

## 2<sup>nd</sup> TRANSNATIONAL WORKSHOP PRESENTATION

### The Hijab Affair

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The Euro-Asiatic people and nations are close one to each other (they have the same origins) and for this reason they go through almost the same stages of historical development; the problem is that they go through it at different moments. Their tragedy is based on the fact that one nation's historical development doesn't coincide with the historical development of the others. So that is how the cultural and political clashes between countries due the incomprehension or the misunderstood ideals happen.

These problems can be attested very clearly in the "affair of the hijab"-as people call now the "problem" with the girls who wear the hijab. Until recently the hijab had not been a problem. Wearing a hijab became a problem in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a problem which has not been resolved until this moment. Of course as with every problem there is more than one point of view.

The Moslem countries which have a pro-European policy are trying to eliminate the hijab. Why? Because according to the European and pro-European opinion the hijab symbolizes the submission of the woman to the man. This "injustice" contradicts the most important ideals of our time- that of freedom and equality which are the only conditions for development and progress.

It is difficult to understand the Arab word hijab, because the Koran and the Hadiths are written in an old Arabic language and in some places the translation cannot be exact. One school of thought is that "hijab" descends from the word hajaba which means "to hide". The word hijab thus takes also the meaning of "curtain", "screen". The semantic field corresponding to this word is broader than for the English equivalent "veils" which includes *to protect* or *to hide*, but does not *to separate*.

It is, however, important to remind that veiling is not specifically a Moslem practice. It is practiced in other cultural and religions too. Its principal purpose is to mark the social differences, respect, and holiness. According to the Sourate 24 An-Nûr, the meaning of the hijab is that men and women are free and chaste. The used word is khimar. According to the references of the Arab language, the khimâr, synonymous with nasîf is "what covers the head". The rules for clothing are also mentioned in some of the hadiths: "All the body of the woman must be "awra (hidden) except her hands and her face" (Brought back by Bukhari). Multiple Western attempts have been made in the name of modernity to point at the need to remove the veil in order to attain civilization -of course European civilization.

In Turkey and Iran, the *un-veiling* was imposed at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and of the Shah of Iran, who saw the adoption of the Western behaviour as a sign of modernisation. Atatürk even promulgated a decree that prohibited the veiled women to enter university. Many are the cases of girls who were expelled from their faculty because of their clothing.

In Tunisia, Habib Bourguiba prohibited polygamy, promulgated a law which deprived the fourth child of a family of all its rights (of heritage and social assistance) and also prohibited the wearing of the veil in public administration and strongly advised women against covering with a veil in public places. The decree 108 of 198, prohibited the wearing of the veil in the publicly-owned establishments with the risk, for employees, to be laid off. The text was created to bar the road to integrism. The Tunisian authorities prevented the students of the university campus of Tunis and other university cities, to reach their faculties to sit for end-of-year exams, for the simple reason that they wore the veil.

In Morocco, with the advent of independence, King Mohammed V, father of King Hassan II, asked his own daughter to take off the veil in a public place, as a symbol of the women's release. After that the King Mohammad VI began a great struggle to change the sharia law in Morocco, and give more freedom to women and also to prohibit polygamy (on this last he didn't succeed). The King of Jordan Abdullah VI began a legislative movement for the modernization of the country.

The Moslem countries that I have quoted arrived at this point at a time when the society was ready for modernization. But why is this modernization so difficult? Of course because there are many obstacles. One of them and the most dangerous is integrism or fundamentalism.

Fundamentalism is a term which appeared in the last 20 years of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. from the Protestants of America. It means "to turn over towards the foundations, the bases of the religions". Fundamentalism started spreading over the world during the 1970's. In those years both socialists and capitalists contributed to the beginning of a world economical crisis and a major ideological change. Same as the destruction of hopes invested in the future, and the spreading of skepticism everywhere. This was transferred to the societies of the Third World, by what has become a mobilizing myth: the modernization.

However this modernization has not been a myth. It has induced over the past three decades enormous social changes: disintegration of the rural communities, change of the traditional family boundaries, the respective place of the women, the man and the child. These changes shook the individuals' identities in their deepest bases. Social nature is terrified when there is emptiness. If you remove faith, what remains to you in the future? The past naturally. And the past for societies which have just entered in the modernization (the technical westernism) is the religion, the religious traditions.

If someone imposes a change in the political system of a country, a crisis is inevitable. Imagine the crisis which could be provoked if somebody tries to impose the political or the cultural system of his country to another- as the Europeans and the Americans have been doing and still do, consciously or not. This is a crisis of identities and in a crisis everybody is always extreme. Add to this crisis of identity the stage of development of some countries which are still in their time of conquest and you will obtain the fundamentalists, extremists, islamists. These movements are the biggest obstacles for the the evolution of all Moslem countries.

Perfect example is the revolution in Iran which brought back the country three decades, the regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, the extremists in Saudi Arabia. These fundamentalist movements are obstacle for the development of their own countries but their influence reaches other countries too. For example during the reign of king Hassan II and especially in the 90's, in Morocco the only veiled women were the old women, but when king Hassan II died the fundamentalists started relations with Algerian radical movements, and made a big propaganda in the mosques and in the schools and as a result, many young veiled Moroccan women appeared again. King Muhammad VI began in his fight against Islamism, made some changes in the moudwana. There were demonstrations of Moroccan women in Rabat for the women's rights and the abolition of the hijab. Two days later the fundamentalists had organized a demonstration twice as large as that of the women in Casablanca against the changes of the moudwana and all the women involved were wearing a veil.

The situation of Islamist propaganda is the same one in Turkey. The "affair of Hijab" of Mrs Gul is very indicative; she is the first veiled First Lady of Turkey since 1925. Since that year Turkey has never had a veiled First Lady. Strange is also the fact that the Parliament of Turkey has accepted a decree which allows the girls to enter to the universities veiled with a hijab.

But what is more alarming is the role of Europe in this process. Before the arrival of the Europeans the hijab signified firstly the [female] sex and woman's social position. Through the hijab the place and the role of the woman in the society was clearly defined. This means that men and women knew that they were useful for their family, town or country; this was security. It might sound strange but the hijab was also a kind of freedom. The hijab ensures anonymity. If a woman wears the Iraqi veil, nobody can recognize her. This method was used also in Europe by the women of the aristocracy when they wanted to go somewhere incognito. Thirdly, if you live in a desert, without the hijab you will not be able to wash your hair one week after even with the best shampoo and also is significant the fact that if you go to the desert head-naked you will immediately suffer sunstroke. In the end, while reconsidering the "womens rights to work" I believe that calling the work a right is a idea of cynical European. The European woman believes that all women in the world enjoy work. When you live in a region where during nine months the temperature is more than 40 degrees work is one of the last rights which you would like to apply. It is absolutely natural.

The hijab was observed without it being a negative symbol. But when the Europeans with the concept of modernization came they started to interpret it as a sign of women's submission. As a reaction against modernization, the Islamists imparted the same meaning, because they wanted to be different from the modern Europeans. But the more far-seeing Moslem politicians began a pro-modernistic policy and which included the banning of hijab, because they saw that progress at this moment in time is Europe, and this removal symbolizes equality, and specially liberty (the prohibition of the hijab is the first step towards this development; the country must progress).

So what are the Europeans doing? They have begun following a policy which they call "tolerant" towards the Moslem immigrants in their countries.

Here are a few examples:

While King Mohammad VI tried to change the sharia in Morocco, to abolish polygamy and give more rights to the woman, including the right not to wear the hijab, the archbishop of Canterbury announced that it will be very wise to accept the sharia in the Anglican Church and to let the women wear the hijab if they want.

- While Bougriba tries to break the Ramadan by drinking a juice each day in a public place and also forces his arm and his police to follow his example, the mayor of Brussels prohibits the police to eat, drink or to smoke in the public space of the city as a sign of tolerance towards the Muslims.
- The mayor of Brussels forbade to honour the memory of the deceased of 11/09 when at the same time king Mohammad VI held a reunion of the Moslems, the Christians and the Jews in the biggest Cathedral in Casablanca to stand in memory of the victims of that date and to show the tolerance between the follower of these three religions.
- And finally the fact that BBC prohibits the use of the term “Islamic terrorism” with the argument that such term doesn’t exist. It is strange to claim that there isn’t such term when the terrorists and the fanatics use it...but perhaps BBC knows it better?

These actions and policies are absolutely paradoxical. They stimulate the Islamism which is a tragedy especially for the Moslem world and does not give courage to the countries that want to progress. Because this so-called "tolerance" is a result of an absolute incomprehension of the Moslem world, and of a confusion over the terms Islam - Islamism which are completely different. The problem of the hijab is a problem, because if some years ago the hijab was a symbol of religious difference, faith (as the true Islam promulgates), now in some countries it is a symbol of power, terror and submission (as a result of Islamism). There is no problem if a woman wears a hijab because she really believes in it the problem comes when it is imposed to her to wear it and when she tries to impose it to other people. We must see the difference between these two behaviours otherwise we would commit irreparable mistakes.

And finally I conclude by reminding the fact that although the nations may look alike, each nation is very different from the others: we depend so much on the biology, the geographic situation, the climate and especially from our history. Then it is absurd to believe that we can totally impose our ideas to another nation, or to accept absolutely ideas from another nation. We must understand the differences, but we must accept only these which are adequate for the concrete society.