



MARHABA COUSINE

Synopsis

In May 2003 I travelled to Syria to visit my cousin Claudia. We had been very close as children – she was the sister I never had – but we had not been in contact for 15 years. Claudia converted to Islam and now lives in Damascus with her husband and three children. Islam has become an integral part of her life, giving it order and meaning. I am not married, have no children, and live in Vienna. Religion and family are hardly issues in my life. However, Claudia and I are held together by our shared memories and by the interest which each of us has in the other's life.

MARHABA COUSINE asks such questions as: Why did Claudia convert to Islam and decide to move to a foreign country with a foreign culture? How does she plan her life with a husband and children in a society with preconceived religious and cultural values, and how does that compare with the way I plan my life? Will she confirm my "western" prejudiced ideas of a Moslem woman, or will she change my ideas? How will my attitude towards Islam change when I get to know more about Claudia's life?" (Astrid Heubrandtner)

MARHABA COUSINE explores the different lifestyles of two women. It is an attempt at mutual understanding on the part of two women who share the same family background. The story is a journey into a shared past, but also a critical and very personal examination of different life patterns and of the general subject of women in Islam.

MARHABA COUSINE allows a different, very personal look at a subject which has been an inalienable element in the media since September 11, 2001. The viewer is torn between the Western and the Arabic worlds, but cultural boundaries seem to disappear in the banality of everyday life, relativizing the cliché of the "clash of cultures". Western prejudices about a Moslem woman are held up against the reality of a European woman who has converted to Islam and lives in Syria.

