
An Arranged Marriage Issue

Cultural Artifact

The film *Arranged* (2007) illustrates the modern day lives of an Orthodox Jewish woman named Rochel Meshenberg and a Muslim woman named Nasira Khaldi, who, despite their religious differences and what society thinks, become friends while teaching fourth grade in New York. Along with many judgmental and scornful stares by neighbors, children, and even family members, there is one scene in particular that stood out to me involving this judgment against a budding friendship between the two women with different religious beliefs. This scene begins in the fourth grade classroom that Rochel and Nasira are teaching in, when one of the children asks how Ms. Rochel and Ms. Nasira can be friends if they are two different religions. A few other classmates chime in, asking questions such as, “don’t the Muslims want to push the Jews into the ocean?” and “I heard the Muslims want to kill all of the Jews”. Rochel and Nasira handle this predicament very calmly, explaining how many Muslims there are in the world and how they all live in different places, speak different languages, and lead different lives. Nasira explains that people hate other humans because of ignorance, and misunderstanding. Rochel suggests that during the next class they all participate in a “unity circle” which would help banish racism within the classroom.

Right after this occurrence that Principal Jacoby promptly gets word of, she calls Rochel and Nasira into her office, calling them beautiful, and blatantly stating “under all that you could be models”. She proceeds to describe them as the smartest, hardest working, loving, prompt, creative, successful participants in modern world “besides this religion thing”. She offensively lists her issues with their religions, such as the rules, regulations, and the way they dress. “What happens in two three years when I lose you to the mosque and they marry you off?” states principal Jacoby. “We’re in the 21st century, there was a women’s movement! I went through it!” she continues, handing them money for designer clothes instead of the modest outfits they always wear. “Have a drink, enjoy yourself you’re too serious”, she finishes with, astonishing the two women as they walk out of the classroom after having refused the money.

Both Nasira and Rochel are devoted, religious women who choose to live their lives through their churches. If either of these two women’s gender had been changed to male, they would not have had to endure this humiliating experience involving Principal Jacoby. If they were men, Principal Jacoby, and many other people, would not question whether or not they are being forced into these religious beliefs and practices. The people around them would respect their choice more. If Nasira were a man, she would not be wearing the hijab, which would also

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change the scene, because Principal Jacoby might not even be aware of her religion if this were the case. She would be treated as an equal, and understood that way too if she were a man, in this scene, and in the rest of the film.

On the other hand, if Nasira and Rochel were men instead of women in this scene in Principal Jacoby's office, and Principal Jacoby still chose to blatantly disrespect their choices, culture, and religion, men would not react as calmly and submissively as Rochel and Nasira did. If Rochel and Nasira were men, they would have been outraged by Principal Jacoby's behavior. Nasira mentions afterwards, in private with Rochel, that they could "sue the school and retire at 25", but never actually goes through with it. I believe that if they were men in this scene, that some type of action, whether it be legal or verbal, would have been taken out on Principal Jacoby, and in turn, the school.

Because Rochel is an Orthodox Jew and Nasira is a Muslim, they are taught to be very submissive, which is how they acted in this scene. Their roles within their societies are to have a marriage arranged by their parents, to have children, and to serve their husbands, all while being devoted to their religions. Men within these two religions are much more dominant. Their role in their societies is to be a leader, be aggressive, and to protect their families and their beliefs. For this reason, I believe that if the two women's genders were switched to male, that this scene would be drastically different, beginning with the idea that the children in the classroom would probably not speak up in such a way if Rochel and Nasira were men, just out of fear of their masculinity. This movie would not be the same at all if these two women's genders were switched, because it is all about arranged marriages, and how unfair it is to the women involved because, like many other things, they do not have a say in who they are going to marry.

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