



The Representation of Gender-Based Violence “GBV” in MENA Conflict Zones in the Egyptian TV Drama



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Abstract

This study investigates the depiction of gender-based violence in MENA conflict zones in the Egyptian TV docudramas. **Method:** This a descriptive study, that is following a quantitative approach, the researcher used content analysis of (90 episodes) of Egyptian TV docudramas to investigate the research objectives. **Sample:** the researcher conducted a pilot study on 68 respondents of Egyptian youth and adults, their ages range from 18 to 45 years old, to select the top-viewed TV docudramas that focus on GBV representations in conflict zones. The sample includes four TV soaps, which are: Maliha (2024), Ala'edoon "*The returnees*" (2022) , Bitlou' Alrouh "*with the last breath*" (2022), and Cairo–Kabul (2021). **Findings:** The data collection reveals that women are represented as suffering from physical, psychological, sexual, and economic violence. Additionally, they were portrayed as victims in the majority of the sample, while the men were predominantly depicted as the perpetrators.

صورة العنف الجندي في مناطق الصراع في الشرق الأوسط وشمال أفريقيا كما تقدمها الدراما التلفزيونية المصرية

ملخص :

يستهدف هذا البحث دراسة صورة العنف القائم على النوع "العنف الجندي" في مناطق الصراع في منطقة الشرق الأوسط وشمال أفريقيا من خلال المسلسلات التلفزيونية المصرية. **المنهج:** تعتمد الدراسة على المنهج الوصفي، حيث استخدمت الباحثة أداة تحليل المضمون لعينة مكونة من (90 حلقة) من المسلسلات المصرية لتحقيق أهداف البحث. **العينة:** قامت الباحثة بإجراء دراسة استطلاعية على عينة قوامها 68 مشاركاً من فئة الشباب ومنتصف العمر، تتراوح أعمارهم بين 18 و45 عاماً، وذلك لتحديد المسلسلات الأعلى مشاهدة وفقاً لآرائهم و التي تركز على قضية العنف الجندي في مناطق النزاع والحرب في الشرق الأوسط وشمال أفريقيا. وقد تضمنت العينة أربعة مسلسلات وهي: مليحة (2024)، العائدون (2022)، بطلوع الروح (2022)، والقاهرة - كابول (2021).

النتائج : أظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن النساء في المسلسلات عينة البحث يتم تصويرهن على أنهن يعانين من أشكال مختلفة من العنف، وهي كل من العنف الجسدي، والجنسي، والاقتصادي على التوالي. و بالنسبة لصورة الضحايا و الجناة من حيث النوع، فقد أظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن النساء ظهرن كضحايا للعنف الجندي في مناطق الصراع بنسبة 71.4% ، كما ظهر الرجال كجناة و مرتكبي جرائم العنف الجندي في أغلب مشاهد العينة بنسبة 83%.

الكلمات المفتاحية: العنف الجندي- المسلسلات المصرية – مناطق النزاع المسلح – الشرق الأوسط - دوكيودراما

Introduction:

Women have suffered from degrading representations in the media and, more generally, in culture, to the extent that it motivated the French philosopher *Simone de Beauvoir* to write a book about women titled *Le Deuxième Sexe* (The Second Sex), in which she expresses how women suffer from being subordinate to men, and the name of the book reflects the hegemonic masculinity in different societies (De Beauvoir, 2014).

If women in some societies, especially the patriarchal communities, experience discrimination and violence, then in the context of conflict and war zones, the issue becomes more complicated; The conflict creates a “continuum of violence”, which means that the gender-based violence that occurs before conflict or wartime, will continue to happen during and after this conflict (Moussa, 2005) and even worse.

Since film and TV drama act as a mirror that reflects the moral values, norms, and attitudes in any society, while also dramatizing prevalent societal issues (Mansour, 2012), especially the political drama which has always played an important role in portraying and countering corruption and colonialism (El Gayar, 2013). So, this study is exploring how gender-based violence in MENA conflict zones is represented in the Egyptian TV drama, especially docudramas.

Theoretical background:

This study is anchored on both “framing theory” and “feminist film Theory”.

Framing theory:

Framing theory posits that the way an issue is presented to an audience (referred to as "the frame") influences how individuals process the information. According to this theory, the media shape how the audience perceives different messages. This is because, beyond telling people what to think about, it also guides how they should think about it. Framing can be understood as a process where certain elements of reality are highlighted and given more significance, thus defining the problem, diagnosing its causes, suggesting moral judgments, and proposing possible solutions or actions (Nnabuife et al., 2023, 51).

In this context, frequent exposure to stereotypical representations of gender roles in media is believed to have long-term impacts on individuals' perceptions of the roles of men and women in society (Aley & Hahn, 2020).

Thus, the frequent representation of women as victims in media, especially in TV drama, will reinforce the image of them as victims among the audiences.

Feminist Film Theory:

This theory is used as a theoretical framework for analyzing gender bias in terms of female objectification: the extent to which a text portrays female individuals as objects of visual pleasure (Luo et al., 2024). Additionally, it aims to identify oppressive ideological stereotypes attempt to substitute them with a real image for real women (Fol, 2006).

Laura Mulvey used psychoanalytic film theory to explore the socially constructed interpretations of sexual difference that control images, erotic forms of looking, and spectacle. This foundation of patriarchal ideology, as outlined by psychoanalysis, shapes Mulvey's language and argument, positioning her in a discussion of the world as phallogocentric (Mulvey, L. , 2013). Mulvey was not trying to provide a solution to this issue directly; instead, she argues that by identifying and analyzing patriarchal culture through the lens of patriarchal frameworks—specifically psychoanalysis—we can start to understand how to address the problem of what she named "the male gaze". This gaze that displays women as sexual objects (Conaway, 2018).

For some time, film as an art form and the concept of feminism have coexisted. The connection between feminism and feminist film theory began with the need to clarify how women should be defined, which led to an exploration of how women are represented in films and why. However, this relationship has often been strained, as film has perpetuated biases and reinforced stereotypes of women as sexual objects, while promoting the idea of women primarily as mothers. It is important to note that these representations of gender in film have shaped cultural expectations for each gender worldwide. Feminist film theory emerged as a method to analyze the influence of these portrayals. The repeated portrayal of women in certain ways has been criticized as a harmful distortion, which can negatively affect female viewers, unlike mainstream films that typically depict women as mothers or objects of beauty. (Alola & Alola, 2020).

In this context, this study is trying to identify the representation of the gender-based violence in MENA conflict zones in the Egyptian TV drama.

Literature review:

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a worldwide issue with strong socioeconomic, political, and cultural roots. Several media, including TV drama, have studied and analyzed GBV.

Definitions of “gender-based violence”:

UNHCR defines the term “gender-based violence” (GBV) as any type of “violence that targets individuals or groups of individuals on the basis of their gender. It includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threat of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty” (UNHCR code of conduct, 2003, p.10).

GBV can take different forms, sexual violence is just one of them. Witnessing extreme violence and brutality as isolated actions and ignoring the larger, underlying causes that make them possible. In this regard, sexual and gender-based violence is a component of a wider range of institutions, norms, and patriarchal, discriminatory, and unequal systems that affect women's everyday lives and tolerate male aggression. Women are used by militaries and other non-state armed groups for a variety of purposes, including as spies, workers, sexual objects, and fighters (Kaya, 2020).

According to UN Women, women experience four primary forms of violence: physical, psychological, sexual, and economic. The physical violence includes slapping, hitting, burning, and killing. Psychological violence includes forced isolation, intimidation, and manipulation. For sexual violence, it includes sexual harassment, rape, forced marriage, and all forms of sexual exploitation, while economic violence includes total control over any financial resources, withholding access to money, and forbidding employment (UN Women, 2024).

Although the term “gender-based violence” is not restricted on a specific gender, most of the scholars and journalists use it to refer to the “violence against women”. Wife abuse, sexual assault, marital rape, forced prostitution, female genital mutilation (FGM), selective malnourishment of female children, and sexual abuse of female children are all examples of gender-based violence, which encompasses a wide range of harmful behaviors that are directed at women and girls because of their gender. In particular, any act of coercion, physical or verbal abuse, or deprivation that poses any threat to a woman or girl's life is considered violence against women (Heise, et al., 2002).

Among different social structures, there is an inequitable gender interaction that support the legitimacy of male aggression. There are structural and ideological characteristics that put women in subordinate roles with men, for instance, in the relationships between female employees and male employers, wives and husbands, female patients and male physicians, and female athletes and male coaches. These disparities support a “patriarchal mindset” that stigmatizes and despises strong and capable women and views "women's subordination as normal, natural, and expected” (Russo and Pirlott, 2006).

Representation of Gender-based Violence (GBV) in Mass Media:

Despite numerous initiatives aimed at raising awareness of gendered violence and strategies to address this important issue, several studies have highlighted that gender-based violence remains a recurring theme in media, particularly in TV drama.

Manaf Bashir analyzed 150 episodes from the five most-watched Egyptian series that aired during Ramadan in 2012, and this was followed by a textual analysis of selected scenes depicting gender-based violence from this sample. The results show the prevalence of gender-based violence (GBV), considering both verbal and non-verbal forms (Bashir, 2015).

Additionally, El Kalliny (2023) affirmed that the GBV is highly visible on screens, as the TV dramas during Ramadan 2018 showed a 64.49% increase of violence against women compared to the previous two years (Al Kalliny, 2023, 82).

In TV dramas, most research studies on gender-based violence (GBV) align with the previously mentioned "patriarchal mindset," where the perpetrator is typically male and the victim is female. Mariana Alderete argues that negative representations of women as victims in media are more common than those of being perpetrators (Alderete,2024).

This is affirmed by many studies, such as AlKalliny (2023), as she pointed out to that 84.7% of the violence perpetrators in the sample of her study were men, particularly husbands (AlKalliny, 2023, 84). Additionally, Manaf Bashir (2015), as mentioned that the majority of gender-based violence scenes in his study were perpetuated by men. Moreover, he highlighted that the justification for GBV was not dependent on whether the perpetrator or the victim was at fault (Bashir,2015).

Similarly, Kaya (2019) observed the growing trend of male violence against women in Turkish TV series, particularly in depicting female characters as victims of rape (Kaya,2019).

Overview of GBV in Conflict Zones:

Women are suffering from severe humanitarian crises, as most of them are facing different forms of violence, such as forced displacement and sexual abuse. Gender-based violence during conflict and wartime is a direct result of a more complicated gendered socio-political, historical, and economic structures that create hierarchies, fears, and discrimination in different societies (Kaya, 2020).

Fanatic groups “valorize hegemonic masculinity and present protecting ‘women and children’ as a key motivation and justification for their resort to armed conflict” (Kaya, 2020, 6). In the same way, media representations of gender often “treat ‘men’ as a uniform group and ‘masculinity’ as a static, timeless concept (Hamdan, 2022).

Zeynep Kaya pointed out to that “commodification and objectification” of women is one of the main characteristics of the fanatic groups ideology. Sexual slavery, human trafficking and selling women in their markets is an action that reinforces their hegemonic masculinity. This hegemonic masculinity considers women’s bodies as a valuable “object”, and treat them as a “property”; Consequently, men should have a full control over them. In times of conflict, women’s sexuality becomes a “commodity” to be exploited and traded by violent men. Militias often view sex as a “form of payment”, turning female sexuality into a “resource” (Kaya, 2020). The price of the enslaved women depends on their age and beauty (Ali, 2015).

In ethnic conflicts, like in Sri Lanka, women participate in fights as a result of their fear of becoming victims of either warring parties. To escape social stigma, young women, frequently victims of rape and exploitation, are coerced into carrying out suicide bombings. (Raghavan and Balasubramaniyan, 2014) .

Since 2014, there has been a disturbing rise in reports of sexual violence, including rape, slavery, and forced marriage, in Syria, Yemen, Iraq, and other conflict-affected countries (Ghazzaoui, 2016,4). Although there is gender imbalance in most of the extremist and terrorist communities, women in conflict zones in MENA region are sometimes act as a “perpetrator” of violent actions like murdering and suicide bombings. Fanatic groups have

realized that women are important in their communities, and started to use them in their operations (Raghavan and Balasubramaniyan, 2014).

Women in terrorist organizations and groups also play a key role in enforcing rules and regulations within these communities. For instance, ISIS uses “Al-Khansaa Brigade” as the group's female division that controls and enforces the group's strict interpretation of “Islamic dress codes” and conduct (Agazie,2018). Shukreya Elserag added that women in terrorist groups, besides participating in violent operations, are playing important roles in logistics (Elserag, 2018).

Additionally, terrorist groups exploit women in different ways. In traditional societies, widowhood usually isolates women from being an active participant in the society, leaving them marginalized and unable to contribute productively in their communities (Raghavan and Balasubramaniyan, 2014). Contrarily, terrorist organizations are forcing women to marry quickly for many reasons, among these is to cement the relationships between the group members (Agazie,2018, 20), and attract more male warriors to participate in war. The most important reason is that quickly marriage to a warrior “Mujahid”, after being divorced or widowed, will prevent women from “returning back to their home countries” (Agazie,2018, 20).

In addition to women, militias are usually recruiting, training, and deploying children in operations. These groups enlist children as a way to ensure the group's long-term survival (Rose et al, 2017,932).

Portrayal of Gender in Conflict Zones:

As previously mentioned, if the idea of violence against women is rooted in culture and reflected on media representations, the situation becomes even worse for women in war and conflict zones. This means that if women are often represented as victims of violence in media, their representation would be more victimized during wartime and conflicts.

Gender is a key element in the politics of violence (Kaya,2020). Traditionally, the failure to protect women is associated with shame and dishonor in Arab culture. For this reason, during wartime, some parties are “feminizing the enemy” as a form of symbolic domination. The winners of war insult their enemies by “feminizing” them; as femininity is traditionally perceived as a symbol of weakness and submission (Salih, 2019).

This rationalizes that some “Arab cartoonists relies on metaphoric concept of a woman as a nation” (Issa, 2021, 10). Saddam Issa emphasized, in his study

about the representation of ISIS in Arabic political cartoons, that women – even as “a metaphor of a nation and national honor” - were mostly depicted as threatened and victimized by terrorism (Issa, 2021,13).

Throughout history, women have been victims of violence in conflict areas all over the world (Raghavan and Balasubramaniyan, 2014). Most of the stories about women in MENA conflict zones, especially Syria, are consistent with ISIS semi-official manifesto on women, that highlights gender inequality in these communities (Winter, 2015).

Nesrine Abdel-Aziz, in her research about the depiction of terrorists in the Egyptian film and TV drama, highlighted that killing and torturing women and children were highly represented in the film and TV drama, and the perpetrators usually use brutal ways like burying alive (Abdel-Aziz, 2018,189).

Moreover, Nazmi Al-Masri and Manar Al-Houbi mentioned in their research about the socio-cultural semiotic analysis of gender-based violence in Palestinian films, that the depiction of women in conflict zones shows more violence against them; the Palestinian movies are usually depicting the mental, psychological, and physical violence that Palestinian women, especially mothers, face due to blockade and war (Al-Masri and Al-Houbi, 2023).

The importance of docudrama as a genre:

Unfortunately, there is neither a single definition nor a prototype of this genre, and the scholarly research has not used the concept of docudrama in any consistent manner, but generally it is “a fictional recreation of the events”. It is a combination of real events and images with fiction, that is represented in a persuasive way (Valenzuela and Brandao, 2015). “Docudrama combines the field of documentary and drama, with people representing and reenacting real-life events in a space of symbolic representation” (Nyam and Hediger,2023, 263).

It's worth noting that the media environment now is changing and challenging; the audiences' preferences and behavior have greatly changed. The audiences all over the world are now preferring less consumption of “news”. Consequently, the “news avoidance” either intentionally or unintentionally becomes a worldwide phenomenon (Villi et al. 2022). In addition to the absence of social and political conditions that would support freedom of speech, the political drama contributes in the creation of a cultural

atmosphere that expresses the people's opinions. Because there is no other option in the mainstream media, the viewers will keep accepting whatever is offered to them (Samak, 1977).

In this context, the docudrama can help the audience to know what is happening around them. They prefer this genre because it serves as a sort of "historical documentation", in other words, docudrama is a dramatic recreation of the historic events (Lipkin, 2002, 3) ; it is a dramatization and re-framing of facts, mostly in moralistic way (Hayes, 2024).

In the Middle East , TV drama producers act as "public intellectuals" who provide insightful analysis of social issues, and they merit greater recognition from scholars and others. TV dramas deserve greater attention because of their creative narrative and in-depth societal commentary (Salamandra and Halabi, 2023). Sutherland described media-makers, especially docudrama producers, as "new historians" (Sutherland, 2010, 270).

Waheed Hamed, famous Egyptian screenwriter, said that even when he fictionalizes events in historical and political drama, he has to write the "truth" (Shaker, 2017). Thus, docudramas can be considered as a blend of "reality of fact" with a "reality of emotion" (Paget, 2016). It may be informative, yet more entertaining than documentaries (Hoffer and Nelson, 1978, 21). It can be conceptualized as a "pseudo-documentary" genre that is trying to represent historical truth, yet it prioritizes narrative elements of popular fiction in order to "maximize its marketability" (Lipkin, 2002, 2).

One of the main advantages of docudramas is its ability to depict unrecorded events and people, so it is a representation of what happened when there is "no other way to tell it". Additionally, it effectively highlights critical situations and issues, and provides a fuller and more in-depth representation of those people and events (Gregory, 2019,4). Docudrama's exclusive addition is its dramatization, it's a reconstruction of real events, usually through narration, dialogue, music, and fictional or composite characters. The producers of this genre use melodramatic techniques to trigger the audiences' emotions like fear, romance, hope, and triumph in order to attract a wide range of viewers (Hayes, 2024). Some scholars define docudrama as a "presentation of real-life contemporary problems in a dramatic fashion on television" (Lipkin,2002,1)

Vandermark highlights the content of the docudrama can change the behavior of the viewers and impact their emotions and attitudes. Other scholars suggest that the docudramas could impact the individuals spiritually (Vandermark,

2014), as it mediates religion by depicting the relationship between concepts of religiosity, spirituality, and the dynamics of individuality and community (Trihastutie, 2024).

Dalia El Matbouly, in her research about the portrayal of political figures in Egyptian drama and its impact on adolescents, found that 82.3% of the sample use this political drama as a source of information about the current events in the society, while 78.9% of the sample considered the political drama as a source of documentation that helps that provides them with information about the political events that they did not witnessed (El Matbouly, 2007).

This is consistent with the research of Dorreya Sharaf Eldin, as she affirmed that the political drama contributes in raising awareness and helping people to face life challenges in a better way (Sharaf Eldin,1990).

Conflict and Wartime Docudramas:

The MENA region has experienced persistent violent conflicts and volatility since 2011 due to the “Arab Spring.” In 2011, the conflict in Syria started, and the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) started expanding its actions in Syria, forming the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria -named “ISIS”, which was formed in 2013 (Gerges, 2016). They don’t allow journalists to enter the territories under their control; instead, they have their own media channels where they use brutal scenes of beheadings and burning alive as a propaganda tool for them. They claim that their strategy of intimidation involves arousing fear among the enemy. (Ali, 2015).

These violent confrontations give rise to stories, and stories give narrative closure, or a sense of finality. The docudrama and representation of traumatic conflict experiences, are two types of storytelling that are employed in conflict situations. (Nyam and Hediger, 2023).

Although conflict zones are usually covered in the news, it cannot say everything about war, because these areas are totally isolated, and going into such areas is considered as a “suicidal” operation. (Ali, 2015). On the other hand, the political film -including docudrama- is considered as a mirror that reflects the reality of the past, the present, and forecasting the future.

Unlike the news, political drama can express different views about sensitive political and economic issues freely. “Docudrama, is a restaging of traumatic events” (Nyam and Hediger, 259). This is why some scholars consider this kind of drama as a tool of “documentation” for the history. (El Gayar, 2013).

Political drama-including docudrama- helps viewers in better understanding of the traumas, moral complexities, and human suffering brought on by war and conflict. What is not said in the news, is conveyed by the political drama's characters' personal emotions, especially the marginalized people like refugees and conflict survivors, so this genre of drama could be described as a “voice for the voiceless”. (Lipkin, 2002).

Moreover, docudramas are used in psychotherapy and restoring mental health of post-conflict survivors. Stiuma (2008) suggests that the docudrama film is the most effective medium in which sensitive and emotional topics could be discussed. In his study, he used docudramas in psychotherapeutic sessions, as he claims that the refugees who suffered from “post-conflict traumas” could gain a deeper understanding of self after watching docudramas, especially the content that depict abandonment, rape, and death (Situma, 2018, 107).

For these reasons, some scholars claim that TV drama could reshape the national memory of a specific nation (Salamandra and Halabi, 2023).

Research Problem:

Since the TV drama is one of the main sources of portraying images and stereotypes; the researcher is trying, in this study, to explore how the gender-based violence in MENA conflict zones is depicted in the Egyptian TV docudrama.

Research Objectives:

- Description of the portrayal of gender-based violence in MENA conflict zones in the Egyptian TV soap operas.
- Determination of the different forms of GBV in conflict zones as represented in the sample, including physical, psychological, sexual, and economic violence.
- Identifying the gender of the victims and perpetrators of violence in the sample.
- Identifying the age category of the victims in the sample.
- Reveal the victim- perpetrator gender dynamics in TV drama, in terms of male-to-male, male-to-female, female-to-female, or female-to-male violence in the sample.

Research questions:

The main research question is:

How is gender-based violence in MENA conflict zones represented in Egyptian TV docudrama?

This main question includes many sub-questions, among these are:

- 1- What forms of physical violence were represented in the sample?
- 2- What forms of psychological violence were represented in the sample?
- 3- What forms of sexual violence were represented in the sample?
- 4- What forms of economic violence were represented in the sample?
- 5- What is the gender of the victims of violence in the sample?
- 6- What is the gender of the perpetrator of violence in the sample?
- 7- What is the victim and the perpetrator gender dynamics? in terms of male-to-male, male-to-female, female-to-female, or female-to-male violence in the sample?
- 8- What is the age category of the victims in the sample?

Significance of the study:

This study explores the representation of gender-based violence (GBV) in MENA conflict zones and how it is depicted in Egyptian TV drama. Additionally, it covers a gap in the literature regarding the depiction of GBV in conflict zones in Egyptian TV dramas, as most existing research focuses on GBV as part of domestic violence. Moreover, most media studies in Egypt, that focus on conflict zones, are concerned with news coverage, or study this issue from political and historical perspective, rather than from a gender perspective. Consequently, the current study covers this gap in literature, especially in the Egyptian TV drama. Besides, the audience may consider this genre of drama as a source of documentation, so it's important to study the depiction of conflict zones in TV drama.

Furthermore, this study is considered interdisciplinary, as examining the representation of gendered violence in conflict zones in TV drama requires the integration of various social sciences, including anthropology, mass communication, psychology of art, and political science.

Method of data collection:

This study is a quantitative research; the researcher used content analysis in order to describe objectively the depiction of gender-based violence in MENA conflict zones in Egyptian TV docudramas.

Sample:

The researcher used a purposive sampling technique, as this is considered one of the most popular sampling techniques in content analysis studies (Riffe and Freitag, 1997), additionally, it provides the benefit of selecting particular content and themes that are most relevant to the research topic. Moreover, this sampling technique guarantees that the content of the sample examines directly the objectives of the study, and help to generate more significant findings.

The sample consists of four Egyptian TV soap operas; the criteria of selection of these four TV series was based on a pilot study that was conducted by the researcher, on 68 respondents of Egyptian youth and adults, their ages range from 18 to 45 years old, asking them about the Egyptian TV series that they rank as the most TV series that could depict gender-based violence in war and conflict zones in MENA region.

The sample consists of four TV series (90 episode), includes the following TV soaps: Maliha(2024), Ala'edoon "*The returnees*" (2022) , Bitlou' Alrouh "*with the last breath*" (2022), and Cairo–Kabul (2021). Most of the events of these TV soaps took place in conflict zones in Middle Eastern countries and cities, among these are: Raqqa -Syria, Mosul- Iraq, Gaza- Palestine, Arish- Egypt, Libya, Turkey, and Kabul- Afghanistan.

Validity and Reliability:

In order to determine the validity of the coding sheet of the content analysis, the sheet was given to some media experts including media professors and researchers in this field¹ in order to assess the degree to which the coding sheet actually measures what it sets out to measure (Wimmer and Dominick, 2011, 175).

Regarding the reliability, the researcher applied Holsti's method for determining reliability (Wimmer and Dominick, 2011, 172); the researcher assigned a coder ⁽²⁾ to analyze 14 % of the sample (13 episodes), then the

⁽¹⁾ **According to the alphabetical order:**

Dr. Dina Tawfic - Media Researcher and Lecturer, The University of Melbourne, Australia.

Prof. Dr. Nagy Fawzy - Professor of Television and Film Criticism, Academy of Arts, Egypt.

Prof. Dr. Wail Abdelbary- Professor of Mass Communication, Ain Shams University, Egypt.

⁽²⁾ **The coder:**

Yassmin Elsayed, M.A., Adjunct faculty, Journalism and Mass Communication Department, The American University in Cairo, Egypt.

Holsti's equation was used to determine the reliability of the data as the following:

$$\text{Percentage of agreement (PA)} = \frac{2M}{N_1 + N_2}$$

Where (M) is the number of the two coders' consensus decisions, (N₁) is the number of cases coded by the first coder; (N₂) is the number of the case coded by the second coder. If the first coder is named A, the second is B. The reliability of the data is calculated as the following:

$$\text{PA (A, B)} = \frac{2 \times 132}{156 + 156} = 0.846$$

The value (0.846) reflects high level of agreement between the two coders.

Statistical Analysis:

To achieve the objectives of the study, some statistical techniques were applied, such as frequencies and percentages.

Operational definitions:

TV drama: TV docudrama or soap operas that dramatize real-life events, especially political and historical events, like conflicts and wars. It may include archival footage. Additionally, it can be based on a true or fictionalized story and characters, or a composite of both.

Gender-based violence (GBV): Any violent action directed at a woman because of her gender that causes direct or indirect harm. This can take various forms, including physical, psychological, sexual, and economic violence.

Conflict zones: Areas where there are active armed conflicts, including guerilla warfare, that result in insecurity and political instability.

MENA: Countries of Middle East, North Africa and Near East, including Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Palestine (Gaza Strip), Jordan, Turkey, Libya, Gulf countries, Iran and Afghanistan.

The perpetrator-victim gendered violence dynamics: refers to the unequal distribution of power in violent situations, based on societal gender roles, whether the perpetrator is male and practicing violence against female or male victims, or the perpetrator is a female practicing violence against other females or males.

Results:

Table 1: Forms of gender-based violence as represented in the TV drama

Forms of gender-based violence	N	%
Physical violence	57	50.9
Psychological violence	24	21.4
Sexual violence	21	18.8
Economic violence	10	8.9
Total	112	100

According to the table 1, The physical violence is the most prominently represented type of gender-based violence in conflict zones with 50.9%. Secondly, the psychological violence was represented with 21.4%, then the sexual violence with 18.8%, and lastly the economic violence with 8.9%.

Table 2: Forms of physical violence as represented in the TV drama

Forms of physical violence		N	%
Killings	Gunning down	17	29.8
	Beheading	5	8.8
	Poisoning	2	3.5
	Human shields	3	5.3
	Burning alive	1	1.7
Beating		16	28.1
Forced Displacement		7	12.3
Flogging		6	10.5
Total		57	100

The results show that the “killings” is the most prominently represented form of physical violence in the scenes of the sample with 49.1%, highest rate of killings was gunning down by using either guns or firearms with 29.8%, then the beheadings as the second form of killing represented in the scenes, and all the cases were “public beheadings”. Then, human shields were the third form of killings with 5.3%, all the cases were “gender-based” human shields, as the non-state armed groups used women as front-line human shields and were forced to wear “explosive belts”. All the cases of the gender-based human shields depicted in the sample lead to mass death. Then, poisoning come as the fourth form of killings, with 3.5%. Burning the victim alive was represented only one time with 1.7%, and the researcher observed that this scene was a simulation of burning the Jordanian airforce pilot Muath Al-Kasasbeh by terrorist groups.

Secondly, beating -including slapping and hitting- comes with 28.1% as the second form of physical violence represented on TV series. Then, forced displacement was the third form of physical violence with 12.3%. Finally, Flogging comes as the least represented form of physical violence with 10.5%, and five out of the six cases were “public flogging”.

Table 3: Forms of psychological violence as represented in the TV drama

Forms of psychological violence	N	%
Threats and intimidation	8	33.3
Witnessing Public trials, beheading, and flogging.	6	25
Accusation of infidelity	4	16.7
Emotional manipulation	3	12.5
Humiliation and degradation	3	12.5
Total	24	100

According to the data in table 3, Threats and intimidation were the highest frequency of all forms of psychological violence, with 33.3%. The majority of victims -six out of eight- were women. Second, witnessing public trials that result in shooting, beheading and flogging, which represented 25% of the psychological violence. Then, the emotional manipulation, mostly guilt tripping, comes in the third place with 12.5%. Fourth form of psychological violence is accusation of blasphemy with 16.7%, as the word “infidel” or “*Kafir*” is commonly used by the terrorist groups in the four TV soaps of the sample, and this was mostly related to the guilt tripping. Lastly, humiliation and degradation come as the least represented form of psychological violence, mainly verbal abuse like public shaming, name-calling and insult, with 12.5%.

Table 4: Forms of sexual violence as represented in the TV drama

Forms of sexual violence	N	%
Sexual slavery (melk yameen)	10	47.6
Sexual harassment	5	23.8
Forced marriage	3	14.3
Forced divorce	3	14.3
Total	21	100

According to table 4, the sexual slavery or right-hand possessions named “melk yameen” comes as the most prominently form of conflict-related sexual violence represented in the sample with 47.6%. This is considered as a sexual violence as the women were represented as suffering from lack of autonomy, power imbalance, coerced to be in a relationship that leads to sexual exploitation of them. Sexual harassment represents 19% of the sexual violence represented in the conflict zones in TV drama. Four sexual harassment victims were women, and only one case was a young man who faced a coercive marriage proposal and verbal abuse from the top leader of “Al-Khansaa Brigade”, which is a female militia group. Lastly, both of forced marriage and forced divorce were represented with 14.3%, and all the victims were women.

Table 5: Forms of economic violence as represented in the TV drama

Forms of economic violence	N	%
Gender-based mobility restrictions	7	70
Withholding basic utilities (electricity, water, internet, mobile phones, etc.)	3	30
Withholding access to money	2	20
Total	10	100

Table 5 shows that the “gender-based mobility restrictions” comes as the most frequently represented form of conflict-related economic violence in the sample with 70%, additionally, as the woman cannot go anywhere without a “mehrem”- male relative like a husband, father, brother, etc.- and veil is imposed as a dress code; the woman should wear black robes “abaya” and cover her face. This form of violence is depicted as a direct cause of restricting access to resources. Secondly, 30% of the economic violence scenes was including withholding the basic utilities like (electricity, water, internet, etc.). Finally, withholding access to money with 20%, as a result of lack of autonomy and mobility restrictions.

Table 6: The gender of the victims as represented in the TV drama

The gender of the victims	N	%
Female	92	82.1
Male	16	14.3
Both	4	3.6
Total	112	100

The data in table 6 shows that 82.1% of the violence victims were female, only 14.3% were males, and 3.6% were groups of both males and females, which indicates that the gender-based violence is prevalent in conflict zones as represented in TV drama.

Table 7: The gender of the perpetrator of violence as represented in the TV drama

The gender of the perpetrator of violence	N	%
Male	93	83
Female	15	13.4
Not clear	4	3.6
Total	112	100

According to table 7, 83% of the perpetrators of violence in conflict zones were males, while 13.4% were females. It was not clear whether the perpetrator of violence was male or female in some cases, such as mass bombings, this represents only 3.6%.

Table 8: The perpetrator-victim gendered violence dynamics in the TV drama

The perpetrator-victim gendered violence dynamics		N	%
Male against	Male	13	11.6
	Female	80	71.4
Female against	Male	3	2.7
	Female	12	10.7
Not clear		4	3.6
Total		112	100

The results of the content analysis show that 83% of violence perpetrators were men, the majority of victims were women with 71.4%, while 11.6 of these cases were against men. On the other hand, 13.4% of the violence perpetrators were females, and the majority of victims were females as well with 10.7%, and only 2.7% of the female-male violence victims were males. 3.6% the perpetrator's gender was not clear, especially in the scenes of mass bombings.

Table 9: The age category of the victims in the TV drama

The age category of the victims	N	%
Adult	75	67
Elderly	13	11.6
childhood	11	9.8
Adolescence	9	8
Not clear	4	3.6
Total	112	100

According to table 9, the age category of the violence victims were adults with 67%, while 11.6% were elderly people, the 9.8% of the victims were children, 8% were adolescents, and 4% were unclear in the cases of groups or masses.

Discussion:

This study uses content analysis to determine the portrayal of the gender-based violence in MENA conflict zones as depicted in the Egyptian TV docudramas. The results show that physical violence was highly represented with 50.9%. It takes different forms in the scenes, but mostly killings. The sample shows that the majority of physical violence was shown in a brutal way, like gunning down with 29.8%, beheadings with 8.8%, human shields with 5.3%. It's worth noting that most of the physical GBV scenes were represented in public settings. So, gunning down, beheadings, even flogging and burning alive, was often shown to happen in public. These results are consistent with Shahali et al. (2020) as they pointed out to frequency and severity of physical violence happening in such areas of conflict (Shahali et

al. 2020, 4). Nesrine Abdel-Aziz , highlighted in her study that killings and torture were the highest rates of violence in the Egyptian film and TV drama that depicts terrorism (Abdel-Aziz, 2018, 189). Moreover, the results of the current study align with the results of Heba Hanafy research about the depiction of woman in international terrorist organizations in Arabic drama, as torture and killings represent 66.1% (Hanafy, 2022, p.1492).

Beating was less represented than killings in the sample. It comes as the second form of physical violence represented on TV series with 28.1%. The most represented forms of beating were slapping and hitting. This is consistent with Mah-Rukh Ali, who suggested that women in terrorist communities are being beaten as a kind of “discipline” (Ali, 2015,20).

It’s worth mentioning that the human shields were “gendered”, the sample shows that all the cases of human shields were women, and only one case were consisted of women and children. All the scenes of these “gendered” human shields end with a mass death. This is partially consistent with (Rose et al., 2017), as they highlighted that terrorist organizations train the children and use them in armed operations, but in the current study children were not trained for militant operations, instead, they were used as a part of human shields.

For the forms of psychological violence represented in the sample, threats and intimidation were the most psychological violence technique used against the victims, who were mostly women. Witnessing punishments of public trials was the second form of psychological violence, especially forcing the public to witness bloody punishments like gunning down or beheadings. The third form of psychological violence represented was the accusation of infidelity, as the violence perpetrators usually use the word “infidel- *Kafir*” to legitimize their violence against the victim. This is consistent with Abdel-Aziz, terror groups named their opponents as infidels with 39.4% (Abdel-Aziz, 2018, 191), besides, it is consistent with the results of Heba Hanafy’s research, as she suggested that these groups demean the victims and calling them “infidels” (Hanafy,2022,1489). The least represented psychological violence form was humiliation and degradation through verbal abuse like name-calling and public shaming with 12.5%.

Third, the sexual violence is represented in the sample with 18.8%. The sexual slavery or the right-hand possession “melk yameen” was the most prominently form of conflict-related sexual violence represented in the sample with 47.6%, all the characters were women. This is consistent with the

research of Shadab Shahali and others, as they claim that 70% of women and girls who survived from captivity in Iraq were raped (Shahali et al. 2020), additionally the results aligns with the research of Sariah Ghazzaoui (Ghazzaoui , 2016). Dima Salih highlighted that fanatic groups manipulate their victims by using misinterpreted explanations of verses from Quran and Sunnah that focus only on females, to legitimize their actions especially in terms of sexual slavery (Salih, 2019). Then, Sexual harassment was depicted with 19% of the sexual violence represented in the conflict zones in TV drama. Almost all victims were women, except only one case. Both forced marriage and Forced divorce were represented equally with 14.3%, all of them were women.

It's worth-noting to mention that most of the represented psychological violence is associated with physical and sexual violence in a way or another, it precedes or follows it. In some instances, accusation of infidelity precedes beheading or flogging, and in others, the perpetrator uses intimidatory remarks after executing the victim.

In terms of Economic violence, which is the fourth represented form of violence with 8.9%, women in conflict zones are generally represented as suffering from lack of autonomy and access to money and utilities. The “gender-based mobility restrictions” is the most prominently represented form of economic violence in the sample, with 70%; as women were not allowed to drive cars, or even go out of their homes alone without a “Mehrem” – a relative male like husband or male. They should follow the dress code which is a black robe “abaya”, covering their faces with a veil; otherwise, women could be arrested by female police for violating the rules and regulations of the Caliphate state. This is consistent with the research of Michael Griffin (Griffin,2016,87) and Heba Hanafy (Hanafy, 2022, 1472).

Then, withholding the basic utilities like water, electricity, water, and internet, comes as the second form of economic violence. This was repeatedly represented in both “Bitlou’ Alrouh” and “Maliha”, and all characters were women. The least represented form of economic violence was denying access to money, and all the characters were women as well.

For the gender of the violence victims, the majority of the victims of violence represented in the sample were females with 82.1%. Males were represented as victims only in 14.3% of the cases of violence. Then, 3.6% of the victims were mixed groups. On the other hand, the males were the perpetrators in 83% of the cases, while only 13.4% of women were perpetrators. These

results show that violence was commonly practiced by men against women in the areas of conflict, and depict how women are suffering from undermining, disempowering and even denying their basic rights in these communities.

Regarding the perpetrator-victim gender violence dynamics, the male against female violence was highly represented in the sample. The content analysis results show that 83% of the violent actions in the sample were perpetrated by men, 71.4% of these cases were male against female, while only 11.6% were male against male. On the other hand, only 13.4% of the perpetrators were females, 10.7% were female against female, and only 2.7% were female against male.

These results are consistent with many previous studies; among these is Saddam Issa, as he concluded that women were extensively depicted as victims in Arabic political cartoons (Issa, 2021). Besides, the “female against female violence” could be supported by the research of both Shukreya Elserag (2018), and Raghavan and Balasubramaniyan (2014), as both of them pointed out to increasing role of women in terrorist groups.

It’s significant to mention that almost all cases of “male against male” violence were primarily due to conflict of interests, while the violence against women, whether “male against female” or “female against female”, were because of gender. This highlights the extent of the representation of GBV in the docudramas in MENA conflict zones.

For the age range of the victims, the dominating age category of the victims was young and middle-aged adults with 67%, then the elderly with 11.6% and finally children with 9.8%. This result is consistent with the study of Heba Hanafy, as she concluded that 91.1% of the characters were adults and youth, elderly people represent 8.9% and there were no children among the characters (Hanafy, 2022, 1475).

Conclusion:

The study investigates the GBV represented in the MENA conflict zones in the Egyptian TV drama. The results of the data collection show that women in MENA conflict zones were represented - in TV docudramas- as suffering from physical, psychological, sexual and economic violence respectively. Additionally, the results have revealed that the majority of the female characters were victims of violence and the majority of the perpetrators were men. Although there is a limited representation of the “female against female” violence, the portrayal of males as “perpetrators” still dominating the sample; Consequently, the results affirmed that the gender stereotypes are reinforced, especially in terms of gender imbalance and victimization of women.

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