From the President
Peter Sluglett, Professor of History
University of Utah, Salt Lake City

Dear SSA Members,

I am delighted to be able to report what I hope will prove some long overdue good news about US-Syrian relations. Although diplomatic approaches to both Iran and Syria were one of the central recommendations of the Baker-Hamilton Report last December, the Bush administration has taken several months to make a tentative step in that direction. Nevertheless there was a brief meeting in Baghdad between US and Syrian and Iranian representatives on the general topic of Iraqi security on 10 March. It has been clear for some time, both officially and unofficially, that the Syrian government wishes to move into some sort of dialogue with the present Administration, and irrespective of one’s feelings about either government, some tentative moves in that direction can only be welcomed. Zalmay Khalilzad, the US ambassador in Baghdad, said cautiously after this meeting: ‘I think one has to be cautious about exaggerating the impact of what has happened, but in my view it cannot be dismissed.’ I hope Barack Obama, or John Edwards, or Hillary Clinton, or whoever else might be the next President of the United States, has been following these developments.

The SSA will sponsor a total of three panels at MESA in Montreal this year. In addition, we are helping to organise the visit of the Syrian cartoonist, Ali Farzat, with the assistance of his US publisher, Scott Davis of Cune Press. I hope that as many of you as possible will come to Montreal, deservedly famous for its culinary delights as well as its cosmopolitan atmosphere.

As always, I would like to thank our Secretary/Treasurer, Annie Higgins, and our indefatigable Newsletter Editor, Elyse Semerdjian.

I wish you all an enjoyable and productive summer,

- Peter Sluglett
MINUTES OF NOVEMBER 2006
SYRIAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION (SSA) BUSINESS MEETING

Held on the 18th of November, 2006, in conjunction with the Middle East Studies Association Annual Meeting at the Boston Marriott Copley Place Hotel, Boston, MA.

President Peter Sluglett called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m. with eighteen members present. [Additional members came after the opening.]

The Minutes of the 2005 Business Meeting in Washington, D.C. were circulated and approved.

Secretary/Treasurer Annie Higgins presented the Treasurer’s Report, which is included in this Newsletter. The Treasurer’s Report was accepted. Continued appreciation was expressed for Newsletter Editor Elyse Semerdjian’s time, and Whitman College’s material support of printing and postage.

Peter Sluglett then introduced the new Board Members: Geoff Schad, Member-at-Large; and Hania Abou Al-shamat, Student Representative. The new Syria Liaison, Mohamed Dorai, was not present. Secretary/Treasurer Annie Higgins passed out copies of Membership Applications, and urged current members to encourage colleagues to join our organization: http://www.ou.edu/ssa/member.htm She mentioned that seventy members on our Roster were paid up until at least 2005, but that approximately ninety are lapsed in membership dues. Hence, it would be to our benefit to encourage fellow members to reinvest in the organization. She will be sending members a Directory and occasional SSA updates. Hania Abou al-Shamat expressed interest in mounting a membership drive amongst graduate students.

Peter Sluglett introduced a Bylaw change to extend terms for officers, in the interest of continuity of service with less time spent on frequent elections. Members expressed ideas on the pros and cons of making such a change. A motion was made and seconded:

“To elect the officers for a period of three years as opposed to two years.”

The motion passed by unanimous acclamation.

Subsequent discussion focused on how this change would affect the business of the organization. Dawn Chatty spoke of the advantages of the current system of two-year terms to keep contributions of service fresh and active, and especially to ensure smooth transitions by having the President serve simultaneously with the President-Elect, followed the next year by the President serving with the Past-President. A number of members contributed to this discussion. It was suggested that a similar transition could be achieved by staggering the three-year terms of President and Secretary/Treasurer. Hence, since Peter Sluglett and Annie Higgins were both elected in 2005 for two-year terms, the following motion was made and seconded:

“To make this Bylaw Amendment apply to Annie Higgins through 2008, and to Peter Sluglett through 2007.”

The motion passed by acclamation.

Prize Committee Chair Mary Wilson announced the Award for the Dissertation Prize to Kevin Martin, Ph.D. 2005, Georgetown University, for his dissertation entitled, “Enter the Future: Exemplars of Bourgeois Modernity in Post World War II Syria.” In addition to a creative but disciplined analysis of social and economic evolution, this study included a daring final chapter constituting an imaginary walk down a commercial street, enabling the reader to envision the practical results of change.

An Honorable Mention was awarded to Myriam Ababsa, Ph.D. 2005, Universite de Tours, for her dissertation entitled, “Ideological Territories in the Syrian Frontier: Raqqah.” This study measured how state economic projects undermine nonstate loyalties.

Mary Wilson noted the high quality of submissions, and how the prize-winning dissertations utilized imaginative approaches to complex issues, thus contributing notably to the field of Syrian studies.
Our next prizes will be the Article Prize and the Book Prize. Publication must be between 1 July 2005 and 30 June 2007. Submissions will be due 30 June 2007. Please send your submissions!

Book Review Editor Steve Tamari was not present, but sent a message of thanks for increased activity by members submitting book reviews. Publishers are now coming to him with books for review. In addition, he hopes to see reviews of new titles in Arabic and other languages, as well as reviews of deserving titles which might not be published elsewhere, thus making the SSA Newsletter THE place for Syria-related publications.

Peter Sluglett brought up the topic of MESA panels for SSA sponsorship, and expressed an interest in expanding our borders to include contemporary Syria. Annie Higgins reminded us also to think of Syrian Studies as including the areas of historic Bilad al-Sham beyond the limits of the modern Syrian state. Panel proposals will be due in mid-January.

In conclusion, Peter Sluglett invited the membership to the Reception, including a “Dialogue on Syria and Syrian-US Relations” between Board Member Joshua Landis and Andrew Tabler, Damascus based Fellow of the Institute of Current World Affairs and Editor-in-Chief of Syria Today magazine.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Annie Higgins, SSA Secretary/Treasurer.

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**EVENTS**


Presentations of film shorts and feature length films included:

**Just Get Married!**
(dir. Husam Chadat, Syria/Germany, 2003),

**Verbal Letters** (Rasa’el Shafahiyyah)

and

**Stars in Broad Day** (Nujum an-Nahar)
(dir. Onssama Mohammad, Syria, 1988, DVD, 115 mins, color)

For more details visit:

This program was co-presented with the Middle East Center at the University of Pennsylvania.
Less than 15 km south of Damascus lies a world that many of my middle-class Damascene friends have decided is “strangely unfamiliar.” Shocked, but fascinated, they usually point out how “backwards” yet “cosmopolitan” the area seems. Surrounded by rows of small shops, ranging from mobile phone sellers to 22k gold jewelers, dusty apartment buildings, offices of high-ranking religious scholars and informal merchants selling Iraqi women’s abayas, Sayyeda Zaynab’s golden dome and blue minarets arise out of the dusty streets like a new-born phoenix. Facing the glittering Iranian owned Safir Hotel to the West and several Iraqi shawarma stands and restaurants to the East, Zaynab’s shrine reveals a stunning blend of old and new. The newly remodeled shrine complex is sometimes jokingly referred to as the “Disco Mosque” because its dazzling interior dome is entirely made up of patterned cut mirrors.

Renovated, decorated and funded by the Iranian Islamic Republic, Sayyeda Zaynab’s tomb and compound now form the center of a growing Damascene suburb that has become the primary destination for both religious tourists such as Iranian and South Asian Twelver Shi’is and Shi’i Southern Iraqis who come seeking a sanctuary. In an atmosphere reminiscent of Iranian and Iraqi cities rather than Damascus, the crowds are conspicuously absent during the day, but emerge from their homes and hotels in the late afternoon and fill the streets and the shrine with an array of languages.

Dazzling mirrors, however, are not the only interesting aspect of the growing town surrounding the tomb of Sayyeda Zaynab. As the granddaughter of Prophet Muhammad, her shrine is important to both Shi’is and Sunnis, though Twelver Shi’is make up the majority of her visitors. Ali Shari’ati, the famous Iranian scholar and activist had even become a permanent guest in the area. Since he died in exile before the Iranian Revolution, he was buried near Zaynab and rests just a little north-east of her compound in a small graveyard that is also open to visitors during the day.

The day Sayyeda Zaynab probably receives the most visitors is Ashura, the tenth day of Muharram and the anniversary of the death of Imam al-Hussein. According to the tradition, Prophet Muhammad’s grandson Hussein was on his way to Kufa when he was killed by Yazid’s army on the fields of Karbala. On this day Twelver Shi’is from all over the world gather at important tomb-shrines such as Zaynab’s in order to participate in mourning Hussein’s death and Zaynab’s tragic loss.

Wanting to prevent violent incidents on Ashura such as those that have occurred in Southern Iraq in the last few years, the Syrian government has taken a pro-active stance on keeping order during the “un-orderly rites” and
events of Ashura. During the days that lead up to Ashura and during the forty days that follow, police keep a close eye on those who enter and leave the compound, while sorrowful pilgrims seek out Zaynab’s protection and blessing.

During the commemorations I observed, groups of mourning visitors generally arrived together and stayed together as they looked for a semi-private corner where they could pray and chant semi-privately in Azeri, Farsi, Urdu or Arabic. Last year on Ashura, the northern entrance and road were blocked. As a result, many of the pious remained inside the compound rather than leave the compound to perform latam (which is the ritually and rhythmically striking of the chest, both an embodiment and an expression of Shi’is’ sorrow).

It was the night of Ashura in 2006 and it was getting very late when a group of South Asian men spontaneously gathered. Following the example of a talented young man, whose rhythmically sad chant spoke across language barriers, more and more men joined the lines. Having broken a sweat after the first narrative chant, the South Asian men pulled up their pants past their belly-buttons as they took off their shirts in order to be able to strike their bare chests. According to religious law, they conformed to a minimum of modesty, since their long baggy pants covered more than their thighs and lower torso. However, this was not enough “coverage” according to Syrian norms and so several policemen appeared quickly and persuaded the men to slip back into their shirts.

Perhaps wanting to live up to certain “civilized” norms of piety, the police officers may have seen their intervention as an act of protecting conservative public morals from non-normative religious performances. My middle-class Sunni Damascene friends could not decide ultimately whether this beautiful shrine with its international, but mostly very poor, crowds of visitors was “modern” or “traditional.” But when I invited them to Iraqi shawarma on fluffy bread with cardamom tea, they knew there were convincing reasons to come and visit again.

Edith Szanto Ali-Dib is a doctoral student in Religious Studies at the University of Toronto. She first came to Syria in 2004 as a Fulbrighter and now researches contemporary Islamic practice among Shi’is in Syria.
AGRARIAN COUNTER-REFORM IN SYRIA: THE STATE FARMS PRIVATIZATION

By Myriam Ababsa

Between December 2000 and January 2005, the Syrian Ba’th party and government promulgated a series of political decisions (taqarir) and decrees that aimed at privatising all State Farms in Syria. The main one, decision number 83 of 16 December 2000, put an end to 43 years of collectivist experiments in the field of land reform, including 38 years under the aegis of the Ba’th party. Those reforms had established state farms and, more generally, the replacement of the traditional tribal social allegiances by a collectivist system. The main region targeted by the decision 83 of 2000 was the Syrian North-East, the Jazîra. It is there that the massive irrigation scheme, the Euphrates Project, was implemented, consisting in the construction of a major dam (1974) and the subsequent irrigation of 150 000 hectares (on the 640 000 scheduled) in the valleys of the Euphrates, the Balikh and the Khabour.

Decision number 83 of 16 December 2000, parcelled out the land in shares of 3 ha for irrigated land and 8 ha for non-irrigated land. It called for land to be distributed to, in order of priority, the former owners, the farm workers, and employees of the General Administration of the Euphrates Basin (GADEB). In January 2005, in all Syria, 12 500 beneficiaries received 38 500 ha. In the Euphrates Project, half of them were former owners or land reform recipients; a third were sharecroppers with exploitation contracts and a fifth were workers and GADEB employees. I analyse this process as a case of counter-revolution that marks the end of the socialist Ba’thist ideology. The primary beneficiaries of the reform process are not the traditional rural constituents of the Ba’th party, but a re-emergent class of latifundists tied to central state and traditional power structures.

1. STATE FARMS IN SYRIA AND THE EUPHRATES PROJECT

State farms were created in Syria as a result of successive land reform laws in 1958, 1963 and 1966. These laws offered the state the opportunity to rationally manage agricultural resources that had been previously ‘plundered’ by absentee landowners. When the land reform was completed in 1970, 1,513,000 hectares (ha) had been expropriated by the State, including 443,000 ha that had been handed over to private individuals, 338,000 ha distributed collectively to peasants in cooperatives, 38,000 ha sold and 140,000 ha reserved for the state farms.

State farms were conceived as “avant-garde” structures to train farm labourers with modern techniques of production and to diffuse the Ba’thist socialist ideological principles. They quickly became associated with low productivity and heavy production costs. Fifteen Pilot Project farms and villages were created as part of the large Euphrates Project. That project constituted the major Ba’thist enterprise of the 70s. It created a new agro-alimentary sector and an abundant electric power supply. The Euphrates Project was as much a political as an economic project. The land reform was to assist in the new socialist order as a substitute for the tribal structures dominant in the Jazîra region (northeastern Syria) and with it the political control of a long insubordinate area. More than half a million hectares of new irrigated perimeters were planned that included 450,000 ha to be gained on the steppe and improvements to 160,000 ha already irrigated land to be made.

Part of these improvements included the creation of lake Assad in 1973 which submerged 66 villages and 126 hamlets located on fertile lands in the Euphrates banks. Sixty thousand people from the Walda semi-nomadic tribe had to be moved. The Dam Ministry created 15 State farms for the displaced in the Pilot Project and 42 colonization villages at the Turkish border, in the kurdish area of Hassaka Mohafazat to form an “Arab belt.” The fifteen state farms of the Pilot Project were built on lands expropriated by the State in the barriya, a zone of pasture and dry culture. Most of its land belonged to members of the Hleissat, a formerly semi-nomadic tribe that settled near Raqqa in the 1940’s.

At the beginning of the 1980’s, 20,000 ha of fields irrigated but not drained were salified and unsuitable for agriculture, and 35,000 ha had lost half of their productivity because of salt formation (Hinnebusch, 1989: 236). Evidence suggests that state farms produced little benefit for the farmers and failed equally in their ideological role of peasant training. The production costs were higher than revenue from the beginning. Thus, in 1980, the income of the GADEB farms was 25 million Syrian
pounds whereas the production costs were 50 million (Hannoyer 1985: 33). In 2000, the benefit of the whole of the state farms and the projects of Euphrates managed by the GADEB were 25.5 million Syrian pounds, whereas the production costs reached on the 645 million Syrian pounds: they had been multiplied by 13 in twenty years!

In the face of the evidence indicating the failure of the State Farms, the government was forced to act within the framework of its campaign against corruption and for the cleansing of national accounting.

2. DECISION NUMBER 83 (16-12-2000) ON THE DISTRIBUTION OF STATE FARMS

Since the beginning of the economic opening in 1991 (infitah), the Syrian State launched the renewal of private economic initiative. At the same time it also insisted that some sectors be protected from liberalization for geopolitical reasons. In 1992, a new production system was introduced in the state farms. This allowed the exploitation or hiring contracts, which gave 20% of the production to those who signed it. A new category of owners thus appeared alongside farm labourers and the various engineers and technicians: that of the holders of an exploitation contract (mucharikin).

Ten years of economic liberalization, severe decline in agricultural production, and extensive corruption in the state farms led to the privatisation of all Syrian state lands by decision n° 83 (December 16, 2000). Critically, this decision was taken executively rather than from within the legislature. Indeed, it is not a ministerial decree, nor a law, but a political decision enacted by the Ba’th Party, and then transmitted to the Agriculture Ministry and to the Irrigation Ministry (and the GADEB). Decision n° 83 was intrinsically political. It came from the Ba’th Party. It was not subject to deliberation within the legislature; and it was not accompanied by the cancellation of the preceding decrees (1971 and 1983 (n° 1033)) which related to the distribution of ownership. It led to the confusion between the rights of the owners, the agrarian reform recipients, the workers and the technicians. In this context of legal inaccuracy and conflict between administrations, many owners, recipients and heirs started to assert their rights to the land, and many complaint letters were sent to Damascus, addressed to the President of the Republic.

The government took into account the complaints of these various groups, and particularly those of the temporary workers and the civil servants employed an insufficient number of years by the GADEB. Thus, as of December 2003, the implementation of decision 83 had proceeded in four phases. The 1st phase of application took place from October 2001 to March 2002, and concerned the owners and the recipients of the land reform, as well as the employees and contractual workmen specified by the text of December 2000. The second phase of application began in April 2002 with an amendment that included amongst the recipients those who had worked at least three years in the GADEB. The third phase of application of decision 83 proceeded from October 2002, benefiting those who could show that they had worked one year for the GADEB. The fourth phase primarily concerned those choosing to retire from the GADEB and take a state pension: from September 2003, every employed GADEB can take his/her retirement and obtain 3 ha of irrigated land in addition to the standard monthly allowance. This last measurement aims reducing manpower of the GADEB whose major functions are now to provide water at flat price and to prescribe the types of agriculture in conformity with the Plan. A fifth phase of distribution has been envisaged since 2004 to allow everyone employed within the secretariat and administration of the GADEB to profit from a plot of ground if he/she voluntarily leaves employment.

3. THE DISTRIBUTION OF STATE FARM LAND IN THE EUPHRATES PROJECT

At the end of the four implementation phases, in June 2005, 14 454 hectares of irrigated lands were distributed to 5 614 recipients. Half of these beneficiaries are made up of owners and agrarian reform beneficiaries, and more than a third are comprised of exploitation or leasing agreements. The remainder are farm labourers.

In spite of government pride regarding the speed of the distribution process between December 2001 and April 2002, many doubts have been raised among intellectuals and employees about the implementation of this measure in the Syrian East.

(continued on page 8)

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1 In 1983, decree n° 1033 limited the private property in the State Irrigation Projects to 160 donoms. 3 100 hectares were expropriated and transformed as State land that was rented for 75 S.P. a donom a year (Bauer, 1990: 38).
For some Raqqawî, this reform will reinforce the local power structures and not change the land inequity in the region. Some people think it served only to give land to highly influential persons in Damascus. The main complaint is that some land was given—via false GADEB contracts—to powerful persons close to a former Raqqa Ba`th Secretary who had served in Raqqa in the 1990s.

However, disputes over decision 83 legal principles and implementation have taken place within a broad consensus on the fact that the economic improvement and increase of productivity are noteworthy. The decision aimed at reshaping the bond between land and farmers, even without property rights, on the base of use rights. The distribution comity director argued that each recipient was able to double his annual revenue. According to Raqqa agricultural direction, Raqqa Mohafazat total agricultural production was multiplied by five in three years since the end of the State farms system. From 400 000 millions S.P. in 2000, the agricultural production jumped to 2 billion in 2003. The principal reason of such productivity increase is an illegal one and deal with the constitution of large fields by illegal plots resale.

Following the parcelling out of the lands and their distribution, many recipients now either rent or sell their plots. In case of land hiring, the current price is 1 500 to 2 000 Syrian Pounds per donom. As the sale or hiring of the State farms plots are both illegal, the contracts are confidential and engage only private individuals. The denunciation risk weighs on the land recipient and not on the man who rents or buys it. I have tried to uncover the identities of new large landholders in this process, but it is a difficult subject to broach in interviews. I did, however, learn that approximately 80% of the recipients do not exploit their lands directly, but rented them or sold them; and that the largest “purchasers” are currently members of the Châwaya tribes, in particular that of the Hleissat, who are specialized in sheep sale. Some Hleissat sheikhs confirmed this analysis in October 2004, by saying: « Of course the Hleissat are the ones who buy this land: because it is their land ! We, the former owner, received only 30 donoms out of thousands donoms we had. We do everything to get our land back. Why did not the government simply give us our land back ? ». As a Ba`th militant reminded me, this former big owner should thank the government that gave him back some land, for, in most of the case, big ownership was built illegally in Jazîra. During the 1950’s, many tribe chiefs registered in their name common tribal properties, and many Raqqawî urban landowner took land from indebted peasants.

Furthermore, one must keep in mind that the agrarian reform was not fully implemented in the Jazîra: in 1970 it had concerned only a third of latifundia (Khader, 1984).

Table 1 : The recipients of the Pilot Project State land distribution
The 31 May 2005 according to the 4 implementation phases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Recipients number</th>
<th>Surface distributed (donom)</th>
<th>Type of recipients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1ère</td>
<td>2 344 1 290</td>
<td>48 727,4 d. 38 587,9 d.</td>
<td>Owner and farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Holder of an exploitation contract*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2ème</td>
<td>334 194</td>
<td>9 961,9 d. 5 793,6 d.</td>
<td>Holder of an exploitation of location contract, workers and shepherds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3ème</td>
<td>696 26 6</td>
<td>20 785,1 d. 62,8 d. 58,6 d.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Contract holder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Heirs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Punctual indemnity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4ème</td>
<td>163 168 20 368 3 1</td>
<td>4 890 d. 5 013, 75 d. 572,5 d. 11 013,25 d. 15, 391 d. 6 d. 20 d.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Holder of an exploitation of location contract Retired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Holder of an exploitation contract Temporary workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Punctual indemnity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Indemnity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 614</td>
<td>140 454,85 d..</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* mucharikin (Source : internal GADEB documents, Raqqa June 2005).
CONCLUSION

A double process results from the sale and hiring movements of the Pilot Project fields. On the one hand, there is a reinforcement of large contractor capacities who have the means to rent and exploit large surfaces, and that were able to keep their properties during the agrarian reform by giving it to their heirs. On the other hand, there is the renewal of large latifundia, which exceed all property ceilings fixed by the successive land reform laws. Thus, the change in the property structures and nature of exploitation is radical. It passed from state farms to large private domains, that the Ba’th Party wished to limit above all. It is indeed a form of counter-revolution (Bush, 2002). To a greater degree than the political liberalization process announced in 1991, this land reform has marked the end of the socialist Ba’thist ideology. However, it has done so while simultaneously renewing the clientelist political system.

Myriam Ababsa is a Social Geographer, Researcher at IFPO in Amman, Jordan. Her main study concerns the dialectic between ideology and territory in Syria, and the implementation of several development projects in the Jazîra (with a focus on Raqqa). As a Post Doctoral Researcher she is directing a program on the public policies and the juridical practices toward informal settlements in Jordan and Syria (with D. Baudouin Dupret). She is also in charge of the Atlas of Jordan program, in collaboration with the Jordanian Department of Statistics.
Wednesday May 2

• 09:30 Opening at Irwin Hall Auditorium, Lebanese American University

Welcoming statement by Layla Harmoush, Chairperson of the Humanities Division

Welcoming speeches by Joseph Jabbra, President of the Lebanese American University

Manfred Kropp, Director of the Orient-Institut Beirut

Samira Aghacy, Dean of the School of Arts & Sciences

Keynote address by Geir Pedersen, Personal Representative for Lebanon of the UN Secretary General

Opening lecture by Salwa Saniora Baassiri, Secretary General of the Lebanese National Commission for UNESCO

• 10:40 Coffee break

• 10:40-11:30 Conference registration at Irwin Hall Conference Room (6th Floor). All sessions take place in Irwin Hall Conference Room. Concurrently, a photo exhibit by LAU faculty member Bassam Lahoud will be on display near the Conference Room area.

• 11:30 SESSION 1: LEBANON: A LAND OF DIVERSITY

Moderator: Paul Tabar

The Sound of Dialogue: Exploring a Contextual Theology of Dialogue in Lebanon

Mahmoud Natout (University of Oxford)

Discrimination and Tolerance in Lebanon

Evelyne Accad (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)

“I am not sectarian; they are.” Sectarianism and Intolerance in Modern Lebanon

Sami Ofeish (University of Balamand)

• 13:00-13:30 Discussion

• 13:30-15:00 Lunch break

• 15:00 SESSION 2: THE MIDDLE EAST AND GENDER ISSUES

Moderator: Arnim Heinemann

Masculinity and War, East and West

Kathleen Barry (Pennsylvania State University)

A Rhetoric of Intercultural Understanding in Rashid al-Daif’s “The German Comes Back to His Senses”

Ken Seigneurie (Lebanese American University)

Gender and Sexuality in Saadawi’s “Two Women in One”

Luma Balaa (Lebanese American University)

• 16:30-17:00 Discussion

• 19:30 Dinner

Thursday May 3

• 09:30 SESSION 3: INTOLERANCE IN RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

Moderator: Gabriel Reynolds

Discrimination and Tolerance in the Middle East

Nasr Abu Zeid (Leiden University)

Zandaqa: Anathema in the Shadow of the Abbasids

Vahid Behmardi (Lebanese American University)

The Conflict between Shiite Factions in Iran during the qājār Period (in French)

Denis Hermann (University of Paris - Sorbonne)

• 11:00-11:30 Discussion

• 11:30-11:45 Coffee break

• 11:45 SESSION 4: CHRISTIANS UNDER OTTOMAN RULE I

Moderator: Nai'a Kaidbey

A Rare Revelation: An Arab Christian of the 17th Century Reflects on the Influence of Islam Exercised over the Course of Time on the Development of his Community

Carsten Walbiner (Catholic Academic Exchange Service – Bonn, Germany)

Churches Oriented Towards Mecca: Tolerance among Shiites and Maronites in 17th-Century Mount-Lebanon

Ray Mouawad (Lebanese American University)

• 12:45-13:15 Discussion
Friday May 4

• 11:30 Coffee break

• 11:45 SESSION 7: ONGOING WORRIES II
Moderator: Latif Zeitouni
Al-Islam Al-Muhajir Wa Iktishaf Al-‘Ansariyya Al-Arabiyya Fi Sayaqal-Awalam

Mona Fayyad (Lebanese University)
Hal Tahtam Al-Hadathah Al-Takhli ‘An Al-Tanthink Al-Dhimmi Aw Al-Milli?

Mahmud Haddad (University of Balamand)
• 12:45-13:15 Discussion
• 13:30 Lunch

• 15:00 SESSION 8: ONGOING WORRIES III
Moderator: Ken Seigneurie
Iraqi and Syrian Fiction: The Arab Individual and the Authoritarian Discourse

Samira Aghacy (Lebanese American University)
Rights of Citizenship and Rites of Neighborliness: Mediations of Difference in Recent Egyptian Fiction

Hala Halim (New York University)
Is Tolerance Rational?

Jay Gupta (Lebanese American University)
Towards a Stronger Foundation for Tolerance and Pluralism: Religion without Absolutism and Exclusivism

Richard K. Khuri (Lebanese American University)
• 17:00-17:30 Discussion
• 19:30 Farewell Dinner

SSA

• 13:30 Lunch break

• 15:00 SESSION 5: CHRISTIANS UNDER OTTOMAN RULE II
Moderator: Ray Mouawad
The Giziya in Lebanon during the Ottoman Period (in Arabic)

Suad Slim (University of Balamand)
Copts, Religion and the Question of Identity in the Ottoman Period

Magdi Guiguis (Cairo University)
The Christians under Ottoman Rule as Viewed by 18th-Century Historians of Bilad al-Sham

Hayat Bualuan (American University of Beirut)
• 16:30-17:00 Discussion
• 17:30-19:30 Documentary Short-Films Screening (LRC 21) by Umam Documentation & Research, Lebanese Association for Cultural & Artistic Exchange

• 20:00 Dinner

FRIDAY MAY 4

• 9:30 SESSION 6: ONGOING WORRIES I
Moderator: Vahid Behmardi
Patterns of Discrimination in the Allocation of Public Resources among the 1948 Palestinian Population

Ghazi Falah (University of Akron, Ohio)
Writing the Self: Addressing a Culture of Tolerance through Literature (Palestinian and Israeli)

Ibrahim el-Hussari (Lebanese American University)
Ahl Al-Dhimma in Hizbullah’s Islamic State: Acceptance and Tolerance

Joseph Alagha (Lebanese American University)
• 11:00-11:30 Discussion

Latakia
“FOMENTING FEARS OF SHIITE CRESCENT?”

By Shana Marshall

There are many shady forces signaling the rise of an ‘Iranian-led Shiite crescent’ - but a surprising number don’t come from the Middle East. Many extra-regional actors are fanning the flames out of their own self-interest. Aside from the Bush administration’s thinly veiled propaganda there are other more pervasive forces difficult to pin down. Chief among them are the ‘regional experts’ eager to provide the Bush administration with justification to intervene in Iran and other hot spots, either because of shared ideological commitments or personal aggrandizement. Then there’s the global defense industry targeting the Gulf market, which is conveniently made up of precarious Sunni monarchies awash in petrodollars.

As usual, there is no shortage of experts ready to peddle their advice on confronting this “looming danger.” The most vivid and menacing assessments include Gulf Research Council Chairman Abdulaziz Sager’s prediction that, “The Gulf region, which has not enjoyed security and stability for decades, is currently passing through a danger-laden historical turning-point.” A columnist in the state-sponsored Saudi daily wrote “Iran is invading the Arab world and burning everything in its path.” In July Reuters reported a Western diplomat in Riyadh as saying, “Who in the long term is their main strategic threat? They see it as Iran.”

If that’s true the Arab public seems to have missed it. A November 2006 University of Maryland/Zogby poll of six Arab countries (including Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) indicates that more than ¾ of respondents see Israel and the US as their greatest existential threats, only 11% name Iran. Although they overwhelmingly support Shiite Hizbullah and its leader, Hassan Nasrallah, as well as Iranian President Ahmadinijad, it isn’t because of their sectarian identity – but because they refuse to bow to US and Israeli pressure. This reflects the vast divide between Arab governments’ policies and the real interests of their citizens. One U.S.-based Saudi analyst speaking on condition of anonymity to Reuters last year summed it up: “It seems that the Saudis will likely continue to spend on the most modern weaponry, regardless of whether this Iranian-led Shi’ite crescent is real or not.”

Predictably, fears of a “Shiite crescent” have driven defense spending to unprecedented heights in the region. Overall measures for 2005 show that the largest relative spending increase in the world was in the Middle East, and that’s without Iraq and Qatar, excluded because of inconsistent data (SIPRI). But, if Iran is planning any major military action in the region, it’s doing so on the cheap: its 2005 per capita military spending was less than half the average of the other Middle East and North African states (IISS).

A critical inspection lends significant support to the theory that fears of sectarianism reflect a well-orchestrated campaign more than a flare up of primordial divisions. Rumors of mass conversions of Sunnis to Shiism following Hizbullah’s impressive performance in the summer war with Israel, the circulation of proselytizing literature among Sunnis in Egypt, videos of anti-Sunni rallies in Jordan and other places all have dubious origins.

View from the Aleppo Citadel
and are dismissed by many well-placed analysts and religious leaders as untrue. The drive to confront Iran, and the US plan to establish permanent bases in Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, and the UAE and at least 12 equipment ‘sets’ from which to launch operations from Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan, would both be served by trumping up fears of Shiite ascendancy.

Divide and Conquer has always been a tool of control – the question is whether Arab governments are willing to play up sectarian divisions and the Iranian threat just to further US policy goals. If the Sunni-Shiite outreach on Al Jazeera and the recent high profile meetings between Ahmadinijad and Saudi Arabia’s King Abdullah signal anything, it is that Middle East leaders are realizing the importance of building bridges as US power diminishes. This development may prove the most constructive in the region’s history.

Shana Marshall is a Research Assistant at the Anwar Sadat Chair for Peace and Development at the University of Maryland.

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IN MEMORIAM

WILLIAM CLEVELAND (1941-2006)
Professor of Middle East History
at Simon Fraser University
in Burnaby, BC, Canada.

In a message to colleagues, his Department Chair, Prof. John Craig, said:

“An award winning teacher and distinguished scholar of the modern Middle East, William Cleveland came to Simon Fraser University in 1968, having completed his doctoral work at Princeton. He was a dedicated member of the university, serving three times as chair of the department and as an Associate Dean in the Faculty of Arts from 1977-80. He was an inspirational teacher as the letters in the latest edition in the Peak (newspaper) attest. The last two years of his life were dogged by ill health and he tragically passed away within weeks of his retirement.”

Letters of condolence may be sent to his wife, Rachel Cleveland via:

Gretchen H. Cleveland
6229 Summit Avenue
West Vancouver, B.C. V7W 1Y3
Canada
MESA at Montreal in 2007 will see a bumper crop of SSA sponsored panels! The distinct time periods and areas of Bilad al-Sham covered demonstrate the breadth of our membership’s interests.

Thank you to those members who submitted proposals this year!

**PANEL: STATES OF REPRESENTATION, STATES OF DISCOURSE IN CONTEMPORARY SYRIA**
Organizer: Alexa Firat

- **Shareah Taleghani**, New York University
  *Of Aesthetic Interventions: Prison Literature and Human Rights Discourse in Contemporary Syria*

- **Faedah Totah**, Knox College
  *States of Being: Politics and Development in Damascus*

- **Alexa Firat**, University of Pennsylvania
  *Looking In, Looking Out: The Construction of a Literary Discourse in Syria after ‘67*

- **Nell Gabiam**, UC Berkeley
  *“Palestine Before the Golan:” The Politics of Development in Syria’s Refugee Camps*

- **Edith Szanto**, University of Toronto
  *Minority Cultural Production in Syria: Shi’i Children’s Books: the Formation of Twelver Shi’i Identity, Community and Practice*

- **Mafalda Ade Winter**, Waqf tendency and consular jurisprudence in late Ottoman Aleppo.

**PANEL: CITIES IN BILAD AL-SHAM DURING THE OTTOMAN PERIOD**
Organizer: James A. Reilly
Discussant: Jens Hanssen


- **James A. Reilly**, Ottoman Saida in the minds of three recent Lebanese historians.

- **Edith Szanto**, Waqf tendency and consular jurisprudence in late Ottoman Aleppo.

**PANEL: "BEFORE NATIONALISM: LAND AND LOYALTY IN THE MIDDLE EAST"**
Chair: Dina Khoury
Discussant: Karl Barbir

- **Ulrika Martensson**, The Promised Land: The Material and Analytical Significance of the Sawâd in al-Tabari’s (d. 923 CE) History of the Messengers and the Kings

- **Nabil Al-Tikriti**, Was There an Iraq Before There Was an Iraq?

- **Zayde Antrim**, Watan before Wataniyya: Love for Land in Ayyubid and Mamluk Syria

- **Anne Troade**, Strategies of Settlement of the Early Mamluk Rulers in Bilād al-Shām

- **Dana Sajdi**, The City Possessed: Narrations of Damascus in the 12th and 18th Centuries

- **Steve Tamari**, “Bilad al-Shamism” or Territorial Consciousness in Ottoman Syria

- **Boris James**, The Tribal Territory of the Kurds through Arabic Medieval Historiography: Territorial Categories, Spatial Dynamics and Sense of Belonging

- **Dyala Hamzah**, “Misr, Kinanatu-allah fi ardih” or Early 19th-Century Egypt (Re)Invented

- **Sahar Bazzaz**, Salwat al-Anfas and the Topography of ‘Baraka’ in 19th Century Fez

Annika Rabo’s engagingly-titled ethnography examines “tajir-ness,” perceptions of what it means to be a merchant, in neoliberalizing Aleppo. Drawn from over a year of anthropological fieldwork spanning 1998-2002, this study explores the social value of independence and the quest for stability in a context of rapid change and growing uncertainty. The book reveals a complex relationship between urban space, economic practice, and social relations.

Rabo’s choice of subject reflects a profound understanding of Syrian society, and provides a unique point of access to the contemporary condition more broadly. In urban Syria, trading is a highly valued profession, far eclipsing the symbolic capital of medicine, law and the university. The term *tajir*, which can refer to small shopkeepers and leading businessmen alike, carries an elite resonance scarcely conveyed by the English “merchant.”

Focusing particularly on *ahl al-souq*, traders in Aleppo’s legendary covered market, Rabo identifies a tension between a desire for independence—embodied in both the ideal and the reality of a shop of one’s own—and the webs of connectedness needed to render such a venture successful. Her book is an extended exploration of this central paradox. We see how social and professional networks become increasingly crucial amid a shrinking public sector. As the welfare state unravels and government jobs no longer provide, entrepreneurship, small and large, is seen as the path to security and status. Perceived as the quintessence of independence, trading involves the tireless nurturing of relationships, a fragile reliance on families, clients and other traders. Informal networks and the effort to maintain them engender a dependency in some ways greater than that of the elaborate state structures of the Ba’thist era.

At its best, Rabo’s ethnographic description situates the reader in a stall in the covered souq, as merchants talk politics, gossip circulates, elections take place, and seasons pass. Shopkeepers’ descriptions of European tourists are both hilarious and revealing. The ever presence-absence of women—traders’ wives, who rarely visit the *souq* but who telephone their husbands’ frequently and are discussed widely, undermines any notion of strict gender segregation. Rabo’s evocations of everyday life reveal a grasp of the nuances of Aleppine colloquial Arabic, and convey a sense of local idiom. Such passages help enliven the drier sociological sketches of the city and its people. Extended lists of facts and figures have all but disappeared from contemporary ethnographic writing, yet Rabo’s provide a useful body of data not easily available on contemporary Syria.

Levels of analysis form concentric yet fluid circles. Aleppine and Syrian traders, the Syrian state and polity and an international marketplace of people, commodities and ideas move in and out of focus. Her insightful treatment of traders’ perceptions of the regime complicates any facile dichotomy between state oppression and local resistance. The state is critically evaluated, but never vilified, and power and powerlessness are analyzed with reference to wider processes. Eschewing clichéd “global and local” theorizing, Rabo nevertheless demonstrates the impact of economic forces beyond Syria, as the once ubiquitous Soviet women traders have all but disappeared from the winding lanes of the covered market, and locally produced chewing gum is named for a Mexican telenovela and exported to the Balkans.

The contradictions of Syrian modernity permeate *A Shop of One’s Own*. Parochialism rubs elbows with global connectedness among Aleppo’s *ahl al-souq*. A deep-seated notion of hierarchy exists alongside both Ba’thist and Islamic egalitarianism. Social distinction finds expression through indignation over the upward social mobility of those without prestigious names. Family origin is a social construct, and Rabo details practices for maintaining reputation—modes of inclusion and exclusion—including marriage patterns and commissioned genealogies. A “good name” is valued for its sake, and for its weight in the marriage market as well as the souq. For Aleppo’s merchants, Rabo argues, name becomes brand-name.

One hopes this work finds an audience beyond the small world of Syrian studies, where it should become required reading. *A Shop of One’s Own* contributes a richly-detailed Syrian case study to the growing body

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of anthropological literature on “alternative” or non-Western models of capitalism. It will be of interest to anthropologists longing for a solid, lightly-theorized ethnography, scholars interested in locally situated studies of market economies, and aficionados of Aleppo and its spectacular and understudied covered souq.

Christa Salamandra is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Lehman College, City University of New York. She received her Ph.D. from the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Oxford, where she also served as Postdoctoral Research Associate. She has been a Visiting Lecturer in the Department of Anthropology, The School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, and a Fulbright Scholar and Visiting Professor at Lebanese American University in Beirut. She is the author of A New Old Damascus: Authenticity and Distinction in Urban Syria (Indiana University Press, 2004), and articles on Arab and Syrian media. Her current fieldwork among Syrian cultural producers examines the recent expansion of the pan-Arab television drama industry. Salamandra can be reached at CHRISTA. SALAMANDRA@lehman.cuny.edu


As film technology develops, becoming simpler to use and perhaps, more importantly, cheaper to buy, the (hi)stories of Arab cinematic production will become more difficult to navigate as productions multiply. In addition, despite the longevity of Arab film production, there exist relatively few critical studies devoted to this rich field, particularly in English, where the paucity is almost embarrassing. Where else to turn but to Viola Shafik’s Arab Cinema, History and Cultural Identity (AUC Press, 1998) if teaching a film or culture class? Lina Khatib’s Filming the Modern Middle East (I.B.Tauris, 2006) is a welcome addition, though its purpose is not to explore Arab cinema, but the filming of the region and the identity of politics in both Arab and Hollywood cinemas. A few other titles come to mind: Alia Arasoughly, Screens of Life: Critical Film Writing from the Arab World (World Heritage Press, 1996); Lizbeth Malkmus and Roy Armes, Arab and African Film Making (Zed Books, 1991); Oliver Leaman, Companion Encyclopedia of Middle East and North African Film (Routledge, 2001). Fortunately, scholarship in Arabic and French is more developed but, in general, the field of Arab cinema deserves much more careful attention.

An issue that comes to light when considering the production of culture is regionalism in the production and the distribution of these goods to a variety of markets. The traditionally held view of Egypt (“Umm al-Dunya”) as the capital of Arab culture from literature to music to cinema is giving way to attention directed at more peripheral locales such as Beirut, Ramallah, and Damascus. (Here, we must distinguish the Mashriq from the Maghrib, which has its own set of centers and peripheries.) Indeed, these cities have been cultural producers in their own right throughout, but modes of production, distribution and, finally, recognition, usually passed through the gates of Cairo. While this tendency has not disappeared completely, the fragmentation of the cultural center is not isolated from other geo-political shifts in the Arab world.

With this in mind, Insights into Syrian Cinema: Essays and Conversations with Contemporary Filmmakers edited by Rasha Salti is a significant work that begins to fill the lacuna in the literature, as well as to raise critical questions about the study of culture and Arab cinema, in general, and Syrian cinema, in particular. Arab cinema waits to be studied and, in the meantime, forms and reforms itself. Works such as Salti’s and the recent publication of Hamid Dabashi’s Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema (Verso, 2006) suggest that we investigate the local and the systemic quality of cinematic productions while we also consider the whole.

Insights into Syrian Cinema was conceived of as a companion catalogue to a showcase of Syrian cinema that began to tour major US cities in 2003. As the editor and contributors recognized the dearth of sources on Arab and Syrian cinema in English, the concept of a book became obvious. The selection of writings was made in conjunction with the filmmakers. The work, as a whole, was never intended to be a study of Syrian cinema, and even with the addition of critical articles, it remains true to its title: insightful. Like the seventh art itself, the work is rich with narratives, memories, and reflections and prefers to raise questions or even insinuate them, rather than to draw conclusions as to the state of Syrian cinema.
The text is divided into two sections. The first consists of critical essays written by Rasha Salti, Lawrence Wright, Oussama Ghanam, and Cécile Boëx. Salti's essay situates the era and geography of the filmmakers included in the work. The first film was projected in Syria in 1908 in Aleppo and the first Syrian production of a long narrative dates to 1928 (Al-Muttaham al-Bari’ [The Innocent Suspect], written, directed and filmed by Rashid Jalal). However, it would not be until the 1960s with the development of the National Film Organization (NFO; al-Mu’assasah al-‘Ammah li-l-Sinama) in 1963 as an independent arm of the Ministry of Culture overseeing the production, distribution, import and export of films in Syria, that a fully fledged Syrian cinema would be set in motion. The trajectory of Syrian cinema recounted in this work covers the 1960s through the 1980s, a period which corresponds to the Baathist and Asad eras and all the attendant historic events including the Corrective Movement, the 1967 and 1973 wars, the 1982 Hama massacre, and the building of the Asad Dam.

The following three essays consider films and filmmakers through interviews and personal observations (Wright); an analysis of certain films by means of historic contextualization (Ghanam); and an attempt to transcend history and concentrate on a particular element in Syrian cinema—in this case—the body (Boëx). Ghanam’s observation “[that Syrian cinema] of the last quarter century is essentially an auteur cinema, borne of the particular circumstance of being produced by the state and only barely disseminated through a relatively non-existent network of distribution...In other words, it has lived without an audience” resonates and underscores the second section of the work, the testimonies of and conversations with the filmmakers (70).

The peculiarities of Syrian cinema that the critical essays discuss are attested to by the personal experiences of the filmmakers. As products of an intelligentsia rather than of an industry, the films that were produced—normally about one or two per year—are visual expressions of the filmmakers’ critical and aesthetic positioning. So, while Egypt provided motion-picture entertainment during this era, Syrian directors navigated the bureaucratic system of censors and the NFO to produce critical testimonies on the state of national (and pan-national) consciousness.

The filmmakers included in this text is not comprehensive, but a selection of those most closely associated with narrating the Syrian consciousness, rather than just being Syrian. So, we find Nabil Maleh, Omar Amiralay, Mohammad Malas, Samir Zikra, Oussama Mohammad, Abdellatif Abdul-Hamid and Hala al-Abdalla Yakoub—auteurs whose work and lives (whether inside or outside the Syrian borders) engage the Syrian cognitive state from their individual aesthetic vantage points.

These testimonies reveal the importance of collaboration within the community of filmmakers. Given the opportunity to direct a work once every 14 years or more, every shot, light, and sound is plotted out in detail. And, while filmmakers wait for the censors to release the script and disperse the funding from the only agency in Syria that produces film, the NFO, they often work on each others’ sets. The collaborations brought together for each work reads like a who’s-who of Syrian filmmaking. This sense of community is also seen in the initial support and later disillusionment with the NFO, an organization that some had hoped would help create a strong, independent and viable Syrian cinema. This idea (and ideology) affected other cultural sectors and literature, for example, was nourished by socialist promises. Three of the aforementioned filmmakers studied at the Moscow film institute, VGIK, ushering in a “new wave” of realist filmmaking upon their return.

To read firsthand the views and experiences of these auteurs brings us closer to understanding their work and the process of creating it. Moreover, their accounts illuminate the poetics of Syrian cinema. We hear how individual experiences shaped each filmmaker’s vision, whether it was a slap on a child’s face by a military officer, a grandmother’s white skin or a Pasolini film. The filmmakers’ voices transcend the written word and create an intimacy that suggests their own cinematic processes. Hala al-Abdalla Yakoub’s “Entries from the Diary of a Film Script,” shows rather than tells by using fragments of her process through photos, prose, poetry, and personal reflections. Other contributions, like those of Maleh and Amiralay are personal, but direct, reflections on their lives as filmmakers. Malas includes a screenplay and reflects on women in film, while Zikra and Mohammad’s pieces are poetic essays musing on film. Finally, Abdul-Hamid narrates a short piece on his two births, as a human and as a filmmaker.

The logic of this text may not suit those in search of a critical view of Syrian cinema. Instead, this text will engage a variety of readers, both in and out of the classroom. It will beg for more critical discourse from the field of cinema and cultural studies, particularly so as to question the role of audience and reception theory. Many, but not all, of the films discussed in this book have not had a public showing in Syria. Since the...
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1990s, Damascus has played a crucial role in producing television for a larger Arab audience via satellite. It even presents serious competition to Cairo for the Ramadan serial limelight. Technology has become more savvy and mobile, and audiences may view these films outside of theatres. These issues and more will have to be raised in succeeding studies and testimonies on Syrian cinema, but this collection is a valuable place to begin.

Alexa Firat is a PhD candidate in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at the University of Pennsylvania. She is currently writing her dissertation which deals with post-1967 discourse, the Syrian novel, and the production of an autonomous literary field. In addition to teaching Arabic at Philadelphia-area colleges, she is finishing production with a colleague on a short documentary that explores the implications of change, development and tourism in the Southern Sinai on the livelihood and culture of the indigenous Bedouin. Firat can be reached at firat@sas.upenn.edu


Among the Jasmine Trees examines the ways in which debates over the artistic qualities of music in contemporary Syria form the ground for broader arguments over the proper course and orientation of Syrian selves. In particular, discussions about “authentic” Arab music encompass much broader concerns about the development of an appropriate Syrian Arab modern identity. Through its role in fostering the cultivation of a rationality leavened with sincere sentimentality, music becomes the primary means by which Syrians construct an authentically Arab, authentically modern stance – one in apposition to the ‘alternative’ modernities of other formerly colonized peoples, and in opposition to the ‘normal’ modernities of Western Europe. This shift in focus from the political sphere to the culture provides a refreshing and – more importantly – productive reconfiguration of the sometimes rather tired field of post-colonial identity studies. It also offers a far richer study of political, cultural, and social life in contemporary Syria than most recent studies of the country, which have restricted themselves to the overtly political sphere.

Shannon’s study centers around the cultivation of what he terms the “aesthetics of authenticity”: the two-step process of first defining ‘authenticity’ as a crucial aspect of the aesthetics of artistic production and then evaluating artistic performances according to their degree of authenticity. Although all types of artistic production in Syria are subject to these aesthetics, Shannon considers music to be singularly central to contemporary Syrian culture because of its history as one of the Islamic world’s most elevated art forms and its current status as a highly popular, widely available and widespread experience. The authenticity of a piece or particular musical performance is judged on three related elements: the musician’s oriental spirit (ruh sharqiyya) and emotional sincerity (sidq), and the musical rapture (tarab) produced in both musician and audience.

Musicians and music lovers in Syria today employ authenticity in aesthetic judgments as a means to articulate their visions of a Syrian modern identity. They do so vis-à-vis an organizing thematic of the general decline of Syrian culture, in which the modern, urban present of historical time is devalued in favor of a timeless, mythic past of folk and Bedouin culture. The construction of a credible authentic modern Syrian identity requires legitimation through references to this past. Consequently, the Aleppan wasla – the set of songs and instrumental pieces performed in a range of maqamat (melodic modes), in a blend of improvisational styles, and sung in a mixture of colloquial and classical Arabic – is valorized over and against Arabic pop songs. Though the latter are much more “popular” in the sense of being much more widely heard and played, they are derided as inauthentic, constructed from derivative Western musical forms and superficial lyrics.

Shannon’s objective is to “show how affective and moral states associated with musical aesthetics participate in the construction of modern subjectivities in ways more subtle and perhaps more powerful and deeply seated than more overt intellectual discussions”, and in this he succeeds admirably (xix). Musical authenticity, demonstrated by the production of tarab through the cultivation of a particular relationship between performer and audience, becomes the signal of a distinctive Syrian Arab modern identity. Authenticity is a critical concept because it enables the construction of a local modernity,
one liberated from the debasing need to imitate “Western” modernity or to create a derivative “alternative” modernity. Instead, Shannon proposes the metaphor of musical improvisation – of free composition within the parameters of the larger production, taking elements of established pieces and combining them in creative ways to form a new whole.

Disallowing notions of Western European modernity as singular and “normal” and Arab modernity as the product of Europe “shocking” it out of stagnation, Shannon describes modernity as co-produced through interactions between Europe and the rest of the world. The historical conditions of its production – social, political, and economic – favored Europe, but European modernity is merely one articulation of a general process. It is neither the norm nor the standard, but its historical predominance means that Syrian and other modernities develop in relation to it. Through music, this Syrian modernity announces its distinctness from the European: where Western modernity stresses the techno-rational, Syrian Arab modernity “leavens” rationality with sentiment and emotionality.

Among the Jasmine Trees looks at several related aspects of music-making and music-debating, including the consecration of early mid-twentieth century developments in musical structure and form as part of the repertoire of ‘classical’ music and the etymological significance of musical terms. Most importantly, it examines the contexts of contemporary music performance, and how changes in the location of music performances have altered but not debased the audience’s experience. Historically, waslas were performed during sahras, evening gatherings in the private homes of Syria’s elite families. However, the early mid-twentieth century witnessed the migration of these elites to suburban areas and smaller, nuclear family houses and apartments. Today, musical performances are given in public or semi-public venues; rather than receiving invitations to an evening soirée, audience members buy tickets. At the same time, technological advances allowed for the introduction of recorded music and electric sound systems. The spread of records, cassette tapes, eds, and digitally recorded music has enabled a much larger percentage of the population to hear music on demand. (What remains implicit in Shannon’s analysis is the way in which these two changes have broadened the circle of music listeners to include many more non-elite Syrians. It may be that these changes themselves are the pre-conditions for considering music as the ground of authenticity and the source for the construction of modern Syrian selves.)

That the experience of music heard on the radio and in large concert-halls has not changed the audience’s relationship with the musician performing by making it at once less intimate and more commercial points to the nature of listening as an act equally as creative and as performative as musical performance. The experience of tarab comes from the interaction between musician and audience, and depends in great degree upon audience perceptions of the performer’s oriental spirit and emotional sincerity. While musicians might seem to be the central figures in the sphere of classical Arab music, listeners play perhaps the greatest role in determining which performances and whose musicianship is “authentic” and hence good. The spread of music beyond the private sahra has resulted not in the diminution of tarab but in its multiplying, so that there is a form of tarab for each musical listening experience available in contemporary Syria. This multiplicity, in turn, fuels debates over which music is more authentic and hence better suited as part of a Syrian Arab modernity.

The connections that Shannon draws between contemporary Syrian debates over “authentic” music and the broader issue of efforts to construct an equally authentic Syrian Arab modern identity do a great service not only to the community of Syria scholars, but also to the great many Syrians whose daily efforts to create meaning in their lives are overlooked by state-level political analyses.

Andrea Stanton is a final stage doctoral student in modern Middle Eastern history at Columbia University, focusing on 20th century broadcast media. She is an affiliated researcher at the American University of Beirut’s Center for Arab and Middle Eastern Studies (CAMES), and has presented her research at the CAMES faculty seminar and the Center for Behavioral Research. Her chapter “Broadcasting a Nationalist Modernity: the Palestine Broadcasting Service under Ajaj Nuwayhid” will appear later this year in Jerusalem: An Aborted Modernity, edited by Dr. Lena Jayyusi. Stanton can be reached at als83@columbia.edu
NEW BOOK

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Governing Property, Making the Modern State:
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IB Tauris, London, 2007, xiii, 304, 2 colour plates
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Courtyard at the Sayyeda Zaynab Mosque

This dissertation focuses on the period 1954-58, the so-called “the democratic years.” Kevin Martin explores advertising to situate “bourgeois modernity” in the striving towards achieving a lifestyle replete with symbols of modernity like cars, radios, eating out, and going to the movies. And he explores two advice columns, one by a doctor and the other by a lawyer, to situate “bourgeois modernity” in the cultivation of knowledge about legal matters and health care. The columns reveal a bedrock of common sense, which itself reveals something about urban bourgeois mentalité, combined on the doctor’s part with “science” and doubtful pharmaceuticals and on the lawyer’s part with a healthy regard for establishing written records to make cases to the bureaucratic state. Each presents his advice in fatwa form, question and answer. Their answers draw seamlessly on folk remedies and new pharmaceuticals and on shari‘a and new state laws respectively. Through the use of these novel sources, Martin is able to present a picture of life as lived and as dreamed in Syria of the mid-fifties. In his closing chapter he attempts a daring narrative technique by inventing a couple who walk through the western (modern) parts of Damascus in fall 1955 during the first international fair and again in fall 1956. He convincingly describes what they see, where they eat, how they pass the time, and their attitudes towards the goods and entertainments that mid-1950s Damascus offers them.

HONORABLE MENTION


Geography

Myriam Ababsa argues in her dissertation that the development of the Raqqa region is best evaluated through the lens of governmental success in overturning local hierarchies of power and loyalties based in tribalism, rather than through the usual measures of agricultural production and infrastructure building. She suggests that government-inspired development projects are perhaps more successful in subtle political and cultural ways by transforming parochial identities into citizenship than in achieving their overt goals of economic development. By looking at a region that has been largely ignored by scholars she is able to map it alongside the development narrative directed from Damascus.

SYRIAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION BEST ARTICLE PRIZE 2007!

Our next SSA prize will be for the best article in Syrian studies.

The publication must be between July 1, 2005 and August 30, 2007.

Submissions are due August 30, 2007.

Please send your submissions to our new Prize Chairman, Fred Lawson. Professor, Government Frederick A. Rice Chair Mills College, 5000 MacArthur Blvd., Oakland, CA 94613. Lawson@mills.edu.
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Annie Higgins is pleased to accept her new position as Assistant Professor of Arabic Literature in the Department of Near Eastern and Asian Studies at Wayne State University where she will begin in Fall 2007. This will be SSA’s new administrative home.

From August 2007 onward, the SSA address will be:

- Syrian Studies Association
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Founded in 1992. Membership: 85. Annual dues: $25 full; $10 student. Purpose: SSA is a private, nonprofit, nonpolitical organization of scholars and other persons interested in Syrian studies. The Association defines its area of study as historical Bilad al-Sham. The SSA is dedicated to promoting high standards of scholarship and instruction, to facilitating communication among its members through meetings and other contacts, to encouraging international scholarship on Syria, to promoting international cooperation among persons and organizations concerned with Syrian studies, and to encouraging students to learn Arabic in Syria. It sponsors panels at professional conferences, publishes a newsletter twice a year, awards prizes for best dissertation and best published article in Syrian studies, and publishes the latest information on Arabic programs and language courses in Syria. President: Peter Sluglett (sluglett@aol.com).

For membership, contact:
Annie Higgins, Secretary/Treasurer (higginsuf@yahoo.com) or pay using paypal on our website www.ou.edu/ssa). Payments can be sent by mail to:
Annie Higgins, Secretary/Treasurer SSA, African and Asian Languages and Literature, University of Florida, Box 115565, Gainesville, FL 32611-5565

Annual Membership Dues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>US Dollars</th>
<th>One Year</th>
<th>Two Years</th>
<th>Three Years</th>
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<tr>
<td>Regular Member</td>
<td>$25</td>
<td>$47</td>
<td>$69</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joint Membership at Same Address</td>
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<td>Student Member</td>
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<tr>
<td>Institutional</td>
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MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FORM

Please complete this form and send with a check for your membership dues (personal check in U.S. dollars or in Euros) payable to “Syrian Studies Association” to:

Annie Higgins, Secretary/Treasurer SSA  
African and Asian Languages and Literature  
University of Florida  
Box 115565  
Gainesville, FL 32611-5565

You have the option of paying your dues on-line with a major credit card. Visit the Syrian Studies Association membership page at - http://www.ou.edu/ssa/member.htm - and select the appropriate type of membership.

New membership: [ ] Renewal: [ ]

Membership type:
1 year, Regular ($25): [ ] 2 year, Regular ($47): [ ] 3 year, Regular ($69): [ ]
1 year, Joint [2 at same address; one Newsletter] ($35): [ ]
1 year, Student ($10) and less than $35,000: [ ] 2 year, Student ($20) and less than $35,000: [ ]
1 year, Institutional Membership ($100): [ ]

Name: ____________________________________________
Title: ____________________________________________
Institution: ______________________________________
Work Address: ____________________________________
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Tel: ________________________ Fax: ___________________________

Email: ____________________________________________ Web: ______________________________________

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Send Newsletter to: WORK ADDRESS [ ] HOME ADDRESS [ ]