



Tiny Leaps Productions
Presents

Veiled Voices

Directed by Brigid Maher
HD Video, Color, 59 mins., 2009

Distributor Contact

John Sinno
Typecast Releasing
3131 Western Ave, Suite #514
Seattle, WA 98121
Phone: (206) 322-0882
Fax: (206) 322-4586
John@typecastfilms.com

Synopsis:

Women across the Arab world are redefining their role as leaders in Islam. **Veiled Voices** investigates the world of Muslim women religious leaders through the eyes of three women in Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt. Shot over the course of two years, **Veiled Voices** reveals a world rarely documented or filmed before now and explores both the public and private worlds of these women. The stories of the women featured give insight into how Muslim women are now increasingly willing to challenge the status quo from *within* Islam, promoting Islam as a powerful force for positive transformation in the world. Each triumphs over difficult challenges as they carve out a space to lead in Islam and their communities.

Summary:

Veiled Voices profiles three influential women, their families, and the communities they serve: Ghina Hammoud in Lebanon, Dr. Su'ad Saleh in Egypt, and Huda al-Habash in Syria.

Ghina Hammoud faces a personal challenge in gaining legitimacy as a leader as a divorced woman, since divorce is controversial in conservative communities throughout Lebanon. Although she has been a television personality for 15 years and founded and runs her own Islamic Center in Beirut, she lost many followers after she split from her husband. Despite these setbacks, Ghina has found strength to rebuild her life through her role as a community leader. Ghina inspires and helps other divorced women while counseling others to stay in marriages if possible. Her story is fraught with contradictions, yet these contradictions also humanize her and show why she has been able to retain a devoted following.

The story of **Dr. Su'ad Saleh** demonstrates how, in a country that is known for having the highest number of women religious leaders and teachers, these women still fight for public recognition by the Egyptian religious authority at al-Azhar, the famous Cairo mosque and university founded in the 10th century. Su'ad, widely considered the most influential female religious leader in Egypt, leads this fight through her weekly television show, "Women's Fatawa," a "telephone call-in show" in Egypt through which people solicit her advice and religious judgments based in Islamic Shari'a Law, "fatwas."

Unlike her two counterparts Lebanon and Egypt, **Huda al-Habash** has both institutional support and the support of her husband. She teaches women in Damascus, and lectures all over the Middle East, helping people "move...from ignorance to knowledge." Her husband speaks eloquently about how he takes on domestic tasks to support his wife's endeavors to teach and travel across the Middle East. Huda's story reveals the benefits that can happen when a woman is unfettered in her pursuit of leadership. Her daughter, Inas, who studies International Studies at American University, Sharja and hopes to correct misconceptions about Islam through her own actions.

About the Filmmaker:

Producer and Director Brigid Maher is an assistant professor in the Film and Media Arts Division at American University, Washington D.C, filmmaker, and multimedia designer. Her work focuses on issues of cultural identity and discrimination. She has directed film and theater productions across the world and recently completed a film short, *AWOL*, shot on location in Lebanon and now touring the festival circuit. She wrote, directed, and produced the feature film *Adrift in the Heartland*, shot in the West Bank and Chicago. Her films have been screened at international film festivals in the United States and abroad.

Typecast Releasing

Founded in 2005 by John Sinno of Arab Film Distribution, Typecast Films is a distributor & producer of quality independent films that challenge cultural and political assumptions about some of the underrepresented peoples and cultures of the world. Typecast Films aims to present audiences with films featuring international perspectives and experiences not often explored in modern cinema. Typecast Releasing has previously released the Academy nominated documentary *Iraq in Fragments* and more recently festival award winners, such as, *Remnants of War* and *The Corporal's Diary*.