

ARRANGED HAPPINESS



WINNER
Aljazeera
FILM FESTIVAL
2011

OFFICIAL SELECTION
AUSTRALIA
Byron Bay International
Film Festival
2011

FIPA
International Festival
of Audiovisual
Programs
2011

OFFICIAL SELECTION
KRAKOW
International
Film Festival
2011

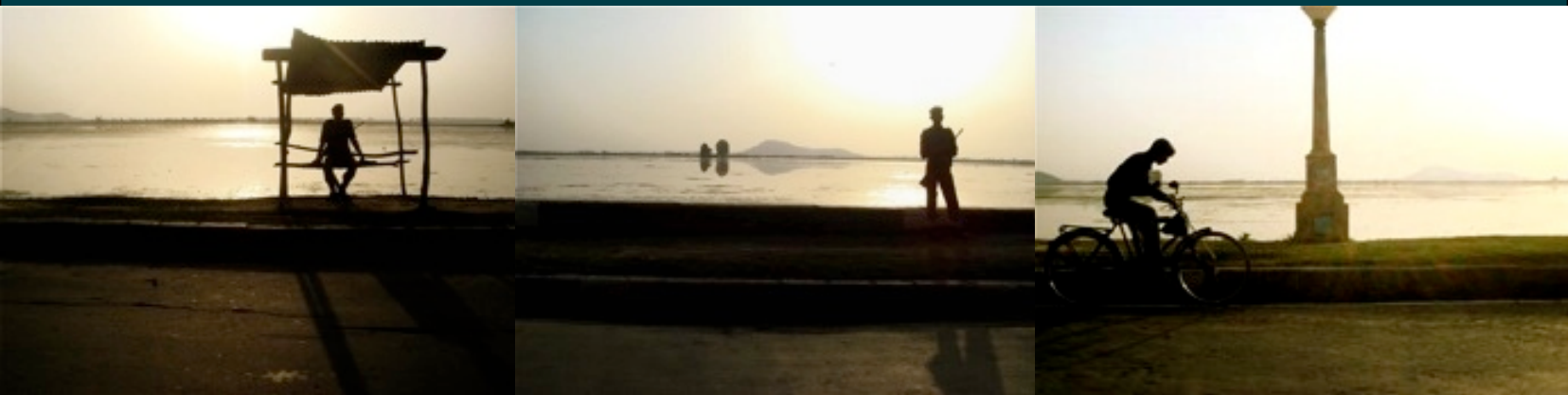
WINNER
Best Documentary Film
Madrid ImagineIndia
FILM FESTIVAL
2011

A feature documentary
by

Daniela Dar-Creutz

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Father Mohammad Iqbal Dar and daughter Masrat, playing cricket

1. SYNOPSIS

WAHEEDA DAR, a 27-year-old Muslim woman lives in Srinagar, a disputed territory of Kashmir, and it's time for her to get married. Until now, she was a successful actress and singer, but as the third daughter of four in a carpet-making family it is her turn to wed. The search for a suitable husband must happen in accordance with the traditions of her culture and in this case, the marriage will be 'arranged' by her younger brother, Ashiq, who is spending his life savings for the occasion.



Waheeda Dar (28)



Brother, Ashiq (26) Dar with his sister

The 'arrangement' of Waheeda's future and, above all, the search for a suitable husband and family to marry into, serves as the narrative thread that weaves itself through the different stages leading up to Waheeda's wedding celebration.

While filmmaker Daniela Dar-Creutz remains a neutral observer at the outset of the story, she slowly reveals more of herself and her relationship to Ashiq, the protagonist. However, it's not until near the end of the film that they reveal their personal relationship to the family.

Ashiq and Waheeda's delicate journey and their family's history reflect the contradictions between the traditions of the past and the modern life young Muslims now seek. political events that have occurred in Kashmir over the past 15 years and serve as a vehicle for exploring the impact of these events on the especially for their son Ashiq who is striving to take control of his own life today.



Film set: Actors Balbier Singh (soldier) & girl Muzalmil

As children, Ashiq and Waheeda grew up in Srinagar, the capital and university-town of Kashmir, a city often compared to Venice because of its many beautiful waterways and canals.

Ashiq and Waheeda's idyllic childhood ended at age 10 and 12 in 1989, with a surge of violence relating to Pakistan and India's ongoing dispute over the sovereignty of the region, a conflict that dates back to the partition of these two countries in 1945.



Dar siblings as children



Srinagar, patrolling soldier



Srinagar, Watercanals

Though Waheeda and Ashiq's parents were very observant and traditional Muslims, they were also relatively liberal encouraging their children, especially their son, to make independent decisions. The two older sisters are already married when the filmmaker meets the family. The youngest sister, Masrath, studies English and Economics.

At the age of 17, Ashiq's college was bombed by militants and many young Kashmiri men were arrested without cause and suspected of underground terrorist activities.

Ashiq's family decided to send him out of Kashmir and into a place where he could begin to earn money safely. He left the family and moved to Varkala, a small beach town in South India. While working in a shop selling Kashmiri handicrafts and jewelry to tourists, Ashiq became exposed to a Western culture with expanded possibilities. Though he discovered a new outlook for his life, he remained strongly connected to his culture, his family and to Kashmir.

Waheeda and Ashiq's family, like many other families in Kashmir, have endured tremendous suffering. The stress of living in a conflict zone exacerbated their mother's heart condition, which killed her prematurely.



Father Iqbal in TV room

The patriarch of the family, Iqbal Dar, decided never to remarry and to care for his five children alone. Now, with no wife at his side, Iqbal has only Ashiq to help him in the search for an appropriate husband for Waheeda. The family has little money at this stage, and there are still two daughters who must be taken care of; each needing a dowry since a suitable match depends on the financial resources of the bride's family. Iqbal is fragile from old age and no longer is able to earn a living; therefore, the ability to pay for the wedding ceremonies, fund the bride's dowry and bestow golden presents to all the family members of Waheeda's intended husband all fall upon Ashiq's shoulders.



Ashiq Dar with family



At the film's outset, he has been saving for eight years to make his sister's wedding a viable reality.—

Shadowing Waheeda's wedding is the knowledge that the family now counts on her "replacement," the unspoken agreement that this woman will be the future wife of Ashiq. In this way, the Kashmiri families maintain a level of reciprocity in terms of resources and care for their elders.

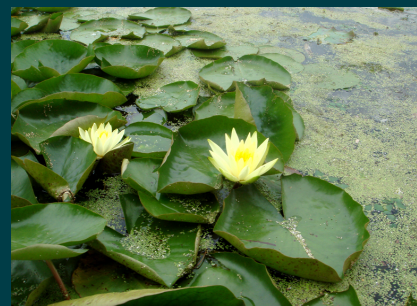
But Ashiq is not ready to marry, nor has he any money left to pay for a second wedding. And, more importantly, he has been in a secret relationship with the woman he first met in Varkala and who is shooting this documentary: Daniela Dar-Creutz, the director.



Ashiq Dar and soldier



Director: Dany Creutz





Srinagar, Water Canal at Lake Dal

2. DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

On my first trip to India I met and fell in love with a young Kashmiri man named Ashiq Ahmad Dar. A few months after meeting Ashiq we travelled to meet his family, Muslims who have lived for generations in the beautiful yet troubled region of the Hindu-Kush Mountain range of Kashmir.



The Dar family



Ruins of Srinagar

When I met Ashiq's family I learned that the process of arranging a marriage for his sister, Waheeda Banu, was about to begin. The ritual intrigued me and became the inspiration for making this film. Upon returning to Germany I managed to gain funding and I enlisted Ashiq as my assistant.

For the next three years we filmed the story side-by-side and during all this time, we had agreed to hide our relationship out of respect for his family elders since we were unsure of our future. It was not until we finished shooting the last day of the wedding—and found ourselves still in love -- that we confessed our relationship to Ashiq's father.

The objective of *Arranged Happiness* is to present Western audiences with an accurate portrait of the daily life of a devout Muslim family that must balance modern desires with what may appear to us as near inexplicable



Hazrat-Bal Moschee, Srinagar

loyalties to traditional familial customs. It examines the different paths love can take and the challenges that culture can pose. The struggle of the characters in part reflects and is a result of the conflict contained in Kashmir valley, a long-disputed territory between India and Pakistan, where the Kashmiris themselves are innocent people caught amid the tension and violence borne from to cultural and political divides inherent to the region.

I'd come to know Waheeda as a warm, mature and headstrong young woman—the fact that she left the search for her husband and the planning of her marriage completely in the hands of her male relatives challenged my own ideas about what it means to be an independent and modern woman. I wondered what lay behind her unwavering deference to the wishes of her elders. Further,

I wondered how most of the relationships and marriages in India and other places in the world where marriages are still “arranged” seemed to enjoy sustainability given the contrived circumstances of their unions.

When I asked Waheeda why she didn't take charge of such an important life decision, she explained that she could trust her family utterly and that since her mother was dead, there were only male elders left to decide. Who other than those who loved her most could know what would be best for her? And besides that, God, she said, watches over her, and for that reason she was sure a good husband would be found.



Waheeda's good bye from her family

Two years into our filming, and despite the fact that Ashiq and I had been together secretly for even longer (and in that time I was often living in the home as an additional family member), Ashiq still felt that our relationship would not be accepted by his family.

I realized it wasn't that the family did not like me. In their eyes, I simply was not an appropriate candidate. A marriage with a Western woman meant they would lose their only son to another world--one in which he might eventually prefer to live in.

The Dar family's sustainability and safety is built on the support and the growth of family members. Without this established social net, an ailing father like Mohammad Iqbal, who has no health care nor a pension to retire with, will find himself left alone after all the daughters have been given away. Father Iqbal was not expecting me, a woman from the West, to move in, do housework and care for him. But I knew he expected his son to be a 'good' son. And a good son was expected to marry his father's choice. His reaction was startling to me. He gave us his blessing to marry but under the one condition: Ashiq must marry a second wife in Kashmir.

At the end of filming Ashiq and I are left trying to satisfy Iqbal's desires without abandoning our own.







Srinagar, Kashmir



DOP Vuskovic on 16 mm Arriflex

3. FILMOGRAPHIES:

KEY PERSONNEL:

| | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Daniela Dar-Creutz | [Director, Producer, Writer] |
| Joseph Reidinger, Carolin Dassel | [Co-Producers] |
| Roland Vuskovic | [Director of Photography] |
| Caspar Stracke | [Editor] |
| Ori Kaplan | [Composer / Balkan Beat Box] |



~ DANIELA DAR-CREUTZ [director, producer, writer]

Born and raised in Germany, Daniela Dar-Creutz received an MFA in Communication-Design from the University of Munich before immigrating to the USA in 1995 in order to study at The Graduate Film Program at New York University. She has directed several documentary films, including "Nobel Voices," a 33-part series about Alfred Nobel and the most distinguished Nobel laureates, for the Smithsonian Institute and "Generation Klima" (Generation Climate), a 20-minute short feature promoting environmental consciousness for the government of Bavaria and exhibited at Museum Mensch und Natur. Her short fiction film, "Captivated," screened at the Henry Miller Film Festival, World Short Film Festival Toronto, Novi Sad Film Festival and Cinequest. Her short fiction film, "Conman," was awarded the Audience Award at the International Film Festival Oldenburg, and Best Short Film at the International Short & Video Festival, New York.

"Arranged Happiness" is Dar-Creutz's first feature-length film.



~ ROLAND VUSKOVIC [director of photography]

Roland Vuskovic has collaborated with Daniela Dar-Creutz as Cinematographer on her short film „Captivated“ (2006). He also has worked as a longtime collaborator with renowned German Cinematographers Robbie Mueller, Torsten Lippstock and Robert Narholz. Roland has worked as a Second Unit Director on "Fünf Minuten" (1998), he is the Cinematographer of the feature length film "Die Spur im Schnee" (2005), "Coming Home" (2004), "Brooklyn Express" (documentary) (2004), and covered numerous commercials including clients of Microsoft and AV Communication. He also produced, "Like in America" in 2001.



~ CASPAR STRACKE [editor]

Since 2000, Caspar Stracke has worked as an editor for many documentary films, TV and industrial movie in US and Germany. He works perma-lanced as an editor for the German 3SAT/ZDF's culture magazine "Kulturzeit" for over 8 years. Since then, Caspar Stracke has cut video and TV work for clients such as SONY, MTV, ZDF, Pro 7 /Sat 1, ORF (Austria) , SF (Suisse) , NDR, WDR, President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities (PCAH) Deutsche Bank TV New York, CW-X USA, Liz Clairborne, Loews Cineplex Entertainment, 24/7 News Media , !K7 Records, Gold Dust Records, Madame Tussaud US, Diane Blackman, Petra Foundation, among many others. Most recent work include cutting a TV doc for documentary film maker and Academy-Oscar®-nominated, Katja Esson, "Hole in the Sky" (5 year of 9/11 anniversary) that won the Gold Award at the Word Media Festival. He also cut for German WDR television the documentary "The Party Thereafter" on New Orleans Post-Kathrina, by Dominique Gradenwitz/3 Sat / ZDF.



~ ORI KAPLAN [sax player / composer]

The first band that Kaplan played for was DXM, an underground sampler-driven group in Tel Aviv. He chose playing for DXM instead of taking clarinet lessons. He stayed in Israel until 1991, which is when he immigrated to the U.S. After getting a degree from Mannes College in 1996, Kaplan formed a group with Tom Abbs and Geoff Mann called "Trio Plus". The Trio became a quartet in 1997 when Steve Swell joined. In the same year, Kaplan also joined a lot of jazz projects related to the Knitting Factory. Kaplan joined the rock band Firewater in 1998 and toured both the U.S. and Europe. He also formed his "Ori Kaplan Percussion Ensemble", with Susie Ibarra, Geoff Mann, and Andrew Bemkey. He joined the band Gogol Bordello and toured with them extensively from 2001-2004. In 2004 he formed Balkan Beat Box with Tamir Muskat. The band has been touring globally since and have released 2 albums thus far.