

The Four Hijabs

An Animated Short by Jamil Khoury with Dr. Manal Hamzeh

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SCREENINGS

To book a screening of the animated short *The Four Hijabs*, along with a presentation and facilitated conversation, contact info@silkroadrising.org

DEDICATION

The Four Hijabs is dedicated to the memory of Moroccan feminist writer and sociologist Fatima Mernissi (1940-2015), whose groundbreaking scholarship made this film possible.

SOURCE MATERIAL

This animated short film is inspired by *Pedagogies of Deveiling: Muslim Girls and the Hijab Discourse* (Information Age Publishing, 2012) by Dr. Manal Hamzeh.

QURANIC VERSES

Ethical Hijab: 33:32, 33:33

Spatial Hijab: 19:17, 33:53

Visual Hijab: 24:31, 33:59

Spiritual Hijab: 6:25, 7:46, 12:107, 17:45, 18:57, 38:32, 41:5, 42:51, 50:22, 83:15

VISIT THE WEBSITE

For more information, visit www.fourhijabs.org

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

NOISE: low level noise: Police sirens, car noises, whistles; Horns: bull horn, fog horn, megaphone; white noise, TV

FRIEND #1

I want to understand the story of the hijab. The real story.

FRIEND #2

I feel like the word "hijab" is misunderstood. Like it's been intentionally distorted, for ages.

FRIEND #1

As far as I know, in Arabic, the word "hijab" means "to cover" or "protect."

FRIEND #3

It can also mean a boundary or a barrier.

FRIEND #1

So it's not just a headscarf?

FRIEND #3

No. The headscarf is but one small part of it.

FRIEND #2

The hijab is not only about modesty and piety.

FRIEND #3

It's actually more complicated than that.

FRIEND #1

I know. It's about separating men and women.

FRIEND #3

No! The whole gender segregation thing is a big myth.

FRIEND #1

But every conversation about the hijab is 'to veil or not to veil.'

FRIEND #2

Which is the wrong question. Especially in this story.

FRIEND #3

Exactly! The real question is about four distinct hijabs that appear in 16 Quranic verses.

FRIEND #1

Just 16 verses?

FRIEND #3

Yep just 16, out of thousands.

FRIEND #1

Wait. One, two...I know maybe four. The popular ones.

FRIEND #2

I know at least 6!

FRIEND #3

Yes, and those popular verses have been misread. The other ten have been completely silenced.

FRIEND #1

Can we read them ourselves? I mean, without Quranic scholars?

NOISE begins to increase.

FRIENDS #2

Of course. We need to be our own scholars, without mediators! We can interpret the text for ourselves. Let's revisit what the Quran says about the four hijabs.

FRIEND #1

Wow! Freeing our imaginations and engaging our minds!

FRIEND #3

And asking questions about building a gender-just world.

FRIEND #1

We can do that?

FRIEND #2

We can do that and more.

FRIEND #3

But first let's do something about all that noise.

NOISE: Cacophony

All (in unison):

Quiet on the set!

NOISE stops, ball bounces, hits wall offscreen. "Set" falls down. Puffs of dust, darkness.

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

ETHICAL

Hello and welcome to all our viewers out there. I am the Ethical Hijab. We have a very special program planned today. One that we have needed for ages. Yes folks, the wait is over, all four hijabs are together at last!

SPATIAL

Woo-hoo togetherness!

SPIRITUAL

About time, hijabs!

VISUAL

Sing it, sister!

ETHICAL

I've convened this here gathering because we four hijabs have been kept apart far too long and because it was the right thing to do.

My fellow hijabs, we have suffered and we have been wrongly accused of making others suffer. Am I right or am I wrong?

SPATIAL

Two hundred percent!

SPIRITUAL

So right!

VISUAL

Estas correcto!

ETHICAL

We've been misrepresented, distorted, contradicted, taken out of context, and we have been co-opted by patriarchal politics.

SPATIAL

Boo Patriarchy!

SPIRITUAL

Truth to power!

VISUAL

Name it, girl!

ETHICAL

So we're here to reclaim our Quranic verses, clarify our layered meanings, and speak for ourselves.

SPATIAL

Bam! Preach!

SPIRITUAL

Reclaim that text!

VISUAL

Yeah. Mnhmm.

ETHICAL

Introductions first, shall we. Let's start with you, Spatial.

SPATIAL

I am the Spatial Hijab. I'm the divider between private and public spaces.

ETHICAL

That's lovely. Visual.

VISUAL

Oh my God, my turn? Okay. Wow. I am the Visual Hijab. I am the modest dress that is prescribed for Muslim women *and* men.

ETHICAL

Very good. I am the Ethical Hijab and I am the gateway to piety and to modest behavior.

SPIRITUAL

Last and historically least, I am the Spiritual Hijab. I am the barrier blocking spiritual and intellectual advancement. I must be overcome.

VISUAL

Gee, you're like so complex. I really envy that.

SPIRITUAL

I envy your simplicity.

ETHICAL

Envy is so not becoming of us.

SPATIAL

Hello! Spatial here. First one called, remember?

ETHICAL

Please proceed.

SPATIAL

I'm mentioned in the Quran only twice. I'm the curtain that separated The Prophet's bedroom from those overstaying guests on His wedding night. And I'm also the curtain that protected Mary's privacy as she gave birth to Jesus. In other words, I divide that which is private from that which is public in the lives of Muslims.

FRIEND #1

Wait, there's nothing confining or inhibiting about that.

ETHICAL

You're next, Visual.

VISUAL

(dramatically) I'm ready for my close-up. Be sure to get my good side. *(laughs)* I'm just kidding! Every side's my good side. Okay. Some say I'm overexposed, that I'm everywhere you turn. Others say I'm shallow and superficial. But honestly, I am so much more than just appearances. Just like Spatial, I'm mentioned only twice in the Quran. I cover the bodies of Muslim men and women who express modesty through their dress.

FRIEND #2

That's men and women equally, without double standards.

VISUAL

But here's the kicker, you three get to operate literally, figuratively, and metaphorically, I'm just a scrap of cloth.

SPATIAL

Yeah, but you're universal. Hindus, Jews, and Christians are also taught to dress modestly. That's really cool.

SPIRITUAL

Plus, you get to have different appearances and different meanings in different places at different times. Now that's power.

FRIEND #3

Actually, they all show up in every world religion, throughout history.

VISUAL

Great. So I attract a lot of attention. Most of it's still negative. Even when I look stunning.

ETHICAL

Check the ego, please. Okay time to move along. I'll go. I'm the Ethical hijab. I'm referred to in two Quranic verses, for which I'm humbly grateful. I directed The Prophet's wives and his male and female kin to be reserved and to be more pious, especially as Islam's emerging message was facing great resistance.

FRIEND #2

Those were painful times for Muslims.

SPIRITUAL

I'm amazed you can stay so diplomatic, Ethical. Where's your anger?

ETHICAL

I try and model the best behavior that I can. I'm the ethical threshold. I call upon Muslim women and men to inspire others through the behavior they model.

VISUAL

I'm the fashion model, and you're the role model. (*laughs*)

SPATIAL

You ever notice how only you laugh at your jokes?

VISUAL's eye narrows, somewhat menacingly.

ETHICAL

(*diverting attention away from what could be a fight*) Okay Spatial... Now, Spiritual, you have ten verses, we each only have two.

VISUAL

We can't compete with that.

SPIRITUAL

But I still feel erased. No one's ever heard of me.

SPATIAL

You may want to lose the self-pity.

SPIRITUAL

I am the one who inhibits consciousness. I impair vision. I deafen ears. I numb minds. I prevent Muslims from overcoming ignorance and illiteracy. Ignorance is not bliss. With critical inquiry and deeper knowledge Muslims can transcend me.

FRIEND #1

Oh my God! Spiritual hijab exists to be eclipsed?

FRIEND #3

Absolutely. For Muslims to resist oppression and to thrive, they have to open their minds.

FRIEND #2

The verses are available for all Muslims to read, without mediation.

SPIRITUAL

Ten verses or not, I've been ignored.

SPATIAL

Because you're scary.

SPIRITUAL

I'm not scary.

VISUAL

You're complicated.

SPIRITUAL

Learning is scary. Questioning is scary. Challenging deeply-held beliefs is scary.

VISUAL

I feel so ashamed, so humiliated. I've been turned into false dogma, a fixed symbol of female *muslimness*. I don't exist to restrain women's bodies.

ETHICAL

We're experiencing some real breakthroughs here.

SPATIAL

I would never prevent women from participating fully in public life. I don't imprison women in their homes. That's creepy.

VISUAL

When Muslim women embody me as a headscarf or a long cloak, all of a sudden I'm controlling women's bodies. That's not me.

SPATIAL

Public space belongs as much to women as to men. I'm not a barrier to full access or freedom of movement. I'd despise myself if that's what I was.

FRIEND #1

They lied when they told me the basketball court was only for boys?

FRIEND #2

The basketball court belongs to everyone.

VISUAL

Oh, and then I get appropriated by Western *and* Muslim politicians to wage wars. And neither of them care about women, they care about power.

FRIEND #3

So the imperialists and the Islamists are two sides of the same coin.

FRIEND #2

Women's bodies become their battlefield. The imperialists want women uncovered, the Islamists want women covered.

FRIEND #3

Women are but a pretext for justifying domination. They use women to advance their own interests. They don't care what women want.

FRIEND #1

They said I couldn't swim because boys would see me in a bathing suit.

ETHICAL

And I'm not here to police Muslim women or men, in public or private spaces. The individual Muslim determines how to express modest behavior. Not me.

SPIRITUAL

How did I become the suppressor of knowledge, free art and critical thinking? I'm not the enforcer of ignorance or backwardness. I'm the obstacle that Muslims must overcome, using their free will. New knowledge and spiritual depth await Muslims who see beyond me.

FRIEND #1

So there's not one "right" interpretation?

ETHICAL

There can never be. *You* have to interpret our verses and understand them for yourselves. That is something anyone, and *everyone*, can do.

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

	FRIEND #1
Wow, what just happened?	
	FRIEND #3
<i>Ijtihad.</i>	
	FRIEND #1
<i>Ijtihad?</i>	
	FRIEND #3
The Islamic form of interpreting the scriptures.	
	FRIEND #2
It's feminist <i>ijtihad</i> .	
	FRIEND #3
Because it works to imagine an equitable world.	
	FRIEND #1
A gender-just world.	
	FRIEND #2
We can interpret the Quran ourselves.	
	FRIEND #3
We don't need mediators.	
	FRIEND #1
This feels great! We can make sense of our own <i>muslimness</i> in the face of injustice.	
	FRIEND #2
And we can do it in our classrooms.	
	FRIEND #3
In our homes.	
	FRIEND #1
Mosques.	
	FRIEND #2
Legislatures.	

FRIEND #3

On social media.

FRIENDS #1 & #2

Anywhere.

FRIEND #3

This is exactly what we want: a practice of critical de veiling.

FRIEND #2

One of deep understanding and empowerment.

FRIEND #1

That's non-patriarchal and anti-racist.

FRIEND #3

It's all there in the 16 verses. Through critical de veiling we can reread the hijab verses and make them our allies.

FRIEND #1

Well then, I say it's time we re-read those verses.

THE END.