

Wadjda: a portrayal of women's struggle in a misogynistic society



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The film *Wadjda* directed and written by Haifaa Al Mansour explores the cultural orders that perpetuate gender segregation in Saudi Arabia. The film achieves this by following the experiences of an ambitious young Saudi girl, Wadjda, who questions the country's misogyny with everything she does. Overall, this worthwhile film comments on the oppressive intersectionality of gender and religion in Saudi Arabia and optimistically advocates for change through the symbolism of a bicycle.

Interestingly enough, the reality of gender segregation active in the film immediately manifests itself within the actual production of the movie. This movie was the first movie ever filmed in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, the director, Haifaa Al Mansour, is the first female filmmaker in Saudi Arabia history. Due to the gender segregation rules in Saudi Arabia, Al Mansour was actually forbidden to interact with her male crew; instead, she had to direct the street scenes from a parked van, watching through a monitor and giving instructions through a walkie talkie ("Wadjda Trivia"). In essence, the misogyny of her country challenged her while she made a movie challenging the misogyny of her country.

Al Mansour's hope for change in this movie is revealed through the symbolism of a bicycle. Throughout the course of the movie, Wadjda is always saving up for a bicycle and eventually enters a religious competition to win money for the bicycle. Although seen as very "unwomanly," what Wadjda desires is to ride the bicycle and race her male friend. At one point Wadjda's mother even says, "If you ride a bicycle you will not be able to have children." The object of the bicycle and the resistance to it is very important. The actual bicycle represents a way of transportation, progress, <https://assignbuster.com/wadjda-a-portrayal-of-womens-struggle-in-a-misogynistic-society/>

and moving forward — all these being things women are fighting for. The cultural opposition to Wadjda riding a bicycle represents the current state of misogyny in Saudi Arabia. At the end of the film, Wadjda's mother uses her money to buy the bicycle for Wadjda instead of buying a dress to impress her unloyal husband. This scene seals the theme of the empowerment of women and the symbolism of the bicycle in the film.

Finally, the intersectionality of gender and religion in Saudi Arabia is one of the most interesting topics addressed in this film. This film explores how the combination of being a woman and living in a religiously fundamental culture may work toward the overall oppression of women. This topic is addressed in the film when Wadjda joins the religious club for a single purpose: to win the competition money and buy a bicycle. Although seemingly uninterested in actual readings of the Koran, Wadjda memorizes the lines for the competition. In my eyes, the most powerful moment in the film is when Wadjda is asked to recite a line in the Koran which almost exactly portrays her disposition. In front of the whole school, Wadjda recites, "Great is the penalty they incur... When it is said to them: 'Make not mischief on the earth,' they say: 'Why, we only want to make peace!' Certainly they are the ones who make mischief but they do not realize it." Wadjda is the mischief maker; she is the one who challenges the cultural notions by wanting to ride a bike, among other things. Without being fully aware of it, Wadjda makes mischief in the hope of peace and equality. By reciting this line, she wins the competition and the money only to announce that she plans to buy a bicycle with her new money. As a result, the principal is dismayed and announces that they will donate the money to Palestine, instead — furthering a religious

cause. I come back to this moment and find it so powerful because the line from the Koran illuminates the dilemma of a nation, yet Wadjda decides to take ownership of the line, in a sense, and take a stand for equality in front of the whole school.

Overall, this uplifting and interesting film aims at dismantling the notions of sexism and misogyny. The dynamic character of Wadjda disproves the overriding theory in Saudi Arabia that women are subordinate and lesser than men. Moreover, the relationship between Wadjda and the boy her age also disproves the sexism active in Saudi Arabia. The boy is unconvinced of the social and cultural implications of being friends and accepting a woman. Instead, he freely chooses to ignore these ignorant implications and befriend Wadjda. Nobody is born sexist; it is learned through cultural and social means. The movie was very accurate and well done. It gave a valuable insight into a world that few Americans ever have before considered — the experience of a woman in Saudi Arabia. The compassion and heart of this movie is inescapable. It is a story with heart and meaning.

Works Cited

“ Wadjda (2012) Trivia.” IMDb, IMDb. com, www.imdb.com/title/tt2258858/trivia.