

I will speak to you about forced marriage from the perspective of a muslim from the netherlands.

Marriage in Islam is a special and sacred thing, everyone wants for it to go right and for the couple to be happily married for a long time. It is said that the Profet Muhammed has said that whoever of the youth is able to marry, should definetely do so. It is also said that marrying is regarded as fulfilling half of the Islamic religious duties. So while divorce for Islamic people in de the Netherlands is not unheard of, it is still something to try to stay far away from. A succesful marriage is, henceforth, imperative.

In order for the marriage to go well, there ought to be some expectations by the youth and their parents alike, and when asked, young people with an Islamic bachground do tend to agree that their parents opinion matters a lot tot hem. However, when asked about forced marriage as a suitable way of marriage, they all disagreed and were opposed to it. While family matters are highly regarded, individuality and self-determination, which are inherent in Dutch society, and which is thought to us from a young age on, are necessary to them as well.

Oftentimes in the Netherlands, when asked about forced marriage, it is actually mostly associated with Islam and is regarded as something archaic, barbaric and backwards. And while surely not the only ones, it is indeed still being practiced in the Netherlands by Islamic people who feel rightfully backed by their Islamic beliefs.

Marriage in Islam is something that is seen as a social occasion, in the sense that the social environment of the marrying couple plays an imported role. On the one hand this is shown through the festivities, on the other hand it is shown through Islamic jurisprudence regarding the waliy, the person that has guardianship of the daughter, mostly the father. A saying by the prophet that is highly regarded is "A marriage without the consent of the waliy is invalid". Adding tot hat, there are a lot of saying believed to be said by the prophet regarding the meddling of people into the marriage of others, "and regarding the best precepts, is mediating between two people of marriage".

The aforementioned sayings are one way to solidify the argument of the validness of forced-marriage within Islam. The others being, in the netherlands percieved as, cultural aspects such as honor dignity, solidifying family ties or money etc.

But when arguing in such a matter, the defender of forced-marriage forgets an important aspect about Islam, which is autonomy. When going back to the basics of Islam, when going back to making choices , either right or wrong, a human being is responsible and judged for their own. And in this autonomy, lies the right for a human being to make up their own minds, and the freedom to choose their own paths. There is another saying by the prophet muhammed, which mentions that, before marrying, the suitor should look upon the other and see for themselves what attracts them to each other-- this saying very clearly includes this autonomy.

So when ordered to marry off their children, it should be interpreted that the waliy should simply not stand in the way of marriage and not cause for the young people to be unable to marry.

Now, regarding what I have said before, namely that the young Islamic people in the Netherlands are opposed to forced-marriage, but do take their parents point of view in high regard, it gives a grey area. For, if regarded so highly, they could be pressured and/or manipulated by said parents into marrying someone they did not intend to. Is an arranged marriage then not the same as a forced-marriage? This question is typical for Dutch society where, as mentioned before, self-determination is regarded very highly. Overall in dutch society, parents have no say in the partner choices their

children and will just have to accept whoever the youngsters bring home. This is the opposite of what the islamic youngsters have mentioned, which is why it is sometimes difficult for people in the Netherlands to accept that an arranged marriage does not necessarily equal a forced-marriage. But the fact remains that it is very hard to draw the line between the two.

In the readings that I have done, I have found 4 ways of arranged marriage:

- A marriage planned by the parents in which solely their opinion is taken in regard
- A marriage delegated to the children in which the children, mostly sons, name their preferences regarding characteristics of their future partner, after which the parents start to search for them
- Together the parents and children are searching for a suitor, dating could be a possibility
- Own initiative, the children search for a suitable spouse and ask their parents for permission.

The first one, a marriage planned by the parents, can easily be interpreted as a form of forced marriage, however, even this is not as black and white as it sounds: when the youngster agrees with the marriage solely planned by their parents, is it still considered forced-marriage? Because whereas my dutch friends would say one thing, my friends with an islamic background might say the other. So you see, in my experience, it is very difficult to draw an exact line between forced marriage and arranged marriage.

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