



TRANSPARENCY

Produced & Directed by Osama Al-Zain

Documentary
TRT: 30 min

Transcript

FADE IN

...I always wanted to be valued for what I have.

...It makes me feel very angry when I see them. I wanna go and take it off from their head....

...You cannot leave a man and a woman alone in a room together because the devil is always there.

...It's not everything that I have

...If all women started to do that, it would change the man's behavior.

...I wanted to be seen beyond my Hijab.

...They're so weak. They're helpless. They have no right to say I don't want to wear, and they're so trapped....

ARABELLA JOHNSON

I was born Christian, but the reason I converted to Islam actually was because I started having dreams about being Muslim.

My dreams were very clear, and in my dreams I was walking around and I had on the hijab in a Masjid. I had a series of those dreams.

But I said may be, you know, God, Allah is showing me that this is the religion for me.

NAVID NAHIDIAN

I consider myself a religious person, maybe not in a common sense. But I believe there is a god. To consider yourself a practicing Muslim or... you have to do everything right. I mean everything down to every single detail of what it says in the Holy Quran. What I see in the majority of Muslims, maybe 99.99% of them, I don't see this. They just narrow it down to the praying to the fasting to the Hijab, other



things. But they don't do the most basic things that it's asking them, cleanliness, not lying, a lot of other things. You know details. I think most of the religion is in the details.

ARABELLA

You know, it's a real challenge for specially, Muslim women, or people who converted to Islam to cover because we haven't grown up in that kind of society and people start looking at you like what's that? What do you have on? Why are you dressed like that? Who do you think you are? You are American.

When I saw like Muslim ladies, I was thinking "oh they look like grandma." I grew up in this country where every woman in America is going to make herself look the best before she walks outside of her house for every one to see, oh she looks so nice, what color of lipstick is that you have on, what did you put in your hair? You know, it's a big deal here, so it was very difficult and I just that might be the one thing I won't be able to do is to cover.

ROWAN ITANI

Having born and grew up in Lebanon, I was obviously exposed to Islam which is one of the major religions there, although there are many other religions there. And I was raised in a Muslim liberal background.

Growing up in the Arab world for example you have a lot of influences from the west and you're struggling between keeping your traditions and yet being a modern person.

I like the US because you can wear whatever you want you can have the life style you're interested in, and that sense of freedom and being yourself is very interesting in this country.

I had an incident at work. I was at a new place and a woman was asking me where are you from and what religion you are, so I said "I come from Muslim background" and she said "oh it's interesting you don't have that thing on your head" she did like that, and I feel that was insulting and it's ridiculous and that shows again how people have that stereotypical idea that you can be only one thing and one image and that's it.



MERVE KAVACI

I was never forced to wear hijab by my parents, but I was encouraged to, and also I had good role model as my mother as an intellectual Muslim who chose to wear the hijab. My parents always encouraged me but they left the choice to my self. So after I finished my high school which was an American private school in Ankara Turkey, I decided to wear hijab as I was admitted to medical school at the university of Ankara where I was hoping to become a doctor and serve my country. I was the only freshman in the 400 students in the first year, and in sophomore year we were about 10 people as students with hijab.

Few months after admission there was the ban of hijab on students in Turkey. In the last 20 years Muslim women who wanted to wear hijab in Turkey has suffered from the ban of hijab in public life, and that was very much enforced specially in the universities over the university female students.

It was a psychological war that was applied to the nation's young women, and it was very tough. Some of my friend has chosen their hijabs off and continue with their education, but that was not an issue or considerable thing for my self. Hijab was part of me, so to leave it behind me, to compromise on that was out of the question.

I was one of the lucky ones, because I was supported by my family at any decision that I was ready to take, and I did make my decision as to leave the medical school and my family moved to the United States to give and education to us.

TITLE: After finishing her degree in Computer Science from the US, Merve Kavaci returned to Turkey.

ROWAN

I feel as a person involved in the media as a producer and making film I do not feel represented, I do not fit that stereotype the American media has created about being covered up, I am not covered up, like for example they always create this image of a Muslim women who is mistreated, abused, who doesn't have an education, who doesn't have a personality, who doesn't work, who doesn't know anything about the world and I don't think I fit that image.



ARABELLA

I didn't look like how I am covered right now, because covering is... is a process. It's not just something you do for a day and you say, I know how to cover.

The most important thing in covering or hijab for women is that the female form and the figure is not showing, so that's why you have to wear a loose fitting garment or clothing where none of the female form is showing, because that's the whole idea is that you're covered.

ROWAN

I find it difficult to have a friendship or like a deep relationship with a woman who's veiled, because obviously we have differences in values and life style, and how we look at things. And the other thing is that also I feel that they try to preach and force you that their way is the right way and then you have to be like them. I think that even though they might not do it directly, generally veiled women try to use...to preach in a way that this is the right and then they would like all women in the world to cover their hair.

NAVID

My own wife she doesn't practice wearing the hijab. I don't have a problem with that, and I don't know what she thinks, I mean you have to ask her why she is not wearing it. I wouldn't have a problem with it even if she was, if she a strong point of view about it, and if she really knew why she is putting it on.

TITLE: In 1999, Kavci was the first woman with Hijab elected to the Turkish Parliament.

MERVE

There I was, the first women elected to the parliament with Hijab, getting ready to leave for the swearing ceremony of 550 members of the parliament. As I was walking in the hall, to find a place and sit down and wait for my turn to take my oath, I started hearing the bangs on the desks. Later I have realized that those bangs were the start of a protest against my self being with Hijab in the Grand National Assembly. 150 members of the Social Democratic Leftist Party rose up and started applauding and chanting at the same time, as loud as they could in one voice "deshatel... deshatel"... "get out...get out"



Eleven days after my appearance in the parliament to take my oath, I was expelled from Turkish citizenship based on the fact that I was a dual citizen of the United States and Turkey. Yet there were no regulations to prevent me from being a member of the parliament and hold two nationalities. But I was discriminated and this was used against me and I was expelled.

One good thing that came out of this, one of the many good things that came out of this was the fact that I met my husband through my fight of freedom and we got married. The fact that he was living in Washington DC moved me to the United States, also including the fact that there was not much to be done in a country where the freedom of expression and freedom of speech was banned. United States became my home for the second time.

ROWAN

Here in the US I find it very strange to see women who have covering on their hair, in the Arab world you kind of expect it, it's their, it's fine you're accustomed to it, but here I am still shocked, even after being here for 5 years whenever I see one, I don't understand why do they even bother, why do they need to cover their hair, you don't have to here, there is no social pressure, there are no expectations, and on the contrary, I think it's odd an they are bringing a lot of unwanted attention to themselves and they stand out.

MERVE

The problem that women with hijab face is that hijab is something that we have to carry around in our social life, when we go out which makes it a little harder for people who have prejudice against hijab to accept our understanding.

ANDREA FARSAKH

I think there are two types of veiled women in the United States, one is obviously women who immigrate from the middle east, or who are visiting here, and all you have to do is go to a shopping mall and you see plenty of Kuwaitis wearing abaias and you sometimes even see women who cover their faces, you see a lot of women wearing the Hijab, these are people who brought the customs of their own societies with them. But I find it very surprising that there are women who are not of this culture who will take the veil and I can only think that it comes from a lack of sufficient understanding of what Islam really says about veiling and the fact that there are certain expectations that people have who are not necessarily scholars of Islam, and these



women just believe what they are told and they do it. Now yes Islam calls for modesty of women, they should not be wearing mini skirts and they should not be wearing halted dresses and things like that, but they can still be good religious Muslims and not wear the Hijab.

TITLE: HIJAB

MERVE

I would use the word hijab as an international term although it's Arabic as in the international arena as accepted scarf.

ROWAN

Recently we have this term of hijab which is an Arab word but now it's being introduced and incorporated in the English language and now everybody uses it. But it's used mostly to promote a certain ideology, a certain political movement.

MERVE

It is definitely and clearly as mentioned in the Quran an order a command from our Lord, and it is between the woman and her lord.

ANDREA

It is simply tradition, customs and interpretation by men who may feel that they know it all, that they have the correct interpretation but they really have nothing to back it up.

AHMAD YOUSEF

Actually when these verses decent in Medina the woman are who interpreted these verses and they went to their curtains and pull it and covered their bodies and their faces.

ANDREA

All the traditions and all the commentaries are valid only to a certain degree in order to get what the religion really wants you to do you have to go back to the Quran.

MERVE

Is it in the Quran, I do believe that it is in the Quran. Is it "farz", an order from Allah, yes it is.

ROWAN

The problem is that when you have words and translations that have been 1500 years ago, and they meant something else



in that time in that location, in that certain environment and now in the 21st century you're trying to understand and make this adapted to today's life. Maybe it doesn't fit so we're not sure, we don't know exactly what it means.

AHMAD

In two chapters of the Quran there are verses that are addressing that issue, in chapter 24 and in chapter 33 in sourat Al-noor and Al-ahzab, Allah states saying to believing men and saying to believing women

ANDREA

That they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty, that they should not display their beauty and ornament except what must ordinarily appear thereof, that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husband's fathers, their sons, their husband's sons, their brothers or their brother's sons. Now what does beauty mean? I would contend that you can make mean what ever you want it to mean.

MERVE

Women must wear hijab, but they should also have the right to choose not to wear so and accept the consequences.

ARABELLA

I have a daughter, we call her Hedaia, she is 6, her birth name is Amenieh, and I don't think I will force her to wear hijab, she has me as an example, and she is in an Islamic environment, and for her hijab is not a big deal, mommy wears it everyday, mommy is happy wearing hijab, and I don't think that is an issue for her.

HEDAIA

Everybody wears scarf because... I don't know.

ARABELLA

Right now she doesn't have to wear the veil because she is young, but she chooses to wear it because she wants to and her friends wear the veil. She knows when we go to the Masjed that she puts on the veil because we cover ourselves specially, when we go to the Masjed.

I know some Muslim people would disagree with me and say that's wrong sister, no mater what you're supposed to enforce the veil, but you can't enforce it. I can say put that veil on, and make someone put it on in my presence and then I go around the block, what they're going to do? Take



it off and throw it in the garbage can. It's better to be a silent reminder, it's better to be an example and to have a good character, interact and show mercy.

NAVID

I myself come from a country which had the hijab mandated, back in Iran, and that's exactly why I am here, not only the hijab I mean the whole package of religion as they saw, I am not claiming that was religion or is religion but it's their way to control the society and the power.

ROWAN

They are starting from one thing and it's leading to a series of more and more limitations on women's rights.

ANDREA

My take on the veil is that it is oppressive, first of all I am not convinced that women wear it because they want to, I think a lot of women wear it because they are forced to, by their fathers, by their husbands, by their families generally or by the society.

AHMAD

It's women's choice and nobody will pressure women in most of the Muslim and Arabic society will push women to practice veiling... it's her own personal choice.

NAVID

I don't find the hijab being oppressive to women in anyway, I mean, governments could be oppressive, or, you know, different sects of the religion could be oppressive by their own interpretations.

MERVE

People have used according to the political and social winds of time what to take from Islam, which order command from Quran and what to leave out and ignore according to their own benefits, but this is not real Islam.

ANDREA

One can certainly see very starkly the situation in Saudi Arabia, as the best illustration.

ROWAN

It's like an institution, it's part of a package of a whole set of values, where women not only have to cover themselves but it comes along with not being able to vote, not being able to drive...



ANDREA

Every aspect of life is controlled by these veiling regulations, women can not go and do banking in a bank, they have to go to a separate women's bank, they can not get on a bus they have to go and sit in a segregated part of the bus, so it informs every aspect of life and this is the veiling at it's most extreme.

MERVE

We had women who were doctors and nurse at that time, et now we're talking about not allowing women to drive and to speak out?

ARABELLA

I am kind of split on my opinion about women in other Muslim countries. I know they have to live a certain way according to Islamic law, so some people think that's an oppressive state, because they don't understand the Islamic laws or the Islamic code.

MERVE

Nobody can be forced to do something against their will and specially, in our religion where the "niah", the intention is very much important as actions. The intention of wearing hijab should not come, must not come from the enforcement or the fear of some other people.

NAVID

Interestingly enough, a lot of religious women back home, now they even believe it shouldn't be mandatory, what's their reason? Because they say "we go out in the street in full hijab and the hijab is mandatory even the non believers go out in full hijab, so who to see the difference between us and them?" at least that's their take on it.

I think hijab is a state of mind because somebody can be wearing a complete hijab and everything and still be very sexual and sensual.

AHMAD

Jelbab or hijab or the head scarf, it's looks like fence or first line of defense, it will give an indication to whoever approaching that woman she is not an easy person.

ANDREA

I had an Egyptian woman who worked for me once say that she decided to do it because it kept men from pinching her on the bus. As you know the buses in Egypt are extremely



crowded and men take the opportunity when they see women to pinch them but, women who wear the veil don't get pinched.

ROWAN

So women have to cover their hair and their bodies all the time, anytime they're in public, 24 hours, 7 days a week, all the time, so that if randomly might be one guy who has some ideas in his head or some feelings and might do something.

ARABELLA

How I dress, my appearances say, ok she is not like all these women who are running around. She is dressed in a certain way and they have a certain amount of respect.

ROWAN

Why do veiled women always take things to extreme and they say I put the veil to gain respect or protection, as if not wearing the veil means completely the opposite like being almost naked?

ANDREA

The veiling of women is something that has had unfortunate social consequences. When women are viewed as sex objects and this is the way they are viewed, consequences follow from that. The way to protect men against being tempted by women who will lead them down the path of evil as Eve lead Adam, and therefore Judaism and Christianity and Islam all have this strain in their religion where a woman are seen as a temptress. You make the woman a non person... you cover her up totally so she has no other attribute except her femaleness and sex.

ARABELA

Because we're in a country where sex is in everything, you can't watch a television program without seeing somebody nude or this or that. I think that really people are not paying attention to me in terms of she is a sex object that's why she is covering.

NAVID

If you as a man are going outside shopping in a mall, that's one thing, you are not there to look at women. So you can control yourself if you see women there, you know, even if they are not modestly dressed or they act in a certain way, you're there for something else, I don't care. Some men might be distracted, but if you wanna go and stare at a woman, yeah I can go to a strip club or something like that, or I can get a magazine or watch a movie.



AHMAD

The whole concept of hijab is not the issue. The issue is how the woman behaves.

MERVE

Hijab is definitely a religious freedom and more importantly it is a matter of women's right issue.

ROWAN

We've come a long, long way to try and give more equality to women. There are still a lot of problems and the veil to me is bringing us back, specially, a woman in the US who has so many rights so far and she needs to fight for more rights in terms of wages and all kind of things. Why add another problem.

MERVE

As Muslim women we have to regain our liberties. That were granted to us as the servants of Allah. As Qur'an was revealed to Prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him.

ANDREA

I think the time is coming when men will no longer have a monopoly on interpreting religion and therefore women will have a greater voice even though in some ways the veiling is a negative, in other ways it has fostered a growing interest among women in studying the Quran and studying religion.

NAVID

If it is my religion, if nobody else had an influence on me, if no other organization had an influence on me, and I believe that I should do that, then it is most probably right for me. But if somebody else imposed it on me and I'm just saying I do this or I do that because this guy said it's true or millions of people do it, it must be true, that's exactly the same reason I don't believe in it.

FADE OUT

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