
This documentary by Yael Kipper and Ronen Zaretzky presents true stories of arranged Jewish marriages. Esther, Naomi, Hana, Shoshana, Rumi and Ziona, now over 80 years old, confess the gloomy stories of being married at the age of 11, 12, 13 or even 5 to much older men. Their marriages where nothing more than simple transactions between families. The young girls were told of their parents decisions without any possibility of objecting to it. The women recount their stories to their own children, and therefore the documentary becomes a kind of family psychotherapy, giving a meaningful insights as to harmful memories that reveal many aspects of forced marriages. With the passing of many decades and with a different social awareness, forced marriages are viewed as an unbelievable cruelty inflicted on young girls. It is even, therefore, hard to believe that they are still taking place around the world. However, this documentary tries to explore not only the women’s unquestionable trauma, but also the social context allowing such things to happen without any objection or protest. The girls were almost never told about ‘what getting married means’. They were taken out of the playground, dressed up in ceremonial clothing and brought to their new homes without any knowledge of what was going on. The grooms were often 30 or 40 years older, and hardly any verbal contact would take place between them and their brides. The teenage brides were paralysed with fear and disgust, and their wedding nights ended up with them being brutally raped, with the silent condonation of both families. Although everyone knew about forced marriages of girls, they were hardly ever contested. Esther was the only one out of the group of women who rebelled against the family will. She continued escaping from her new house for seven years, even though she was being caught and raped by her husband. Finally, she managed to get a divorce and remarry another men whom she loved. It is, however, clear that the protest wasn’t an easy thing to think of or to put into practice. For centuries, women have been thought to accept their fate and to serve their families, giving birth to children and raising them quietly. Thus they could never imagine rebelling against what was stipulated by their families and kinfolk. Change could only be achieved by the emancipation of women and a modern reinterpretation of societal roles and systems of values.

Joanna Bocheńska
Jagiellonian University