

IL-KABĪR AWĪ SERIES AS INSTRUMENT
TO DIAGNOSE CULTURAL DISCREPANCIES
IN CONTEMPORARY EGYPTIAN SOCIETY AND THEIR
RESOLUTION VIA CONSENSUS AND ASSIMILATION

ABSTRACT: The author of this article discusses the series *Il-Kabīr Awī*, pointing at cultural contrasts and the assimilation processes. The series shows an exaggerated image of Egyptian society and a stereotypical view of Upper Egypt and the USA. It helps to understand that a certain way of thinking, speaking or behaving, is determined by one's place of upbringing.

Il-Kabīr Awī features a clash of cultures, distrust, and finally the gradual merging of cultures, which actually exists in Egypt.

KEYWORDS: Egyptian Ramaḍān TV series, *Il-Kabīr Awī*, society, consensus, assimilation, cultural discrepancies, Upper Egypt, comedy, satire

RAMAḌĀN

Ramaḍān is very important in terms of religious time. It is the 9th month of the Islamic calendar¹ in which the Qur'ān was revealed. During this month Muslims must abstain from food, drink, and sexual relations from dawn till sunset. The fast is regulated by the Qur'ān (The Qur'ān 2: 183–185, 187):

183. *O you who believe! Observing As-Saum (the fast) is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may become Al-Muttaqūn (the pious – See V.2:2).*

184. *[Observing Saum (fast)] for a fixed number of days, but if any of you is ill or on a journey, the same number (should be made up) from other days. And as for those who can fast with difficulty, (e.g. an old man), they have (a choice either to fast or) to feed a Miskīn (needy person) (for every day missed). But whoever does good of his own accord, it is better for him. And that you fast is better for you if only you know.*

185. *The month of Ramadan in which was revealed the Qur'ān, a guidance for mankind and clear proofs for the guidance and the criterion (between right and wrong). So whoever of you sights (the crescent on the first night of) the month (of Ramadan i.e. is present at his home), he must observe Saum (fast) that month, and whoever is ill or on a journey, the same number [of days which one did not observe Saum (fast) must be made up] from other days. Allāh intends for you ease, and He does not want to make things difficult for you. (He wants that you) must complete the same number (of days), and that you must magnify Allāh [i.e. to say Takbīr (Allāhu Akbar; Allāh is the Most Great)] for having guided you so that you may be grateful to Him.*

¹ Islamic calendar is a lunar one, consisting of 12 months, each of them has 29 or 30 days. Time is measured from 622 A.D. (the year of Prophet Muḥammad's migration from Mecca to Yatrib, later renamed Medina).

187. *It is made lawful for you to have sexual relations with your wives on the night of As-Saum (the fast) They are Libās [i.e. body cover, or screen, or Sakan (i.e. you enjoy the pleasure of living with them – as in Verse 7:189) Tafsīr At-Tabarī], for you and you are the same for them. Allāh knows that you used to deceive yourselves, so He turned to you (accepted your repentance) and forgave you. So now have sexual relations with them and seek that which Allāh has ordained for you (offspring), and eat and drink until the white thread (light) of dawn appears to you distinct from the black thread (darkness of night), then complete your Saum (fast) till the nightfall. And do not have sexual relations with them (your wives) while you are in I'tikāf (i.e. confining oneself in a mosque for prayers and invocations leaving the worldly activities) in the mosques. These are the limits (set) by Allāh, so approach them not. Thus does Allāh make clear His Ayāt (proofs, evidences, lessons, signs, revelations, verses, laws, legal and illegal things, Allāh's set limits, orders) to mankind that they may become Al-Muttaqun (the pious – See V.2:2).²*

In addition to the religious aspect, which is surely the most important when observing Ramaḍān, there is no possibility to avoid the phenomenon of Ramaḍān TV series, especially in Egypt, which this article concerns. Choosing Egypt is not accidental. We cannot forget that

...national television channels air programmes that appeal to a sense of community. National television channels in Egypt and Saudi Arabia have historically been instrumental in setting these trends, and these two countries continue to be important benchmarks for Ramadan television (Kraidy and Khalil, p. 101).

Thus it is important to conduct research on contemporary Egyptian TV series.

RAMAḌĀN TV SERIES

Ramaḍān TV series and programs are created only for this period. Despite the fact that they are produced for this special time for Muslims, it does not mean that they only raise religious issues.³ There are also other genres, e.g., comedies,⁴ historical series,⁵ or those raising social problems.⁶ According to Marwan M. Kraidy and Joe F. Khalil:

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, culminating in special programmes celebrating 'Eid al-Fitr'⁷ (p. 99–100).

² All quotes from Al-Quran in the article are coming from *The Noble Qura`ān. English Translation of the meanings and commentary*, Madinah Munaqqarah.

³ E.g. the program *Al-imām at-Ṭayyib* ("Imam at-Tayib" from 2017, 2018) or the program *Qiṣṣas al-aḡā'ib fī al-Qur`ān* ("The stories of miracles in the Qur`ān" from 2014).

⁴ E.g. the series *Duktūr amrāḍ nisā* ("Gynaecologist" from 2014) or the series *Lahfa* ("Lahfa" from 2015).

⁵ E.g. the series *Sarāyā `Abidīn* ("Abdeen's palace" from 2014).

⁶ There are series talking about drug addiction, e.g. *Taht is-sayṭara* ("Under domination" from 2016) or about people stricken with sicknesses such as leukaemia and brain tumors such as *Ḥalāwat id-dunyā* ("Sweetness of life" from 2017).

⁷ The "Festival of Breaking the Fast" is one of the two most important Muslim festivals. It marks the end of Ramaḍān.

Taking into consideration their creation for the time of Ramaḍān, they usually consist of 29 or 30 episodes (depending on the length of the month). Moreover, some of them do not finalise the plot in one series. So, fans who want to follow their heroes' next moves must wait for the next year. Some of them⁸ consist of many series, so viewers have to wait a few years to reach their end.

The phenomenon of these series is dependent on the fact that Egyptian viewers live and breathe them, and the biggest television companies compete to offer more and more ideas, employing the greatest Arabic TV stars. Ewa Machut-Mendecka mentions:

Egyptian series are especially interesting because, due to Egypt's substantial film and television production since the 1960s, they have gained huge popularity throughout the Arab world. They have become one of the main forms of popular culture (p. 196).⁹

Egyptians watch their series from the time of *al-iftār* to the time of *as-suhūr*; from the moment they can eat the first meal after fasting, to the last one. Between *al-iftār* and *as-suhūr* they watch reruns of series.¹⁰ So, if viewers like to watch two series that appear on different channels at the same time, they can watch the first in the actual time of the broadcasting and the other the next morning. The popularity of this kind of series is down to the fact that Muslims,¹¹ after fasting all day, can finally gather with their families and friends to eat and drink. They do so mainly while watching TV and following their favourite stories. After Ramaḍān, TV channels repeat the series,¹² meaning that it is almost impossible not to see or know the plot of any of them. It should be pointed out that some series do appear on different TV channels.¹³

⁸ E.g. the program *Rāmiz* ("Ramez") has aired since 2013 and every year it changes its title a little bit or the series *Il-Kabīr Awī*.

⁹ Unless otherwise stated, all translations in the article were made by the author.

¹⁰ In case of e.g. the series *Fī al lā lā lānd* on CBC channel, the new episode appeared at 7 p.m. and its repeats were released at 2 a.m. and 1 p.m. The same series on CBC Drama appeared five times a day (see Ibrāhīm, Ḥālīd. "Arḍ musalsal Dunyā Samīr Ġānim «Fī al-Lā lā land» 8 marrāt 'alā qanawāt cbc". *Al-Yawm as-Sābi*, 28 May 2017). Other examples can be the series entitled *Raḥīm* ("Raḥīm" from 2018) on CBC Drāmā with the new episode appearing at 12 a.m. and its repeats being shown at 4 a.m., 11 a.m., and 4 p.m., or the series *Malīka* ("Malīka" from 2018) on CBC Drāmā with the new episode appearing at 1 a.m. and then at 7 a.m., 12 p.m., and 6 p.m. (see CBC Egypt, 18 May 2018).

¹¹ Not only Muslims watch these series in Egypt – Christians too – but Muslims were mentioned due to the religious aspect of this month and the tradition of watching Ramaḍān series.

¹² See, e.g., Ibrāhīm, Ḥālīd. "Cbc tuqarrir i'ādat 'arḍ musalsal «Ḥilāwat id-dunyā» ba'd naḡāḥih". *Al-Yawm as-Sābi*, 2 July 2017.

¹³ See, e.g., McArthur, Rachel. "Your ultimate Ramadan TV guide". *Gulf News*, 8 July 2013.

*IL-KABİR AWĪ*¹⁴ SERIES

Il-Kabīr Awī's¹⁵ first season appeared in 2010 and contained only 15 episodes, because the lead actor broke his leg while filming and, due to the plot, it was impossible to continue shooting. In 2011 it was revisited with the next 15 episodes, and in this way, the second season appeared. Those were supposed to be the final episodes, but the season was eventually extended by another three series (2013, 2014, and 2015, with 30, 30 and 30 episodes respectively).

Aḥmad Mikkī (Ahmed Mekky) – a famous Egyptian comedian – was the person who created the idea for such a production. Many popular actors play in the *Il-Kabīr Awī* series. Aḥmad Mikkī plays there different characters, namely *Il-Kabīr*, his father, grandfather, and all his brothers. In this series we may see (among others):

- Dunyā Samīr Ġānim playing Hadiyya, that is *Il-Kabīr*'s wife,
- Sa'īd Ṭarābīk playing Ġābir – '*umda*'s employee,
- Muḥammad Salām playing Haġris – Johnny's Egyptian friend,
- Bayyūmī Fu'ād playing Al-Mazārīṭa's doctor – Rabī' and from the 5th season – Bābā Dublus, the box trainer in Turkey,
- Laylā 'Izz al-'Arab playing Sāmāntā, that is *Il-Kabīr* and Johnny's American mother,
- Samīr Ġānim playing Hadiyya's father.

IL-KABİR AWĪ'S PLOT

On his deathbed, an '*umda* (the village administrator), from the traditional Egyptian village, informs his son that, no matter what he has thought during his life, his mother was an American, whom his father had married when he was young. The couple gave birth, not to one, but to two sons – so *Il-Kabīr*¹⁶ has a twin brother who travelled with

¹⁴ There is a need to explain a few issues connected with this title. First of all, two names for this series exist: *Il-Kabīr* and *Il-Kabīr Awī*, where the first one appears in the credit titles and the latter one is used by the television stations (e.g. CBC) while promoting the 5th part of the series (even if they wrote the first one; see CBC Egypt. “#CBCegy|#CBCPromo| tābī'ū...Musalsal *Il-Kabīr al-ġuz'* al-ḥāmis yawmiyyan as-sā'a 7 masā'an 'alā sī bī sī". *YouTube*, 18 June 2015, 0:00–0:50). The longer option was also used on the Youtube page of CBC Drama (see title of the video) even if the shorter name was available in the opening credits of the series (e.g. CBC Drama. “Musalsal *Il-Kabīr Awī al-ġuz'* 3 – al-ḥalaqa 27". *YouTube*, no date given). The longer name also exists in media (e.g. Ramadan, Ahmed. “Al-Kabeer Awi: Three characters, half a series”. *Egypt Independent*, 26 August 2010). Because it is used interchangeably, the author of the article uses the name: *Il-Kabīr Awī* as the title of the series. What is more, it has to be mentioned that the word *awī* from this title can be written either as *awī* or *qawī*. The correctness of the record will not be explained because it is not the issue of the article. The first option will be used. The pronunciation of this word can also be different according to which dialect the series' character or viewer uses.

In the footnotes, the shortened form of the episodes (with ...) will be used.

¹⁵ The title of the series can be translated as 'Very Big Boss'. The word *kabīr* in Arabic means 'big' so the title can also be translated as 'The Big [Man]'. The word *kabīr* is also commonly used in the Egyptian dialect in phrase *yā kbīr*, which can be translated as 'guy', or 'boss'. Moreover, it is used to show the abilities of the main character – he is a very important person in his village executing great power there. Therefore, after analysing the episodes, it has been decided that the translation 'Very Big Boss' will be used.

¹⁶ It seems that *Il-Kabīr* can be considered the name of the hero. This issue also needs explanation. First of all, it can be understood in the way shown in the upper footnote, so in this case, we would not treat the word as a name but as a nickname, and we would say that we do not know his

his mother to America. Just before dying, his father got in touch with his American son via SMS and over the Internet, to allow him to claim his inheritance. After the administrator's death, the other twin, Johnny arrives in Mazārīṭa / Al-Mazārīṭa¹⁷ to receive his share of the estate (Melody Drama – Mīlūdī Drāmā. “Musalsal Il-Kabīr Awī ġ1 ḥ1...”, 0:00–23:25). Al-Mazārīṭa is a fake village set in Upper Egypt, created for the series. The moment of Johnny's arrival from America is when we see two different worlds collide.

In the later seasons, viewers are introduced to new brothers,¹⁸ but as these parts of the plot were presumably added due to the popularity of the series, they do not concern this article. An analysis of the stories connecting just the twins – Il-Kabīr and Johnny – is presented.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The hypothesis is as follows: The comedy series *Il-Kabīr Awī* can be treated as an instrument to diagnose cultural discrepancies in contemporary Egyptian society. To study it, a few questions need to be posed:

- 1) Is there any relation between the series' plot and reality?
- 2) What is the purpose of presenting the characters in such a way?
- 3) Is it possible that such a series may help Egyptian society in any way?
- 4) Why such a series may be important in Egypt?

real name. But, in this series, unquestionably, we need to treat it as the name of the hero, which is proven in one episode where he says that *Il-Kabīr* is his name (Shoof Drama / Šūf Drāmā. “Musalsal Il-Kabīr Awī 3 al-ḥalaqa 13...”, 5:25–5:30). This issue seems a little more complicated though: when his father died, his wife called *Il-Kabīr Awī māt! Il-Kabīr Awī māt!* meaning: “Il-Kabīr Awī died! Il-Kabīr Awī died!” (Melody Drama – Mīlūdī Drāmā. “Musalsal Il-Kabīr Awī ġ1 ḥ1...”, 21:30–21:35). While attending a program called *Mazārīṭa ‘andahā talent* (transl. ‘Mazarita's Got Talent’) after being asked to state his name, he says: “Il-Kabīr. Il-Kabīr Qawī” (CBC Drama, 28:38–29:07). In the 5th season, when the hero travelled to Turkey, he introduced himself in this way: “I..I. Il-Kabīr, name Il-Kabīr, The Biggest, The Bigger”, and then: “I.. Kabīr, son of Kabīr Qawī” (SelMedia Egypt, 17:34–18:08). A similar way of introducing himself can be seen in another episode – “Il-Kabīr Il-Kabīr Qawī”, thus clearly showing that his name is Il-Kabīr and his father's name is Il-Kabīr Qawī (Shoof Drama / Šūf Drāmā. “Musalsal Il-Kabīr Awī 3 al-ḥalaqa 11...”, 15:53–15:57). Moreover, during a court case, the name of Il-Kabīr's brother is presented as “Johnny Il-Kabīr Awī” (Fenoon – Fanūn. “15...”, 4:25–4:30). In the same way his brothers were introducing themselves as “Ḥazalqūm Il-Kabīr Awī” (Fenoon – Fanūn. “22...”, 14:58–15:02) and “An-Na`ūm” (Fenoon – Fanūn. “30...”, 35:45–35:48). On the other hand, when Ḥazalqūm arrived in Al-Mazārīṭa, he introduced himself in a different way as “Ḥazalqūm Il-Kabīr Awī Awī” (Melody Drama – Mīlūdī Drāmā. “Musalsal Il-Kabīr Awī ġ2 ḥ15...”, 30:28–30:40). Il-Kabīr, while talking with an actress, said that his name was “Il-Kabīr Awī” (Fenoon – Fanūn. “25...”, 24:04–24:08). That is why this issue is dubious. Nevertheless, discussing this character in the present article the name Il-Kabīr will be used without delving into the matter as it is not of great importance to these studies.

¹⁷ Both of these names exist alternately, but the author of the article will use mainly Al-Mazārīṭa because this version exists in the credits and, after the analysis of all the episodes, seems to be more appropriate (Shoof Drama / Šūf Drāmā. “Musalsal Il-Kabīr Awī 2...”, 0:00–0:35). Sometimes the shorter version also appears, e.g. when there is a show called “Mazārīṭa ‘andahā talent” but strangely when the audience calls out the title of the program, they clearly repeat “Al-Mazārīṭa ‘andahā talent” (CBC Drama, 3:08–7:55).

¹⁸ For appearances of the other two brothers, Ḥazalqūm (written also as Ḥazal`ūm) and An-Na`ūm, see Melody Drama – Mīlūdī Drāmā. “Musalsal Il-Kabīr Awī ġ2 ḥ15...”, 30:25–31:33 and Fenoon – Fanūn. “30...”, 34:32–36:47.

ANALYSING CULTURAL DISCREPANCIES IN THE SERIES

Studying the cultural text mentioned above, one ought to analyse how the image on the screen arises from a connection between the subject and the world of narration – so the connection in relation to a “created-real.” Watching *Il-Kabīr Awī* gives the chance to observe how Egyptian society views, stereotypically, inhabitants from Upper, traditional, Egypt, and how they view the USA and its citizens.

The main pivot of the production is the trials and tribulations of the brothers. Despite the comedic character of the series, there is the possibility to see how difficult it is for somebody from outside to understand certain behaviour, ways of thinking, and how cultural differences can cause communication problems. The series shows that being born in Egypt is not enough to understand life in Al-Mazārīṭa. One needs to be brought up there. It’s worth looking over these seasons scientifically because it allows conclusions to be drawn that may be applied to Egyptian society, especially as these series are created *by* Egyptians *for* Egyptians. Al-Mazārīṭa is supposed to be a condensed image of Upper Egypt, seen in a false mirror. As one of the most important aspects of the Egyptian economy is tourism observing and commenting it is especially important, having in mind that a significant part of its population is confronted with the cultural distinctiveness of foreign tourists every day.

CLASH OF CULTURES

Regarding the subjects that are brought up in *Il-Kabīr Awī*, the series covers different fields, such as cultural, juridical and linguistic. The culture clash can be seen at the very beginning, when Johnny arrives in Al-Mazārīṭa with his friend Thomas, and his sister, Ashley. They are foreigners. As in all Upper Egypt, in the village women wear long black dresses, and men wear white *jellabiyas*. Johnny, Thomas, and Ashley wear western clothes. Ashley wears normally quite tight clothes and comparing it with ‘Upper Egyptian style’ – very tight clothes (Melody Drama – Mīlūdī Drāmā. “Musalsal Il-Kabīr Awī ġ1 ḥ1...”, 22:40–23:24). Moreover, Johnny’s friend has a small red mohawk (in one episode he is even called “a parrot” by an “old-timer” from Upper Egypt (Melody Drama – Mīlūdī Drāmā. “Musalsal Il-Kabīr Awī ġ2 ḥ15...”, 14:21–14:26). They look different and strange, and they behave not as inhabitants of Al-Mazārīṭa.

Problems also appear as Johnny gets to know his brother and sister-in-law and wants to hug her. It is normal for him. Not for the others – when he tries to get closer to her – Il-Kabīr’s subordinates aim weapons at him (Melody Drama – Mīlūdī Drāmā. “Musalsal Il-Kabīr Awī ġ1 ḥ2...”, 5:36–5:48). According to the rules of Upper Egypt, no man can kiss or hug another man’s wife.

In the series, something that is not so important for people from the West can be noticed – the opinion of others. In Upper Egypt (as in most of the country) what others think is very important. This can be observed when Johnny appears in his brother’s house – Il-Kabīr’s wife, Hadiyya, utters the special and characteristic *zaġārūt*, by which Egyptian women express their happiness and reason for celebration. Her husband gets angry – what people will think? After all, his father died, and doing it is not proper! (Melody Drama – Mīlūdī Drāmā. “Musalsal Il-Kabīr Awī ġ1 ḥ2...”, 5:18–5:34).

After arriving in Al-Mazārīṭa, Johnny shows his brother documents indicating that he is the older of the two, and that is why he should seize power in the village. Il-Kabīr does not accept such a solution. So, Johnny, brought up with a democratic spirit, suggests carrying out elections. Il-Kabīr, whose favourite way to argue is by using weapons, terrorises

the townsfolk (Melody Drama – Mīlūdī Drāmā. “Musalsal Il-Kabīr Awī ġ1 h2...”, 13:40–13:51 and 17:30–23:15; Shoof Drama / Šūf Drāmā. “Musalsal Il-Kabīr Awī 1 al-ḥalaqa 3..., 3:12–7:40). One day Johnny, with his American friends, organizes a demonstration outside Il-Kabīr’s house. Besides them, only one Egyptian arrives, but he flees, upon seeing Il-Kabīr (Shoof Drama / Šūf Drāmā. “Musalsal Il-Kabīr Awī 1 al-ḥalaqa 3...”, 7:40–10:02). It shows that people do not know democracy, and believe they are subordinate to the *‘umda*. Actually, the idea of an election paralyzes Il-Kabīr. However, finally, despite the intimidation, he loses and Johnny becomes an *‘umda* (Shoof Drama / Šūf Drāmā. “Musalsal Il-Kabīr Awī 1 al-ḥalaqa 3...”, 22:20–22:55). Anyway, Il-Kabīr keeps his influence, since he is the one, who provides work for the locals.¹⁹

Although Al-Mazārīta is a very closed, traditional place, technological novelties get through, for example, phones, PlayStation,²⁰ etc. Moreover, Johnny’s presence leads to the desire to experiment with novelties, for example, Valentine’s Day. The American citizens initiate this – Johnny and Ashley promote Valentine’s Day by creating the slogan: *Hidiyya li-mirātak hatġayyar ḥayātak*, which means “A present for your wife will change your life” (Shoof Drama / Šūf Drāmā. “Musalsal Il-Kabīr Awī 1 al-ḥalaqa 12...”, 8:15–8:20). At the beginning everybody treats Valentine’s Day as something strange and does not understand it, but eventually most of them buy gifts for their wives – some buy “traditional” ones, like teddy bears, others give and decorate (in a romantic way) donkeys. However, Hadiyya did not understand the idea of Valentine’s Day and her husband scared her in a funny way. Finally, Ashley explained to her what this day really meant and she prepared a surprise for Il-Kabīr. It did not work because of unfortunate circumstances but in the end Il-Kabīr brought her a present. (Shoof Drama / Šūf Drāmā. “Musalsal Il-Kabīr Awī 1 al-ḥalaqa 12...”, 3:10–23:15).²¹ It means that even a person who was against this “Western tradition”, finally adopted it to satisfy his wife. This has also a wider meaning. Here, there is a simple example of a typical “clash of cultures”. That act of preparing a gift in a form of a donkey can be seen as some adaptation of celebrating this day by the local character and how the “Western culture” needs time to enter the other one. Sometimes it can enter without bigger changes and sometimes it can still retain its local appearance. It also shows that people belonging to two different cultures can celebrate the same feelings in different ways. Similarly to people in America, also inhabitants of Al-Mazārīta love their dear ones but their way of showing it is different. It does not mean also that any of these ways is better or worse. In the village, it was never popular to show love to women in a public way. “American visitors” show the people of Al-Mazārīta that it can be accepted, as well. What is more, there is nothing wrong with it – both sides can be happy (the donators and receivers of gifts). And furthermore, it can be as well beneficial for the local economy because of the new opportunity to sell presents, especially for this day.

¹⁹ In the end of the second season Johnny will renounce power to his brother, living with him in love and happiness for a long time, despite some differences between them (Melody Drama – Mīlūdī Drāmā. “Musalsal Il-Kabīr Awī ġ2 h15...”, 6:25–6:34).

²⁰ It can also be observed in real Egyptian society.

²¹ Valentine’s Day is more and more popular in Egypt every year, though the phenomenon is not evenly spread across Egypt. In Alexandria or Cairo, it would be more celebrated than in rural areas, but it has to be clearly said that *īd al-ḥubb* or *yawm al-ḥubb* (“the fest of love” or “the day of love” – Valentine’s Day) has entered the Egyptian calendar of festivities permanently.

The next clash of cultures is a misunderstanding in the field of love and marriage. Once upon a time, Johnny notices one beautiful girl on the roof of one house. He falls in love. When the inhabitants of his home get to know about it they are happy that he decided to marry. For him it is too early – how come he will marry as he does not know his chosen one?! He wants to date her, hug her hand... It is unacceptable and the household tries to explain to him the rules of the village. When finally he decides to marry, and go with one of the home's workers to the father of the girl, he totally does not know how to make all arrangements (Melody Drama – *Milüdi Drämä*. "Musalsal Il-Kabir Awī ġ2 ħ10...", 10:16–26:02). Here preparing to marriage is presented more as a kind of contract between families – everybody has to know exactly what his family will buy or prepare. Moreover, respect for women involves no contact before marriage. The father of the girl would be even not happy if Johnny informed him that he saw his daughter before marriage! When the young ones talk, they can do it only in the presence of the family. The clash of cultures is observed as well during the wedding party – Johnny still does not know how his future wife looks like. He had to ask Hadiyya for clues as women were having a party in a different part of the house than men.

After analysing the series, but also observing the culture itself, it seems that family and emotional issues can cause the largest problems when talking about the clash of cultures. Evidently, it has to be emphasised that it does not mean that feelings are not important in Arab countries. We have to be aware of the differences between each family and their more or less traditional thinking but what is clear is that 'dating' still looks different in the West and East and sometimes some families even do not allow it to happen. Or, if they do, they demand observing strong rules to protect the honour of the woman.

Johnny also opens an internet café. This fact is shown in a false mirror. He and his friends teach the villagers to use the computer, create profiles on Facebook for them, or even make selfies for their profiles.²² Some are surprised that they can not only talk with men but with women via the Internet. It makes them happy. In the series, net café has special access times only for women and there is also a plan to devote some hours for families (Melody Drama – *Milüdi Drämä*. "Musalsal Il-Kabir Awī ġ1 ħ8...", 3:25–8:14 and 9:50–10:06). Here we can observe again that in a very traditional place there is something 'international', global. It does not mean that the culture has totally changed. It combines two different worlds by implementing inside Internet 'local' traditions such as gender separation. Again, it has to be reminded that here we can see the situations which are exaggerated to emphasise the meaning of particular behaviours or cases and to explain that such a clash of cultures (even if a little bit less intensive) can happen every day and everywhere.

A similar thing can be observed when next Jonny's problem appears. He feels bored and misses the nightlife which does not exist in Al-Mazārīta. Finally, he collects other inhabitants to enjoy time together – he opens a nightclub where Al-Mazārīta's men spend their evenings and nights. During the day, however, they do not have enough strength to work which makes Il-Kabir angry. Finally, Johnny loses power in the town when people prefer to go to work early in the morning than to enjoy themselves at night in the club (Melody Drama – *Milüdi Drämä*. "Musalsal Il-Kabir Awī ġ2 ħ3...", 3:33–29:38). In this case we could observe different ideas about spending time and different approach to

²² Facebook is very popular all over Egypt. According to data from 31 December 2019 Egyptian Facebook subscribers number 42 400 000. It can be expected that there are now more ("Internet Users Statistics for Africa").

work. The example can be analysed not only on a cultural level (in some areas in the Arab world it would be understood as inappropriate if women wished to go to a coffee shop to watch a match while such a problem does not exist in most parts of the West) but also on the level of the village vs city.

Finally, “Mazarita 3andaha talent” programme mentioned before was organised also in the village! (Shoof Drama / Šūf Drāmā. “Musalsal II-Kabīr Awī 3 al-ḥalaqa 25...”, 20:07–35:01; Shoof Drama / Šūf Drāmā. “Musalsal II-Kabīr Awī 3 al-ḥalaqa 26...”, 3:25–29:08; CBC Drama 3:08–37:31; Shoof Drama / Šūf Drāmā. “Musalsal II-Kabīr Awī 3 al-ḥalaqa 28...”, 3:35–31:44). These episodes show the metaphor of another phenomenon that we may witness every day. The same programmes are available all over the world. For example “America’s Got Talent”, “Arabs Got Talent” and its Polish counterpart – “Mam Talent”. Of course, they are not prepared totally on the basis of “copy-paste” formats. They include common elements but also some local changes dictated by the law of the country or culture.

AMERICANS VS EGYPTIANS AS AN EXAMPLE OF CLASH OF CULTURES BETWEEN TWO COUNTRIES

Egyptians’ thoughts about Americans and their abilities are shown in an interesting way in the *Il-Kabīr Awī* series. Al-Mazārīṭa’s football team, which was hastily organised, beats an American team, even though the Egyptians were still learning and the American players had a lot of experience. Compared to the Americans, they were not athletic, rather overweight and clumsy, while the ‘ambulance’ was a skinny donkey with a crescent painted on its back (Shoof Drama / Šūf Drāmā. “Musalsal II-Kabīr Awī 2 al-ḥalaqa 7...”, 3:57–35:20; Shoof Drama / Šūf Drāmā. “Musalsal II-Kabīr Awī 2 al-ḥalaqa 8...”, 3:14–24:36 and Shoof Drama / Šūf Drāmā. “Musalsal II-Kabīr Awī 2 al-ḥalaqa 9...”, 3:20–33:09). To receive the message of the clash of cultures both sides were presented in an exaggerated way. Thanks to it, not only the difference in the look could be seen but also the approach to sport and the spirit of fighting in the name of the country (at the end of the game when the Egyptians won we could hear patriotic songs for Egypt), etc.

In some episodes of the *Il-Kabīr Awī* series, America is perceived as an enemy and a supporter of Israel. This happens when II-Kabīr suspects Thomas is an American spy. However, he turns out not to be (Shoof Drama / Šūf Drāmā. “Musalsal II-Kabīr Awī 2 al-ḥalaqa 1...”, 5:37–28:35 and Shoof Drama / Šūf Drāmā. “Musalsal II-Kabīr Awī 2 al-ḥalaqa 2...”, 3:15–28:35). On the other hand, America is shown as a super power, one that’s best not to get onto the wrong side of. For example, when Johnny’s brother’s workers point guns at him, he says: “Oh my God! *Da irhāb!* (‘This is terrorism!’) *Ma-tinsāš innī* (‘[don’t forget that I am] an American citizen’) (Melody Drama – Mīlūdī Drāmā. “Musalsal II-Kabīr Awī ǧ1 ḥ2...”, 8:40–8:48), and he threatens that it is enough to make one call to the embassy to fix this situation. Hadiyya warns her husband that it is better to “finish” with his brother in a clever way, as they cannot have the USA against them (Melody Drama – Mīlūdī Drāmā. “Musalsal II-Kabīr Awī ǧ1 ḥ2...”, 8:48–9:54). This is also a very good example of differences between cultures. Here, of course, again the situation was presented in the false mirror and exaggerated. Its goal was to make people laugh. But if we would look at it more widely we would see that somebody’s behaviour (even a good one!) can be totally misunderstood in a different country. Sometimes people even do not assume that they do something wrong. That is why while having contact with representatives of

other cultures one has to be very tolerant and go out a little bit from his own culture. We have to be aware that a person with a different cultural background may obey different rules and codes of honour which do not need to be similar to ours. It does not mean that any of them is better or worse than the other. It is extremely important, especially when we are discussing a country where tourism plays important role in the economy and its citizens every day may deal with people from all over the world.

In the example of the clash of cultures between America (Johnny) and South of Egypt (Il-Kabīr) the international problems connected with the bigger or smaller differences between cultures are presented.

JOHNNY AS AN AMERICAN

Notwithstanding that the series shows Johnny as an American, it needs to be underlined that some of his behaviour is not “American”. He sometimes seems to be an Egyptian who has just grown up in a much more open place (e.g. Cairo or Alexandria), but still in the homeland, for example, when Johnny meets Haġris – one of the citizens of Al-Mazārīṭa – at the beginning, Johnny misunderstands him and thinks he is gay. It terrifies him (Melody Drama – Mīlūdī Drāmā. “Musalsal Il-Kabīr Awī ġ1 ħ2...”, 18:48–20:10). That kind of reaction is not expected from a “real” American.

This fact is mentioned by Aḥmad Ramaḍān as well. There is just one point of contention to be made – Ramaḍān wrote: “Johnny may look American, but he acts like an Arab. He and his American colleagues mysteriously speak Arabic”. It should be argued that the accusation connected with talking in a dialect by American guests should be dropped. It is about showing the differences, and not all Egyptians would be able to watch a series in which half of the dialogue would be in English. What is more, in such a scenario, how would Americans speak with the people of Al-Mazārīṭa? Especially when it is shown numerous times that Al-Mazārīṭa’s inhabitants do not speak, nor understand, English.²³

LANGUAGE ISSUES

It is important to draw attention to the next aspect of this series – language. Inhabitants of Al-Mazārīṭa use their own dialect – *ša’īḍī*. Johnny uses a different accent, and mixes English words into his dialogue. This can also be observed among contemporary Egyptians – not only those born outside of Egypt.²⁴

The actor playing the parts of all brothers and the dying father perfectly emphasises the differences between the protagonists – not only by appearances or behaviour but particularly by language. They can say the same words but do so in different ways. Sometimes they do not understand each other because, for example, Il-Kabīr uses words in his dialect, and Johnny does not understand them.

²³ E.g. in episodes mentioned earlier – when Il-Kabīr speaks for the first time with his brother, during the demonstration in front of Il-Kabīr’s home, or when Thomas is called “a parrot” by mistake.

²⁴ As an example, the author of the article would like to mention her favourite sentence she once heard: *Anā already ħallašt ej-job* viz, “I have already finished work”. It cannot be assumed that the “language mix” appeared because of her presence, as this sentence was said from one Egyptian to another. It proves that “language mix” exists in the Egyptian dialects and is more and more popular. What is more, it must be remembered that the series were tracked from 2010 till 2015, so this phenomenon may be much more popular by now.

SUMMARY

Il-Kabīr and Johnny are strongly anchored in their own cultures, and their meeting is a clash of individual expressions that, at first, leads to cultural problems and gradually to cultural consensus. Both heroes need time to understand their differences, to get used to them, and finally find a solution to live together by accepting all the things that divide and unite them.

After studying the *Il-Kabīr Awī* series it is possible to determine the strong relationships of the “created-real” type, and the series can be viewed as an aid for diagnosing the cultural discrepancies that exist in contemporary Egyptian society. It portrays these contradictions in the framework of the existing system: West vs Arabic East, Upper Egypt vs Lower Egypt, democracy vs its lack, customary law vs formal law, open Western women vs the mentality of traditional inhabitants, modernity vs strong, centuries-old, tradition.

It should be strongly emphasised that the world created in the *Il-Kabīr Awī* series is a metaphor for contemporary Egyptian society, shown in a false mirror. Egyptian citizens are more or less prone to similar problems. So, every day, a clash of the “Il-Kabīr–Johnny” type may occur. Not only between two citizens of different cultures or countries but even between inhabitants of one country brought up in different conditions. Moreover, as in the series, in reality, the individual contact of representatives of the different cultures creates a special bridge between them, and a dialogue exchanging of points-of-view contributes to the reduction of cultural misconceptions from both sides. It leads to cultural consensus and assimilation.

Il-Kabīr Awī is not only a comedy for people to laugh at cartoonish images of Upper Egypt. Thanks to the series, it is possible to observe Egyptians’ stereotypical thoughts of themselves – especially about Upper Egypt, whose inhabitants are believed to be more reserved and traditional in contrast to the North Egyptians perceived as more open, sometimes even more “Western”. It depicts Egyptian society – even though in a caricatured way.

As the analysis proved the hypothesis that “the comedy series *Il-Kabīr Awī* can be treated as an instrument to diagnose cultural discrepancies in contemporary Egyptian society” is confirmed. There are some relations between the plot and the reality but all the stories are exaggerated and shown in the false mirror because of the main reason – it is a comedy whose main aim is to let people relax and laugh. The other aspect, let’s call it “educational one” is additional. But to receive the proper goal the attitudes of the characters have to be bolded. They can not behave exactly as our neighbours because we will simply not be able to realise a lot of things that the series tries to explain to the viewers. This ‘educational aspect’ can be very helpful in Egypt where citizens may meet every day with tourists who generally do not know and understand Egyptian or Arabic culture. Even if the fans of the series are not able to understand Chinese, Polish or American citizens, they can simply laugh at their behaviour and remind Johnny, and not to be angry immediately.

Such a series in general (not only in Egypt) can help to let people understand that we are all the same. We are all people. But actually, everybody is different, thinks in a different way, was brought up in different conditions, looks at the same issues differently, and behaves differently. This “difference” is not better or worse than we are. We are just simply different. And it can make both sides smile or laugh but we should all respect each other, be more tolerant and try to understand others, and learn from our differences.

Tomas Goban-Klas while mentioning the main problems concerning the theories and research about media talks about integration. There is a part of his book that in the opinion of the article author may have a connection with the *Il-Kabīr Awī* series:

There is an alternative view on the relationship between mass media and social integration based on different media characteristics. They are supposed to show the ability to connect dispersed individuals in one national, large audience, integrating new immigrants into urban communities by promoting a common system of values, ideas, and messages, which helps to create a collective cultural and national identity... (p. 120).

If we understand it more widely, we will see that the *Il-Kabīr Awī* series can be a tool to integrate people – to a large extent (people from different cultures or countries) or a smaller one (people from villages and cities – for example, the club which Johnny opens in the village). It shows that every person, even if coming from a different place or thinking differently, is important for the community and that together love can exist between each other and their new culture is a resultant force of all the experiences of every inhabitant.

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