



Module 3:
*Me and the
Mosque Documentary
(Description, Debriefing
Questions, and Ordering
Information)*

| Being a Canadian Muslim Woman in the 21st Century

Me and the Mosque documentary

INTRODUCTION

The documentary *Me and The Mosque* looks at how Muslim women have increasingly been excluded from the public spaces of their mosques. It also examines the various roles Muslim women play within their communities.

This unit provides information about the documentary and how to order it. It also provides debriefing questions that aim to develop critical media literacy skills and an understanding of the debates within the sphere of religion, culture and society.

ME AND THE MOSQUE

Credits

Director: Zarqa Nawaz

Producer: Joe MacDonald

Writer: Zarqa Nawaz

National Film Board (NFB) of Canada

Information about the film and its awards is available at the NFB's site:

<http://www.onf-nfb.gc.ca/eng/collection/film/?id=51517>

Synopsis

The director, Zarqa Nawaz, takes us on an intimate journey as she struggles to understand the way Muslim communities across North America have increasingly excluded Muslim women from the public spaces of their mosques. Nawaz travels across Canada and into the U.S. as she interviews women and men who offer multiple perspectives on where women should or should not be in a mosque.

The focus, however, is on the voices of women whose experience of Muslim life is shaped and impinged upon by the structural and institutional containment of women within certain areas of mosques, and in some cases even the erasure of their presence entirely. Through this journey, difficult questions are asked about the meaning and history behind the practice of segregation in Muslim prayer spaces. Is this practice gaining ground in Muslim communities in the U.S. and Canada? Why and how do Muslim scholars disagree on the validity of the practice? And how do Muslim women balance their commitment to their faith with their opposition to segregation?

What distinguishes this documentary is the passionate faith-centred perspective through which Nawaz engages with these questions. She bravely, and often with humour, shares with us the pain and the conflict that she struggles with, as well as the hope that keeps her looking for answers.

Purchasing Information

To buy the DVD from the NFB site, go to:

<http://www2.nfb.ca/boutique/XXNFBibeCCtpltmDspRte.jsp?a=b&formatid=55227&support=DVD>

Debriefing Questions

1. Nawaz opens the film by talking about how her experience of Muslim community life as a young woman did not include segregation. Complex reasons are given throughout the film by various people for why this practice is increasing in mosques. What are some of these reasons?
2. Many of the people in the film who oppose the segregation of women in mosques speak of a distinction between religion and culture. How do they separate the two? Is this a meaningful distinction? What are the implications of this distinction?
3. Through the film we get to see the vast ethnic diversity of the Muslim community in North America. How does the film deal with this diversity? How does the issue of ethnicity, and the multiple histories that Muslims in North America bring with them, impact on the politics of mosque segregation?
4. When Nawaz visits Asra Nomani and her mosque in Morgantown, she learns how Nomani has fought to challenge the segregation there. Do you think this is an effective way for women and men to challenge this practice? Brainstorm other methods of challenging segregation in mosques.

5. Throughout the film there are women who support segregation in mosques. What are their perspectives? Can segregation be opposed while some women continue to support it?
6. In the mosque meeting in Winnipeg, the discussion of women's space in the mosque quickly leads to a discussion of women's roles in family and community life. How are these issues linked? There is a lot of tension in that room. Look at that clip again and think through what the experience would be for women who were there and speaking out against mosque segregation. In class, reverse roles of women and men and have a discussion about segregation of men. What arguments would the class use on either side of the debate?