

FASHION

This Palestinian Barbie is reclaiming her heritage with every stitch

A love letter to Palestinian embroidery

By [Dana Sharawneh](#) - August 9, 2023





Barbie's release in Arab countries has ignited a wide array of cultural conversations. Namely, Arab artists are leveraging the fashion doll's popularity to communicate social statements: We've seen **Hij Barbie** pay homage to distinguished hijabi women, and now, Palestinian Barbie is honouring her country's traditional garments.



Via [@hijarbie](#) on Instagram

Who is Palestinian Barbie?

Palestinian Barbie's creator is Wafa Ghnaim. The 40-year-old dress historian's life is a series of full-circle moments, constantly bringing her back to her **Palestinian** roots. Serendipitously born on World Embroidery Day to an accomplished embroidery artist mother, Wafa was always fated to preserve traditional Palestinian clothing in her work.



Via [@khalil.studios](#) on Instagram

Wafa's artistic roots are immortalized in VHS videos, where she can be seen **embroidering** traditional Palestinian *thobes* alongside her mother and sisters. She shared, "there is something identity affirming with watching Mama thread a needle while I was beside her pulling waste **canvas** at 10 years old in a scrunched bun."



Via [@tatreezandtea](#) on Instagram

That's *precisely* what **Barbie** is: An identity-affirming vessel. With her unprecedented initiative, Wafa strives to make young Palestinians in the diaspora feel seen and affirmed.

A love letter to traditional tatreez (embroidery) and thobes (dresses), Palestinian **Barbie** serves to recognize and preserve the shared identity of young Palestinian girls.

"Palestinian women are the backbone of the resistance," writes the artist. "In every stitch, our rebellion is renewed."



jenanmatari and tatreezandtea
Original audio

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PALESTINE 101: The History of Tatreez & Thobes

The 3rd and final (maybe 🎂) part of our Tatreez lessons.

So grateful for experts like Wafa of [@tatreezandtea](#) for both their work in preserving our history and culture and for taking the time to do videos like these to help make this education more accessible.

If you haven't yet done so - please be sure to buy a copy of her newest book THOBNA, and please continue to support her work 🙏❤️🇵🇸 (and if you have a second - please also be sure to wish her a very happy birthday! 🎂)

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Many of Wafa's Palestinian Barbies belonged to her and her sisters back in the 1980s. The Barbies don traditional Palestinian thobes which were masterfully embroidered by Wafa's mother. "Mama's tatreez and thobe **details** are impeccable," she writes.

But Wafa's vision is not exclusive to girls – she also seeks to affirm the Palestinian identity of young boys, curating Ken dolls with traditional *keffiyeh* scarves around their heads.



Via [@tatreezandtea](#) on Instagram

Beyond Barbie, Wafa Ghnaim's overarching mission is to reclaim Palestinian heritage by preserving, documenting, and rescuing its art and culture.

She's so much more than a Barbie fashion designer: Wafa is a researcher at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, a curator at The Museum of the Palestinian People in Washington, D.C, and an educator at **The Tatreez Institute**. She's earned her stripes as a revolutionary artist, one embroidery initiative at a time.



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TATREEZ INHERITANCE opened today! [@tatreezandtea](#) curated a beautiful collection of Palestinian embroidery and traditional dresses. We can't wait to welcome you to the Museum of the Palestinian People in Washington, D.C. to see these incredible works of art in person.

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We wish Wafa continued success in all of her artistic projects moving forward. Check out her recently released book *THOBNA: Reclaiming Palestinian Dresses in the Diaspora*.

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