



Religion today: tradition, modernity and change

Egypt's return to Islam

Screen ident: Returning to Islam

Narrator/ Narrator

I thought I'd start my journey by speaking to Mohammed Abdullah Khadus who comes from a distinguished liberal family. His father was one of the most famous Egyptian novelists of the 20th century. Yapsan Abdul Quaddus and his grandmother the feminist and publisher Rosa Yusef. Like a generation of wealthy Egyptians, he grew up influenced by secular and nationalist ideas so I asked him why he had turned to Islam?

Mohammed Abd al-Quaddus *(English subtitles)*

Islam was always part of my heritage, but after the war in 1967, Islam flourished across my generation. That's why I turned to Islam.

Narrator

What were the differences between yourself and the older generation in your family?

Mohammed Abd al-Quaddus *(English subtitles)*.

There wasn't a lot of difference between me and my father. Even though we had opposing political views and differing religious beliefs, we respected each other – which is why we could live in the same house

Narrator

What were the reasons for you going more deeply into Islam?

Mohammed Abd al-Quaddus *(English subtitles)*.

I was really influenced by Sheik Mohammed Raisellah. In fact I went on to marry his daughter. As I mentioned the war had a big effect on me and when I met the Muslim Brothers, I really liked their ethics and ethos and how they presented themselves as living as a big Islamic family.

Narrator

Is your story typical of society as a whole?

Mohammed Abd al-Quaddus

Yes, a lot of my generation turned to Islam in the 1970s. The only difference between me and them was my liberal upbringing.

Screen ident: Sharia Women's clothing

Narrator

A very wide variety here.

Azza Negm

Oh yes. And quite colourful too.

Narrator:

Are these worn? These are worn over the head?

Azza Negm

Yes. To cover their hair. Yes. Sometimes they are covered from here. Sometimes they are just.. the two ends are thrown at the back. Sometimes they are very long loose ones. Actually they are.. it differs.

Narrator

What other things would women wear? I can see there is a..

Azza Negm

Yes. These ones over there.

Narrator

Is this..

Azza Negm

This is called 'Abaya'. Abaya. Yes. It is the perfect thing for a Muslim woman. A woman wears it. she would wear whatever she likes to wear underneath, and this is on top, to cover her body. Because you can see it's long and loose. So it's quite appropriate for Islamic costume.

Narrator

So she would wear this to go out on the street?

Azza Negm

Yes. Exactly. When she mixes up with strangers or with men, she has to be covered.

Narrator

And she would wear the veil on her head as well.

Azza Negm

Yes. As well. Yes.

Narrator

So to complete cover, from top to toe.

Azza Negm

yes. Certainly. You show your face, your hands, your feet.

Screen Ident: Young men and women chose Islam

Riham Sheble Mahrous

I read a lot about Islam and I kind of rediscovered it was like a reversion. I reconverted if you like to Islam. And it taught me a lot. It taught me a lot about my personal choice, that I can choose. And I have to be responsible for my choice. And it gives you much freedom to choose what you want, and to express yourself. And it taught me a lot about my rights as a woman. And the veil for me now, it's not a sign of seclusion, as much as it is to have pride in my body and a pride of my being a woman.

Narrator

I understand that Islam has been influencing social and political conduct more and more but do you think that it is happening in the right way?

Riham Sheble Mahrous

I think as for the legal reforms, yes. It's happening the right way, that Islam is used positively to give more freedom to women.

Narrator:

I had heard that the Koran, and ancient traditions had been used as a justification for changing the existing Egyptian divorce laws. What exactly do they say?

Riham Sheble Mahrous

There was a woman who went to the Prophet and she asked to be divorced, because she didn't like her husband. Despite the fact that he was a very good Muslim and he had good conduct and what have you. So he asked her to give him back the garden that he gave to her as a dowry. And to get divorced immediately.

Narrator

Right. Right. So this was used as an Islamic justification for reforming the law?

Riham Sheble Mahrous

Yes. Yes.

Narrator

And actually giving more rights to women.

Riham Sheble Mahrous

Yes. Absolutely. So the woman doesn't have to wait until she's ill treated, or beaten up severely or what have you, to be able to get divorced. But traditionally, Islam is used as a hindrance rather than freedom.

Narrator

Yes. So it's used by individuals or within families in order to restrict women.

Riham Sheble Mahrous

Women's pace. Yes.

Narrator

I was hoping to interview some teenage girls from a Mosque funded Islamic school. But the government Press Department and Ministry of Education thought otherwise and has taken me to an international school in the upmarket district of Zamalek.

Narrator

I want to ask you about your life expectations. Will your lives do you think be very different from your mother's and grandmothers?

Samar Mohammed

I think yes, it differs so much in technologies and in educations and we now are greater than our grandmother's and mother's education. And our mother's life. Yes.

Narrator

What about you?

Susan Badr

I think our life is more different. Their lives were classic lives. We live in a modern life. We are open-minded. We have a very good chance to explore the world.

Narrator

I have spoken to young women about the veil and Islamic dress. Now I want to speak to a young man about technology and Islam.

Narrator

Conventionally, public information has been controlled by the government and religious teaching my traditional Islamic scholars. So has the Internet changed things? I spoke to advertising consultant Hassam Mourou.

Hassam Mourou

There is more freedom for individuals to express themselves, directly through to people all over the world. There is no censoring.

Narrator:

Do you think that through visiting sites like these, that more and more young people get to know about Islam and perhaps expose it?

Hassam Mourou

Definitely. Well sites like this; this is a site for example Understand Islam. It's explained to foreigners and Muslims and non Muslims more about Islam and it talks from a more philosophical perspective and basically it's very convincing to the people that are actually looking for Islam or looking for a new way of thinking about life in general. The knowledge of Islam more mobile.

Narrator

So what does Islam mean for a young man in today's technological age?

Hassam Mourou

It's more of a way of life. You can really tell when someone's religious because you do everything while you're considering that God is looking.

Screen ident: The Muslim League mix religion and politics

Narrator

I've talked to various people about the impact of Islam on private life. I am here now to see what impact Islam has had on social life. I am about to witness a wedding taking place in a Mosque. Something that has been happening more and more in recent years.

Narrator

I have been invited to this wedding by Esam al-Eyran. He's a member of the illegal organisation The Muslim Brotherhood. The Brotherhood was set up in 1928 to campaign for full Islamic society in Egypt. I asked him whether the aims of the Brotherhood conflicted with those of a modern democracy?

Esam al-Eyran (*English subtitles*)

We are fighting the elections under the slogan 'Islam is the solution'. I think the most important needs of our people are freedom and to face corruption in our society and to implement *shura*, which in your culture means democracy. I think after that, the people need many reforms in our political system, in our administration and other activities. You know we have in our social and medical services, even in the civil service itself, a lot of corruption. So that's one of the main reforms in our programme

Narrator

And the Muslim Brotherhood.. The Muslim Brotherhood intentions or goals of political goals, or social goals are to improve society but not necessarily....

Esam al-Eyran (*English subtitles*)

...to take power, no...but we are ready to share in power.

Screen ident: Promoting community health

Narrator

I asked Doctor Freddy Albadi of the Salem Evangelical School and Medical Centre, whether the Christian church had also strengthened in the last 30 years?

Dr Freddy as-Baiady (*English subtitles*)

Actually I believe there is a revival in the Christian church. Twenty years ago the church found a big need to help poor mothers to go to work, and to find a safe place to leave their children so we started the day care centre. Then later on came the idea of the medical service and the medical centre four years ago. The centre works on two planes – one of them is health education. The other health care is the curative plane. The population

distribution here means that Muslims are the majority, so while these projects are organised and subsidised by the Church the people who get are mostly Muslims. About eight-five per cent are Muslims

Narrator:

In recent years Mosques have also developed private charitable health and social services. These have generally become an essential part of Cairo's infrastructure and I wanted to see what was happening so my next stop was a nearby Mosque.

I was surprised to find a new partnership between Islam and the government. Whilst the buildings were funded by a charity from the local Mosque, operational funds and doctors' salaries are supplied by the government. It seems that at least here the government is willing to work in partnership with Islam.

In the west, religious teachings are often involved in controversy with medical ethics. So I was intrigued to ask a female doctor if there was a conflict between Islam and modern western medical practices. Particularly with childcare.

Female Doctor:

Advice for family planning. But Islam is against sterilisation. But ask for family planning in order to give a chance for a woman to be healthy. For children to take a chance to be healthy, to be educated. And so on.

Narrator:

Can you tell us a little more about the relationship between science and Islam?

Female Doctor

Yes. It's a good relationship between Islam and science. Islam asks all people to become educated; to know everything about science in all branches, in about human being, anatomy, physiology, about nature, about air, in order to know God, in order to know god. God who bring all these things and in order to know God, we must know all these things.