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Ventura Kessel, Ivyliet

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# Representation of Arab Muslim women in the series *La víctima número 8* and *Skam España*<sup>1</sup>

**Representación de mujeres árabes musulmanas en las series *La víctima número 8* y *Skam España***

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ARTICLE



Ivyliet Ventura-Kessel

University de Deusto

PhD candidate in the Leisure, Communication and Culture program at the University of Deusto with a COFUND Marie Skłodowska-Curie research grant from the European Union. Graduated in Journalism at the University of Havana with honors, she studied the Master in Communication and Culture at the University of Seville as a scholarship holder of the AUIP in 2020 and obtained the Extraordinary End of Studies Award. She is developing her doctoral project at the intersection of postcolonial and gender studies to examine the cultural discourses on Arab Muslim women in the Spanish audiovisual fiction of the 21st century.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9398-7323>  
ivyliet.v.kessel@deusto.es

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## Abstract

This article identifies and analyzes the image and stereotypes associated with Arab Muslim women in the discourse of fiction produced in Spain through the study of the series *Skam España* and *La víctima número 8*. Through a qualitative methodology based on the characterization model and the analysis of the stereotype

figure, it is concluded that both audiovisuals give relevance to these women, offer alternatives to the activities and spaces to which they are commonly circumscribed and enable them to confront and correct the stereotypes with which they are defined.



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## KEYWORDS

Spanish fiction series, Arab Muslim woman, representation, stereotypes, *Skam España*, *La víctima número 8*.

## Resumen

Este artículo identifica y analiza la imagen y estereotipos asociados a mujeres árabes musulmanas en el discurso de la ficción producida en España, a través del estudio de las series *Skam España* y *La víctima número 8*. Mediante una metodología cualitativa basada en el modelo

de caracterización de personajes y el análisis de la figura del estereotipo, se concluye que ambos audiovisuales otorgan relevancia a estas mujeres, ofrecen alternativas a las actividades y espacios a los que comúnmente se les circunscribe y posibilitan que ellas mismas enfrenten y corrijan los estereotipos con los que se les define.

## PALABRAS CLAVE

Series de ficción españolas, mujer árabe musulmana, representación, estereotipos, *Skam España*, *La víctima número 8*.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The image of the world shown by fiction films and series puts into circulation and/or reinforces meanings and discourses that acquire symbolic value among the members of a community and influences how certain events, characters, spaces and other communities are perceived (Novoa-Jaso *et al.*, 2019). The power of audiovisual fiction to construct and sustain stereotypes and prejudices around notions linked to race, ethnicity and cultural identities different from those of its audience has been demonstrated (Mastro, 2009).

Minorities and ethnic groups are often portrayed in the media in a more negative way than members of the majority (Marcos-Ramos, 2014) which can lead to discriminatory attitudes towards those portrayed (Greenberg *et al.*, 2002 cited by Marcos-Ramos, 2014).

In Spain, studies on the media representation of foreign minorities mainly analyze the informative treatment of these groups; fewer studies examine the social discourse of entertainment on the subject (Eberl *et al.*, 2018). Nor are there many studies on the relations between the Spanish-Moroccan (and Spanish-Arabic) world

in television fiction products (Martínez-Sáez, 2021). Moreover, most studies offer a general overview and do not delve into the case of women (Marcos-Ramos *et al.*, 2020); and, if they do, they are studied as a whole and do not focus on each group. However, it has been identified that the space given to women in fiction varies considerably, depending on their place of origin (Zarco, 2018).

The consolidation of audiovisual fiction series as a successful product in the last decade places them in a privileged space to disseminate patterns and lines of interpretation of the world (Torres-Romay and Izquierdo-Castillo, 2022).

This article is part of a research project that seeks to diagnose the role of Spanish media in the reduction of inequalities and promoting gender equality. For this purpose, the cultural

discourses on Arab Muslim women<sup>1</sup>, disseminated through fiction audiovisuals produced in Spain in the second decade of the 21st century, are analyzed, as well as their influence on the construction of the collective imaginary.

This paper specifically describes the representation of Arab Muslim women and associated stereotypes in the fiction series *Skam España* (Movistar plus) and *La víctima número 8* (ETB2 and Telemadrid).

### **1.1. STEREOTYPE: A RECURRENT FIGURE IN AUDIOVISUAL FICTION**

Representation in serialized audiovisual fiction recurrently employs the figure of the stereotype. These cultural proposals provide a simplified mental image of some category of people, institutions, events, regardless of their truth or otherwise (Arranz Lozano, 2020). Because they offer characteristics that are easy to grasp and memorize, everything about the category in question is reduced to these traits, which are consolidated over time.

They are collective, impersonal, constructed, subjective and anonymous representations (Bernil Laguna, 2022) that not only describe how certain groups of people “should be” but also associate them to behaviors (Álvarez *et al.*, 2017 cited by Bernil Laguna, 2022).

The construction of stereotypes begins from the first years of life (Bernil Laguna, 2022). They

are transmitted through the family, education, oral tradition, culture and the media (Arranz Lozano, 2020). In fictional audiovisuals, viewers internalize stereotyped images during reception, transfer them to the plane of identification and can transform them into irrefutable truths.

Reliance on these mental images originates from the fact that they are shared by a large number of people within the group to which one belongs (Arranz Lozano, 2020). Cognitively they function through an intertextual network that fuses the characteristic and the representative, the distinct and the distinctive and offer commonplaces that repeat, transform and refer to each other within the discourse (Santos Unamuno, 2018).

Stereotypes, moreover, are evidence of power relations. According to Arranz Lozano (2020): “The triumphant stereotypes will be those that favor the stability and reproduction of the elite in power, [...] those imposed by the dominant group on the rest of the dominated groups” (p.45). They are not, therefore, the result of group spontaneity, but a control mechanism of the underlying power to categorize or name.

### **1.2. THE IMAGE OF IMMIGRANT WOMEN IN SPANISH AUDIOVISUAL FICTION PRODUCTIONS**

In the 1990s, Spain went from being a sending to a receiving nation of immigrants, and foreigners arriving in the country began to be represented in fiction series. Studies on the subject confirm their under-representation, both in characters and plots: 1.24 on a scale of 0-4 (Marcos-Ramos *et al.*, 2019; Marcos-Ramos *et al.*, 2020).

Authors agree that immigrant characters are generally not essential to the plot. Their psychology, emotions or conflicts are not explored

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2 A female character belongs to this group not only if she was born in an Arab nation but also if she was born in a Western country into a family of immigrants of that ethnicity, and in both cases, she is Muslim. This distinction will be followed, because sometimes, the children of Arab immigrants born in the West are identified and self-identify according to the ethnicity of their parents (García *et al.*, 2011).

in depth; they are constructed through actions that characterize them and appear related to violence, low qualifications and irregular migration status (Marcos-Ramos *et al.*, 2019; Villamor and Romero, 2018).

Immigrant women appear almost 30% less than their male counterparts in Spanish television fiction, although the majority of the foreign population is female (Marcos-Ramos *et al.*, 2022). They are mainly associated with domestic work, caregiving, low-skilled jobs, prostitution, drugs and human trafficking. They do not study, nor do they have a stable profession; they are victims of violence; they seek marriages of convenience to regularize their migratory status or due to family cultural pressures; they belong to the lowest scale of marginality; they are more grateful characters and have better health habits than nationals and male immigrants (Fernández Soto, 2009; Marcos-Ramos *et al.*, 2022; Sánchez, 2021).

They are associated with the role of mother-wife, in which service, accompaniment and satisfying the needs of others predominate. In these characters, their immigrant status takes precedence over their gender, and it is more common for them to participate in conversations about racism or immigration than about machismo or empowerment (Marcos-Ramos *et al.*, 2022). Their verbal expression may also be limited due to their lack of fluency in Spanish (Sánchez, 2021).

The literature concludes that, although the social discourse has attempted to deconstruct certain preconceived ideas about immigrant women, Spanish audiovisual fiction maintains models of representation tied to stereotypes, prototypical roles, and do not show all the existing diversity, nor do they include characters of foreign origin with a notable presence in Spanish society (Marcos-Ramos *et al.*, 2022; Sánchez 2021).

### **1.3. ORIENTALISM AND NEO-ORIENTALISM IN THE WESTERN MEDIA REPRESENTATION OF THE ARAB MUSLIM WOMAN**

In the Western world, Arab Muslim women not only suffer from the domination of the patriarchal structure, they are also victims of Orientalist marginalization that places the West as the heir of modernity and defines the East<sup>3</sup>, by opposition, as underdeveloped, irrational, mysterious, threatening, barbaric and reluctant to any integration (Gezgin *et al.*, 2021).

Edward Said proposed the term orientalism to account for this worldview (Said, 2003). Dag Tuastad (2003) updated the concept to neo-orientalism after the 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States and the transformations they introduced in the relationship between the West and the Arab Muslim world.

This model of thought is transferred to the discourse and traverses the way in which these spaces and characters are constructed and shown on screen (Akmeşe, 2021; Berciano Garrido, 2021; Gezgin *et al.*, 2021; Güven, 2021). Violence is shown as an intrinsic feature of Muslims and Arabs, and political movements in this region are associated with the potential Islamic-terrorist threat, homogenizing the collective and equating it with radicals and terrorists (Telseren, 2021). Fear of Islam is central to the discourse and is represented as a monolithic and violent entity (Güven, 2021).

With globalization and migratory processes, the images of Arab Muslim men and women no

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<sup>3</sup> The term Orient, when it is not specified as referring to the entire Asian continent or denoting the distant and exotic, actually implies the Arab Muslim world (Said, 2003).

longer portray a distant other, but rather people who live both outside and inside Western nations (Telseren, 2021) and are a constituent element of their societies.

Women function as one of the most recurring differentiating elements by which the Muslim Arab world is observed and evaluated. Their behavior and clothing are represented on screen as measures of modernity or barbarism, embodying the conflict between modern Western values and traditional Eastern ones (Akmeşe, 2021; García, A. *et al.*, 2011; İmik Tanyıldızı and Yolcu, 2021; Telseren, 2021).

From the West, Islam has been blamed for the situation of Arab Muslim women as a religion that is intrinsically unfair to them and for allowing the consolidation of cruel and oppressive societies (Martín Muñoz, 2012). This ignores the patriarchal sociocultural heritage that, through religion, sacralizes and perpetuates structures and laws that benefit male political, social and economic dominance (Martín Muñoz, 2012; Telseren, 2021).

The rejection of what is Muslim is conveyed through women, considered as victims, subjected on screen to the archetype of the exotic, oppressed, socially devalued woman, deprived of any form of freedom and under the yoke of male domination (García *et al.*, 2011; İmik Tanyıldızı and Yolcu, 2021; Telseren 2021). The hijab has become a sign of that oppression, minimizing the variety of connotations it entails (García *et al.*, 2011).

Research has identified other on-screen models: the economically independent Arab Muslim woman, westernized in her appearance, but inserted in societies that allow her only partial emancipation, and the veiled and traditional mother figure, who perpetuates the patriarchal system and safeguards its continuity among young women (İmik Tanyıldızı and Yolcu, 2021;

Telseren, 2021). There are also characters who live or were born in Western countries and have as a trait a political awareness that makes them react to the West with suspicion, hatred or admiration (Akmeşe, 2021).

## **2. SKAM AND LA VÍCTIMA NÚMERO 8 SERIES**

The two series analyzed in this study were released in 2018. *Skam España* is an adaptation of the successful Norwegian youth audiovisual counterpart (Onieva, 2018). In 39 chapters it tells the stories of five girls attending high school in Madrid: Eva, Cris, Nora, Viri and Amira.

The Spanish version maintained the original storyline with minimal changes in plots and characters, although it included specific elements adapted to the local audience. All four seasons employ the narrative resource of changing the perspective of the story, thus contributing to polyphony, expanding the range of identifications and representations, and offering greater depth to the contexts and conflicts of each protagonist (Mateos-Pérez, 2021).

After a discreet premiere in the first season, the second season of this series turned out to be a success in terms of viewership both on and off the Movistar platform. The fandom factor spread and, in the following seasons, the audiovisual became a phenomenon, managing to create conversation from its followers each and every day of broadcast. It was not only trending in social networks in Spain, but also in Argentina, Brazil, Italy and Mexico (Diéguez, 2019).

*La víctima número 8* is an eight-part thriller that begins with a jihadist terrorist attack in Bilbao. The story focuses on the consequences of the attack for both the families of the victims and the family of the main suspect. It had very different reception rates in Madrid and the Basque Country, going almost unnoticed with a 3.8%

audience share in the capital, while in Euskadi it was the audiovisual with the second highest number of viewers on its premiere day (verTe-le!, 2018).

However, the impact of these fictions in terms of audience is not the criteria followed for the selection of the sample in this work.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The analysis of the image and stereotypes associated with Muslim Arab women in these series is based on the contributions on the construction of characters that have been proposed from the audiovisual narrative. The phenomenological approach is adopted, which considers the character as a simulation of a real person, with an intellectual, emotional, and attitudinal profile, and understands it as a perfect simulation of what we encounter in life (Casetti and Di Chio, 2007).

The methodological proposal is based on the characterization model developed by Elena Galán (2006), which comprises three fundamental axes on which a character is designed: physical, psychological and sociological description. An analysis sheet was prepared that includes three to five indicators in each of the dimensions mentioned above (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

#### *Characteristics of the characters*

Series title:

Year of release:

Season number and episodes:

Character name:

Nationality:

Physical Dimension:

- Age.
- Physical traits/ Appearance
- Transformation

Psychological dimension:

- Behavior
- Objectives/Goals
- Evolution

Social Dimension:

- Social status/economic level:
- Professional/occupational environment
- Educational level
- Family environment:
  - Marital status
  - No. of children
- Spatial framework

A second methodological direction focuses on the figure of the stereotype in its relationship with the characters. For the construction of the instrument of analysis, contributions from cultural and postcolonial studies, the concept of orientalism and neo-orientalism were used as a starting point. Likewise, previous research on stereotyping in audiovisual fiction series (Galán, 2006) and the representation of Arabs and/or Muslims (Akmeşe, 2021; Berciano Garrido, 2021; Güven, 2021; İmrik Tanyıldızı and Yolcu, 2021; Telseren, 2021) were reviewed.

In addition, a first visualization of the series was carried out, which allowed us to identify scenes in which dialogues or behaviors motivated by a preconceived idea towards Arab Muslim women or their community appear. The numerical superiority and the possibility of analyzing



explicit phrases in which stereotypes were evidenced led to the selection for this study of the moments in which the characters externalize their ideas through verbal expression and discarded the moments in which they are expressed exclusively through gestures or attitudes.

The analysis sheet has two sections: the first is focused on identifying who are the characters who verbally express these stereotypes and in what context, and the second allows us to analyze the use of stereotypes associated with five categories or themes (Figure 2).

**Figure 2**

*Analysis of stereotypes and stereotype-generating themes.*

Series title:

Year of release:

Chapter title:

Season number and episodes:

Scene Context:

a) Analysis of verbally expressed stereotypes:

- Who speaks
- Socioeconomic status of the speaker
- Who is it being talked about
- Who is the recipient
- Socioeconomic status of the listener
- What they say and when they say it
- With what attitude
- Why they say it
- Where it is said

b) Treatment of the following topics:

- Lifestyle

- Religion
- Clothing
- Violence
- Integration

The two case studies were selected based on the series produced in Spain that included at least one Muslim Arab female character in a leading or secondary role, discarding those productions in which they appeared as background characters. The second decade of the 21st century was chosen as the time frame, in which a series of relevant political events occurred in the Arab Islamic world (such as the Arab Spring, the Syrian War and the emergence of the Islamic State), which have influenced how the Western media have represented communities and nations of that region (Corral *et al.*, 2021).

With these criteria, a search was carried out in the catalog of the Spanish Film Library. From the universe of series identified, it was decided to study the cases of *Skam España* and *La víctima número 8*.

*Skam España* features a Muslim teenager of Moroccan descent who assumes the leading role in the fourth season, which is unusual in Spanish audiovisual fiction. *La víctima número 8* includes a middle-aged Moroccan immigrant woman as one of the most relevant secondary characters for the plot.

The audience rating was not the main element in favor of these two specific cases. Within the audiovisual universe, proposals such as *Élite* had a much greater impact in terms of reception. However, *Skam España* has the peculiarity of being the only series in which an Arab Muslim woman takes the leading role in a season (Nadia in *Élite* is one of the main characters in a choral proposal).



Since one of the cases of analysis was a youth series, it was decided to choose another audiovisual that did not share this genre: *La víctima número 8*. In addition, the characters under study do not belong to the same age group nor do they live in the same area of the country, thus diversifying the units of analysis and, consequently, the results obtained.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1. ANALYSIS OF THE CHARACTERS

Both Amira Naybet's character in *Skam España* and Adila Jamal's character in *La víctima número 8* constitute fundamental elements in the development of the plots of their respective audio-visuals. The first is a teenager and the other is a middle-aged woman. They have physical features usually associated with Arabs and their descendants, brown or dark skin, eyebrows and hair equally dark. Neither undergoes significant changes in appearance throughout the series. Amira wears western clothes, while Adila opts for djellabas, long dresses and baggy pants. However, both follow the Islamic code of modesty in their dress; they do not show shoulders or cleavage (Table 1).

Both cover their hair. The former appears in all the scenes of the series with hijab, she does not show her hair even in the private space of her home. As will be seen, this garment not only constitutes her distinctive element, but will also be a source of conflict with her environment and with herself. Adila, on the other hand, wears her head uncovered both at home and at her workplace. Outside these spaces, she wears a hijab or turban (Table 1).

Table 1 <i>Physical dimension of the characters Amira Naybet and Adila Jamal</i>		
	Amira Naybet	Adila Jamal
Title of the series	Skam España	La víctima número 8
Year of the series	2018-2020	2018
Number of seasons and episodes	Seasons 1, 2, 3, 4 39 episodes	Season 1 (only one) 8 episodes
Nationality	Spanish (Moroccan descent)	Moroccan
Age	16-18 years old	44 years old
Physical traits/appearance	Medium height, slim, dark skin. She wears a hijab in all her scenes, she doesn't show her hair even in her home. She opts for western clothes, but she always has her legs, shoulders and cleavage covered.	Medium height, slim, dark skin, wears her hair covered with a scarf, turban or hijab. She only shows it at certain times at home and where she works. Dresses in djellaba, long dresses, baggy pants and upper garments that cover her shoulders and cleavage.
Transformation	Maintains her physical characteristics and appearance throughout the audiovisual.	There are no relevant changes in her appearance or physical characteristics.

In the psychological dimension both characters are shown as strong and frontal. Adila and Amira make decisions and act to achieve their goals. The former is motivated by her condition as a mother and the latter by her desire to live her faith as a Muslim without being subjected to discriminatory remarks and behavior by others (Table 2).

Both stand firm in their objectives and goals. Adila seeks to prove her son Omar's innocence. Amira tries to combine the lifestyle of a teenager from Madrid with the practice of Islam.

Both defend their deepest convictions: to look after the welfare of her children, in the case of Adila, and to be faithful to the precepts of Islam despite the pressures of society, in the case of Amira (Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Psychological dimension of the characters Amira Naybet and Adila Jamal*

	Amira Naybet	Adila Jamal
Behavior	Responsible, focused on her studies, loyal to her friends. Confronts discriminatory or stereotypical attitudes. Although she sometimes doubts about her identity, she manages to overcome it with maturity, reaffirming her beliefs and personality.	Fighter, courageous, strong and frontal. She is not passive, she takes the initiative in actions to achieve her goals. Mother capable of fighting tooth and nail for her children.
Objectives/ Goals	Not to be singled out or judged for her customs or religion. She tries to lead a life like the rest of the teenage girls, but without renouncing the precepts of her faith. She dreams of studying engineering.	To prove that her son Omar, accused of being the perpetrator of the attack in Bilbao, is innocent. In the midst of the situation resulting from the terrorist attack, she is looking after the needs of her other two children.
Evolution	Various conflicts make her doubt about how she wants to live her faith in Allah within a Western society. However, despite external pressures, she discovers her own path within Islam.	She maintains firm confidence in Omar's innocence. Even when she decides to turn him over to the authorities, she is motivated by her intention to save him. She acts according to what she thinks is best for her children.

Both characters belong to the middle class. Their main contrasts lie in their occupations, educational level and the spatial framework where they mainly carry out their actions. While Adila is dedicated to domestic work and care-giving, Amira is in high school and aspires to study engineering at the university. Precise information about the former's educational level is not given, although it is shown in scenes that she knows how to read and write. The protagonist of *Skam España* is one of the most outstanding students in her class, and she is even proposed to give the graduation speech (Table 3).

Adila is the head of her family, has three children and is married to Ibrahim. He provides the economic support, but she is the one who makes the decisions regarding children and family. Amira lives with her parents and is single (Table 3).

The character in *La víctima número 8* occupies mainly the domestic and private sphere. Her main scenes take place in her home and in María's home, where she works. It is in these spaces where she makes decisions (Table 3).

Amira's main field of action is the public space. Her scenes take place mainly in high school, the Las Labass association, bars and leisure spaces she frequents with her friends. One of her conflicts lies in the search for belonging to this public space in which she is singled out for her condition as a woman of immigrant descent and as a Muslim (Table 3).

**Table 3**

*The social dimension of  
the characters Amira Naybet and Adila Jamal*

	<i>Amira Naybet</i>	<i>Adila Jamal</i>
Social status/ Economic level	Middle class	Lower middle class
Professional/ occupational environment	High school student	Housework and caregiver
Educational level	She is one of the most outstanding students in her high school class, with very good grades. The teachers ask her to give the gradua- tion speech.	No information is provided on their level of education, but it is inferred that she has basic education and can read and write.
Family environment Marital status: No. of children:	Single from season 1 to 3. She starts a re- lationship with Dani, Cristina's brother in season 4. She lives with her father and mother.  She has no children.	Married to Ibra- him Jamal, her marriage has been broken for years, but she does not separate or divorce for econo- mic and cultural reasons. However, the relationship between the two is not bad.  She is the mother of 3 children: Omar, Zakir and Aissa.
Spatial frame	She interacts and faces her conflicts in the public space. Most of her scenes are in high school. She feels excluded from the public spa- ce because of her status as a woman of Moroccan immi- grant descent and a Muslim.	She mainly occu- pies the domestic, private space. Her main scenes take place at home and in the house of Mrs. Maria, whom she takes care of.

## 4.2. ANALYSIS OF STEREOTYPES AND STEREOTYPE- GENERATING THEMES

Between both audiovisuals, a total of 24 scenes were detected where stereotypes associated with Arab Muslim women or their community are verbally expressed. These ideas are expressed both by characters outside this group and by Muslim Arabs. In 23 scenes, the middle class speaks; only one upper class character, in *La víctima número 8* expresses a stereotyped idea.

The phrases uttered by the Spanish characters in both series contain the following ideas: the rejection of the "Moorish"; Muslim Arabs as potential terrorists; religion is the guideline for all aspects of their lives; discomfort when wearing the veil or displaying customs (especially with religious connotations) in Spanish public spaces; a community that does not interact with Spaniards or adopt customs from the host country; they do not belong to Spain, even though they were born here.

Questions about these women are limited to the fact that they do not know and cannot live their sexuality freely and remain subject to the will of the family. In addition, misconceptions about the use and meaning of the hijab were expressed.

Arab Muslim characters speak from anger and surprise, having to endure the reproduction of these preconceived ideas and being mostly defined and judged by them. When they allude to stereotypes about themselves, they mention: the blaming of the whole community for terrorism; the rejection of the Arab and/or Islamic; the need to keep their customs in a private space in order not to disturb; the understanding of the Arab Muslim world as a homogeneous unit; their descendants are not considered

Spaniards; and the criticism that women receive about their decisions and behaviors from members of their community as well as from outside it.

The Spanish characters reproduce these stereotypes convinced of the veracity of the idea they replicate. They also do so with surprise, discomfort, curiosity or mockery. Only Maria, Adila's employer in *La víctima número 8*, expresses embarrassment at having thought of her as a "damned Moorish woman". When the conversations occur between Spaniards, they avoid being overheard by the Arab Muslim character, also on screen, evidencing an acknowledgment that what is said may be inappropriate and even offensive.

There is a predominance of phrases alluding to Arab Muslim women, their community and the behavior of the rest of the Spanish society towards them.

The scenes that include stereotypes mostly appear to be questioned or rejected by Adila, Amira and other characters of the Arab Muslim community. Only in three moments of *Skam España* are they reproduced or strengthened without questioning. In these scenes the conversations occur between Spanish characters and Amira is not present.

#### **4.2.1. LIFESTYLE**

Several scenes in *Skam España* allude to stereotypes about the lifestyle of Arab Muslim women or of this community in general. In *La víctima número 8* this topic is not mentioned.

*Skam España* addresses the way in which Arab Muslim women live their sexuality. Viri directly assumes that Amira will not go to the beach because it is a space where the body is shown and on two occasions she expresses her discomfort to talk about sexual issues in front of the girl,

"because Muslim women do not talk about that". Esther's character (friend of Amira's boyfriend at the time) says: "Moorish women can't do it until marriage. It's general culture".

The idea of considering all Arab Muslim countries as an entity lacking in particularities, hot and desert-like, is recurrent. This is what Viri says, while Kasim (brother of one of the girls of the Las Labass Association) complains that he is continually asked about the situation of other Arab nations as if he had to know about it.

A tendency to associate Arabs and Muslims with problematic and very traditional people was identified. In the specific case of women, it is believed that their destiny will inevitably be to marry an Arab Muslim boy, thus precluding any other life project:

Cris' mother: As smart as Amira is, I don't think they will let her do engineering.

Cris: Who won't let her?

Cris' mother: Her parents, if they have forced her to wear a scarf and everything.

Cris: Mom, they have NOT forced her.

Cris' mother: That's what she says, but you know how those people are.

Cris: No, what are they like?

Cris' mother: Well, in the end Amira will end up getting married to a Moorish boy, as soon as she finishes high school.

Cris: Her parents are not like that.

Cris' mother: They didn't seem to be like that, and you see, with a scarf and everything.

### 4.2.2. RELIGION

Both audiovisuals deal with stereotypes related to Islam. It is shown that Muslims are very religious, they follow the precepts of their faith to the extreme, without exceptions, and religion controls absolutely all aspects of their lives. On repeated occasions, Amira's friends give their opinions or speculate on how Amira will behave, always subordinating her behavior to her religion.

In the two series, Spanish characters, but also Muslim Arabs, establish a parallel between Islam and jihadist movement, manifesting the stereotype of perceiving the Arab Muslim community involved in a kind of religious crusade. However, both Amira and Adila correct this idea at different times:

Concha (mother of one of the victims of the terrorist attack blamed on Omar):  
...I guess I'm looking for answers.

Adila: Answers to what questions?

Concha: To why my son is dead.

Adila: There are questions that have no answers. Just as there is goodness without reason, I think the same thing happens with evil.

Concha: But the murder of my son, the murder of all those people does have a reason: your religion, your Holy War or whatever you call it?

Adila: It is my religion, but not my war. Killing in the name of Allah makes as little sense to me as it does to you.

### 4.2.3. CLOTHING

Several scenes in *Skam España* deal with the way Arab Muslim women dress. The hijab acquires prominence as a differentiating element

that causes amazement or curiosity. In *La víctima número 8*, the subject is not mentioned.

Amira's decision to wear it surprises a high school girl who associates the cause with the celebration of Ramadan or with her having dirty hair. Viri curiously asks if she is not hot wearing it and her boyfriend Dani's friends are convinced of what they know about the veil:

Esther: I love your style. Like that, with the scarf. And have you always worn it?

Amira: For a while now.

Esther: Of course, because you wear it with your first period.

Amira: No, you wear it whenever you want. I put it on when I was 16.

Patri: And what about the color of the scarf, is it because of your mood?

Amira: No, it's like any other garment. I don't wear the same one to school or to go out.

Likewise, Amira and her friends from the Las Labass Association discuss the belief that the hijab is a symbol of oppression and that wearing it or taking it off brings criticism from both non-Muslims and Muslims.

### 4.2.4. VIOLENCE

Characters in both series discuss the link established from the stereotype between violence and the Arab Muslim community. Specifically, terrorist violence motivated by religious conceptions is addressed. In the case of *La víctima número 8*, the beginning of the plot with an alleged jihadist attack makes it possible for the entire Arab Muslim community of Bilbao to be blamed for what happened:

Adila: Are you sure they are not going to suspend the ceremony because of last night?

Ibrahim: I spoke to Habib and he said no.

Adila: It's horrible... Poor people.

Ibrahim: Poor us. The same thing again... To apologize for something, we haven't done...

Adila: Better to apologize than to bury a son, Ibrahim...

Ibrahim Jamal repeatedly asks his wife to leave the city because he is convinced that the stigma of terrorist violence will haunt them, even if Omar's innocence is proven. With a similar thought, Amira in *Skam España* explains that Muslims are associated with potential terrorists, so the image of a person with a veil and a backpack immediately refers to the possibility of an attack.

#### 4.2.5. INTEGRATION

There are scenes about integration in both *La víctima número 8* and *Skam España*. Certain characters in both series question the capacity of the Arab Muslim immigrant community and that of their children born in Spain to integrate. This idea provoked in the past for Maria not to want a "damned Moorish woman" to take care of her. This is what she confesses to Adila with shame years later. In *Skam España* it is Cris who recommends to the girls of the Las Labass Association to allow non-Arab Muslims to collaborate in the projects so that they are not accused of not integrating:

Dounia: This is a space where I can be with girls who share the same problems than me. It is not an NGO.

Cris: But what Amira says makes sense. If you only hang out with each other, in the end you won't fix anything, right? Because people will keep saying that you don't integrate.

Dounia: What exactly do we have to integrate into? Come on, I was born here, at Jiménez Díaz.

This response leads to a reflection on how society perceives the children of Arab and Muslim immigrants who were born in Spain. In another scene, Noor (one of the girls in the association) complains that people in the street mostly assume that she is a foreigner, before considering the possibility that she is Spanish.

Amira expresses that as a "Moor" she is expected to sacrifice her customs so that the rest of the Spaniards do not feel upset. The girl expresses this idea after the school management, in response to the protest of some parents, decided to remove the Ramadan Mubarak poster. The placement of this poster also provoked the reaction of some students who, as their words show, confuse religion with nationality:

Boy 1: What's that, man?

Boy 2: I don't know, they want to be cool now.

Boy 1: But what's that doing there, man? They just need to put up a little couscous stand.

Boy 2: No way! They should put banners in their own fucking country!

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

From the analysis it is evident that the importance of Amira in *Skam España* and Adila in *La víctima número 8* does not depend exclusively on the relevance of a male character. The former assumes the leading role from the fourth season of her series. Adila, although she begins in *La víctima número 8* as “the mother of” (in this case the protagonist), is the head of the Jamal family and makes decisions that influence the course of the story.

The stereotypes that appear in the series agree with those pointed out in studies on the subject, previously referenced in this article (Berciano Garrido, 2021; İmik Tanyıldızı and Yolcu, 2021; Telseren 2021). The ideas address the way in which these women live their sexuality and their destiny of becoming wives and mothers. The hijab is situated throughout the dialogues as a differentiating element, a symbol of oppression and a catalyst for criticism. They are labeled as extremely religious women and an intrinsic relationship between Muslims, violence and terrorism is perceived. The ability and willingness of this community to be part of Spanish society is questioned and their descendants born in the country are not identified as Spaniards.

Adila and Amira are depicted with features regularly associated with people belonging to the Arab Muslim community. They dress according to the Islamic code of modesty; however, Adila opts for clothes usually associated with the

traditional image of these women and Amira wears western garments. This difference seems to be driven by the age of each character and the fact that Amira was born in Madrid. Both cover their hair: Adila in public spaces and Amira permanently.

What is innovative in the treatment of stereotypes is that both series show a strong, frontal, active Muslim Arab female character, breaking with the tendency to represent these women marked by submission and passivity. Amira's role allows us to delve into her conflicts, motivations and aspirations, while little is known about Adila beyond her role as mother, wife and the main person in charge of her family.

Adila follows the trend of showing immigrant women associated with housework or caregiving, with a low or medium level of education, and whose sphere of action is the home environment. However, Amira possesses characteristics that are not normally associated with these women: she is a good student who aspires to study engineering and actively participates in the public sphere.

The latter is the one that is farthest from the characteristics with which Arab Muslim women are represented in the audiovisual; however, it is in *Skam España* where there are more scenes in which stereotypes are introduced. Nevertheless, on most occasions, these preconceived ideas are immediately questioned or rejected by the characters addressed.

An advance in the relevance given to both characters is evidenced. Alternatives are offered



in terms of the activity they perform and the spheres in which these women are commonly placed. When they are faced with stereotyped phrases about them and their community, both Amira and Adila react by correcting and expressing their discomfort with the preconceived images they are associated with. However, their status as Arab and Muslim is the constant that defines them within Spanish society.

It can be concluded that, although they reiterate formulas of representation identified in previous research on the image of immigrant women and Muslim Arabs, the series addressed in this article incorporate elements that deviate from the trend.

The analysis of two specific cases does not allow extrapolating the results to a model of representation of Muslim Arab female characters in all Spanish products. However, the case study contributes to expanding theories, understanding the interaction between the parts of a system and its characteristics (Gordillo and Liberia, 2016). Moreover, the analysis carried out in this article exposes original results in the treatment of this group in recent audiovisual productions.

This study allows the development of future research to explore the representation of Arab Muslim women in Spanish film production and to establish comparisons with respect to serialized audiovisuals. Likewise, it is relevant to analyze the logics followed by scriptwriters, directors, message senders, when constructing the characters belonging to this community, as well as to examine the collective imaginary of the Spanish public about these women and their correspondence with what is shown on the screen.

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