

US Sponsored “Democracy”: New Egyptian TV channel to only feature fully face-veiled women

By [Global Research](#)

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The first niqabi-only TV channel will be launched on the first day of Ramadan; eyebrows raised in media circles

The first Egyptian satellite channel completely operated by women wearing the full face veil (niqab) is set to be launched 20 July, which will coincide with the first day of the holy month of Ramadan.



The channel will be named “Mariya” after one of Prophet Mohamed’s wives, who was a Coptic Egyptian freed slave. A full niqabi film crew will manage and operate the channel, including TV presenters, producers, directors and correspondents.

The channel will air its programmes through the ultra-conservative Islamic Umma Channel for six hours every day. The majority of the programming will focus on the niqab and married life.

The channel will be exclusively managed by women. Men will be prohibited from working in or appearing on Mariya, and even participating in phone-ins during live programmes.

El-Sheikha Safaa Refai, a preacher who will head the channel, said that Mariya programmes aim to educate Muslim women about their religion.

“Our message will be directed at Muslim women, to teach them the Sunna (practices) of the Prophet Mohamed,” Refai told Al-Ahram Arabic news portal Thursday.

Refai pointed out that this is not the first time niqabi women work in the media, adding that they have already been working as presenters in several religious channels over the past few years.

She insisted that the niqab is the proper Muslim attire as stipulated by Islamic Sharia law.

Refai went on to label any woman who does not wear the full face veil as “uncovered,” stressing that the niqab is a “red line” that cannot be crossed.

She indicated that Mariya plans to feature only niqabi pundits. However, if the channel airs a programme about an issue and cannot find a niqabi expert, they will host a non-niqabi and give them two options: either to wear the niqab temporarily during the programme, or have their faces blurred out while the programme is being broadcast.

However, Refai added that this does not mean that they will be “excluding anyone” explaining that Mariya aims to bring back the dignity of niqabi women who were oppressed and fired from their jobs over the past few decades.

Among the programmes that will be featured on Mariya is “Memoires of a woman,” which will discuss marital infidelity, with the focus on women cheating on their husbands.

The channel currently has 30 niqabi TV presenters. They also have a temporary male director, Mohamed Dunia, who will be replaced with a niqabi woman soon, according to Refai. Similarly, the “uncovered” camerawomen Mariya has hired for the time being will also soon be replaced.

The head cover (hijab), the more common Islamic attire in Egypt, was banned on Egyptian TV channels during the Mubarak era. It was, however, common in a variety of religious satellite channels.

News about Mariya caused shockwaves across the Egyptian media sector.

Al-Jazeera TV anchor Mona Salman, who is also Egyptian, says that facial expressions are an important tool used by TV presenters when programmes are being aired.

“They are vital tools in connecting with your audience, including eye contact,” Salman said.

She added that Mariya’s concept seems more appropriate for radio.

“There are certain types of programmes in which the TV presenter does not appear. These include documentaries or other programmes where the presenter is not on camera.” Salman explains. “However, once the presenter is in front of the camera, then yes, facial expressions become very important.”

According to Refai, the idea of the channel was presented in 2005 by El-Sheikh Abu Islam Ahmed Abdallah, the owner of the Umma Channel. Abdallah began by producing several niqabi only programmes on his channel, before coming up with the idea of creating a channel exclusively for niqabi women.

Refai refused to reveal who is funding the channel.

Since the fall of Hosni Mubarak in February 2011, Egypt has witnessed an ongoing Islamist

ascendency. During the Mubarak regime there were heavy crackdowns on Islamists, with the Muslim Brotherhood, the largest opposition group, officially banned, though tolerated.

Members of the Brotherhood were routinely detained, their properties regularly confiscated, and they were often banned from running for political office. This situation changed after the 25 January 2011 uprising, with the Brotherhood launching the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP).

Islamists have since enjoyed a predominant presence in the political sphere, with the Brotherhood and the Salafist El-Nour Party winning 47 and 23 per cent of parliament seats respectively.

The presidential race also saw several Islamist candidates vying for the top post, including Salafist Hazem Abu Ismail, Abdel Moneim Abul-Fotouh and the Brotherhood's Mohamed Morsi, who went on to win the elections and become Egypt's first Islamist president.

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