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«Linguistic and Cultural Elements of Arabic Speaking Students in Juvenile Special Detention Centre of Volos»

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Abstract

This paper represents a qualitative research study on the cultural and linguistic characteristics and beliefs of the younger Arab populations. Nine Muslim young men from Syria, Morocco, Palestine and Iraq in the Special Juvenile Detention Facility of Volos were interviewed regarding their own opinions, experiences and practices in respect to multiple aspects of their daily lives. The participants displayed various viewpoints respecting the following parameters: hospitality and politeness, attire and head garments, marriage and divorce, language, customs and cultural and historical heritage of their homelands. The vast majority of their answers showed that their life choices and standpoints were influenced by their religion to a great degree. Additionally, their answers gave prominence to the patriarchal structure of the societies and families they were raised in. Last but not least, the Syrian and Palestinian interviewees demonstrated similar habits and stances through their answers as distinct from the Moroccan and Iraqi participants.

Key Words:

Arab identity, young Muslim generation, linguistic elements, Arabic diglossia, cultural traits, religion, attire, head coverings, marriage, divorce, cultural heritage, customs

Introduction

In this thesis, the academic focus of the reported survey is the Arabic identity and more specifically, the linguistic and cultural traits that characterize the younger Arabic populations. It goes without saying that the research and analysis of an ethnic population's identity is not, though, a simple procedure to follow as it is rather a manifold topic that requires a thorough and deliberate forward-planning. Given that the Arabic identity is a rather wide umbrella term, it will be interesting to examine whether the Arabs deriving from diverse countries constitute a homogeneous or heterogeneous group, focusing on social, cultural and linguistic aspects of their life.

Despite the massive exchanges of population among the West and the East, Arabs cultural and linguistic traits are still not fully understood by the Westerns or are even worse significantly distorted due to preconceived notions. Additionally, due to the high influx of Arabic speaking populations in Europe and America, the cultural and linguistic elements may undergo a significant alteration as they are both two living features that vary over the course

of time. What is more, the younger Arab generations may view specific cultural and linguistic concepts from another point of view and hence, their beliefs are valuable for delving deeper into our survey. All in all, the researcher intends to build up new knowledge regarding the linguistic and cultural elements that prevail in the Arabic world through the eyes of the younger Arab generation. Therefore, the author has selected to hold a qualitative research in the Juvenile Special Detention Centre of Volos by engaging young adult Arabic speaking male students into open semi-structured interviews.

More specifically, in this paper the author focuses on diverse cultural elements that the Arab World consists of. To become more concrete, features such as the notion of hospitality and politeness, the traditional attire and head coverings, the institution of marriage and divorce, religious as well as historical and cultural aspects are being thoroughly presented, tested and analyzed in an effort to examine the beliefs and standpoints that the younger Arab generations have adopted always compared to older generations and well-established norms. Last but not least, the reality of the Arabic linguistic identity with the prevailing diglossic situation and the stance, which the survey's interviewees hold towards it, are being researched by the author in order to verify which of the two linguistic codes, the standard or the colloquial, is more widely employed and the reasons that justify such preference.

To begin with, in our interviews, questions concerning the language were posed. The interviewer tried to concentrate on the speakers' view of the linguistic diglossia that characterizes the Arabic societies by asking them whether they prefer the Modern Standard Arabic (al-fusha), which is the common language all Arabs worldwide understand, or their own regional dialects, which vary from one country to another. Interestingly, the results indicated that there is an obvious preference for the latter due to a number of different reasons. What is more, the participants were also asked for their opinion regarding the Greek language and the difficulties they face with it. Furthermore, the interviewer intended to investigate other aspects of their identity, such as the rite of marriage and the customs that surround it in their culture and the issue of divorce and whether women have the right to file for one in their homelands and under which particular conditions.

What is more, given that Arabs are widely known for their politeness and hospitality, they were questioned as for what hospitality means to them and the way it is expressed in their families. Moreover, the researcher tried to shed light on the traditional Arab clothing, and more specifically, the female and male head coverings that are widely used by the Arabic populations since it is an integral part of who they culturally, historically and religiously are. The author of this paper tried to understand the role that they have and whether they constitute a merely religious or cultural trait for both sexes. Last but not least, the

participants had to answer a question regarding the historical and cultural heritage of their homelands in an effort to give prominence to the historical wealth of those lands. All in all, religion was evident in almost all aspects of their lives since it governs the customs, beliefs and traditions to a great degree even of the younger generations up to today.

Literature Review

1. Linguistic Elements

According to Hassan (2012), language is a way of socializing, which assists a person develop emotional ties to a specific culture from an early childhood. Similarly, in the Arabic world, language and national identity are closely interrelated, since the former is the carrier of the Arabs' cultural traits (Hassan, 2012). When it comes to the Arabic's origin, the Arabic peninsula and the Syrian steppe is the motherland of it (Al-Wer & de Jong, 2017).The expansion of the Arabic language to the Arabian Peninsula dates back to 632 CE via the Arab Islamic invasions, the year of the Prophet Muhammad's death, and the century of the conquests that followed (Versteegh, 2014). In general, Arabic is thought to belong to the Semitic language family (Bitar, 2011). In all Arabic countries, the linguistic reality is characterized by diglossia, with the simultaneous presence of the High variety, or else Standard Arabic, and the regional dialects, which constitute the Low, or otherwise informal/colloquial variety (Hassan, 2012).

As Holes (2004) supported, the spoken Arabic dialects are the diversifications of a language which all native speakers acquire as their first language before they start their official education which takes place at school. More precisely, the Arabic language is a number of spoken dialects with noteworthy phonological, morphological, lexical and syntactic variations, together with a standard written linguistic code, identified as Modern Standard Arabic (Chiang et al., 2006). It should be highlighted that Arabic, in its standardized form, is the formal linguistic code of twenty countries in Middle East and Africa (Holes, 2004). More specifically, Ferguson (2003) explained the Arabic diglossia by labelling as High Variety the superposed/superior linguistic code, while defining as Low the regional dialects that prevail from region to region. The term "High Variety" is known as *al-fuṣḥā or al-Arabiya,* whereas

the "Low Variety" is known with the term *al-'ammiyyah* in the Arabic language (Ferguson, 2003).

More specifically, Arabic, which comprises the prestigious linguistic variety, is part of the Arab national identity since it is the language of the Qur'an, the God's authentic message (Hassan, 2012). The Classical Arabic or otherwise Arabiyya, is a variety that has not been used as a first language for centuries but it consists the formal language that children learn at schools in its modernized version, what they, nowadays, call Modern Standard Arabic (Retsö, 2013). The children in Arabic countries learn how to speak both the regional dialect of their country and the Standard Arabic as they grow up (Bitar, 2011). In most Arabic-speaking societies, Modern Standard Arabic is not imparted inherently by the parents to their children, but on the contrary, it is acquired through formal instruction at a subsequent time (Al-Wer & de Jong, 2017). Standard Arabic is instructed to them the same way foreign languages are taught to non-native students around the world, with the exception that Arab children are already accustomed to the sounds and letters of the language (Bitar, 2011). On the other hand, the Arabic dialects, known as vernacular Arabic are the native languages of the Arabic speakers, acquired in the home and streets (Al-Wer & de Jong, 2017).

Because of the fact that the majority of the Arab population is Muslim, it does not necessarily mean that the Arabic language is merely used for the Islamic religious practices. On the contrary, the Arabic language is also important for the Christians in the Middle East, as it used in their religious practices and ceremonies (Shah, 2013). However, it should be noted that prior to the emergence of Islam, Arabic was widely known with the name "mu'allaqaat", which brought all Arabs together under the same culture (Rouchdy, 2013). After the rise of the Islamic religion, though, Arabic became more profound and respected by its speakers (Rouchdy, 2013). According to Albirini (2016), who tried to capture the Arabic diglossia, Standard Arabic, which is the official linguistic code, includes both the Classical Arabic (CA) and the Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), whereas, Colloquial Arabic does not possess a standardized orthography.

Namely, Standard Arabic is a retrofit simplified descender of the Classical Arabic (Amer et al., 2011). It is exploited in formal and semi-formal frameworks, such as in public administration, education, and mass media, religious discourse, arts and high culture (Albirini, 2016). At the other end of the spectrum, Colloquial Arabic is used in informal communicative discourses, for instance in families and neighborhood, sports, music, films and TV broadcasts (Albirini, 2016). Standard Arabic was spoken by consequential Bedouin tribes, notably in the Al-Hijaaz area (Albirini, 2011). Except for the Qur'an, which was written in Classical Arabic, the Sunnah, which contained the words and acts of the Prophet Muhammad, was documented in

Standard Arabic, as well (Albirini, 2011). Therefore, Standard Arabic is considered to be extremely important for comprehending the Sunnah, the second most significant reference for Sharee'ah (Albirini, 2011).

Albirini (2011) also focused on the colloquial/ dialectal Arabic which share a broad amplitude of lexical, syntactic and morphological characteristics among them, despite the fact that they differ in many ways in relation to their vocabulary and phonology. According to Al-Wer & de Jong (2018), the Arabic dialects, which constitute the native languages of the Arabic speakers, are the first languages that people acquire in the home, apart from the ethnic groups who preserve their heritage languages. Dialectologists classified the Arabic dialects based on regional criteria, and more particularly, they divided them in Bedouin, which were spoken by nomadic tribes, and sedentary ones, which were spoken by rooted rural and urban societies (Al-Wer & de Jong, 2018). Notwithstanding, this distinction is not related to the modern lifestyle, since most of the Bedouin dialects are nowadays used by citified populations, while, a more well-grounded division is based on the two geographical super groups, the Eastern and the Western dialects (Al-Wer & de-Jong, 2018).

More precisely, there are nine distinctive dialectal sub-divisions in the Arab world, such as the Egyptian, Gulf, Iraqi, Levantine, Mahrebi, Yemeni, Somali, Sudanese and Mauritanian (El-Haj et al, 2018). Another noteworthy distinction was proposed by Alnosairee & Sartini (2021), who claimed that the variety of the spoken Arabic dialects should be made based by regional criteria, such as for example Maghreb Arabic, which is spoken in Algeria, Tunis, Morocco and western Libya, Gulf Arabic which is spread throughout the Gulf Coast and Levantine Arabic, which is employed in Palestine, Lebanon, Syria and western Jordan. In addition, there is the Hijazi Arabic in some areas of Saudi Arabia, the Najdi Arabic, which is heard in the desert and finally, the Hassaniya Arabic which is spoken in Mauritania (Alnosairee & Sartini, 2021),. Some of them share similarities and differences according to whether they belong or not to neighboring geographical countries, provinces or towns (Aliwy et al., 2020). Further emphasis, though, should be laid on the expectation that exists among multiple Arab scholars that the Arabic dialects will be integrated into one language which will be used in the future for both speaking and writing, but the time and the exact procedure is still not known (Amer et al., 2011).

2. Cultural Elements

2.1. Arab Hospitality and Politeness

According to Sobh et al. (2013), hospitality in the Arab World is an integral part of its culture since generosity towards guests is an essential pillar of the Islamic faith. As stated in the Qur'an and "ahadith", it is of outmost importance to shield the guests from external attackers, while neglecting to provide them with protection renders great shame on the host (Sobh et al., 2013). Besides, Arab hospitality dated back to the nomadic life of the Bedouin Arabs who managed to survive thanks to it in adverse desert environments (Torstrict & Faier, 2009). An outlander had to be accommodated and fed for three days without expecting an equivalent hospitality in turn (Sobh et al., 2013). As stated in Barnes (2013), the term "hospitality" is viewed as being associated with the Arab world since Arabs are well known for the warm welcome they demonstrate to their guests. In return, the guests evaluate the nature of the hospitality they receive, and the greatest concern for the host is to fail at providing a satisfactory experience for them as such a case would mean that bad rumors may spread to fellow kin (Shryock, 2012).

According to Sobh et al. (2013), the relationship between the host and the guest is reinforced though the ritualized consumption of the Arabic coffee. The making, serving and drinking of Arabic coffee (ghahwa) in the Arabic countries assists the host to gain a good reputation for breadth or karam (Young, 2007). Apart from coffee, the host family serves their guests food, which is also an integral part of their kind of hospitality since it is viewed as a foregone fact that is never omitted (Young, 2007). Omer (2010) stated, inside the Islamic religion, a home is regarded as a small-scale representation of the Islamic culture and civilization. Hence, the Islamic Sharia Law has summarized some pivotal principles that each Muslim home should enclose, that is, privacy, modesty and hospitality (Othman et al., 2014). This hospitality is illustrated by the hosts' attempts to secure that the guests content and comfortable during their stay (Sobh et al., 2013).

The majority of the traditional societies in the Muslim World are male-dominated; accordingly, men are in charge of amusing the guests in the public places of the house (Sobh & Belk, 2011). Similarly, the manliness and virtue of a Muslim home is represented by the "majlis", the place of sitting and interacting among the men (Sobh & Belk, 2011). Nevertheless, hospitality does not only concern the male guests in the Arabic culture but also the female ones (Kastrinou & Knoerk, 2024). In view of the fact that a home is regarded as a female realm, the family's women ought to develop solid bonds with their female

friends and relatives by exchanging news and information (Sobh & Belk, 2011). However, it is of outmost importance that the houses contain distinct spaces for the gathering of the two sexes separately (Memarian et al., 2011). It is, also, necessary for the Syrian guests to never visit a house for the first time empty-handed (Kastrinou & Knoerk, 2024).

Hospitality is an asset that is indissolubly tied to a person's level of politeness, known as adab (أدب) in the Arabic language (Grainger et al., 2015). Nonetheless, in the Pre-Islamic period, adab was another word for "invitation", and had little to do with the current meaning (Al-Oqaily & Tawalbeh, 2012). Acts of hospitality are enclosed in the religious customs of the Arabic speaking populations, especially during the Ramadan, the holy month of Islam (Grainger et al., 2015). What is considered to be polite is the initial rejection of the offer-either of hospitality or offering the food- by the guest so as to give the host the chance (Grainger et al., 2015). An illustrative example is that of Morocco, where the offering must be retold and refused several times before it is finally accepted by the guest since if the very first offer is promptly accepted, it is considered to be highly impolite (Alaoui, 2011). Such a phenomenon is not solely observed in Morocco, but in other Arab countries as well, where the host has to make use of various expressions so as to apply pressure to the guest so as to illustrate both their politeness and generosity (Bayraktaroglou & Sifianou, 2001).

Furthermore, apart from their undeniable hospitality, Arabs are also very keen on titles and that of "Sheikh" is a commonly exploited one for addressing the rich, powerful and elderly men (Ajaaj, 2016). Another important characteristic of proper behavior is to appropriately sit in front of adults or strangers, while crossing their legs over the course of a conversation towards their interlocutors is an impolite act that menaces their rumor (Ajaaj, 2016). Moreover, although the act of shaking hands is a widely known symbol of fondness in the Arabic culture, the opposite genders are not allowed to do so given that such a social behavior is precluded by Islamic principles (Ajaaj, 2016). Arabs pay also much attention to the correct way of greeting their guests, thus, the latter anticipates from the host to greet them by uttering the standardized expression "May Allah bless you", while failing in doing so is translated as a serious insult (Ajaaj, 2016). Last but not least, displaying modesty towards women is essential for a man's good reputation, whereas illustrating excessive familiarity is a sign of low moral values (Ajaaj, 2016).

2.2. Head Garments and Attire

Among others, religion also influences the Muslim women's clothing choices, for the reason that Islam's holy book- known as the Quran- dictates the modest dressing of them (Bachleda

et al., 2014). On the other hand, Hoodfar (2006) believes that some clothing preferences; such as the covering of a woman's hair, is a cultural rather than a religious product. Whether it is a cultural or religious product, modesty is prioritized in the more traditional societies; therefore, a modest woman ought to entirely hide her body from the public eye, encompassing her face (Boulanouar, 2006). More specifically, a woman's clothes should be adequately loose and thick so as to neither point out the shape of her body nor her complexion (Boulanouar, 2006). According to Nasr (2009), Muslim women who do not comply with the before mentioned principles are either not faithful enough or even worse are enemies of Islam. There are, though, some deeply religious women, who fast and fulfill the five required daily prays, but do not cover their hair (Kaya, 2010), given that what they wear is irrelevant to their faith (Ruby, 2006).

Despite the dressing imperatives of the Quran, Morocco has not voted for any formal ruling on what the female population should wear; therefore, women are allowed to wear whatever they wish for in public view (Boulanouar, 2010). On the one hand, there is one portion of women who prefers making use of a conservative, traditional, loose attire, known as "the djellaba", whilst others favor more western style clothes (Boulanouar, 2010). No matter the level of religiosity though, when a woman gets older or gets married, she frequently tends to choose more modest and traditional clothes so as to protect both her husband's and her own fame (Bachleda, 2014). In case that a woman is provocatively dressed, she runs the risk of being regarded as a sexual object, hence, she loses her trustworthiness (Omair, 2009). A large portion of women in the Arab world state that they feel dignified to wear their hijab and highlight that it is no one else's but their own will to dress in that way (Omair, 2009).

When it comes to the history of the head veil, it dates back to the period when Prophet Mohammed was still alive. According to the sources, being a woman was highly dangerous back then as they were frequently sexually attacked and mistreated by men (Omair, 2009). Therefore, the first women that ever made use of the hijab belonged to the family of the Prophet Mohammad so as for them to be distinguished from the rest in order not to get harassed (Omair, 2009). Nowadays, women who cover themselves with a headscarf and prefer more modest clothes are considered to be highly pious and thus, they are desirable from most Muslim men and families (Patel, 2012). The reason behind this mentality is that the more religious women are believed to behave prudently before and after the marriage, a quality that protects the whole family's reputation (Patel, 2012). Moreover, those societies tend to consider that religious women bring up righteous children, while marriages with them also have far less possibilities to result in divorce (Patel, 2012).

As far as men are concerned, there is also a head garment that is widely worn in the Arab world and that is known with the term keffiyeh. The keffiyeh signifies Arabness in more ways than the veil, since the former is the most recognizable feature of an Arab man's cultural identity (Donica, 2020). However, the keffiyeh is barely related to religious groups, as it is worn by Christian, Druze, Muslim and Secular Arabs, as well (Donica, 2020). Long before becoming a symbol of the Palestinian nationalism, the keffiyeh was an integral part of the Bedouins' clothing since it offered them protection from the harsh weather conditions of the desert, even before the emergence of Islam in the region (Donica, 2020). Nevertheless, it was later utilized as a Palestinian symbol of their nation's struggle and resistance against their occupation, thus it has been a form of identification since almost the 1930s (Burgos Gomez, 2023). It was widely worn by the rebels in the Arab revolution of 1936 in order to conceal their faces and protect them against being recognized. It should be noted though that Keffiyeh's name did not come from Palestine but from the Iraqi city of Kufa (Donica, 2020). Other names that were given to that same headdress were shemagh in Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, Jordan and Iraq, chafiyeh in Iraq and Lebanon, ghutra in the Gulf States and rezza in North Africa and Egypt (Donica, 2020).

2.3. Marriage & Divorce

When it comes to the social phenomenon of marriage, one can claim that the formation of a family has always been a priority for most Arabs, since it has been viewed as a refuge for both the elderly and the children without any exception (Sonneveld, 2019). However, marriage in the Arab world has lately been affected by the Western cultural norms of the 21st century. To become more specific, early marriages are no longer the primary goal in the Arabic societies as it once used to be (Rashad et al., 2005). Only in specific countries are early marriages still in force, such as in Oman, Yemen, and Egypt and in specific areas in Palestine, as for instance in Gaza (Sonneveld, 2019). As far as Syria is concerned, marriages there constitute a deeply religious practice since they are held in front of the Sharia courts, hence, stressing the important role that the Islamic religion plays in them (Gogonas, 2012). Noteworthy is the fact that the words being used stress that a man marries a woman and not that the two get married to each other (Sonneveld, 2019.)

Another characteristic fact that should be noted is the high percentage of arranged marriages between relatives within the Arab families, a custom known as consanguinity. The highest frequency of that practice between relatives and more specifically between cousins, is found in Sudan, Libya and Saudi Arabia (Rashad et al., 2005). Nevertheless, the prevalence

of arranged marriages has been declining since nowadays, a good number of women decide to enter the tertiary education and the job market, therefore, and they have more offers when it comes to marriage partners (Al-Gazali & Hamamy, 2014). Another serious topic that needs further studying and analyzing is that of polygamous marriages. Polygamy is the marital state of a man being married to multiple wives (Al-Krenawi, 2014). A huge incline of polygamous marriages is depicted in the Bedouin community of Israel, showcasing the existing strength of the patriarchal stereotypes (Boulos, 2019). This patriarchy influences women negatively as especially the first wife has many difficulties accepting her husband's choice to marry other women, as well (Al-Krenawi, 2014).

As for the procedures that take place before and during a marriage, it should be highlighted that in Islam a wedding is examined from different viewpoints, and those are the pre-wedding period, the wedding and the after wedding life (Nureeva et al., 2019). In the pre-wedding period, known as the engagement period; or as it is known in Arabic khutba, the man's family asks for the girl's hand from her parents, a stage that should be highly respected by the third parties since according to the Quran, Allah forbade interrupting the marriage proposal of another Muslim brother (Nureeva et al., 2019). After the engagement phase, the couple passes to the marriage ceremony stage, which includes some basic requirements (Nureeva et al., 2019). First and foremost, the couple or some of their close relatives should take part in the ceremony, and both parties ought to express their agreement or disagreement with the wedding (Nureeva et al., 2019). If they all agree with it, the couple's marriage should be announced to everyone and this is why the Prophet of Allah recommended that people get married in mosques so that everyone know it (Nureeva et al., 2019). Finally, the groom has to offer a "mehr" to the bride, which may be comprised of money, jewelry etc., with the latter being able to decide on the dowry's quantity (Nureeva et al., 2019).

Marriage, or otherwise "Nikah", is obviously central in the Arabic society since it is closely related to the union of Adam and his companion, Hauwa (Meraj, 2018). However, it is a really interesting fact that young girls in Middle East have frequently no right to choose their partner. Middle Eastern parents opt for their daughter's spouse sometimes even without their girl's consent (Sahbani et al., 2016). What is more, the husband is the one who chooses when it is the right time to have children with his wife, no matter if she has the same desire or no, and although she is frequently below the age of 18 years old (Sahbani et al., 2016). On the other hand, there are also some men who do not desire to get married and create a family. These men are seen as sinners in the Arab world, since a man there who stays unmarried without a logical reason, disrespects God and His wills, as in Islam, marriage is a

"Sunnat Muakkadah" (Meray, 2018). Last but not least, the ones who do not commit it, they do not have the right to get religious advantages later on (Meray, 2018).

When it comes to getting a divorce, there have been a lot of alterations throughout most of the Muslim countries. The first alteration included some limitations in the husbands' prior rights to a non-mutual divorce by uttering the word "talaq", which literally means release. At the same time, legislators have given a woman more rights to petition for a fault-based divorce, known with the term "tatliq", mainly in the Arabic countries in which the Hanafi School is prevailing (Kruiniger, 2015). An example of a man's restriction to talaq is in Morocco, where talaq is powerless when it is pronounced during the women's monthly bleed or an outbreak of excessive anger (Sonneveld, 2019). Moreover, both Egyptian and Moroccan women were granted numerous reasons for divorce since the establishment of the Maliki School in Morocco, which is the most progressive of all the other three Sunni law-schools (Sonneveld, 2019).

A new radical reformation, which privileged women over men, widely known with the term khul' was put into practice in several Arab countries, with Egypt as its pioneer (Sonneveld, 2019). Khul' was established so as to control and limit the excessive power that men had with talaq, since neither the husband's agreement nor the wife's proof was needed in court so as for it to be valid (Sonneveld, 2019). According to Sonneveld (2012), khul' created chaos in and out of Egypt, while in Morocco it never got accepted by the Moroccan legislative system.

2.4. Religion

Religion is the most important component of the Arab community since it is present in all aspects of people's lives. The Arab's main religion is Islam, which is monotheistic, and has Muhammad as its Holy Prophet through whom it managed to spread far and wide throughout the centuries (Ali, 2015). The literal meaning of the word Islam is getting into paradise and the believer who follows that is called a Muslim (Ali, 2015). Islam shares both similarities and differences with Christianity and Judaism since all three of them derived from a common origin (Denny, 2015). Jesus, the son of God for Christians, has also a significant role in Muslims' faith but He is known as Isa, a highly esteemed prophet, given the fact that Muslims do not consent to his divine nature (Denny, 2015).

The Holy Book of Islam is called Quran and it was delivered to Muhammad in the month of Ramadan while he was spending a night alone in the cave of Hira (Ali, 2015). The night he

received the God's message was named the Night of Majesty; in Arabic "Lailat al-Qadr", and the language that was transferred was Arabic (Ali, 2015). This book has stayed without any changes since then and it is up to this day cautiously treated by its believers, who in order to read it, they should have previously exercised "wudu", a type of cleaning, since they must be physically and mentally clean before coming in contact with the God's message (Denny, 2015).

Apart from the Quran, Muslims also follow the practices and sayings of their prophet Muhammad, which are known with the terms Sunnah and Hadith respectively (Ali, 2015). What is more, Islam consists of five basic pillars, and these are the belief in God, Muhammad and the angels, the five-time prayers, the fasting which takes place in the 9th month of the Islamic calendar, the pilgrimage to Mecca and the yearly donation of zakat, which is a specific amount of money that affluent Muslims should distribute to the impoverished (Denny, 2015). The received pilgrimage, known as hajj, must be fulfilled at least once in a Muslim person's life during the festival of Eid-ul-Adha (Denny, 2015). Any other occasional pilgrimages to Mecca are known as "umra" (Denny, 2015). When it comes to the religious places of worship, all Muslims gather at mosques, known as masjids in Arabic, which function as places of education, and courtrooms, as well in their community (Denny, 2015). However, it is important to note that men and women gather in different places, and the men's space is more spacious than the women's since it is obligatory only for the male community to attend Friday's prayers in the mosque (Denny, 2015).

What is more, the Islamic Law, widely known as Sharia, is very important for the function of the legal system in the Muslim countries (Johnson & Sergie, 2014). Its meaning in Arabic is path and it governs Muslims' daily lives, religious and familial duties, and their financial interchanges (Johnson & Sergie, 2014). The vast majority of Muslims support that the Sharia Law is sent by God and thus, an Islamic government should follow its doctrines (Quraishi-Landes, 2014). Therefore, governments in Islamic countries tend to mainly be theocratic rather than democratic (Quraishi- Landes, 2014). However, Sharia, which is considered to be the divine Law, depicts the total truth, but given that all humans are imperfect, they often perceive and practice that truth mistakenly (Quraishi- Landes, 2014).

Nevertheless, it should be highlighted that the Quran and Sunna, are two sources that are not processed, thus, they cannot be used without any human interpretation (Peters & Bearman, 2016). That interpretation is realized by specialized jurists who try to develop out of them the rules that were meant to convey, a human activity that is known with the term "figh" (Peters & Bearman, 2016). Hence, Figh was developed to give answers to particular ambiguous questions (Thalib, 2018).Given that it was not possible to govern a state by

mainly relying on the revealed by God sources who were frozen in time, Muslim jurists accepted the need for adjusting but not altering some of the laws (Fadel, 2016). Although Muslims deeply respect the Sharia since it is the only path to salvation that God showed to His Messenger Muhammad, the West is against it as it is frequently characterized as being illogical and uncomfortable (Peters & Bearman, 2016).

On the other hand, another very significant aspect of the Muslim community that ought to be analyzed is that of the Sunni and Shia communities, which two basic sub-groups in Islam are. The division of Muslim believers into various sub-groups, or else sects, derives from their disagreement of how to practice their faith and worship (Qomar, 2015), with the most important division being the contrast between the Sunni and Shia groups (Al-Munawarah et al., 2024). Those two Muslim groups have been fighting each other in an effort to verify one's superiority over the other, with characteristic examples the rivalry that arose in Iraq and Libya, after the authoritarian regimes of Saddam Hussein and Muhammar Kadafi collapsed (Al-Munawarah et al., 2024).

It should be stressed that both groups, Sunnis and Shias share more similarities than differences when it comes to their faith (Chitwood, 2017). Notwithstanding, their dissimilarities derived only after the demise of Prophet Muhammad in AD 632, when the two groups disagreed on who would be the next caliph (Chitwood, 2017). On the one hand, today's so-called Sunnis supported Abu Bakr, the prophet's closest friend, whereas, Shias. Which constituted a minority group, went for Prophet's son-in-law and cousin, Ali (Chitwood, 2017). According to Chitwood (2017), this division has led to theological and practical differences since Sunnis are expected to pray five times a day, while Shias reduced them to three.

2.5. Historical and Cultural Heritage

The Arabic world is characterized not only by much linguistic but also by a wealthy cultural heritage, with Syria being the leading Arab country when it comes to history and culture since according to multiple archaeological sources, Syrian civilization is one of the most ancient civilizations on Earth. More specifically, Syria is known for the desert city of Palmyra, which is located in the central Syrian desert to the north east of the capital city of Damascus (Mudie, 2018). Palmyra developed as an essential trading center during the Byzantine and Islamic periods due to its important prime location on the cross-desert caravan paths (Mudie, 2018). In the late Ottoman rule (1876-1922) and the consequent French dominion (1923-1946), numerous Palmyrene antiquities were removed from the location and transported to

museums all over the world (Mudie, 2018). After the emergence of the civil war and the arrival of ISIS in 2015, Palmyra, which one was the main source of the Syrian income, started decaying due to the detrimental effects on the archaeological site and its surroundings (Mudie, 2018).

Another major archaeological site in the southern part of Syria is Bosra, which is resided 140 km south of Damascus, considering that a modern town has been raised amongst the monuments (Tapete & Cigna, 2020). In the ancient times, Bosra used to be the core of a wealthy and affluent area, well- equipped with monuments, temples, hippodrome, theatres, all of it protected by exterior walls (Greenhalgh, 2017). Moreover, the Roman and Byzantine periods, ancient Bosra was a highly influential city as it was the capital of the Provincia Arabia (Piraud-Fournet, 2022). In the southeast part of Bosra, the ruins of Palace of Trajan, the largest ancient habitation, exist in the outskirts of the biggest Byzantine church of the Provincia Arabia, as well (Piraud-Fournet, 2022).

Additionally, a city which is regarded to be one of the most noteworthy cities in the Middle East, due to its 150 archaeological landmarks, is Aleppo (Shadi & Bashar, 2015). More specifically, those archaeological landmarks consist of the fortress built in the twelfth century, the Great Mosque and multiple schools from the 16th and 17th centuries (Shadi & Bashar, 2015). Notwithstanding, Syria's ongoing war has been threatening and destroying a vast number of its cultural legacy, a loss that does not only affect the Syrian state and history, but also the whole mankind (Shadi & Bashar, 2015). Furthermore, Syria is famous for its castle, known with the name "Krak de Chevaliers". Its history dates back to 1031 CE when it was originally constructed for the Emir of Aleppo, Salah al- Din's grandson (Miller, 2023). Later on, the castle was occupied by the Knights Hospitaller in the middle of the twelfth century and was broadly renovated (Miller, 2023). However, in April of 1271 CE, Mamluk leader Al- Zahir Baybars beat the castle and its residents and handed the Krak de Chevaliers back to Muslim hands (Miller, 2023).

When it comes to Palestine, the Zionist domination of the Palestinian land has led to Israeli's appropriating Palestinian's cultural wealth (Hawari, 2010). In other words, plenty of the archaeological, historical and holy sites in the West Bank and Jerusalem have been exploited by the Jews by being labeled "biblical" or "Jewish" (Hawari, 2010). According to Hawari (2010), the citadel of Jerusalem, which is located in the Western part of the old city, is regarded as one of the most important sights of it. That castle is a representative example of the Islamic and medieval military architecture, a site of military force which influenced the political affairs and the social life of Jerusalem until the beginning of the 20th century (Hawari, 2010). Moreover, a city of great importance for the Palestinian land is Bethlehem, the

birthplace of Christ, which attracts thousands of pilgrims who travel per year to the Holy Places to worship their God (Suleiman & Mohamed, 2011). An archaeological site that has to be highlighted is that of the ancient city of Jericho. It is located approximately five miles west of the Jordan River beside the Ein es-Sultan spring on the northwest border of modern Jericho, and it is very significant for the state of Jerusalem since it is highly related to the biblical city of Jericho and the story of its catastrophe (Kennedy, 2023). According to multiple sources, Jericho is one of the many villages in Canaan where an impressive fortification system was built throughout the Middle Bronze Age (Kennedy, 2023).

Not only Palestine though or Syria are characterized by much cultural heritage but also Morocco, which is admittedly a geographically homogeneous land (Abdullah, 2015). Even so, Morocco consists of 31 Medinas, otherwise known as old traditional Arab parts of a town, including the Fez el-Bali Medina (Abdullah, 2015). On the whole, Moroccan Medinas have maintained a genuine physical environment throughout the centuries, although in some cases the forsaken buildings have been replaced by new constructions (Abdullah, 2015). Particularly, Fez is the third biggest city in Morocco and it is also one of the most ancient imperial towns (Abdullah, 2015). It was founded at the beginning of the ninth century and soon became a religious site and a trading hub, which consists of two Medinas, with Fez el-Bali being the most ancient and significant of the two, given that it was announced as a UNESCO World Heritage Site (Abdullah, 2015). Last but not least, according to Abdullah (2015), Fez has been characterized as the Athens of Africa and the Mecca of the West.

What is more, the Moroccan land is also well-known for its most significant archaeological site, Volubilis, which has been announced as a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1997 (Badreddine et al., 2020). The archaeological of Volubilis includes numerous monuments inside the city walls, such as massive buildings, houses, temples, statues and mosaics and it depicts the co-existence of two types of the ancient world, Punic Mauritian and Roman. It should be mentioned that Volubilis was a prominent military post of the Roman Empire in 40 AD (Al-Mukhtar et al., 2016). This site reinforces today's tourism and hence, increases the annual income in the area, making its preservation a noteworthy issue for the Moroccan government (Al- Mukhtar et al., 2016). Additionally, Morocco is widely advertised for its magnificent monument of Rabat city, the Hassan Mosque, which was an extravagant project of a Moroccan architecture that blossomed along the Almohade dynasty (1147-1269) (Achakir et al., 2017). The Hassan Mosque was established by the caliph Abu Yusuf Ya'qub Al-Mansour and it was avowedly the result of the dynasty ruling and the holy war, or else, Jihad (Achakir et al., 2017).

Methodology

Method

In order to address the topic, collect the findings and complete the survey, the researcher decided to employ the qualitative approach after a thorough search for qualitative and quantitative methods had first taken place. First and foremost, according to Marshall & Rossman (2014), the qualitative approach is rather a trustworthy tool frequently employed for shedding light on social phenomena. Moreover, it permits the researchers to improve and implement their interpersonal and subjectivity proficiency into their research investigative procedure (Teherani et al., 2015).According to Hignett & McDermott (2015), qualitative researchers are concerned about how people comprehend the world and under what conditions they explicate various events. It should be stressed that in such a procedure, our interviews are our data to base our observations on, while, the study population is rather restricted through purposeful selection (Teherani et al., 2015).

A qualitative research, which is almost always investigative, is the best option for the researcher providing that the survey questions aim at discovering what people believe, know or practice in their real life (Kelly, 2017). Qualitative methods are employed to respond to questions concerning experience, meaning and viewpoints, most frequently from the participants' angle (Hammarberg et al., 2016). That is to say, the participants are given voice in a qualitative survey, whereas at the same time, the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee is often less official than in a quantitative research (Pathak et al., 2013). However, the interviewees are sometimes insincere due to the fact that they may not feel comfortable or may be unaware of some parameters (Kelly, 2017). The qualitative research techniques entail semi-structured and in-depth interviews to inquire views on a particular topic (Hammarberg et al., 2016).

Tools

Therefore, in-depth interviews with semi-structured questions were engaged through which the researcher attempted to obtain depth of information rather than just statistically represent the outcomes (Teherani et al., 2015). Last but not least, the researcher seeked to

interpret the meanings that the survey participants expressed throughout the interview (Teherani et al., 2015). The semi-structured interview was adopted because it allows the participants to transfer their own personality and viewpoint to the discussion and the focus questions are openly stated by the interviewer (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). What is more, semi-structured interviews offer the most direct approach to collecting in-depth and wealthy data concerning a specific social phenomenon (Barrett & Twycross, 2018) and are based on a number of open-ended questions related to the topic (Moriarty, 2011). Another advantage of the qualitative research for the researcher is that no predetermined criteria for the sample size are required as long as the content is successfully approached (Lopez &Whiteboard, 2013).

The procedure of the data collection is closely connected with sampling and it is regarded as being supplemental to it (Lopez & Whitehead, 2013). In other words, data is directly gathered from the engaged sample population, and it is divided into two main categories, the direct and the indirect data (Lopez & Whitehead, 2013). Direct data collection encloses recordable spoken or written responses, body language and interactions (Lopez & Whitehead, 2013), and it was the method employed by this paper's researcher. In particular, the researcher opted for a semi-structured interview with open-ended questions because they give the interviewer a full insight into the participants' world, although they are admittedly much demanding when it comes to decoding and analyzing them (Neuert et al., 2021). Besides, in open-ended questions, the quality of the answers are influenced by the respondents' age, experience, gender, education and background, and thus, there are no correct or incorrect responses (Neuert at al., 2021). Last but not least, an open-ended interview necessitates the cultivation of a reliable relationship between the two parties (Hammer & Wildavsky, 2018).

Sample

Our research took place in the Juvenile Detention Centre of Volos and the main goal of this study was to examine and compare as for their similarities and differences the linguistic and cultural elements of the Arabic speaking students who come from different Arab backgrounds. Such a linguistic, cultural and social diversity derives from the fact that the Arab world is divided into twenty-two countries despite the existence of the wide concept of the Arab Unity (Nahar, 2006). The researcher attempted to gain more information regarding the following thematic axes: Arabic language, clothing and head garments, marriage and divorce, hospitality and politeness, religion and cultural heritage. More specifically some of

the suggested questions were: 1. how is politeness perceived and expressed in your country? What is considered to be very rude? Were you ever mistreated by anyone and why? , 2. Why do women and men make use of head garments? Do you or any of your close family members make use of any?, 3. Which linguistic variety and why is mostly used and respected in your area, Modern Standard Arabic or the regional/colloquial dialect? What do you feel more comfortable using, MSA or QA, and why? , 4. What are the steps that a couple has to take in order to get married? Can women file for a divorce and what is the procedure? , 5. What are some important religious celebrations and what is celebrated in each one of them? , and 6. Are you aware of any archaeological/ historical monuments in your homeland? etc.

 The researcher interviewed eight internees, deriving from Syria, Palestine and Morocco. The language used for the survey was Greek since the participants did not possess the English language. Due to the wider framework and its peculiarity, written permission was taken and complete anonymity was preserved. The place for the realization of the interviews was the school of the Juvenile Detention Centre of Volos in view of the fact that the interviewees were all students and the school classrooms were the only spaces, in which the interviewer had easy access to. Because of the perplexity of the environment, the participants could not have as much time at their disposal as they wished for since there were strict yard timetables that had to be respected. This is why there were some interviews that had to be stopped and continued on another day and this undoubtedly interrupted the respondents' stream of thoughts. Moreover, the interviewer had to deal with the frequent unannounced transfers of the detainees, an obstacle that delayed the whole procedure. Additionally, since no voice recorders were allowed, the transcription of the interviews took a considerable length of time. Last but not least, all the detainees were men, hence, the survey lacks a female's point of view.

Main Findings

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Out of the nine men, who participated in the survey, most of them were between the age ranges of 19-25 years old, with only one approaching the thirtieth decade of his life. Among them, there were six Syrians, two Palestinians, one Moroccan and one Iraqi men. The majority (6 out of 9) were unmarried, whereas, one was engaged and only two were married

with children. Most of the respondents were not educated, since no one has finished the tertiary education, only two have completed the secondary education, while the rest either have fully or not fulfilled the primary education due to the war that took place in Syria and forced them to drop out of it. In addition to that, all of the nine interviewees were Sunni Muslims, with one of them being engaged to a Christian Syrian woman. Also, eight out of nine considered themselves very religious, with just only one respondent standing out by stating that he does not follow religion in all its aspects.

 What is more, seven out of the nine respondents left their country mostly because of the war, or the conflict zones that took place there. Only two of them, the Moroccan and the Iraqi left their country in order to find better living and financial conditions. Surprisingly, all nine have lived in Turkey for some time, either studying or working there, before coming to Greece. What is even more surprising is that they all left from Turkey as they faced intense racism and even physical violence on a frequent basis due to their nationalities. As far as their familial background is concerned, only one child is a member of a polygamous marriage (i.e. his father has two legal wives simultaneously). The rest of them are children of monogamous large families, since children are considered to be the greatest blessing in their culture.

Results

 Our interview focused on seven main thematic axes, that is, hospitality/politeness, clothing and head garments, language, marriage, customs, religion and civilization. To begin with, hospitality and politeness were placed very highly by all participants, no matter their origin, social and academic background or marital status. More specifically, the participants from Palestine and Syria highlighted the importance of offering accommodation and serving food to a guest at least for three days; even if they are unknown, when they were asked about the way hospitality is expressed in their country. Hospitality is prioritized in every household; however, they all agreed that prior notice is expected since the women of their house have to prepare food and desserts and they, also, need to cover themselves if the guests are not close relatives. In some cases, women might also need to move to another room if the guest is unknown to them. To understand the importance of hospitality, a Syrian interviewee added "All houses must have a guest room, no one enters that room from our family, and it is the best room of the house".

 The Palestinian interviewee also stressed how much hospitality means to them and their reputation. He said "The first floor of our house was solely devoted to the guests, my mum

and sisters cleaned it and when we had guests, they first offered them desserts, fruits and coffee and then, homemade food. Men and women all sat together but my mother always wore her hijab". Another Syrian interviewee claimed "My house will become yours if you are my guest. You can ask for whichever room you want to sleep in and what kind of food or fruit you wish for. I, as a host, have to make sure I serve all of your needs and wishes. But, hugs are not allowed between different sexes, only handshaking. When a house includes a separate guest room, then no one from the family is allowed to enter it since it has to stay empty and clean". On the contrary, the Moroccan participant said "The guest room in not something ordinary in Morocco, unless you have a double-floor house. When we had guests, mostly from our extended family of course, because we didn't trust strangers, the main dish had to include meat. After the lunch, we offered cake and fruits to them".

As far as politeness is concerned, it is a core value which is very highly placed within the Arab societies. There are various behaviors that can be viewed as being impolite, such as for example being violent towards women. More particularly, as a Syrian stated "It is very rude to hit a girl in our culture". This was also confirmed by one of the two Palestinians who commented "It is forbidden to hit a woman. Even if she cheats on you, you must just break up with her". In addition to demonstrating violence to a woman, the Palestinian added that it is considered very rude if women swear whether justifiably or not publicly. However, the Moroccan differed himself from the rest by claiming that it is not impolite to hit a woman since you are allowed to do so in the Quran under specific circumstances. According to him, it is impolite, though, to shout at or misbehave towards an elderly person. Respect to the elderly was also prioritized by the Iraqi interviewee who said "It is essential to show respect to the elderly by listening carefully to their advice". Another finding that differed from the rest was the response of another married Syrian who supported that it is rude to take the hijab off a girl by force.

When it came to the question why men and women make use of particular head garments, the answers coincided largely. More specifically, the majority of the participants claimed that women make use of head coverings, widely known as hijabs, because God commanded them to do so in the Quran, while men might wear their head coverings, known as keffiyehs, because they are markers of their Arab cultural identity. According to a Syrian interviewee: "Girls must wear their hijab because it is a demand in the Quran. But, men wear theirs because it attributes beauty, charm and quality to their appearance. In the follow-up question, whether participants themselves or any family member wear a head garment, the answers were all positive when it came to the female members of their family. Although, almost all if the participants stated that there are women who do not wear hijab back in

their country, all of their family's women make us of them outside the house. According to the Iraqi man: " 80% of the young women in my country do not wear hijab in the street, while at the same time 90% of the elderly women do".

One of the two Palestinian participants supported that his mother and sisters, all wear their hijab and abbayah, whereas his fiancé, who is Christian, does not follow that strict code in their country since she is not Muslim. On the other hand, the Moroccan claimed that the hijab must be worn no matter what for religious purposes. Namely, he said: "Hijab is worn because it is a sin for a woman to show her hair. My sister has been wearing her hijab since the age of seven in order to get used to it. Imagine that even I have barely seen my own mother's hair. Hair should by no means be demonstrated publicly, otherwise one makes fun of God". On the contrary, when it came to men, the participants claimed that neither themselves nor anyone their age wears keffiyehs or egals anymore since they are considered too traditional, and only under the older men wear them and under particular occasions. An illustrative example is what the Moroccan interviewee stated: "My grandpa wears his keffiyeh on the head and a djellaba on his body. My father and uncle do not wear them…Clothing has altered a lot due to social media I guess".

It is interesting, though, to examine a more modern viewpoint from a non-conservative Syrian interviewee who supported that the use of hijab should be a matter of free choice. He recalled how much ISIS had influenced the attire in many Syrian districts, since it demanded the strict use of niqab and burqa by all women, during which not even their hands could be shown outside. On the other hand, men's keffiyeh was a matter of culture, passing on from generation to generation. He stated that his father wore his keffiyeh on his head, but he himself never wore one in his life because it seems old-fashioned and countrified to him. However, he added that the white attire, known as thobe, and the keffiyeh indicate the Arab identity. Notwithstanding, he stressed that not all of his girl classmates wore a hijab in the school, and he finally concluded that in some areas many Christians were dressed as Muslims and quite the opposite.

Family is another deep-rooted structure that plays a central role in the Arabic countries. All participants expressed their desire to get married and create a big family in a few years' time, whereas only one Syrian interviewee with more liberal viewpoints, expressed his desire to get married after the age of thirty and have one-two children since in his opinion, children can cause many problems to the couple. More particularly, he stated "I don't want to get married now because I am too young and I will not be able to handle with the monogamy. I am thinking of getting married at the age of 30-35. Age is just a number when it comes to love, however, it is generally better for a man to be older than the woman. Personally, I

don't want a lot of children and quickly, I don't think that marriage means only having children as I have heard that the majority of the couples have problems after the arrival of their kids". When the interviewer posed the question of how their societies view an unmarried person, either a man or a woman, their views did not differ to a large extent. There were some participants who supported that someone makes a big mistake if they decide not to get married, since both sexes were created by God so as to reproduce themselves. According to the Palestinian participant " It is a big sin not to get married since our God created us so as to reproduce and create big families…. Especially for a man it is very important to start a family." Almost half of them agreed on the fact that someone, who is unmarried, is viewed as absent-minded and people do not value their opinion. Nevertheless, the Moroccan interviewee claimed: "It is not a sin to stay single, but we say in our country that a marriage equals half religion", reinforcing the view that creating a family is highly desired by the Muslims.

 As far as the wedding is concerned, our participants were asked about the overall process that takes place before a couple gets married in their country. Only a few of them mentioned falling in love as the main reason prior to proposing marriage to a girl, while the majority focused on their family's opinion, and more particularly, their mother's view about her which plays a decisive role in their final choice. "If my mother chooses a wife for me, I will get married to her without second thoughts because I trust my mother's criteria…she knows more" were the exact words of the interviewee from Morocco. A Syrian interviewee confessed: "I saw my wife in a friend's wedding, we danced dabke and we fell in love with one another. Her friends asked for my number and she texted me on What's app. I asked her out and sent my mother to ask for her hand. If my mother had said no, I wouldn't have continued with her no matter how much I liked her". Interestingly, the Iraqi participant was the only one who mentioned the word sex in his response, stating that it is not advisable before marriage, for neither of the two sexes, and especially for the women.

 What is more, all participants from Syria and Palestine highlighted the process upon asking for a woman's hand in their country and their answers coincided to a great degree. "It is a shame to steal a girl secretly without asking for her family's consent. It is a shame for our whole family that gets stigmatized. When we love a woman, we send the women of our family to ask for her hand from her mother. If her mother approves, then the following days the men go to her father and ask officially for her hand. The two sides have to agree on the dowry, money that the groom offers to his future wife and father-in-law" was the answer of a Palestinian interviewee who was totally against having any kind of physical contact before the wedding takes place. Out of the nine interviewees, only one claimed that offering money

was not necessary since his father-in-law, who was also his uncle, never asked for it in order to give his daughter. More particularly, he stated "I never offered a dowry to my father-in-law, he was my uncle… I just asked for the girl and we agreed on the details before getting married to her." Interesting was the fact that dowry is not given by women, but, on the contrary by men, and offers have to be proposed to the bride's father before approving or rejecting the potential groom. All of the participants highlighted the importance of convincing the girl's family, while no one mentioned the girls' desire as a prerequisite.

As far as the issue of divorce is concerned, the researcher found out that both parties have the right to file for it. A high percentage of our participants referred to the dissolution of a marriage via the use of the word "talaq" three times, always provided that it is only uttered by the husband, and it is valid if and only he is sober and not under the influence of addictive substances. According to the Syrian interviewees, a woman can ask for a divorce, but it is a phenomenon that mostly appears in big cities, where women feel freer. In particular, one of the young Syrian men said: "Yes, of course a woman can ask for a divorce, but mostly in a city… In a city she goes to her lawyer or talks to her father about her decision and if her spouse doesn't agree, they give him his money back to end their marriage". Another Syrian participant claimed that women have the right to ask for a divorce at the court, but the judge will only decide to approve of the divorce in case of a serious reason. A remarkable finding from the interview was that a woman has the right to apply first for a divorce in Syria, but the man is not obliged to give her money, no matter if there are children or not.

Furthermore, as the Iraqi respondent asserted, Iraqi women have the right to initiate a divorce by the law, but, in some cases they are afraid to do so because they feel insecure about their future. However, divorce in Morocco favors more the female population, contrary to Syria, since the Moroccan interviewee said: "Women can ask for a divorce…men do not usually ask in my country because if they do, they need to pay for their woman's needs until she gets married again". The Palestinians supported that both men and women apply for divorces. However, if the man does not agree to give his woman a divorce, the couple ends up in the court, in which the trials may take up to five years if the two parties do not agree on the prerequisites. One of the two Palestinians, also, added: "In Palestine, if you have sons, they can stay with their mother until the age of fifteen and daughters until the eighteenth year of their life in case of a divorce….the father can see them every week and has the obligation to pay an alimony only for his children, not for his ex-wife".

Interesting were the answers regarding the linguistic diglossia in the Arab countries. More specifically, in the question whether the participants prefer to use more the Standard Arabic, known as al-fusha, or their regional dialect, they all showed a clear preference for the

colloquial dialect of their homeland. The reasons varied from the fact that al-fusha is a difficult language to use to the fact that it sounds too formal, and therefore old-fashioned. Surprisingly, no one mentioned how important al-fusha is to them or the status that it holds given that it is the language that the God chose to convey His message in the Quran. According to a Palestinian respondent, it might be more polite but it sounds too heavy, and thus, he avoids using it on his daily interactions. Finally, the vast majority of the answers showcased that the colloquial dialects are preferred because their speakers feel more confident since they are the first linguistic codes that they hear and speak.

In addition, the participants from Syria, Palestine and Iraq told the interviewer that they do not understand the North African dialects deriving from Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Egypt. Similarly, the Moroccan denied understanding the Levantine dialects (i.e. Syrian, Palestine etc.) because they differ from his own to a great degree. More precisely, he said: "In Syria, people speak clear Arabic, in Morocco the language is different, our Arabic is a street language …almost no one fully understands al-fusha although it is taught at school. I find it hard to communicate with the Syrians, our languages are so diverse, and the Moroccan dialect is a blend of Arabic and French." Last but not least, the Syrians explained that the colloquial dialects differ completely from one another based on the region in Syria. On the contrary, the Iraqi made it clear that the Iraqi colloquial dialect is the same in all his country's districts.

As far as the Greek language is concerned, the largest number of respondents highlighted the difficulty they are dealing with its letters and the fact that it is written and read from left to right. Two out of the nine participants believe that the most difficult trait of the Greek language is its long polysyllabic words. The vast majority stressed the difficulty in reading and writing, rather than in speaking it. One of the interviewees, also, mentioned the demanding spelling, which makes it difficult for someone to master it. Namely, he said: "I wanted to learn how to speak Greek so as not to need translation…I can read Greek, but I can't write, too many /e/ sounds". As for why all of them keep asking if the Greek language has two main dialects, they all responded that they believed that the linguistic situation in Greece was similar to theirs, and they thought that schools teach the official language, in addition to existing an informal street Greek variant, as well.

As for their customs and traditions, nine out of the nine participants connected that question to their religion. First and foremost, they all mentioned Ramadan as part of their Islamic tradition, during which no food, water, sexual intimacy or swearing is permitted. Additionally, Eid al-Adha was also mentioned by the majority of the interviewees given that it is a celebration during which they slaughter an animal and share its meat to the poor. As a

Syrian claimed: "You slaughter a lamb but you do not keep it for you…If you know a poor person, you give it to them, otherwise you give it to an imam". According to the Palestinians, not all Muslims follow the Ramadan in Palestine, and they gave the example of a woman who is on her menstrual cycle and cannot fast on the specific days. Notwithstanding, they said that she can make up for the days she lost at a later time or else, she has to give some money as a charity to the poor in exchange.

On the other hand, the Moroccan respondent answered that there are two important celebrations in Morocco, Ramadan during which people who fast should wear new clothes and Eid al-Fitr, during which they cook lamb, but not for the poor, but for their family members. As he said, lamb is given to the poor only if there is surplus meat. What is more, the Moroccan stated the boys' circumcision as a custom, which most frequently takes place at the age of two or three. In Syria, as has been reported by our target population, boys' circumcision is a custom that takes place two to five days after the birth of the child. Another custom that they have in Morocco, contrary to Syria, is that parents decide by lottery their children's names. According to the Moroccan interviewee, names are suggested and the couple decides by lottery since in Morocco children do not inherit their names from their grandparents, contrary to Syria, where the firstborn boy is given the name of his father's father.

When it came to their historical culture, the majority of the respondents were not aware of the rich cultural heritage of their countries. Only a small proportion mentioned some landmarks, yet they could not recall much information. More particularly, the Syrians mentioned in their responses the ancient city of Tadmor, today known as Palmyra, the city and museum of Deir ez-Zor, the castle Krak des Chevaliers and the Citadel of Aleppo. According to a Syrian: "In Deir ez-Zor, there is a big stone with a drawing of Myriam, Jesus' mother on it. ISIS did not destroy those monuments, but they looted Christian cemeteries". Surprisingly enough, neither the Moroccan nor the Iraqi remembered any cultural and historical sights of their countries. On the other hand, the Palestinian interviewees mentioned the Al-Aqsa mosque, the tomb of Osman, their fifth prophet and the existence of many old Christian cemeteries.

Finally, the survey closed with a question that referred to what the participants like and dislike in the Greek culture. The vast majority responded that they like the fact that women and men talk to one another freely without fearing the criticism. Notwithstanding, what most of them dislike the most is the approval of homosexuality since God created only two sexes, the man and the woman and the fact that men's position is not that important in the Greek family. In particular, a Syrian interviewee said: "I don't like that there are so many gay

men who get dressed like women" and "I don't like that a man is not number one in the family, he comes last after the children, the woman and even the dog". Moreover, many respondents mentioned that what they love is the freedom, the peacefulness and the lack of racism in our country since it is something they missed. All in all, their answers showed that Greece's freedom of choice is something they all admire since they can live however they wish for.

Discussion

 The present research reveals the deeply religious and male-dominated societies of the Arab-speaking populations in both the North African and Middle Eastern countries. The participants' answers indicated that there are important similarities and differences among the Arab populations, since apart from their common religious background, they constitute diverse societies with different practices. To begin with, hospitality, which is an integral part of the Syrian and Palestinian culture, seems not to be equally important in the Moroccan households. Sobh et al. (2013) stated that a stranger used to be hosted and fed for three days in the ancient years of the Bedouin tribes, a habit that is seen still nowadays in Syria and Palestine, where hosting a guest is expected to last not usually less than three days as stated by our sample. Notwithstanding, contrary to what Memarian et al. (2011) supported in their study, our respondents never mentioned that women and men gather separately in distinct rooms. On the contrary, we found out that both sexes can sit together provided that women make use of their hijab in front of men who are not their relatives, as it is dictated by their religion.

 Another pillar that characterizes the Arabic communities is politeness. Our participants, though, did not give expectable answers that were stated in previous bibliographical sources. Namely, no one mentioned basic behaviors that attribute kindness, such as the ordinary use of particular greetings uttered by the host to their guests, such as the use of the greeting "As-salamu alaykum" or the title "Sheikh", an act of high importance according to Ajaaj (2016). On the contrary, our interviewees stated that politeness equals attention and care for one's woman and focused on the respect that people need to show to their women's use of hijab. What is more, the respect for the elderly was also highlighted, whereas, no one mentioned that the shaking of hands by opposite genders shows lack of politeness, although it was made clear in the Moroccan's answer that no physical touch should take place among members of different sexes unless they belong to the same family.

As far as the female head coverings are concerned, the researcher did not collect unpredictable findings. First and foremost, the participants ascertained the surveys of previous researchers who claimed that women make use of their head coverings, known as hijabs, because it is dictated by their religion. The majority of the participants from Syria and Palestine, although young, did not seem conciliatory as for their own wives' choice of not using their hijab in public, a behavior that demonstrates that women, even if they wanted to seem more modern, are not free to choose for themselves since they do not have much freedom on their body. On the other hand, men's use of head coverings, known as keffiyehs, are not dictated by neither the religion nor the society. Contrary to women, younger men do not make use of their keffiyehs since they consider them outdated and are afraid of getting teased given that only older generations use them nowadays. All in all, our interviewees described keffiyehs as indicators of Arabness, a view that was also proven by Donica (2020) who supported that a keffiyeh is the most identifiable trait of an Arab man's identity. To the researcher's surprise, neither the Palestinians nor the rest referred to keffiyehs as symbols of the Palestinian struggle against the Israelis, despite the current ongoing conflicts in Gaza.

As far as marriage and divorce are concerned, the responses which the researcher received proved what Sonneveld (2019) had explained that the formation of a family is of outmost importance for the vast majority of Arabs. Men still ask for the girls' hand from their parents (Nureeva et al., 2019) and only if the latter agree the wedding procedures begin. A man has to propose the dowry he wishes to give to his future wife in order to come to an agreement since it is a custom that cannot be disregarded. However, in our literature review, we learnt that the girl decides on whether she is satisfied with the offer the man suggests. Contrarily, our interviewees made it clear that it is the father's girl who approves or rejects the offered dowry, known as mehr. Concerning, the decision of staying unmarried, Meray (2018) had supported that men who stay unmarried are viewed as sinners who show no respect to God. Nonetheless, our interviewees did not characterize unmarried men as sinners, but as people who lack a good reputation. Last but not least, our findings verified previous surveys that women have nowadays the right to file for a divorce.

Language is a complex social phenomenon in Arab countries considering that a linguistic diglossia governs all of them, since two linguistic variants coexist, the formal one which is common for all of them, known as al-fusha, and the informal, which varies from one country to another and sometimes even from one region to another. It is undeniably true and verified by our collected data that a colloquial dialect is the first language that children acquire since it is spoken in informal daily interactions, as distinct from al-fusha, which is a language that Arabs respect but do not use frequently because of its difficulties. The current

research, though, discovered new stances by the new generations towards the formal Arabic language (al-fusha), as according to our sample al-fusha sounds extremely old-fashioned and do not prefer it. Along with that, no interviewee referred to the religious importance of al-fusha for them and no one admitted whether they feel proud of it since it is known that it is the language of the Quran, the language that according to multiple previous researches, God chose to transfer His message to the world. Last but not least, the respondents from Middle East admitted that they do not really understand the dialects from North African countries, and vice versa.

Finally, to the dismay of the researcher, the participants knew only a little about their countries' rich cultural and historical heritage. Despite the fact that Syria, Palestine and Morocco are places with plenty of landmarks and archaeological attractions, the respondents had a hard time recalling places of interest in their country, probably because of the fact that their education was incomplete and the majority has left their homeland at a young age due to the political upheaval. Some of the answers referred to the ancient city of Tadmor, otherwise called Palmyra, the city and museum of Deir ez-Zor, the castle Krak des Chevaliers and the Citadel of Aleppo. A really interesting fact is that both the Syrians and the Palestinians referred to specific places of importance for the Christianity, despite being Muslim themselves, such as for example, the big stone with the drawing of Myriam in Deir ez-Zor in Syria, and the multiple Christian cemeteries in Palestine. When it comes to the Iraqi and Moroccan participants, they was not aware of their countries' historical and cultural heritage, despite the fact that they both had completed the elementary education in their homelands. Finally, as for their homelands' customs and traditions, they all made reference to the religious celebrations, such as Ramadan, Eid al-Adha and Eid al-Fitr, showing that religion defines their cultural identity and traditional practices critically.

Conclusion

All in all, the image of Muslim Arab communities is often distorted by the Western media due to mainly religious and political reasons. Hence, western countries tend to believe that all Arabs behave and think alike no matter where they come from. It should be noted, though, that the Arabic world comprises of twenty-two countries, all of which share similarities and differences among them when it comes to cultural and linguistic characteristics, based on their geographical proximity and of course, the political situation. The researcher attended to give insight into those cultural and linguistic traits of the younger Arab generations by interviewing participants from four different countries. Notwithstanding, the sample was limited and the answers were biased and one-sided since they were given

solely from the males' point of view. Therefore, a new research on the same parameters should take place with female interviewees in order to form a more universal opinion of the stances and habits that prevail in the modern Arab World.

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Appendix A

Interview 1

1. How is respect and kindness shown in your country? What is considered to be rude?

There is a wide range of manners that is considered to be socially accepted and esteemed. It is extremely important for someone who wishes to visit or reside in Syria that stealing is viewed as a total sin and whoever steals is seen as their family's shame. Moreover, drinking alcohol in public and doing drugs is unacceptable. Also, maintaining eye contact while communicating is of outmost importance if you do not want to be called impolite. Oh, and always apologising after coughing or sneezing is essential.

2. Can you recall any moment from your life during which you felt that you are not respected outside the borders of your country?

Hmm… I will never forget that evening when I was wandering around in the Taksim square. There were some Turks next to me who were staring at me angrily and as they did not know that I can understand Turkish, they started complaining to one another about me for being Syrian and possessing an i-phone 11. They commented that Syrians are not welcome in their country as they exploit Erdogan's allowances and while the Turks suffer financially, the Syrians live generously. I felt irritated since they judged me for my nationality and they uttered racist comments against me without thinking whether I could understand them and whether their words would hurt my ego.

3. How do Syrians show their hospitality?

First of all, all houses in Syria have one spacious guest room, which is the most beautiful of all and no one enters there without reason. When a family has guests -after being warned in advance- all present men and women sit in the guest room together (women wear their hijab in front of men). The hosts first offer their guests Arabic coffee or tea and they discuss

various topics. Then, they dine and after the dinner, they offer again tea and a Syrian dessert with peanut. For showing their gratitude for the nice hospitality, the guests buy the host's children some presents depending on their gender.

4. Why do men and women make use of specific head garments?

Arab men mostly wear keffiyeh as it is rather a habit of tradition that passes down from generation to generation. However, it is not obligatory for a man to wear one, it is mostly a matter of choice. Keffiyehs vary from black and white to read and white. Most men that make use of one come from or reside permanently in villages or small towns, as men from bigger cities find keffiyehs rather old-fashioned. As far as the women are concerned, the vast majority wears hijab. Although in cities, it is not unusual to see women without hijabs- some girls at schools do not wear them-, in villages it is not socially acceptable as people start gossiping. During ISIS domination, women were strictly obliged to wear niqabs or burqas in public without exposing neither their hands. However, that had one positive aspect, as men could get dressed with burqas in order to secretly meet their beloved ones and no one could understand them.

5. Do you or any of your family members wear head garments? If yes, which one and what does it mean for them?

Well, my father wore black keffiyehs when we went either to his job or outside with friends. He wore it because this is what his father, grandfather and great-grandfather did in the past. I remember hear him saying that it is a family tradition. To be honest, I never wore one. My mother and sisters wore their hijabs when they went outside or when we had male guests in our house.

6. Can you spot any differences/alterations as for the clothing comparing older and younger generations in your country? Please explain with examples.

Of course, there are alterations as years go by. In the past, women could not even walk outside without wearing their headscarves and abayas. Nowadays, girls can wear their casual

clothes and avoid wearing their hijabs. And there is acute criticism from older to younger generations for that. It is also not unusual to see Christians in Syria-apart from Muslims-wearing headscarves as they are more a cultural characteristic rather than a religious one.

7.In your opinion, what is the most characteristic clothing of the Arab world and why?

When I think of the Arab identity, what first comes to my mind is the white attire that we call "thobe" and the turban independently from which Arab country the person, who wears it, is from.

8. A lot of Arab students constantly ask if there are two dialects in the Greek language. Can you understand why such a question is made?

This question is probably made because in Arabic we have two different variations of the same language. The first one is Al-Fusha and we use it at our school, all our coursebooks are written in al-Fusha and we have another regional dialect that we use out of the school, when we are in the streets or our homes.

9. Were you taught Al-Fusha? If yes, where and how long did it take you until you finally managed to conquer it?

Yes, of course. I was taught Al-Fusha when I was at school. I understand it but I don't use it. At school, there was a specific school subject called "Al-Fusha", and apart from it and all the other school coursebooks were written in Al-Fusha, although the teachers explained everything in our regional dialect so as to be easily understood. Al-Fusha is very difficult. It took me quite long until I was finally able to make use of it.

10. Which of the two Arabic dialects do you prefer using when you are both in and outside of your country?

Al-Fusha is only used at schools and on TV in Syria. I certainly prefer our "street language". I feel more confidence without struggling at all.

11. Can you understand the regional dialects of the other Arabic countries? If yes, which ones are closer to the Syrian dialect?

I can easily communicate with people coming from Lebanon and Palestine. Their dialects are very similar to ours. I don't understand almost a thing from the regional dialects of the North African Arabic countries. And another important fact that has to be stated is that from all the Arabic regional dialects, the Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian dialects are closer to Al-Fusha.

12. Which characteristics of the Greek language do you find more difficult as a native Arabic speaker?

What is really difficult for me in Greek is pronouncing the words that consist of many syllables.

13. How is marriage arranged in your country and what are the steps that must be followed by the couple before getting married?

If a boy likes a girl in Syria and wants to propose to her, then he tells his parents to visit her parents so as to ask for her hand. If her parents do not know the interested boy, then he has to be present in the procedure, as well. The girl's father will normally ask for his daughter opinion before giving the final answer to the boy's family. However, there are some fathers that still do not ask their daughter's opinion and they decide themselves about the final result. If the girl's father is willing to give his daughter's hand to the boy, then he asks for money that goes to his daughter so as to purchase the necessary stuff for their future house.

14. Can both men and women ask for divorce in Syria?

Yes, both sides can ask for divorce but mostly in big cities. In villages and smaller societies, a woman cannot easily go to a lawyer and this is why she goes to her father to tell him that she wants to divorce her husband. In big cities, the woman can go to the court and apply for divorce. If the man doesn't accept the divorce, her family gives him money to bribe him. If the man wants a divorce, he can say three times the word "talaq" which means our wedding is over. If he is although under the influence of alcohol or drugs, what he said is not valid.

15. What does family mean to you? Do you want to make your own family and children one day? Why?

Family means love. I don't want to get married now because I am too young and I will not be able to handle with the monogamy. I am thinking of getting married at the age of 30-35. Age is just a number when it comes to love, however, it is generally better for a man to be older than the woman. Personally, I don't want a lot of children and quickly, I don't think that marriage means only having children as I have heard that the majority of the couples have problems after the arrival of their kids.

16. How do people see the unmarried men and women in your country?

It is not something positive for the society as far as religion is also concerned. A woman, though, will not stay unmarried as easily as a man.

17. Can you describe some important customs/ traditions of your country?

Yes, we have Ramadan during which no food, water, sexual intercourse and bad behaviour/swearing is allowed. And there is also, Eid ul Adha during which every family has to butcher a lamb but you shouldn't keep it for you. You should give it either to a poor family or to the imam.

18. Which are the most important religious holidays in your country and what do you celebrate in each one of them?

First of all, we celebrate Ramadan which is considered to be the month in which the Quran was given from God to people on Earth as a guidance of what actions are permitted and not. Furthermore, we have Eid ul Fitr, which follows after the end of Ramadan and it lasts for three days. We celebrate the breaking of the Fast. And the last one is called Eid ul Adha, which lasts for four days and it is a celebration of sacrifice and generosity. It is linked to Abraham's sacrifice of his son in the name of God.

19. Are there any popular archaeological/ historical monuments in your country? Which ones? What do you know about them?

Yes, I remember that there are some important historical monuments in Tadmor, which is an ancient city in Syria. It's far away from my hometown and I have never visited it.

20. Comparing the Greek culture to the culture of your country, what makes a positive and what a negative impression to you?

Your culture is better than ours. I understood that here in prison. If someone goes to prison in Syria, they are deleted for the society. They do not give them a second chance, you see a prison is not a hotel. And almost the same happens in Turkey, as even if you are accepted by the community, you will always have the stigma. I think Greeks are more open-minded and they give second chances.