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The way women are portrayed in the Egyptian TV series *Il-Kabīr Awī*

Abstract

Il-Kabīr Awī is a Ramaḍān TV series that was very popular in Egypt from 2010–2015 and continues to be shown on different TV channels. On his deathbed, the *‘umda*, mayor of village in Upper Egypt informs his son that he has lived a lie his entire life – his son’s mother is an American, and gave birth to twins. The father summons his American descendant, second of the twins, to come to Il-Mazārīṭa and receive his inheritance. This series provides excellent research material for an analysis of cultural differences and stereotypical perspectives. The main crux of the series is the adventures of the *‘umda*’s sons. For this article, the research area concerns the portrayal of women. The research paper allows us to get to know how women are shown, and if the image the TV show presents of women is in any way compatible with reality. The author considers whether the way in which the female gender is represented simply presents a stereotypical viewpoint or it could send any messages to the public.

Keywords: Arabic media, Egyptian Ramaḍān TV series, *Il-Kabīr Awī*, women, Upper Egypt

Abstrakt

Il-Kabīr Awī to serial ramadanowy, który święcił triumfy w Egipcie w latach 2010–2015, a do tej pory jest powtarzany w różnych stacjach telewizyjnych. Na łożu śmierci *‘umda* (sołtys) wsi w Górnym Egipcie informuje syna, że całe życie żył w kłamstwie – jego matka jest Amerykanką i urodziła bliźniaki. Na wezwanie ojca drugi z bliźniaków przyjeżdża do wsi Il-Mazārīṭa, by odebrać należny mu spadek. Wspomniany serial komediowy jest świetnym materiałem badawczym do analizy różnic kulturowych i stereotypowego myślenia. Główną osią produkcji są perypetie synów *‘umdy*. Badania, których wyniki zostały zaprezentowane w artykule, dotyczą postaci kobiet. Można dowiedzieć się, jak zostały one przedstawione przez twórców serialu, a także, czy telewizyjny obraz odpowiada w jakimś stopniu rzeczywistości. Autorka podjęła również rozważania, czy taki sposób ukazania płci żeńskiej to

wyłącznie przejaw stereotypowego myślenia, czy też próba przekazania społeczeństwu jakiejś wiadomości.

Słowa kluczowe: arabskie media, egipskie seriale ramadanowe, *Il-Kabīr Awī*, kobiety, Górny Egipt

Muslim woman is Fatima, Layla or Malika, one out of over milliard believers of Islam living nowadays on the world. However, it is not easy to talk about her in a more abstract sense, because she brings to mind a conglomerate of diverse patterns and phenomena difficult to unify.¹

These words² are those of Ewa Machut-Mendecka and concern all Muslim women, and this shows the importance of research in different fields about Muslim or Arabic women. Research can be made into the role of women in religion, literature, special historical periods, in particular communities or countries, and so on. It is also worth analyzing the role of women in Arabic television. We need to reflect the view of Omar El Ebiary, who claims that:

Television drama is one of the most important forms of drama in the modern era. It is considered one of the most important contents that Arab television channels are interested in presenting.³

Ramaḍān TV series

Ramaḍān is the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar consisting of twelve months, each of them having 29 or 30 days. During this month, Muslims must abstain from food, drink and sexual relations from sunrise to sunset. This period of the year is also special in the realm of popular culture. As Kraidy and Khalil have noticed:

From the television industry's standpoint, Ramadan is a do-or-die television season that shapes production, programming and acquisition trends for the entire year. During this high-stakes month, Arab television channels make unusual efforts to sustain existing audiences and attract new viewers.⁴

¹ E. Machut-Mendecka, *Kobieta bez zasłony. Muzułmanka w świetle wiary i kultury*, [in:] *Być kobietą w Oriencie*, ed. D. Chmielowska, B. Grabowska, E. Machut-Mendecka, Warsaw 2001, p. 18.

² Unless otherwise stated, all translations in the article were made by the author.

³ O. El Ebiary, *Social and Religious Values as Reflected in Egyptian Ramadan Television Drama Series*, [in:] *Ad-Drāmā al-‘arabiyya wa-qaḍāyā al-hawīyya. Arabic Drama and Identity Issues*, no ed., no place no date, p. 734.

⁴ M.M. Kraidy, J.F. Khalil, *Arab Television Industries*, London 2009, p. 99.

Ramaḍān TV series⁵ usually consist of 29 or 30 episodes, depending on the length of month. They are later repeated throughout the year, but their premieres come at the beginning of Ramaḍān. Some of them have a closed formula but others are open ended and do not come to a conclusion in one series, so to see the next season, viewers must wait almost an entire year. Not all TV productions are connected to or concerned with religion. There are many different kinds of series, and every year they become more varied.⁶

Such series can be watched from *al-iftār* to *as-suhūr*, i.e. from the moment of breaking the fast until its beginning. Reruns of episodes are shown a few times each day and night.⁷

***Il-Kabīr Awī* series**

*Il-Kabīr Awī*⁸ is a popular Egyptian series that first aired in 2010. It contained only 15 episodes. The lead actor – Aḥmad Mikkī suffered an accident and it was impossible to continue filming.⁹ In 2011, viewers could once again watch the first 15 episodes, followed immediately by 15 new ones. A further 3 series were produced – in 2013, 2014

⁵ The names connected with the TV series mentioned in the article are written according to their most popular dialect pronunciation that is why they can be different than the proper Arabic names. Other Arabic names are presented according to their original terms.

⁶ E.g. in Ramaḍān 2017, the leading production company, Synergy released the first Middle Eastern horror series – *Kafr Delhab* [*Kafr Dilhab*] and in Ramaḍān 2020 first Egyptian science fiction series – *El Nehaya* [*In-Nihāya*]; Egypt Today staff, *Synergy releases the promo of 1st Egyptian science fiction series 'El-Nehaya'*, <https://www.egypt-today.com/Article/4/84693/Synergy-releases-the-promo-of-1st-Egyptian-science-fiction-series>, accessed 13 August 2020 and Egypt Today, *Sherif trends on Twitter after last episode of 'Kafr Delhab'*, <https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/4/8919/Sherif-trends-on-Twitter-after-last-episode-of-%E2%80%98Kafr-Delhab%E2%80%99>, accessed 13 August 2020.

⁷ See: Schedule of Ramaḍān TV series released on DMC Drāmā: <https://www.facebook.com/dmctv/photos/pcb.1156914788095606/1156922724761479/?type=3&theater>, accessed 13 August 2020 and schedule of Ramaḍān TV series released on MBC Masr and MBC 2 channels: <https://www.facebook.com/MBCMast/photos/a.328992447198662/3035153476582532/?type=3&theater>, accessed 13 August 2020.

⁸ Two names for these series exist: *Il-Kabīr* and *Il-Kabīr Awī*. It is used interchangeably so in the article *Il-Kabīr Awī* is used as a title of the series. To know more about the title see: E. Wolny-Abouelwafa, *The Il-Kabīr Awī series as instrument to diagnose cultural discrepancies in contemporary Egyptian society and their resolution via consensus and assimilation*, "Przegląd Orientalistyczny", forthcoming in 2021.

⁹ A. Ramadan, *Al-Kabeer Awī: Three characters, half a series*, <https://www.egyptindependent.com/al-kabeer-awi-three-characters-half-series/>, accessed 13 August 2020.

and 2015, each with 30 episodes. Mikkī has stated on numerous occasions his desire to create a new season of *Il-Kabīr Awī*. However, this did not happen in time for Ramaḍān 2021.¹⁰

The plot of *Il-Kabīr Awī* predominantly follows the adventures of the sons of the 'umda (mayor), who, on his deathbed, informs his son Il-Kabīr¹¹ that he has lived a lie his entire life. His son's mother is an American whom he married when he was very young. What is more, Il-Kabīr is not an only son as he had been brought up to think, but he has a twin. Just before dying, the 'umda contacts the second twin, Johnny, who lives in America. Johnny arrives in Il-Mazārīṭa, a fictional village set in Upper Egypt, with his friends.¹² In later seasons viewers get to know more about other sons of the 'umda – Ḥazalqūm (Ḥazal'ūm) and In-Na'īm.

Research problem and questions

The main research problem concerns the portrayal of the female characters in this series. To clarify this, it was necessary to pose a few research questions. I focus on these questions to see whether these portrayals send any kind of message to society or whether it is just a case of stereotypical or traditional Egyptian perceptions. Or maybe it is simply the placement of new characters for the amusement of the public?

I try to answer the following questions:

1. Are women important characters in the examined series?
2. How are women presented in *Il-Kabīr Awī*?

¹⁰ 'A. Riḍā, *Aḥmad Mikkī yatarāḡa* 'an taqdīm al-ḡuz' as-sādis min "Il-Kabīr Awī" bi-sabab Karīm 'Abd al-'Azīz, <https://www.sayidaty.net/node/1113196/%D9%81%D9%86-%D9%88%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%8A%D8%B1/%D8%A3%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%8A%D8%B1/%D8%A3%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF-%D9%85%D9%83%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%B9-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%B2%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B3-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%A3%D9%88%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%A8-%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%85#photo/1>, accessed 13 August 2020.

¹¹ The name of the hero is also a dubious issue. Talking about this character, the name *Il-Kabīr* is used without delving into the matter as it is not a great importance to these studies. To know more about the name of the hero see: E. Wolny-Abouelwafa, *op. cit.*

¹² Names 'Il-Mazārīṭa' and 'Mazārīṭa' exist alternately. To know more see: E. Wolny-Abouelwafa, *op. cit.*

3. Is it only women from Il-Mazārīṭa that are shown? If no, how are all the women shown?
4. Are their images compatible with reality?

Women in *Il-Kabīr Awī*

The most important female character, Hadiyya, is played by one of Egypt's most popular actresses – Dunyā Samīr Ġānim. Other important female characters are: Ashley (played by Rawān 'Āṭif) and Sāmāntā (played by Laylā 'Izz al-'Arab). In the series we also see Lebanese characters, Ukrainians, Turks and characters from African countries.¹³

Hadiyya

Hadiyya, the most important female character in the series, is the first lady in Il-Mazārīṭa, Il-Kabīr's wife and mother of the twins – Johnny and 'Itra. Il-Kabīr's love for her began when she was in high school. She was quarrelsome and shouted at Il-Kabīr when she saw him for the first time. At that time she was engaged to her cousin, but she did not love him. Il-Kabīr sent her cousin to work in Italy and he (Il-Kabīr) became engaged to Hadiyya and they married two weeks later.¹⁴

Hadiyya represent the traditional image of a woman – believing in magic and genies¹⁵ and following her favourite series on TV.¹⁶ On the other hand she is open to the new – American visitors, Valentine's Day and new technologies (such as PlayStation and the Internet). She is even more open minded than her husband (or maybe he just does not want to admit this fact).¹⁷ In one part of the series she follows the advice of her mother-in-law and Ashley and changes her style for Il-Kabīr. It is clear that she does not know how to walk in high-heeled shoes and feels shy in shorter clothes.¹⁸ She is rather incon-

¹³ In the series we can observe also women from the history but the article concerns only contemporary society.

¹⁴ *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 3, episode 16, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m_hqIzKd0yQ, accessed 17 August 2020.

¹⁵ *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 1, episode 9, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=znc4yNdXXaQ>, accessed 15 August 2020.

¹⁶ *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 3, episode 1, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HV4P2jLSx4>, accessed 17 August 2020.

¹⁷ *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 1, episode 1, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uPs0F7r-r6Uc>, accessed 15 August 2020; *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 1, episode 8, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHD-UwOIgd0>, accessed 15 August 2020; *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 1, episode 12, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m6Nrcyz5Xak>, accessed 15 August 2020.

¹⁸ *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 1, episode 14, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cES2TX-6Tq7U>, accessed 15 August 2020.

sistent though – sometimes she will cover her hair in front of strange men, sometimes she does not.¹⁹

She listens to her husband, cares about the house, cleans, prepares clothes and food for him, thus one can think that she is a wife following only the orders of Il-Kabir. This is an illusion. She is usually quite amenable when close to others²⁰ but when she is alone with him we see a strong woman who knows how to talk to her husband to get what she wants. She knows how to calm him down and has great influence on him. Il-Kabir regularly follows her advice (which does not always end well for him).²¹ They love each other dearly and she is often jealous of him. She seems to be very romantic and her husband knows how to make her happy.²² When she is pregnant, she often uses the fact that Il-Kabir would do everything for her to get what she wants.²³

She is not a subtle woman. Force is not unfamiliar to her, and she knows how to use a gun.²⁴ Sometimes Il-Kabir is scared of her.²⁵ Hadiyya knows how to repair the mistakes of others – for example

¹⁹ E.g. *Il-Kabir Awī*, season 1, episode 12; *Il-Kabir Awī*, season 2, episode 11; *Il-Kabir Awī*, season 3, episode 6; *Il-Kabir Awī*, season 3, episode 10; *Il-Kabir Awī*, season 3, episode 22, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qv9lN3K6hBU>, accessed 17 August 2020; *Il-Kabir Awī*, season 4, episode 18.

²⁰ Sometimes she totally does not care that Il-Kabir talks with somebody and she answers and cuts their conversation (e.g. *Il-Kabir Awī*, season 3, episode 1).

²¹ E.g. *Il-Kabir Awī*, season 1, episode 2, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t-G0IOJ7hNB0>, accessed 15 August 2020; *Il-Kabir Awī*, season 1, episode 3, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FudjJH3ZiEY>, accessed 15 August 2020; *Il-Kabir Awī*, season 1, episode 7, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YiIVEmXjM4M>, accessed 15 August 2020; *Il-Kabir Awī*, season 1, episode 13, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QNyclPZ5q9U>, accessed 15 August 2020; *Il-Kabir Awī*, season 2, episode 2, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZfIT_J1CJxA, accessed 16 August 2020; *Il-Kabir Awī*, season 3, episode 4, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jG8pDgm_XWs, accessed 17 August 2020.

²² E.g. *Il-Kabir Awī*, season 1, episode 6, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tzz4n-OvUKYA>, accessed 15 August 2020; *Il-Kabir Awī*, season 3, episode 1; *Il-Kabir Awī*, season 3, episode 10, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HyvW5X7NA40>, accessed 17 August 2020; *Il-Kabir Awī*, season 3, episode 16; *Il-Kabir Awī*, season 4, episode 18, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQT-OZcbwJw>, accessed 18 August 2020; *Il-Kabir Awī*, season 4, episode 21, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-WAWPHsy7L4>, accessed 18 August 2020.

²³ *Il-Kabir Awī*, season 2, episode 11, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IFjIt-J9vaol>, accessed 16 August 2020.

²⁴ *Il-Kabir Awī*, season 1, episode 5, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Y-in-8qOYhE>, accessed 15 August 2020; *Il-Kabir Awī*, season 3, episode 12, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tblmz5cZ510>, accessed 17 August 2020.

²⁵ *Il-Kabir Awī*, season 2, episode 1, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2Bqg-ZAMbe0>, accessed 16 August 2020; *Il-Kabir Awī*, season 3, episode 6, <https://www.you->

she talks pointedly with the family of Johnny's fiancée – she knows the rules and knows how to care about her brother-in-law's interests.²⁶ She is brave – sometimes braver than the men.²⁷ At one point she wants to participate in *Arabs Got Talent* but Il-Kabīr refuses. Finally she sings in *Mazarita 3andaha Talent* (*Il-Mazārīṭa Got Talent*).²⁸

Despite her great love for her husband, she does not understand the “Western” way of love. When she hears that Johnny likes a girl, she immediately thinks that he will marry her. She, as everybody in the village, does not accept that he could simply go out with a girl, hold her hand, etc. He must be engaged to her. These are the rules and he must follow them.²⁹ On many occasions, she presents Johnny girls suitable for marriage.³⁰

Ashley

Ashley is Thomas's sister and a friend of Johnny. At first glance she is totally different from Upper Egyptians. She wears tight, short clothes and never covers her hair.³¹ She keeps her own style while being in Il-Mazārīṭa – she does not think to follow the rules of the village.³² She knows that her clothes make some of Il-Mazārīṭa's men crazy (e.g. Fazzā') and knows how to use this.³³

She represents the “typical Western girl” – travels alone, has a boyfriend, cares deeply about her appearance, healthy food and makes the program *Is-sitt il-fit* (Fit Woman), things that are strange in Il-Mazārīṭa's society.³⁴ Often she does not understand women in the village.³⁵

tube.com/watch?v=uyJZknQLYFk, accessed 17 August 2020; *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 4, episode 20, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0OQcvaJo6ZI>, accessed 18 August 2020.

²⁶ *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 2, episode 11.

²⁷ E.g. *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 3, episode 8, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=75vY6m2q_Qk, accessed 17 August 2020; *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 3, episode 24, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CV3bHT7Rdf4>, accessed 17 August 2020.

²⁸ *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 3, episode 25, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ph7ak_Z3W98, accessed 17 August 2020; *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 3, episode 27, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4vCYmMZiXRM>, accessed 17 August 2020.

²⁹ *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 2, episode 10, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t0DBT-5dOSMs>, accessed 16 August 2020; *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 2, episode 11.

³⁰ *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 4, episode 21.

³¹ *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 1, episode 1.

³² E.g. *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 1, episode 5.

³³ *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 1, episode 4, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sJ1P9ldX-Ugo>, accessed 15 August 2020.

³⁴ *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 1, episode 10, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8c6O-T8OoTI&pbjreload=101>, accessed 15 August 2020; *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 1, episode 12.

³⁵ *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 1, episode 10.

Ashley tries to create a cheerleading team before a match of American football, but the result does not satisfy her – the women were local and sang local songs.³⁶ She has no problem with gender mixing and can sleep in the same room as Johnny and Thomas.³⁷

Sāmāntā

Sāmāntā Fox is an American lady with long blonde hair who Il-Kabīr's father met in a club and married. She dictated the conditions – the marriage could not last more than 9 months and she would take the child to America. She researched types of genes. She claimed that she had kids all over the world but she was interested in trying an Upper Egyptian (*Ṣa'idi*) – American child. The deal did not predict twins, thus she took only one child.³⁸

The older Sāmāntā comes to Il-Mazārīṭa. She now has short blonde hair and wears “Western style” clothes. She always gets her own way. She also does not accept Upper Egyptian tradition and behaves as if she was still in America – sits in coffee shops alone with men and smokes shisha. She is surprised that she does not see women in the village and that all of them wear only black clothes and have their hair covered. She is irritated that Hadiyya talks only about the food. She shows her a singer on TV and says that this is a woman, not who she sees in Il-Mazārīṭa. She tries to explain to her daughter-in-law that a woman should feel that she is a woman and be *wow* and stylish. She tries to change Hadiyya's style – later on, she does not let Hadiyya use her special local “conditioner” on her hair. We can see here the clash of two cultures. Sāmāntā does not understand that in Il-Mazārīṭa there are two different worlds that do not mix – the male world and the female world. The American mother is unaware that she often makes Il-Kabīr feel shy in front of other men.

Moreover, she is very open in love – she brings a young man from Sharm el-Sheikh with her. She and Johnny do not see anything wrong with the fact that a young man can love an older woman. Il-Kabīr does not accept the boy's behaviour towards his mother. The Egyptians know that he wants something from her, and they are right.³⁹

³⁶ *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 2, episode 8, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ixEagqA-O5Ww>, accessed 16 August 2020.

³⁷ *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 2, episode 4, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fBvPb-DHNV48>, accessed 16 August 2020.

³⁹ *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 1, episode 15, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EPLZ-7_9pul, accessed 15 August 2020.

Sāmāntā complains about Egyptian food, she does not accept eating with her hands or that the workers of Il-Kabīr do not eat with the family. She has brought her own rules and does not accept anybody's objections. She can always get Il-Kabīr to listen to her.⁴⁰

Sāmāntā returns to Il-Mazārīṭa at the end of the 3rd season. This time she decides to marry a guard of Il-Kabīr – Fazzā'. She falls in love with him after talking on Facebook and she has no problem that he has a wife – he could now have two. Il-Kabīr does not allow her to marry anybody, especially Fazzā'. She calls her son "old-fashioned". Even Hadiyya is more understanding. In spite of the above-mentioned situation, Sāmāntā decides to stay in Il-Mazārīṭa and continues to represent the "Western woman". She marries and gets divorced.⁴¹

Another time, after visiting a nightclub in Ain Sokhna, she marries doctor Rabī'. This is also not acceptable for Il-Kabīr. The couple divorces the next day but decides to be together. Sāmāntā does not understand that she is destroying the reputation of her Egyptian family. Hadiyya demands official actions from them. Il-Kabīr decides to talk about the conditions of marriage. Finally the marriage is interrupted and Il-Kabīr does not let Sāmāntā and Rabī' remarry.⁴²

Other women

Lebanese singer – Nikūl Sābā – comes to Il-Mazārīṭa to give a concert. She presents the "high-life style"; her clothes are sexy and underline her beauty. She finds Il-Kabīr attractive, and this is reciprocated. She is interested in Il-Mazārīṭa's culture but she does not plan to leave her life. It is a superficial fascination. In the beginning she does not see the difference between Il-Kabīr-gentleman and Il-Kabīr-husband (using force or not allowing his wife to hug other men). She even plans a wedding⁴³ but then decides to break up.⁴⁴ The other pretty Lebanese woman, Razān Muḡrabī, is a jury member in *Mazarita 3andaha Talent*.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 1, episode 14.

⁴¹ *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 3, episode 29, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-0-3uuBES8o>, accessed 17 August 2020.

⁴² *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 4, episode 27, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xlo_iWTShwk, accessed 18 August 2020; *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 4, episode 28, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yiPYr8nRk6A>, accessed 18 August 2020; *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 4, episode 30, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Urz4DLvUMy4>, accessed 18 August 2020.

⁴³ Il-Kabīr will later plan to marry one more time but just to teach his wife and family lesson; source: *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 4, episode 30.

⁴⁴ *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 1, episode 5; *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 1, episode 6.

⁴⁵ E.g. *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 3, episode 27.

The majority of the women presented in the series are **Upper Egyptians**. Most of them wear black clothes and cover their hair (some also cover their faces). All of them follow the rules of *Il-Mazārīṭa*. They do not meet alone with men before marriage; their families discuss the conditions of marriage and future life.⁴⁶ The rules of meeting girls are similar throughout Egypt. The North is presented as more open-minded, but the patriarchal approach is dominating so that the family does not realise it.⁴⁷

Il-Mazārīṭa's women are presented as very traditional. Traditional does not mean weak – when their husbands have a party with some Ukrainian girls, women arrive with daggers, knives and other “weapons” and scare all the men. Finally “no one can ever laugh at *Il-Mazārīṭa*'s women”.⁴⁸ The same example can be observed with the doctor – he asks his children to tell their mother to wake him up, but for her to do it in a polite way, without violence, insult or being rude, “if she could” of course.⁴⁹ Sometimes they also try to pick men up.⁵⁰

Women try new activities, for example, going to an American football match (to the area reserved only for women).⁵¹ One elderly woman even performs acrobatics (in hijab and traditional clothes) in *Mazarita 3andaha Talent*.⁵² Most of *Il-Mazārīṭa*'s women are presented as slightly overweight (except two Egyptian actresses).⁵³

Other **Egyptians** are, for example: celebrities, TV presenters, wives of businessmen, maids, stewardesses or flight attendants in an airline's business class section. They look chic, beautiful and wear tight clothes.⁵⁴

⁴⁶ E.g. *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 2, episode 5, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2as-5JMxF4tw>, accessed 16 August 2020; *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 2, episode 8; *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 2, episode 10.

⁴⁷ E.g. *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 2, episode 6, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z7uK-K2mWeGQ>, accessed 16 August 2020;

⁴⁸ *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 3, episode 6.

⁴⁹ *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 3, episode 22.

⁵⁰ *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 5, episode 22, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QVT-MyM7hJjo>, accessed 20 August 2020.

⁵¹ *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 2, episode 9, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VPUQDQ-6hbU>, accessed 16 August 2020.

⁵² E.g. *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 3, episode 27.

⁵³ *Ibidem*; *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 3, episode 2, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iaamqZZzOeA>, accessed 17 August 2020; *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 3, episode 10; e.g. *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 5, episode 24, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JJLwAOX-vijg>, accessed 20 August 2020.

⁵⁴ E.g. *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 2, episode 1; *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 3, episode 10; *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 3, episode 23, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6qlVriXJYGE>, accessed 17 August 2020; *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 4, episode 20.

There are also other girls with whom men can spend night in the hotels or clubs in Cairo. Cairo's life is presented as much more open-minded. But there are differences, e.g. in very good hotels there are girls looking formal, whilst in worse quality of the hotels there are girls who do not wear smart outfits but instead wear more local clothes. Cairo's women also keep their husbands on their toes.⁵⁵

Some **Ukrainians** pass by the village when their bus breaks down and they are welcomed into Il-Kabīr's home. They are presented as slim, pretty girls with tight clothes. They are open, smile at men, even flirt a little bit; they stay with the men, have a party and play games. They speak English.⁵⁶

Natasha is another foreign girl, probably from Russia or Ukraine. She is slim and beautiful with long blonde hair. She speaks English, has contact with men, and wears high-heeled shoes and tight, short clothes. She comes from a good family and she is able to spend her holidays in Sharm el-Sheikh. She arrives in Il-Mazārīṭa after adding a boy on Facebook without knowing him very well. She is not very thoughtful – she does not understand Arabic but wants to marry this boy. Her friend is also presented as a “sexy girl”.⁵⁷

There is a Russian woman – the beautiful Dinamis, a wife of a mafioso. She tries to seduce and kill Ḥazalqūm. Earlier she had worked in Egypt as a dancer.⁵⁸

Aside from a TV presenter, the first **African** deserving of attention is the cleaning lady working in Il-Kabīr's home. She is from Congo and has Polish nationality. She scares Il-Kabīr as she can apparently perform magic.⁵⁹ Africans are mainly represented by Ḥazalqūm's wife – young, curly haired and pretty, the daughter of the tribe's leader. She and other women wear colourful, quite tight clothes with lots of big jewellery, and they carry spears. They are more open than Arab

⁵⁵ *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 3, episode 13, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eUi-S9vtASk>, accessed 17 August 2020; *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 3, episode 14, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6e1g3-6tYs>, accessed 17 August 2020.

⁵⁶ *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 3, episode 6.

⁵⁷ *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 3, episode 11, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F1YNZ1zpyY0>, accessed 17 August 2020.

⁵⁸ *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 5, episode 7, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hrtQn-2Bx1Lc>, accessed 19 August 2020; *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 5, episode 11, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=twtpaHmpg4s>, accessed 19 August 2020.

⁵⁹ *Il-Kabīr Awī*, season 3, episode 21, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x-8FCNI9WsAQ>, accessed 17 August 2020.

women – they socialise with men and hold hands before marriage, but also keep close ties to their local traditions. They can also be scary (e.g. they still eat people).⁶⁰

The **Turkish** girls shown in the show wear “Western style” clothing; most of them do not cover their hair. In hospital, an older nurse wears a hijab and is more traditional than others. There is also a Turkish-Egyptian girl – very open-minded, with colourful hair and piercings, who has no issue welcoming men in her home. She is a good person who falls in love with Il-Kabir but sometimes behaves strangely, e.g. she wants to commit suicide to study the reincarnation of souls.⁶¹

Analysis

Il-Kabir Awī is a series that can be treated as a good comedy but also as a metaphor of contemporary Egyptian society, shown in a false mirror. The research focussed on those women who are important characters in the series. The most important, Il-Kabir's wife, is portrayed as a good, but strong at the same time. She loves her husband and cares about tradition. She is also very open to new things. She is a good representative of typical Ša'īdi lady. Not only because of her appearance and clothes which are typical for any traditional women. She wears black abaya and sometimes wears the cover on her hair. It has to be mentioned that portraying Hadiyya in this way shouldn't be a surprise for any Egyptian. In her society, Upper Egyptian women are well-known as guardians of the tradition. That is why, for example, she couldn't let Johnny marry as he wished. He was almost obligated to follow the rules. The strength of the first lady of Il-Mazārīṭa is expected as well. The life in Upper Egypt is more difficult than the life in Cairo. The reasons of such situation can be found in the tradition which not always allow women to start any professional activities or less freedom with choosing their own path of life, less places of work, more difficulties with reaching the proper education (because as children they are helping families and not always can concentrate on school or just they live quite far or far from the universities which can help them with reaching better future), less development opportunities and sometimes poverty.

⁶⁰ *Il-Kabir Awī*, season 4, episode 5, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aBZZe-FkJA1s>, accessed 18 August 2020.

⁶¹ E.g. *Il-Kabir Awī*, season 5, episode 2, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Ep-Kf1ZhOSQ>, accessed 19 August 2020; *Il-Kabir Awī*, season 5, episode 4, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ci3kwMgrq3U>, accessed 19 August 2020.

Mainly traditional women will concentrate on their families and growing children but not making career as a goal of their life. Even if Upper Egyptians face more difficulties of life, they are strong and can live happy life.

Il-Kabir Awī does not present the list of the problems which Egyptian women can struggle with but also it is not needed as a main reason of the series is to make people laugh – not to let them analyse all the problems of the contemporary society. These issues are the basis of the other Egyptian productions as for example the Ramaḍān series from 2014 *Sign in-Nisā* (Women Prison). Even the references to magic which could be found in *Il-Kabir Awī* are connected with the real believes as Upper Egyptian are also well-known as those who can know some magic or (mainly šayḥ or šayḥa) who can help us with drive the ghost (‘ifrīt) out of the possessed person or change the influence of the “bad eye”.⁶² This topic is also mentioned in the series and is not a basis of the plot as in the other series as for example the series *Sāḥrit ig-ganūb* (The Witch of the South). In my opinion adding such typical for Upper Egypt topics is a tool to locate the plot strongly in the Egyptian heritage and showing it in a false mirror but also as a huge part of reality.

The same measure of showing women we can observe while presenting other Egyptians. This seems to be the most interesting as it can cover also the message to the society – the Egyptian women are different as in the series as in the reality. We can see here differences between the “big wide world” and the villages. This image is spiked with making certain points even more clear. The “big wide world” is represented by elegant, beautiful, slim – we can even say “ideal looking” women wearing tight clothes – mainly stars, working ladies or wives of businessmen. On the other side there are local and traditional Upper Egyptians. They are presented as the opposite of Cairenes, wear black clothes, they look similar, they are not often seen on the streets, they respect the rules (much more so than girls from different parts of Egypt). They can look weak, but they are very strong and brave. They are romantic but mainly they have their feet on the ground. They can also try new things, but

⁶² According to the popular believes, the “bad eye” is kind of curse which somebody – intentionally or no – casts on other person who will face misfortunes or injuries. The person who received the “eye” is mainly unaware about it. That is why the help of “specialised” person can be needed – mainly it would be a person who knows good religion (to cite Quranic or Bible verses) but also to understand what happened with the injured one.

without abandoning their traditions. Upper Egyptians are also jealous and show their dissatisfaction towards “beauties”. One has the impression that *Il-Mazārīṭa* is opposed to the rest of the world.

This way of presenting Egyptian women is also expected as every day every Egyptian girl from the Upper Egypt, from Sinai or Alexandria watches television and sees “ideal women” who are totally different than her mother, aunties or friends. The magnitude of these differences depends on the level of life, the family who grows girls, area – neighbourhood of the family home, wealthiness etc. That is why this division is not an eye-opener but, by hyperbolising some attributes or the strong adherence to tradition and by comparing with their ‘neighbours’, can show that in one country there are totally different women having more or less common traditions and features. And finally, this can let one think about all these issues and deliberate about their own society and maybe even their own behaviour. This was also perfectly presented in *Il-Kabīr Awī* when Johnny and Ashley created their own television and Upper Egyptians were watching the programs which actually were not addressed to them. Again – we see the hyperbolised situation shown in false mirror but actually so real and common one in the reality. Here it is worth to mention words of Denis McQuail who wrote:

In the area of *culture* mass media are a main channel of representation and cultural expression and main source of perception about the social reality and the material of creating and keeping the social identity. (...), media makes an impact on the life styles, prompt the topic of the conversations and models of behaviours in every situation.⁶³

On the other hand we can observe also foreigners in the *Il-Kabīr Awī* series. Here, opposite to the image of Egyptians, they are strongly shown in a stereotypical way. Every European, African, Russian or Lebanese will immediately agree that this image is very far from the reality. But, on the other hand is very close to other reality – it shows the way how Egyptians think and how they see the world. That is why we can take a chance and say that it shows the Egyptian reality. The stereotypical way of presenting foreigners can be an effect of the influence of tourism. Egyptians see foreign women wear much shorter clothes than they used to see in their own country, the ways of thinking about social-relations and love sometimes are extremely dif-

⁶³ D. McQuail, *Teoria komunikowania masowego*, Warszawa 2012, p. 23.

ferent, finally in Europe or America the relation of older woman with young boy is not so much strange. Still, it is not very common but on the other hand, it happens a lot of times in the touristic destinations in Egypt that is why the imagination about such relations in the Western world can be expected among Egyptians. One can think that they should know how the Lebanese are – finally they live closer but on the other hand – Lebanon is popular destination for the surgery operations and a lot of international, Arab stars try to show how sexy they are. The example that can be mentioned is star Nīkūl Sābā. That is why presenting Lebanese in this way is also unsurprising.

While knowing the way of directing the plot by concentrating on the reality (do not forget the false mirror!) of Egyptian life and showing the stereotypes inside the Egyptian society about the other world one can think about the reason of not showing the real Americans, Ukrainians etc. In my opinion, there are a few answers. Firstly, the problem of women in this series is based on opposition: *Ṣa'īdi women* vs. *other Egyptians* and *Egyptians* (generally) vs. *foreigners*. Secondly, the series is not a kind of educational production or document to explain the reality and kill the stereotypes. Thirdly, I strongly believe that showing the world in false mirror is a reason to send a message to the Egyptian society and let the people think about the world they live in and its diversity. By hyperbolising features one can see himself and his surroundings anew. Fourthly, nobody attacks the Americans, Ukrainians, and Africans because of their differences. Finally, most of them are presented as normal people who just see the world different, think in their own way (maybe sometimes wrong but anyhow their own) but do not hurt Il-Mazārītānians. All of them can meet, can talk and can exist together – for longer or shorter period of time. They do not have to fight and convince each other to change themselves. Sometimes differences can cause problems but here we have to remember also the respecting of culture we live in or we visit. Maybe by such way of showing foreigners (as totally different people than “us” but also positive) media let the society to accustom to differences of the guests which they welcome every year in their cities. Not only touristic ones (e.g. Hurghada or Sharm el-Sheikh) as the foreigners step by step start to arrive to non-touristic places where they meet their inhabitants. Or those inhabitants will go to work to touristic places and face this clash of cultures.

Conclusion

After the analysis of the series for the presentation of women in the *Il-Kabīr Awī* it is clear that there are many different women presented. They are categorised according to their origin. The answers to the research questions are now clear. They are important heroines of the series and are presented according to their origin and their position in the series. Their image in the series is compatible with reality, but much more simplified or stereotyped. The audience can see them in black and white, but it seems to be the aim of this series to emphasise special attitudes, behaviours and ways of thinking. The Egyptians may ask themselves how the reality in which they live looks like. In my opinion this series does not only present a stereotyped world. There are also messages that I treat as secondary. First aim of the screenwriters is to make people laugh. But when somebody analyses the scenes, they can find a lot of topics to discuss and think about them in relation to their own culture and country. *Il-Kabīr Awī* does not give answers, and does not cause harm or offense. It just lets people see their own world in a false mirror and lets them think which parts of this world they accept, like and see as proper, or which parts should be changed.