, after becoming more educated about phenomenon such as these perhaps the consumers can regain their originally uninhibited individuality.



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