

# Moustache Hairs Lost: Ramadan Television Serials and the Construction of Identity in Damascus, Syria

*Christa Salamandra*

This paper explores the uses of television in social relations in a specific urban, Middle Eastern context. In contemporary Syria locally-produced historical dramas form part of wider processes of culture construction and social distinction. Televisual representations of the Old Damascus serve not to foster nationalist sympathies but to promote sub-national identities. By interpreting and debating the histories presented in serial dramas, Syrians dispute the past and criticise the present.

## INTRODUCTION

Throughout the Middle East local and national identities are being constructed and contested through appropriations of transnational cultural forms, such as television. In contemporary Syria locally-produced television dramas aired during the fasting month of Ramadan will often evoke an imagined idea of Old Damascus. These programs play a pivotal role in ongoing debates over representations of local and national culture. Dramatic depictions of Old Damascus do not engender feelings of connectedness among the different social groups comprising Syrian society, as Anderson suggests the novel does [1991]. Rather, they exacerbate regional and sectarian tensions, provoking resentment and hostility rather than kinship and fraternity.

Given the locally-specific social and political context of these conflicts, the vast body of formalist, semiotic and sociological media criticism is of little use in exploring how Syrians engage with their own television productions. Much of this material examines the process of reading visual texts, with audience reactions invoked—if at all—to support general theories of agency and subjectivity [Mulvey 1975; Hall 1980; Modleski 1984; Fiske 1987; Morley 1992; Wilson 1993; Silverstone 1994]. The recent interest in globalization has exacerbated this trend towards abstraction [Lull 1995]. In eschewing detailed case studies, much of this material fails to link television convincingly to the very social and historical processes it

---

*CHRISTA SALAMANDRA* is a doctoral candidate at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Oxford. She is also book review editor of the *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford (JASO)*. Her thesis in progress examines public culture in Syria, based on field-work in Damascus, 1992–1994.

seeks to analyze. In addition, much of the ethnographic material on television centers on the family [Morley 1986; Lull 1988, 1990; Rogge 1989; Silverstone and Hirsch 1992; Silverstone and Morley 1990; Zoonen and Wieten 1994] or gender [Hobson 1982, 1989; Press 1989; Seiter *et al.* 1989; Livingstone 1994]. Several studies examine local reception of foreign, usually American, "soap operas" [Ang 1985; Katz and Liebes 1986; Liebes and Katz 1989; Miller 1992]. Only recently have anthropologists and the media studies specialists turned their attention towards the role locally-produced television programs play in social, ideological and political contests in specific contexts [Lull 1991; Abu-Lughod 1993, 1995; Mankekar 1993; Das 1995; Griffiths 1995; Lutgendorf 1995; Rofel 1995; Armbrust 1996]. These works explore the ways in which indigenous dramas and local responses to them serve as modes of social distinction. They illustrate the now commonplace observation that global cultural forms, such as television, are locally appropriated and transformed to serve culturally specific ends. In Damascus sub-national identities are being constructed and reconstructed through identification with or rejection of nostalgic representations of the city's past, such as those presented in Ramadan serial dramas.

#### RAMADAN TELEVISION

Ramadan is a season of remembering for Syrian Muslims, very much like Christmas in some American circles. Families gather, expatriates return, and the days of old are evoked around the *iftar*—"fast breaking"—table and on the television screen. On Ramadan evenings Damascenes exchange their suits and dresses for long, old-fashioned caftans and robes (*jalabiyah*-s and *'aba'ah*-s) and visit relatives and friends to watch together the season's nostalgic and folkloric television offerings. Most Damascus homes receive only two television channels: Channel One, which airs programs in Arabic, and Channel Two, which at other times of the year broadcasts foreign-language material.<sup>1</sup> During the fasting month, Arabic programming takes over much of Channel Two's air time.

Religious programming is restricted to the periods just before and after sunset. Some afternoons feature popular mufti Muhammad al-Buti's "Quranic Studies," followed by the call to prayer filmed at various mosques in Damascus. Ramadan early evening broadcasting in 1993 and 1994, however, included such nostalgic and folkloric offerings as "Intoxication with the Past" (*Min Nashwat al-Madi*), "Our Popular Memory" (*Dhakhiratuna al-Sha'abiyyah*) and "Ramadan Days" (*Ayyam Ramadaniyyah*), all featuring "customs and traditions" (*'adat wa taqalid*) from around the country. In addition, various "chat programs" feature Syrian celebrities sharing holiday memories. These programs reflect government taking advantage of the opportunities Ramadan presents for national culture construction. They form part of the ruling Ba'th Party's efforts to incorporate diverse groups under a rubric of Syrian, and beyond this Arab, nationalism.<sup>2</sup> Routine visits to the *souq* to buy spices are videotaped and framed as part of "our national heritage."

How closely Syrians watch these programs is difficult to ascertain. Many households, especially those fasting, will turn the television on around sunset, to hear the exact moment to break fast, and to keep hungry guests and lively

children occupied while food is heated. But most tend to treat as background noise the programs aired just before and after sunset, in distinct contrast to those which captivate viewers later in the evening. The later period that might be called "Ramadan prime time", approximately one hour after the beginning of *iftar*, is reserved for the year's most eagerly-anticipated local television production, the Ramadan dramatic series (*musalsal*).<sup>3</sup> Syria produces many low-budget serial dramas each year, often on contemporary urban issues, but showpiece productions, usually on historical themes, are always aired in Ramadan. Often a second locally-produced series is shown later in the evening, in a similarly desirable slot. Watching these series has become as much of part of Ramadan for the Damascenes as breaking fast with tamarind juice.

#### "DAMASCENE DAYS"

During the first half of Ramadan in 1993, a series entitled "Damascene Days" (*Ayyam Shamiyyah*) occupied the earlier prime-time slot. Produced by Syrian Arab Television with funding from Dubai, the series was said to have been inspired by Egypt's successful "Hilmiyyah Nights". While several television series have been set in Old Damascus, "Damascene Days" was the first to depict social life in the city in the late Ottoman period (1910). It is also said to have been the first such program without a strong plot, and with politics as a backdrop rather than central focus. "Damascene Days" attempted to portray daily life in an unnamed Old City quarter, concentrating on family relations, problems between neighbours, and local administration. Customs and traditions associated with rites of passage were carefully depicted. An epitome of local folklore, "Damascene Days" was shown in Cairo—arguably the present capital of Arab culture—as part of a program of cultural exchange between Egypt and Syria [*Funun* 18/7/1994], and won an award at the 1995 Arab Television Festival. The series was broadcast in numerous other Arab countries.

"Damascene Days" was clearly the media event of the year. As one reviewer put it, streets and shops emptied each night during the hour-long broadcast, and as they left their houses afterwards, people imitated the old-fashioned, drawn-out accent of the "Damascene Days" characters [Jabur 1993: 26]. Television sets were tuned to the series even in the presence of large numbers of guests. "Damascene Days" sparked numerous newspaper and magazine articles, interviews and editorials. During 'Id al-Fitr, the holiday which closes the fasting month, Syrian Television aired "An Evening with the 'Damascene Days' Family", an hour-long discussion program filmed in an Old Damascene house, during which all those involved in the production, and various other media figures, were asked the same question: What is the secret of the public's love for "Damascene Days"? The series was the subject of endless discussion at parties, in buses and shared taxis, in hairdressers and shops, in restaurants and cafés.

The central plot involves an impoverished widow and her *hommous*-seller son who had been forced ten years earlier to mortgage half their house to the quarter's café owner. Son Mahmoud is unable to pay off the mortgage, so the café owner now wants to rent the rooms to his waiter. Fearful of a "stranger" moving

in, and hoping to raise his status and attract a suitable wife, Mahmoud decides to ask the quarter's wealthiest merchant, Abu 'Abduh, for a loan. Abu 'Abduh agrees, but first asks for some type of collateral. Mahmoud offers his shop. Abu 'Abduh asks for something "more valuable than a hundred houses or shops": a clipping from Mahmoud's moustache. At first Mahmoud refuses vehemently, for surrendering moustache hair is tantamount to risking his masculinity (*rajuliyah*). After several agonizing days Mahmoud agrees to Abu 'Abduh's terms. Abu 'Abduh wraps the clippings in a handkerchief and stores them in a locked wooden box to which Umm 'Abduh, his elder wife, has the only key. Naziha, Abu 'Abduh's younger wife, steals the key and hides the handkerchief in an attempt to discredit Umm 'Abduh. Relations between the co-wives are predictably sour: Naziha brags of Abu 'Abduh's attentions to her, while Umm 'Abduh taunts Naziha about her childlessness.

Mahmoud works diligently and is able to repay the loan quickly, but Abu 'Abduh cannot produce the moustache hairs. Mahmoud is furious; his reputation remains sullied as long as the hairs are missing. Abu 'Abduh tries to substitute a lock from Umm 'Abduh's braid, but his deception is discovered, and this attempt to pass off "women's hair" as Mahmoud's escalates the scandal. Umm Mahmoud tries to convince her son that he is better off with the money—15 Ottoman gold lira—than the moustache hair, but material resources will not restore his standing. Indeed, Mahmoud's debasement is the talk of the quarter. Abu Daher the quilt-maker refuses to engage his daughter to Mahmoud, as the legacy of lost honor will disgrace generations of the latter's progeny. Enraged and distraught, Mahmoud tries to storm Abu 'Abduh's house to look for the missing bristles; a crowd rushes from the café to restrain him. The matter is taken before the quarter's council of notables (*al-qadawat*) and the *za'im*, locally-recognized leader of the quarter, declares any slur on Mahmoud's honor to be one on his own, thus restoring Mahmoud's reputation. Mahmoud marries Abu Daher's daughter and prospers. Eventually the moustache hairs are recovered, and a disgraced Naziha is nearly returned to her natal family. In the end it is Umm 'Abduh who dissuades Abu 'Abduh from divorcing Naziha; Umm 'Abduh has grown fond of her co-wife who, she argues, has suffered enough for her deed.

#### IT'S A WONDERFUL (FANTASIZED) LIFE

Around this story a rich tapestry of social life, of bygone ways, is woven. Abu Daher the quilter teaches his apprentices ethics, molding character as well as skill. Women exchange gossip through windows in adjoining walls, men in the barber shop and café. The barber cuts hair and also practices medicine, treating abscesses with garlic and lemon, amusing his customers with jokes and stories. The midwife "tests" a potential wife and daughter-in-law, kissing her to sniff her body and checking her housekeeping skills. The *qabaday*—strongman—a fugitive from the quarter of Shagur, brandishes his dagger to defend a humiliated Mahmoud, but also cries for the mother he left behind. Men gather in the café each Thursday night to hear the storyteller (*hakawati*) recount heroic tales, while women sing and dance in each other's homes. The series' concerns are intensely

personal and familial, its characters charmingly naive. The quarter residents resemble an extended, mostly happy family, who help each other financially and calm each other's anxieties. Disputes are settled with affection. Notables treat their social inferiors with paternalistic concern.

Women visit each other frequently, but before leaving their houses cover their long dresses with black skirts and drape black shawls over their upper bodies and faces. In only one scene does a woman speak to a man not her relative, and here Mahmoud turns his head away to address the fully-cloaked midwife. Women are meant to be invisible, or at least anonymous in public places. In a scene which confounded contemporary Damascus dwellers, Abu 'Abduh scolds his young son for walking in on a group of visiting men in the merchant's reception room; now when fully-wrapped mother and son walk together in the quarter, the men will know whose wife she is. Female chastity, a central component of male honor, is carefully guarded: when Turkish soldiers rape the egg-seller's daughter, the latter takes the problem to the *za'im*. His solution safeguards honor, but not at the expense of the girl's future, for he marries her to one of his sons and instructs the egg-seller to keep the attack a secret. This son was meant to divorce the girl shortly afterwards, the marriage serving only to legitimize both her loss of virginity and any offspring resulting from the rape. Instead the boy falls in love with her and keeps her.

"Damascene Days" is an attempted reconstruction of this fantasized world of innocence and wholesomeness. Characters appear guileless. Some "Damascene Days" fans argue that people really were this way. "Damascene Days" screenwriter Akram Shareem describes the imagined Damascene of 1910: "[A man of that time] didn't have self-interest (*ihitimam*), he had love. He loved his house, he loved his children... As a human being he was simple, his way of thinking simple, his way of life (*tabiyy'at hayat*) simple, uncomplicated, pure (*naqi*)" [interviewed by the author, 14 April 1994]. These themes of simplicity and purity, in contrast to the complexity and corruption of contemporary life, emerge and re-emerge in discussions of "Damascene Days". The series' rosy nostalgia was widely read as criticism of the present. In an interview on "An Evening with the 'Damascene Days' Family" actor Rashid 'Asaf gives his account of the series' success:

The work depicts a moment in our people's history, a pure moment in the face of life's pressures, a moment that represents our reaction against divisiveness, and our refusal to accept these pressures. It reflects our search for a better society, a pure society based on trust and belief. This work really dealt with all this, and the way people responded to it shows that this is what they long for [interview on "An Evening with the 'Damascene Days' Family"].

"Damascene Days" constructs a static, timeless era of sweetness and naïveté. Massey notes this tendency to associate strong notions of place with static concepts of tradition, essentialist views of the past, and bounded notions of culture, despite evidence of flux, social, economic and political transformation, and interrelationships and interdependencies among places [1994]. The past serves as a "golden age" susceptible to generalizations and simplifications untenable in treatments of the present. A desire for a "simple," politically stable setting to

construct a timeless account of social life, a portrait of pristine "customs and traditions," is what attracted Shareem to 1910:

I knew there was an old custom of using moustache hair as collateral, and I wrote it into a story, but then the problem was finding a time period. The Teens and Twenties were inappropriate; there was too much going on politically, like *saferberlik* [mass conscription into the Ottoman army] and World War I. The Thirties was the French Mandate period. The Forties wouldn't work; it was inappropriate because it was a time of consciousness generally: political, economic, educational and health consciousness. This consciousness develops in Part II. In Part I we had a quarter with a locked gate, and a community (*mujtama'*) within it. So I went back to 1910 [interviewed by the author, 14 April 1994].

Most Damascene viewers saw in "Damascene Days" an authenticity in keeping with their own sense of local identity. For Dr. Nadia Khost, a writer and prominent proponent for the Old City, the series recreated the "magical atmosphere of the Damascene quarter" [interviewed by the author, 17 February 1996]. A prominent lawyer and media figure, Najat Qassab Hasan, author of the widely-read *Damascene Talk (Hadith Dimashqi)* and well-known Old Damascus advocate, found the series "beautiful, the best such program; it stopped time" [interviewed by the author, 3 July 1993]. Colette Khoury, a Damascene author, People's Assembly Member, and unofficial representative of Christian Damascus, thought the series "elegant and refined" [interviewed by the author, 10 February 1996].

Some saw flattering continuities; Muhammad Bashar Al-Jiban, a Damascene civil engineer and Director of the Committee for the Preservation of the Old City of Damascus (*al-Lajnah li-Himayah Madinat Dimashq al-Qadimah*), pointed out that the series dealt with honor, a concept which "still informs our customs and traditions" [interviewed by the author, 30 April 1994]. Fawaz Haddad, the author of two novels set in Old Damascus, lauded "Damascene Days" for "its efforts to paint a positive picture of Damascus from beginning to end" [interviewed by the author, 12 September 1994]. Positive portrayals of the local past seem to be what Damascene audiences value most highly.<sup>4</sup> As the Damascene actor Rafiq Sbei'i, the *za'im* or *zkurty* of "Damascene Days," put it:

Every human being is protective of his home environment, and wants it to be shown in the best light...; in my opinion, art is a beautification (*tajmil*) of reality, and a presentation of that reality in as pleasant a picture as possible. This is the fundamental task (*mahammah*) of the artist, so that it will not be said of us that we "air our dirty laundry in public" and paint ourselves as scoundrels [Mansour 1993: 62].

"Damascene Days'" huge success is in part attributable to its actors, many of whom, like Sbei'i, are known for folkloric roles. One reviewer described Sbei'i as "a noble Damascene tree, blooming every season because he drinks from roots deeply planted in authentic ground" [al-Kisan 1993: 20]. Sbei'i's "Abu Siyah" was the central character of the first drama series set in Old Damascus, "*Hamam al-Hanah*" of 1968. In 1993 Sbei'i could still be seen as "Abu Siyah," on variety shows singing old songs, and in an advertisement for government investment bonds. The *za'im* was the favorite "Damascene Days" character, a success which Sbei'i attributes to his experience as a Damascene: "I'm a son of this Damascene milieu (*bi'ah*), grew up in it, and lived this folk life (*hayat sha'biyyah*) in all its

minute details. This I was able to reflect in an authentic portrait (*surah sadiqah*)" [al-Kisan 1993: 21].

Here is where the elaborate concerns of cultural criticism and film studies seem so distant from ethnographic detail. Membership in imagined communities determines commentary. Praise for "Damascene Days" invariably centered on the accuracy of language, decor and social customs. The series was evaluated less for its production or entertainment value than for the historical realism. Some Damascenes qualified their generally enthusiastic responses with reservations about historical mistakes or misrepresentations. When I asked what they thought of "Damascene Days" generally, Damascenes often answered with an estimate of how much of the series they thought was true-to-life: a Damascene 'Adel Sa'ady claimed it was "80 percent accurate"; while Muhammad Bashar al-Jiban of the Committee for the Preservation of the Old City of Damascus, rated it as "only 40 percent realistic, I can even say a little less" [interviewed by the author on 7 September 1994 and 30 April 1994 respectively]. The program's nostalgic depiction of the past served not as mere pleasurable diversion, but as historical document. For Damascenes and non-Damascenes alike, "Damascene Days" constituted an evaluation of Damascene culture and its relationship to the Syrian state.

## AUTHENTICITY

Damascenes subject media representations of their golden age to an exacting set of standards. After lauding overall quality of "Damascene Days", many would point out what they thought it got wrong. For Nasr al-Din al-Bahra, a Damascene journalist, former People's Assembly member, and author of a nostalgic book on the Old City, the makers of the series:

...tried to, and achieved, a great deal of realism. Some of the characters were very realistic, like the barber and the quilt-maker. But there was exaggeration (*mubalaghah*), as in the story of the moustache, and in the treatment of the merchant and his two wives. The two wives would not have sat together with their husband, as they do in the series. Also, the [merchant's] wife beating is exaggerated. It happened, but not everyone did it. The wife calling her husband "*sidi*" (my lord) was rare. Most women called their husbands "cousin" (*ibn 'ammi*). The series was not authoritative, but it was beautiful folklore [interviewed by the author, 28 July 1993].

Burhan Qassab-Hasan, a brother of Najat and the President of the Friends of Damascus, an organization set up to protect and celebrate the Old City, also pointed to exaggeration:

The way they talk; they shout. It wasn't like this. For example, my father would talk to me with respect; he would use the plural. You would think they were at Oxford with you; they were known to be very gentle, very soft. They didn't have this harsh accent. But when they show this, everyone laughs. It's like when in films you always hear actors speaking in Cockney accents, it isn't representative [interviewed by the author, 7 March 1996].

Exaggeration and inaccurate depictions of gender relations were the most frequently-cited points of contention among Damascenes. Many took issue with

the wealthy merchant's heavy-handed and violent treatment of his wives. Dr. Nadia Khost argues:

As a woman I object to the depiction of women [in the series]. The woman in the Damascene quarter had her rightful position. True, she was covered (*muhajjabah*), but she was queen and mistress of her house; she wasn't a man's slave. She would flatter a man (*tulatifuhu*). Damascene women were noted for flattering men;...this is a skill, letting the man think he was making all the decisions, when in fact she's the one deciding. This was not made clear in the series, where women of that time are portrayed as they are in the contemporary imagination (*al-dhihn al-mu'asir*): weak, backward, and simple-minded [interviewed by the author, 17 February 1996].

Many Damascenes pointed to Shareem's non-Damascene identity as the reason for what they see as misrepresentations. "He's an old friend," said one, "but he's not Damascene; he's Palestinian." Privileging direct personal experience over research, Damascenes argued Shareem has not lived in Old Damascus, did not grow up there. The suggestion is that non-Damascenes do not have the right to represent Damascus, however meticulous they are with facts and however positive their representations. According to Siham Tergeman, author of the widely-read memoir, *Oh Wealth of Damascus (Ya Mal al-Sham)*:<sup>5</sup>

All these writers [of television series] are non-Damascene. The writer of "Damascene Days" is Palestinian. He was asked, "How do you know about these things, proverbs, weddings, women? Women in the period you're talking about, the 40's [*sic*] weren't like that..." He answered, "I knocked on doors and asked for material." This isn't sound; it's weak...You have to *know* Damascus. All of this [*Oh Wealth of Damascus*] is from family, my memory. I lived the life of Damascus. Don't pay any attention to television series; they're all commercial. You'll only find mistakes [interviewed by the author, 18 February 1996].

Shareem's decision to set the story in 1910, just beyond the cusp of living memory, may have been in part an effort to avert such criticism. I asked him about claims of historical errors, citing complaints about "Damascene Days" wives addressing their husbands as "*sidi*," (my lord). For many Damascenes this term suggested an inaccurate and unacceptable degree of deference on the part of wives. Shareem argued that his critics' information was all from the 1930's. In a published interview Shareem claimed that the series depicted negative and positive aspects of the period equally, and that wife beating was in fact much more widespread than the series indicated. He pointed to the market stalls which used to specialize in the reed canes (*falaka-s*) which formed a standard part of Damascene household furnishings. "We did not depict in 1910 what would make [the contemporary viewer] feel that our own era is the backward one!" [Shareem 1993: 18]. He and director Bassam Malla anticipated a rough time from the local public. According to Malla:

We feared our audience; we knew they would take us to task for any mistakes. This made our work very hard. We really faced a challenge...We worked from a position of respect for and fear of our audience...We considered them smarter than we are; we're not at all smarter than they are. This is one of the most important reasons for the series' success [interviewed on "An Evening with the 'Damascene Days' Family"].

It was such fear that prompted Shareem to consult over forty sources, including social history books, local historians, and traditional artisans [Shareem 1993: 18]. Some commentators claim to detect the sources Shareem used. Nasr al-Din al-Bahra, for instance, claims that Shareem bases several characters and stories in the series on Ahmed Hilmi al-Alaf's seminal book, *Damascus at the Rise of the Twentieth Century (Dimashq fi Mutla'a al Qarn al-'Ashreen)*. Another prominent Old City activist, author of a well-known Old Damascus memoir, directly accused Shareem of plagiarism:

My book was taken, the title changed, and a few changes made. They took songs, customs and traditions, just lifted them from my book without citing it. The writer stole my book. They don't know academic etiquette; they don't know that if you want to take something from a book, you must give the reference...Don't even mention "Damascene Days" to me, it really upsets me.

#### PARADISE LOST

The old quarter of "Damascene Days" is a world turned in upon itself; the inward-looking closeness of the Damascene house mirrors the self-contained and seemingly self-sufficient quarter whose occupants rarely leave its walls. Yet Damascene quarters in the early part of this century were in fact largely residential, housing only small shops and light craft production. Most male inhabitants worked in the commercial district [Khoury 1984: 509]. By focusing on those professionals who would have spent their days within the quarter—such as the barber, the egg-seller, the *hoummos* seller, the café owner, the quilt-maker, the night watchman—"Damascene Days" suggests an exaggeratedly isolated social unit. No characters from outside the quarter—save the fugitive *qabaday* and patrolling Turkish soldiers—are introduced, even though waves of migrants have always moved into and through the Old City. Few references are made to any community larger than the quarter, despite the emergence of Arab nationalist ideology at about this time [Khoury 1987: 67]. Also, while many old quarters of the period in fact housed members of similar occupations, the residents of the "Damascene Days" quarter all practice different professions. Muslim quarters tended to be economically homogeneous, which is not at all true of that in "Damascene Days" with its mix of rich and poor [Khoury 1984: 512]. The Old Damascus of "Damascene Days" is a simplification, a distillation of historical material into a handful of "traditional" prototypical people and places.

The series' set design reinforces this cozy sense of seclusion. True, the old-style Damascene house, like most Arab architecture, is built around a courtyard, and thus has a feeling of inwardness and enclosure, but it also has an upper level open to the sky, from which the courtyards of neighboring houses can be seen. Life in such a house is in many ways less private and more social than it is in a modern flat. By using only ground-floor sets, the makers of "Damascene Days" overstate the closeness of life. Compounding this impression is the dim studio lighting, not at all suggestive of the bright Mediterranean sunshine which makes its way into the narrowest alleys of the real Old Damascus.

"Damascene Days" constructs a time when virtues of chivalry (*furusiiyyah*), generosity (*nakhwah*) and masculine honor (*muru'ah*) and masculinity (*rajuliyyah*) mattered more than money, as so they might if everyone knew his neighbor and no wider world intruded. The criticism of contemporary values need never be made explicit. Nowadays material wealth is rapidly becoming the most important measure of status in Syria, and Damascenes blame this trend on a regime they see as dominated by peasants, largely of the 'Alawi sect of Islam.<sup>6</sup> Until the Ba'th Party takeover in 1963, a number of elite "notable" families with long ties to the city controlled social, economic and political life in Damascus. The nationalizations of the mid-1960s undermined the notables' economic dominance. In addition, those non-Damascene, often peasants, who made fortunes in the Gulf during the oil boom of the 1970s often returned not to their villages but to Damascus, and formed part of a *nouveau riche* class with strong links to the regime. This new ruling elite is regionally and religiously mixed; yet popular perceptions link political and economic power to sectarian affiliations.<sup>7</sup> For Damascenes, the new elites are barbarians from the countryside who destroyed the older, Damascene-controlled forms of commerce with socialist policies, yet have themselves made fortunes licensing legal trade and controlling smuggling.<sup>8</sup> Damascenes, particularly the intellectuals among them who claim to trace their roots to the city's old notable families but whose fortunes, once considered significant, have long been dwarfed by those of the newly rich, argue that their older, nobler forms of social relations and modes of distinction are being replaced with the worship of money. They yearn for the days when moustache hairs weighed more than gold.

"Damascene Days'" rosy nostalgia appears to contradict what many Damascenes see as the regime's desire to discredit them, to downplay the richness of their local identity. Many Damascenes believe that because the former ruling class was largely Damascene, the current government views the contemporary Damascenes as a potential threat. Some even speak of government conspiracies to break Damascene power by tearing down parts of the Old City. Given this perception, questions arose as to why the regime would allow such a celebration of Damascus and Damascene-ness to be aired in the most coveted time slot of the broadcast year. Although many Syrian television series are now produced by private production companies, television stations remain under strict government control. Censorship in Syria is so rigorous that in some cases films the government itself has funded have been banned from distribution. Thus when a series is aired, Syrians voice theories about messages they think the government might be trying to relay. What then was this regime, long considered to be anti-Damascene, attempting to convey in an ode to Old Damascus? A Damascene filmmaker saw "Damascene Days" as "a positive depiction of a dictatorship, a community united under a strong leader, the *za'im*." A Damascene director argued that it was part of the regime's general effort to contain Damascene identity, to keep it from growing into a subversive counter-culture. When I asked another Damascene director how preparations for the long-anticipated "Damascene Days, Part II," were proceeding, he said the regime would never permit a sequel:

"Damascene Days" slipped through the door, and they were faced with the overwhelming popularity of the series, so they just rode the wave. They started talking about how

wonderful Damascus was, and how much they love Damascus. Do they really love Damascus? Of course not! If they love Damascus so much, then why did they make so many revolutions against the Damascene people?

Likewise, the author of a widely-read Old Damascus memoir said she has refused offers from a Damascene television director to dramatise her book, because the regime would never allow another "Damascene Days".

Indeed, the series' flattering image of Damascus and the Damascenes proved contentious. The most vociferous of criticisms came not from the Damascenes themselves, but from those groups sometimes referred to as the "minorities" (*al-aqalliat*), or "people from the countryside" (*ahl al-rif*), even though the outsider category may include non-Damascene Sunni Muslims and those from other Syrian cities. Non-Damascenes argued that "Damascene Days" sanitized and romanticized life in the Old City, glossing over or collapsing social and economic differences. For instance, both merchant and *hoummos* seller have mother-of-pearl inlaid furniture, and all characters are positively drawn, save the brutal but buffoonish Turkish soldiers. Yet many Damascenes who remember life in the Old City of the thirties and forties contend that class differences were indeed less accentuated then than they are now. Syrians of non-Damascene origin living in Damascus object more generally to the glowing depiction of life in Old Damascus. A Sunni journalist from the city of Hama asked why I considered "Damascene Days" part of my research, as there were "more important", more realistic dramas in which to find the "authentic Damascene quarter", and "Damascene ways of thinking" (*tabi'at al-tafkir dimashqi*). He offered as an example "Smile of Sadness" (*Basmat al-Husn*), a largely ignored series in which the main character, an oppressed and stymied young woman, hangs herself from a lemon tree in the courtyard of her house.

Critics see "Damascene Days" as part of a wider movement by Damascenes to glorify themselves and their past. Many non-Damascenes thus would agree with Clifford's view of authenticity as a tactic, an attempt to assert cultural and social dominance [Clifford 1988: 11–12]. They saw in "Damascene Days" (quite rightly, according to some Damascenes) the suggestion that life in the city was better then—nobler, less corrupt—than it is now, under a non-Damascene, non-urban regime. They link the series to complaints from Damascenes about the deterioration of the city brought on by mass migration from the countryside, and particularly from the largely 'Alawi coastal region (the *sahel*) over the past thirty-five years of Ba'th Party rule. According to an 'Alawi-born doctor, a long-term Damascus resident:

It's part of a trend; they want to show themselves as more authentic, and they look down on the minorities. They've failed in so many ways, in politics, in social structure—the family has disintegrated—so they produce "Damascene Days" to prove how wonderful they were in the past. And then there is the association of all Damascus with Ramadan. But why not with Christmas? Do they ever talk about traditions in Bab Touma? When you say "Damascene Days" it really means "Ramadan days." It's all about one sect. They try to prove the authenticity of Damascus, but ignore its diversity.

An 'Alawi journalist remarked:

I liked the story to an extent, but not the work as a whole. It's a clear expression of our identity crisis. The problem is how to think about the past in the present... It's not

important to produce a series about how a Damascene got married in the nineteenth century... These series reflect patterns of consumption, not culture. They reflect a crisis of the past, present and future. Isn't there anything positive in the present to base a series on? You can go to any quarter of Old Damascus now, find the same sorts of characters, and make a wonderful series, but a satirical one. They portray themselves as wonderful, but half of them were traitors; historically, half of Damascus were traitors, during the days of the French, and those of the Turks and Mamluks.

## OTHER VERSIONS

In Ramadan 1994 Old Damascus again occupied Syrian Television's post-*iftar* slot, in the series "Abu Kamel, Part II." Set in an Old City quarter during the last days of the French Mandate—the early 1940s—this unsuccessful sequel to the popular "Abu Kamel" broadcast several years earlier firmly contradicted any notion that the regime had become partial to, or was attempting to appease, its Damascene faction. The series was criticized in many circles; viewers found it drawn-out, outlandish and dull. Many stopped tuning in long before the last of its thirty episodes was aired, making it difficult to find anyone to help me follow the twists and turns of the series' intricate plot. "Abu Kamel, Part II" failed to live up to expectations heightened by the success of the first "Abu Kamel II," and failed to take full advantage of its relatively generous budget and thirty hours of prime air-time [Ayadah 1994: 12]. Non-Damascene audiences were disappointed and indifferent; Damascene viewers were outraged. "Abu Kamel II" they argued was "all imaginary" and "all lies." Unlike "Damascene Days", which presented Old City dwellers galvanized to help one another and to defend themselves against the Turks, "Abu Kamel II" depicted Damascenes as traitors who collaborated with the French, informed on each other, and fought among themselves. Most of the series' dialogue consisted of hysterical arguing. Once again, Damascenes objected to depictions of women. Scenes of a young woman character committed to an insane asylum were considered offensive and untrue. Many found the female lead's freedom of movement unbelievable. According to a Damascene translator:

At this time you didn't have women living alone, or going outside without their heads covered, or letting men enter their houses like that. You couldn't just bring men into your house like that, even if you were at the center of a revolution... at the end, she said to that man, "we can be lovers, we can marry." Nobody can, it's unheard of in Damascus, even now, so how could it have happened then?

The screenwriter of "Abu Kamel", Dr. Fu'ad Sharbaji, "failed the history test" as 'Adel Abu Shanab, author of the nostalgic memoir *Damascus in the Days of Old (Dimashq Ayyam Zaman)* put it. Sharbaji placed people and events in the wrong times and places, he argued. Abu Shanab and others claimed the French were portrayed too harshly in the series, since in the early 1940s French involvement in the everyday affairs of Old City dwellers was minimal. Underfunded and overburdened with wartime concerns, Mandate forces did not go about searching houses and beating old men, as they do in the series [Abu Shanab 1994: 23]. The issue of Damascene collaboration with the French upset many viewers. A prominent Old City activist, who himself hails from another city in Syria, argued:

It's completely false, because when you look at the social life of the Old City of Damascus, you'll find they rebelled against the French Mandate authorities. People were very honest in Damascus, they didn't have bad feelings towards each other, and they did not behave badly in the way that those in "Abu Kamel" do. Lying, cheating, robbery, all these things are not true. Relations between families and neighbors in the same quarter were so homogeneous and harmonious, people loved each other and protected each other, and they interacted in a very respectful way. The writer of the screenplay wrote very badly. I think he didn't ask any expert for advice, nor did he contact any elderly people who lived in Damascus in the thirties, because many elderly thought "this is awful, this is not true, we didn't have this kind of behavior in the Old City in the thirties."

Some Damascenes admitted that collaboration did take place, but not to the extent or in the way the series suggested:

The relationship between the French and the people of the country, and relationships among merchants weren't like that;... it did happen that people benefitted from circumstances, but not in this atmosphere, not in this way. The big families, the leading merchants worked with the French. It's true; they did work with the French, but within a nationalist atmosphere (*dimn jaww watani*). They didn't work with the French against the people of their country, but because they were the source of power in everyday affairs. They worked with the French for the community, for the sake of the quarter, as mediators for the people of the quarter, not for personal gain.

Non-Damascene-ness re-emerged as a problem; but this time accusations of inexperience of the city were aimed not at director 'Ala al-Din Kawkash, who was born and raised in an Old Damascene quarter, or at screenwriter Fu'ad Sharbaji, a fellow Damascene, but at the lead actor Asad Fida, an 'Alawi from the coastal region. According to a young translator, "'Abu Kamel' [Fida] is not a Damascene; you can't give this role to someone who's not Damascene. He wasn't very good with the accent, he wasn't good with the way of speaking." Despite their frequent protests about the base commercialism of television, and objections to my use of television material as an object of study, Syrian intellectuals and politicians do watch and take seriously the representations of the past shown in drama series, especially those shown during Ramadan, which they know are widely followed. The foremost haunt of the local intelligentsia, the Cham Palace Hotel's "Café Brésil," wheels out a set for the month, for their painter and writer patrons who claim otherwise never to watch television. The Damascene intellectuals came out in full force to condemn "Abu Kamel," on television and in print. Anthropologists tend to look to so-called subversive cultural forms, such as books and cassette tapes, for expressions of cultural resistance; yet here is a case where sensitive issues such as formerly repressed local identities are being discussed and debated in state-controlled media. Najat Qassab Hasan and Colette Khoury appeared on the program "Television Magazine" to denounce "Abu Kamel" as an attempt to belittle the Damascenes. They warned the producers against any idea of a third part, which Qassab Hasan claimed would be scandalous [20 March 1994]. The Syrian television establishment was humbled. A letter from the editor published in the arts magazine *Funun* admitted:

Never before, in the entire history of Syrian Arab Television, has there been anything like the consensus on the rejection of a series—a condemnation of what was said in it, and a

disapproval of what transpired in it—as occurred with part two of the series “Abu Kamel,” with agreement among critics, writers, viewers and media figures. Declarations of rejection and condemnation were not restricted to people’s living rooms during the month of Ramadan, but were also found on the pages of all the newspapers, and on radio and television programs [al-Kisan 1994: 2].

In contrast, a series broadcast in the second Ramadan time slot, entitled “The End of a Brave Man” (*Nihayat Rajul Shuja'*), showed the people of Baniyas, a coastal city, struggling together against French forces. The religious affiliation of characters was never mentioned, but opening scenes took place in a village thought to be 'Alawi. Beautifully filmed with an infectious musical score, “The End of a Brave Man” was the work of a private production company owned by the son of vice-president 'Abdul Halim Khaddam—a Sunni Muslim from Baniyas. Its link to the regime was obvious. Based on a novel by the acclaimed Syrian Christian author Hanna Minna, “The End of a Brave Man” won high praise in many circles for its tight plot and high production value, but also for its depiction of a valiant and noble past in which everyone was unified against French occupation. As an 'Alawi university professor pointed out, this is an inversion of historical fact, as the 'Alawis are well-known for having collaborated with all foreign powers, from the Crusaders onwards.

Compounding the insult to the Damascenes was the fact that another series set in Old Damascus had vied for, and lost, the Ramadan prime time slot to “Abu Kamel, Part II.” This was the above-mentioned dramatization of the highly-regarded Damascene author Ulfat al-Idlibi’s novel *Damascus, Oh Smile of Sadness* (*Dimashq Ya Basmal al-Husn*).<sup>10</sup> Like much of the literature written by Syrian women, this work involves a self-sacrificing female central character whose ambitions are squelched by a dominating patriarch.<sup>11</sup> The book was hailed for rendering the rhythms of local idiom into classical Arabic, and for its loving descriptions of social life in the Old Damascus of the 1940s. The series, whose title was shortened to “Smile of Sadness” (*Basmal al-Husn*), was aired shortly before Ramadan, in early 1994, and not widely viewed. Those Damascenes who saw it were disappointed with its treatment of a novel they hold dear. Again, a non-Damascene director was castigated for daring to depict Damascus on the small screen. According to a Damascene television director:

It was very bad. I know the director, Lutfi Lutfi. He has no taste, he’s not from Damascus, and he knows nothing about Damascus. It was a wonderful book, but it should never have been made into a series, because all the events surround a young woman’s suicide. The screenwriter is a dirty, dirty man who now lives in Cairo.

## CONCLUSION

Television dramas like those shown during Syrian Arab Television’s Ramadan prime time provide a rich example of the local production and consumption of mass media. Much globalist discourse fails to examine specific ethnographic contexts, implying, often unintentionally, that transnational cultural forms operate similarly everywhere. The indigenization of television and other global cultural media is in fact producing prolific diversity; yet as Appadurai [1990: 5–6] and

Abu-Lughod [1993: 510] point out, this in turn creates and reinforces local hegemonomies, as dominant groups control access to modes of representation. As Appadurai puts it, "one man's imagined community is another man's political prison" [1990: 6]. Ba'th Party censors may have hoped "Damascene Days'" glowing portrait of an honorable and heroic past would incite feelings of national pride in all Syrian citizens. The structure of the Syrian state encourages such over-interpretation among Syrians and non-Syrians alike.<sup>12</sup> More likely, the series was simply allowed to "slip through the door." Its broadcast intensified centrifugal tendencies instead of promoting national unity. As Verdery notes, literature on transnational culture often takes the nation for granted [1994]. The Syrian case reminds us not to assume that the presence of a state implies a strong sense of nationhood.

In contemporary Syria, the battle continues over which group, whose history, dominates the small screen, arguably the most accessible and influential of the media. Syrian television dramas and the debates they provoke are not mere celebrations of difference. At issue in these debates over televisual representations of the past is the very question of who rules, or who ought to rule, in the present.

## NOTES

1. This was very much true in 1993, but by the end of the following year middle-class households were gaining access to satellite dishes.
2. For a discussion of Ba'thist use of folklore in the socialization of Syrian youth, see Early [1995].
3. The term *musalsal* (plural *musalsalat*) is sometimes translated as "soap opera." Yet *musalsalat* are closer to the short dramatic mini-series like "Roots" or "North and South" than they are to the long running daytime dramas of American television. The word "*musalsal*" literally means "chained" or "continuous." I have rendered it as "series." For material on Egyptian *musalsalat*, see Armbrust [1996] and Abu-Lughod [1993, 1995].
4. This concern with positive representation is not limited to Damascenes. Members of Syria's Druze population were angered over a recent Syrian film's "negative" depiction of a Druze woman leaving her husband for another man. This film, "*al-Lajat*", won second prize at the Damascus International Film Festival of 1995. Yet it was not shown outside the festival because Druze sheikhs threatened to attack any cinema that dared run it. In addition, some Aleppines objected to negative aspects of "The Silk Bazaar" (*Khan al-Harir*), a 1996 Ramadan television series set in Aleppo, considered by many to be Syria's finest television production to date. The director of another 1996 Ramadan drama, "Brothers of the Earth" (*Ukhwat al-Turab*), was physically attacked while filming the series in Suweida', southern Syria, by local people who suspected he would portray their region in an unflattering light.
5. An abridged version of *Oh Wealth of Damascus* has recently been published in English as *Daughter of Damascus*, translated by Andrea Rugh. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994.
6. I use the term "Damascene" to refer to those who consider themselves to have roots in Damascus, to be "Shami," from the local term for Damascus, "al-Sham."
7. For more on class, sectarian and regional divisions in Syria, see Van Dusen 1972, 1975; Batatu 1978, 1981; Longuenesse 1979, 1885; Drysdale 1981; Picard 1980; Hinnebusch 1989, 1990, 1993; Perthes 1991, 1995; Van Dam 1995 (1979).

8. The view that the Damascene elite has been displaced is far from undisputed. Non-Damascenes maintain that it is the "merchant princes of Damascus," as an 'Alawi university professor put it, who still govern much commercial enterprise. They often complain of Damascene elitism and exclusivity. 'Alawis in particular see themselves as a historically oppressed minority, and point out that while a particular group of their co-religionists form the core of political power, this has not benefited their sect as a whole.
9. St. Thomas' Gate, a Christian quarter of Damascus.
10. This novel has been published in English as *Sabriya: Damascus Bitter Sweet*, trans. Peter Clark. London: Quartet, 1995.
11. For an analysis of self-sacrifice in the work of Syrian woman writers, see the dissertation in progress by Mary Tahan, Department of Asian and Middle East Studies, University of Pennsylvania.
12. Questions about government intentions dominated the discussion of my "Damascene Days" presentation at a recent conference, "Anthropology and Television, Anthropology and Television," at the University of Kent (a section of the 1996 Ethnographic Film Festival).

## REFERENCES

Abu-Lughod, Lila

1993 Finding a Place for Islam: Egyptian Television Serials and the National Interest. *Public Culture*, 5(3): 493–513.

1995 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.

Abu Shanab, 'Adel

1991 *Damascus in the Days of Old (Dimashq Ayyam Zaman)*. Damascus: al-Sham lil-Dirasat wa Nashr.

1994 Abu Kamel Hides His Head: The Writer Creates Confusion, and Fails a History Test. *Funun*, 23 March: 24–25.

Alaf, Ahmad Hilmi al-

1976 *Damascus at the Rise of the Twentieth Century*. Damascus: Dar Dimashq.

Anderson, Benedict

1991 *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.

Ang, Ien

1985 *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*. London: Methuen.

Appadurai, Arjun

1990 Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy. *Public Culture*, 2(2): 1–24.

Armbrust, Walter Tice

1996 *Mass Culture and Modernity in Egypt*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

'Ayadah, Lou'i

1994 Notes on the Local Series "Abu Kamel" in its Second Part. *Funun*, 18 April: 12.

Batatu, Hanna

1978 *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

1981 Some Observations on the Social Roots of Syria's Ruling Military Group and the Causes for its Dominance. *Middle East Journal*, 35(3): 331–344.

- Clifford, James  
 1988 *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Das, Veena  
 1995 On Soap Opera: What Kind of Object is it? In *Worlds Apart: Modernity through the Prism of the Local*. Daniel Miller, ed. Pp. 169–189. London: Routledge.
- Drysdale, Alasdair  
 1981 The Syrian Political Elite: A Spacial and Social Analysis. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 17(1): 3–30.
- Early, Evelyn  
 1995 Poetry and Pageants: Growing up in the Syrian Vanguard. In *Children in the Muslim Middle East*. Elizabeth Warnock Fernea, ed. Pp. 410–419. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Fiske, John  
 1987 *Television Culture*. London: Methuen.
- Griffiths, Alison  
 1995 National and Cultural Identity in a Welsh-Language Soap Opera. In *To Be Continued... Soap Operas Around the World*. Robert C. Allen, ed. Pp. 81–97. London: Routledge.
- Hall, Stuart  
 1980 Encoding/Decoding. In *Culture, Media, Language*. Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe and Paul Willis, eds. Pp. 128–138. London: Hutchinson.
- Hinnebusch, Raymond A.  
 1989 *Peasant and Bureaucracy in Ba'thist Syria: The Political Economy of Rural Development*. Boulder: Westview.  
 1990 *Authoritarian Power and State Formation in Ba'thist Syria*. Boulder: Westview.  
 1993 State and Civil Society in Syria. *Middle East Journal*, 47(2): 243–257.
- Hobson, Dorothy  
 1982 *Crossroads: The Drama of a Soap Opera*. London: Methuen.  
 1989 Soap Operas at Work. In *Remote Control: Television, Audiences and Cultural Power*. Ellen Seiter, Hans Borchers, Gabrielle Kreutzner and Eva-Marie Warth, eds. Pp. 150–167. London: Routledge.
- Jabur, Diana  
 1993 "Damascene Days": Damascus in the Spirit of the People. *Fann*, 17 May: 26–27.
- Katz, Elihu, and Tamar Liebes  
 1986 Mutual Aid in the Decoding of Dallas: Preliminary Notes from a Cross-Cultural Study. In *Television in Transition*. Phillip Drummond and Richard Paterson, eds. Pp. 187–198. London: British Film Institute.
- Khoury, Philip S.  
 1984 Syrian Urban Politics in Transition: The Quarters of Damascus During the French Mandate. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 16(4): 507–540.  
 1987 *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920–1945*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kisan, Jan al-  
 1994 First Word (Editor's Comments). *Funun*, 11 April: 2.
- Kisan, Randa al-  
 1993 The Actor Rafiq Sbe'i: the Zkurty of "Damascene Days" Embodies the Values of the Folk Character. *Funun*, 22 March: 20–21.
- Liebes, Tamar, and Elihu Katz  
 1989 On the Critical Abilities of Television Viewers. In *Remote Control: Television, Audiences and Cultural Power*. Ellen Seiter, Hans Borchers, Gabrielle Kreutzner and Eva-Marie Warth, eds. Pp. 204–222. London: Routledge.

Livingstone, Sonia

- 1994 Watching Talk: Gender and Engagement in the Viewing of Audience Discussion Programmes. *Media, Culture and Society*, 16(3): 429–447.

Longuenesse, Elisabeth

- 1979 The Class Nature of the State in Syria. *MERIP Reports*, 9(4): 3–11.  
1985 The Syrian Working Class Today. *MERIP Reports*, 15(6): 17–24.

Lull, James

- 1988 *World Families Watch Television*. London: Sage.  
1990 *Inside Family Viewing*. London: Routledge.  
1991 *China Turned On: Television, Reform, and Resistance*. London: Routledge.  
1995 *Media, Communication, Culture: A Global Approach*. Cambridge: Polity.

Lutgendorf, Philip

- 1995 All in the (Ragu) Family: a Video Epic in Cultural Context. In *To Be Continued... Soap Operas Around the World*. Robert C. Allen, ed. Pp. 321–353. London: Routledge.

Mankekar, Purnima

- 1993 Television Tales and a Woman's Rage: A Nationalist Recasting of Draupadi's "Disrobing." *Public Culture*, 5(3): 469–492.

Mansour, Muhammad

- 1993 The Damascene Quarter: A Treasurehouse of Arab Values. *Fann*.

Massey, Doreen

- 1994 Double Articulation: A Place in the World. In *Displacements: Cultural Identities in Question*. Angelika Bammer, ed. Pp. 111–121. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Miller, Daniel

- 1992 The Young and the Restless in Trinidad: a Case of the Local and the Global in Mass Consumption. In *Consuming Technologies: Media and Information in Domestic Spaces*. Roger Silverstone and Eric Hirsch, eds. Pp. 163–182. London: Routledge.

Modleski, Tania

- 1984 *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-Produced Fantasies for Women*. London: Methuen.

Morley, David

- 1986 *Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure*. London: Comedia.  
1992 *Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies*. London: Routledge.

Mulvey, Laura

- 1975 Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema. *Screen*, 16(3): 6–18.

Perthes, Volker

- 1991 A Look at Syria's Upper Class: The Bourgeoisie and the Ba'th. *Middle East Report*, 21(3): 31–37.  
1995 *The Political Economy of Syria under Asad*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Picard, Elizabeth

- 1980 Y a-t-il un problème communautaire en Syrie? *Maghreb-Machrek*, 87: 7–21.

Press, Andrea

- 1989 Class Difference in Women's Perceptions of Television Realism and Identification with Television Characters. *Media Culture and Society*, 11(2): 229–251.

Qassab Hasan, Najat

- 1988 *Damascene Talk, 1884–1983*. Damascus: Dar Tlas.

Rofel, Lisa

- 1995 The Melodrama of National Identity in Post-Tiananmen China. In *To Be Continued... Soap Operas Around the World*. Robert C. Allen, ed. Pp. 301–320. London: Routledge.

Rogge, Jan-Uwe

- 1989 The Media in Everyday Family Life: Some Biographical and Typological Aspects. In *Remote Control: Television, Audiences and Cultural Power*. Ellen Seiter, Hans Borchers, Gabrielle Kreutzner and Eva-Marie Warth, eds. Pp. 168–179. London: Routledge.

Seiter, Ellen, Hans Borchers, Gabrielle Kreutzner and Eva-Marie Warth

- 1989 "Don't Treat Us Like We're So Stupid and Naive:" Toward an Ethnography of Soap Opera Viewers. In *Remote Control: Television, Audiences and Cultural Power*. Ellen Seiter, Hans Borchers, Gabrielle Kreutzner and Eva-Marie Warth, eds. Pp. 223–247. London: Routledge.

Shareem, Akram

- 1993 First Encounter with the Writer of the Series "Damascene Days." *Funun*, 22 March: 18–19.

Silverstone, Roger

- 1994 *Television and Everyday Life*. London: Routledge.

Silverstone, Roger, and Eric Hirsch

- 1992 *Consuming Technologies: Media and Information in Domestic Spaces*. London: Routledge.

Silverstone, Roger, and David Morley

- 1990 Families and their Technologies: Two Ethnographic Portraits. In *Household Choices*. Tim Putnam and Charles Newton, eds. Pp. 74–83. London: Futures Publications.

Tergeman, Siham

- 1990 (1969) *Ya Mal al-Sham*. Damascus: Alif Ba' al-Adib.  
1994 *Daughter of Damascus*. Trans. Andrea Rugh. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Van Dam, Nikolaos

- 1995 *The Struggle for Power in Syria: Politics and Society under Asad and the Ba'th Party*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Van Dusen, Michael H.

- 1972 Political Integration and Regionalism in Syria. *Middle East Journal*, 26(2): 123–136.  
1975 Downfall of a Traditional Elite. In *Political Elites and Political Development in the Middle East*. Frank Tachau, ed. Pp. 115–155. Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman/Wiley.

Verdery, Katherine

- 1994 Beyond the Nation in Eastern Europe. *Social Text*, 38 (Spring): 1–19.

Wilson, Tony

- 1993 *Watching Television: Hermeneutics, Reception and Popular Culture*. Cambridge: Polity.

Zoonen, Liesbet van, and Jan Wieten

- 1994 It Wasn't Exactly a Miracle: The Arrival of Television in a Dutch Village. *Media Culture and Society*, 16(4): 641–659.

## FILMOGRAPHY

Anzour, Najdat Ismail

- 1994 The End of a Brave Man [thirty-episode serial]. Damascus: Sham al-Dawliyyah.

Kawkash, 'Ala al-Din

- 1994 Abu Kamel, Part II [thirty-episode serial]. Damascus: Syrian Arab Television and Mu'assasat al-Khalij lil' Amal al-Fanniyyah.

Lutfi, Lutfi

1993 *Smile of Sadness* [fifteen-episode serial]. Damascus: Syrian Arab Television.

Mahshawi, Ramiz

1993–1994 *Our Popular Memory* [series]. Damascus: Syrian Arab Television.

Malla, Bassam al-

1993 *Damasene Days* [fifteen-episode serial]. Damascus: Syrian Arab Television.

Malla, Mu'min al-

1994 *Intoxication with the Past* [series]. Damascus: Syrian Arab Television.

Syrian Arab Television

1993–1994 *Quranic Studies* [series with Muhammad Said Ramadan al-Buti]. Damascus: Syrian Arab Television.

Tutunji, Mamduh

1993–1994 *Ramadan Days* [series]. Damascus: Syrian Arab Television.

Zarzouri, Haytham Muhammad

1993 *An Evening with the Damascene Days Family*. Damascus: Syrian Arab Television.