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## Strong Girls and Lost Boys?

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## **Strong Girls and Lost Boys? Growing up Muslim in Nordic Films**

Sofia Sjö

### **Introduction**

In spring 2017, the fourth season of the Norwegian online-series *Skam* (Shame) premiered. The series, produced by the Norwegian public broadcasting company, NRK, is about a group of high school students in Oslo. *Skam* has been immensely popular in Norway and abroad. Each season of *Skam* follows one character. In season four, the focus was finally on a character many fans had long wanted to get to know better, Sana – a devout young Muslim woman. From the very beginning of the series, Sana is represented as strong, loyal and creative, but also as a character who has to face prejudice and who struggles with how to be a devout Muslim and have secular Norwegian friends. Sana inspired a great deal of both public<sup>1</sup> and academic<sup>2</sup> discussion concerning Muslims in popular culture, and religion and ethnicity in popular culture more broadly.

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<sup>1</sup> Andulkarim 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Moffat and Käätä 2018.

Though I would argue that Sana is in many ways a noteworthy character, she is also only one in a line of fictional representations of young Muslims in Nordic popular culture. Particularly in film, and particularly since the turn of the millennium, Muslim characters have become more common, especially in Danish, Norwegian and Swedish productions.<sup>3</sup> Predominantly the films focus on characters with a migrant background, a theme highlighted as key to many films of late, not just in the Nordic countries.<sup>4</sup> These films can be seen as a natural outcome of the fact that the Nordic countries are becoming more ethnically and religiously diverse. As Mette Hjort has argued regarding Danish film, the process has been slow and it took quite some time before a cultural interest for these stories came about. However, Hjort describes a noticeable ethnic turn, which started with ethnic Danish filmmakers making films about immigrants and has now led to filmmakers with a migrant background taking executive control and making films relating to their own experiences.<sup>5</sup> Similar turns have been identified in both Norwegian<sup>6</sup> and Swedish<sup>7</sup> film and in Finnish film too, some changes are noticeable.<sup>8</sup>

A number of concepts have been presented to capture the identified new focus on multiple belongings and complex identities in Nordic and other cinemas that is connected to the ethnic turn and aspects of migration. Hamid Naficy talks about an accented cinema, a cinema he connects to exilic, diasporic and postcolonial ethnic and identity filmmakers. Naficy argues that these filmmakers, through their experiences and perspectives, provide different stories and

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<sup>3</sup> Sjö and Danielsson 2013, 53–56.

<sup>4</sup> Berghahn and Sternberg 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Hjort 2005, 243.

<sup>6</sup> Bakøy 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Wright 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Hiltunen 2016.

different ways of making films – in other words accented films.<sup>9</sup> Naficy's work is discussed in studies of Nordic films about migrants, but it is often argued that filmmakers in the Nordic countries have stuck closer to traditional genre motifs than the filmmakers Naficy explores.<sup>10</sup> Still, their films do provide new perspectives, as will be highlighted in this chapter.

A lot of the research on migrants on film focuses on filmmakers with some form of immigrant background. Berghahn and Sternberg make a distinction between migrant filmmakers, who have themselves experienced migration, and diasporic filmmakers who are second or third generation immigrants, for whom migration still plays a central role. They underline that a filmmaker is not a migrant or diasporic filmmaker just because of his or her background; they also need to deal with issues relating to migration in their films.<sup>11</sup> The focus on migrant and diasporic filmmakers highlights that it matters who is allowed to tell whose stories. However, migrant and Muslims characters are of course not only to be found in films by migrant or diasporic directors.

The ethnic turn in Nordic films is clearly not only about Muslims, but the topic of growing up Muslim and the challenges this entails – and the focus is generally on the challenges – is a recurring topic in many films. In this chapter, I discuss one film directed by what Berghahn and Sternberg would define as a migrant filmmaker, Reza Bagher's *Wings of Glass* (*Vingar av glas*), made in Sweden in 2001, one film by a diasporic filmmaker, Ulrik Imtiaz Rolfsen's *Izzat*, made in Norway in 2005, and one film by a filmmaker with a Danish background, Natasha Arthy's *Fighter* made in 2007. By including films by directors with different backgrounds, I have

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<sup>9</sup> Naficy 2001.

<sup>10</sup> Bakøy 2010, 149.

<sup>11</sup> Berghahn and Sternberg 2010.

wanted to be sure to capture varied views on the topic. However, the films are primarily chosen because they capture many recurring themes in Nordic films about Muslims, still the films also all present unique features.

In my analysis of *Wings of Glass*, *Izzat*, and *Fighter* I specifically focus on how Islam is brought into the films, how the characters relate to their religious background, and how their background not just as Muslims, but as migrants, or children of migrants, is presented. I particularly highlight aspects of the coming-of-age-theme, emphasizing both well-known features and less usual topics that the films present. In the final section of this chapter, I reflect on what understandings and possible misunderstandings the films provide, and what one can learn and what one might miss with stories of this kind.

### **Finding one's way – *Wings of Glass***

Coming-of-age stories are quite common in films and tend to include certain themes. Though some have argued that there is a difference between Nordic coming-of-age films and the internationally more known American versions, similarities have also been highlighted.<sup>12</sup> Nordic filmmakers have often taken inspiration from American genre films, but added their own twists. Generally, coming-of-age films are about finding oneself and breaking free, or at least declaring a form of independence in relation to parents and other caregivers. As Moseng has highlighted in his study of Norwegian youth films, other recurring themes are marginalization, questions of

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<sup>12</sup> Moseng 2011.

sexuality and romance, and related issues of the body and gender.<sup>13</sup> Reza Bagher's *Wings of Glass* focuses on marginalization and coming to grips with who you are, but romance also plays a part.

The main character in *Wings of Glass* is Nazli, a young woman of Iranian decent, who grew up in Sweden and, in the beginning of the film, tries very hard to behave like her Swedish friends, even calling herself Sara instead of Nazli. From the first scene on though, Nazli's complicated situation becomes obvious. When she arrives at a job interview, the employers are expecting the very Swedish sounding Sara Lindström and Nazli admits to using a Swedish name to get the interview, since she does not believe that she would be interviewed if she used her real name. Nazli does not get the job and throughout the film, she struggles to find employment and thereby independence from her family.

The family is a second area of struggle for Nazli. She lives with her sister Mahin and their father Abbas, who is a widower. Abbas promised his late wife to make sure that their daughters marry well and he chooses partners for them. While Mahin happily obliges – Abbas chose for her a young man he knows she is in love with – Nazli refuses and shows no interest in Hamid, her cousin, who Abbas picked as her future husband. Nazli, however, willingly accepts a job in Hamid's store. Hamid tries to make Nazli see how good a husband he would be, mostly by bragging about his financial success, but their relationship comes to an abrupt end when Hamid tries to rape Nazli.

Nazli attempts to convince her father to cut the contact with Hamid, but since her father is financially dependent on him he takes Hamid's side. In protest, Nazli moves in with her Swedish boyfriend Johan, a boyfriend she has kept secret from her family. Nazli and Abbas are both very

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<sup>13</sup> Moseng 2011.

stubborn and unwilling to take the first step towards reconciliation. Though Abbas does come across as a dominant patriarch by trying to decide whom his daughters should marry, the picture becomes more complicated when one takes into consideration that Abbas does in fact fulfill both traditional male and female roles in the film. He is the one who is always cooking and taking care of the home and he genuinely seems to want his daughters to be happy, but without breaking with his views of what is correct behavior.

What is the role of Islam in this film? At the job interview in the beginning of the film, Nazli explains that she did not give her real name because people would then start thinking that she wears a veil. Already in this scene Islam or being a Muslim is indicated as a part of Nazli's identity, but a part she is not comfortable with. When Nazli tells her Swedish friend that Abbas wants Nazli to marry a cousin, the friend is shocked, calling the proposal incestuous. Nazli explains that it is not considered incest among Muslims, which again shocks her friend who asks if Nazli is a Muslim, to which Nazli responds that she does not know what she is. Generally, Nazli's family does not come across as particularly religious. In a somewhat comic scene, Abbas takes out a religious wall decoration and dusts it off in preparation for the visit of Mahin's soon to be in-laws, who are devout Muslims. For the most part in the film, Islam is thus connected to a traditional life with marriage and children for young women and the family as central focus. Nazli is not comfortable with these ideals.

Though religion and traditional values connected to the family's roots in Iran are parts of Nazli's challenges and things she seems to want to break with, the final resolution of the film offers a more complex picture. When Johan declares Nazli's family to be strange, Nazli gets very upset. Soon after, she is shown watching a young girl in a chador rollerblading in the street. In the beginning of the film, she watched the same girl and, as Andrew Nestingen has highlighted, this

scene seems to entail a symbolic turn for Nazli.<sup>14</sup> In the next scene, she enters a driving school, introduces herself as Nazli and declares that she is Muslim, but also Swedish. The owner of the driving school, whose accent indicates that he is an immigrant from Finland, is not particularly interested in who Nazli is, but is willing to work out a deal with her, which means she will work in the office and get cheap driving lessons. This means she can fulfill her dream of getting a motorcycle driving license. In this scene then Nazli seems to have decided to accept her Muslim background, but also a Swedish identity.

In *Wings of Glass*, Islam also becomes more than just rules and traditions that need to be followed through Abbas. When Abbas finally comes to visit Nazli in Johan's apartment, after having been encouraged by Johan, Abbas mentions that he has not been to the mosque since he came to Sweden. However, now he tells Nazli he has visited the mosque and prayed on his knees for the strength to come see Nazli. In this scene, Nazli and Abbas take time to listen to each other and try to understand each other. Johan's role in their reconciliation cannot be ignored, but this is not a case of the more balanced Swede helping the lost immigrants. Johan is in many ways just as lost as Nazli. He is an orphan who lives with the constant threat of being evicted since he cannot pay his rent. When Abbas finally accepts Johan as Nazli's boyfriend, he is provided with a family he seems to be in need of.

Though Nazli's story is to some extent unique, it does at the same time include several recurring features that can also be found in films such as Susan Taslimi's *All Hell Let Loose (Hus i helvete)*, made in Sweden in 2002, Khalid Hussain's *Import Export (Import-eksport)*, made in Norway in 2005, and Natasha Arthy's *Fighter*, which I will return to later. As Tigervall discusses in her thesis on migrants in Swedish films, the characters are often represented as "Other" and

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<sup>14</sup> Nestingen 2008, 139.



different, but many films at the same time present the migrant characters very sympathetically. The resolution in these films is often not a case of choosing one identity and leaving another, instead a compromise is reached. In addition, natives Swedes are often shown to have a great deal to learn from the migrant families and the independence ethnic Swedish characters represent is generally not shown to be an altogether positive thing, as it often leaves them lost and lonely, as is the case with Johan.<sup>15</sup> Recurrently though, male Muslim characters are represented rather unsympathetically and as a hindrance for the young Muslim women wanting to find themselves and their place in Scandinavian societies. While films focusing on young Muslim women include a hopeful view, suggesting a better future ahead, the same is generally not the case in films focusing on young Muslim men.

### **A violent way – *Izzat***

Nordic noir, or crime fiction, is currently very popular both in the Nordic countries and internationally. We come across Muslim characters in these stories too. For the most part, Muslim characters play the roles of criminals or victims of crime. These characters are seldom given much of a background. However, in a number of gangster films and thrillers an emphasis is put on Muslim characters as part of criminal gangs. The main characters in these cases are often young Muslim men.<sup>16</sup> On the surface, one could argue that Nordic films offer the same stereotypes found in Hollywood films, where violence, masculinity, and Islam are often

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<sup>15</sup> Tigervall 2005.

<sup>16</sup> Sjö 2015.

interconnected.<sup>17</sup> However, there are films that try to go beyond the clichés. I have previously discussed the violent crime drama *Go with Peace Jamil* (*Gå med fred Jamil – Ma Salama Jamil*), made in Denmark in 2008 by Omar Shargawi, and argued for the complex characters that hide behind the violent central narrative.<sup>18</sup> Here I focus on Ulrik Imtiaz Rolfsen's *Izzat*, a film that even more obviously focuses on the question of growing up Muslim and growing into violence.

Rolfsen has indicated that the story of *Izzat* is based on his experiences growing up in a migrant community in Oslo.<sup>19</sup> The main character in *Izzat* is Wasim, a second-generation immigrant whose parents moved to Norway from Pakistan. The story, told in voice-over by the grown up Wasim, starts in 1982. Wasim and his brother are walking down the street together with their father, who Wasim tells the viewer knew every Pakistani in town, which meant walking down the street took forever. As with *Nazli*, Wasim's marginalized status is indicated from the beginning. This is not only done by underlining Wasim's migrant background, but also by early on showing how ethnic Norwegians bully Wasim. The school system does little to support Wasim. He is required to learn about Christianity and considered insolent when he asks the teacher how he is expected to know the sayings of Jesus.

From the very start Wasim is presented as an outsider, however, this does not mean that he is alone or unable to find a place for himself. Wasim has two good friends who are also of immigrant decent, Riaz and Munawar. The boys soon befriend the toughest Pakistani gang in town and quickly develop into to harden criminals. As young men, they are three of the gang leader's, Saddiq's, closest allies and successful drug dealers. According to Wasim, they

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<sup>17</sup> Ramji 2010.

<sup>18</sup> Sjö 2013.

<sup>19</sup> Larsen 2015, 173.

considered themselves kings, with money and power at their fingertips. This is, however, when it all changes.

Munawar has become tired of following Saddiq's orders. When he finds out that Saddiq's relative, Khalid, is courting his girlfriend, Munawar gets Khalid arrested. Khalid, who is not a legal resident in Norway, is deported and Saddiq decides to get his revenge. When they find Munawar, he is first severely beaten and Wasim is then forced to kill his friend. When Riaz decides to leave the country shortly after, Wasim is left on his own with problems that just seem to expand. Wasim tries to break with Saddiq and another drug dealer, Kula, by blackmailing them and thereby forcing them to leave him and his family alone. His plan backfires and Wasim's younger sister is kidnapped and raped. In the end, when trying to save his sister, Wasim shoots Kula and Saddiq and ends up in jail. In the final scene, the viewer finds out that he is telling his story to a representative of a review board that will discuss his parole.

Wasim does not come across as a devout Muslim and in general, his behavior upsets his religious parents. However, the viewer is told that Wasim drives his parents and sister to the mosque every week, but he does not seem to go there himself. Wasim is thus not represented as particularly interested in religion, yet he does seem to be a devout son and brother, or at least he tries to be. In one of the few scenes where Islam is clearly connected to Wasim's life, it is presented as a form of punishment. When Wasim's father finds out that Wasim has not been to school for several weeks his father sends him to a Qur'ān school in Pakistan. Here Wasim is shown being beaten by his teacher when he cannot repeat lines from the Qur'ān. According to Wasim, he was sent to Pakistan to become more respectful, but all he felt was lonely and nagged at, just as in Norway. Back in Norway, Wasim quickly returns to his life of crime.

Islam and religion thus play a marginal role in *Izzat*, but from the very beginning the characters are identified not only as people with migrant backgrounds but also as Muslims. The

story as a whole does not give a particularly cheerful image of what it is like growing up as a Muslim boy in Norway. Still, the film does, similarly to *Wings of Glass*, highlight the hybrid identity of the main characters, but also their delight in being Norwegian and something else. For Wasim being a Norwegian citizen has a very practical consequence. It means that he, if he is arrested, is not deported but gets to spend time in a Norwegian jail, which is according to him preferable to having to spend the rest of his life in Pakistan. Consequently, the scenes in the jail are filmed in a clean room with a soft yellow light and with Wasim looking well and ready to be a free man.

### **The kung fu way – *Fighter***

The last film I want to discuss, *Fighter*, has similarities with both *Wings of Glass* and *Izzat*, blending narratives of violent young Muslim men, as seen in *Izzat*, with issues of navigating identity, as in *Wings of Glass*. The film has a somewhat un-original plotline, but explores issues of Muslims in a very un-common Nordic genre: a martial arts film. In *Fighter*, the struggle with growing up Muslim and having to deal with family expectations, strict gender norms, and threats of violence from men in your community is combined with the story of a young person falling in love with martial arts and developing into a talented kung fu fighter. What the film also underlines even more than *Wings of Glass* is the challenge of living as a Muslim woman among secular youth.

The main character in this film is Aicha, whose parents are from Turkey. As in the other films, her parents have very strict ideas about how their children should behave. Aicha's parents, similar to Nazli's and Wasim's parents, have sacrificed a great deal for their children and worked

hard to provide for them, something they all let their children know. Aicha's parents expect her to study hard, and become a doctor, just like her brother Ali – who very clearly breaks with the recurring image of young Muslim men being violent criminals. They also expect her to marry a Muslim and emphasize that she cannot get involved with someone who is not a Muslim. Aicha is also expected to behave well so not to risk anything going wrong with her brother's engagement to Yasemin, a woman he is secretly dating. What Aicha wants is of little interest to anyone, but it is her dreams that the film is about.

When the film starts, Aicha trains in a martial arts group for women, but does not get along with the other girls. Her trainer encourages her to find a different team because she thinks Aicha has potential to become a talented kung fu fighter. The problem is that the new team is a mixed group with women and men training together, something Aicha's father does not accept. Aicha starts attending the team in secret and is befriended by the top fighter Emil. Emil is clearly infatuated with Aicha, but Aicha is reluctant to get involved with him, knowing her family would never accept their relationship.

Training kung fu and hanging out with a native Danish man is not the only secrets Aicha keeps from her family. She also hides the fact that she is failing school. Things get more difficult when Omar, a friend of Yasemin's brother Mehmet, joins Aicha's training group. Omar refuses to fight women and is consequently thrown out of the team. He tells on Aicha at her brother's engagement-party which results in a fight between Aicha and Omar and Aicha's brother's engagement being broken off. Aicha's brother is distraught, and things get worse when it transpires that his ex-bride-to-be is pregnant. Yasemin's brother and his friends, not Omar though, go looking for Ali. Aicha is warned by Yasemin and saves Ali, thanks to her kung fu skills. No one is grateful though, but Ali does take Aicha's advice, to go apologize to Yasemin's parents. Apologizing is something Aicha has done throughout the film.

*Fighter* does not have as clear a resolution as *Wings of Glass*, but here too a way forward is suggested. The film ends with Aicha taking part in a tournament, where she wins over Emil and loses to Omar, a result everyone seems happy with. After the competition, she suggests to Emil that they should take it slow which he accepts. Aicha then speaks to her father and hopes that he someday will be able to forgive her and be proud of her. She will not become a doctor, but she is determined to become something, though she does not yet know what. Aicha's father does not reply, but takes her hand, indicating that he cares for his daughter.

Similar to Nazli, identifying as a Muslim or being identified as a Muslim is an issue for Aicha. Early in the film when Emil asks "So you're a Muslim from a Muslim country?" Aicha sarcastically answers "Yes. So I'm a Muslim from a Muslim country. And you're a Christian from a Christian country, or what?", suggesting she does not like the generalizations Emil is making. Emil apologizes and tries to explain that he does not know many Muslims and therefore does not know how to talk to her, to which Aicha replies that he should talk to her as if she was not a Muslim. However, that Aicha is not like other girls becomes clear in scene after scene. She is uncomfortable with getting physically close to Emil, either in training or in other situations. When it becomes clear that Emil is interested in being more than friends Aicha tells him that they can never date and never marry, to which Emil responds with a surprised laugh since marriage is nothing he, as a young Danish man, is thinking about. When Aicha's friends ask Aicha if she is sleeping with Emil, Aicha responds that they are not dating. They reply, "What does that have to do with anything?" For her friends having sex, drinking, and partying is a natural part of being young, but not for Aicha.

*Fighter* and *Wings of Glass* both show that there are many expectations of Muslim women, especially around sexuality, because of familial relationships and attitudes. Aicha is very hesitant to get in a situation where sexual desires might be encouraged and coy about sex with her

friends. Similarly, Nazli tries very much to behave like her ethnic Swedish friends but is reluctant to sleep with her boyfriend, and is not shown doing so in the film. The severe reaction to Yasemin's pregnancy also underlines this theme. Sex before marriage, or at least women having sex before marriage, is highlighted as being a particularly sensitive issue among Muslim migrants. The issue is not exclusively tied to religion, but since the characters are clearly presented as Muslims this is something that in the films come across as being central in Islam.

### **The Nordic way?**

The themes woven across these Nordic films are not unique to the Nordic contexts. Issues relating to finding one's place in between cultures is common in films by migrant and diasporic filmmakers in other contexts too<sup>20</sup> and in many films focusing on Muslim characters.<sup>21</sup> While in countries such as Britain, some researchers have suggested that the migrant and Muslim background of characters is today less of an issue,<sup>22</sup> Nordic films are not there yet. Still in Nordic countries recent films about characters with migrant backgrounds would seem to put less of a focus on Islam and playing more with preconceptions. For example, in the humorous 2010 Norwegian horror-film *Troll Hunter (Trolljegeren)* by André Øvredal it is clear that trolls can smell Christian blood and Christians should therefore stay away from trolls, but the troll expert is confounded when asked if it is a problem that one person in the team is a Muslim. However, as

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<sup>20</sup> Berghahn 2010.

<sup>21</sup> Ramji 2010.

<sup>22</sup> Malik 2010.

the reactions to Sana in *Skam* indicate, there is a need for strong and complex Muslim characters in the Nordic countries, but there is also a need to think through the narratives about Muslims in Nordic popular culture.

Taken together the films discussed in this chapter demonstrate common themes across Nordic films. The films highlight that growing up Muslim in the Nordic countries today is challenging. One has to deal with prejudice from many quarters and young people have to negotiate their own path. What is somewhat problematic though is that the characters' marginalized position is largely portrayed as a personal choice or related to their families. This has been argued to be a problem with coming-of-age stories more generally as well.<sup>23</sup> This setup ignores the social and structural aspects that might be behind the marginalization, such as discrimination on the job market and an un-supporting school system. The films can at times be read as a critique of society, but this is often a minor theme. The opening scene in *Wings of Glass* indicates the lack of understanding that Nazli and similar characters have to deal with. While one of Nazli's interviewers is somewhat supportive, the other is confused about the fact that she is not the ethnic Swede they expected and the fact that she chose to lie about her name ends up being her downfall. In a similar vein, the school system does not seem able to provide an option for Wasim and his friends who end up looking for other contexts in which to strive. However, the films, by focusing on them and their views, presents the criminal path as their choice, not as the outcome of a lacking system.

The problem is thus that the focus on the internal and personal struggles of characters coming of age means that the social structures behind the character's marginalization are largely made invisible. One of the few exceptions of a Muslim character in Nordic film that disrupts

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<sup>23</sup> Moseng 2011.



these patterns is Gabriela Pitcher's *Eat, Sleep, Die (Äta, sova, dö)*, made in Sweden in 2012.<sup>24</sup> In this film, the viewers are introduced in several scenes to governing agents that underline a systematic lack of concern through their actions and put the blame on those who are marginalized. The main character is the young Muslim woman Rasa who is represented as strong-willed and imaginative, but unable to break free from a faulty system.

What the films that I have analyzed here likewise hide is the relatively long history of Muslims in some Nordic countries. The films do highlight the fact that most Muslims in the Nordic countries today have a migrant background. However, with the story of migrant Muslims being so dominant other histories and Muslim identities are easily ignored. In Finland, for example, there has been a Muslim minority since the nineteenth century when Tatar salesmen settled in the country.<sup>25</sup> The focus on young Muslims with a migrant background coming of age also ignores the fact that ethnic Scandinavians sometimes convert to Islam.<sup>26</sup> The films also do not generally focus on characters with a mixed background that is to say with one parent with a migrant background and one who is an ethnic Scandinavian. One exception is the Finnish film *Heart of a Lion (Leijonasydän)* from 2013, directed Dome Karukoski, about a neo-Nazi who falls in love with a woman who has a child who is a Muslim.<sup>27</sup> In general though, the story is somewhat generic.

Despite their limitations, the films discussed in this chapter also have many noteworthy features. Films about growing up often receive less scholarly attention than other genres, but they

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<sup>24</sup> Lindvall 2013.

<sup>25</sup> Daher 1999.

<sup>26</sup> Roald 2004.

<sup>27</sup> Hiltunen 2016.

do obviously fill a purpose.<sup>28</sup> The stories might seem somewhat similar, differing mostly in their details and whom they give center stage. However, they do also provide important voices to both individuals and groups while bringing additional topics to traditional themes in coming-of-age stories. Particularly the films that focus on young Muslim women underscore issues concerning the body, love, and sexuality and being different and in-between. The stories are thus not just about the struggles of falling in love, exploring your sexuality and finding yourself, but doing this while juggling expectations of your secular friends and your often more traditionally oriented family. The films about the young Muslim man's road to crime in turn illustrates the many layers of marginalization, another recurring theme in stories about growing up.<sup>29</sup>

Growing up is tough – particularly on film where the story requires some conflicts to be worth telling – but often in real life too. However, having parents of not just a different generation but also from a different cultural context, having to make your way between varied ideas about how and who you should be, and, independent of what you choose, still risking to be categorized by others according to their preconceived notions, is no doubt even more challenging. In this situation, to see someone on the silver screen – or some other screen – dealing with issues that you too struggle with can without a doubt be important. In addition, it can help those around you better comprehend your struggles. The reactions to Sana in *Skam* clearly illustrate this, but Nazlis's Wasim's and Aicha's stories can certainly work in the same way. Films and other popular cultural narratives can of course also create prejudice, but at their best they can be a sounding board for understanding and accepting difference, an understanding greatly needed today.

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<sup>28</sup> Shary 2014.

<sup>29</sup> Moseng 2011.

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