

SCRIPT: “Being a Woman in Egypt: Hopes, Dreams and Restrictions”

Noura Shibl

Spring 2017

This audio documentary is about how parental restrictions limit adult women in Egypt from activities that help them grow and develop their personalities. You’ll hear the stories of two women, along with mine, and an interview with my mother to get the parents’ point of view as well.

*Music: FADE IN : Jamendo - Before I sleep (from the beginning of the track. 1:03)*

*Toaa Essam (TS): “You have specific days. You cannot go out everyday because you are a girl., and you also cannot dress like whatever you want because you are a girl.” (.10s)*

*Reem Fatth El-Bab (RF): “Like coming back late. It doesn’t make sense because if I don’t come back home for the night, it’s fine but [laughter} if I come back late it doesn’t make sense!” (.10 s)*

Those were the confessions of Toaa Essam, a twenty-one year old architecture student, and Reem Fath El- Bab, also twenty-one, a journalism graduate from the American University in Cairo.

They both shared how limited most women in Egypt feel, because what to wear, when to go out, and when to come back home are just some of the things that our parents interfere with or entirely decide for us. A lot of parents In Egypt do not let their daughters make their own choices by the time they’re adults.

But lucky for me, I have travelled out of the country on my own before as a part of my undergraduate life at AUC.

But here’s the catch, for “safety,” my parents let me travel only on university trips. and I am graduating soon, which means,

*SFX: graduation ceremony music (.5 s)*

no more travelling for me!

*“Aisha Mahmoud (AS): You have two chances, you marry*

*SFX: Suspense stroke (.3 s)*

*or ...*

*Noura Shibl (NS): So you’re saying I have to get married to travel, right?” (.9 s)*

*Nat sound: My mother talking fading under narration. (.8 s)*

That was my mother who uttered that ultimate vision of Egyptian parents for their daughters: marrying us off.

*Music: FADE IN under narration Enigmatic - Bensound. (.37 s)*

It just puzzles me why we’re not allowed to do things on our own. Why am I only allowed to travel on university trips or when I am married? And God knows when that’s going to happen.

*TS: “Well, they don’t really agree to the fact that I want to travel. They believe that women don’t have the right to travel alone.” (.9s)*

Last year, Toaa and I wanted to go to Italy, but as you heard, initially, her request was denied.

*TS: “ when I spoke to my father he told me that it’s not allowed in our religion in Islam and for that reason he won’t allow me to travel.. ” (.11 s)*

Religion. It’s often misused to justify that women can’t do a lot of things, including travelling. It all started during the seventh century at the very beginning of the call to the Islamic religion.

*Music: FADE IN Ancient Arabic Music by Derek Fiechter. (.5 s)*

Of course during the seventh century, it was unsafe for women to travel alone, and therefore it wasn't allowed. But today, travelling is safer. So, Muslim scholars say that Muslim women can travel alone. After Toaa did some research and learned this information, she confronted her father.

SFX: Suspense (.3s)

*Music: FADE IN under soundbite. Enigmatic - Bensound. (.18s)*

*TS: "So I went to him to talk to him and I told him that it's actually not forbidden and in our religion it's fine to travel. And I was even more shocked when he told me that he already knows that so I was so shocked he used religion just to forbid me from travelling. I didn't know what to say. I was like what? You know? He said yeah I just told you that so you can stop asking me to travel. So, I couldn't answer I was like why how could you do that." (.36 s)*

So eventually, Toaa's father let her travel,

SFX: *Children cheering. (.4 s)*

and we had an amazing week in Italy.

*Music: FADE IN under narration Italian music. (.34 s)*

In these few days, I felt more free than I ever did in my entire life. I remember Toaa and I exploring and having fun more than anyone else on the trip, and we couldn't stop talking about how amazing it was when we came back.

*(TS): "You're somehow discovering a new world you have no idea about it and different cultures you learn about them and you see things you've never seen before in your entire life and it's actually a pretty fun experience and an experience that you can learn from it and yeah I think it's a must for every human being to travel to see the world." (.15 s)*

Not only does travelling allow you to discover the world, but it lets you discover your own identity and be independent.

Music: On tiptoe - Purple Planet. (65 s.)

RF: *“It felt great cause when you have this pace for yourself, it gives you the opportunity to think. To be who you really are. Like to set your own limits with how you want to deal with people when to come back home what do you want to wear.”* (.19 s)

Nat sound: *Reem talking fading under narration.* (.8 s)

That was Reem, talking about her experience of studying in Denmark for three semesters when she was an undergraduate student. And I thought it was weird when Reem mentioned that she wore what she wanted, because she wears a hijab, and she did not take it off when she was in travelled.

RF: *“It’s just the feeling of it. Like now I choose to put this on because I completely believe I want to put this on. No one tells me to do so. It’s not like anyone has been telling me here. Am I doing this because I really want to do this or is because my mom does it and I’m conforming to how societal norms work around me?.”*

Getting to decide, to learn and to discover the world are things that Egyptian women were not so simply allowed to do.

MUSIC: Fearless - Purple Planet. (.39 s)

During the nineteenth and the twentieth century, many activists and philosophers advocated for women’s rights, such as Muslim scholar Refaa El-Tahtawy and Qasim Amin. El-Tahtawy said that Islam emphasizes educating women and their participation in the workforce. Qasim Amin was fiercely criticized when encouraged women to go out into society, and In the early twentieth century, women founded many political parties that led to women holding significant positions and getting into the parliament. While these efforts have definitely improved women’s status, there is still a long way to go.

*“TS: I actually sometimes wish I were a boy. If Aly my brother wants to travel, and he just goes to my father and tells him that I’m going to travel with my friends he won’t even discuss it with him. If I did the same he’s going to be who are you going with and for how long, it’s not safe for you. It’s gonna be so dramatic.” (.30 s)*

This kind of parenting leads the daughter, like me and Toaa, to pure frustration and might even lead us to think that marriage is the way out. And perhaps it is. It might give women the sense of independence they need away from their parents.

*RF: “Own yourself and own your life and get into a relation as a mature whole equal. If you don’t do that it ruins the relationship and we see that with friends and family around us like suffering in their relationships. Standing up for yourself is that only way out.”*

*Music: Before I sleep - Jamendo. (.22 s)*

Throughout history there were people who fought for us. For our right in basic things such as education and work. But if our parents still restrict us from pursuing our own choices by the time we’re adults, if they prevent us from travelling, force us to dress in a certain way and limit our every move, then it’s not much different from how women were treated centuries ago, when they were not able to study or make their own life decisions. The hope comes from the fact that parents want what’s best for us. Other than marrying me off, my mother said I may have another chance to travel.

*“AS: And the other one any company you want to travel with them,*

*NS: A company you mean with like tourist group?*

*AS: Yes. but they must be*

*NS: Since when? You’ve never mentioned this before.*

*AS: No. Because soon you will finish your university.”*

I’m going to take that verbal permission and exercise my independence while traveling on my own.

*SFX: Computer keyboard clicks. (.3 s)*

Now, where do I want to go first?

Music: Fearless - Purple Planet. (.20 s)

This Audio documentary was produced by Noura Shibl for Audio Production course at the American University in Cairo taught by Professor Kim Fox in Spring twenty seventeen. Special thanks to Toaa Essam, Reem Fath El-Bab and Aisha Mahmoud. Music by Jamendo before I sleep, and sound effects from youtube. Also tiptoe and fearless from purple planet, and non copyrighted Italian music from youtube.