



**WORKSHOP MANUAL**

# **European Muslim women's identity – Unveiling new narratives**

by **Samira Brahimi**

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## 1. Introduction

In our childhood, two of the first competences we learn are reading and writing. Yet, it is only long afterwards that we discover that words carry significant cultural, social, historical references about the writer and the reader. The diverse use of words is powerful in shaping different **narratives**<sup>1</sup> about the same context, identity, event or concept. To be aware of the effect of different narratives is fundamental in understanding, exploring, and embracing diversity in our European context. To be aware of what stands behind specific narratives is fundamental in improving our society for the better.

This workshop focuses on the impact of diverse narratives on a specific minority in Europe: **Muslim women**. For many years thousands of diverse women have been generalised by a single and passive narrative, with no real space to stand for themselves. Over four modules, the participants will approach and understand the concept of narrative and will then deconstruct this single and passive narrative into diverse, active, and complex narratives. This deconstruction is facilitated using different methods including the blackout poetry technique, a creative tool used to analyse texts.



### DURATION

105 minutes without a break



### TARGET GROUP

students between 14 and 18 years old



### FORMAT

on site



### MATERIALS

laptop, projector, presentation, copies of the text that will be analysed, black or coloured markers, highlighters.

<sup>1</sup> Narratives are understood here as ways of representing or understanding a situation or series of events that reflects and promotes a particular point of view or set of values.

## 2. Schedule

DURATION	MODULE	METHODS / TOOLS	DESCRIPTION
10 min	<b>MODULE 1</b> <b>Introduction</b>	Ice breakers and open round	Participants will introduce themselves using the ice breaker “Introducing my mate” combined with “If I were a book/ song/ movie, I would be...”
15 min	<b>MODULE 2.1</b> <b>Understanding the term narrative</b>	Presentation and open round  Tools: the presentation, a laptop, a projector.	The trainer will ask the participants if they know what the term “narrative” means. The trainer will then explain it by using examples and analogies. There will be a short open debate with the participants.
15 min	<b>MODULE 2.2</b> <b>Muslim women narratives</b>	Presentation	The trainer will present different examples of Muslim women narratives.
<b>BREAK</b>			
10 min	<b>MODULE 3.1</b> <b>Blackout poetry</b>	Presentation	The trainer will explain the blackout poetry technique using visual examples.
35 min	<b>MODULE 3.2</b> <b>Create your artwork</b>	Blackout poetry technique  Tools: a copy of the text, black or coloured markers, highlighters.	The participants will create a blackout poetry artwork on a text.
20 min	<b>MODULE 4</b> <b>Reflection, feedback and conclusion</b>	Open round or walking art gallery	The participants will share their artworks and their feedbacks.

## 3. Implementation

### MODULE 1

#### Introduction — 10 min

First, the trainer will welcome the participants and invite them to take a seat. The participants will introduce themselves by using two combined icebreakers: “If I were a...” and “Introducing my mate”. They will be asked to change their seat, to choose a partner and to introduce themselves mutually. They will be doing so by answering the following question:

- “If you were a book/ song/movie/ TV show what would you be?”

After introducing each other in pairs, all the participants will gather again and will be asked to introduce their partner to the whole group. This exercise is helpful to encourage listening and to show how difficult it is to talk about the identity of others. In addition, asking this very question can illustrate what participants read, watch and listen to. This allows a first impression of their interests, perspectives, and influences.

Space setting: it would be preferable to prepare the room with seats in the round so all the participants will have the chance to see each other at the beginning of the workshop. Then, during the introduction round in pairs, participants would move the seats accordingly to be more comfortable talking to each other.

### MODULE 2.1

#### Understanding the term narrative — 15 min

Before introducing the meaning of the term narrative, the trainer will ask the participants some questions to have an idea about their understanding of the term:

- Have you ever heard of the term narrative?
- What is a narrative?

The trainer will introduce the meaning of the term narrative by using some examples and some analogies as shown in the presentation.

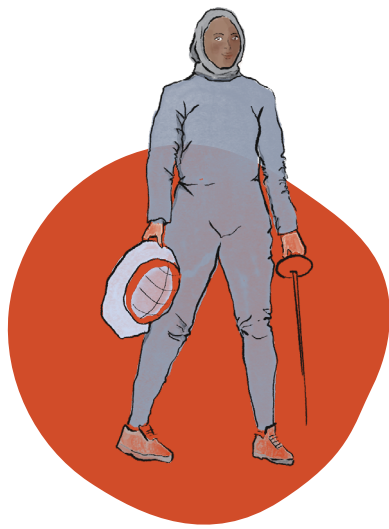
#### Here is the definition of narrative:

- result of choosing specific information from a wider collection while storytelling
- it can be more or less distant from what we consider as conventional
- it is conditioned by the social, cultural, historical context in which this narrative was developed

Analogies to help explaining the action of choosing specific information from a wider collection can be:

- a filter, just part of what the filter contains passes through
- binoculars, instead of having the view of the whole horizon, you are focusing your sight on a specific area
- glasses, wearing sunglasses or eyeglasses give you different information of what you see.





## MODULE 2.2

### Muslim women narratives — 15 min

**Meaning of the term “narrative”:** way of presenting or understanding a situation, a series of events, persons or a group that reflects and promotes a particular point of view or set of values.

**Analogies to the effect of a narrative on what/who is represented in it:** narratives can be compared to work in similar ways as a filter, eye masks, lenses.

**Examples:** considering our target group for the workshop, it would be suitable to choose examples which focus on youngsters. For example, showing that young people have been often represented as lazy and undisciplined through the centuries.

After briefly introducing this term, the trainer should ask the participants to share the recurrent narratives they have dealt with in their experience in an open round. This feedback moment is fundamental to verify if the participants understood the meaning of this term. The trainer should be careful to moderate the discussion in order to have feedback of the participants understanding of the term and not a broad conversation about a specific topic (e.g. from sharing examples of narratives about young people to talk generally about youth struggles).

The trainer will present examples of Muslim women highly active in different fields and ways by using newspaper/magazine headlines, pictures, short videos, links to their social media (link to the presentation). Using different sources to present these women is fundamental to illustrate their diversity: using different tools to represent multiple layers of their identity

In this module, the aim is to spotlight less dominant narratives about Muslim women. Presenting a diverse group of Muslim women is the first step in fighting discrimination and Islamophobia. This module is helpful for persons who are not familiar or close to female Muslim identities by raising awareness about different Muslim women narratives. And therefore, it's providing an opportunity to get in touch with them. To those persons who feel represented by these identities or feel somehow connected to them, it can give a sense of empowerment.

→ **Disclaimers for the trainer:** most of the Muslim women mentioned in the presentation are wearing hijab. The intention of this presentation is to spotlight that some Muslim women wear hijab and others don't but those who are visually recognizable as Muslim are more subject to the mainstream narratives. Mainstream narratives also affect Muslim women who don't wear hijab but are outspoken about their religious orientation.

The trainer should be able to prevent debates about the hijab that are guided by prejudices and anti-Muslim racist stereotypes. The trainer can answer to such attempts by reminding participants of the workshop's aim: not to question or discuss this identity, but to give space to this identity, to listen to it and to acknowledge it.



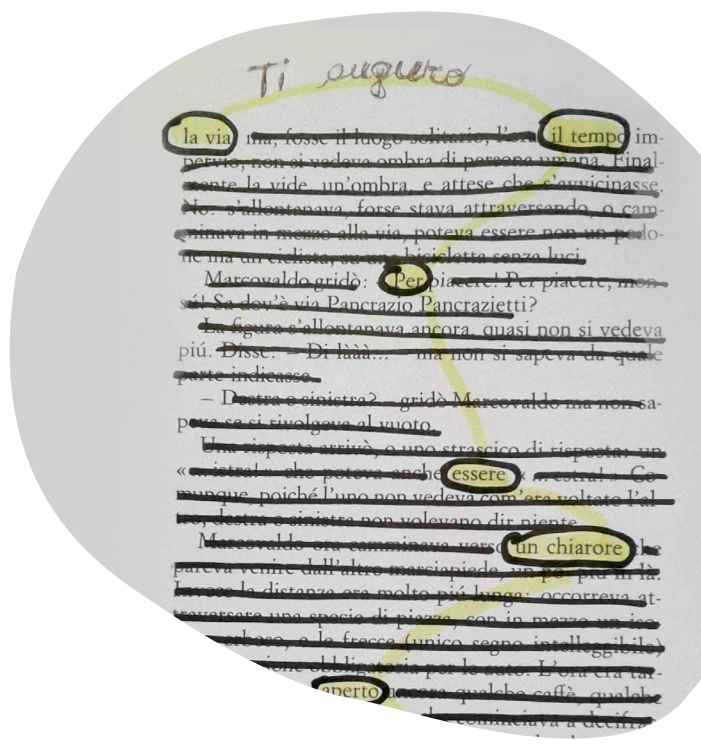
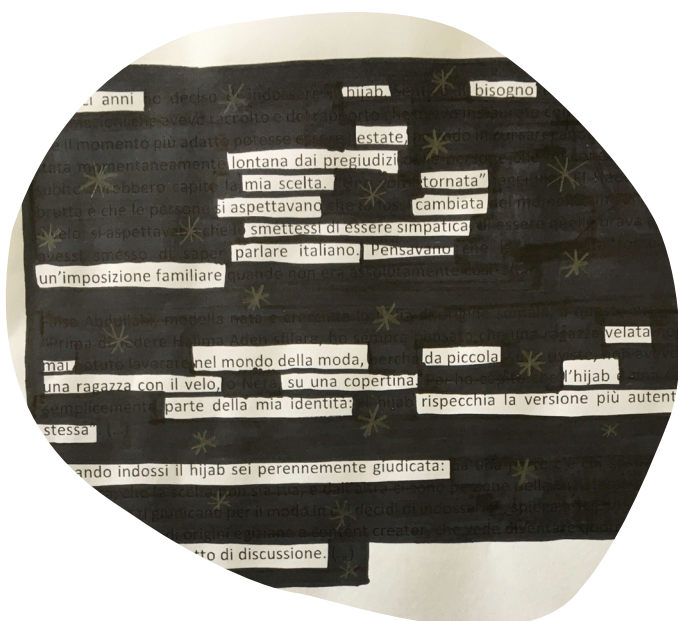
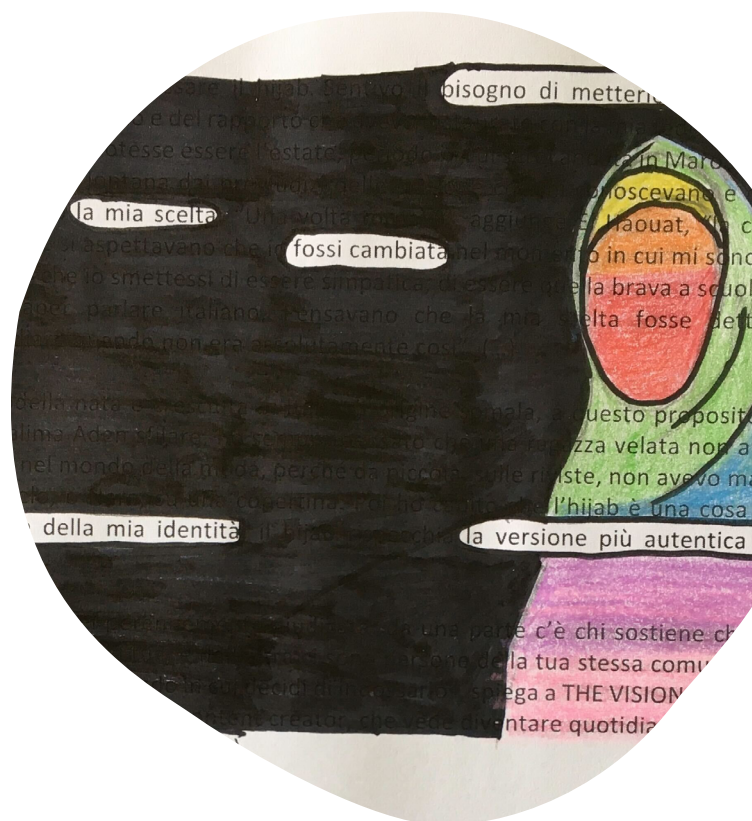
### MODULE 3.1

## Introducing blackout poetry — 10 min

In the next stages, the participants will analyse a text using the blackout poetry technique.

The blackout poetry technique implies blackening most of a text with the aim of composing new sentences, changing the text meaning, or being creative. Creating a visual artwork with this method visualises the analytic process that goes hand in hand with reading.

The trainer will explain this method using the visual examples below. Showing diverse applications of this method (highlighting, blackening, drawing, connecting words) is essential to make the participants comfortable with this technique and to offer them different options for the next module.



## MODULE 3.2

### Create your artwork — 35 min

In this module, the participants will read and analyse a text about different experiences of young Muslim women. The trainer will hand out copies of the text, black/coloured markers, and highlighters.

The trainer will give the following instructions:

Participants are free to change their seat to a more quiet or comfortable area of the room to work better. After reading the text and having a first impression of the content, every participant can blacken/highlight most of the text, or just some words based on the following considerations:

- the participants can blacken words or sentences that according to their sensibility are triggering or unnecessary
- the participants can change the meaning of the text completely by leaving just some words that compose new sentences
- the participants can highlight part of the text that are significant for some reason
- the participant can draw on the text.

The participants can work on their own or in small groups (2 or 3 people).

→ **Disclaimers for the trainer:** the trainer should not introduce the text. The participants should approach the text with no information about the text to make the analysis process autonomous and unbiased. The text is a translated abstract from “Per noi il velo è una scelta, non un’imposizione. La libertà non finisce ai confini dell’Occidente” (The veil is a choice, not an imposition for us. Freedom doesn’t end at the borders of the West) written by Fatima El Mouh on “The Vision”.

#### Original text

*A sedici anni ho deciso di indossare il hijab. Sentivo il bisogno di metterlo alla luce delle informazioni che avevo raccolto e del rapporto che avevo instaurato con la mia fede. Ho pensato che il momento più adatto potesse essere l’estate, periodo in cui sarei andata in Marocco e sarei stata momentaneamente lontana dai pregiudizi delle persone che mi conoscevano e che non subito avrebbero capito la mia scelta. “Una volta tornata”, aggiunge El Haouat, “la cosa più brutta è che le persone si aspettavano che io fossi cambiata nel momento in cui mi sono messa il velo: si aspettavano che io smettessi di essere simpatica, di essere quella brava a scuola o che avessi smesso di saper parlare italiano. Pensavano che la mia scelta fosse dettata da un’imposizione familiare quando non era assolutamente così”. (...)*

*Faiza Abdullahi, modella nata e cresciuta in Italia di origine somala, a questo proposito, dice: “Prima di vedere Halima Aden sfilare, ho sempre pensato che una ragazza velata non avrebbe mai potuto lavorare nel mondo della moda, perché da piccola, sulle riviste, non avevo mai visto una ragazza con il velo, o Nera, su una copertina. Poi ho capito che l’hijab è una cosa che fa semplicemente parte della mia identità: il hijab rispecchia la versione più autentica di me stessa”. (...)*

*“Quando indossi il hijab sei perennemente giudicata: da una parte c’è chi sostiene che tu sia oppressa, che la scelta non sia tua, e dall’altra ci sono persone della tua stessa comunità che ti rinnegano e ti giudicano per il modo in cui decidi di indossarlo”, spiega a THE VISION Esra Warda, ragazza italiana di origini egiziane e content creator, che vede diventare quotidianamente il suo abbigliamento oggetto di discussione. (...)*

## Translated text

*"At sixteen I decided to wear the hijab. I felt the need to put it in the light of the information I had gathered and of the relationship I had established with my faith. I thought that the most suitable time could be summer, a period in which I would go to Morocco and be temporarily away from the prejudices of the people who knew me and who would not immediately understand my choice. "Once I got back" adds El Haouat, "the worst thing is that people expected me to be changed after putting on the veil: they expected me to stop being nice, being the good one at school or to not be able to speak Italian anymore. They thought that my choice was dictated by family imposition when it was absolutely not like that ".(...)*

*Faiza Abdullahi, a model born and raised in Italy of Somali origin, in this regard, says: "Before seeing Halima Aden on the runway, I always thought that a veiled girl would never have been able to work in the world of fashion, because as a child, in magazines, I had never seen a girl with a veil, or Black, on a cover. Then I realized that the hijab is something that is simply part of my identity: the hijab reflects the most authentic version of myself ".(...)*

*"When you wear the hijab you are perpetually judged: on one hand there are those who claim that you are oppressed, that the choice is not yours, and on the other there are people from your own community who deny you and judge you for the way you decide to wear it ", Esra Warda, an Italian girl of Egyptian origins and content creator, explains to THE VISION, who sees her clothing becoming the subject of discussion every day. (...)*

→ **Disclaimers for the trainer:** be careful in translating the adjective Muslim into your respective language: check if the translated term is not stigmatizing by referring to only religious fundamentalists or extremists. In this part of the workshop, reading and understanding the language used in the text is even more crucial. The trainer should be careful in checking if someone is facing language barriers.

In some instances, language barriers can be overcome by working on a shorter version of the text. The trainer can choose two out of the three contributions to lower the comprehension threshold.





#### MODULE 4

### Reflection, feedback and conclusion — 20 min

The trainer will invite the participants to take their seats. There are two different methods for reflecting and gathering feedback on the last module:

- the participants sit in a circle, and are invited to show their artwork voluntarily and to share thoughts and insights about the text and the use of the blackout poetry technique
- fixing all the artworks around the space (on the wall, on the chairs, on the floor) to create a visual gallery; the participants are invited to walk around, to look at them, and to share their general impressions about what they have seen.

#### Guiding questions for the facilitator:

- How did you feel during the whole process?
- Did working with the text make you feel different about how you envision Muslim women? How do you feel different about it?
- Did you change the meaning of the text intentionally and why? Or was it more an intuitive creation process for you?

As the guiding questions show, the key aim of the creative process is reflecting on the process itself not the final artwork.

In conclusion of the workshop, the participants are free to share their impressions and their thoughts about the workshop. The trainer can also choose to propose an anonymous survey (digital or analogue) to make feedback less intimidating and more honest.

#### Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ):

There is a FAQ in the PowerPoint for the trainers. During the workshop pupils might have common questions about Muslim women.

#### AUTHOR

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Samira Brahimi is a fourth-year student of the Master course in Dentistry and Dental Prosthetics at the University of Verona. She is the course representative and the Local Exchange Officer for AISO (Italian Association of Dentistry students). In 2021, she participated in the programme “Future of Post-migrant Europe” run by the Schwarzkopf Foundation Young Europe. In 2022, she was selected to be part of the “Thinking of Europe” fellowship run by the Schwarzkopf Foundation and Alfred Herhausen Gesellschaft. Samira has recently joined Understanding Europe Italy as Peer Educator.

## 4. Sources

- Here you can find the original and complete article used in the workshop:  
<https://thevision.com/attualita/hijab-donne/?sez=author&ix=2&authid=421>
- We Belong podcast and online platform can be useful to find other Muslim women active within the European context:  
<https://www.welongoeurope.com/>
- “Look beyond prejudice”: a short, animated video directed by Takoua Ben Mohamed:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I5QRSBs0324>
- On the AfrobySara platform you can find examples of content that speaks beyond language barriers.
- Muslim women talk hijab:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5\\_BapO1SsMw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5_BapO1SsMw)
- Two Muslim Women in France Discuss Islamophobia and Wearing a Hijab:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ykcAqJIRDNo>
- Muslim woman at the Jordan Football Association Final Women's League game:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cLe2p5KWaRQ>
- ENAR report about Gendered Islamophobia (2016)  
[https://www.enar-eu.org/wp-content/uploads/factsheet9-european\\_lr\\_1\\_.pdf](https://www.enar-eu.org/wp-content/uploads/factsheet9-european_lr_1_.pdf) (short version)
- [https://www.enar-eu.org/wp-content/uploads/forgottenwomenpublication\\_lr\\_final\\_with\\_latest\\_corrections.pdf](https://www.enar-eu.org/wp-content/uploads/forgottenwomenpublication_lr_final_with_latest_corrections.pdf) (long version)

## 5. Glossary

**NARRATIVE** – Way of presenting or understanding a situation or series of events, persons or a group that reflects and promotes a particular point of view or set of values.

Source: Defined by the author

**EMPOWERMENT** – The term has been characterised by the U.S Civil Rights and Disability Rights and Independent Living Rights movement and stands for the self-empowering or self-enablement of people. This means a process in which marginalized, discriminated and disadvantaged people develop their own strengths and use their skills to participate in political and societal decision-making processes and do so to improve their living circumstances and opportunities to develop independent of the benevolence of the majority class.

Source: [Understanding Europe Glossary](#)

**ANTI-MUSLIM RACISM** – “Anti-Muslim racism (AMR) is a culturally based form of racism that targets Muslims and people who are marked as Muslim, regardless of whether they actually practice Islam or how religious they are. The AMR is based on the assumption of a fundamental and irreconcilable otherness of (supposed) Muslims. The marking is done by external characteristics such as e.g. religious clothes, appearance, name or nationality. They become an “ethnically” defined origin [...], an “ancestry” and a religious and cultural affiliation.”

Source: [Mediendienst Integration](#)

# Imprint

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