



---

## Reports

# The Role of Drama in Countering Violence and Hate Speech

Director Inaam Mohamed Ali

A closer look at the current drama on Arab TV screens, especially the dramas shown during the month of Ramadan each year, a month in which the viewing rate is at its highest, one has to wonder if what the viewers see is what they really want or need to see? Does the drama reflect the viewer's concerns, issues and society?

This juggernaut, called terrorism, threatens the existence of all these countries and destroys the history, civilization and future of the society, not only in Egypt but in most Arab countries. For example, in Ramadan 2017, more than 35 drama series were shown in Egypt, with *only* one series, *Al-Jama'a Part II*, dealing with this malignant disease. Part I, was aired in Ramadan 2010. With its two parts, it is one of the most important works dealing with terrorism directly. It exposed the ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood, stressed that terrorist groups of different names are offspring of the mother organization and that the misleading idea planted by Hassan al-Banna and ignited by Sayyid Qutb is the same misleading idea that wears the cloak of religion and under its banner destroys and sweeps the land, displaces its inhabitants, and holds its women captive, etc.

Another series aired in Ramadan 2014, is '*Ad Tanazoly* (Countdown). It is a very important series in the current circumstances that have plagued our societies. It answers questions that confuse many people: why and how do some BA holders get involved with terrorist groups? When one of them goes through an awakening and discovers he has been misled, he will be liquidated.

Ramadan 2013 saw the airing of a series that dealt with the issue of the influence of art and human lofty emotions, namely, *Al-Dai'yya* (The Preacher). Its hero is a famous TV preacher known for his hard-line views. He falls in love with a violinist in the Opera. In a smooth and



persuasive manner, the screenwriter was able to make us feel the role played by love and art in changing even a hardline preacher.

The series *Dawaran Shubra*, which went on display in Ramadan 2011, discusses and touches on the intimacy of interfaith relations presenting two families, one Muslim and the other Christian, living together in one of the old buildings in Shubra district. The series shows through its events how the bonds of camaraderie, compassion and love in good and bad times united the two families.

In Ramadan 2002 the biographical series *Qasim Amin*, considered a role model for drama dealing with the renewal of religious discourse, was offered to the viewers. The series presented about ten figures of enlightenment in the second half of the nineteenth century, led by Imam Muhammad Abdu whose role in establishing the rules of the rationalist approach in interpreting the Qur'an is highlighted by the series. His encouragement of Qasim Amin to write the book *Liberation of Women*, his instruction of the writer in jurisprudential argumentation on the issue used in the book receive their focus too. Muhammed Abdu also rallied a number of senior journalists of his time to support Qasim Amin in his battle against hard-line religious scholars.

These are examples of dramatic works that have dealt with terrorism from multiple angles at different times where the elements of quality in scriptwriting, directing, and acting were complete.

On the other hand, there are other works that dealt with similar topics and were unsuccessful because they lacked the aforementioned elements. This lack of success made production companies reluctant to produce such works. On the whole, drama dealing with terrorism is limited in number in view of the seriousness of the issue which threatens our very existence.

On the other hand, the month of Ramadan has had televisions displaying drama series which contribute to creating a cultural environment that encourages spread of extremism and intolerance, such as detective series. These series were given priority for several years and filled the screens. Based on action, thrill, the these dramas show superheroes with extraordinary abilities. Such drama is often adapted from foreign works. It is characterized by melodramatic treatments in which scenes of violence, murder, blood, bullying and the use of all kinds of weapons prevail. This predominance contributes to the transfer of these actions to the street, specially in working-class areas, villages and ham-



lets and among youth. Murder and bloodshed have thus become commonplace, a situation which made young people easy prey to misinformation and brainwashing.

Every year, a number of social drama series that focus on corruption, drugs, prostitution, marital infidelity, vulgar behavior, low-level dialogues, charlatans, etc. are presented. This is given in blatant melodramatic events during which we may see people reeling from social injustice to the point of rejecting the existing society, throwing away law and taking it into their own hands. The better the acting, the greater the sense of grievance transmitted to the audience, who may identify with the actor, leading to growing hatred and rejection of society, possibly causing rebellion it and creating a fertile soil for recruitment by terrorists.

In conclusion, many drama series do not show positive models because they choose their heroes from negative models with an imbalance between good and evil, and lack of any compensation that opens a window of hope or foresees a better future.

#### **Recommendations to counter violence and hate speech**

1. Development of a plan for drama that meets the needs of the audience with diverse works that fuel the viewer's thought and conscience, helping in the upbringing of his/her children and developing the sense of belonging and attachment to the homeland.
2. Resuming the production of religious drama, which almost disappeared with the exit of government production companies from the annual Ramadan race, to present the Islamic precept of tolerance and refute terrorist thought.
3. Proliferation of national drama that embody important victories in our history, such as *Al-Tariq ila Ilat* (the road to Eilat) (*Ra'fat Al-HaJan, Dumu fi uyun Waqiha*) and others and observe the present victories and sacrifices. Our valiant army is already leading fateful battles to defend the homeland and the identity. Martyrs from the army and the police are many. Each can serve as a hero of a drama.
4. Production of drama that monitors what is happening in Egypt today regarding the changes in the social and demographic map, where communities living on the margins are moving to other more developed ones that preserve human dignity. The efforts made to link the border population to the valley and create new communities in a co-



hesive society that has no place for agents of darkness should also be highlighted.

5. Resuming production of biographies through choosing symbols from various fields as new generations need role models. Things must not be left without control resulting in the role model being a myth rather than a real person like Talaat Harb.
6. Dramatic formulae must not be limited to the thirty-episode template, which forces redundancy upon the drama. There is, for example, the TV film formula which consists of 7 and 15 episodes, and others. This makes it possible to achieve the greatest benefit from the artistic work, enabling it to be displayed not only on TV screens, but in gatherings such as cultural palaces, youth centers, villages, and others.
7. Strengthening the role of censors and selecting censors who are knowledgeable, endowed with understanding and awareness so that censorship does not become a restriction on freedom of creativity.
8. Attention must be given to the artistic content as much as it is given to the form. Artistic content now suffers from intellectual flattening, and lack of topics that carry a message helping to the change the recipient's ideas and conscience for the better. In order to achieve this, we must search for writers who are aware of the concerns and problems of their nation, have good societal visions and possess the technical tools that reshape this reality and envisage a better future.
9. Relaunching the productive sectors of the state allowing them to participate in drama production. The private sector foremost goal is profit. The state sector is entrusted with the provision of dramatic works that contribute to the building of the country intellectually, emotionally and direct the public conduct and undertake production of major works fostering the national spirit.

Finally, I hope that every creative artist using a pen or a camera will realize that his/her creativity will drive his/her community back, or lead it forward.