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*SKAM Italia*—Season 4. Directed by Ludovico Bessegato. Screenplay by Ludovico Bessegato. Italy. TIMVision, Cross Productions, Netflix. Four Seasons, Ten episodes, 2020—.

The opening scene of the fourth season of *SKAM Italia* quickly sets the tone for the conflicts and tensions that will follow. We hear an off-screen radio interview with a headteacher who rehashes an “I’m not racist, but...” line to complain about Muslim girls wearing veils to school. Sana (Beatrice Bruschi), the teen protagonist—also wearing a veil—decisively switches off the radio. We then see her sitting in her car watching a group of young men playing basketball. Eyeline matches confirm that her gaze is sexualizing; we see close ups of their bodies, flashes of legs and abdomens. Both the young woman and the young men she is watching are suddenly interrupted by her phone as it plays the *adhan*, calling her to prayer. At this point the men gaze back, this time denoting surprise and incomprehension, and Sana quickly drives away.

The sequence thus anticipates the forces that impact Sana’s life throughout the season: sex and love, as well as her faith and the reactions of outsiders (and of herself) to it. It also anticipates how she will seek to control the factors around her, as with the radio, although sometimes this will prove impossible. Indeed, the rest of the episode (re-)introduces the spaces of her school friends and her family life, two worlds that Sana labors to keep separate yet which, thanks to a chance encounter, will clash by the end of the episode. Sana’s coming to terms with this change—and especially her seemingly untenable romantic attachment to Rami’s (Ibrahim Keshk) friend Malik (Mehdi Meskar)—shapes the story arc of the season.

Season four of *SKAM Italia* reveals both continuity and some interesting differences with respect to the previous three. Of course, the program is one of six other adaptations of the original Norwegian *SKAM* (NRK, 2015-2017). The format is defined by quasi-anthological seasons that focus on single protagonists from a group of friends—this time, Sana is the protagonist—while carrying forward a macro narrative about the whole group. The Italian edition has an intriguing production history, too. Initially a TIMVision production, the series was canceled in 2019, only to restart later that year on a fourth season co-produced and co-distributed by TIMVision and Netflix.

Stylistically, the fourth season closely resembles the previous three. It adopts the same language, with a handheld, documentary-style camera and continuous editing; a pop soundtrack; integrated social media and text messages on-screen; and a linear timeline (the superimposed dates in large yellow text have become a “meme-able” calling card of the series). This season also maintains the melodramatic register of the teen drama, depicting the events that trigger the title’s “shame” (the meaning of the word “skam,” in Norwegian) for the teenage protagonists. In this fourth season, the melodrama and Sana’s “shame” are caused by clashes between faith, love, sex, and friendship. Specifically, the two most important plotlines are Sana’s relationship with Malik—which appears incompatible with her faith, and yet causes her to mistreat and manipulate a friend, Eva (Ludovica Martino), to distance her from him—and a queer love triangle between her friend Martino (Federico Cesari), his boyfriend Niccolò (Rocco Fasano), and Luai (Ryan Daroui), the latter’s closeted ex and member of the Muslim community. The story also makes liberal use of heavy-handed metaphors: from pathetic fallacy, as storm clouds anticipate trouble, to the scene in which Sana finds herself with (literal) blood on her hands after a fight between Martino and Luai (episode 5). In the aftermath, Sana finds herself abandoned in the middle of a tunnel as her two groups of friends literally and symbolically leave in opposite directions.

*Skam* season four nevertheless distinguishes itself for its ability to integrate and filter the wider social issues of multiculturalism, racism, and faith. As for the previous seasons’ protagonists, Eva, Martino, and Eleonora, it is Sana’s own mistakes that cause interpersonal conflicts; this time, however, these conflicts are not simple, teenage mishaps but more complex clashes tied to Sana’s cultural identities and their impact on how she perceives the world. Such tension is foregrounded when Eva

inevitably discovers her friend's manipulations and Sana sends an impassioned voice message to the Whatsapp group chat, apologizing and expressing her struggle to fit in as a young Muslim woman in Italy. At times the impact of Sana's struggles, and its links to broader social questions, is manifest—as in the sub-plot about cyber bullying and the nickname “Sana-Bin-Laden.” But more often the representations of the young woman's challenges is more nuanced. Sana is not only the object of external racism, but her storyline is also shaped by errors of perception: how she believes she must behave or her interpretations of the behaviors and opinions of others. These, in turn, can be traced back to broader influences of racism and intercultural conflicts treated in previous seasons.

The nuance of Sana's storyline culminates in one of the most interesting scenes, when she and Martino compare their experiences as minorities (episode 7). In addition to providing a rare and affirming image of allyship in contemporary Italian media, the dialogue poses thorny questions about how to respond to prejudice and the responsibilities of combating ignorance with education. While Sana responds to prejudice by closing herself off, even to her friends, Martino is more open-minded about how he can help them learn things that they would otherwise never know. The use of the soundtrack here seems to emphasize Martino's position in particular—something that indeed we will see Sana follow later on. This, of course, could be problematized, but perhaps it is enough that a television series like this even poses this kind of complex and contemporary issue.

Ultimately, Sana's conflicts are resolved through her romance with Malik and the re-constitution of her friend group, all of whom depart on holiday with Rami and his friends, too. This resolution plays out interestingly at a formal level. The most memorable example is certainly the long take we see at Sana's Eid celebration (episode 10). The camera unites the characters as it weaves between them, highlighting specific, meaningful pieces of dialogue. Perhaps more striking still, though, is the final shot of the ninth episode. After the textbook will-they/won't-they storyline, Sana and Malik share a romantic moment, on their own terms, in Viterbo's public gardens, where he works. Though the actors' dialogue and blocking anticipate a standard resolution with a kiss, the camera instead cuts and moves away, ending with a long shot of the couple. In this way, Sana's narrative concludes by frustrating the viewer's expectations, substituting them with an alternative kind of romance (self-aware, respectful) that is more fitting to the specificities of the characters.

As these sequences illustrate, the fourth season of *SKAM Italia* responds carefully and conscientiously to the thorny issue of representation. Thanks, no doubt, to consultations with figures like the writer, activist and politician Sumaya Abdel Qader, and her family, as well as associations like *Giovani Musulmani d'Italia* (Italian Muslim Youth), the season presents us with concrete identity questions while also working to challenge stereotypes at different levels and in affirmative ways. The consequences of this are clear throughout: from declarations of how Sana sees her veil as a feminist statement to when it is made “pop” when she tries on different colored hijabs (to impress Malik) over the soundtrack of “Ready 2 Wear” by Felix Da Housecat (episode 1), or the self-conscious, ironic jokes of her Muslim friends when she is finally willing to let them her school friends (“Bene, finalmente le possiamo lapidare!”/“Great, we can finally stone them!”). The season finds success precisely by tying together the standard generic codes of the teen melodrama with these self-aware and ironic comments and representations, as well as a handful of elements of formal innovation.

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