

**SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY  
HIGHER LEVEL  
PAPER 1**

Wednesday 22 May 2002 (afternoon)

1 hour

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**INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES**

- Do not open this examination paper until instructed to do so.
- Read the passage carefully and then answer all the questions.

*Texts in this examination paper have been edited: word additions or explanations are shown in square brackets [ ]; substantive deletions of text are indicated by ellipses in square brackets [...]; minor changes are not indicated.*

*Extract (pp. 191-205) from Lila Abu-Lughod, 'The Objects of Soap Opera: Egyptian Television and the Cultural Politics of Modernity', in **Worlds Apart: Modernity Through the Prism of the Local**, Daniel Miller, ed., pp. 190-210 (London: Routledge, 1995).*

More than any other form of mass media, especially in a place where many remain non-literate, television brings a variety of vivid experiences of the non-local into the most local of situations, the home. [...] [In particular,] television gives women, the young, and the rural as much access as urban men to stories of other worlds. [...]

5 With little daytime television and a state-controlled television industry until recently only minimally supported through advertising, there never developed in Egypt an equivalent of the Western daytime soap opera. Instead, since the late 1960s, the form of the evening dramatic television serial, or *musalsal*, consisting of anywhere from fifteen to thirty episodes broadcast on consecutive days, has dominated Egyptian television  
10 entertainment. [...] [These] television serials are believed to have women as their primary audiences while reaching out successfully to whole families, men included. Every household in the village of Upper Egypt where I have been working had a television set, [...] [and] only on rare occasions would this television be silent.

15 Most Egyptian television serials are set in urban locations and deal with urban problems, often upper-class problems. [However,] like their urban counterparts, villagers I knew were capable of selective readings of dramas. An anecdote about watching television in a relatively poor household can illustrate the gulf between local and television lives and the selective ways women interpret what they watch. One evening, Yamna, the vivacious but exhausted mother of the family, was preparing dinner with the help of her sister  
20 when the television serial, *Love in a Diplomatic Pouch*, came on. The family was miserable that night, burdened by sick children, a sick father, upcoming school exams, and serious financial difficulties. Yet the television serial they watched centred on a wealthy diplomat's family and included characters like ballet teachers, women doctors, journalists, and radio personalities with career problems.

25 As Yamna cooked, her sister shouted out a summary of the plot for her. She focused on the family dynamics that are the regular stuff of their own forms of telling life stories in the village. Divorces, arguments, absences, thwarted matches. She also picked up the moral message of the television serial about women and family – the importance of the mother's role in raising her children and the negative consequences of mothers who put  
30 themselves or their marriage first.

However, many of the "women's issues" in this television serial were constructed in psycho-social terms that were foreign to Yamna and her sister: "psychological" problems like men unable to commit themselves to marry for fear of losing their  
35 freedom; and mothers who cried because their children were not emotionally open with them. Village women simply ignored in their discussions these aspects of the television serial that were not part of their experience.

40 What is remarkable is the ease with which villagers have incorporated television in their everyday lives. [...] What they experienced through television added to, but did not replace, whatever else already existed. They treated the television world not as a fantasy escape but as a sphere onto itself, with its familiar time slot and specific attitudes. [...]

45 In the villagers' attitudes toward the stars is a clue to the larger question of how television serials affect them. The villagers spoke about these stars as "ours", somehow belonging to them as viewers, but not as "us". They had similarly mixed attitudes to the television serials, feeling entitled to them but also distant from them. They are for "our" pleasure but they depict lives of others who have different problems [and] follow different rules.

50 The villagers do not anxiously compartmentalise the modernity that television serials present in order to preserve a static traditional community somehow untouched by the global or modernity. On the contrary, while the village appears picturesque with its "traditional" sights like mudbrick homes and swaying palm trees, there is not an aspect of people's everyday lives that has not been shaped by the modern. [...] Television is, in this village, only one part of a complex jumble of life, and the dramatic experiences and visions it offers are surprisingly easily incorporated as discrete, but not overwhelming, elements in this jumble.

1. Describe and illustrate how Upper Egypt villagers see television, the television stars and the television serials as their own, while also feeling distant from them. *[6 marks]*
  
  2. In which ways is television viewing particularly interesting to women in this village of Upper Egypt? *[6 marks]*
  
  3. Compare Upper Egypt villagers' response to television with the ways in which a token of globalization (other than television) is integrated into and transformed by the local context in another society. *[8 marks]*
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