

„Withdrawing faces“

Nora Gresch and Sophie Uitz

Irritating, aggressive, oppressive, dangerous, emancipatory, intriguing... These are only some of the adjectives associated with a scarf worn by Muslim women to cover their hair, shoulder, face or body: the focal point of the so-called “headscarf-debates” in many European countries. Although present in Europe since the mid 1980s, the debates have intensified during the recent years and an increasing number of countries has introduced regulations concerning the wearing of Muslim body covering in the public realm.

Employing a joint approach of social scientific research and philosophical considerations regarding the (re)presentation of the face of the other (Emmanuel Levinas) and its potential violence to the other (Judith Butler), we raise the questions, what it is that the headscarf (re)presents in these debates and how wearing a headscarf is able to give rise to such passionate controversies today.