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Reconciliation through Art: Perceptions of Hijab Project Report



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Reconciliation through Art: Perceptions of Hijab

Project Report

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Preface

ReconcArt is the acronym of “Reconciliation through art: Perceptions of hijab”, a European project implemented by research institutes, theatre companies and other cultural operators in Greece, Italy and Bulgaria with support from the European Commission, Framework programme Culture 2000.

At a time when the Muslim custom of hijab (the headscarf worn by Muslim women) has caused considerable controversy in Europe and attracted much debate and media attention, ReconcArt attempts to explore the issues underlying the use of this symbolic garment as perceived by Muslim and non-Muslim women.

Using a grassroots approach and a methodology based on self-expression through the performing and visual arts, the project encouraged women of different cultural and religious backgrounds to converge towards a point of mutual understanding. Creative expression techniques such as acting, singing, painting, writing, dancing and other forms of art were used to encourage the expression and analysis of deep-rooted feelings and thoughts held by people on the subject. Indeed, held in a secure and non-judgmental environment, creative expression practices were proved very powerful in releasing the participants’ emotions and reaching the desired result of true understanding.

This project has drawn on the collective effort of theatre writers, directors, actors and other performing and visual artists committed to work with ordinary people (non-professionals) in order to develop creative expression approaches and reach a valid artistic result.

To achieve its aims, the project used different routes and set in motion a variety of actions in the three participating countries. These include:

- Background research to identify the social, cultural and political aspects that underlie the use of hijab by women in Europe.
- A series of creative expression workshops, bringing together a group of women in each country, including Muslim and non-Muslim ones, those that wear the hijab and those that don’t. These workshops provided the opportunity to participating women to express and debate their feelings and thoughts concerning the practice of hijab using different art forms, under the guidance of a facilitator.
- Production and public performance of a theatre play in each country, based on the material developed and themes identified during the workshops. The plays were performed by the workshop participants.
- An international cultural event, including performances of the three theatrical productions; a conference that brought together all the participants as well as members of the artistic and academic communities; and an exhibition inspired by the hijab.
- A publication featuring key findings of the research and highlights the other activities of the project.

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PART 1. Research results

The custom of hijab and the related debate in Europe

Introduction

Political events around the world have made the hijab a topic of heated debate in Europe, reflecting cultural, political and gender issues. Hijab is the veil worn by Muslim women, in various shapes, colours and materials, covering their head and part of their face. The migratory wave of Muslim people, caused mainly by wars in Middle Eastern countries, has brought hijab at the centre of interest in many European countries. Moreover, the visibility of hijab-wearing women in Europe has put the boundaries of western values such as tolerance, multi-culturalism, free expression of faith, and even human rights to a test. The topic has provoked public reflection on the issues of immigration, integration and education, sometimes triggered by incidents involving the tolerance of the custom of hijab in schools and other public places in European countries.

The research conducted by the ReconcArt project team had a dual objective. Firstly, to explore the custom of hijab in the Muslim tradition, especially as it is practiced by immigrant or ethnic minorities in Greece, Italy and Bulgaria, and in Europe more generally, and analyse the historical, cultural and socio-political context within which this custom takes place; and secondly, to present the main issues that underlie the debate around the hijab and provide input to stimulate the activities of the creative expression workshops.

Definition and history of the hijab

In the Islamic tradition the hijab is linked to modesty, privacy and morality. However, the practice of veiling goes further back than that of the Islamic tradition. Head covering was also practiced in Judaism and Christianity, connected to propriety. In Islam, the tradition of head covering has remained alive while in Christianity and Judaism it has faded away over the centuries.

Initially, in the Islamic world, the hijab was conceived as a status symbol. There have been recorded instances in Assyria and Persia, where the veil was reserved for “noble” women. Working women did not veil themselves as it was impractical to do so. By the final centuries of the Middle Ages, the hijab was widely adopted by the common classes. It is not until the 19th century that covering the head and body by Muslim women started to be questioned. Intellectuals, reformers and liberals began to denounce the idea of women’s protective clothing as part of a wider shift towards a more Western-type society. Slowly, women replaced heavy protective garments with lighter ones and many shunned the Islamic dress for a more European appearance. However opposition to Islamic clothing had never been truly universal. Among the lower economic classes hijab has always been defended in the face of social change and later, in the second half of the 20th century, it was revived as a symbol against modernisation. Since then, the hijab debate has stayed alive.

A quick look around Muslim countries demonstrates that the custom of hijab is practiced with varying degrees of austerity. In some countries it is imposed by law (e.g. in Saudi Arabia) and in others it is heavily discouraged or banned (e.g. in Morocco). In most Muslim societies though, the custom of hijab is optional, and its practice is linked mainly to the country’s or region’s culture and social tradition.

THE HIJAB DEBATE IN EUROPE

Hijab as a statement of faith

The hijab is, in essence, a way of demonstrating one’s faith to Islam. For most Muslim women, wearing the hijab is -arguably- purely a matter of faith. For a woman who consciously agrees to wear the hijab, it constitutes a personal, spiritual matter that concerns her and God. Wearing it makes her feel superior and proud. The more “orthodox” Muslim view is that the hijab is obligatory among devout Muslim women that reach puberty. A more liberal view recognises the right of women to wear it when they personally feel ready for it. Then, there are those that although perceiving themselves as devout, choose not to wear it. Yet a practicing Muslim will most likely wear it when praying or when entering a mosque.

Hijab as part of culture

The hijab, although in its essence a garment introduced by religion, is so much engrained in the culture of certain

societies that is sometimes hard to distinguish between its cultural and religious meaning. Observing the variety of Muslim head and body coverings around the world also suggests that the practice of hijab is more influenced by culture than anything else. Hijab has even succumbed to fashion, with women fitting in as many different styles and combinations within set parameters and guidelines, through colour, fabrics and style of wearing it. It is not rare to see predominantly young Muslim women in Europe combining Western fashion etiquette with the hijab, which almost sounds like a cultural contradiction. For some scholars, this trend is influential in inadvertently launching some kind of reformation, thus “modernising” the Islamic tradition.

Hijab and gender issues

For most non-Muslims the hijab is perceived as the ultimate discrimination against women and it encapsulates female oppression. According to some scholars, it incriminates the female body, femininity and sexuality; it buries life itself; it is a platform for gender inequality. Western women are angered by the enforcement of hijab on Muslim women, especially if enforced culturally, within the family, by religion or by law, because it contradicts fundamental freedoms, entrenched in European societies. On the other hand, many Muslim women do not consider the austere dress-code as oppressive, contrasting it to the “oppression” of western image models. Their counterargument is that, by wearing the hijab, they resist the transformation of women into sex objects which occurs when women are constantly judged by their appearance.

However, the problem of female oppression in Arab and Muslim societies is far more serious and complex than just wearing the hijab. It is the political and social underpinnings of Islam that leads to the oppression of women, as for example is the case with states that impose the practice of hijab. Western models of female emancipation may not be relevant for Muslim societies, but the question of the fundamental rights of women in these societies remains open, including the right to educate oneself, to marry who one likes, to work outside the home or to decide whether to cover one’s head or not. Muslim women have indeed been undergoing their own “feminist” revolution and there are many examples of prominent women activists who fight for women’s rights. In many Islamic countries, the feminist movement urged, first of all, women to take off the hijab, as a symbol of oppression and denial of choice.

Hijab as a political statement

For the past 40 years, efforts to “modernise” Islam have been met with increasing hostility by Muslim groups that perceive this trend as an affiliation to the alien Western values and a betrayal of the Islamic traditions. The opposition to the modernisation or westernisation of Islam has given way to Islamic fundamentalism and the re-affiliation to more traditional and conservative values within Islamic societies. Torn between the “modernising West” and the “fundamentalist Islam” the world has become intensely polarised. In this backdrop, women themselves have voluntarily and purposefully taken up the hijab as a sign of reaction; or in other cases, their governments or communities have chosen to impose it on them. There are many accounts of young, liberated and educated women who have chosen to wear the hijab, giving it a different meaning, with strong cultural and political undertones.

Amidst turbulence between the two sides, Islam and the West, the world has conferred a new meaning to the hijab as a medium of resistance to the West and a return to the Islamic roots. Far from its significance as a statement of faith, the hijab has been entangled in a cultural and political conflict, victims of which are the Muslim women, regardless of their personal desire to wear it or not. Moreover, the limitations imposed by some European countries on the practice of hijab has brought about a new debate about the freedom of the individual, human rights and multiculturalism among Europeans. With the ever-increasing Muslim population in Europe, the issue of how willing are Europeans to assimilate this culturally distinct minority, becomes very pressing, with all the political repercussions it entails. At least in Europe Muslims are able to take part in this debate.

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF GREECE, BULGARIA AND ITALY

THE HIJAB DEBATE IN GREECE

The Muslim population in Greece

It is estimated that around 360.000 Muslims live in Greece today. They belong to two broad groups: indigenous and immigrants.

The origin of the indigenous Muslim minority of Greece as an officially defined group dates back to 1923, when they were exempted from the terms of the Treaty of Lausanne for an «Exchange of Populations» between Turkey and Greece. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Muslim minority represents 0.92% of the total population and it numbers approximately 98.000 people. The Muslim minority is located in Thrace and it is considered a religious and not an ethnic one. It consists of three sub-groups: those of Turkish origin, Pomaks, and Muslim Roma.

The immigrant population in Greece recorded an exploding increase in the 1990s. From the 1991 to the 2001 census there has been a 450% increase of foreigners living in Greece. 797,091 foreigners are currently living in Greece, according to the 2001 census. It is also estimated that another 200,000-250,000 undocumented aliens are added to those, making a total of one million. Half of them are living and working in the Attika region. Muslims represent approximately 30% of the total immigrant population. The majority of these come from Albania and other Balkan countries and are non-practicing Muslims. The numbers of immigrant Muslims from various countries of the Middle East, as well as from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh are relatively small, but increasing fast during the 21st century.

The social position of Muslims in Greece

Islam is constitutionally recognised as one of the three religions governed under public law, along with Judaism and Christian Orthodoxy. Any discrimination on the basis of religion is prohibited by the Greek constitution. Several research studies have concluded that religion-oriented racism and intolerance towards Muslims is not the case in Greek society, even though there have been some instances of discrimination against members of minority faiths, especially from fanatic Christians.

The arrival of immigrants has been met with conflicting sentiment. The vast majority of the economically active immigrant population has quickly entered the labour market, doing jobs that Greeks thought beneath them, thus providing cheap labour. Still, even though the first generation has been accepted as part of society, they have never been fully integrated. The first signs of more meaningful integration are starting to appear now that second generation immigrants attend normal Greek school, speak the language fluently and socialise with Greeks on a more equal basis.

The practice and study of Muslim faith has been met with controversy. Outside Thrace, mosques do not function and imams are forbidden. Although in 1996 a bill was passed forming a Governing Commission for an Islamic Temple in Athens, to manage and sustain a Mosque, this has not been implemented until now. The Muslim community has also been lobbying for a Muslim cemetery in the wider Athens area. Only recently the Church has donated land, worth an estimated \$20 million euro, in West Attica, to build the first Muslim cemetery outside Thrace.

The Muslim minority of Thrace enjoys full equality in law and citizenship. Politically, the minority is represented in the Greek parliament, and the government recognises Shari’a law on family and civic issues for Muslims that live in Thrace. However, the minority has a low education level and limited employment opportunities, compared to the rest of the population. Some positive changes have occurred though regarding the rights of the Muslims of Thrace over the last couple of decades. These concern the right to own property, and to set up enterprises. Also, Thrace is the only region where minority schools exist and operate as equal to Greek state schools.

The hijab and Greek society

The headscarf is considered as part of the Greek folk tradition, and it is still worn by older women in rural Greece. In Thrace the hijab is widespread among the Muslim minority and older women cover themselves with the burqa, although those who moved to urban centres, especially Athens and Thessaloniki, tend to adopt a more westernised attire and dress like other Greek women of their age. Greek society has recently become familiar with its newly-found multicultural identity. As a result, people in the urban areas appear more tolerant to the hijab. The first hijab-wearing student to have graduated from a Greek university has stated in an interview that younger people are accepting women who choose to wear the hijab; and she adds that respect of religious freedom at all levels of education in Greece is exemplary. Nevertheless, it would be inaccurate to assume that prejudice and intolerance against women who wear the hijab has completely caved in. There have been cases of bullying against hijab-wearing students and reports in the national media about expelling a hijab-wearing girl from school. The latter incident was dealt with swiftly by the Ministry of Education and the girl returned to school.

There is also the case of Greek women converting to Islam and choosing to wear the hijab. As one Greek Muslim woman pointed out in a Focus Group organised by the project, being Greek and being Muslim is not

contradictory. Still one is faced with some sensitive citizenship issues, such as the religious practices at school or in the army, or even the social stigma of being a non-Christian, especially from within the family.

In recent years a theoretical debate about the concept of hijab has been taking place in the media and academic circles that follows the general lines of the European debate. The most common point of view within Greek society is that the hijab represents a symbol of gender inequality making women victims of religion, society and family. The second most popular point of view relates to the political dimensions of the hijab, suggesting that the recent resurgence of hijab-wearing by educated women is a sign of resistance to western values.

Increasingly the debate around the hijab becomes part of a wider debate on human rights and freedom of religion, questioning also some other Islamic practices, such as polygamy and female mutilation. The role of hijab as a manifestation of one's cultural identity has been also stressed in the Focus Group conducted in Greece: when a woman belongs to an ethnic or religious minority, there might be social pressure to reassert herself by emphasising her identity.

Muslim women living in Greece admit that they live in a tolerant and sympathetic environment that allows them to wear the hijab as a statement of faith, identity, culture or political protest. Incidents of Islamophobia are very scarce, although some reluctance to allow Islam to integrate more thoroughly into the Greek society can be observed, being partly a residue from the country's long occupation by the Ottoman empire.

THE HIJAB DEBATE IN BULGARIA

The Muslim population in Bulgaria

According to the census of 2001, there are 967.000 Muslims in Bulgaria, or 12.2% of the total population of the country. More recent data suggest that this number may be higher. Bulgaria is the only EU member-state with such a big percentage of Muslim population which is not immigrant but indigenous. They consist of different ethnic groups: Turks (713,000), Pomaks (131,000), Gypsies (103,000) and other smaller communities (20,000). These groups live mainly in the Rhodope Mountains, in south-western and north-eastern Bulgaria, and their main occupation is agriculture and animal husbandry.

The origin of the Muslim population dates back to the 14th century, when the Ottoman Empire occupied Bulgaria. During occupation, between the 14th and 18th century, the country was Islamised, i.e. many Christian Bulgarians were forced to adopt Islam, forming the Bulgarian Mohammedans, also known as Pomaks. The majority of Bulgarian Muslims are however "Sunni" who were the ruling class of the Turks at the time of the five-century-long Ottoman occupation.

The social position of Muslims in Bulgaria

Since the liberation of Rhodope from Turkish rule in 1912-13, the Bulgarian Muslims, especially the Mohammedans, came under enormous pressure to be baptised Christian by force, the so-called "kristilka", and surrender their ethnic identity. This provoked an emigration wave to Turkey that was continued during the Communist regime. A positive political step was taken in the 1930s by the creation of Rodina (meaning "birth country") an organisation initiated by eminent leaders of the Muslim community aiming to achieve spiritual truce and reconciliation between Bulgarian Christians and Muslims. They supported a secular way of life and the rejection of typical Muslim clothing, such as the hijab, promoting the education of girls and women and their free, full-scale, equal integration in society.

During the 45-year period of Communist rule in Bulgaria, however, the Muslim religion, like Christianity, was persecuted by the regime. Dissidents were sent to concentration camps and prisons. Muslims were forced to abandon their traditional beliefs, rituals, dress and, after 1984, also to change their Muslim names to Christian or Slavonic ones. This so-called "revival process" was met by strong resistance from the Muslim community, including hunger strikes and clashes with the police, followed by reprisals such as ceasing the payment of salaries and pensions and, eventually mass deportation to Turkey. Thus, instead of inclusion, Muslims, and especially the Bulgarian Mohammedans, were deeply alienated.

After the re-establishment of the democratic system, the rights of the Muslims were reinstated. The majority of them took back their old names, courses for the teaching of the Quran were set up, Muslim newspapers were published in Bulgarian and in Turkish and Turkish theatres were reopened while Bulgarian National Television started broadcasting a news bulletin in Turkish. Turkish language was added as a school subject in the school curricula in many Muslim regions of the country. The restoration of the rights of Muslims provided opportunities to

some radical Islamic organisations outside Bulgaria to encourage the set-up of local associations in the Muslim regions advocating the political autonomy of Muslims. Some Muslim leaders in the country have expressed their fear that these activities lead to radical Islamic fundamentalism, with all that this entails; and that economic, social and cultural marginalisation is a proven method of surrendering people to radical ideology. It is thus believed that such a prospect can be prevented by fast social and economic integration of the Muslim population into the mainstream Bulgarian society. This has been partly achieved by the political presence of Muslims in the government of the country. The Muslims are united in a party, the Movement for Rights and Liberties, which has a constant parliamentary presence of 25 MPs and has taken part in many coalition governments.

The hijab and Bulgarian society

For half a century the Communist regime imposed a ban on wearing the typical Muslim clothes including the hijab. Since the transition to democracy, there has been a widespread use of the hijab as a symbol of categorical and in some cases defiant declaration of non-Christian national and religious identity. A debate on the hijab has emerged within a society that until the end of the 20th century did not consider the hijab an issue, taking a tolerant and rather indifferent stance towards it. However, signs of tension started to emerge when, recently, 110 female Muslim students were refused entry to the Medical University of Plovdiv even though this entailed a loss of 400.000 euro for the university. The students demanded that that they should be allowed to study at the university wearing the hijab. This was a genuinely legitimate case, because education in Bulgaria is secular and free, and the right of religious self-definition is protected, including wearing special clothing.

Judged by discussions and comments in the media and views of experts, expressed in different forms, public opinion is in favour of banning the wearing of religious symbols in education institutions, including the hijab. The debate on this was heated up by the transfer of the conflict to the domain of secondary education. The introduction of school uniforms made the solution of the problem easier. However, on numerous occasions radical Islamists put the education system to a test, assessing the country's reaction as to whether women should be allowed to wear Muslim insignia at school. In one occasion, the Organisation for Islamic Development and Culture (OIDC) filed a complaint to the Commission for Protection against Discrimination, stating that two female students at the Economic College of Smoljan, in the area of Rhodopes, were not allowed to wear veils at schools. The categorical answer of the Commission was that at schools where uniforms were introduced, the ban on the veil was not a sign of discrimination. Similar incidents occurred in several other schools, leading the Commission to advice the Minister of Education to introduce a new law, in order to solve the problem legislatively. However, action has not been taken so far.

Sporadically; there are attempts in the media to defend the notion that a ban on the hijab in education institutions is an infringement of human rights. Opposition to the ban on the hijab at universities and schools is put forward by eminent researchers, who claim that religion should be separated from the state; and that negative attitudes towards wearing Muslim symbols is an expression of "secular fundamentalism".

In Bulgaria, the hijab is not a trivial everyday problem that may or may not lead to violation of human rights. It is more profound than that, going hand-in-hand with the resurgence of a radical Islamic ideology. The relatively indifference or neutrality demonstrated by Bulgarian society towards the spread of the custom of hijab can be explained firstly by the famous Bulgarian tolerance to difference; and secondly by political factors, namely the strong dependence of the government on the political party "Movement for Rights and Freedom" which is ethnic and Muslim by nature. An important role is played by the origin of the Bulgarian Muslim community, who is indigenous, with a long presence in the country. In addition, the five centuries of Ottoman rule have developed among Bulgarians the merit of reconciliation and the power to survive. The veil, worn as a protective garment by older Christian women too, can be seen as an element that does not divide Christians and Muslims, but helps them resolve their differences.

THE HIJAB DEBATE IN ITALY

The Muslim population in Italy

Unlike Greece and Bulgaria, Italy does not have an indigenous Muslim population. Muslims are almost exclusively immigrants, attracted to Southern Europe by the opportunities of the informal economy in certain sectors of the labour market, namely domestic care, fishing, agriculture and other unskilled occupations, taking up usually non-regular jobs. Despite the large growth in their numbers, Italy appears unfavourable to immigrants compared to other European countries due to rigid legislation about family reunion, lack of job security, housing problems, few

social provisions to facilitate integration, and last but not least, the increase of racism, especially Islamophobia.

Officially, the number of immigrants in Italy has risen from 350,000 in 1985 to 1,250,214 in 1998 and reached 2,670,514 in 2005. Romanians, Albanians and Moroccans represent the three most populous ethnic groups. Among these, according to statistics, there are over one million Muslims currently living in Italy and Islam is the second most practiced religion in the country. Moreover, the number of Muslims is on the rise, not only because of the continuing flow of arriving immigrants but because of the increasing number of Italians who convert to Islam. It has been estimated that approximately 10,000 people adopted Islam, most of who are women married to Muslim men.

The social position of Muslims in Italy

The Italian Constitution contains a series of articles against religious or ethnic discrimination. By the end of the 1990s the first mosques opened. Currently, there are around 130 official mosques and 123 cultural centres, while 50,000 Muslim children attend public school. The increased presence of Muslims has provoked verbal attacks from some religious groups and political parties. Especially after the 11th September 2001, that phenomenon was augmented, claiming that Islam is also misogynous, intolerant and backward, making the integration process very difficult. The media have contributed to this, portraying Islam as tied up to fanaticism, traditionalism, irrationality and obscurantism. However, this representation ignores that the Muslim population in Italy is on the whole peaceful and highly diversified.

After numerous socio-cultural studies about the Islamic phenomenon in Italy, a number of “clashing” points in relation to the western Christian culture have been identified:

- Marriage and divorce: referring to the possibility of marrying up to four women while vesting to the man the authority to claim the custody of his sons and the material goods obtained within marriage, and so forth.
- Courts, inheritance: where the Shari’a is law, Islam demonstrates a stance against women. The law carrier is opened only to men, and moreover, in all legal aspects a man has twice the value of a woman.
- Prayer and Ramadan: prayer times (5 per day) and holidays (e.g. Ramadan) often interfere with the job routines of Muslim people, although in Italy employers display a tolerant attitude towards these.
- Hijab: women wearing the hijab often find it difficult to get a job.
- Holiday of the sacrifice: celebrations in memory of the missed sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham are one of the most important holidays for Muslim people, including a ritual of killing animals. This generates protests from animal lovers, individuals and associations.
- Infibulation: The mutilation of feminine genitals is not prescript by the Koran, but the overlap of Islam with some tribal traditions identifies this practice in certain cultures as an Islamic one. It is known that infibulation is carried out in Italy in undercover ambulatories, creating a negative feeling among the general population.
- School and Koran. Muslim people demand that Islamic religion becomes part of the Italian schools curriculum, in parallel to the teaching of Christian faith.
- Muslim cemeteries. This problem exists in many cities, but is dealt with differently by the local jurisdiction.
- Proselytism. The issue of the diffusion of the religious message of Islam is controversial and concerns mostly the means and style of doing it rather than its principle.

The hijab and Italian society

The hijab, as a head cover, is worn by many Muslim women living in Italy. It is a practice allowed under the principle of Freedom of Religion stipulated in the Italian Constitution. However there are two key areas of citizenship where the practice of hijab is more controversial. The first concerns education and the second concerns official documents such as the ID card.

Talking about these issues the Italian historian professor Franco Cardini said: “We need to move the origins of these clashes between us and the Muslims, rationalising our differences. This could be possible only by keeping in mind that some of their traditions, linked or not to religion, should be considered in the same way we do with some habits we have: like eating some food and avoiding other.”

Moreover, the hijab debate in Italy is closely connected to the issue of immigration, both legal and illegal. Even defining and counting the number of Muslim people in Italy is not an easy task, considering the very definition of a person as a Muslim (such as nationality, family, personal adhesion or whichever criteria) and the clandestine situation of many immigrants. Today, the presence of foreigners is remarkable in all sectors of social life: school,

jobs, sport, associations, social and sanitary services etc. In this new reality, Islam has become highly visible in Italian society, and the custom of hijab makes such visibility even more pointed. This is why the debate about the hijab in Italy is often entangled with the question of immigration itself and the potential “threats” it poses to Italian culture and social cohesion. The hijab has become part of the integration struggle of Muslim immigrants, who seek recognition of their right to be culturally different.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Reactions to Islamic presence in the three studied countries appear to vary according to the origins of the Muslim populations. Each country presents a different reality.

In Bulgaria, the segregation between Muslims and non-Muslims is prominent and is very much a political issue, and one that has slowly infiltrated into the perceptions of society. Centuries of isolation and injustice committed by the various authorities, combined with the recent political and wealth power accrued by Muslims and evidence of Islamic fundamentalist activity is contributing to a significant rift between Muslim and Christian Bulgarians. Although the custom of hijab has been used as “armament” within this clash, it does not arouse strong public feelings on the whole.

Tensions are also present in the relationship between mainstream society and the Muslim minority of Thrace in Greece. Having a similarly long history as the Muslims of Bulgaria -even though not as turbulent- the issues surrounding the integration of the Muslim minority are very much political, relating specifically to the country’s relationship with Turkey and other Balkan countries. Greeks, outside the area of Thrace, like Italians, are more concerned with the new realities of multiculturalism and the implications of it in matters of everyday life (education, cemeteries etc.) and not with the Muslim religion as such. In both countries, Greece and Italy, the assimilation of immigrants into the workforce has helped with keeping tensions at bay. At the same time, native people have also become more concerned with the side-effects of immigration such as crime, unemployment and illegal trade. The visibility of hijab-wearing women is not high, and this has not yet become an issue, although the debate has started in the media and amongst academics.

Bulgaria and Italy both appear to develop some Islamophobic tendencies, although in a different way. Italians worry about Islamic infiltration (and perhaps corruption) of their own culture and identity, something which is also true for the Greek publics. In Bulgaria, decades of cohabitation with Muslims populations, including the Mohammedans who are of Slavic descent, has not created fears about the majority’s identity but apprehension about Islamic fundamentalism drawing in from Bulgarian minority groups as well as abroad. The hijab is taking on a new meaning in connection to this fundamentalism.

Societies in all three studied countries appear tolerant to the custom of hijab. Furthermore, all three countries have living memories of times when the headscarf was commonplace among the local Christian women. Paradoxically though, it is in Bulgaria more than in the other two countries where the hijab has taken on new dimensions, that of a tool in the fight between Islam and the West (or fundamentalism and secularism). Several hijab-related incidents have occurred recently in Bulgaria and stories about a tactical use of the hijab abound; legislation on the subject is pending and politicians and intellectuals are engaged in public debate on the subject. In Italy and Greece, incidents involving the hijab are still relatively few and most public debate usually stems from incidents in other countries, stereotypes regarding the Muslim religion and the world-wide state of affairs.

The history of hijab from the early days of Islam shows the controversy over this garment is not only a current affair. It existed within Islamic societies long before it became a matter that concerned Western (mostly Christian) societies. Even from those earlier times the hijab served a political, religious, social and cultural purpose.

In Europe, the increased presence of Islamic groups has had an important impact over the past 20 years. Surely two decades of immigration is not a long enough time to enable the integration of a new culture in the dominant European culture. Time aside, history has shown that no cultural shift comes without resistance. In a way it is part of human (and societal) nature to fear the unknown and the new. As this study has demonstrated, this actually represents the present reality in Italy and Greece, where the host society struggles to accept the realities of becoming a multi-cultural and multi-faith community. Within the wider challenge of the integration of Muslim populations in Europe, the custom of hijab seems to matter little when compared to other more controversial issues. Despite this, the hijab has been used in many occasions as a “flag” to reassert cultural and religious identity in the context of Islamic fundamentalism, creating friction and unnecessary conflict between majority and minority communities across Europe.

PART 2. Creative expression workshops

The creative expression workshops have been an emotional journey for both Muslim and non-Muslim women. They brought about greater appreciation and understanding for one another. They also served as the backbone for the three distinctive plays that were produced and performed as part of this project. Theatre has been chosen as the principal medium for the artistic expression of the participants to the workshops. Material, thoughts and ideas evoked at the creative expression workshops lead to the production of a unique play in each country to communicate the message of reconciliation but also to bring to the forefront the conflicts and prejudices apparent or hidden in multi-cultural Europe. Workshop participants were trained to act in the play which was performed during the spring of 2009 in a small number of public performances. Finally all three plays were performed during the Cultural Event organised by project in Athens, in May 2009.

Greek workshops

From April to October 2008 a series of creative workshops aiming to explore issues that relate to the custom of hijab were held in Greece. 23 women attended during 15 sessions, including Muslim and non-Muslim ones, aged 14 to 60 and coming from a variety of backgrounds: Greek, Turkish, Pakistani, Iranian, Moroccan, Afghani, Yemeni and British.

During each session participants were involved in various forms of creative expression, including improvisation, reciting, singing and playing music, movement and dance, painting, drawing, photography and poetry. Women were also giving their personal stories in relation to the hijab, either as a personal experience of wearing it; or as a requirement of their faith and culture; or as spectators of other women who wear it. The personal stories and the creative expression exercises helped the group to develop a common understanding of the different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds of participants; to share experiences as women living and working in a discriminatory world; and to build empathy for each other's point of view. Week by week, participants in the 15 workshops were guided to explore their identities, break down stereotypes and express through acting, movement and music the meaning of the hijab for them, as well as deal with themes such as faith, fear, prayer, ritual and symbols, body image and perceptions of others. Moreover, the women experimented in sharing each other's religious expressions. Most of the workshop participants also shared experiences in an experiment organised by the workshop animators, during which the women were dressed up with veils, in the fashion of the Muslim hijab, and walked for two hours in the streets of central Athens, followed by a photographer who recorded the reactions of the passers-by.

The last few weeks of the workshop focused on the women devising and writing their own story-monologues, leading to the creation of a script for the theatrical play. The result was "Hijab Frappé", a play that raised some fundamental questions, such as: What does it mean to be a Muslim in Greece? Or even more, what does it mean to be a Greek converted to Islam? Can the religious, ethnic and the national identities be combined? The play was written by all women in cooperation and edited by the animator of the workshops actress/director Shirin Youssefian Maanian, and her assistant actress/director Athina Arseni, who both directed the performances of the play. The play was acted by nine women who were active workshop participants. The Greek workshops were held under the aegis of the Hellenic Center of the International Theatre Institute.

Bulgarian workshops

The creative workshops in Bulgaria faced a problem at the start, because of the difficulty of recruiting women willing to talk openly about the sensitive issue of hijab, especially women from the Muslim minority. Eventually, the workshops started in June 2008 with a core group of 7 women, Muslim and Christian. The workshops were led by theatre director Nina Berova, who acted as animator/facilitator. Unlike the other teams, the sessions were built around the core script of a play that Kiril Topalov, a Bulgarian playwright and partner to this project, wrote. In the play, the emphasis is on the political and social issues surrounding the custom of hijab, as they are experienced by Muslim and non-Muslim women in Europe and not only in Bulgaria, based on extensive research. During the course of the workshops, participants experimented with reciting, story-telling, drawing, singing and dance, adding their own experiences to the play. Five workshop participants took part in the performance of the play.

Italian workshops

The Italian workshops were organised in two phases. The first 10 sessions of the workshops took place in the Casa di Ramia, a protected multi-ethnic environment run by a women's organisation. Until June 2008 there



was a series of mediation sessions in Casa di Ramia, with the help of Muslim animators, in order to engage and encourage Muslim women to take part in the creative workshops. During these sessions, the women were encouraged to talk about themselves, their faith, their families, their migration stories and their childhood; and to develop trust and empathy with the other members of the group.

After this initial “mediation” phase, the second phase of creative workshops was held, including a cycle of another 10 sessions in the premises of AIDA Foundation. In this phase, both Muslim and non-Muslim women participated. What had emerged from the first phase of the workshops was re-elaborated with the use of theatrical techniques such as voice variations, improvisation, mimics, body language etc. A wonderfully mixed group of 15 women from various countries such as Morocco, Algeria, Brazil, Palestine and Italy, of various ages and career histories, were facilitated and animated by drama staff composed by Letizia Quintavalla, Gabriel Maria Sala, Rosanna Sfragara and Susanna Bissoli. The facilitators included theatre actors, directors, dramatists and theatre theoreticians, who made it their task to collect the stories and other expressive material produced by the workshop participants, and turn them into a play. A sub-group of seven workshop participants acted in the performances of the play.



PART 3. The plays

Summaries and extracts from the plays appear here. The full texts of the plays are provided in the attached CD.

HIJAB UNDER THE SUN: The Bulgarian play

The question “what is a hijab” arises amongst a group of five female students in a European university. The topic is controversial. Is it an essential part of the clothing of women in the East, protecting them from the sun, regardless of religion? Or is it a provocative symbol of fundamentalist Islam?

The intellectual discussions of the educated girls are entwined with the tragic story of their brothers and beloved boyfriends and a story of an open war is unveiled. At the end, the two stories are merging in a tragic end, so that we can understand that being a good Christian, Muslim or Jew, depends on your morals and your compassion - because in the end, the sun belongs to everyone.

The **summary and extracts** below were approved by Kiril Topalov.

Texts: Kiril Topalov

Production: Academy of Balkan Civilisation

Director: Nina Berova

Characters: First Woman, Second Woman, Third Woman, Fourth Woman, Fifth Woman

Voices of young Muslim fighters: Abdullah, Ali, Hairedin

Fatima - Muslim, a student of law, Abdullah's sister

Nurten - Muslim, a student of construction engineering, Ali's sister

Hatije - Muslim, a student of medicine

Maria - Christian, a student of journalism

Sarah - Jewish, a student of economics

The five girls perform the roles of the Women too. Together with the three Muslim fighters, they are the children of the five Women.

The action develops on two planes – a metaphorical and a real one. The metaphorical plane develops along the various scenes of the play – it opens and closes the play carrying through the idea that the hijab (the veil) and the sun belong equally to everybody. Any attempt to get possession of them by a person, a nation or a religion leads inevitably to a catastrophe.

Scene 1

The beginning of the story: a summer's day in which the sun blazes mercilessly. We see in succession five Muslim and non-Muslim women, the former dressed in black and the latter dressed in white. Both groups come from poor families – their clothes show this. They work in the field, digging the earth alone, without the male members of their families. The black or white veils more or less hide their faces. They talk about their dark destiny – their husbands and sons dying in an unnecessary war. They decide to create a big veil and cover the sun with it, to avoid its tormenting heat. However, this action results in a frightening darkness.

First Woman Ladies... If we don't stop, we'll die. This sun today... It's blazing like a fiend...

Second Woman The sun is not to blame.

Third Woman Today is like any other day. *(She looks desperately at the sun.)* The whiter it looks, the blacker it is.

Fourth Woman The damn destiny is to blame. And poverty too...

Second Woman How do our husbands and our sons survive in this sun there? Under the bombs and the bullets.

First Woman What is this war for? When will it end? As long as I remember, it's always been wartime. Grief on top of grief. Oh Allah...

Second Woman What is this war for? When will it end? As long as I remember, it's always been wartime. Grief on top of grief. Oh God!

Second Woman Oh Sun, spare them! Spare them.

First Woman *(takes off her hijab)*. Stop for a while, oh Sun!

Third Woman Have mercy. Spare our children and husbands.

Second Woman Ladies, let's catch it tonight when it comes down over the desert this evening. Let's entrap it.

Fourth Woman Let's join our veils and make a big one for it.

They all shout.

First Woman Give me the veils.

Fourth Woman The veils.

The women take off the veils. They tie their ends up, making a big black scarf and a big white scarf out of them. They put them on two long sticks and raise them up, towards the sun. Suddenly a shadow falls; sunlight subsides; it starts getting dark as the women shout out joyfully.

First Woman We made it! Ladies, we made it.

Fifth Woman *(Bending over for prayer)*. Glory be to Allah! Glory be to Allah!

Fourth Woman *(Also bowing and crossing herself)*. Have mercy on us. Lord, have mercy on us all.

First Woman Allah is great and Muhammad is his prophet. Let their will be done.

Third Woman Our father, Who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom...

Gradually, the stage darkens. In the dark, the women's voices recede.

What remains is just an oriental song full of sorrow; it gradually grows fainter and fainter...

In the darkness, a distant but loud thunder of shots and explosions flows in; dying soldiers' shouts, thudding tank roar is heard. That is the song of war; in a while it fades away.

We cannot see anything in the total darkness of the war. All we hear are the voices of three Muslim fighters – Abdullah, Ali and Hairedin.

Scene 2

A sunny morning at a café in the students' residence halls. Soft jazz music is heard – Louis Armstrong and Ella Fitzgerald sing their lovely Summer Time. At a round table, almost at the same time, the five girls sit down; they carry different things for breakfast; Hatije and Nurten wear the typical Muslim hijab. Fatima has no hijab. They talk about the hijab and religion, a subject that will be discussed later in a students' assembly. Each tries to prove to the other that her religion is the best.

Maria I don't care about your discussions. I have work to do.

Sarah Maria, you, Christians, and we, Jews, have the same thick holy book. And you have another one too – the Gospel. Do you know its first sentence?

Nurten At the beginning was the word.

Sarah *(To Maria, approving of Nurten's words)*. Well?! Not really... *(She makes a boxing and kicking movement.)*

Nurten Today, I shall use it properly. I hope you'll understand why I wear the hijab.

Sarah Good for you! Have you been reading the Bible?

Nurten No, I haven't. We have our Quran. I know some things as general knowledge as you and Maria put it. But some day I'll go through that holy book of yours.

Maria When you do that, you'll see that in your Quran you have simply copied our Gospel. Some six hundred years after Christ.

Sarah That was their major mistake. If they had copied from our Bible, they could have become the world's religion by now.

Hatije Or rather, world bankers and terrorists.

Nurten Maria, have you read Voltaire on religions?

Maria "A man who has read at least five books in one's life may not believe in God. But one must. In order to be moral in one's life and to attain peace before one's end. A man without faith is half a man."

Nurten Well done. Then you know that all religions have been copied from one another. Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam... In the same way, ideologies of the 20th century – Communism, Fascism – are like twin brothers. It's just that our religion is the best of all.

Maria I beg your pardon?

Nurten And also, the most tolerant one. It is the only one that recognises all other prophets, including your Jesus Christ.

Maria These are "Arabian Nights".

Nurten You don't have a clue.

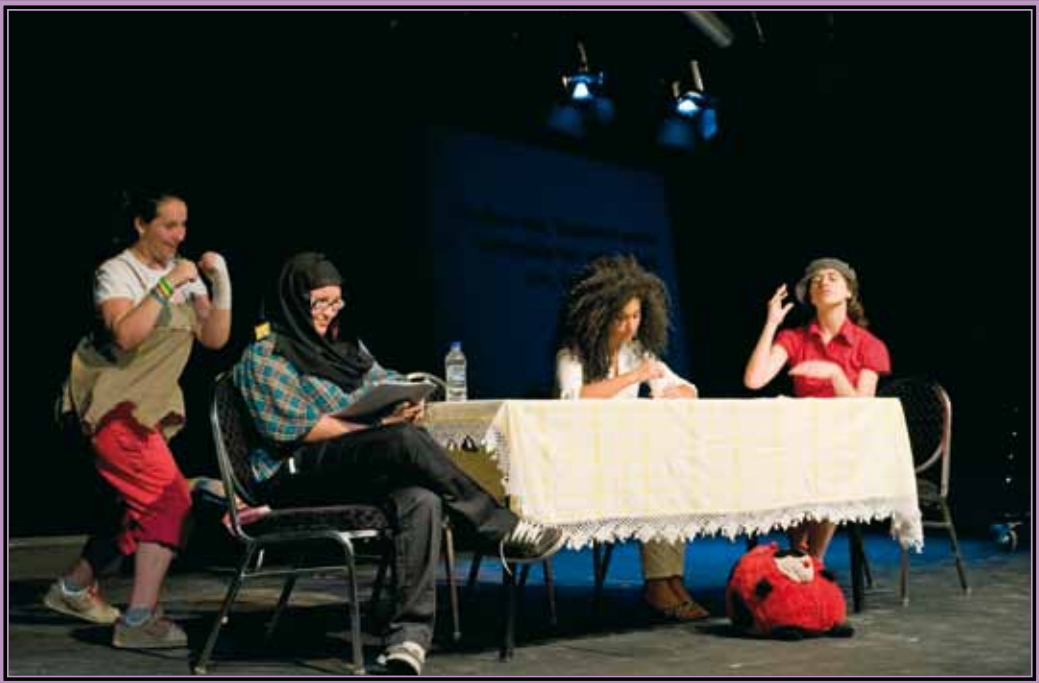
Maria Well, you can give me a piece of advice.

Nurten Well, here you are. Do you know in which city in the world a Jewish community has existed for the longest period?

Maria In Christian Barcelona, Thessalonica and Plovdiv. Choose one.

Nurten Wrong answer. History has chosen Muslim Baghdad by chance. And which religion has spilt the most foreign blood?

Maria Even children know that.



Nurten Children have a lot to learn. For now, only history knows. You just pretend that you know.

Maria OK. Is it ours?

Sarah Nurten, I love you! You're so intelligent that I'll have to take off your hijab soon. No matter that as we say it is easier to pull down your panties than remove your hijab.

Hatije Dirty Jew! If I kill you some day, you shouldn't be surprised.

Maria No chance, Hatije. From now on, she's coming to karate lessons with me.

Sarah Don't listen to her, Hatije. Martial Arts are for the lower races like you and the Christians. I've already explained to you some of the basic differences among us. You hit the head while we win with our heads. So, you have all chances to take my life one day. Don't lose hope, dear.

Hatije (To Maria). Excuse me, how do you stand this filthy racist? She thinks that we're both rubbish.

Maria Nurten, I don't want to... (She tries to leave the table but Maria holds her back on the chair.)

Nurten But Hatije, you're not Nurten's guardian. She's a free girl. She can take off whatever dress she wants where she wants and as many times as she wants. I wonder why the wonderful Quran doesn't recommend that.

Sarah The Quran approves of love and sex, girls. But you must know how to read it. Your religions consider sex and love sinful. (To Hatije and Fatima) Do you imagine? A sin! The most beautiful thing! What a religion! Their God made the woman from Adam's rib. And why is that? Because that is the only human bone without bone marrow. What do you think?

Fatima All in vain, Hatije. I'll be declared a martyr and hero of the Israeli-Arab conflict and you'll go to jail. Mankind will lose a world economist and a world surgeon. Kel faida, as you say. Is that so, Fatima? Fatima, why do you keep silent? Do you want to kill a Jew, too? In line with the Israeli-Arab conflict? Well? Do you want that? Oh, do you?

Fatima I'm pregnant.

Scene 3

Darkness, war, the voices of Hairedin, Ali and Abdullah. They fight at a war front. All three have a close relationship with the girls, either as brothers or lovers. Hairedin tries to convince the others that girls should be free to choose their partners and whether to wear the hijab or not. Abdullah resists this and is intimidating.

Hairedin Abdullah, I don't understand why Fatima should wear the hijab.

Abdullah In order to show that we're different from the non-believers. That we don't accept them. That they must take us into consideration. To remind them every moment and every step.

Hairedin Where is that – at your place or at her place?

Abdullah Everywhere. Soon everything will be our place.

Hairedin What is the difference, Abdullah? Do we differ in terms of their wealth? Their peace and security? The happy childhood of their kids? Their education? Their nice houses?

Abdullah Have you seen anyone of our people with all that you've just mentioned?

Hairedin It's true that there are not so many of them but...

Abdullah A-ha. And why is that? Have you asked yourself? Why are our people unemployed? Why are they fit for manual labour and nothing else? Why can't they buy a house? Why do Europeans and Americans consider us second class citizens?

Hairedin Because most of our people go there not to work, Abdullah. They go for their social security benefits. They go there in order to rape their girls, to sell drugs, to rob their apartments. Especially in France and Holland. In England and in North America, the trick with social security doesn't work, so your team-mates sent three thousand New-Yorkers to Hell. They almost succeeded to do the same in the London Underground.

Scene 4

The girls continue their half-joking, half-serious talk. Maria now tries to provoke them to think in a modern way, more freely. The Muslim girls react with reason and hardness.

Sarah The Quran allows polygamy, the harem, etc. only to your men. If a woman is caught in adultery... Even in case she's been raped... Or, God forbid, she falls for another woman instead of a man... They punish her cruelly; they dishonour her in public. This doesn't apply to men. Are they not "respectable"? or what?

Fatima (She pokes her head out of the bathroom. She is wrapped in a towel. Hatije hand her some clothes). There are no such texts in the Quran. These are everyday practices, old traditions... For example, there are no harems in my country.

Maria Come out, Madam! We aren't Israeli or American soldiers in disguise. Only one of us pretends to

Sarah be a lady, nicknamed Sarah, but we keep that under control. Come out, throw away the mantle like ancient Frina, and we, the sinners, will fall at your feet. And we may kiss the Quran by accident.

Hatije One last question before the discussion. (She shouts in the direction of the bathroom). Fatima, you'll be a lawyer. Explain this. Your people here want to abide by the Shari'a? So, how do we do it – we keep to the Roman law and you keep to Islamic law?

Maria If you don't respect our traditions... Our people want the Shari'a.

Fatima If they want the Shari'a, they should go home. There, they can live as they please. It's Europe here.

Maria You don't want to agree that the Islamic world has values that are better than yours. Thus, there is no dialogue, no discussion.

Nurten If you have them, please show us. Let's measure up our values. Perhaps we'll like some of yours. Let's marry all these wonderful things... Perhaps we'll produce a child who's better than the two parents. For example, Nurten's hair and ass are sexier than mine but she's hidden them away like money under the mattress. Who can see and appreciate them? And in my case – bitte schön! (She raises the hem of the burka up to her waist and makes erotic movements). It may not be so precious but it's appreciated immediately.

Maria The Muslim girl covers her body so she can be appreciated for her mind, not her body. You've started showing off your navels and asses. And because of that no men want you. They want to be gay.

Nurten (Looks around her). Looking at me in this black priest's robe... If I was a man, I'd turn gay too. (She makes several characteristic gestures.) Hello guys.

Maria (Mockingly). You're culturally more advanced... Are you for multiculturalism? For identity?

Sarah So what's your identity, lass? The hijab and the long robe? Or the cut off clitoris? (She takes the hijab, ironed by Nurten, and ties it on her head. She looks like a caricature). Do you know that, before you, women in Byzantium wore scarves? And earlier – Sarah's Jewish predecessors did. And even earlier – my Thracian grandmothers did. I hand over to you a great academic discovery: the scarf was worn, is worn and will be worn in all places where the sun's motor overheats a little. A gift from me too. The Pope in Rome sees only women with their heads covered. The Archbishop of Novgorod has advised all righteous women in Russia to wear a scarf like yours. Be careful lest you take them for your cousins. Russian blessed orthodox fanaticism has only one cousin – the Islamic mufti in Copenhagen. He claims that if you don't wear a hijab, you're a candidate for rape. And before I finish, here's something more optimistic. In Afghanistan, this month, the Mujahadin have executed only a hundred women for not wearing the hijab – too few. And finally, for dessert: in a school in Istanbul, the only girls wearing the hijab were three Greek orthodox girls. A Saudi Arabian organisation paid their fathers for that. The same organisation is said to pay three Orthodox families in the Rodope Mountains for the same thing.

Scene 5

Darkness, war, the voices of Abdullah and Ali. Abdullah learns that his sister Fatima is pregnant and that Hairedin is the father. He decides to kill Hairedin and then he declares that he was killed by the enemy. Later he kills the moderate Ali too, who does not share his fundamentalist ideals.

Ali Abdullah...Your sister is pregnant.

Abdullah I beg your pargon?

Ali Nurten called me to tell me. May Allah forgive her! ...Abdullah, she isn't a good person... She isn't for you...

Abdullah I knew it. I was sure that he (Hairedin) destroyed her. Now I'll do the same to him.

Scene 6

In the students' room. Fatima is sitting up; Maria is sitting by her, embracing her. On the other side of the bed, Sarah is sitting.

Abdullah has travelled to the city where his sister lives and is now in the students' hall. He calls Fatima and Nurten (his sister and his fiancé) from his mobile asking them to come down from their room and get the punishment they deserve.

Fatima is sitting up; Maria is sitting by her, embracing her. On the other side of the bed, Sarah is sitting. They don't know what to do. They are frightened, knowing the cruelty of Abdullah. The Christian Maria, a karate champion, puts on a burka and decides to do down and meet Abdullah, hoping to knock him down. But a gunshot is heard after a while. The other girls run to help Maria, and then more gunshots are heard. They have paid with their lives

their right to make choices for their lives, or their eagerness to support their Muslim friends who dared do so.

Sarah Don't despair. We must act.

Maria Let's not panic. You're safe here.

Fatima There isn't a safe place. I must get away immediately.

Maria He's your brother. You'll get to terms with him.

Fatima He killed Hairedin. I know that. He promised it to me.

Sarah Stay in our room for a while.

Fatima It's my turn now. He promised it to me too.

Abdullah *(His voice comes after a telephone signal).* I know that you're in the room. I tell you for the last time. The three of you. Dressed in burkas, with your passports and all papers, no luggage. In three minutes, I'll be up there with you and...

Sarah And... Police report: Slain in their room by a Jewish and a Christian girl with whom they've been often seen. Case closed. Racism but not at public level.

Abdullah You have two and a half minutes left.

Maria How can we find out how many men are with Allah?

Hatije Obviously, only one. The rest of the seats in the car are for us.

Maria And why "no luggage"?

Hatije Because the car is stolen. There should be no trace left.

Maria What if there are more people in another car?

Hatije This is done with only one car. They should be able to get away from the police easily.

Sarah If the police follows them at all.

Abdullah Two minutes left.

Fatima Nurten, switch off your phone. I'll go down to speak with him.

Maria Are you crazy?

Sarah He doesn't want to speak to you, Fatima. If you refuse to get in the car, that's the end...

Fatima I'm two people. A lot of money... They won't make a mistake.

Abdullah A minute and a half.

Maria The burka! The burka! *(She takes it out of the wardrobe and puts it on.)* I wonder how I didn't think that there was only little Ahmed down there with Abdullah. A slow thinker.

Sarah Now, you've gone crazy. We're getting insane one after the other. I'm coming too. Give me a burka. I can kick and hit as well as you.

Maria You'll stay with them here. In case I miss accidentally...

Abdullah One minute.

Fatima Maria, you don't know him. He's as strong and fierce as a boar.

Maria I know some karate blows... And some little kicks... The human body has many places where there are no muscles... And there are vital arteries... Throats, groins, eyes, etc.

Fatima But they are two men!

Maria I've tried with three men. I have the highest-level belts. I've shown them to you.

Fatima I disagree. He surely has a gun. Nothing helps in that case. He shoots fast and never misses.

Maria Well, if you hear a shot... He's shoot me... But it'll be a good thing, the police will come immediately. Then there'll be a reason to arrest them.

Abdullah Half a minute.

Fatima *(Shouts).* Switch off that phone, Nurten.

Sarah Calm down. I have an idea. Let's go there all five of us. In burkas. By the time they find out who's who, the police will come. They wouldn't dare kill us all.

Hatije I say "yes"!

Nurten *(She has been sitting on the bed absent-mindedly with her head propped against the wall).* I shall go. We've loved each other since we were kids. He'll be moved...

Maria He'll kill you in cold blood, Nurten, if you don't marry him in your burka.

Nurten At least, I'll see him. *(She jumps up hysterically).* I want to see him. I want to see him.

Maria If, instead of a shot, you hear a car-horn three times, run down. We'll escape with their car. I love you.

Maria goes out. *The girls stay frozen. A shot is heard.*

Nurten *(Shouts)* Maria! *(She dashes out of the room and the other girls follow).*

More shots are heard. The sad, slow song, with which the play began, is heard.

Scene 7

The women-mothers realise that extreme behaviours bring about darkness and death for their children. They decide to remove the scarf from the sun – the sun belongs to all human beings, regardless of race, religion or any other differences between them.

First Woman Women, let's pull the hijab off the sun. We can't live that way.

Second Woman Our children have died in this darkness.

Third Woman I told you that the sun isn't to blame. It's our poverty and stupidity.

Fourth Woman Let's ask the Imam.

Fifth Woman Let's ask the Priest. The Priest.

First Woman Neither the Imam, nor the Priest!

Second Woman Let's ask our hearts, ladies! Our hearts.

All together The sun. The sun.

A newborn baby cries in the darkness.

Gradually, the stage is lit with bright sunlight. The five girls, the students, appear with bare heads and in long white dresses. They are the brides of the sun.

The End



HIJAB FRAPPE: The Greek play

Hijab Frapp  tells the story of three women living in Athens today. Azadeh, an immigrant, who recently arrived from Iran; Mary, a Greek Orthodox and a mother of two; and Anna, a Greek woman who has chosen to convert to Islam. What happens when they meet? Can religion shape relationships? Whose perceptions about oppression and freedom are false? The play was based on the experience of all women who took part in the workshops of ReconcArt.

The **summary** below was written by Shirin Youssefian Maanian.

Texts: Sofia Liakou, Maria Tsimou, Anna Makri, Aggi Kontou, Christina Mabger, Habiba Srij, Cleopatra Katsaragaki, Panayiota-Melia Pouri, Stella Mari, Athina Arseni, Shirin Youssefian Maanian

Script editing: Shirin Youssefian Maanian, Athina Arseni

Production: Alecton

Characters:

- Anna - Muslim convert
- Mary - Traditional Greek Christian
- Azadeh - Muslim immigrant from Iran
- Other roles: Aggi, Habiba, Cleopatra, Christina, Panagiota, Stella

Scene 1

Prologue: A definition of hijab is offered to the audience.

Cleopatra: Before the play starts...I thought it might be helpful, as most of you have no idea what it is, to explain EXACTLY what HIJAB is:
Hijab is
Mandila / Ferentze / veil / headscarf / chador / burqa.
It's obligatory / It's optional / It's the law.
You cover your hair / your whole body / you show your face and hands/
you cover even your face / you even cover your eyes.
Hijab is for me / for God / for my community / for my husband.
Hijab is a symbol / Hijab is not a symbol.
It's a duty / of every Muslim woman / and every Muslim man.
It's a sign of Faith / a sign of who I am / a sign of who I am not.
God will punish me if I don't wear it / God won't punish me if I don't wear it.
I don't need to wear hijab to be a Muslim.
It's to show I'm a Muslim / to hide I'm a woman / to hide I'm a person.
It's personal / it's political / it's spiritual.
It's liberation / it's protection / it's a mystery.
Great....so now that we all fully understand what the HIJAB is...we can start the play!

Scene 2

Video: Positive images of the Hijab turn to a montage of global chaos.... the twin towers, war, religious extremism etc. (Persian and rock music mix).

Scene 3

Image of Muslim woman performing daily Islamic prayer .

Scene 4

Azadeh's monologue:

Look at me. Who am I to you? What do you see? Muslim woman, veiled woman, foreign woman, oppressed, silenced, controlled, enslaved, one of many wives, extremist, fundamentalist, fanatic, terrorist, suicide bomber? No. Look at me. I am a person just like you. I love...I cry.... I laugh, sometimes I'm scared, I hurt... I believe in the same God that you do. Yes I look different...I wear a headscarf. I wish for the same things you do: love and brotherhood and sisterhood and peace. I long for it every day. I pray for it every day.
What do you see? Who am I?
Look at me. Look at me. Look at me.

Scene 5

Music and question: "Who is your God?"

The women give their answers as Christians, Muslims, and Atheists.



Scene 6

Mary's Picnic scene: Mary describes all the rules for her famous picnics. Only a few friends and immediate family, no one else is allowed to bring food, no relatives and MOST important of all... NO FOREIGNERS!

Scene 7

Bus stop 1: Mary and Anna.

Mary sees a woman in a headscarf at the bus stop and assumes she is a foreigner. She is shocked to discover that she is a Greek who has converted to Islam. All her prejudices emerge, especially when she finds out that Anna is also a schoolteacher. Finally the last straw for Mary is when Anna explains that she considers Islam to be more progressive than Christianity!

Scene 8

Music and question "What does the hijab mean to you?"

Choreography representing how different people view the hijab.

Scene 9

Bus stop 2: Mary and Azadeh.

Mary once more sees a woman in hijab at the bus stop. She angrily assumes she is again a Greek who has converted to Islam. She is happy to discover that she is a foreigner, from Iran...although she doesn't know exactly where that is! Finally she is overjoyed when it is explained that it is Persia...a wonderful ancient civilisation...just like Greece!

Scene 10

The first time I wore hijab: The women give one-line answers.

Scene 11

"When I first became Muslim". Everyone in Anna's life: her parents, neighbour, daughter, boss, best friend and even the kiosk owner treat her differently when she decides to convert.

Scene 12

GALLUP Phone poll: Mary, Anna and Azadeh.

The 3 women receive a phone call asking their opinions about foreigners and immigrants in Greece. Mary describes how the Greeks are gradually disappearing. Anna shows her comfort with immigrants and foreigners and Azadeh doesn't really understand any of the questions.

Scene 13

"The first day I arrived in Athens".

Azadeh describes how the first day she arrived in Athens from Iran, her husband Hassan left her alone for a minute. In the streets of Athens she is shocked by the sights and sounds: women's hair exposed, red lips, women and men kissing in the street, short skirts and stomachs showing....her conclusion? "I like it here!"

Scene 14

Mary is at home washing the floor and talking to her husband, Yannis. She describes how she yet again met a Muslim woman with hijab at the bus stop. As she tries to tell the story, her husband keeps interrupting her asking if she's ironed his shirts, if she has paid the bills, if the food is ready. She comments on how awful Muslim men are, keeping their wives at home and how oppressed poor Muslim women are. Finally she asks Yannis's permission to go on an outing with her girlfriends but she ends up just fetching his pills...and a glass of water.

Scene 15

Anna at home. Anna describes the everyday headache of wearing hijab: how it flattens her hair and gets make-up all over it. She recounts sadly how her mother hasn't spoken to her in 5 years and how she is worried about where she will be buried, as there is no cemetery for Muslims in Athens. "So where will they take me...to Turkey?!"

Scene 16

Music and question: "When was the last time you prayed?"

A choreography on prayer and the women respond to the question with answers from "10 minutes ago" to "When that big earthquake happened in Athens!"

Scene 17

The first time I wore hijab (Aggi).

Aggi describes how as a child she was so excited to get her first hijab, thinking she would finally be grown up



and look like her mother. She fantasised about scarves with tropical fruits and flowers on them. She is completely disheartened when she is finally given a boring pale green scarf. But then her mother kindly promises “Next time...it will be...fuchsia!”

Scene 18

Anna at the Coffee shop.

Anna loves going to coffee shops but people always stare at her. Why? Because the image of the hijab and the frappé don’t quite match. People are always bothering her and asking her questions. Why she became a Muslim, who will marry her now and why she doesn’t go to church any more?

Scene 19

Mary at Church.

Mary spends the whole time gossiping about everyone and everything. She says a special prayer for the little child of her Albanian neighbour and another prayer asking God for that little Fiat she’s had her heart set on!

Scene 20

Azadeh + Hassan.

Azadeh explains to her husband how important this new beginning is for them and that things are different now in Greece...that maybe they don’t need to show their Faith the way they had to in Iran. How she wants to learn Greek and how she longs for a Greek friend to drink her tea with. But... is Hassan even listening?

Scene 21

The first time I wore hijab (Cleopatra).

Cleopatra says that the first time she wore her hijab she cried. She describes the shock of seeing all her beautiful long hair covered and how sad she was to look just as bitter as her mother.

Scene 22

The first time I wore hijab (Stella).

Stella describes how she has beautiful hair and a beautiful neck, but these are only for her husband to see. It saves her from the unclean gaze of strange men. In her hijab she feels like she is under a protective umbrella. With her hijab she feels truly free!

Scene 23

The Red Stiletto – Mary is in her shoe shop and she describes how a woman dressed in a full black chador came in the other day and bought the red stiletto in the window. Her conclusion? That finally, they are women too!

Scene 24

The Hijab fashion show!

Scene 25

Music and question “Should religion dictate the laws of a country?”

All the women answer the question.

Scene 26

The first time I wore hijab (Azadeh).

Azadeh describes how the atmosphere was in Iran at the time of the revolution and how she was too young to really understand what it would mean for her and all the women in her country. Now there was no going back. Hijab was a political issue. It was THE LAW!

Scene 27

The first time I wore hijab (Anna).

Anna describes how she did an experiment by going to Athens airport to try on her first headscarf. She is surprised that she does not provoke any reaction in people although she does notice how they only seem to stop Muslims at the security gates...Finally she realises that she will have to remove her headscarf before she goes back home...well, what would the neighbours say!?

Scene 28

Azadeh and the gifts. Azadeh’s husband loves her very much and he buys her many gifts. But...each gift she opens is exactly the same....yet another headscarf.

“But I promised him,” she says finally giving in and wearing one of them. “They hide us behind a piece of fabric.”

Scene 29

The first time I **didn’t** wear the hijab - (Christina)

Christina describes how just 6 months ago her father told her that she had to remove it. She was being followed around and harassed in the street. After a while she got used to it and started to feel like the Greek girls at her school. “Daddy says that if my heart is pure I won’t be punished and I can still be a good Muslim...even without my hijab.” Now she can’t imagine wearing hijab again. When she has children she wouldn’t force her daughter to wear hijab! Christina ends by saying: “But when I get married, if my husband says I must...then of course I will!”

Scene 30

Anna and the bouzoukia! Anna calls her mother but her mother will not speak to her. Anna explains that she will take her children to her mother’s as she is finally going out tonight. Where to? The bouzouki club! Of course she won’t drink whiskey but why shouldn’t she go...just because she wears a headscarf? But she is still the same person! She finally has to hang up the phone as it is time for her prayers: “Yes mum...prayers and then...bouzoukia!!!”

Scene 31

Music and question: “Do you believe we can have a multicultural, multi-faith society in Greece?”

All the women answer the question.

Scene 32

Mary’s final monologue

Mary is preparing for her picnic and her friend calls saying that she wants to bring someone. BUT....Mary is shocked to find out that it is a woman from...IRAN!!! And she will bring her own food! Gradually Mary’s curiosity is aroused especially when she hears about the ingredients of the lovely Persian rice! “Hmmmm a new Iranian friend, why not?”

Scene 33

Anna’s mother calls.

After 5 years Anna’s mother finally calls her. She tearfully asks Anna to come to her house...that they should be together...spend Christmas and Easter together and of course her birthday. Anna is overjoyed! “Me too Mum...I love you too...”.

Scene 34

Azadeh’s wish...

Azadeh feels that everything has changed now...and she has to change too. She reminisces about her life in Iran, the picnics she would go on with her family and how she longs to have beautiful times in Greece too. She wishes for a Greek friend one day, who wouldn’t mind her being Iranian or a Muslim or even that she wears a headscarf. And maybe...one day her new friend might even invite her...on a picnic!

Scene 35

Final video + music: Mary’s picnic in a beautiful garden...she is then joined by... Anna and then Azadeh and one by one all the women of the group. They share food, talk and laugh!

The End



HIJAB. THE BORDER, WOMEN VOICES AND GLANCES BETWEEN THE HIDDEN AND THE SACRED WORLD OF THE VEIL: The Italian play

The play is focused on seven women, who represent all the women that took part in the workshops of ReconcArt. It is considered a prime example of Cultural Mediation; it indicates that Art can raise various questions about the nature of the borders and the changes in their perception, beginning from the border that each of us has inside of him/ her. The women have defined Hijab as: limit, identity, diversity, wall, and border. The scenes of the play represent glances of women and of the whole world. Those glances offer hospitality or keep us away, are forbidden or sought, glances beyond the border. Glances that oblige us to look inside us. A play that hosts the voice in different forms: sounds, poetic battles, songs, chatter, tales and different translations in several languages.

The **extracts** below were selected by Nadia Makridopoulou.

Texts: Susanna Bissoli, Letizia Quintavalla, Gabriel Maria Sala, Rosanna Sfragar
Director: Letizia Quintavalla
Production: AIDA Foundation
Characters: Jamila, Najat, Samar, Rosanna, Tuci, Susanna, Batul.

Getting closer to something different, we are forced to look inside us. The questions that we pose make us consider how we are made. I can't get closer to something vital for others without getting closer to something vital for me: in the stories of others ring again our own stories. But we should pay attention not to diminish the importance of things, because that way we eliminate them. It's in the differences that the gold shines.

PROLOGUE

The glance

Seven women sitting down in a row of chairs on the stage, they look at the audience coming into the theatre.

Scene 1

The Veil

Tuci: *(in Brazilian with some words in Italian)* One day in India in Old Delhi I was walking with my husband in a Muslim area and everybody was looking at me with a weird glance. I wore a scarf then in order to protect myself because I felt like I was nude. After one hour I asked my husband to go back to the hotel. Also in Senegal everybody looked at me, but it was a different glance.

Rosanna: In Morocco in the old Fez women were looking at me a lot.

Jamila: Maybe because of curiosity or...because you're beautiful!

Samar: *(firstly in Algerian dialect then in Italian)* I felt that some veiled women don't accept the women that are unveiled.

Susanna: *(reading one of her leafs)* "I don't like to be obliged by glances, by words. I like being able to defend myself. I protect myself by using my brain. The veil is something that covers me, and not something that protects me. I always kept thinking that men are those who make the laws for women as well, as they command" *(to audience in Veneto dialect)* L'ha dito Talia el 15 settembre.

Rosanna: One morning I was on bus n°33 with Fatima, who wears the Hijab, the long one; when another woman on the bus saw her, she made the sign of the cross and she turned around. *(she seems to go away, and then she comes back towards the public)* It also happened the next day as well.

Susanna: What does "Hijab" mean?

Jamila: *(in French):* It means border.

Batul: Door.

Tuci: Threshold.

Najat: *(in French):* Veil.

Samar: Wall.

Rosanna: Curtain.

Susanna: *(in Veneto dialect):* Ok, but what is the origin of this word, its root?

Batul: "Hijab" derives for the root "hjb" that means, "to hide the glance", to pull the curtain, to veil.

Susanna: *(in Veneto dialect):* What does "Hijab" mean to you?

Najat: It means the Islam morality, the discretion.

Jamila: To respect a limit.

Samar: *(she gesticulate with her hands)* it is a border.

Najat: As for me, the meaning of Hijab is first of all respecting yourselves and then to make you looked up by men.

Jamila: *(in Arab and Susanna translates in Veneto dialect):* When I was a girl in my town, Khemisset, in Morocco, the majority of the women did not wear the veil.

Najat: Now, in the Islamic world there is a return to veil. When we were young nobody has explained us that we should wear the veil. Nowadays there are new spiritual leaders who illustrate us the true meaning of the veil and its relation with Allah's love, chastity, faith and how to make the veil compatible with the society, without ghosts – constraint.

Jamila: *(in Arab and Susanna translates in Veneto dialect):* A woman I know decided to wear the veil when she was 40 years old, while she was watching a TV program about the Prophet's word.

Jamila: *(to Batul in Italian):* I know a 17-years-old girl that wears the veil together with blue jeans and tight t-shirts. She is a believer, but she only wears the veil to satisfy her parents' desire, and when she is at school she takes it off, otherwise she feels like she is isolated.

Najat: The veil is quoted within the Koran *(quotation in Arab from the Koran – sura 33,59 of the translation by Roberto Piccardo)*.

Batul: *(she translates the sura in Italian)* "Oh prophet tell your wives, your daughters and all women that believe to cover themselves with veils, in order to be recognised and not to be molested".

Najat: *(she pronounces another sura in Arab and then she translates it in Italian)*.

Najat: The veil is a religious duty, but also a personal choice within one's own path of faith.

Jamila: *(in Arab and Najat translates in Italian):* My mum wears the veil, I do not. Sometimes people ask me why I do not wear the veil. This question does not hurt me, but it is a difficult one, because



	it is intimate. I am sure that I just need to be pushed <i>(in Italian)</i> the veil for me is a not a finished letter yet, I still have to write it.
Scene 2	
The shawls	
<i>Group dance improvisation using their shawls. (Music: R. Aubry - “Invites” n.14).</i>	
Scene 3	
The night	
<i>(The night comes).</i>	
<i>Jamila:</i>	<i>(in Arab):</i> It is time for Khrāfa. The night is the most suitable moment for narrating stories.
<i>Rosanna:</i>	Khrāfa, in Arab means tale! It means fairy tale.
<i>Jamila:</i>	They are old tales. In each family there is a grandmother, doing absolutely nothing, so she dedicates herself to narrating. There is a special way used by elderly people for narrating tales, it leaves you dumbfounded. They are magic tales. These people put poetries and songs into their tales.
<i>Samar:</i>	I really need some healing words, I need them
<i>Everybody:</i>	Me too, me too, me too...
<i>Najat:</i>	<i>(In Arab):</i> Once upon a time there were a prince and a princess, they were in love. The princess’s brother didn’t like the groom and he took the princess away from him. So, the prince started looking for the princess, but her brother always kept her away from him with a magic spell. I remember when the prince turned into a bird and went to look for his princess. His love feeling was telling him that his beloved one was close, so he screamed, “Where are you? What are you eating?” She replied: “My dinner is.... and I sleep with the girls”. Another time she replied: “My dinner is barley and I sleep between donkeys”. It makes rime in Arab! This tale is fantastic <i>(she does not remember its end).</i>
<i>Rosanna:</i>	And then does he find his princess? What is the end of this tale?
<i>Najat:</i>	I do not remember the end. I always forget one part, it is my fate!
<i>Tuci:</i>	<i>(in Brazilian):</i> Do they get married? It is important to know the end!
<i>Najat:</i>	No. The end is not the most important thing. The good thing is that... <i>(All the women run to sit down around her).</i>
<i>Najat:</i>	The good thing about this story is how the two of them look for each other. <i>(Najat gets away from the group).</i>
<i>Susanna:</i>	<i>(in Veneto dialect):</i> When you migrate your stories remain unfinished. Only once you start telling them again you find the thread.
Scene 4	
The sky	
<i>Susanna:</i>	<i>(in Greek):</i> This is such a weird night! How come tonight there are no stars? I remember some starry nights in Greece!
<i>Rosanna:</i>	it is sure somebody is up there, because sometimes there are things falling from the sky.
<i>Susanna:</i>	It is because we are waiting for them! What did you get?
<i>Rosanna:</i>	A husband! What about you?
<i>Susanna:</i>	I do not know, I am still waiting...
<i>Susanna:</i>	I am waiting for the aliens! Do you know that in my classroom I had a classmate who had a button he used to talk with aliens. I was so jealous! Pause. Think, that in the meantime we are talking, sleeping, we are turning around. Do you know that you just have to go out of the orbit and you have nothing keeping you here?
<i>Rosanna:</i>	How fun is this! More than just fun! All this beauty, this night poetry, I am thinking who will be that for.
<i>Susanna:</i>	<i>(in Greek):</i> For women!
<i>Najat:</i>	<i>(in Arab)</i> The 27th night that changed my life.
	The veil is a duty, but, personally, I think that the veil is not an obligation, but in someway is faith that obliges you, not the people. Your life is no more in your hands, but in god’s ones.
	I saw things that sometimes I ask myself if I really did see them, if they are real. If I should tell them maybe nobody would believe what I say. I wanted to wear the Hijab.
	Look, if Allah loves you, He enlightens your way. I have always prayed and I looked for His blessing. I have kept on praying. Then came the Ramadan: the 27th day is really sacred. It is the night of the destiny, when paradise doors open and your sins are cancelled, in that night we start praying a lot. During that month there is no Satan. If you are not willing to pray, it is

	you that do not want to. In one night I cleaned up everything, I made a great purification of my home and my body and after my kids went to sleep I started praying “...” and I kept on praying, praying, praying, reciting some invocations “...”
	At a certain point I heard some voices praying with me, I was thrilled, I kept on sweating and on praying faster, until I became another person. I felt happy. What I received was bigger than expected... It was a great thing, like if I had taken off me a heavy thing, and after that I heard a feeling we all feel: ةنيكسلا the extreme quite, the peacefulness. From that day I could not get along without veil. It is a long story, I felt bad for a while, it was not so easy, it was a fight between compliance and resistance. It was 30 years since the last time I have worn a veil. It is difficult to wear it in another country, above all if other people know the way you were before... with all the existed difficulties I faced. When your faith rolls by, it becomes bigger and bigger and at the end you do this for Allah and you do not care about the people. I was alone, without the support of the people around me, not because they were not good people, but because they did not feel what I was feeling; they were committed to the real world, I was in another world, where words do not have meaning, but only thing matters is what you have inside you. Then something went wrong; I lost consciousness, but not the contact with Allah. I did not speak, I only recited the Koran, I was afraid to loose this contact with Allah, His confidence and love. When you love Allah, you are not sure if He accepts your love. When, instead, He loves you, you are afraid that you might not be able to reciprocate and to deserve His love.
	ألم يف يتركذ ناو يسفن يف كتركذ كسفن يف يتركذ نا مدآ نبا اي « دللا لوسر ينم تنود نا و هنم نسحأ ألم يف كتركذ ةلوره كتيأت يشمت ينتيتأ نا و اعاب كنم تنود اعارد ينم تنود ناو اعارد كنم تنود اربش
	I remember everybody staring at me, it was the first time I felt different. I did not sleep for 7 nights. Then I left for Morocco, three days by car. When I got home I slept. Did you understand what home is? The power of your own family is really big <i>(She calls the names of her family and hugs everybody).</i>
<i>Jamila:</i>	The way back from there to Italy is sad, because mum cries. Ten years ago, when I went to my home in Morocco for one month, the morning I had to leave, I woke up at two. It was dark. The neighbour that was going to bring me to the Casablanca airport was there. The car engine woke up all the neighbours that went to their windows to say goodbye. After 50 km on the highway we stopped to the motorway café. I opened the car door and on the ground I saw a “tasbihé” rosary. I saw a man with a djallaba and a long beard. Whose is this? He said: “Mine! Madam, do you pray?” “No, I do not” “Then, take it, it is yours, do what you are suppose to do.” He was not a person to me, but a letter, a sign. Nothing comes by chance. Since that day I pray. My grandmother, she was one who prayed, in Fourer’s house she stood on the balcony, looking <i>(everything was green, threes, plants)</i> and she prayed, prayed, prayed, she always prayed. Instead with my children, I do not know... they come from a mixed wedding. My husband is Italian, even if he converted to Islam.
Scene 5	
The wedding	
<i>Jamila:</i>	Batul, how many suras do you know?
<i>Batul:</i>	Me? I know 20 of them, and I have one I want to tell you: “Of everything we created a couple, this way you can reflect on that” <i>(quotation from the Koran, LI, 49).</i>
	Before Islam, when a man was born everybody was happy, when a girl was born it was a disgrace. It was a punishment, a chastisement, a disaster, and everybody was ashamed about it, at the point that some came to even bury the alive females. Allah on the Koran says: “How horrible is their way to judge” <i>(quotation from the Koran, XVI, 59).</i>
<i>Batul:</i>	<i>(walking around Jamila)</i> “The most perfect believer in faith is the best of you because of his temper and because he treats women in a good way”, the Prophet said <i>(at-Tirmidi)</i> . In Syria, when a boy wants to find a girlfriend most of the time he asks his mum to mediate for him. If he likes a woman, his mum goes to ask her mum to tell that to her daughter. If the two of them fall in love, they get engaged; otherwise the girl’s mum goes to tell his mum her daughter is not interested. Maybe they already know and they like each other. So everything is fine. Sometimes they do not know each other; they have heard things about each other.
<i>Jamila:</i>	Do you want to find a husband?

Batul: Yes I do!

Jamila says something into Batul's ear and she starts laughing.

Jamila: It is feasible. It is feasible. Although, we need your parents' approval.

Batul: Do you have somebody in mind?

Batul: To us, today, it seems a traditional way to find one's "soul mate" ... But, if you think about it well, what is the difference between finding a boyfriend.

Scene 6

The roots

Rosanna: Are you Christian?

Tuci: Nao ebrei.
No Jewish.

Rosanna: So it was the Jewish Easter?

Tuci: Until I was in Brazil, I did not take into account the "problem" of being Jewish, in Brazil I had friends coming from every country and nobody was worried about asking, if you were Catholic or Jewish. In Europe, instead, when I say that I am Jewish I find two different reactions. Oh, "are you Jewish?" And suddenly comes the silence.

Susanna: *(drawing an horizontal line with her hand translates):* Chill!

Tuci: This situation makes me feel uncomfortable, in both cases.

Susanna: *(translating in Veneto dialect)* She does not like either of them.

Tuci: Mi sentia fora do lugar.
It makes me feel out of place.

She takes a little stone from her sieve and she throws it on the floor.

Batul: You could say you were Brazilian.

Tuci: Indeed, this is what I did. For many years I did not dare mentioning I was Jewish. Now, I just started again to tell it.

Batul: What is your surname?

Tuci: Schieber. *Schieber*. My dad's family was Austrian, Jewish. Schieber, it seems German. That is also something I do not really like, with all that happened in Germany.

Batul: Are you married?

Tuci: Yes I am married with an Italian man.

Rosanna: Is he Jewish, too?

Tuci: No he is not, he is Christian. He is not a regular churchgoer.

Rosanna: You really broke the tradition.

Tuci: Yes, but my mum and dad already broke it, in a different way, this happened because my mum was Arab Jewish, while my dad was European Jewish. So my mum is Shepard, while my dad is Ashkenazi, ... I

Najat: Are you religious?

Tuci: On my own way. *(In Brazilian)* I have my own spirituality. My grandparents, they were strong believers; they were the ones who owned the candles. Instead, my dad is really scientific, I do not believe in anything. My mum is such a religious person, although is difficult to say in what she believes in.

Scene 7

The father

Rosanna: How was for you when your dad decided to come to Italy?

Samar: How did your father take it?

Najat: I did not come alone to Italy, I followed my husband. Let me add one thing: if I could choose to leave home I would have gone to London to finish my studies. I just needed his signature for asking a visa, but nothing could be done. In that moment, I felt really hurt, because I wanted to keep on studying and becoming independent. It was difficult for me, but it is always part of the united family pride, the Arab family pride. Despite this, my dad has always been on my side. We are nine children, but he never let me think that I was different from the other eight. One time, when I was eight years old, he bought me a yellow dress and he told me: there were just two of them, one was taken by the king for the queen, the other one is the one I bought for you.



Scene 8

The mother

Jamila: (in Arab while Batul translates). Once upon a time there was a beautiful woman, more beautiful than I am: she had clear skin, big eyes... she was really beautiful. She got married very young. She was flat- chested, she was still a baby, but at that time this was the tradition. She had eight children. She has always been working hard. She did not talk a lot, not like me, she was really shy, so shy that instead of asking for a glass of water she kept on being thirsty. She was well-mannered, kind, gentle and good. Do you know who is she? (whispering) She was my mum!

Scene 9

The caress

Najat cherishes Samar and Susanna's heads leaned on her lap.

Samar: When I go back home they tell me my voice is changed.

Najat: Why?

Samar: The tone, the words are no more the same. I realised it also on the phone. My family told me that my voice was no more like it used to be, I think it is changed because of all my numerous weeping. I cried without talking, I cried and I did not speak, I cried so much I could make music. Only when I sing I like my voice, instead when I speak in Arab my voice is more masculine.

Najat: Samar, what are missing?

Samar: My childhood, playing, the river, Milud, my family, my sister's house, my district, the straight street that started from the city where I studied and was taking me to the city centre, where I was born, where my parents live and where the river I love a lot is...

Najat: What did you get in exchange?

Samar: I learnt to suffer.

Scene 10

The “here” and “there”

Susanna: (She reads a page of Jamila's diary): 17th January 1990. It is a week that I am here. In this place trees are without leaves and the dark comes early. It is cold and down the road there is nobody, it is all empty!

On Sunday my brother told me:

“Today we live like kings too, we will go for a walk like Italians do!”

I put on my nice green dress, the one I brought from Morocco and my ballerina flats...

Jamila: (interrupting): Do you remember ballerina flats? Those really lights shoes...

Susanna: (keeps on reading): We went out. Somebody has told me that in Italy it was as hot as in Morocco. Instead, here it is freezing; with my light shoes I could not feel my feet anymore...

I came back crawling and when they saw me arriving they even made fun of me. I will never go out again. Here everybody looks sad, they find difficult to greet you and they are always in a rush.

Jamila: In my country I am used to greet everybody (she greets).

Rosanna: It depends; Italy is not the same everywhere. For example, once, when I was in a supermarket in Naples, I sneezed and although there were several shelves covering me, ten people wish me: “Bless you!” Italy is not the same everywhere.

Jamila: (in Arab and Rosanna translates in Italian): Anyway, I desire to be buried there where I was born, close to my family, in Morocco.

Collective action of coming and going in the different languages.

EPILOGUE

The mirror

Imagine a group of women in a path. Imagine a big world. There is the sea, the desert, the land, the mountains, the villages and the cities. There are camels, trains, donkeys, cars, horses, planes, bicycles, carts and scooters. The dust and the sun, palms and the green forest, the red land, the golden land, the brown land, the white land. The fog, the rain, the burning sun. The Po Valley. All of them answer to an invitation, the invitation to cross the horizon and to sail inside the border into the worlds. Each one of these women brings with her, the house steps, the dark before falling asleep, the full houses, and the empty houses. The boat sails slowly, sails fast, goes far away and becomes smaller and smaller. There is no aim, just the horizon.

The End

PART 4. The Reconcart conference

CONFERENCE REPORT

The project was presented on 15th May 2009 in Athens in a conference, in Athinais Cultural Centre. The conference formed part of the two-day Cultural Event, which comprised also the performance of the three theatre plays and the showing of an exhibition devoted to the use and meaning of the veil and headscarf through the ages.

Noted journalists, activists, academics, European politicians as well as theatre writers and directors presented their views on the meanings and functions of the Muslim hijab today, delving into the symbolism and socio-political role of this garment, which carries behind it notions of a religion, a culture and a political stance. The presentation and the discussion that followed highlighted important issues relating to tolerance, freedom of expression and multiculturalism.

The first session of the conference was devoted to the presentation of the project activities. Fouli Papageorgiou, project coordinator, gave an overall view of the aims, objectives and results of the project. Then, Gabriel Maria Sala, Kiril Topalov and Shirin Maanian Youssefian presented the results of the creative expression workshops and the play-writing in the three participating countries, Italy, Bulgaria and Greece respectively, making comments with a wider significance too.

Gabriel Maria Sala, Professor of Cultural Mediation at the University of Verona, took a philosophical look at society's attitude to the culturally different, the “other”, and then wondered about society's approach to faith and the often encountered conflict between secular institutions and religion. In such institutions, religion becomes visible as bearing political meaning linked to conflict. He gave the example of France where the recent events brought hijab to the forefront. Thus hijab has been transformed from something that covers to something that reveals - an act that symbolises a religious and cultural identity, a border that a woman places around her to protect her faith. The women who took part in the workshops tried to transcend this border, through narrations of their personal histories.

Professor Kiril Topalov of the Academy of Balkan Civilisation in Sofia, writer of the Bulgarian play “Hijab under the sun” noted the multidimensional nature of the hijab, stressing the need to learn to be more perceptive and open to other people's beliefs. One of the characters of his play, at one point advocates that openness can make our world a better place. The speaker gave an overview of the history of the Muslim community in Bulgaria, to highlight the particularities of the contemporary standing of this community and the role that hijab plays in reasserting their cultural and political rights.

Shirin Youssefian Maanian, a peace activist and actor-director, of Iranian descent, now living and working in Greece, described how the characters that appear in the play she facilitated, edited and directed “Hijab Frappe”, challenge some of society's fundamental assumptions and prejudices. Are Muslim women really the only oppressed ones? Can coercion transcend religion? Are contemporary societies ready to accept and respect the cultural differences among their members? The speaker voiced her optimism that this is not impossible and gave example from the workshop activities, which showed that women of different cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds could develop a common understanding and a common language, using art as a medium, but also common sense, friendship and humour.

The second session of the conference focused on the theme “The hijab in public life”, offering the floor to two invited speakers, Anna Karamanou and Takis Kampylis.

According to Anna Karamanou, former Member of the European Parliament, multiculturalism is a key issue that needs to be addressed. The migratory wave of the past decades is unprecedented, making the EU member-states more diverse. The transition from a society with a linguistic and religious homogeneity to a multicultural one has changed the picture. It is also known that people tend to fear change and as a result of that we witness the birth of ethnocentric, xenophobic policies in current European affairs. In 2004 the French Parliament voted the ban on the hijab and other religious insignia, despite the critique that such actions limit religious freedom. The French government tried to keep religious fundamentalism out of schools, and in essence tackle the problem of the increasing number of young women wearing headscarves at schools and universities. In many other European countries there is mistrust towards the wearing of the hijab: it is indicative that the former foreign secretary of UK Jack Straw requested that Muslim women who came to visit him in his office remove the headscarf. For most Europeans, the hijab symbolises the subordination of women to archetypes relating to patriarchy and are not prepared to endorse the efforts of some Islamic leaders to interpret their faith in a way that demands blind obedience of women to religious rules and control of their sexuality. The speaker wondered how is it possible to accept the “other” and his/her value system when this clashes with the world-wide accepted human rights and fundamental freedoms.

But what makes an educated Muslim woman living in a western society wear the hijab? Journalist Takis Kampilis addressed this question to a Muslim woman who lived in Greece. Her response was that wearing the hijab makes a personal statement: it can liberate women, as they alone choose to whom they will show their availability. This was paralleled to the findings of a recent survey in Germany conducted among female university students of Turkish origin, who chose to wear the hijab as a protest against the prejudice connecting the hijab with poverty and lack of education. The speaker wondered what was the message carried forward. He paralleled the symbolic meaning of the hijab to that of a national flag, both of which are cultural symbols which instead of creating a collective feeling, divide people to “us” and “them”, thus emphasising the differences between individuals or nations. The speaker also wondered whether the hijab is used by educated women to hide behind it their inability –and lack of wish- to integrate in a western society. We can see many common points here between this approach and the tactics that made Christianity a dominant religion: the exploitation of women, within a powerful patriarchal model of family and society.

The third session of the conference was devoted to the “Contemporary debate around the Muslim hijab: can art function as the medium of cultural reconciliation?” A round table was held, drawing its members from the artistic and literary community, academia and NGOs.

Artist Nefeli Kontarini and poet Kostas Kartelias dwelled upon the issue of reconciliation and the importance of art in achieving it, because art and literature operate at the very basic human level, where there is no prejudice, and cultural differences are welcome and enriching. Composer, theatre director and NGO representative (International Theatre Institute-ITI) Thodoris Abazis reiterated the reconciliatory role of art in resolving cultural and social differences in contemporary communities, stressing that the ITI-Greek Branch, took an active interest in the project and participated in it because they believe that contemporary theatre can have a role in breaking down prejudices and promoting understanding and tolerance amongst people.

Maria Stratigaki, Associate Professor of Social and Political Science at Panteion University of Athens presented the two conflicting arguments regarding the ban on the hijab in France, associated with the 2nd and 3rd “currents of thought” in the feminist tradition. On the one hand, feminist and women’s organisations supported the ban, as it facilitated young women to reject the hijab and at the same time it provided them with an argument to confront their parents. According to the speaker, the equality of the sexes is a multidimensional notion that encompasses all facets of social reality, including insignia and clothes. The hijab, by covering women’s head, contributes to their obscurity and degrades their status as citizens. The counter-argument is expressed by some other feminist organisations, claiming that the ban on the hijab could lead to polarisation. For instance, parents might use the ban as an alibi to prohibit their young daughters to continue their education. Thus, according to this view, whether a woman decides to remove the hijab or not should be the consequence of her emancipation.

The discussion that followed brought up some heated issues, mainly supported by the Muslim delegates. A leader of a Muslim organisation in Greece voiced her reservations towards some views expressed by speakers, who took as a valid model only the one associated with the European, Christian morality and culture, ignoring that Islam is very different culturally and ideologically. The debate that followed brought forward the issues of gender equality, political symbolism of the hijab, freedom to choose one’s own attire, emancipation of Muslim women and the rights of Muslims living in European countries, including Greece. As a conclusion, there was agreement that the religious rights of Muslims should be respected, in the same way as those of other religious minorities; and that the custom of hijab is tightly connected with gender issues and the position of women in contemporary societies. The latter is, however, perceived differently not only between the Christian and Muslim communities, but also within the Muslim community itself.



PART 5. Exhibition

Shield and Symbol. From the Ancient Veil to the Hijab

Over the centuries, women’s head coverings have indicated their social and economic status, their religion, their faith or their place of residence. Depending on their form, various coverings (*calyptras*) have been used as symbols of chastity, mourning, faith, loyalty, modesty, economic prestige, elegance, tradition or cultural identity. Today, head coverings have either a protection function or serve as a religious symbol, as is the case with Islam.

Ancient Greek women covered their body and if necessary their head with a veil, as shown in representations on ceramics and in sculptures. While the veil was most commonly worn by brides at weddings, it was also used as a sign of mourning at funerals, as a means of protection from the sun and as an elaborately decorated status symbol on official occasions.

In the Byzantine era, manuscripts and frescoes reveal that women’s headdresses were influenced initially by the luxury of the East and later by the West. Various types of head coverings appeared, such as *fakioli* (*kerchief*), mitres, blinds, nets, turbans, bonnets and veils, which were worn with elaborate jewellery - *lithokollitos*, *lithovlitos*, *porfyreon* - depending on the manner in which they were decorated.

Ordinary women commonly wore a long cloth (akin to the veil of the ancients) called a screen, *kridemnon* or *calyptra*, which covered the head and part of the body and was identical to the maforio of the Virgin Mary.

The Christian religion originally advocated that women cover their heads every day. In his first letter to Corinthians, Apostle Paul stated that a woman “should pray to God with her head covered”. With time, the headscarf prevailed only in “women who had devoted themselves to God”, such as nuns, while in certain cases it was used during church functions by women in Russia, Spain and some Balkan countries.

In the medieval Western world, married upper-class women generally covered their hair with veils, scarves, nets and bonnets called *kaperounia*. Single women, on the other hand, mostly left their hair uncovered. The same trends, with different permutations, prevailed in the regions of Europe according to their economic welfare and social class for many centuries. The main purpose of these trends was to convey social differences; this often resulted in excessive displays, such as impressively tall hats. In the Renaissance period, women used a simpler, almost homogeneous head covering. Conversely, in subsequent centuries, laces, bonnets, hats and veils adorned or covered complicated hairdos (as in the case of the impressive *fontaz*) according to the fashion trends followed by local communities.

The rise of Protestantism brought substantial changes in women’s head coverings, since this religion advocated a simple appearance and expected women to wear a simple cap, as opposed to the ornate styles preferred by Catholic women.

In Greece, many elements of head coverings date back to ancient times and the Byzantine era. In Crete, for example, head coverings appear in 14th- and 15th-century religious paintings, in which women wear *turbans* or *tambourines*, *caps*, *fakiolia* or *nets* according to the customs of the era. Later, similar types were used only in bridal dress, while the traditional Cretan costume mostly retained a headdress which was made of gossamer cloth and thrown on the shoulders. “Synaxario for Noblewomen”, a 17th-century text by an anonymous author, called the head covering *skepi*, while it was referred to as *magnia* in “Erotokritos” and as *bolia* in “Fortounato”. The same object that traveller Tournefort describes as “women’s head coverings worn as veils, and falling on the shoulders with grace”, is described by Thomas Santhouith as featuring “lace on the seams”. In earlier times, depending on the region they lived, women wore similar headdresses, such as *krousates*, *gazes*, *chrysobolies*, and *argyrobolies*, as well as the everyday *bolia* for agricultural chores.

In traditional Greek society, women’s head coverings varied according to their place of residence, their social status, their activities, their appearance and their station in life. Thus, a single woman’s head covering was different from that of a married, in confinement, elderly or widowed woman. Of particular note is the wedding headdress which symbolised the transition to a new situation and was prepared according to a specific ritual. The infinite types of head covering combinations include *kerchiefs*, *scarves*, and *bolies* - monochrome or multicoloured, light or dark, printed or embroidered with plant, animal, or geometric patterns, featuring simple finishes or lace and bibbles, festive or for everyday use. Hence the couplet:

*Forty armlengths your bolia
and sixty your hair...*

*One bolia, one golden bolia is sold in the bazaar
and has the weft of gold and warp of silver.*

*The little kerchief you are wearing is ripping my heart,
when you dance, vlacha, you look like a butterfly.*

Greek literature often bears references to head coverings, either as a symbol of mourning: *“Nerantzi knitted... Her dark face, tense in the black scarf, was melting of heartache... Zina’s mourning outpouring from her heart... She took the shells of pomegranates, boiled a caldron and dyed them black... Her clothes... headscarves...”* writes Stratis Myrivilis in Panayia (Madonna) the Mermaid»,

or as mementoes: *“She would have drowned. I saved her. I took her into my arms and saved her. I would rather have died at a stroke at that time. She called me names. But she left me the red scarf. Now, I will lay it on the pillow every night and sleep”.*

The great social and economic changes, such as the industrial revolution and urbanisation that occurred in the Western world in the 20th century, gave women financial independence, along with new roles, a new lifestyle and a new pace, with the result that their dress habits also underwent a fundamental change. Following the requirements of their new life, women began to adopt modern fashion instead of continuing to use local costumes. Traditional dress, which was time consuming and costly to make and particularly unsuited to women’s new daily obligations, was given up. In parallel, women uncovered or covered their heads with more modern accoutrements according to specific aesthetic rules. With fashion dictating that women adorn their head with elongated scarves, turbans, feathers, hats and ribbons, traditional head coverings began to disappear. Hats, caps and scarves remained the necessary accessories of feminine beauty and elegance until the middle of the century.

After the war, the classic square silk scarf known as the “travel carré” scarf, made its appearance as a symbol of prestige and style. All famous modern women, including Grace Kelly and Jackie Onassis, took care to be seen and photographed wearing the scarf, which they saw as a symbol of the modern era - an era of simplicity and practical dress. The most famous scarf maker of the time, Hermès, stated in advertisements: “you can wear it as you wish” and noted “a square (Hermès scarf) always tells a story; it is bequeathed from mother to daughter and from grandmother to granddaughter”. This classic type of square scarf is timeless, used from generation to generation for aesthetic and practical purposes.

During the 1960s, in Greece, head coverings inspired by traditional costumes came back into fashion, along with a trend advocating a return to the roots. After several decades of disuse, *headscarves*, *kerchiefs*, *bolies*, *yiazmas*, *yemeni*, and *fakiolia* - whether festive or for everyday use, painted, printed or embroidered - reappeared in modern women’s wardrobes, where they remained for approximately two decades. Short or long scarves in silk or cotton, tied into skilful knots, covered women’s hair and drew attention to their face. Along with this trend came a release of women’s hair from the hairdos of the period, such as buns, bananas and plaits, among others.

In the 21st century, fashion begins to rebel and break all rules, often recycling itself. Yet designers do not abandon the elaborate headscarves which modern women wear in various ways according to their specific needs and desires. Women decide when and how to use them - to show reverence, to protect themselves from the sun and cold, to highlight their wardrobe, to mourn, to express something, because they’re useful, because they like it, because it is their choice.

For Muslim women the headscarf is a symbol of religious devotion, and has at the same time social, cultural and political meanings. For their majority, wearing the hijab - a cloth covering the hair, ears and neck - is a matter of faith and tradition, and sometimes even a political statement. Most non-Muslims, however, perceive the hijab - and even more the burqa, chador or niqab (a headscarf that also covers the face) as the ultimate symbol of discrimination against women in Muslim societies.

In the past few years, the hijab has become increasingly popular among Muslim women, sparking a debate on human rights, law and social values. Young, educated women have taken to wearing the hijab, thus protesting against the “oppression” of Western image models. For such women, wearing the traditional headscarf represents faith, heritage, honour, femininity, and sometimes even comfort; hence, many of them have strongly opposed decrees banning the hijab. The feminist movement is divided upon this point: on the one hand it is accepted that Muslim women have the right to dress as they wish and define their social and cultural identity; on the other hand, it is recognised that the primary function of hijab is that of a medium of oppression and subjugation of women, undermining their professional, social or political role outside the family.

In the confrontation between Islam and the West, the hijab has gained a new meaning as a medium of resistance to the West and a return to Islamic roots. Fundamentalist Islamic groups, even governments of Islamic countries, regard the shunning of the hijab by Muslim women as an affiliation to Western values and a betrayal of Islamic traditions. Thus, the issue of wearing the hijab is entangled within a cultural and political controversy, which affects Muslim women - regardless of their desire to wear the hijab or not.

The exhibition *“Shield and Symbol. From the Ancient Veil to the Hijab”* attempts to highlight, through the eyes of the artists, the two issues that have been discussed above: on the one hand the continuity over time, the universality, the symbolisms and the messages that pervade head coverings through the ages in Europe and in the Hellenic culture; and on the other hand the controversy and conflict that permeate the perceptions of hijab both in western societies and in Islamic countries. Moreover, through the eyes of the artists we are confronted with images of the hijab as a symbol of the political and cultural debate surrounding it; and as evidence of the inner psyche, tradition, honour, devotion, faith, but also alienation, imprisonment of mind and body, isolation, subjugation of women.

Artists taking part in the exhibition

Io Angeli, Velissarios Voutsas, Vassilis Vrettos, Irene Gonou, Sotiris Danezis, Savvas Dimos, Apostolis Zolotakis, Iris Zoric, Evi Kazakou, Konstantina Katrakazou, Nefeli Kontarini, Harris Kondosphyris, Kalliroi Marouda, Panos Mitsopoulos, Maria Deverikou, Akis Peirounidis, Theophano Saramanti, Maria Schina, Eleni Tzantzos, Elena Charou.



Athinais, 15-16 May 2009



Alektion, 7-14 May 2009



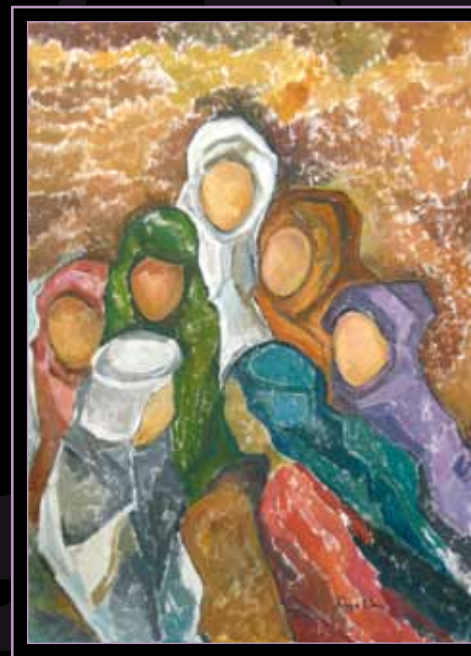
Irene Gonou / Ειρήνη Γκόνου
"Hijab I, II, III, V", 2008- 2009
arabic calligraphy gouache
on wasli paper, 15x21 cm
each (approx.)



Konstantina Katrakazou /
 Κωνσταντίνα Κατρακάζου
"Truth non-truth
assimilated evolve into
smoke", 2006, mixed
media, pencil, pastel,
photograph, 70x100 cm



Akis Pirounidis /
 Άκης Πειρουνίδης
"In waiting", 2008,
acrylic on canvas, 160x120 cm



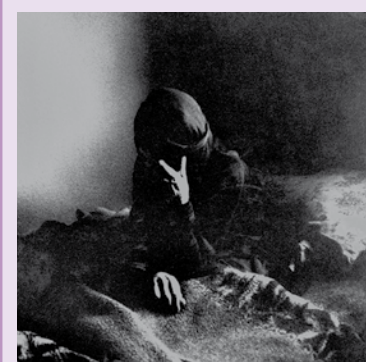
Elena Charou /
 Έλενα Χάρου
"Whispers", 2009,
oil on canvas, 40x60 cm



Kalliroi Marouda /
Καλλιρρόη Μαρούδα
*"The aunt with the white scarf",
1984, pencil on paper,
20x30 cm*



Savvas Dimos /
Σάββας Δήμος
*pin for headscarf,
2009, silver*



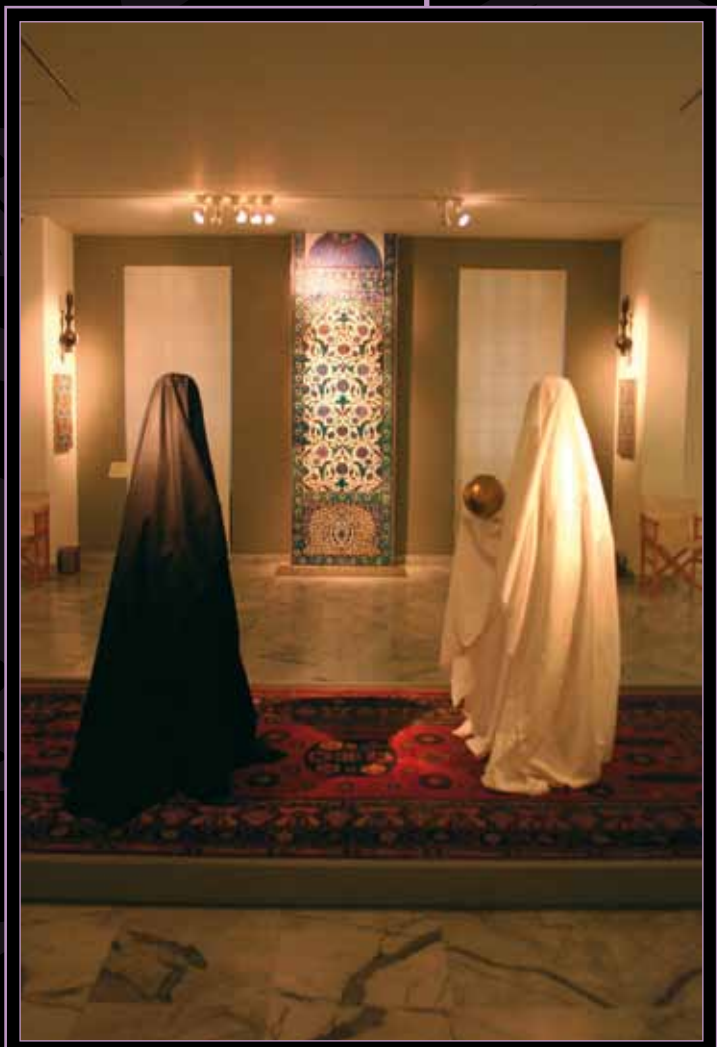
Apostolis Zolotakis /
Αποστόλης Ζολοτάκης
*Untitled, 1982,
composition of photographs
(25x25 cm each)*



Harris Kondosphyris / Χάρης
Κοντοσφύρης
“The veil of despotism” 2009,
black pen on
paper, 41x50 cm



Iris Zoric
“Winner, Fighter”, 2006,
silkscreen print,
50x50 cm



Nefeli Kontarini / Νεφέλη Κονταρίνη
material (in video) from the exhibitions
“Two eyes only...” in Benaki Museum-Islamic Art
Annex (2008) and “The historic tradition
of the image over time” Pazar-Hamam, Thessaloniki,
2006 and Bath of Aerides, Museum of Folk Art,
Ministry of Culture, 2007



Panos Mitsopoulos /
Πάνος Μητσόπουλος
“Burqa”, 2007,
mixed media, 25x25 cm



Io Angeli / Ηώ Αγγελή
Untitled, 2009, mixed media
 40x50 cm



Velissarios Voutsas /
 Βελισάριος Βουτσάς
"Woman from Karpathos",
 2006, photograph



Maria Deverikou /
 Μαρία Ντεβερίκου
"Persistence", 2007,
 mixed media, 120x80 cm

Maria Schina / Μαρία Σχινά
"Headscarf", 2009, video





Sotiris Danezis /
Σωτήρης Δανέζης
"Muslim women in Iran",
2005, photograph



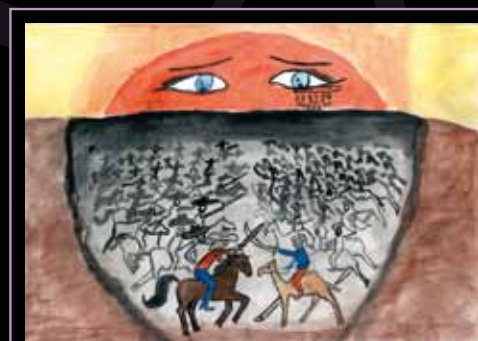
Greek workshop "Tree"
collage of individual
participants' artworks,
tempera on paper, Athens,
2008, 75 x 180 cm



Velissarios Voutsas /
Βελισάριος Βουτσάς
"Pomak woman", 1995,
photograph



Vassilis Vrettos / Βασίλης Βρεττός
"Muslim woman of Xanthi", 2007,
photograph, photographic archive
of Benaki Museum



Bulgarian workshop,
3 variations on the theme of
the "The sun is for everybody"
pencil on paper, pen on paper
and aquarelle on paper, Sofia,
2008, 25 x 30 (max.)



