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Introduction

As far as Syrian press vendors were concerned, the copy of *Star* magazine that arrived on 2 July 2005 was just another week's instalment of the paparazzi title. A brief glance at the magazine's front cover would present little to suggest otherwise: the brand title retained its five-pronged star in place of the letter 'A;' the issue number – 30 – registered the magazine's continuity; the faces of selected celebrities still radiated youth and vitality. But a closer inspection of the cover would point to the fundamental change that had taken place within: gone was the English-language banner reading 'Weekly paparazzi magazine' to be replaced by an Arabic phrase, 'We have achieved change… and we have not been changed (*Gheyirna … wa ma tagheyirna*).' The Lebanese and Western celebrities who graced the cover of the

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Lebanese-produced magazine had been largely exchanged for Syrian stars of a different kind. Turning to the first page, an English-language editorial written by a member of the new all-Syrian team raved about the implications of *Star*'s transformation. 'Wow,' it began, 'a phone call which costs only 4 S.Y.P [Syrian Pounds] can cause all this?' Dedicated to 'introducing youth work,' the editorial spoke directly to its intended young Syrian reader: 'I know you'd probably think that we aren't good enough for this work, but … we'll prove to you that we're worth your time.'

Figure 1: See http://users.ox.ac.uk/%7Emetheses/WeymanThesis.htm#Fig1

Star magazine began life in Lebanon during the summer of 2004. Produced by Integra Publishing and Marketing Solutions, the Lebanese subsidiary of Syrian-based conglomeration United Group, the magazine was packed with paparazzi snaps and gossip from Lebanon, the Arab world, and the West. Catering mostly to a young female readership, *Star* combined celebrity news, exclusives, gossip-based interviews, and fashion with film and TV reviews, games, and horoscopes in the mould of any Western celebrity magazine. In December the same year, the magazine was brought out in Syria with a new issue number and different adverts, but otherwise exactly the same content. However, 29 issues later, in July 2005, the Syrian magazine was transformed in a bid to reflect Syrian interests and values. The Lebanese content was dramatically trimmed down, and the focus was channelled towards Syrian actors and public figures. Other features concentrated on issues deemed important for young people such as preparing for interviews, making lifestyle choices, and pursuing relationships. The writers who contributed most of the Syrian-produced material were not high-flying paparazzi journalists, but young student amateurs brought in to form

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what was called the *Star Team*. According to the current editorial manager, Carole

Ibrahim Bashara, who joined in July after the change, the Lebanese issue was 'not

appropriate' for young Syrians.[1] In her version of events, *Star*'s general manager

Khaldoun Qita` Al-Na`l had the idea to adapt the magazine to the Syrian market on

the basis of statistics indicating an appetite for a more authentic magazine amongst

potential readers. Syrian culture, according to Carole, is more local and Arab-focused

than cosmopolitan Lebanese culture. The intense political context, in which Syria

was being widely blamed for orchestrating the murder of the former Lebanese Prime

Minister Rafik Al-Hariri in February 2005, was also a factor in persuading *Star*

Syria's management to tone down the Lebanese content.   Certainly, cooperation

remains between the two offices – for example, *Star* Syria continues to offer a

package of pages from the Lebanese version. But the marked differences between the

Syrian- and the Lebanese-produced magazines offer a unique insight into the cultural

differences between the two societies, and point to the enduring desire of Syrian

cultural producers to authenticate representations of social life.

A study of *Star* Syria is not only pertinent to the prevailing cultural and

political order; it can also contribute to an understanding of the broader historical

narrative of the modern Middle East. The Syrianization of the magazine, a process

which has continued apace since the new version was first established in July 2005,

articulates with other periods and countries where popular-culture forms adopted from

the West have been gradually authenticated. Ryzova has documented how the

construction the 'woman-as-a-body'[2] in popular illustrated magazines of early- to

mid-twentieth century Egypt began in the 1920s with imported sexualized images of

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[1] Interview, 8 December 2005
[2] 2005: 88

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Western women. These were replaced gradually over the next few decades by 'localized, personalized' images of Egyptian women's bodies 'made capable of relating directly to specifically Egyptian publics.'[3] This authentication lag in popular culture is observable in numerous other realms. Wise has shown that Reality TV formats and entertainment programming bought in the first case directly from Western formats is increasingly becoming authenticated as 'ethical' and consistent with Islamic principles.[4] In a bid to mimic and improve on the success of Western reality TV formats *Super Star* (Future TV) and *Star Academy* (LBC), a new religious channel, *Al-Risella* (The Message), will launch in Cairo during 2006. It will be dedicated to producing authentic entertainment programming compatible with Islam. Similar trends could well hold for the establishment of fast food outlets, the development of satellite news channels, and the production of video clips in the Middle East. *Star* can be located within this broad historical trend, and is therefore a valuable source for considering modernity in the region.

Indeed, a study of *Star* aligns well with the broad thrust of studies which have considered popular culture and mass media as crucial realms of social contest and experimentation in the modern Middle East. What is at stake in an analysis of popular culture goes far deeper than many assume; it has potential repercussions for understanding shifting state-society relations, changing perceptions of West-East incompatibility (or alternatively, productive synthesis), and emergent responses to the pace of globalization. In short, popular culture is a fertile field for gaining an appreciation of the Middle East's experiences of modernity. As high cultural production is often linked to the national cause, the contest between elite-high and

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[3] Ibid: 82
[4] 2005

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mass-low cultural visions elucidated by Twitchell in the Western context[5] is all the more dramatic in the Middle East where national identities remain emergent and malleable. This thesis has a firm contribution to make to understandings of cultural contests in Syrian society. In addition, class contests are also relevant. Despite the fact that media professionals in the Middle East habitually claim to speak to all levels of society, the cultural output they have produced throughout the twentieth century has consistently shown class biases and presented class-based role models to be emulated.[6] The ongoing relevance of the paradigm in which the emerging middle classes are drivers of an authentically Arab modernity is compellingly confirmed by *Star* magazine. Furthermore, no group could be more representative of the vanguard than the *young* middle classes. It is precisely this group to which *Star* magazine claims to speak, and it is all the more didactic as a result. Because the young are equated with the future of national progress, contests over how society should look are played out more urgently amongst those who seek to speak to and shape the young. The notion of 'youth' (*shabab*), which in the Middle East has tended to refer to unmarried adolescents and young adults, is a modern concept which emerges with the advent of mass education.[7] Intervening between childhood and marriage, mass education provides for a period of social and personal transformation in which social relations and experimentation can take place outside the home. Consequently, young people (*shabab*) are prime targets for those both within and beyond the state who seek to raise public morality, as well as for private companies forging new patterns of leisure consumption. For all these reasons, a popular-culture youth magazine is an ideal avenue for exploring changing social relations and cultural visions within Syrian society.

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[5] 1992
[6] Armbrust, 1996
[7] Armbrust, 2005

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Studies examining the role of mass media in shaping social perceptions in the Middle East have tended to focus on the consumption of widely-consumed media events, particularly dramatic serials (*musalsals*), and largely during the fasting month of Ramadan.[8] But, as Salamandra notes, the fragmentation of audiences brought about by the rapid increase in accessible programming has rendered such ethnographies and analyses problematic at best. What is needed to trace developments in the media landscape of the Middle East is ethnography which looks instead at the processes of production.[9] Such ethnographies are, to date, rare. It is acutely difficult to maintain regular contact with busy media professionals, let alone observe their practices at work. However, because *Star* magazine is largely produced by young amateur writers who are more willing to share their time than professionals, it offers a unique opportunity to engage with the process of production and gain an otherwise unattainable insight.[10] Moreover, the ethnographic element of this thesis, which is developed particularly in chapter 4, provides an occasion to revisit and question the theoretical assumptions of the neo-Marxist Frankfurt School. A study which details the interactions and experiences of young amateurs involved in producing a popular-culture magazine they might themselves consume can vividly highlight the flaws of an analysis which posits that popular culture is mobilized by a small clique of managers who aim to dupe the masses into passive consumption.

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[8] Salamandra, 2004, 1998; Abu-Lughod, 2004; Seymour, 1999; Armbrust, 1996
[9] 2005: 8
[10] I must, of course, point out the obvious obstacles to my producing an in-depth ethnography. Limited time, my deficiencies in Syrian colloquial Arabic, and my restricted cultural literacy in Syrian public life all pose problems for the ethnographic insights I propose. Nevertheless, I attempt to posit measured conclusions with these qualifications in mind.

Bibliography

Star is also problematic for Frankfurt-School theories of popular culture because it defies easy categorization. In the first instance, it is problematic to claim that *Star* is a mass-consumed product. With a print run of 10,000 copies in Syria, half of which are distributed for free according to the magazine's website,[11] the magazine has clearly yet to reach a mass audience in the way that, for example, satellite television has. Indeed, it might be inferred that the magazine's impact in Syrian society is limited at best. Yet, *Star* is relevant to the study of contemporary mass media in Syria because it *aspires* to reach a mass audience. As we will see, contests played out within the *Star Team* to determine the proper role of the magazine in Syrian society demonstrate that those who produce it consider it a national magazine of national importance. It is, unmistakably, the first Syrian-produced magazine in many decades to combine celebrity culture with commercial advertising. Moreover, although accurate readership and audience ratings are notoriously hard to obtain in Syria, many of Syria's urban young know about the magazine. Distributed in cafes, restaurants, and hairdressers, the magazine has located potential readers and entered the inventory of domestically-produced print media in a country where such publications are rare. Since domestic print media have been overtly linked to the ruling regime for decades, *Star* is testimony to a new kind of publication which can neither be defined as uniquely regime-driven nor as singularly driven by commercial interests. Certainly, the drive towards sales and profitability is taken very seriously by *Star*'s managerial team, and the magazine is clearly geared to exploiting advertising revenues. Perhaps more importantly, the company which owns the brand, United Group (UG), is business-oriented and keen to make its investments succeed. The range of brands the company has built up in Syria within the fields of marketing

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[11] http://www.united-group.org/home.html consulted 2 May 2006

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and media is testimony to this: the telephone directory Yellow Pages is a proven commercial venture world-wide; the classified advertising publication Al-Waseela promotes trade and commerce; the outdoor-media company Concord which specializes in billboard advertising is highly lucrative. Unlike the commercially unviable political magazine *Abyad wa Aswad* (Black and White) owned by Bilal Turkmani son of Defence Minister Hasan Turkmani, *Star* magazine aims to lure a mass readership and make big money.[12] Yet UG is also close to the regime and in part seeks to promote political continuity as any state-owned publication would.

What UG and the other private media companies in Syria are busy advancing is a corporate social responsibility which bolsters the ruling regime. UG's website claims the company is 'proud to belong to our [Syrian] community … to share its needs and to efficiently contribute to its development.'[13] One of its chief publications is the English-language *What's On*, a free magazine which looks at cultural and recreational events in Syria. Like the highly didactic *Star* magazine, *What's On* presents a very positive image of Syria and its cultural infrastructure which, given the timing of the two publications' emergence on the scene, points to another agenda within UG's remit. Not only is UG dedicated to commercial growth, but also to maintaining the 'stable and secure [political] environment that has characterized Syria,' which, as its website suggests, is essential for commercial opportunities and economic prosperity. But this is not the only reason why UG is keen to maintain the political status quo. UG's founder and current Chairman, Majid Suleiman, is the son of the former head of the Internal Security Branch (*Mukhabarat*), Bahgat Suleiman. This is important because, during a period of great political, economic, and cultural

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[12] I am grateful to Marlin Dick for this comparison.
[13] http://www.united-group.org/home.html consulted 2 May 2006

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turmoil, the Syrian regime headed by the young Bashar Al-Asad has sought to widen
the public sphere whilst simultaneously mobilizing new techniques of state control.
Many of the methods of maintaining power (with the exception of patronage)
previously favoured by Bashar's late father, Hafiz Al-Asad – the overwhelming cult
of personality focused on the President, the stringent socialist economic model, the
corporatist institutions of state – seem increasingly untenable. Private corporations
with close links to the regime, as this thesis will argue, are central to the regime's bid
to produce a new generation of politically-compliant, culturally-confident, wealth-
generating young Syrians.

The part-privatization of authoritarianism is seemingly a model which has
been harnessed elsewhere. As chapter 2 will tentatively suggest, Egypt has for some
time been developing techniques of control in which private corporations are active
and relied upon. Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is possible that the
use of private capital in the reproduction of the legitimating structures of authoritarian
rule has a history within the Middle East which extends back to the 1970s. The
Infitah policies of economic liberalization pursued in Egypt first by Anwar Sadat and
more recently Hosni Mubarak may contain the seeds of the dynamic I describe. It is
clear that Mubarak's campaign during the first contested Presidential elections to ever
take place in Egypt in the summer 2005 was greatly enhanced by the validation he
received from the private sector in an ostensibly voluntary show of support.
Nevertheless, this mechanism of control is being all the more urgently mobilized in
Syria because of the profound threats it is facing.

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The pressures facing the Syrian regime are three-fold. Firstly, the Syrian economy is struggling to find alternatives to the oil revenues and Soviet financial support so crucial in previous decades. Having been forced to terminate its thirty-year military and political presence in Lebanon – the financial hub of the Levant – Syria now has reduced access to world markets and capital. With a staggeringly young population, Syria's overwhelming priority is to find young people jobs and opportunities within the country. Secondly, the regime faces on the one hand, a growing Islamist threat domestically, and on the other hand, unprecedented and hostile American and Israeli influence in the region – American forces have occupied Iraq since 2003, Israeli military strength continues to grow, and now Lebanon, once the backyard of Syrian interests, is a de facto US satellite. Thirdly, perceived political threats to the regime are replicated in the cultural sphere. With the advent and spread of satellite, mobile telephone, and internet technology, Western and Lebanese cultural production has not been so prevalent in Syria for over forty years. The regime's ability to shape the cultural consciousness and national identity is further eroded by the growing strength of sectarian and Islamists trends which have risen again in Lebanon and Iraq, and are thought to be growing in Syria as well.

These pressures should be understood within the context of a changing political environment in Syria. Since the early nineties, the Syrian regime has been pursuing a policy of guarded economic liberalization in an attempt to adapt to post-Cold War realities. However, it was not until the death of Hafiz Al-Asad in 2000, bringing to an end his thirty-year tenure as President and the passing of power to his son, that commentators saw an opportunity for media development and political change. The period which followed, dubbed the 'Damascus Spring,' seemed to

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suggest that widespread liberalization in the spheres of politics and media was inevitable. Civil society groups were permitted to meet in public and discuss Syria's future for the first time in three decades. Yet many of these reforms have been reversed, and the imprint of authoritarianism remains. Despite this, the regime has made clear its intention to pursue a gradualist but consistent policy of economic liberalization. Reforms enabling greater foreign investment and the establishment of private banks indicate this consistency on the macro-economic scale.[14] As for the employment of young people, the Syrian regime has set up a number of agencies, such as *Bidaya* (Beginning) and the *Syrian Young Entrepreneurs Association* (SYEA), to encourage wealth creation. Meanwhile, the Junior Chamber International (JCI), the youth version of the International Chamber of Commerce, has recently been established in Damascus providing a node around which business interests can coalesce and young people can be encouraged to volunteer.

It is in the context of this partial economic liberalization that *Star* has emerged. It is one of a growing range of lifestyle and specialist magazines produced privately in Syria. In addition to UG's *What's On*, three privately-owned magazines were established in 2005: *Shabablek*, *Jouhaina*, and the English-language *Syria Today*. This trend can be aligned with the emergence of Syria's first private radio station - *Al Madina FM* – and the freeing up of access to internet, mobile phone and satellite technology. These are trends Bashar Al-Asad has been encouraging since the late nineties when he was acting president of the Syrian Computer Society.[15] Indeed, he continues to publicly encourage widening media access as Syrian President

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[14] http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/syria/intro/index.htm consulted on 29 April, 2006

[15] Alterman, 1998: 40

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today. In a keynote speech given at Damascus University in November 2005 he

spoke of mobilizing Syria's young to take advantage of new media for the Syrian

national benefit:

> 'The world is moving very fast. And there are challenges produced by these changes.   There have been new opportunities for achievement. Since at the heart of these changes lie information, communications and the digital revolution, we have all to work in order to integrate young people into this information age and to provide the integration mechanisms in all our institutions, … cultural and media structures…'[16]

His message, it seems, is being heard by those media professionals dedicated to

widening the scope of domestic media.[17] But, as will be argued in this thesis, this

development is small and highly controlled by the government. The range of

publications to be established in recent years is miniscule by comparison to other

periods and places experiencing genuine media freedom. The new media – the

internet and satellite television – pose a tangible threat to the state's control of

citizens' access to symbols, products and information, as is attested by Bashar Al-

Asad's accusations against the 'Arabic language media … which adopt the causes of

the enemies and the opponents' of Syria and wage a 'huge media campaign' to inflict

'moral defeat' on Syria. The threat has been met with three strategies: first, the

expansion of Syrian-produced output through these new media; second, the controlled

development of domestically-produced media; and third, the continued censorship and

scrutiny of domestic publications.

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[16] http://www.cggl.org/scripts/document.asp?id=46245 consulted 2 May 2006
[17] It is widely claimed that this development in Syria's domestic media is a direct result of refomrns brought by Bashar Al-Asad. For example, Jouhaina's owner and chief editor, Fadia Jabril, commented in an interview with me 13 December 2005 that an official in government encouraged her to set up a magazine that tackles controversial social issues, explaining that the regime's change in approach has taken place because the 'new President is young and has an open-mind and is keen to reach to the whole world to understand 'us.'' This was a view repeated to me time and again, not least by Ahed Abuzeid, a government official I spoke to at the Wazarat Al-`Illam, the ministry responsible for media.

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Star is remarkable precisely because it encapsulates these three strategies. Firstly, it is dedicated to building national confidence by harnessing the energies of young people towards engaging with Western-inspired popular satellite television through the lens of Syrian-produced output. Secondly, it is part of the widening scope of domestically-produced media, to which *Al Madina FM* and *What's On* also contribute. Thirdly, it shows the continued insistence within the Syrian regime towards censorship in *print*. In Syria, publications produced domestically have been inextricably attached to the machinery of the regime for over thirty years. The three major newspapers in the country, *Tishriin*, *Al-Ba`th* and *Al-Thawra*, are overtly controlled by government, and private publications have been strictly limited.[18] One solitary private newspaper dedicated to examining and critiquing the regime – Al-Domary – surfaced in 2001 to great international fanfare. Produced by the celebrated Syrian cartoonist, Ali Farzat, the paper was eventually brought to its knees in 2003 after provoking censors with a thoroughly negative depiction of Saddam Hussein during the build up to the US-led invasion which Syria opposed. One result of censorship is that domestically-produced publications are scrutinized intensely.[19] What is represented, claimed, discussed arouses more intense reactions because it is seen as emanating from some internal national conscious.[20] Indeed, perhaps because

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[18] David Hirst (*The Guardian*, 21 August 2003, http://www.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,,1026127,00.html consulted on 28 February 2006) claims that although the regime denies any role in censoring publications in Syria, it is able to achieve the same ends through its control of printing, distribution, and advertising. Certainly Syrian press vendors, media professionals, and young consumers I spoke to believed in the continuing relevance of state censorship.

[19] I should note that *Star*'s licence and publication are still located in Lebanon. However, the Syrian magazine is distributed by the Syrian state agency, is designed by the Syrian office within UG, and is perceived as a strictly Syrian magazine. In other words, it faces the same press laws and social responses as other domestically-produced publications.

[20] For example, in my recent trip to Syria in December, I saw a newspaper seller in a prime location in central Damascus underline the headlines of *Tishrin* using a red pen. The headlines repeated Bashar Al-Asad's claim on French television that Syria is completely innocent of involvement in Rafiq Al-Hariri's murder. The seller's display did not extend to foreign publications which were less clearly visible. The vendors display reflects the fact that domestically-produced publications are scrutinized more intensely than foreign publications. I similarly noticed a tendency for young men to photocopy

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of censorship, contests over representations of social life which take place in print are all the more intense. *Star*, then, is a very useful starting point for understanding social change in Syria today.

Combining interview, ethnographic, and textual sources, this thesis will consider the magazine's content and production in order to determine the extent to which *Star* and the changing media landscape in Syria is testimony to the empowerment of young people through media development. I will argue that *Star* magazine reflects shifting state-society relations in Syria whereby the regime is seeking to widen the public and commercial spheres whilst concomitantly reshaping and enhancing the techniques it uses to constrain them. Due to the methodological problems associated with mapping and interpreting reactions amongst consumers and readers of the magazine, as well as time considerations, the thesis will not make substantive claims about how the magazine is being received in Syria. Rather, the discussion will focus on how the magazine is produced and what it *intends* for its readers. Indeed, one significant area of investigation which could provide a productive field for future study is the magazine's relationship with religious norms and discourse. This thesis touches only on religion in so far as to say that *Star* is an avowedly secular magazine devoted to bolstering secular visions of society. Chapter 2 looks at the relationship in *Star* between national-regime symbols and commercial symbols, and argues that the magazine is testimony to the part privatization of national symbolic production in Syria as an efficient technique of control. It tentatively suggests that similar techniques of control are observable in other Arab

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and distribute articles from the government press if they believed the article to be of real significance, something which seems unnecessary given the remarkable availability of the three dailies and their low price.

states, notably Egypt, such that the mechanisms of authoritarianism may be

converging across the Middle East. Chapter 3 considers the relationship between the

Lebanese- and the Syrian-produced material in the magazine, and suggests that *Star* is

part of a cultural war in which Syrian cultural producers seek to engage with global

media and popular culture on their own terms for national ends. Finally, Chapter 4 is

ethnographic and focuses on the dynamics within the team of young amateur writers,

comparing the consensus within the team to the consistencies of the magazine's

didactic discourse. It claims that *Star* seeks to displace patriarchal norms with a new

privatized corporatist consensus by displaying a group of middle-class modern young

Syrians to be emulated.

2

Privatizing Symbolic Production: New Space for Commercial Brands, New Means for Regime Control

> *God protect Syria.* **The final words of Bashar Al-Asad's speech to Damascus University, 10 November 2005**
>
> *God protect Syria.* **The slogan adorning the front cover of Star magazine, issue 50, 19-26 November 2005**
>
> *God protect Syria.* **The name and chorus line of a rousing song played as an exclusive on**

Bibliography

Syria's first private radio station, **Al-Madina FM,** *in late November 2005*

Introduction: *Star* as a Site of Symbolic Contest

One way of understanding commercial lifestyle magazines is as a space for competing symbols. *Star* magazine is one of a group of magazines which have made available and are circulating such a space. The magazine collects and orders these symbols, whilst also creating its own and recycling others (particularly from the internet) which it claims as its own. The space for competing symbols which *Star* has created is, therefore, overtly managed by its design and editorial staff. Nevertheless, this space represents in microcosm what is taking place more generally in Syrian society where broadly two sets of actors – state and what might be termed private-corporate – are vying to imprint their images in the consciences of young people. This is not just some market-place battle for brand supremacy, but part of the on-going web of contests which will decisively shape the future of Syrian society and its relationship with the state.

A central role of the public space *Star* circulates is to expand further the reach of commercial advertising and therefore, at least theoretically, allow for the development of rival publications and media. This has happened with tacit state approval and is part of the regime's changing strategies for maintaining power.[21] But the wave of new commercial publications in Syria, of which *Star* is a part, is tiny in

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[21] Any publication that does not meet the regime's criteria for acceptability is likely to struggle. Al-Domary – the satirical paper of cartoonist `Ali Farzat introduced during the early years of Bashar al-Asad's Presidency – was eventually closed down because it provoked regime sensibilities. See Hirst (*The Guardian*, 21 August 2003), http://www.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,,1026127,00.html accessed on 28 February 2006.

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comparison to media developments in other periods and regions where commercial freedoms have been greater. For example, Martin details the emergence of an unprecedented variety and number – at least 260 separate titles – of periodicals published in the 'Democratic Years' in Syria between 1954 and 1958.[22] Similar developments took place in pre-Shah Iran.[23] More recently, Perthes has noted that in the aftermath of the civil war, over 100 radio stations and 50 television networks were established in Lebanon.[24] The wave of new journals in Syria today numbers only in the tens at most. This goes to show either that the conditions needed for a wider range of commercial publications to take root have not materialized, or that the regime is both involved in producing and containing the commercial media development as it grows.

Star, it will be argued, is evidence for the latter. A tension at the heart of regime thinking in Syria for over a decade has been how to liberalize the economy in order to generate new revenue without undermining regime authority. According to Hinnebusch, the fear is that, as the Syrian bourgeoisie grows and develops resources through private capital, so the regime's authoritarian rule will be contested. In order 'to be economically effective and politically unthreatening', he notes, 'economic liberalisation … [has] required the emergence of a reconstructed bourgeoisie *on good terms* with the regime [italics added].'[25] The 'extent, depth and rapidity of economic liberalization' then has been 'constrained by the interest of the regime.'[26] As Heydemann notes, 'It is the state, not capital, that defines the private sector's terms of

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[22] Unpublished dissertation transcript, p22. See also note 38, p22.
[23] Amin, 2001
[24] 1997: 20
[25] 2001: 132
[26] Ibid: 131

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engagement and the boundaries of its participation.'[27] Regime interests may have

been playing a dual game of liberalization and constraint with private capital interests

for some time, but the job of constructing a wealth-generating secular middle class *on*

good terms with the current political order is still very much in its embryonic stages, a

theory which *Star* confirms. How this task is played out in *Star* is the subject of this

chapter. It will seek to show that the magazine is testimony to the part-privatization

of regime symbolic production and has opened up a space for commercial advertising

that is crucially constrained by regime rhetoric.

Reading Regime Intention from Symbolic Production and Social Discourse

Such a close emphasis on the regime as an actor in social change in Syria has

come in for criticism. Salamandra has argued that studies of Syria have tended to

over-emphasize state centrality.[28] To redress this, she proposes an 'ethnography of

elite groups' which avoids regurgitating 'a story of economically or socially

disenfranchised groups battling a hegemonic state.'[29] But, as any cultural history of

print media in Syria would show, the state *has been central* to events, restricting the

range of publications produced domestically and managing the output of the three

lead dailies – *Tishriin*, *Al-Ba`th*, and *Al-Thawra*. As for media specifically aimed at

young people, there has been very little to speak of largely because of the nature of

state power in Syria over the last three decades. Indeed, to gain an understanding of

the regime's strategies for maintaining its power does not entail the assumption that

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[27] 1999: 210
[28] 2004
[29] Ibid: 20, 24

across society all groups are disenfranchised and see the state as the 'enemy,' an assumption Salamandra quite rightly seeks to avoid.[30] Rather those at the heart of government emanate from a 'bourgeoisie-in-formation, partly official … with a foot in both public and private sectors.'[31]

Elsewhere, studies have tried to diminish the relevance of the state to cultural and social analysis. Appadurai is a leading proponent of an idea that sees global society in terms of flows, or 'scapes,' of ideas, people and capital.[32] Whilst compelling on the level of those global flows states are largely powerless to impede from crossing borders or to shape unilaterally, such as capital flows, this theory drastically underestimates the continuing relevance of states for understanding domestic social change. As a brief comparison of *Star* magazine in Syria and in Lebanon will show, the Middle East is far from impervious to mass-mediated, popular and hybrid cultural innovations from outside the region. But that comparison will also show how widely state preoccupations can infuse media representations of society, not least because the symbolic field *Star* generates is acted upon by the state, as well as by other non-state actors. Another pressing question concerning the state revolves around the much debated viability of distinguishing between the state and society. Mitchell argues that the state, far from being a coherent structure imposed on society, is a metaphysical effect of the disciplinary powers which characterise the modern age.[33] Grounded in the idea that modern methods of power – ordering space, partitioning time, systematizing surveillance – worked to endow modern institutions, such as armies, schools and hospitals, with the appearance of having an independent

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[30] Ibid: 24
[31] Hinnebusch, 2001: 91
[32] In During, ed., 1993: 220-230
[33] 1991

existence greater than the sum of their parts, Mitchell's argument dismisses any notion that the state is really an independent or unified structure.[34] Mitchell is indeed right to think that the *idea* of the state is powerful because it attaches 'unity, morality and independence' to what is in fact 'disunited, amoral and dependent.'[35] But, although Mitchell shows that ultimately a complete definition of the state is a hopeless task, he does not show how continuities and discontinuities in structures, functions, and goals attributed to the state work through complex interactions with social forces and actors around them.[36] What this chapter seeks to understand is how discontinuities (changes in engagements with private capital) are managed to the maintenance of continuities (the ongoing authority of the Al-Asad line, its close cohorts and mechanisms of power such as the Ba`th Party) through symbolic production.

A study which takes symbolic production very seriously is Lisa Wedeen's *Ambiguities of Domination*.[37] In this book, which seeks to understand the cult of Syria's late President, Hafiz Al-Asad, as a form of power, Wedeen argues that official discourses must be read as 'strategies without strategists.'[38] In this, she borrows from Foucault's formulation that

> '…the significance of official discourses is to be found … in "the conditions
> of their manifest appearance," the "transformation which they have effected,"
> and "the field where they coexist, reside, and disappear," rather than in

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[34] Ibid
[35] Quoted from Philip Abrams, 'Notes on the difficulty of studying the state', *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1/1 (March 1988 in Sakr, 2001: 28
[36] Migdal, in Migdal, Kholi and Shue (eds.), 1994
[37] 1999
[38] Ibid: 153

"silently intended meanings," or in the explicit intentions of leaders who formulate these discourses.'[39]

Yet, I argue that Wedeen's theory, in seeking to claim the middle ground between 'total constructionism and total voluntarism,'[40] actually conflates two issues. Thus, on the one hand, she bases her argument on voluntarism, claiming that materialist, ideational, and punitive theories of state power fail to understand the role of Hafiz Al-Asad's cult, since they 'do not explain why the Syrian government expends exorbitant sums of money and scarce resources on symbolic production.'[41] Here, Wedeen is arguing that we should study the regime's symbolic production as a mechanism of power precisely because it is a *deliberate* strategy. Yet, on the other hand, she claims that the cult's *effectiveness* – its ability to engender compliance through rituals of uncommitted adulation on the part of citizens – is discursively constructed. Thus, she argues 'it is unlikely that anyone specifically designed a policy calling for transparently phony rituals of obeisance.'[42] It is my contention that these two positions, as far as is possible, have to be unravelled because they simultaneously confirm and deny the significance of *intention* in forms of power. Firstly, we should argue that, although a policy of spending exorbitant amounts of state money on symbolic production to bolster the regime is a policy with a cultural and discursive legacy that extends far beyond Syria's borders, nevertheless the policy has been actively selected out of a range of possible policies. Secondly, we should argue that the *effects* of that policy are constitutive of the cult of Hafiz al-Asad and must be read from the conditions of the cult's 'manifest appearance.' The task in this thesis, then,

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[39] Ibid, quoted from Michel Foucault. 1991. "Politics and the Study of Discourse." In Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (eds). *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality.* London: Harvester Wheatsheaf: 60

[40] Ibid: note 84, p.178, quoted from Sherry B.Ortner. 1996. *Making Gender: The Politics and Erotics of Culture.* Boston: Beacon Press: 11

[41] Ibid: 5

[42] Ibid: 153

is to look broadly at phenomena relating to the former which are decipherable through the latter. In other words, this thesis assumes that *Star* is testimony to the ways in which the Syrian regime is trying to reshape society. It is far too soon to posit the effects of *Star* and magazines like it for Syrian society, but it is not too soon to try and analyze what such published material strives to achieve through the interaction of state and private actors, discourses and symbols.

Widening the Space for Brands to Play In

As has been pointed out, the emergence of a host of new commercial magazines is not a novel experience in Syria. As Martin has demonstrated, the mid-1950s saw a rapid and unprecedented growth in published material, although the experience did not last.[43] For young Syrians today – the target readers of *Star* – there has been no comparable period of commercial freedom during their lifetimes.[44] The current period, then, is new for the young Syrians *Star* concerns itself with. More commercial freedom entails more space for commercial symbols (brands), which suggests that brands, and their managers, are accumulating a growing power in shaping social life in Syria. An example of this is the growing competition between Damascus's eateries. Salamandra has examined the growing trend in which old Damascus is being commercialized for bourgeois leisure through the establishment of

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[43] Unpublished dissertation transcript
[44] Most of the young Syrians I spoke to see Bashar al-Asad as a reformer and understand the current period as a continuation of the 'Damascus Spring,' the honeymoon immediately following Bashar Al-Asad's rise to President when media restrictions were relaxed.

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new restaurants in renovated traditional houses.[45] This development continued apace during the time in which she wrote her book,[46] and has continued since then. During my research visits to Damascus, at least three new bar-restaurants were established in the old town, and one new restaurant was being built.[47] What has accompanied this development more recently has been a growing competition amongst the restaurants and bars of Damascus, and Syria more widely, to win the struggle for customers, a struggle which centres on the battle to achieve brand supremacy. *Star* is testimony to this latest development, which has seen restaurants and cafes advertising themselves in published material like *Star*, particularly during times when consumption is encouraged, such as the fasting month of Ramadan. Issue 44, for example, published during Ramadan, features three adverts for one of the most popular restaurants in Old Damascus, *Haretna*,[48] an advert for a fast food joint, *Batata*, and one for an open-air restaurant in Aleppo, *The Roof* (figure 2; see

http://users.ox.ac.uk/%7Emetheses/WeymanThesis.htm#Fig2). Issue 58, published during `Id Al-Adha, contains adverts for *Barada Sport Café*, *Inhouse Coffee* (a café), as well as *Haretna*. But even during non-festival periods, eateries and cafes make a strong showing in *Star*'s advertising space. What this contest demonstrates is that commercial media and forms of commercial enterprise which revolve around consumption, particularly leisure consumption, depend on each other to develop. As Ohmann has argued for the US, advertising (and the lifestyle magazines through which advertising developed rapidly in the second half of the nineteenth century)

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[45] 2004

[46] Ibid: see the epilogue pp. 158-164

[47] The new eateries and bars of old town Damascus include the sister restaurant of *Bab Al-`Atiq* (The Antique Door) only two doors away, *Jupiter* bar opposite Bab Tuma and the *Oriental Restaurant* near Bab Sharqi. Another house near Hammam Al-Bakri was being renovated to house a new restaurant.

[48] My colloquial teacher, a Christian who lives in the old town east of Bab Tuma, recommended Haretna as the best restaurant in Damascus. He said the food, atmosphere and tobacco for the water pipes were of the highest quality.

played a crucial role in 'smoothing out the course of [capitalist] accumulation.'[49] For

the capitalist, advertising ensured that new markets could be forged and consolidated,

and new production lines could be adapted to the more precise predictions of demand.

For the magazine producer specifically, readers' attention was traded for advertising

revenue at a profit. If Ohmann's thesis is an accurate indication of the integral role

magazines played in consolidating America's rapid march to industrialize, then we

can make some tentative inferences about *Star*'s intended role in widening the playing

field for corporate and capitalist development in Syria.

      Star is not the only space available to advertisers in this widening field.

Billboards are now an established feature of Syria's urban landscape and line road

networks (Figure 3; see

http://users.ox.ac.uk/%7Emetheses/WeymanThesis.htm#Fig3).[50] There is no more

flamboyant and ironic example of this than the stalled building site of a state-funded

mosque in central Damascus which has now become the largest advertising façade in

the city, and probably the country, as the supporting structure for an enormous banner

promoting *Areeba* (the telecommunications company). *Al-Madina FM*, Syria's first

private radio station, is a favourite of Syrian advertisers and is perhaps so aware of the

prevalence of advertising on its schedule that it advertises its own brand in *Star* with

the slogan 'Friday without advertising.' Satellite television, although regional in its

reach, has exposed Syrians to greater brand diversity than was previously possible in a

country where still many Western brands are not widely available or are proscribed.[51]

At the same time as the space available for brands to lodge themselves in the popular

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[49] 1996: 85
[50] Salamandra, 2004: 161
[51] McDonalds is a classic example of this, even though it is widespread in urban areas of neighbouring Lebanon

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consciousness has been widening, a small elite of domestic companies dedicated to very contemporary branding techniques has emerged to dominate the key commercial spheres of communications, media and leisure consumption. This core group of domestic companies, including United Group (UG) which runs *Star*, joined forces to sponsor the website www.salam.sy devoted to encouraging the defence of the regime during the international crisis over Syria's suspected role in the murder of former Lebanese Prime Minsiter, Rafik Al-Hariri. UG holds a commanding hand of brands across the media, advertising and marketing spectrum, *Areeba* and *Syriatel* jointly dominate the market for mobile telephone service providers, *SCS-NET* is the strongest private internet service provider and so on. What these companies share is a foundational belief in their brands as vehicles for sales, a national reach and a willingness to use their strategic position in developing media to promote themselves. But there is also room to play at their margins: Syria has witnessed a considerable growth in private advertising agencies.[52] The website of *Chilli adverts*, the agency which produces ads for *Al-Madina FM*, is testimony to the role of smaller players in building awareness of domestic brands and confirming the advertising prophecy that brand is more important than product. Above all else, the students with whom I mixed while researching this thesis were aware of the new domestic brands, as well as foreign ones, and were more than willing to participate in this unequal game, shared by corporations and individuals, of entrenching brands in public life.

But we should not get carried away. The growth in both advertising and the space in which advertising is to manoeuvre is quite small. By comparison with the magazines of 1950s Syria, the range of adverts, products and services, as well as the

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[52] Salamandra (2004: 50) notes that, although only three television advertising agencies existed in Syria in 1990, within the next year over sixty new agencies were established.

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number of new publications available to advertisers and consumers, is very narrow.[53]

Martin details the 'bewildering variety of cars, home appliances, cosmetics,

fragrances, cleansers, medications, entertainment media and venues, travel

opportunities, and financial services' on display in a selection of magazines from the

period which he describes as 'comparable [for a Syrian] to that seen by his

contemporary American or British counterpart.'[54] This range is not replicated in either

Star or the crop of new Syrian magazines, which focus on other media (mobile

phones, radio, internet services), soft drinks (Fayruz, pepsi), and restaurants

(*Haretna*). Advertising in *Star* consists of one of two things: either an advert will fill

a whole page or it will feature as a sponsor along the bottom margin of a page. But

because the same advertisers straddle both spaces, the number of total adverts on offer

remains relatively small. Of course, *Star* may not need much advertising to cover its

production costs, but considering that UG manage one of the few market research

companies, *IPSO-STAT*, in addition to *Star*, it seems likely that *Star* would be able to

advance its advertising revenue where others could not go. Indeed, if we turn to

another growing realm for advertisers to compete – the internet – domestically-

produced websites are conspicuously short of advertising on their pages. This points

not just to the limitations of the medium in a country lacking the infrastructural,

technological and economic resources to maximize the internet, but also to the role

the state is playing as a constraining force on the very commercial growth it seeks to

generate.

Nevertheless, the space available for competing commercial brands to vie for

public attention is expanding. Although the Syrian regime is partly responsible for

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[53] Martin, unpublished disstertation script: 43
[54] Ibid

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overseeing this development, the growth of advertising and private capital does pose a number of dilemmas for it. In what follows, I will lay out four broad dilemmas which present themselves to the Syrian regime as it seeks to widen advertising space. I will do this by setting commercial developments in their immediate historical and sociological contexts and by comparing the historical legacy of Ba`thist visions of society with the logic of the capitalist imaginary. I will seek to show that theoretically the two visions are incompatible and antagonistic. Subsequently, I will seek to show how the regime intends to resolve these concerns.

The Needs of Corporate Capital versus the National-Regime Imaginary

Studies of consumption and advertising in the Middle East have stressed that the state and private-corporate world can work in partnership towards the goal of building patterns of consumption around national events.[55] State-managed Ramadan television in Egypt, for example, has long succeeded in 'bundling commercial and state ideologies with entertainment' in ways which go unnoticed by the audience.[56] Elsewhere, Neo-Marxist theorists have maintained that the state and private capital can function ideologically in concert because they present two sides of the same structural equation: bourgeois capitalist control over the means of production.[57] Yet, in Syria, the logic of unheeded capitalism and of the regime's vision of society continues to grate with profound effects. This dynamic is particularly true of the potentially conflicting ways in which the regime and corporate capital imagine the

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[55] Armbrust, in Meyer and Moors eds., 2006
[56] Ibid: 220
[57] Gramsci, 1971: 182; Althusser, 2001: 97

Bibliography

individual. Ba`thism, which continues to provide the rhetorical material of much official discourse and the doctrinal DNA, at least in theory, of many of Syria's institutional structures, places socialism and the national collectivity above the individual.[58] Despite the ideological weakening of Ba`thist resolve during the Presidency of Hafiz Al-Asad, and the concomitant rise of the cult of personality around him,[59] Bashar Al-Asad has inherited the discursive, institutional, and ideological legacy of Ba`thism,[60] and has to confront that legacy in order to assert his own position and power. He cannot simply wipe the slate clean and start again; rather he has to find a way to incorporate or adapt the rhetorical infrastructure of Ba`thism towards a new politics of control. This is clear from the keynote speech he gave at Damascus University in November 2005 in which he responded to international pressure on Syria over its suspected role in the murder of Rafik al-Hariri. He repeatedly appealed to the unifying concept of pan-Arab nationalism as part of and indivisibly linked to Syrian nationalism, claiming that current threats were 'campaigns … waged on the Arab nation, and Syria in particular…'[61] The rhetorical legacy of Ba`thism continues to provide guidelines for proper national conduct, since the fear of 'moral defeat is half, if not three quarters, of the real defeat in any battle, whether it is military, [or] *cultural*…[italics added]'[62] This rhetoric potentially places limits on the kinds of consumption individuals can pursue.

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[58] Van Dam, 1996: 17
[59] Ibid: 144
[60] As Heydemann (1999: 208) puts it, 'several years after history was alleged to have ended with the decisive victory of liberal market capitalism much of Syrian political discourse remains archaically revolutionary in tone.'
[61] Translation available at http://www.cggl.org/scripts/document.asp?id=46245 consulted 19 January 2006
[62] Ibid

Bibliography

The national-regime imaginary has often translated into certain set roles for young men and women. In the first case, achieving manhood has hinged on the expectation that men should be fighters and defenders of the nation. During the three decades of Hafiz al-Asad's rule, the possibility of military confrontation with Israel loomed large. Regime rhetoric defined Syrians as the steadfast defenders of the Palestinian cause and of Pan-Arab nationalism. The state instrument to implement these rhetorical ideals, the army, was massively expanded by years of ambitious military spending, and the numbers in the army as a proportion of the national population reached unprecedented heights.[63] Even today, it is compulsory for most men to serve two years of military service, providing the state with a powerful opportunity to shape, on the one hand, the way that young men think of themselves as defenders of the nation, and on the other hand, to mould popular understandings of masculinity around notions of honour, duty, warrior-ship and obedience to the superior and compelling will of the state. Military service remains a pivotal moment in young men's lives.[64] Indeed, it is not uncommon to see men in military uniform across Damascus. A uniform is a social signifier which marks men as soldiers in the national army first and individuals second. Despite army cutbacks, the regime has found few concrete alternatives with which to re-order its rhetorical structuring of what it means to be a man. Hence, images of the President show Bashar Al-Asad in military uniform not just to construct him as an authority figure, but as a man and as a defender of the nation.

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[63] Hinnebusch (in Hinnebusch and Ehteshami eds., 2002: 150) suggests that by 1986 the Syrian army numbered 500,000 men – an 'enormous armed force for a state of its size.'
[64] Conversations with young Syrian men of all backgrounds during my research visits to the country often involved some mention of military service. Both positive and deeply cynical views were expressed.

Bibliography

In the case of women, studies have shown that national movements in the Middle East of the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries emphasized women's roles as disciplined mothers and managers of the domestic space.[65] Najmabadi has shown the modernist trajectory of what she calls the 'domestic sciences' in Iran which sought to transform women from being 'part of the household' to being 'manager of the household.'[66] Women's education was given high priority by nationalists and modernists because women were in turn seen to be the educators of the nation's sons and daughters.[67] Similar trends have been noted for Egypt. Shakry has argued that in order for Egypt to become modern, women had to be educated both in the science of child rearing and the authentic customs of the nation – only then could the health and prosperity of future generations of Egyptian men and women be achieved.[68] The long legacy of modernism in Middle Eastern states then has been to define women as mothers whose proper place and roles reside in the home. National movements have further entrenched women's roles by incorporating religious personal law and paternalistic family structures, into the machinery of state.[69]

Of course, these concepts, both for men and women, have been contested and challenged, but the broad schema of how the State relates to the individual has never been completely unravelled. Corporate capitalism, conversely, seeks to propagate the idea that the individual is either determined by lifestyle consumption choices or professionally as a member of a private corporation. The crucial point is that stressing motherhood roles for young women and military roles for young men take both out of the social realm where they can be encouraged to consume. Developing a

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[65] Shakry, in Abu Lughod ed., 1998; Najmabadi, in Abu Lughod ed., 1998
[66] Ibid: 95, 102
[67] Ibid: 110
[68] In Abu Lughod ed., 1998: 156
[69] Joseph: 1996; Thompson: 2000

lifestyle, and therefore an *individuality* according to the capitalist principle, depends

on being able to make, and being aware of others making, lifestyle choices about

consumption – buying and wearing certain clothes, taking part in certain leisure

practices and so on.

Similarly, the national-regime vision and the private-corporate vision differ on

both method and content in the social instruction which renders the individual

effective and useful. Mass education is widely seen as a powerful tool of Middle

Eastern states for inculcating a national conscious and for producing disciplined,

obedient citizens.[70] For example, Starrett has shown how the Egyptian state

appropriated religious instruction in order to manage the proper social and moral

content of its citizens.[71] In Syria, the regime has constructed a whole institutional

machinery over and above state-run mass education for the purpose of socializing

young people to its norms from an early age. Children are virtually obliged to join the

*Vanguard of the Ba`th* (Tala'i` al-Ba`th) in elementary school and the *Revolutionary*

Youth Organization (Shabibat al-Thawra) in senior school.[72] These organizations

overtly seek to inculcate nationalist and socialist beliefs from a very early age, and

provide structures which logically direct young people towards Ba`th Party

membership.[73] Meanwhile, university campuses are monitored by members of the

students' union to ensure that students are not involved in activities which might be

socially threatening to authority.[74] No other associations are permitted to recruit or

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[70] Mitchell, 1988; Starrett, 1998
[71] 1998
[72] Wedeen, 1999: 161, note 5
[73] Hinnebusch, 1980: 149; Heydemann, 1999: 208
[74] Wedeen, 1999: 161, note 5. A good friend and informant during my research visits to Syria told me quite openly about his experience of being taken for questioning by the union's prefects after he took photographs of his class.

organize students.[75] The crucial point is that these institutions practically and

rhetorically divert young people from pursuing consumption practices associated with

leisure. Indeed, despite Ba`thist rhetorical claims that such state institutions are

designed to eliminate social distinctions, the regime has traditionally used these

institutional hierarchies to forge social hierarchies and elites in wider society. That

consumption and lifestyle choices now seem to be more important for defining social

status in Syria[76] implies that the regime is losing control over society. Indeed,

practices of consumption are set to increase. In the United States – the main source of

all-pervasive global popular culture – advertisers, marketers, and producers of popular

culture have sought to dominate the material which inspires young people's use of

leisure time. Consumption practices associated with youth leisure time and state

structures for regulating youth are not easily reconciled, not least because

countercultures which mock institutional checks on leisure have been cultivated for

commercial profit in Western media.[77]

According to Wedeen, the central mechanism for maintaining Hafiz Al-Asad's

authoritarian rule in Syria until his death in 2000 was not institutional; rather it relied

upon citizens self-regulating their own compliance to regime norms.[78] This

mechanism was the cult of personality surrounding the President. In Wedeen's

theory, Hafiz Al-Asad's cult worked to discipline citizens 'by occasioning continual

demonstrations of external obedience' in which they acted '*as if* they revere their

leader.'[79] This 'politics of *as if*' does not require that citizens actually believe the

President's material claims, rather it 'produces guidelines for acceptable speech and

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[75] Perthes, 1992: 16
[76] Salamandra, 2004: 2
[77] Frank, 1997
[78] 1999
[79] Ibid: 131, 6

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behaviour.'[80] It is according to these guidelines generated by the politics of *as if* that atomized citizens regulate their own public behaviour, though there may also be intervening state officials who punish particularly outlandish behaviour and dissent.[81] Social anxiety and feelings of isolation can only be properly countered in private. If Wedeen's theory correctly interprets the power of symbolic production and the cult of Hafiz Al-Asad in the persistence of authoritarian rule in Syria over the last thirty years, it also suggests that mechanisms of authoritarian control through symbols are incompatible with the capitalist imaginary. How can the consumer learn to conform socially by relieving social anxieties and desires through consumption if the overwhelming state-generated mechanism of public display is atomizing and discourages acting upon social anxieties? Indeed, how can consumption patterns – which depend on consumers perceiving themselves to voluntarily choose certain products because they are glamorous, youthful, or sexy – make any sense in a political environment where patently absurd symbols are geared to reinforcing citizens' acknowledgement of involuntary obedience, as Wedeen's theory suggests?

Moreover, in the private-corporate vision, professionals use their experience and education as indexes of social capital. Upward mobility hinges on professionals mobilizing their experience as social capital towards furthering professional goals and responsibilities, a dynamic which underpins concepts of meritocracy. Notions of meritocracy are theoretically, if not practically, gaining ground in Syria today, as features in *Star* magazine which validate effort and ability – *Real Star* and *Sport Star* – suggest. Of course, the notion of meritocracy can be seen as a legitimizing ideology for the reproduction of middle- and lower-class divisions. Yet, it powerfully

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[80] Ibid: 6
[81] Ibid: see the story of M and the high ranking officer, p. 67

Bibliography

undermines the logic of authoritarian rule where a father – Hafiz Al-Asad – passes

power on to his son – Bashar.

Another field of contention between the private-corporate imaginary and the

regime-national imaginary concerns public association and communication. The

Syrian regime has invariably been hostile to new communication technologies and

media because they are seen to threaten state control. For example, mobile phones

were only made legal after Hafiz Al-Asad's death in 2000, many in the regime have

been unwilling to pursue the expansion of the internet and IT infrastructure, and

satellite dishes were initially banned before their widespread distribution rendered the

law meaningless.[82] The long legacy of the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, where

opponents to the Shah's regime exploited new technologies – photocopiers, faxes,

tape cassette recorders – to distribute subversive messages and propaganda, appears to

live in the memory of Syria's regime elite.[83] Yet, as far as the private-corporate world

is concerned, more communication, which is either a form of consumption or vital

business practice, is better.

But it is not just in communication technologies that these two broad visions

are on a collision course. Since the Emergency Laws of 1963, the regime has kept

tight reins on the freedom of association. Many kinds of public meetings, such as

assemblies of unions and unofficial political parties, are prohibited.[84] In the private-

corporate vision, not only do professionals need to associate freely to get business

done, but aspiring professionals need to build their social capital by mimicking

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[82] My evidence for the change in law concerning mobile telephones comes from conversations with Syrians during my research visits to the country; for the regime's initial response to the internet see Alterman, 1998:41; for early regime attitudes to satellite see Sakr, 2001: 19
[83] See Sreberny and Mohammadi, 1994
[84] http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2004/41732.htm, consulted 9 April 2006

professional experiences. In other words, in order to get valuable experience, young

people are expected to volunteer. In Syria today, groups linked to the corporate world

are seeking to complement the state-run education system by providing young people

with a wider range of volunteering opportunities.[85] This kind of managed association

is not immediately compatible with prevailing national-regime interests; volunteerism

is a form of public association managed by private organizations. There is, of course,

another kind of public association the private sector relies on to produce and attract

new consumers: leisure. Not only does association through leisure directly encourage

consumption practices (friends meet for a cup of coffee and a cigarette), it also

provides the meeting place in which consumers are to keep abreast of new

consumption patterns (they come into contact with new fashions, new gadgets, new

beverages) and the brands which sell those consumption patterns (via television and

radio, in menus). But, as Rojek notes in a discussion of the work of Victor Turner,

> 'one of the serious features of leisure is that it constitutes the time and space in which cultural values can be objectified and subject to reflexive investigation… it is no accident that many of the important political movements of the industrial period have their origins in taverns and public houses.'[86]

If perhaps it is rather deterministic to claim that the 'loosening of inhibitions' in

leisure spaces could lead to citizens 'questioning the values underpinning

normality,'[87] it is nevertheless likely that such an eventuality would concern the

regime. At the very least, loosening of inhibitions would seem to undermine the

power of regime symbols to generate public dissimulation amongst atomized citizens.

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[85] The Junior Chamber International (JCI), Bidaya, and the Syrian Youth Entrepreneur Assocation (SYEA) are such organizations working to increase volunteering opportunities for young Syrians. I interviewed the presidents of both JCI and SYEA, 15 December 2005
[86] 2000: 147
[87] Ibid

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If, as Wedeen argues, one of the most potent elements of the regime's authority is its ability to manage the symbolic domain, then those symbols produced privately will be scrutinized heavily. Indeed, in the national-regime imaginary, authentic national symbols which validate the regime are to be celebrated. Conversely, Western symbols which imply subjugation to foreign ideas, imports, and capital are to be suppressed or rejected – as the wide discrepancy between Western access to Lebanon's urban markets and Syrian markets testifies. Even today, McDonalds is banned in Syria.[88] But for the private-corporate world, the most embedded image is the most powerful. Western brands are able to penetrate even the Syrian market as they have such a wide array of advertising streams to pursue, and present Syrian businesspeople with opportunities for profit. But, these brands are impossible to authenticate and thus are problematic for a regime that wants to manage the symbolic sphere.

Part-Privatization of Symbolic Production: A Solution Emerges

These various unsettling incongruities between the regime-national and the private-corporate imaginaries – over the ability to shape the young individual, over the right to provide individuals with social instruction in how to be effective and useful, over the shaping of public association and communication, and over the orientation and management of symbols – are stirred by the expansion of space

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[88] This was confirmed during an interview I conducted with state official in the Ministry of Media (Wizarat Al-`Ilam), Ahed Abu-Zied, 17 December 2005

purposefully designated for commercial symbols to compete in. This space is a threat to the regime's control of meaning, to its management of the popular inventory of symbols, and to its role in shaping public life. Yet, as has been argued, the regime needs and in fact wants commerce to grow to increase its revenues and cement its power.[89] So a resolution is needed – some kind of mechanism in the symbolic field which can both constrain the commercial space opening up in Syria and align it firmly within the regime's orbit.

Just as space is opening for brands to compete, so the regime is concurrently part-privatizing its symbolic production. This development is diffuse, and should not be seen as overtly state-orchestrated at every turn. Rather, although its outlines are managed by the regime, its detail and dissemination are effected by a range of non-state actors in concert with the government. The mechanism works on three levels: firstly, it mediates alignments between the private-corporate world and the regime; secondly, it influences choices over the production of goods; and thirdly, it merges the boundaries between private-corporate and regime-national symbols within Syria. Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is possible to claim that these techniques have been widely developed for some time in Egypt. If so, it may be that Syrian and Egyptian styles of authoritarianism are converging.

Alignments between the Corporate Realm and the Regime

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[89] In addition to falling oil rents, the loss of a superpower patron in the USSR, and failing state-run industries (all widely cited as reasons for Syrian economic difficulties), there may well be another grave economic challenge facing the Syrian regime with its withdrawal from Lebanon. As Perthes (1997: 18) notes Lebanon has proved an invaluable complement to the Syrian economy over the last decade, providing crucial access to finance, services and the global market, whilst reducing the need for problematic economic liberalization within Syria.

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Towards the back of issue 52 is what appears to be an unusual advert (Figure 4; see http://users.ox.ac.uk/%7Emetheses/WeymanThesis.htm#Fig4). On closer inspection, it becomes clear that this is not an advert at all – there is no product on sale here, no prominent brand to convey – rather this is a political statement of *United Group*'s support for the regime. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss the developments and implications for Syrian politics associated with either the death of Rafik al-Hariri, the former Lebanese Prime Minister and business tycoon of the Middle East, or the U.N. commission which led the investigation into his death and pointed a finger of suspicion at the Syrian regime. Certainly, the period, which is far from complete, has seen a growing chorus of international political pressure mount on the regime, and on Bashar al-Asad in particular, all of which is worthy of comment. But what I hope to do is use this period of political pressure to understand the shifting implications for symbolic production, for the commercial space I have identified, and for the regime's efforts to navigate some of the challenges of encouraging economic liberalization whilst maintaining authoritarian rule. These challenges are deeper rooted than the current political crisis, and will very probably outlast it. Yet, through this period of political crisis, some of the fault-lines of these challenges emerge more clearly than ever. Thus, I propose to analyze symbolic production in *Star* and elsewhere during the period without detailed analysis of the political crisis itself. In short, I am arguing that the kinds of material I analyze are not just a response to short term political pressures, but also to longer term dilemmas created by economic liberalization in an authoritarian world.

The page displays five Syrian faces, three women and two men. They are young (probably in their mid- to late-twenties) and visibly middle class (there are no

hijabs or items of religious significance on display here, and the subjects are dressed casually but in ways which mark them as educated – they look fashionable but not so sharp as to mark them as particularly rich). Two of the women are smiling, the others look at the camera unflinchingly but without firm expressions. At the top of the page, it says, 'Make your voice (*sautak)* heard,' where voice could also mean 'vote.' Subsequently, it says, 'No to threatening Syria.' The 'no' – *la* in Arabic – is emphasized so that it jumps out from the page as if it were a solidarity ribbon akin to the red ribbon used in AIDS awareness. It is pertinent to note that the ribbon, as a symbol of solidarity and awareness, has been appropriated by wide ranging political movements over the last decade or more, most successfully on the international scene by the movement for democracy in Ukraine. This appeal to the ribbon takes on further connotations of national solidarity for Syrians in light of its use in Israel by the rightwing settler movement which opposed withdrawal from the Gaza settlements. There, the ribbon was coloured orange as a link to the Ukrainian movement which garnered wide international solidarity; here it is coloured blue. At the bottom of the page, a webpage is advertised – www.salam.sy – and to the right, beside United Group's emblem, is some commentary. It reads,

'They have accused us of being silent
And that we have no voice
Thousands have voted for Peace. For respect.
Have you taken part?
Don't be silent as they are trying to squeeze you under their political pressure
It is you who is the target.
We have watched the results of those who were silent and decided to wait
And we have decided to stand by Syria.
Enter the website and take part
Because your vote is important…'

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This page is testimony to the part-privatization of symbolic production, a multi-faceted mechanism which has complex implications for advertising in Syria. In the first case, this political advert shows that the elite of domestic companies which controls the strategic sectors of media, communications technologies and marketing, is close to or part of the regime. On the one hand, state monopolies increasingly posture as private companies by projecting a strong brand and media image. The private companies, on the other hand, do not just have strategic interests for cosying-up to state authorities; some are close to the regime through blood or patronage. For example, Syria Tel, the dominant mobile phone company in Syria, is owned by Rami Makhlouf, a second cousin of President Bashar Al-Asad. Majad Suleiman, one of the founders and chairmen of United Group – the company which produces *Star* along with numerous other publications – is son of Baghat Suleiman, former head of the Intelligence Services (*Mukhabarat*) and close friend of the President. Elsewhere, entrepreneurs in the leisure industry are also close to the regime. The company which runs a 24-hour American café, *Pit Stop*, the nightclub, *Underground*, and restaurant, *Gemini*, is owned by the son of the former Vice President, Abd Al-Halim Khaddam.[90] Many of these companies are firm backers of the regime, as their involvement in the salam.sy website confirm. In return, these companies are granted virtual monopolies within their sectors. The charge is even made that in order to establish any kind of business in these sectors the consent of Makhlouf or one of the leading lights is a

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[90] Whitaker (*The Guardian*, 3 April 2001),
http://www.guardian.co.uk/elsewhere/journalist/story/0,7792,1072105,00.html consulted on 2 March 2006. Of course, Khaddam has more recently been labelled as a traitor since his flight to France and vehement (and opportunistic) criticism of the regime. Yet, his son's business interests were firmly established before his departure, and therefore the fundamental point that building a commercial foothold is made much easier by strong ties to the regime is not undermined by Khaddam's defection.

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must.[91] The job which *Star* is dedicated to involves producing a new generation of

entrepreneurs and professionals both sold to capital accumulation and the necessity of

authoritarian rule.

Producing Self-Generated Goods and Brands

The regime is keen that brands be produced in Syria. There is a long legacy of

import substitution, the practice of imitating foreign brands or products domestically

so as to generate jobs and revenue at home.   For instance, Syrian-produced 3M bars,

which consist of three chocolate fingers in a red packet, are quite overtly modelled on

the (four-finger) Nestle brand *Kit Kat*. Many international products, from televisions

to soft drinks to cereals, have their Syrian counterparts. And although the regime is

beginning to allow access to some global brands previously prohibited – Pepsi's

arrival in the Syrian market was greeted with much fanfare by *Star* who published a

Pepsi advert replete with Amr Diab, the Egyptian popular singer – designing and

promoting domestic brands which overtly imitate international brands is still

common. Thus, Pepsi is copied to produce Fire and Prima Cool (Figure 5; see

http://users.ox.ac.uk/%7Emetheses/WeymanThesis.htm#Fig5), McDonald's and Burger King

are reproduced as Batatas, and Starbucks re-emerges as Inhouse Coffee.[92] The beauty

of such a strategy is that it fuses within the brand a sense that it is both modern and

authentically Syrian; or, to put it another way, these brands allow for a self-generated

modernity and avoid reliance on and subservience to Western products. The delicate

balance of such an operation was expressed to me when I visited Said al-Jaafari the

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[91] Ibid

[92] *Star* issues respectively 42, 24 September-1 October 2005: 13, 40, 31; 58, 14-20 January 2006: back cover

Bibliography

Chief Operating Officer of Inhouse Coffee, the café chain which has emerged as perhaps the most visibly derivative and consciously branded commercial leisure space today in Syria.[93] Al-Jaafari was quick to point out that the idea for Inhouse came whilst he and a friend were living and working in the United States at a time when Starbucks was booming. But the challenge was, he insisted repeatedly, to create something new since creativity was, apparently, the only 'proof you're a human being.' 'We don't believe in imitation,' al-Jaafari confirmed. Inhouse, then, is a brand customized to the Syrian market. Although the coffee is imported, the blends – which took a painstaking five or six months to perfect before the chain opened (remember, 'you can't imitate') – are Syrian-designed to suit Syrian tastes. The standards of service offered in store are, I am told, higher than you might expect in the US. To achieve this, staff were hired six months before the first café opened and trained on service alone. Indeed, every aspect of Inhouse – the marketing, the branding, the décor – was produced by Syrians. Even the architectural design was produced by Syrians living and working in Germany. Thus, although al-Jaafari describes the 'fundamentals' of the Inhouse coffee shop brand as foreign (just as he argues fast food is not culturally Syrian and Oriental food in the US is not American), he argues that his coffee shop is appropriate for the Syrian market because it was creatively designed by Syrians with Syrians in mind.

Re-appropriating New Advertising Space: Propagating Regime Messages Through Private Means

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[93] 8 December 2005

Bibliography

Perhaps the most powerful aspect of the mechanism I am describing relates to

the merging of regime rhetoric and national symbols with private advertising. The

evidence for this dynamic, which was apparently completely lacking in Syria

symbolic production of the nineties according to Wedeen's study,[94] is compelling. In

the first case, just as new advertising space has been opening up for commercial

brands in public space,[95] so the regime has been re-appropriating such space for its

own symbolic display. Hence, in Damascus, it is not uncommon to find bus-stop

shelters, lamp-post hoardings, and shop-front posters displaying national regime

symbols (images of the flag, President, the regime's crest), even though they are

designed to display commercial material (Figure 6; see

http://users.ox.ac.uk/%7Emetheses/WeymanThesis.htm#Fig6). At the Jisr al-Ra'is bus stop in

central Damascus, a station visited by thousands every day, there is a new dynamic

billboard which continually rotates to show three different images, as well as telling

the time. I observed this hoarding in early December 2005 displaying an unidentified

image of children waving the Syrian flag interspersed with two other commercial

images (Figure 6; see http://users.ox.ac.uk/%7Emetheses/WeymanThesis.htm#Fig6).

Elsewhere, space in *Star* magazine, in accordance with all UG publications, has been

used to display regime symbols. In Issues 50 and 51, produced shortly after Bashar

Al-Asad's Damascus University speech in November 2005, the Syrian flag covers

almost the entire front page. Overlaid with the closing slogan of the President's

speech, 'God protect Syria,' these covers evoke an earlier issue in which the entire

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[94] 1999

[95] Salamandra (2004: 161) points to the growth of advertising agencies and billboards.

Bibliography

front page was used as an advert for Pepsi featuring Egyptian pop legend, Amr Diab.[96]

This points to two further features of the privatization of symbolic production: first, private companies themselves are recycling regime images and rhetoric apparently of their own accord; and second, the regime is increasingly exploiting techniques of advertising to further compliance. *Star* is not the only commercial outlet recycling regime symbols; the private companies listed as sponsors of the www.salam.sy website are also involved. Indeed, magazines and websites are not the only media used to perform this task – radio is involved too. The much recycled phrase taken from Bashar Al-Asad's Damascus University speech, 'God Protect Syria,' also cropped up as the chorus refrain of a determinedly militaristic song sung almost as an army chant by gravely aggressive male voices. This song was broadcast as an 'exclusive' in December 2005 on Syria's first private radio station, *Al-Madina FM*. Demonstrating allegiance with the national cause becomes such a preoccupation of commercial enterprises that some resort to combining their brand with the national flag. Even mundane household products – such as washing powder – come to be tagged to the regime symbolically (figure 3 see:

http://users.ox.ac.uk/%7Emetheses/WeymanThesis.htm#Fig3).[97] As regime symbols are recycled, so the perceived distance from their source is increased. This effect allows for regime symbols to take on a credibility and legitimacy seen to be lacking in those 'transparently phony' symbols it manufactures itself.[98] Indeed, national-regime symbols are being put to work along the lines of commercial advertising. Commercial advertising, as Richard Ohmann has argued, works to index values to a

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[96] Issue 44
[97] I observed a billboard advertisement for washing powder displaying the national flag at Jisr Al-Ra'is.
[98] This is cited from Wedeen, 1999: 6

product so that the two are seen to be associated by the consumer.[99] Hence the front

cover image of *Star* issue 50 aims to attach the product (the regime, Bashar Al-Asad)

to a set of values (national stability, progress, freedom, God's will) which resonate

with Syrian nationals. By displaying the national flag on its front cover with a slogan

widely accredited to the President, *Star* magazine inverts the advertising code of the

Pepsi cover (Figure 7; see: http://users.ox.ac.uk/%7Emetheses/WeymanThesis.htm#Fig7).

Whereas Pepsi uses Amr Diab to attach the values of sex appeal, charisma, style and

youth to the Pepsi brand, the Syrian flag – which is loaded with nationalist meaning –

gives meaning to Bashar Al-Asad. The underlying code – a code which advertising

has made familiar – remains the same. Readers, as Ohmann notes, have learned how

to read advertising, how to 'supply connections, fill gaps, participate in the

construction of meaning.'[100] The meaning to be inferred is that maintaining the

security and integrity of Syria necessitates maintaining the security of the regime. It

is the propagation of this message in ambiguous spaces which cut across commercial-

state, public-private divides that makes this technique possible.

Finally, it should be noted that *Star* is not only using its pages to further

regime symbols and blur the lines between brands, regime symbols, and popular

aphorisms. Issue 52, produced in December 2005, comes with a rubber wrist band

designed as the national flag and a CD of national songs within a sheath bearing the

same image of the Syrian flag as the previous week's front cover (Figure 7; see

http://users.ox.ac.uk/%7Emetheses/WeymanThesis.htm#Fig7). These techniques

signal the exploitation of marketing tactics characteristic of the corporate world, a

development which is central to understanding current trends in regime message-

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[99] 1996: 102
[100] Ibid: 199

making. CDs are mass consumer goods which newspaper publishers in the West have long been offering to readers for free in order to promote their product. The wrist band has seen a global rebirth of late as US fashion giant, Nike, has cashed in on ethical awareness by selling bands which mark solidarity to certain ethical campaigns. *Star* is also exploiting this development, demonstrating it is tuned in both to global youth fashions and to regime needs.

Privatized Symbolic Production in Egypt: the Convergence of Syrian and Egyptian Styles of Authoritarianism?

It is possible that privatized techniques for legitimating authoritarian power as evidenced by *Star* have their roots, as far as the Middle East is concerned, in Egypt's *Infitah* (Opening). This period of economic reform led by Anwar Sadat in the 1970s led many commentators to assume that Syrian and Egyptian styles of authoritarianism were quite separate; at the time of Egypt's *Infitah*, Syria was experiencing the consolidation of regime power by Hafiz Al-Asad in ways which sought far-reaching state involvement in all matters economic and social. It was not until the early nineties – a period which witnessed the demise of the USSR and questioned the very viability of the state socialist model – that economic liberalization really took shape in Syria in the form of Investment Law Number 10 of 1991. By this stage, economic shifts were well under way in Egypt although authoritarianism was not. It is perhaps sensible, then, to suggest that the mechanisms of control described here and illustrated in *Star* – close alignments between capitalists and regime officials, ostensibly 'voluntary' shows of support for regime continuity propagated through the media by private businesses, and the authentication of consumer products – have been

Bibliography

developed for some time in Egypt. Indeed, it is common knowledge that Gamal Mubarak, son of the current president Hosni Mubarak, is being groomed to take the reins in a stable transition of authoritarian rule reminiscent of the Hafiz-Bashar transition. Capitalists seem to be involved in making this transition possible. Certainly the sophistication of Hosni Mubarak's media campaign which helped him to victory in the first contested presidential elections ever in Egypt in 2005 point to the fact that the convergence of regime and private-corporate interests through media is well-established there.[101]

Conclusion

Economic liberalization is a necessary evil for the ruling regime in Syria today. Although economic change in no way implies the inevitability of political change, it nevertheless presents a threat to the regime's discursive, symbolic, and ideological infrastructure of control. An emerging resolution, legible in *Star* magazine, seeks to widen the space for commercial brands to compete within a constraining framework of state control. Central to this development are three mechanisms which collectively aim to bind those economic forces unleashed by liberalization into securing the continuity of Syria's political status quo. First, the regime is encouraging the development of an entrepreneurial class capable of generating new wealth which is tied to the regime by blood and patronage. Second, domestic companies are being supported to produce authentic domestic brands which imitate global brands. Third, regime-national symbolic production – so prolific during the rule of Hafiz Al-Asad – is being part-privatized. That these mechanisms

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[101] Levinson, 2005: 220

appear well developed in Egypt suggests that the two styles of authoritarianism may

be converging.

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Constraining *Star News*: the Lebanese Paparazzi Pages Wedged between Syrian Musalsals and National Canons

'The world is developing and progressing around us and we Arabs need to keep abreast of the positive changes in this world whilst keeping in line with our authentic Arabic traditions and being on our guard so as to keep at bay western mass media which are destroying the minds of the children of our Arab generation.'
Star Magazine, issue 48, 2-9 November 2005

Introduction: Syrian-produced content does battle with Lebanese *Star News*

Star magazine is testimony to the on-going contest in Syria between two

discourses engaged in what is seen to be a struggle for youth consciousness. By

juxtaposing Syrian- and Lebanese-produced material, the magazine itself becomes a

site of that contest. These opposed discourses orient the reader in radically different ways, one geared to constructing and affirming a vivid national imagination, the other directed towards an imagined world of celebrity culture that virtually erases Syria as a sphere of cultural production. Moreover, the ways in which these opposing discourses and modes of representation are physically ordered in the magazine suggest that *Star* is designed to reassert a vision of national confidence in the face of growing pressures on youth consciousness from Lebanese and global media production.

The Syrian version of *Star* magazine has retained a number of pages from its Lebanese sister publication. These pages broadly fall into two camps: on the one hand, those with a primary focus relating only tangentially to celebrity – *Star style*, *Star horoscopes*, *Top Movies*, *Mots Flechés* and *Faux Jumeaux* – are ordered to the back of the magazine (as in the Lebanese version) and are interspersed with other Syrian material; on the other hand, those pages directly devoted to celebrity news and gossip are shuffled to the middle of the magazine and treated as a coherent whole called *Star News*. That this collection of pages is not in fact sequential in the Lebanese magazine is testimony to the process of selection and reordering in the transfer of pages. As the great majority of the Lebanese celebrity pages borrowed to create the Syrian magazine's *Star News* concentrate on stars from the West or from Lebanon itself, *Star* Syria creates for itself a window on the world which effectively discounts a Syrian-conceived celebrity culture. This window is both internally ordered and externally constrained. Internally, it moves broadly from a Western-only focus in English to an Arab world focus in Arabic via a section which fuses Western and Arab topics in both languages. Externally, this section is shuffled to the middle of the

magazine, hemmed in by overtly Syrian pages, wedged into the constraining framework of a Syrian agenda which, in its avowedly nationalistic self-reliance, seeks to impose both material and ideational boundaries on its opposed Lebanese 'other'. The Syrian pages which achieve this effect - *Star Zaman* and *Double Star* – were not original features of the Syrian magazine but are now firmly established in its repertoire. Both speak a voice antithetical to the paparazzi thrust of the Lebanese section: *Star Zaman* charts institutional, social, architectural, and technological history in twentieth-century Syria whilst Double Star displays a young Syrian professional complete with a familiar inventory of personal details – age, profession, studies, hobbies – and a handy slogan for life. These pages work to contain the paparazzi section not just because they deny the relevance of mass-mediated stardom to cultural and national progress, but because they point away from the west to an indigenous legacy of modernity and a home-grown class of wealth-generating professionals.

Too 'Paparazzi' for the Syrian Copy: Lebanese Material Rejected from *Star News*

Star News, the unit of Lebanese pages addressed to celebrity news within the Syrian magazine, is characteristic of the paparazzi tone and approach of the Lebanese magazine more broadly, a tone which is markedly at odds with Syrian *Star* material. Carole, the editor of *Star* Syria, argues that the paparazzi magazine embodied by *Star* Lebanon is not 'appropriate' for Syrians, claiming that a purely paparazzi magazine is

not reflective of Syrian culture or popular demand.[102] Instead, in her view Syrians

want a magazine with news, taste, and both serious and funny articles. It is certainly

true that Syrian *Star* offers a duality that its Lebanese counterpart does not – the

Lebanese magazine is an unashamed paparazzi magazine, whilst, by contrast, the

Syrian magazine works to impose constraining borders on paparazzi culture through a

self-generated counter-ethic and tone. Indeed, in some ways *Star* demonstrates that a

paparazzi culture generated within modern Syria is for the time being non-existent.

       Star News, then, makes selective use of Star Lebanon's paparazzi ethic. Most

obviously missing from *Star News* are the exclusives in which *Star* Lebanon pursues

an Arab (almost always Lebanese) celebrity's private life over two pages or more.

This component of Star Lebanon has seen many formats – *Got Cha*, *Busted on Cam*,

Star Live, *Star Shots*, and *Happy Hunting* – all of which catch celebrities unawares in

public or private. Many do little more than display a celebrity with family, spouse or

father, but some offer a more provocative insight. For example, one issue shows

Lebanese singer Tina relaxing with friends on a yacht wearing nothing but a bikini

and sarong, a view of lavish celebrity culture and female exposure far removed from

anything *Star* Syria would produce (Figure 8; see

http://users.ox.ac.uk/%7Emetheses/WeymanThesis.htm#Fig8).[103] Other issues

display celebrities kissing in public, arguing in fashion boutiques or making up after a

row with a partner.[104] Or then there's the *Got Cha* report on Mr Lebanon 2003 As`ad

Tarbih's birthday celebration in Downtown Beirut (Figure 9).[105] The reader is

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[102] From interview, 8 December 2005
[103] Star, issue 25, 28 May-03 June 2005: 10-13
[104] Star, issues 20, 23-29 April 2005: 12-14; 14, 12-18 March: 12-13; 0, 4-10 December 2004: 6-7
[105] Star issue 1, 11-17 December: 16-18. All the above are Syrian issue numbers, although the magazines themselves are exact replicas of the Lebanese version. They hail from the period before July 2005 when Syrian *Star* became a different magazine from the Lebanese copy.

Bibliography

presented with a sequence of photographs which are constructed to form a narrative in pictures. Attached to each photograph is the time it was taken and a caption which pokes fun at Tarbih. For example, at 1.36 pm we see him sitting alone slumped in his chair at a street café table. The photograph shows him with his jaw extended forward and both hands on his chin as if he is deeply impatient. The caption reads 'As`ad Tarbih knows how to occupy himself while he waits!' Then at 1.50 a female friend arrives. The photo shows Tarbih launching himself at her, his neck craned forward to kiss her and back arching out of his chair which he still holds with one hand, his right arm wrapped around her. The caption reads, 'He hasn't got used to sitting alone, especially on his birthday … so she quickly comes to join him sitting out.' The narrative continues: we see him gleefully receive and open a birthday present from her, we watch her feeding him with an outstretched hand, and at 2.10, we witness him arch across the table to show her something on his mobile phone, a gesture which brings their heads into contact. The caption reads, 'He knows how to get her close to him!' To complete the story, we see her leave the café walking off into the distance, back to the camera, at 3.12, and then, apparently a whole 13 minutes later, we are shown Tarbih again slumped in his chair, this time with hands on his head, looking away from the camera. The implication is that Tarbih is gazing in the direction his partner walked away, his body language signalling that he is completely overcome with adoration for her. The caption poses a rhetorical question: 'Waiting for another present?!' Finally, the magazine shows Tarbih pursuing his celebrations later that evening but with 'no trace' of the female friend caught on camera earlier in the day. But there is no use celebrities trying to hide their romantic escapades – *Got Cha* will get 'em.

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The power of the sequence of photographs is to build a narrative without text. The captions only confirm what the pictures already say. The photographs are no more than disparate images of fleeting moments; it is their selection and ordering on the page *as a coherent sequence* which moulds the story and works to frame the celebrity interaction. The sequence of pictures – Tarbih waiting impatiently, then launching himself at his partner when she arrives, then opening her present with an ecstatic expression – can only make sense if we assume that Tarbih is madly in love. This assumption gives added meaning to the image of him craning forward to show her his mobile phone: he wants to get close to her. This is precisely what the caption imagines – showing her his mobile phone is only a tactic Tarbih employs to achieve his real goal. But the caption goes one step further: by proposing that Tarbih 'knows how to get her close to him,' it insinuates that he is a good lover, experienced in the strategies of romantic persuasion. That those very same strategies revolve around a mobile phone points to the caption's lively irony. The caption, then, takes the narrative built by the photograph sequence as its point of departure and uses it to mock the celebrity it simultaneously builds up.

The paparazzi approach exemplified by *Star* Lebanon's *Got Cha Exclusive* of As`ad Tarbih has proved problematic for *Star* Syria in a number of ways. Most importantly perhaps, it is intrusive and steps beyond acceptable bounds of public decency in Syria. The paparazzi ethic is provocative, and therefore entertaining, in a way which runs counter to the dominant shame-modesty ethic of patriarchal Syrian society. Carole did hint that Syrians love to gossip and indeed she seemed keen to challenge patriarchal values on a number of levels (discussed in the next chapter), but she also distanced herself from embracing an ethic which might be seen as the

Bibliography

antithesis of shame-modesty. In other words, *Star* Syria may not be keen to champion shame-modesty so much as to protect values of honour. In a related way, then *Star* Syria would find problematic the determination in *Star* Lebanon to mock famous figures in their private lives. *Star* Lebanon's satirical tone is the flip side of its absolute indulgence in celebrity for celebrity's sake – particularly the kind of celebrity which is buttressed by popular appeal amongst adolescent girls. *Star* Syria seeks substance behind its notion of celebrity. Finally, *Star* Lebanon is tied into Western codes of popular culture. As Twitchell reminds us, popular culture is popular in part because 'it takes simple ideas seriously and energetically.'[106] *Star* Lebanon's exclusives take simple narratives and energetically deliver them through the most accessible of media: photographs. Although *Star* Syria continues to describe itself as an 'illustrated' (*musawwara*) magazine, it does not reproduce the popular culture which, as Twitchell demonstrates, has been encircling the globe for much of the twentieth century;[107] rather it seeks a didactic function and a role in constructing national canons.

In addition to the Lebanese exclusives in the *Got Cha* mould, *Star* Syria also rejects the Lebanese celebrity interview, *L'Interview*. The motivation behind *L'Interview*'s omission cannot be explained only by the fact that its focus is Lebanese; the overtly paparazzi tone and approach are also important factors. *L'Interview* does give space for artists to discuss their work and careers, but more potently it takes a provocative, confrontational angle on the star. A pertinent example of this is an interview with the Lebanese singer, Carole Samaaha (Figure 10; see

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[106] 1992: 10
[107] Ibid

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http://users.ox.ac.uk/%7Emetheses/WeymanThesis.htm#Fig10).[108] Each of the three

pages of the interview is divided into two columns, one of which is text, the other

photographs of the celebrity. The photographs, which span roughly two thirds of the

width of each page, dominate the piece much as in the Lebanese exclusives, but here

they are promotional pictures taken in a studio. They show Samaaha part-concealed

by blue net curtains in the intimate surroundings of what looks like a bedroom.

Deliberately racy, the pictures display Samaaha in provocative poses, titillating and

alluring the reader with smiles and glances from a variety of camera angles. Indeed,

her outfits are all revealing. Speech bubbles convey bite-size extracts from the text as

if she were talking intimately with the reader.

      As for the interview itself, it seeks both to buttress her celebrity and intrude on

her private life at the same time. Take, for example, the following exchange about her

personal finances:

> *Star*: What about your fortune?
> Samaaha: I'm not rich, I've got enough. I do very few concerts out of choice,
> but not because there is no demand …
> *Star*: Isn't artistic prestige sometimes bought by money?
> Samaaha: To tell the truth I'm not materialistic, and money matters don't
> bother me…
> *Star*: Would you therefore buy an old car?
> Samaaha: We don't have to go that far, if I am not rich that doesn't mean that I
> am a beggar. Money provides comfort but not happiness…

The first question bluntly takes for granted the fact that Samaaha is rich. This

assumption couched in such an open-ended question grossly oversteps the margins for

decency and respect upheld in *Star* Syria. The second question makes a further

assumption *Star* Syria would find problematic: that artistic prestige is enhanced by

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[108] Star Issue 0, 4-10 December 2004: 24-26

material wealth. Finally, the third question overtly mocks Samaaha, throwing back at her the evasive responses she gives.   By claiming she is not materialistic, she attempts to deflect attention from her finances. But this only adds fuel to the fire, allowing the journalist to posit an extreme interpretation of her non-materialistic streak and build it into a patently absurd question for a celebrity, 'Would you therefore buy an old car?' The only way she can extract herself is by claiming the question is unwarranted.

This aggressive approach designed to corner the celebrity and so expose her publicly works on the basis that the reader's attention is caught by revelation and controversy. In *Star* Syria's pursuit of national canons, revelation and controversy can only be unhelpful, as we will see. But *L'Interview* is not only intrusive and assertive; it is also dogged in its pursuit of salacious gossip, exclusive detail, and celebrity exposure. Here, for example, are the final five questions of the interview with extracts of Samaaha's responses:

> *Star*: You were rejected from the play by the artist Mansur Al-Rahbani *Hukm Al-Ra`ian*: any bad feelings?
> Samaaha: Not at all. My leaving acting was a personal choice – nobody forced me to it. I watched the play and I loved the acting of Latifa in it…
> *Star*: It has been said that the play was not as successful as the rest of Mansur's works.
> Samaaha: No on the contrary I liked the play more than *Maluk Al-Tua'if*….
> *Star*: If your opinions about the work were negative, would you have been brave enough to admit it publicly?
> Samaaha: I would have said that the work was good but not the best.
> *Star*: Your new album is entitled 'I am free'. So to what extent are you really free?
> Samaaha: To the furthest degree, because I am not scared of expressing my views and feelings publicly…
> *Star*: You always sing about love, so where's the man in your life?
> Samaaha: There is love, but I always run away from it because men are selfish and art is selfish. And I'm worried love will steal me away from my big

artistic ambition. But I cannot deny that love and starting a family is what I'm dreaming of.

Each of the five questions is a test for Samaaha, and collectively they put her under intense scrutiny and judgement. The whole basis for this interview is incompatible with *Star* Syria which seeks only to buttress its 'stars,' not to tease and interrogate them. In this section of *L'Interview* five further aspects of the paparazzi ethic emerge. First, *Star* Lebanon is not afraid to accuse the celebrity of failure as, in this case, Samahaa is reminded of her rejection from a play. Second, celebrities are given opportunities, indeed encouraged, to pour scorn on one another. Here, Samaaha is given numerous opportunities to disparage the director Mansur Al-Rahbani, the man responsible for her public rejection from *Hukm Al-Ra`ian*. Third, *Star* Lebanon consistently seeks evidence of hypocrisy in the responses of its interviewees. In this interview, *Star* goes one step further, intimating hypocrisy in the question, 'You always sing about love, so where's the man in your life?' The question implies that the romance of Samaaha's songs does not relate to her actual love life. Hence, it suggests that her songs are emotionally vacuous or unfelt. The veiled accusation of hypocrisy is just one more technique for extracting gossip; it forces Samaaha either to refute the idea that she lacks a man, or to contest the basis of the question. Fourth, *L'Interview* posits hypothetical questions which the celebrity has to resolve. This is yet one more means of scrutinizing the star, and it proves difficult to escape. Samaaha is asked whether she 'would have been brave enough to admit it' had she disliked *Hukm Al-Ra`ian*, leaving her in a no-win situation. Either she refuses to play the game and comes out as a bad sport, or she accepts the conundrum and puts her future actions under greater paparazzi scrutiny. Finally, these questions, as with the financial questions before them, are deeply personal, and give celebrities no room to

hide the awkward or painful aspects of their personal lives. Since *Star* Syria is geared to presenting its celebrities in a purely positive light, these five aspects of the paparazzi ethic evident in *L'Interview* – the acknowledgment of celebrity failure, intimations of hypocrisy, encouragement towards disparaging other stars, and the intrusive elaboration on problematic hypothetical situations and personal questions – are incompatible with the central thrust of the Syrian magazine.

One Step Removed: Why *Duddly's Column* is Included in *Star News*

The Syrian *Star News*, composed of pages borrowed from across the Lebanese magazine, comprises broadly three sections. First, is the unmistakably Westernized *Duddly's Column*. Bright, colourful and breezy, these four pages of short English-language features on Western celebrity gossip are a consistent component of *Star News*. That the vast majority of these features are copied wholesale from celebrity-gossip websites does not diminish the significance of their selection for the Syrian magazine. Second, there is almost always a component of between two and six pages in Arabic devoted to news in the Arab celebrity world. Undoubtedly, these pages focus predominantly on Lebanese stars. These two distinct elements seem to merge through a series of pages which fuse both Arabic and English language, Arab and Western stars. The third Lebanese section which *Star News* incorporates into the Syrian Magazine is a longer feature of perhaps four pages on the career of a specific Western star.

Bibliography

Of the three components that comprise *Star News*, *Duddly's Column* is the most tightly tied in to a paparazzi ethic. The features, taken from Western entertainment websites, are invariably devoted to detailing the private lives of the stars they present. Indeed, many are salacious, radically compromising notions of female modesty. Take for example a piece entitled 'Helena Christensen's lesbian dance:'

> 'Helena Christensen reportedly performed a raunchy dance with lesbians at a gay nightspot. The catwalk queen was at New York's trendy Cubbyhole bar with a group of fellow models when she launched into a spot of dirty dancing. The 36 year old supermodel stunned partygoers with her sizzling antics and according to onlookers Helena was a hit with drinkers at the bar … earlier this year, the Danish born beauty … revealed she often goes out without any underwear…(Figure 12; see
> http://users.ox.ac.uk/%7Emetheses/WeymanThesis.htm#Fig12)'[109]

Not only is homosexuality a highly controversial issue in Syria, as I discovered when I raised the issue of representing gay and lesbian celebrities in the magazine with *Star* Syria's writers, but female independence and social behaviour are intensely contested issues as well.[110] Here we have the image of a woman drinking, socializing late at night without a male guardian, dirty dancing and even wearing no underwear, not to mention implications of homosexuality. This feature is not unique; rather *Star* regularly publishes similarly sensationalist gossip stories in *Duddly's Column*. Thus *Star* turns out stories such as Ellen DeGeneres revealing her childhood experiences of sexual harassment by her father and her impressions of her burgeoning lesbian relationship with Portia de Rossi, Goldie Hawn urging women to 'accept that infidelity is inevitable' and explaining how to have a fulfilling sex life – 'put on really pretty clothes and make love. And do it differently' – not to mention Eva Longoria

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[109] Star, issue 42, 24 September-1 October 2005
[110] Salamandra, 2004: 57; Armbrust, 2005: 22

whose 'extreme bikini wax is worth the pain' considering 'it improves her prowess in the bedroom' – 'it makes sex better' she informs us.[111]

What renders this Lebanese material acceptable in *Star* Syria, unlike the Lebanese pages in the *Got Cha* mould, is that it concentrates solely on Western stars and is written in English. These two factors combine to perform a distancing effect: it is assumed that Western stars under no circumstances provide role models to young Syrians. A similar dynamic has been observed in the development of popular magazines through the first half of the twentieth century in Egypt.[112] The racy images that illustrated magazines began to publish from the 1920s onwards were initially only of foreign women; over the next three decades a process of import substitution took place whereby foreign women were replaced by Egyptian women. But as far as *Star* magazine is concerned, the flip side of this dynamic is that, more than ever, Syrian stars are expected to behave appropriately. Even if *Star* shows that values of appropriate public behaviour in Syria are in constant flux, nevertheless the more Western licentiousness filters in, the more urgent the need to define and legitimize an alternative code of public behaviour deemed 'appropriate' for Syrians. *Star News* and the Syrian material which surrounds it appear directly opposed and antagonistic, yet in terms of the rationale behind the magazine, they are counterparts. By opening a window on the West, *Star News* allows for a spectrum of public behaviour and representation that only the Syrian material can filter.

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[111] Star, issues 24, 21-27 may 2005: 33; 25, 28 may-03 june 2005: 30; issue 24: 34; issue 50, 19-26 November 2005: 21
[112] Ryzova, 2005

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Star in Context: the Motivation for a Magazine of Opposing Codes

Star News is far from an anomaly in the Syrian version of *Star*; rather it has an integral part to play in pursuing the magazine's agenda. This is because *Star*, as part of a growing corpus of publications in Syria which seek to generate a modern secular wealth-generating class who can harness globalization for the Syrian national benefit, is designed to enable an engagement with Western popular culture on Syrian terms. That *Star* Syria is the first magazine of its kind in over thirty years openly pursuing this engagement is perhaps an indication of how far the regime of Hafiz Al-Asad was able to tighten its grip on print media and the public sphere in Syria. Of course, Syria's print media – particularly magazines – have embraced a Western-style popular culture before, not least in the 'democratic' years of the 1950s.[113] Martin shows that popular magazines of the period regularly published 'racy' images of Western stars, as well as reviewing entertainment and leisure activities for the young middle classes.[114] Yet, Ba`thism, the ruling political force in Syria from 1963, pursued a vision of revolutionary socialism which sought alternatives to Western commodities and consumer lifestyles, and hence virtually eliminated print as a vehicle for Western popular culture. Instead, a number of rhetorically socialist magazines emerged whose purpose was to further national socialism.

Ba`thist rhetorical pre-eminence in youth publications was alive and well as late as 1970 when on the first of April, seven months before Hafiz al-Asad launched

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[113] Martin, unpublished phd transcript
[114] Ibid: 234-236

his 'Corrective Movement' to take control of the country, a new magazine was published entitled 'Youth' (*Shabiba)*. In stark contrast to notions of youth in *Star* magazine, *Shabiba* saw the youth as the vanguard of socialist awakening, claiming that the 'committed mass of the youth' was 'amongst the greatest achievements of the new socialist society' which could 'raise the ideology of the Revolution.'[115] The category of youth, as Armbrust has noted, is a modern category which only came into being with the advent of mass education intervening between childhood and marriage.[116] *Shabiba*, then, proclaims the construction of Syria's youth as the unique achievement of Ba`thist mass education. The magazine, designed as the ideological fuel to drive the Syria's revolutionary youth as the engine to further progress, is

> 'committed to nationalist socialist thinking, believing in the goals of the Arabic masses and their revolution, it will be a revolutionary expression of their aspirations and … the fight for our people and our youth, and to deal with them in the spirit of responsibility and commitment to the spirit of the Revolution and the People.'[117]

This rhetorical bent is almost completely lacking in Star, although it does seek to shape society by way of young people in keeping with *Shabiba* magazine of the 1970s. Both *Star* and *Shabiba* were launched expressly to take 'a stake in the creation of this new [young] person.'[118] Yet, *Shabiba*'s means for achieving this were very different: it advocated 'socialist educational efforts' as opposed to endorsing privately-financed routes to academic and professional success. Indeed, unlike *Star*, it saw no place for consumption lifestyles and Western popular culture in young people's lives. The three decades of Hafiz al Asad's rule, as those who grew up in these years attest, saw a near complete decline of publications for young people under

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[115] Quoted in Khadur, 1972: 502
[116] 2005: 21
[117] Quoted in Khadur, 1972: 502-503
[118] Ibid

stringent authoritarian conditions. Thus, *Star* emerges in a near vacuum for indigenously produced youth publications in Syria with the only legacy in near view that of magazines absorbed by the rhetoric of revolutionary socialism. Because of this, *Star* comes in for intense social scrutiny, and those involved in its production know it. Nevertheless, dealing with the Western popular culture which knocks increasingly loudly at the door is a pressing task, made ever more urgent by the spread of new media technologies in Syria.

As the focus of studies over the last ten years shows, television has become the dominant medium for engaging in and contesting national representations in the Middle East.[119] The state's extensive role in producing popular television has been possible for so long because terrestrial television can be closely controlled within national borders in a similar way to print and radio. This involves, firstly, stringent, even arbitrary, censorship powers to control what can be said and to eliminate uncomfortable news and content, and secondly, the production of cultural output designed to affirm a sense of national community, which in Syria means dramatic serials (*musalsalat*). Satellite television, which spread rapidly across the Middle East in the course of the 1990s, poses the most immediate threat to the role the state has enjoyed in terrestrial television. It has enabled consumers to choose from a much larger range of external channels and production, making it virtually impossible to build national audiences around a single state-backed production. The thesis that ritualistic consumption of national media plays a central role in building national identity was most famously made by Benedict Anderson for print capitalism in the

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[119] Armbrust, 1996 pp11-36, 2006; Abu-Lughod, 2004; Salamandra, 1998, 2004, 2005; Seymour, 1999 ; Diase, 1996

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European context.[120] Subsequently, studies of media in the Middle East have made similar arguments about the ritual aspect of terrestrial-television consumption in the region, particularly during Ramadan where the ritual of breaking fast at sunset (*iftar*) has provided an ideal opportunity for the transmission of dramatic serials.[121] In Syria, aligning viewers ritualistically with the transmission of a single national production has at least succeeded in uniting different social, religious, and sectarian groups around one national 'event,' although different viewer responses may produce new schisms and contests in society.[122] Nevertheless, satellite is posing a relentless challenge to the very possibility of serials as national events. Given enduring beliefs that audiences are infinitely malleable to state-backed messages[123] and that television should play a political role,[124] state producers see losing the ability to build audiences around national content as a threat to the very role of television in inspiring national community and cohesion.   As access to foreign audiences and markets has grown, and scheduling time on satellite has increased, *musalsal* production has rocketed. According to Salamandra, this has 'obliterated the annual media sensations that once … united the national audience in the act of viewing.'[125] The task of producing this increased output has fallen to private companies rather than those in the state sector,[126] again distancing state actors from the role of shaping national representations and discourse.

Satellite television poses other threats to those dedicated to the survival of the Syrian regime. Most notably, satellite renders the task of controlling what people

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[120] 1991
[121] Armbrust, 1996, 2006; Abu-Lughod, 2004; Salamandra, 2004
[122] Salamandra, 1998
[123] Ibid, 2005: 11
[124] Abu-Lughod, 2004: 196
[125] 2005: 6
[126] Salamandra, 2005 : 10 ; Ayish, 2002

watch, so long a primary concern of vulnerable governments in the Middle East,

much more difficult.[127] In addition, satellite channels can bring external ideologies

and hostile political messages into the homes of viewers. Syrian viewers will

remember at least two occasions where this has taken place. On the first occasion

during Hafiz al-Asad's funeral in June 2000, the Arab News Network (ANN), owned

by the late President's nephew, Somar Rifaat, was used as a vehicle to convey the

political ambitions of Hafiz's banished brother (and would be successor), Rifaat.[128]

On the second occasion, both the Lebanese channels, LBC and the Rafik Al-Hariri

owned Future TV, used the international arena of reality TV to direct political anger

over the murder of former Lebanese Prime Minister at the Syrian regime widely

deemed responsible.[129] Both Future's *Super Star* and LBC's *Star Academy* produced

and broadcasted patriotic Lebanese songs in the immediate aftermath, whilst LBC

seemed to revel in the elimination from its show of the Syrian contestant, Joey.[130]

Above all else, the advent of satellite television heralded an era in which it became

much harder for regimes to dominate symbolic production and control meaning.

Wedeen has argued that the symbolic production used to generate the cult of President

Hafiz Al-Asad was a central mechanism of the Syrian regime's domination.[131]

Alterman has since claimed that such a mechanism is no longer possible in an era of

satellite television, as evidenced by the more open approach to the media taken by

Bashar Al-Asad.[132] Indeed, it has become much harder for regimes to control the

religious and social realms of representation and discourse. Although the Bahraini

Government succeeded in preventing the complete broadcast of MBC's Big Brother

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[127] Alterman, 2002
[128] El-Hennawy, 2002
[129] Kraidy, 2005: 21
[130] Ibid
[131] 1999
[132] 2002

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(*Al-Ra'is*) over religious objections, it could not prevent Lebanese reality television being broadcast regionally and consumed locally. Syria is of course different from the Gulf, but the regime is similarly incapable of guarding against the broadcast of coverage deemed unwholesome and divisive.

But, scholars have warned against over-estimating the power and novelty of new media technologies such as satellite television. Much of the satellite content that commentators claim to be novel in the Middle East can in fact be traced to a long lineage of media output through the twentieth century, not least the sexualized images of women so prevalent in video clips.[133] Another claim frequently made of satellite television in the Middle East is that it has an unprecedented capacity to challenge state authority and encourage individual freedoms.[134] Yet, satellite channels are in many cases financially dependent upon states, or indeed are owned by state actors and their cohorts.[135] As such, they have very little interest in undermining the dominant political elites or threatening possible markets for advertising.[136] These trends have been largely borne out by ten years of satellite operations within the Middle East. In current-affairs coverage, satellites may have in fact contributed to a sharpening of the 'red lines' of censorship. Sakr argues that, by enabling some criticism to be levelled at governments regionally, satellite channels have provided national governments with an excuse to overlook necessary changes to media laws domestically.[137] In terms of cultural production, mass voting on regional reality TV shows, such as *Star Academy*, has had little impact on domestic politics, despite widespread networking

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[133] Armbrust, 2005: 19-21
[134] Alterman (1998) concisely lays out the arguments for the powerful potential of new media technologies in the Middle East to bring widespread social change.
[135] Ibid; Sakr, 2002
[136] Sakr, 2001: 64; Kraidy, 2005: 22
[137] Sakr, 2005: 163

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through new media technologies.[138] Popular culture is, as Twitchell argues, so

appealing to young people because it takes 'simple ideas seriously,' because, unlike

high culture or politics in the Middle East, it is 'authentically democratic and

classless,' and because it is 'infinitely tolerant … and ultimately adaptive.'[139] Popular

culture broadcast by satellite does not provide some inherent catalyst for political

debate, nor does it necessarily seek to challenge state power even if it drives forward

the use of new, theoretically empowering technologies. The crucial development

satellite television, and particularly Lebanese cultural output, has brought to the

Middle East, then, is not political and social empowerment, nor some kind of novel

process of westernization; rather it has opened a wide and growing space for the

emergence of a genuinely classless popular culture which is capable of standing

outside canons of taste. Cultural shifts towards an *overtly* popular culture unchained

by nationalist modernism have been identified before in the Middle East. Armbrust

points to the advance of mass-appeal 'vulgarity' in Egyptian cinematic and musical

production through the 70s and 80s.[140] But a shift on a scale similar to today is, I

argue, unprecedented.

In order to gain a more insightful understanding of how new media

technologies – satellite television, the internet, and mobile telephones – are having an

impact on social life in Syria, this thesis argues that an analysis of a new youth

magazine and the experiences and attitudes of those who produce it can be

enormously productive. What do these young people and the media professionals

who guide them perceive as the threat inherent in popular satellite television formats

such as Reality TV and video clips? And how are these attitudes reflected in the

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[138] Lynch, 2005: 41
[139] 1992: 10
[140] 1996: 165-220

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content of the magazine? This chapter will seek to answer the second question by showing the very real sense of threat amongst Syria's cultural producers from the satellite onslaught.

The chief fear is the fragmentation of audiences and the loss of a cohesive national identity. To confront this, Syrian *Star* sets out to build a canon of national icons in the one field where Syrian producers are strong – musalsals. Part of this endeavour seeks to combat the classless adaptability of satellite popular culture by generating a new national confidence in a kind of national high culture packaged as popular culture. As Kraidy points out, in the Middle East cultural production is more contentiously contested as a field of national identity construction than in the West.[141] In a region where nationalisms are far from consolidated, and where processes of foreign occupation (the US and its partners in Iraq), annexation (Israel in the Golan Heights), and colonization (Israel in parts of the West Bank) are not only vivid in the memory but alive and well today, defending the national cause remains an existential task which touches the very core of public identities. For some this national vulnerability demands that energies be ploughed into the production of a national high culture. As popular Egyptian television preacher Amr Khaled puts it:

> … I am sorry to say that the features of our Arab nation have been obliterated; they are lost to all of the wellsprings of our culture and art … What is needed, then, is that all creative artists employ their art to drive the wheels of progress in the area.[142]

For Khaled, the stakes are high. His talk of Arab society being 'obliterated,' of its descent into 'flaccidity' and 'collapse' through consumption of video clips points to how very seriously he associates the prosperity of canons of taste with the very

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[141] 2005: 9
[142] 2005: 30, 32

existence of the nation. It is pertinent to note that similarly strident elite views were common in nineteenth century Europe and America, where high culture was considered the apex of human evolution.[143] For Syrian cultural producers involved in making musalsals, cultural production perceived to be high art is still prized as well.[144] The mass popularity of the reality TV formats harnessed by the Lebanese channels, LBC and Future, has unsettled Syrian producers, and *Star* reflects this.[145] Indeed, *Star* frames these competing codes – one unashamedly popular, the other dressed in popular clothes but devoted unflinchingly to the construction of national canons – in a highly orchestrated way so as to enable an engagement with popular satellite content on terms which will favour Syria's national cause.

Star, then, should be understood as new in two specific ways. Firstly, it marks a radical departure in Syrian publications, particularly for young people, in that it openly attempts to engage with the global popular-culture production that Lebanese satellite channels have harnessed with such success in the Middle East. Secondly, it has emerged in a specific context in which Bashar Al-Asad's regime, in trying to come to terms with the global reach of American political and cultural hegemony, is determined to renegotiate state-society relations and redefine the role young people are to play in shaping the new order. These two factors combine to infuse the magazine's core agenda: to open up a space in which an entrepreneurial class can come to harness globalizing formations – media production, technology, services – without impinging on the regime's political control. *Star* seeks both to open a liberal space and to contain it. One of the central components of achieving this aim is the

[143] Twitchell, 1992: 33
[144] Salamandra, 2005: 11
[145] Kraidy (2005: 18) points to market research companies in Dubai and Lebanon which have attested to the success of these shows. See note 42, p27

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interplay between the Western-oriented *Star News* and the Syrian-produced material

which contains it.

Mobilizing Musalsals to the Defence of National Canons

Star's Syrian material is geared to bolstering national confidence. Crucially,

the pages most overtly geared to containing the paparazzi ethic evident in *Star News* –

Star Interview, *Real Star*, *Sport Star*, and *Star Exclusives* – are concerned almost

entirely with Syrians and are written in Arabic, in contrast with the *Star News*

Western- or Arab-world celebrities dealt with either in English or an Arabic infused

with English. This is testimony to their role in constructing the national within *Star*'s

pages. *Star Interview* poses highly formulaic questions to an artist of national

relevance about his or her education and career. In the vast majority of issues, *Star*

Interview is a three- or four-page article which turns the spotlight on actors who are

considered important because they have appeared in national television productions,

particularly musalsals, although directors, a singer, a dancer and a rock band have

made appearances.[146] *Real Star* is a two-page interview with a successful

professional, again focusing on career and education, while *Sport Star* is a two- or

three-page piece that looks each week at a sportsperson involved in sports from table-

tennis to kickboxing, from body building to show jumping. Both these features are

highly formulaic from issue to issue. Finally, *Star Exclusive*s offer a slightly different

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[146] For directors, see Hatim `Ali, Star issue 44, 8-15 October 2005, pp 6-10; Bashar Dahan Star issue 52, 3-10 December 2005, pp18-20; Basil al-Khatib, Star issue 58, 14-20 January 2006, pp4-8; for music, see the band Kulna Siwa, Star issue 41, 17-24 September 2005, pp 4-7 and Miada Basailis and Samir Kuwaifati, Star issue 53, 10-17 December 2005, pp 4-8; for dance, see Lawind Haju, Star issue 36, 13-20 August, 2005, pp 4-6

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dynamic. They often revolve around either foreigners of note on short stay in Syria or

ceremonies in which *Star* plays a role – for example the magazine has hosted whole

teams from domestic television serials. These four features are central aspects of the

weekly Syrian output.

The crucial aim of this Syrian content, particularly the flagship feature, *Star*

Interview, is to construct a national canon out of a new generation of Syrian actors

and professionals. In the Middle East, constructing cultural canons is tightly tied in to

the dominant state ideology, modernist nationalism – a concept that involves an

important dualism.[147] On the one hand, modernism involves a notion of progress:

Middle Eastern states and societies are to develop on parallel lines to Western states

and societies in order to compete with them. On the other hand, modernism can only

be valid if it is authentic; it must be self-generated and tied in to a modern narrative of

national heritage. This temporal dualism remains important today, inflecting political

and cultural discourse alike. However, Arab cultural canons are more complex still,

often straddling boundaries associated with national identity, age, gender and elite-

mass culture. Two of the outstanding musical icons of the twentieth century, Umm

Kulthum and Fayruz, are both still popular and respected in Syria because they fulfil

these stringent cultural criteria. Fayruz dominates morning radio, including Syria's

first private radio station, *Al-Madina FM*, where virtually no other musician is aired

until nine o'clock. One friend mentioned how he was not ready to leave for work in

the morning unless had heard his fill of Fayruz classics.[148] Umm Kulthum recordings

can still be heard on radio and television sets most evenings around residential old

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[147] Armbrust, 1996: 194, Salamandra, 2004: 17

[148] I think of a friend (and trained dentist) in the provincial town of Al-Nabk in particular. It is also noteworthy that young Syrian friends, Souha and Itab, offered me Fayruz as an introduction to Arabic music.

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Damascus. These two performers are representatives of the two states which dominated cultural production in the Middle East through much of the century: Egypt and Lebanon. Both states have had troubled, but nevertheless intimate, relations with Syria over this time. Lebanon is still seen as a sister state of Bilad Al-Sham (the former province of the Ottoman Empire that now encompasses the states of Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and the Palestinian territories) and was part-occupied by Syrian troops for over three decades. Egypt and Syria were the only two states to politically act upon the unifying visions of pan-Arabism, merging to form the United Arab Republic in 1958. Despite the rift that developed over Anwar Sadat's independent peace agreement with Israel in the 1970s, Syria and Egypt have since resumed closer cooperation more recently. As such, it is not surprising that Umm Kulthum and Fayruz, neither of whom are or were Syrian nationals, are nonetheless taken as integral to Syrian national culture, not least because both can be tied into authentic Arab nationalism. In addition, Fayruz clearly straddles generation and gender divides. She is a favourite of the sixty-year old head of the Bab Tuma household where I stayed in Damascus over the summer 2005, just as she is hugely popular among Syrian female friends in their early twenties. As for Umm Kulthum, she was able to cross high and low culture divides by, on the one hand, appealing to classical poetic traditions, exploiting her talent and training in reciting the Qu'ran and singing the work of established canonical writers in Classical Arabic, and on the other hand, appealing to folk traditions in Colloquial Egyptian Arabic.[149] This ambiguity allowed both performers to extend their popularity and influence. Yet, despite being popular figures tied to twentieth-century mass media for their success, they could not be pigeonholed as 'vulgar' in the sense Twitchell uses to characterize popular cultural

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[149] Danielson, 1996

output of twentieth-century America, or Armbrust of some recent Egyptian cinema and music.[150] Most Syrians would firmly reject the idea that the bottom line for these two performers is 'Does it sell?' or indeed that their music's purpose is simply 'to entertain, not to enlighten.'[151] Of course, this is partly because Middle Eastern popular culture has been on quite a different trajectory from the American popular culture Twitchell studies even if similarly mass-mediated. The crucial point is that Umm Kulthum and Fayruz were canonized as national and pan-Arab icons through mass media. In other words, their producers were not simply driven by 'commercial' interests, but by national interests geared towards authenticating national modernization.

Although Egypt was for many decades the dominant force in musalsal production, since the 1990s Syrian-produced serials have been growing in influence and attracting audiences to such an extent that they may now out-rival their Egyptian competitors.[152] Ironically, the vehicle for this growth has been satellite television. Satellite channels from the Gulf proved lucrative buyers of Syrian musalsals which came to distinction in the mid-nineties.[153] Syrian-produced serials, both historical dramas and comedies, have become a 'staple' of television content in the Middle East, due in no small part to the competitive edge private production companies brought in harnessing new satellite advertising revenues.[154] But this phenomenon has not only been reflected in the flourishing market for dramatic production in Syria, but in the creation of a new generation of Syrian acting stars with a potential – in some cases a

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[150] 1992; 1996
[151] Twitchell, 1992: 43
[152] Lindsey, 2005: 203
[153] Dick, 2005: 179
[154] Ibid: 179, 180

very real – pan-Arab appeal. Syrian casts dominate both Syrian and collaborative

dramatic productions, such as the 2004 *Road to Kabul*.[155] As Dick remarks,

'if one is looking for someone to play a medieval Arab poet or an extra who can say a

few lines in classical Arabic, one goes to Syria.'[156]

This development is ideal for the Syrian regime. Musalsal content combines regional

and local interest and can therefore provide appropriate output for domestic

consumption as well as for sale regionally, building Syria's national image at home

and abroad. The success of serials provides work and stardom for a new generation of

state-endorsed actors, many of whom have been trained at the state theatre institution

and so bring strong values about national canons, authenticity in cultural production,

and classical Arabic to a new generation of viewers tempted by ever more channels.

According to Lindsey, the government has continued to play a strong role in

determining suitable subjects for musalsals and in vetting the final product before

broadcast,[157] perhaps in part because the most successful production companies are

owned by individuals close to the regime.[158] Indeed, Bashar Al-Asad appears to

enjoy being associated in foreign capitals with the more critical of these musalsals,

particularly the comedy series *Maraya* (Mirrors), not least because it allows him to

present himself as open and democratic.[159] Yet, recently he made no effort to prevent

the draconian seizure by censors of two whole episodes of the very same

programme.[160] This strategy has allowed the regime to censor what it does not like in

dramatic production whilst conveying its messages to diverse audiences through

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[155] Ibid: 177
[156] Ibid: 180
[157] 2005: 201-202
[158] Salamandra, 2005: 6
[159] Ibid: 7-8
[160] Ibid: 10

private means, as the content of recent productions attests. Nationally, musalsals for Ramadan 2005 such as *Al-Hawr Al-`Ayn* (Maidens of Paradise) preached against terrorism; regionally, historical dramas such as *Tariq* (2004) implied that Arabs must unite and be tolerant; globally, serials such as *Faris bi-la Jawad* (Knight Without a Horse, 2002) angered US diplomats with their negative stereotyping of Israelis.[161] The approach seems similar to the strategy Bashar Al-Asad, as President in waiting, pursued for Syrian involvement on the internet in the late-nineties. He clearly sought to harness the internet for the Syrian national interest by seeking both to monitor use carefully, on the one hand, and to develop Syria's virtual resources, on the other.[162] This dual strategy of harnessing media space whilst simultaneously constraining it should not be read as the hallmark of a culturally confident nation. Rather, this strategy emanates not from a position of confidence, but a position of extreme vulnerability in a period where cultural identity, regime power, and national cohesion cannot be taken for granted. Nevertheless, the outlines of a plan emerge. Cultural production and new media are being harnessed to make the right messages as loudly and as confidently as possible, whilst the wrong messages are confronted and constrained.

Star's Mechanics of Canonization

There is little doubt *Star Interview* is the flagship article in the Syrian magazine. Given central prominence in *Star* Syria, the feature covers the first three or four pages, in contrast to *L'Interview* which is tucked away deep into the Lebanese

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[161] Lindsey, 2005: 199-200; Shoup, 2005: 195; Dick, 2005: 177
[162] Alterman, 1998: 40

Bibliography

magazine. Indeed, the feature's importance is reflected in the prominence given to the actor on the magazine's front cover. Dominating the page, the actor's image often appears as a figure cut-out overlaid above pictures promoting other features. With the exception of the double-spread *Backstage* feature which takes a look behind the scenes of a Syrian musalsal (Figure 13; see

http://users.ox.ac.uk/%7Emetheses/WeymanThesis.htm#Fig13), *Star Interview* is the only Syrian-produced piece focusing on a celebrity (Figure 11;

http://users.ox.ac.uk/%7Emetheses/WeymanThesis.htm#Fig11). This indicates something of the scant resources *Star* Syria is produced with, but it also shows how important *Star Interview* is within the magazine's broad agenda. It is little wonder, then, that *Star Interview* is shot through with the mechanics of canonization. The questions, photographs, and format of the piece are all highly deferential and optimistic, and, in contrast with *Star* Lebanon's *L'Interview*, work to buttress the reputation of the actor on display. Produced with extensive input from the *Star* writers themselves, *Star Interview* displays photographs of the actor and *Star* staff together, often chatting round a table in an up-market café though sometimes outdoors facing the camera. In this way, the celebrity and *Star* writers appear as partners – a quite different relationship from the interrogation in *L'Interview*. Indeed, unlike the paparazzi photography of the Lebanese *Got* Cha, here the actor is a figure of respect who, when captured surrounded by attentive young people, takes on a visible status of prestige – the reader is given a visual representation of the star's relevance to young people. These actors are not just performers or sex symbols, but personalities worth listening to and emulating. In addition, by picturing the stars in recognizably Syrian locations (at least for Damascenes), the magazine defines them as locals and insiders.

Bibliography

Star Interview makes no demands on celebrities; on the contrary, it gives them a chance to show off. It is unclear whether the interview's highly formulaic questions, which differ little from issue to issue, are the result of editorial controls or *Star* staff input,[163] but we can be certain that the paparazzi-style dressing-down characteristic of *L'Interview* is not in view. The formulaic approach functions as a levelling tactic to reduce difference: each actor is treated as a national actor rather than a representative of a particular class or group. Moreover, there is no pressure on actors to reveal personal details; the tactics of paparazzi bullying so evident in *L'Interview* are almost completely absent here. Typical questions include:

> What are your future plans?
> Do you like the cinema? Do you prefer it to the small screen?
> What are your hobbies?
> When did you start to dream of being an actor?
> You have played a number of different parts and characters, what is the role you consider closest to your heart?

Invariably, the actors are asked to list their own favourite Syrian actors and suggest which actor they would most like to resemble. In this way, an inventory of Syrian actors emerges from the actors themselves. Again in sharp contrast with *L'Interview*, questions focus on successes rather than failures, demonstrating that unsettling the celebrity or creating a scandal is not in the picture. For example, in issue 35 Qais Al-Shaykh Najib is asked, 'What in your opinion is the secret of the great success which the serial *Layali Al-Salihia* achieved?'[164] Nowhere is the inverse of this question asked: 'Why did this serial fail?' The unwillingness to tackle any kind of failure,

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[163] The questions asked in *Star Interview* in the December 2005 issues show much greater variation than at other times. This is because December is the academic exam period in Syria when most of the *Star* writers are unable to work on producing the magazine. In such circumstances it is left to Carole and her editorial staff to conduct the interviews and write the articles. They tend to ask more varied and taxing questions. But this does not mean that Carole gives the reins entirely to the young people at other times. The similarities between the questions in *Star Interview*, *Real Star*, and *Sport Star* show that there is an editorial bias against the young writers experimenting and asking tough questions.
[164] 6-13 August 2005: p5

Bibliography

conflict, suffering, or ignominy should be understood within the context of feelings of

national vulnerability, and can be seen in other cultural fields. For example, the

musalsal *Al-Zeer Salim* established new ground for its drastically negative display of a

conventional historical hero in Arab folklore, but only after its producers axed some

of the original scenes for being too negative and controversial.[165] Similarly, in the

socially conservative Gulf, MBC is adapting the American reality TV show *The*

Biggest Loser as *The Biggest Winner* so as to 'keep it positive, not to add a negative

twist.'[166] Every actor featured in *Star Interview* comes out a winner too.

It is important to remember that the majority of Syrian actors appearing in

musalsals have been trained within the state theatre institute.[167] Versed in the kind of

national culture the Syrian regime supports (for example, they are highly competent in

classical Arabic) these actors are state-endorsed cultural icons. *Star Interview*

provides a forum for actors to promote their own notions of the national canon. *Star*

selects actors who reaffirm its ethos and whom it deems worthy of national

celebration. The interview itself is not in fact a news item – again pointing to a

contrast with the Lebanese version which opens with celebrity news stories from the

Middle East – nor is the interview a scoop in the style of the Lebanese *Got Cha*.

Rather, *Star Interview* is a statement of national progress in which an actor is called

upon to reflect on his or her role in, experiences of, and ideas about that national

progress. In return, the actors' sense of self-worth is reinforced, not least because

they are registered within *Star* as national icons.

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[165] Dick, 2005: 184
[166] The MBC producer Abdelfatah Al-Masry, quoted in Wise, 2005: 49
[167] Dick, 2005: 180

Bibliography

Actors stress time and time again the importance of study in harnessing acting talent. Education, as Armbrust has argued, is a central component of twentieth-century modernist thinking in the Middle East, not just because it is seen a powerful state mechanism of producing social change, but because it is tied both to visions of national progress and to the middle classes who are called upon to provide the engine room for that progress.[168] Yet more recent changes in Egyptian cultural production indicate that the value of education for personal achievement and upward mobility is no longer taken for granted. According to the actors who appear in *Star*, however, academic training remains highly valuable, pointing to the continuing relevance of modernism in Syria. *Star Interview* questions actors most weeks as to whether 'talent and experience is enough for an actor to get into the profession' or whether 'he also needs study and training.'[169] Actors usually profess that 'an artist fundamentally needs talent' but that this 'matures through studies.'[170] Qais Al-Shaykh Najib claims that you can learn in four years through college what takes ten years through experience alone and 'in a more academic and better way.'[171] The institution which according to most actors retains the prime position in safe-guarding Syrian culture and ensuring the development of home-grown talent is the Academy of Higher Learning in the Performance Arts (*Al-Ma`had Al-`Ali lil-Funun Al-Masrahia)*. The name of this institution itself indicates the values actors attribute to the kind of 'art' they partake in producing. Indeed, the fact that its role in Syria's acting profession gets such attention in *Star Interview* demonstrates that it remains perhaps the only institution of its kind in the country. Its pivotal position for the acting profession is not just in

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[168] 1996
[169] Interview with Qais Al-Shaykh Najib, *Star* 35, 6-13 August 2005: p5
[170] Ibid
[171] Ibid

producing the next generation of actors, but in ensuring both the quality of cultural output and the notion of high culture in Syrian drama at all.

As state-trained icons of national progress, actors invariably articulate their role as one of producing high, rather than purely popular, art. When asked about the secret behind the popularity of the serial *Layali Al-Salihia*, Qais Al-Shaykh Najib responded:

> 'Because the serial managed a balance between two things – it had a mass popular underpinning in addition to being consistently highly artistic on the levels of décor, costume, camera work, directing, and acting. Added to this, the subject it addressed is popular and presents an important moral value.'[172]

This demonstrates the enduring belief that a serial must impart high cultural ideals to its audience in order to achieve popularity. Just as Umm Kulthum achieved popularity by fusing high and low traditions, Qais believes that mass appeal must be combined with high artistic merit which raises the cultural consciousness of the audience. High culture is not to be made elite, but employed by those who possess competence in it to the ends of national affirmation and cultural enlightenment. Becoming a canonical actor depends first on a process of initiation – learning the know-how in elite cultural forms and being validated as a cultural icon – then on a process of guarding cultural standards and instructing others in them. The two processes, initiation in the tradition and passing on the tradition, are effectively two sides of the same pattern of regenerating the national canon.

Conclusion

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[172] Ibid

Star demonstrates the emerging response of the Syrian regime to the perceived combined threats of new media (satellite television, the internet, mobile telephones) and untrammelled Western-conceived popular culture which is increasingly accessible. These threats seem to signal the end of the state's role in producing and broadcasting terrestrial television whose goal is to align national audiences around national output. The regime response is as legible in *Star* as it is within the speeches and policies of state officials. The energies of young Syrians are to be put to harnessing new media –satellite television and the internet in particular – to the national benefit. Devoted to achieving this engagement, *Star* opens a space for Western, and particularly Lebanese, popular culture whilst concomitantly constraining that space with a mechanics of national canonization. Thus, Syrian actors in the flourishing sector of musalsal production are to be moulded as canons to combat the icons of (largely Lebanese) reality television and video clips who cannot be authenticated.

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Shaping New Authority Structures: Carole, *Star* Writers, and the Privatized Corporatist Consensus

Bibliography

Restricting freedom means dwarfing it, but regulating its practice means developing it and making it healthy… Freedom and its regulations belong side by side. They do not live apart… Like everything in this universe, freedom needs order.'
Hafiz al-Asad on freedom at his 1990 Revolution Day address.[173]

Introduction: No Ordinary Stars

Star magazine is only partly devoted to buttressing the stardom of current celebrities. A consistent feature of the magazine's output and production is geared to generating stars of a very different kind from an unusual source. Rather than building exclusively on the careers, habits and private lives of celebrities in music, television, and drama, *Star* sets out to mould and display a team of young role models – the amateur writers, many students with no previous experience or training in journalism, who contribute much of the Syrian content to the magazine – whose only success is to have confidently located the right path to personal progress. The path they have found revolves around the pursuit of higher education, professional ambition and a secular consumption lifestyle. If these are the building blocks of national modernity in Syria, then it is the young middle classes, epitomized by the writers in *Star*, who are to ensure the safety of Syria's passage to that modernity. In other words, *Star*'s young writers contribute to the magazine's mission on two levels: first, by taking part in *Star*'s production they guarantee their own position within Syria's own evolving modernity; second, as students of the *Star* way, they can be displayed and projected outwards to the reader as role models to be emulated. This implies that even the

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[173] Quoted in Heydemann, 1993: 100

magazine's title – *Star* – is part of its agenda of engaging with global media on Syrian terms. Taking an English word which is now widely established in the youth repertoire of foreign vocabulary thanks to the massively popular *Star Academy* and *Super Star* on Lebanese satellite TV, the magazine aims to redefine the concept of a 'star' to encompass the role models and bringers of national success that readers discover in its pages.

It is not hard to locate the young writers in the magazine because they are almost everywhere; they comprise the yarn which weaves the magazine's fabric together and gives coherence to its diverse content. Facing the inside cover is a piece written in English accredited to one of *Star*'s young contributors. This piece is mirrored by a final commentary in Arabic opposite the inside back cover again written by one of the amateur team. Turning to 'Inside this week' on page 2, the eye is drawn to a photograph on the opposite page encapsulated in the red outline of a five-point star. It shows the team grouped in front of the UG offices in Mezze Village Sharqia and is entitled 'Our team Damascus' in English (Figure 14; http://users.ox.ac.uk/%7Emetheses/WeymanThesis.htm#Fig14). Trails of smaller red and yellow stars encircle the picture. In it, more than twenty writers from the team face the camera smiling and laughing; this is a really positive image which speaks cheerful youth, confidence, and fulfilment. Females are generally brought to the front, males to the back, though there is some intermixing. Many of the males have arms around each other and hands on each others' shoulders in an overt display of camaraderie. Moreover, these young people are dressed up for the occasion. There are no hijabs here; rather the women display earrings, jewellery, painted fingernails and lipstick. One carries a trendy handbag; another is wearing sunglasses seated on

her forehead. All are wearing jeans and colourful, revealing tops. As for the men,

style seems to be equally significant. One is proudly wearing sunglasses, another a

'Les Angels Laker' t-shirt. Beneath this photograph is a second, smaller star

displaying four well-groomed young faces. Below, it reads 'Aleppo'.   But the

display of the young writers does not stop there. *Star Interview* and *Star Exclusives*

almost always show members of the team interviewing a celebrity in a public space,

such as a café or restaurant. *Me, my friends and Star*, a series of pages displaying

young people out socializing in Damascus's restaurants and bars, often shows *Star*

writers joining in the fun or even as party hosts.[174] Indeed, the *Star* writers are always

on show at official publicity events for the magazine, not least a promotional concert

performed by Nancy `Ajram and sponsored by *Star* (Figure 14; see

http://users.ox.ac.uk/%7Emetheses/WeymanThesis.htm#Fig14).[175] Finally, *Star*

writers contribute much of the content for the second half of the magazine following

Star News. Often a writer's name and picture will be attached to the article.

Star, then, provides the reader with a text which is only partly

structured around the notion of celebrity. Rather it is designed to elevate the young

amateur writers and authority figures amongst their contemporaries to a position of

stardom for their role in furthering national secular modernity. This chapter seeks to

understand the *Star* writers' textual contributions and representational roles within the

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[174] Issue 41, 17-24 September 2005: 62, 64. The pages are devoted to the birthday celebrations at Cesar restaurant of Walaa `Alam, prominent *Star* writer and sister of the magazine's Public Relations manager, Dona `Alam

[175] Issue 36, 13-20 August 2005: 32-33. The double page spread, which shows Nancy singing and dancing on stage, includes several pictures of the *Star* team at the concert, some waving promotional flags. Issue 42 (24 September-1October 2005: 34-35) goes one step further. Advertising *Star Night*, a party held to promote the magazine with sponsorship from Nokia and Fayrouz soft drinks, the double page piece proudly announces that the night lasted until eleven and shows selected members of the *Star* writers dancing with their friends. A slightly different example is a six-page *Star Exclusive* (issue 45, 15-22 October 2005: 36-41) focusing on an event at which *Star* magazine hosted the team behind the musalsal *Ashwak Na`ima* (Soft Thorns). Pictures show *Star* writers welcoming and interviewing their guests from the serial wearing black promotional T-shirts bearing the magazine's name.

Bibliography

magazine. It will seek to do this through an ethnographic exploration of the contests which infuse the magazine's production process. Thus, the chapter will draw on attitudes and experiences of key members of the group, as well as their relations with professional staff. This ethnographic approach can offer a more contextualized insight into the magazine's production process than a purely interview-based approach because it builds on observations about how and where the interview took place, and takes account of my own position within the interaction. *Star*, it will be argued, is testimony to the emergence of what might be called a secular privatized corporatism which envisions a young generation firmly tied both to the existing political order and to increasing consumer consumption. This privatized corporatism, which draws on the discourse of western individualism, consumerism, and meritocracy for its vocabulary, is being unleashed to do battle with religious and patriarchal norms with a view to asserting a secular and productive vision of Syrian modernity. It is, in other words, the discourse of an authority structure defined by the ability to validate certain lifestyle practices and norms whilst devaluing others. Like regime-generated corporatism, it is avowedly nationalistic and devoted to preserving regime continuity because it emerges from the web of state patronage. Unlike regime corporatism, it is located in the private sphere and is chiefly mobilized by those whose primary goal is the creation of capital. Thus, what *Star* offers both its readers and those who are involved in its production is a discourse that extols individual freedom as necessary and virtuous, but similarly insists on a rejuvenated vision of compliance in modern Syria. *Star* is designed precisely as the vehicle to an evolving realm of corporatist control.

Bibliography

The *Star* Writers

The team of young amateur writers consists of a pool of perhaps forty young people whom Carole Ibrahim Bashara, the magazine's editorial manager, draws on for content. They are not officially employees of United Group (UG), but are paid for whatever they have published. *Star*'s managerial team is a small unit of roughly twenty full-time professional employees in marketing, sales, distribution, public relations, photography, and design. The magazine is led by a general manager, but it is Carole as chief editor who relates most directly to the team of amateur writers. According to Carole, the Lebanese version is produced by a similarly sized professional team which begs the question of why *Star* Syria needs its team of amateur writers at all.[176] The extent to which they are used to keep costs low is not clear. It is clear, however, that the writers are invaluable in furthering *Star*'s core agenda: they are not just there to save money and render the magazine profitable, but to stand as role models for a new generation. This much seems clear from their centrality in the magazine, a centrality acknowledged by Carole and stridently proclaimed in the first issue of the Syrian magazine. Announcing the magazine's arrival with a 'WOW', the *Star* team's front page editorial speaks of its mission in 'introducing youth work' and loudly pronounces itself 'The Voice of the Youth.'[177]

The overwhelming majority of these young writers are university and school students. Many have attended or are currently attending foreign language schools in Damascus, such as the American and French schools, and consequently speak either

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[176] Carole reported this to me in an English-language interview I conducted with her by telephone, 23 January 2006

[177] Issue 30, 9-15 July 2005: 1

English or French fluently. The majority are undoubtedly middle class and from privileged backgrounds. These writers were recruited from a variety of sources. Most, it seems, were brought in through informal contacts and chance meetings with *Star*'s professional team.[178] According to Carole, the prospective writer has first to complete an application form explaining why he or she wants to work for *Star* and then pass an interview with Carole to demonstrate writing ability and willingness to talk. This process is far from standard practice, however. Ghalia and Lina, for example, had good enough grades not to need an interview.[179] It is too soon to say how the group renews itself (certainly no-one has been fired to date and it is unclear whether Carole could fire anyone), but it appears that some members, having been involved for some months, have moved on to pursue new interests whilst others have joined more recently. Of the forty, ten writers are part-time employed with UG as trainee journalists. This goes to show the extent to which UG and *Star* are keen to reinforce their professionalizing mission for the youth of Syria by offering genuine opportunities for young people within the company.

The *Star* writers' involvement in the magazine broadly comprises producing articles and attending the team meeting, both of which are managed by Carole. Having conducted some research, mostly on the internet, and written a draft article, the *Star* writers pass their work to Carole for editing. She reads the draft article, adds notes to it, and gives it either to a sub-editor (a full time UG employee) or to the writer again. Thus, the formal text is altered to meet her requirements. Where there are major linguistic or stylistic faults in the text, or where the ideas are not appropriate for the magazine, Carole returns the piece to the writer giving ideas of how to re-write

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[178] See below for the stories of Ahmed and Yousef detailing how they became involved in the magazine.
[179] Interview conducted with them at Inhouse Coffee in Mezze, 15 December 2005

Bibliography

the text from scratch. As we will see below, editing is one of the ways in which *Star* enforces the bounds of compliance and justifies its corporatist agenda.

The routine is punctuated by two meetings during the week, except during exam time when the group meets once-a-week and Carole takes on the greater burden of conducting interviews and producing content. Functionally, the meeting allows the group to discuss and make preparations for the following week's issue. The ideas tend to come from Carole who asks the writers to prepare articles on a certain topical subject, such as the cultural celebration of Christmas, or a certain area of interest, such as love or psychology. In this way, she manages magazine content and provides the ideological lynchpin for the magazine's agenda. As for the standard pages, Carole asks the writers whether they know anyone appropriate for this week's piece. So, for example, to find an appropriate sportsperson for *Sport Star*, Carole asks if anyone has a friend who plays the chosen sport. This procedure is central to the magazine's pursuit of content; the group's network of friends and relatives becomes an active resource for a commentary on the state of modernity in Syria. Thus, members of *Star*'s informal extended network both widen and delineate the margins of the middle class snapshot *Star* seeks to portray of modern Syrian youth. Indeed, it constructs stars and role models from the ranks of the successful, ambitious and productive, drawing a wide array of young people into furthering *Star*'s core mission: to produce a self-confident generation of young, middle class Syrians.

The other, perhaps more significant, role of meetings is less concerned with the immediate preparation of the following week's content. This role is an ideological one. Carole, it must be remembered, is perhaps only five or ten years older than the

majority of *Star* writers, and is therefore able to straddle diverse roles within a

meeting. She can simultaneously act the manager, the teacher, the role model and the

social peer, fusing messages which might not initially seem incoherent, but on closer

inspection often appear contradictory. So, as social peer and mentor devoted to the

retreat of patriarchy, she encourages her young team members to challenge the social

norms of their parents by trying everything at least once, right up to drugs (*hata al-
hashiish*);[180] yet as a professional authority figure – someone who has achieved a

managerial position in a dynamic company – she encourages the writers to pursue

their professional dreams, often shared by their parents, through study and work

experience. As a social engineer and modernizer, she encourages greater 'freedom,'

saying confidently, 'we are free men so we have the right to choose,'[181] yet as

manager accorded her role on the understanding that she evades political controversy,

she is a staunch backer of the regime and actively seeks to relegate politically

contentious discussion from meetings and the pages of the magazine. As a proud

Syrian nationalist she talks of defending 'our traditions' and 'our pure mind' by

knowing 'our history,' and works to introduce a page to the magazine which explicitly

explores Syrian institutional history in the twentieth century (*Star Zaman*), whilst as

bringer of modernity she is concerned with opening the eyes of young Syrians to the

outside world, arguing of young Syrians that 'you should look around you and decide

to be what you want; you can't decide if you're closed.'[182] As a Christian she openly

refers to Biblical parables to confirm her point during meetings, as if conducting a

sermon, yet as a manager devoted to Syria's secular modernity she calls on her writers

to avoid using religious phrases in articles, such as *Insha Allah and Masha Allah*,

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[180] This and most of the subsequent anecdotes about Carole come from a *Star* meeting I joined, 13 December 2005
[181] Interview with Carole, 8 December 2005
[182] Ibid

threatening to reject any such pieces that come her way.[183] It is not accurate to claim

that there is some coherent meta-discourse which can even out these inconsistencies.

On the contrary, such inconsistencies may be necessary components of modernist

middle class thought in the Middle East. Armbrust, for example, has mapped the

development of the 'conservative radical' in Egypt where modernism combines a

narrative of national progress with a counter-narrative of seeking an authentic national

self through continuities with the past.[184] The important point is that Carole believes

in the validity of her own ideological role within the *Star* team and actively pursues it

during meetings. As she puts it, *Star* aims to 'give the youth information by the light

way for them to accept it [in a light format so that they will accept it].'[185] Not only

does *Star* seek a didactic and corporatist role in the lives of its readers, but in the

social, professional, and educational lives of its writers as well.

Carole is undoubtedly proud to work for United Group. Formerly a co-

ordinator for the marketing subsidiary, Concord, she has been in the group since 2002,

and cites its youthfulness and diversity as reasons for its success. Still in her late

twenties, she is young to be in a managerial position, but uses her age to form a closer

rapport with the *Star* writers who see her partly as a peer. She is a graduate in French

literature and has travelled abroad, boasting a command of French and English.

Indeed, she is not unwilling to point out her talents, claiming she is a good

communicator and an articulate Arabic user. In Carole, *Star* possesses a confident,

direct, and effusive editor who is not afraid to say what she thinks. Other analyses of

power structures in Syria have used gender, ethnicity, and religious affiliation to

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[183] *Star* meeting 9 August 2005. One of the *Star* writers, Ahmed, also provided me with a text he had rejected because of the religious phrases it included.
[184] 1996: 194
[185] Interview 8 December 2005

understand Syrian society.[186] Whilst all three categories could provide useful explanations of Carole's relationship with the team, I argue that it is her class affiliation, pro-regime stance, and professional experience which are most pertinent, not least for understanding the corporatist consensus she enables within *Star*.

The team of amateur writers, as Carole puts it, represents a 'small cell of Syrian society,'[187] albeit a highly privileged one. They are seen by Carole as a resource to provide both content for the magazine and *Star*'s insight into the social life of Syria's youth. But, as Carole and her professional team in *Star* are active in selecting and shaping the team of writers, there is an inbuilt self-reflexivity about the insight *Star* writers provide. In other words, the broad consensus of social attitudes which largely characterizes the team's outlook only reconfirms what Carole and the managerial cadre of *Star* already thought they knew: Syria is modern, should be secular, and can be as dynamic a place for social experimentation amongst young people as anywhere in the West. *Star*, then, can be considered an introspective space for experimentation in which external observations merely reinforce internal certainties and expectations.

The *Star* Consensus Under Threat from Within

I was lucky enough to bump into Ahmed again on my second field work visit to Damascus in December 2005.[188] At first, it came as no surprise to find him

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[186] For a study looking at state power structures through gender and paternalism see Thompson, 2000; for the role of kinship and ethnic group in state power see Batatu, 1982; for Sunni-Alawi tension over representations of Old Damascus see Salamandra, 2004
[187] Interview with Carole, 8 December 2005
[188] 7 December 2005

hanging out not far from Bab Tuma in Inhouse Coffee, the most upmarket chain of coffee shops modelled on Starbucks. He had always struck me as well-spoken and confident, firmly grounded in Damascus's urban middle class, and not untypical of the clientele frequenting the Inhouse chain. When I was first introduced to the *Star* team of amateur writers at one of their meetings in August the summer before, it was Ahmed who most proactively responded to my questions in English.[189] The second time I attended a *Star* meeting later that summer to conduct an informal written questionnaire, Ahmed was the only writer who approached me to comment on my survey.[190] Jotting down his email address on the back of his form, he said 'I'd like to meet you again,' and proceeded to flatter me with the words in English, 'I like the way you think.' Not long after, again during the summer, I ran into Ahmed and his closest friend at *Star*, Aladdin, conducting their own survey about tourists' impressions of Syria in the old town near Bab Tuma. Having filled in their survey as honestly as I could, I exchanged phone numbers and vowed to make contact soon. Alas, I failed to meet either Ahmed or Aladdin again during the summer.

So it was that I came across Ahmed in Inhouse the following December confident I had found someone who broadly represented the group of *Star* writers. But had I considered my exchanges with Ahmed more carefully, I might have more accurately predicted his relationship with *Star*, the team and Inhouse Coffee. At my first meeting with the *Star* team in the summer, I had been offered the stage. I joined the group of writers around an enormous glossy conference table in a long stylishly furnished room with luxurious swivel chairs and glass panes lining one side. Dona `Alam, the Public Relations Manager, allowed me as long as I wanted to ask the team

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[189] 26 July 2005
[190] 9 August 2005

Bibliography

questions about their work. I attempted this in English, French and a little Arabic, but such was the general proficiency in English, I tended to stick with the language I could use most clearly. I asked all kinds of questions about social issues I thought pertinent – marriage, religion, their role in the magazine – until I felt comfortable enough to ask something I knew would be provocative. I asked the team how they felt about displays of Western singers in their magazine who are openly homosexual, such as Elton John. It was Ahmed who responded first, claiming that homosexuality was totally forbidden in Syria. His outburst brought a range of responses, but most extraordinarily from a prospective *Star* writer sitting next to me who had come to be interviewed that day. He countered Ahmed directly, saying he had friends who were openly gay and knew of social haunts where they were accepted. Fast-forward to my second meeting with the *Star* team, and Ahmed's attempt to compliment my intellectual approach. As he left, I looked closer at his responses to my questions – most of which dealt with trans-national media, reality TV formats, and social values. The questionnaires, though provisional, were undoubtedly a failure, but none more so than Ahmed's. He had refused to engage with any of the questions on reality TV formats except to say, 'I hate them, I hate them all.' Ahmed, as I should have realised early on, had far more unsettled opinions on the project he was involved in than most of the other writers. When I told Carole that I would be speaking to Ahmed about his typical experiences of the magazine, she cautioned me against the strategy obviously fearing the negative spin he would give me, and described him as an 'extremist.'[191]

Ahmed is a self-confessed success story. Hailing from a government school, he considers himself special because he is a strong learner and self-starter. A

[191] Interview 8 December 2005

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second-year economics student at Damascus University and practising Muslim, he speaks excellent English and is confident and out-going. Ahmed lives with his father and sister although he also has two half sisters from his mother's second marriage to a Palestinian man. His involvement in *Star* can partly be explained by the fact that he pre-dates Carole's appointment as editorial manager. He had taken it upon himself, with his close friend Aladdin, to conduct some research on why students prefer certain English Language Schools in Damascus over others, and subsequently wrote an article which was partly published in the national newspaper Tishriin. Whilst Ahmed was working at one such school – Horizon Language Centre – the manager recommended him to a member of *Star*'s marketing staff who was on business selling advertising there. Ahmed and Aladdin received a call from *Star* soon after and joined the team.

But Carole's arrival brought new problems for Ahmed. He openly admits that she 'hates' him, not least because he challenges her authority by questioning her social outlook and technical knowledge. For example, he frankly contested her view during a meeting that digital cameras produce inferior results to conventional cameras. Similarly, he argued with her over whether Muslims celebrate Christmas by hanging up decorations in their houses. Hearing these stories over an extended conversation at Inhouse Coffee, I asked Ahmed why he continues to work for *Star*.[192] He responded with three reasons: first, he enjoys working as a 'journalist,' second, he is grateful for the income, and third, he believes he has a message to deliver. When I asked what this message might be, he claimed that his aim is to give the youth of Syria a role model. Of course, Carole also wants to give young Syrians positive role

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[192] 10 December 2005

models, and indeed, acts that part within *Star* herself. The crucial point of divergence

between Ahmed and Carole is precisely who can and cannot be an appropriate role

model. As we will see, this contest has crucial implications for understandings of

Syrian modernity, and cuts to the very core of the competition over social values,

visions of national progress, and interpretations of Syria's youth.

Ahmed and Carole do, in fact, agree on a number of things. They are both

enthusiastic about the nationalist modernist narrative of twentieth century Syrian

history, as their equal pride for *Star Zaman* shows. This page, which traces the

modern history of institutional and technological developments in Syria, was

introduced as a regular feature by Carole, yet even Ahmed cites its presence as a

reason for him remaining at the magazine. This modernist bent inflects their view

that *Star* should be a secular magazine. Indeed, they both prize high cultural ideals,

and believe firmly in the value of education. Where they differ is over the role that

patriarchal norms should play in social life and in governing the kinds of mediated

representations of young people magazines like *Star* can print. Carole, as a female

professional authority figure, who doubles up as a social mentor for her team of

young journalists, seeks to insert herself into the lives of the *Star* writers and, to some

extent, replace parental authority. Ahmed contests this. He views parents as the

ultimate arbiters over the proper social behaviour of their children, and rejects the

claim Carole makes to impose herself irrespective of her managerial role.

This much became obvious at a meeting I attended in December in which

Carole instigated a discussion about parental roles.[193] There were twelve writers

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[193] 13 December 2005

present, though some came late and others left early. Due to college exams, the

writers were not contributing as much to the magazine as at other points of the year.

Instead, Carole was publishing pieces from a reserve of articles she had built up over

a period of months, as well as contributing more content herself. Because of this, the

meeting only briefly touched on the actual magazine. Instead, Carole used the time to

conduct a debate. Initially she part-elicited, part-delivered the agenda, asking 'What

would you like to talk about today *shabaab*?' and writing bullet points on the board.

Figure 15 (**See http://users.ox.ac.uk/%7Emetheses/WeymanThesis.htm#Fig15**)*: Carole's bullet points written on the white board to spark a discussion on young people and parental roles during a meeting with the Star team. It reads:*
'Old and dying Customs: The differences between expectation and young people; Society's view of relationships between guys and girls; Free time (or when you have nothing to do).'

At first, the writers seemed to lack interest and enthusiasm in the discussion, but as

more of them offered opinions, so the interaction gathered momentum. Despite the

active involvement of all present, the meeting nevertheless revolved around Carole

who prodded the writers with questions, offered ideas for discussion and consistently

gave feedback, most of which was affirmative, to the opinions being expressed. With

the discussion in full swing, one of the female writers, sitting next to Ahmed, spoke

up to tell a story about her hair.[194] As an adolescent she had had long hair that

reached down to her legs, but she grew tired of it. So she sought the consent of her

parents to have it cut. When her father refused to consent to this, she went ahead with

the haircut anyway, prioritizing her own wants over the risk of incurring her father's

wrath. When she arrived home that day from the hairdressers, her father took one

look and said, 'you've just lost your future!' This story elicited one of the loudest

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[194] Due to my deficiencies in Damascene Arabic, some of the details of this exchange were provided by Ahmed as we caught a taxi across town immediately after the meeting. Nevertheless, I made detailed notes on how speakers presented themselves, the responses Carole and the team gave to them, and the gist of the discussion.

bursts of laughter at the meeting. With renewed confidence she told of how she had upset her parents by coming to the *Star* meeting that evening in her new pink pyjamas for the first time. In response to this, Ahmed tried to argue that parents are wiser than young people and should be respected accordingly. Whereas young people *think* they know what is right, parents *know* what is right. He gave the example of his decision to grow his hair long against the wishes of his parents. After a year or two he realised they had been right all along and had it cut, although he admits that his current beard is not to the liking of his parents. Carole met Ahmed's defence of parental authority (and in particular patriarchal authority) with disdain. She contested his views and mobilized the gathering consensus amongst the *Star* writers against Ahmed's position. Clearly, Carole felt her authority and her message of encouragement for youth empowerment within the family to be under threat. Thus, Ahmed received a swift rebuke from the girl in the pink pyjamas who insistently asked, 'Why is that true? Why is that true?' (*Leish Sah?*).

Under Carole's supervision, the young female writer was not only able to tell her story openly in public, but elicit the most telling sign of peer approval: a laugh. Studies of authoritarian regimes have pointed to the significance of jokes in reminding those who tell and share them of their shared acknowledgment of involuntary obedience to authority over them.[195] The hair story – essentially poking fun at parental authority – and the approving peer response point to a shared acknowledgment amongst the *Star* writers of unwanted parental intrusion. Not only by telling the story, but also by appearing at the meeting wearing her new pink pyjamas, this *Star* writer was actively contesting parental norms. In providing her this

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[195] Wedeen, 1999: 120-129

opportunity, the meeting constitutes a challenge to patriarchal norms and parental control. Ahmed is active in opposing this view from within the group. He believes that parents are right *because* they are parents. It would be inaccurate to claim that Ahmed respects all forms of authority at all times; he openly opposes Carole and he even behaves in ways his parents disapprove of.[196] But he does strongly believe in the moral scrutiny of parents and their right to set out moral guidelines for him to follow. His view sees the family as the correct framework for socialization and morality right into early adulthood – indeed up until a *shaab* has married and started a family of his own.

Ahmed's alienation from the group of *Star* writers is only partly due to his steadfast faith in the family over other institutions of social control. It is also partly to do with his conservative views on representations of women. On balance, Ahmed believes that *Star* magazine is bad for Syrian youth. He has set himself up to defend patriarchal values from within the magazine. As he puts it, he does not want to change the team; he wants to change the topics in the magazine. But 'alas, young people want to read this stuff,' he laments, complaining that the appeal of the magazine is misguided. Underlying this view is the idea that inevitably a youth magazine should be, indeed can only be, functionally didactic. Media representations constitute a zero-sum game; if *Star* encourages the wrong kinds of behaviour, there needs to be another option correcting those wrongs. In Ahmed's view, *Star* without him would mark the unabated decline of high moral values in Syrian society. As he says, young people 'should concentrate on redirecting themselves,' rather than

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[196] Ahmed told me a story he has also told the *Star* team about an occasion when he was caught by University prefects taking photos of the class. This was deemed unacceptable behaviour. But Ahmed openly confesses he has no respect for the prefects and would challenge them again. He has also challenged his parents' authority by growing a beard and long hair.

reading this magazine. But what is it precisely that Ahmed finds morally problematic about *Star*?

In the Middle East, displays of women's bodies often function as the site of social contests over morality and control.[197] Ahmed deems many of the representations of women in the magazine as 'slutty.' There are two implications of this view, as Graham Brown argues: first, representations of women as 'sexual objects and symbols of wealth' are often objected to on the basis that they appear to display women 'escaping male control over their conformity to the norms of 'good behaviour;''[198] second, fears are expressed over the corrupting repercussions of such images in which 'other, less privileged women could be 'led astray' by aspiring to such lifestyles.'[199] Although the idea that changing norms of women's representation lead directly to substantive changes in social relations remains largely unfounded in the Middle East,[200] Ahmed nevertheless has very little social experience of such images in *Syrian print* and he is therefore, as he puts it, 'shocked' by them.

During our discussion in Inhouse, he gave me some indication of which images he finds most offensive by ranking a series of photographs within a single issue on a scale of one (acceptable) to ten (totally unacceptable) (Figure 16; see http://users.ox.ac.uk/%7Emetheses/WeymanThesis.htm#Fig16).[201] He found the front cover image of a Syrian actress, Laila Al-Atrash, perfectly acceptable even though she

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[197] Graham Brown, 1988: 239, Armbrust, 1999: 107
[198] Graham Brown, 1988: 247. Though, as she points out, in practice these representations are the product of male control just as much as in most other domains. Take, for example, the number of male directors, producers, and camera-men who control the whole production of Arab video clips in which women star.
[199] Ibid
[200] Ibid: 245
[201] *Star*, issue 45, 15-22 October 2005

is captured from above revealing her bra strap. Perhaps the high-culture role assigned

to her by the magazine as youthful national icon, and the fact that her image does not

overtly attempt to arouse the reader explain his view. But, he was not '100 percent'

happy with the picture of the *Star* team in which young female colleagues can be seen

wearing light, and revealing, summer clothing. Next, he ranked cat-walk images of

Kylie Minogue, Elizabeth Hurley and Hilary Duff six out of ten.[202] Here the

formality of both dress and occasion appear to lessen the impact of open shoulders

and cleavage. He ranked the explicitly sexual image of Jessica Simpson perched

provocatively on the Dukes of Hazard car in short skirt eight out of ten.[203] But he

reserved his greatest ire for any image of Haifa Wahabi, the Lebanese singer and

presenter of the Reality-TV show, *Al-Waadi*, ranked ten purely because of her sullied

reputation as he saw it.[204] 'We guys hate her,' he told me, because 'she acts like a

slut.'

Ahmed's feelings have on occasions bubbled to the surface in *Star* team

meetings. He described to me how, during a meeting, he argued with Carole over the

appropriateness of the images *Star* publishes. She said that *Star* does not publish 'bad

photos' of women, and asked him to show her any such image from the magazine.

Ahmed duly found a photo which he found offensive showing a Western actress

revealing a healthy amount of cleavage and flesh (Figure 16; see

http://users.ox.ac.uk/%7Emetheses/WeymanThesis.htm#Fig16).[205] Unsurprisingly,

the picture appears in *Duddly's Column*, a Lebanese feature in English at the heart of

Star News. At this point Carole accused Ahmed of feeling this way because he only

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[202] Ibid: Minogue appears on p21, the other Hurley and Duff on p67
[203] Ibid: p82
[204] Ibid: pp32-33
[205] Issue 47, 29 October-1 November 2005, p21

ever sees his mother and sister covered by the hijab. This, according to Ahmed, was

not only factually incorrect – none of his three sisters wears the hijab – but also

patronizing. He rebuked Carole, arguing that he and Aladdin 'don't live in a shell, we

see, we know what is acceptable and what is not … we can't just leave behind what

we learnt.'[206]

What Ahmed has learnt is not simply a religious ethic, but an emotional belief

in the importance of female modesty to underscore male honour. This social belief, as

the literature on patriarchy in the Middle East often argues, cuts to the heart of family

structure and social control.[207] During our conversation, Ahmed expounded his

opinions on female modesty arguing that it is shameful for a girl to lose her virginity

before marriage. If this happens, as he put it, 'her future collapses.' He went on to

outline the legal-national grounding for this view, explaining that Shari`a personal law

condones honour killings where male family members murder a female relative who

is sexually promiscuous. Ahmed fears the magazine because he feels it seeks to

undermine his views, views which he regards not only as vital to the moral health of

Syrian society, but deeply ingrained in Syria's religious and cultural landscape:

> 'It's hard to reform a whole current that's been flowing for 14 hundred years –
> a tough job for a magazine like star. It's a big thing to change, we can't
> change. To force youth to … dump their religion and everything they used to
> know, it's like changing the UK into a Republic.'

Of *Star*'s content, it is *Star Zaman* that Ahmed points to as appropriate

material for Syria's young generation (Figure 17; see

http://users.ox.ac.uk/%7Emetheses/WeymanThesis.htm#Fig17). The page, which

presents a morally unambiguous snapshot of Syria's modern history, offers young

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[206] He related this to me during our interview in Inhouse Coffee, 10 December 2005
[207] Bourdieu, in J.G. Peristiany ed., 1965: 223-224

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Syrians the right kind of educational supplement. According to Ahmed, the feature's didactic message is clear: 'you youth, see what you used to have and try to stimulate it'. At our meeting in Inhouse, Ahmed went on to tell me a family story which for him only confirms the message brought out by *Star Zaman* that older generations were more morally upstanding in their defence of the national cause. Apparently, whilst touring the country during mandate occupation, his grandfather was caught by the French and offered a small fortune to work for them. He refused and fought on until his untimely death in prison. As Ahmed puts it, the moral of the story is that his grandfather did not 'pay attention to seductions given to him.' This is a lesson Ahmed would like to promote amongst today's youth who are now 'irresponsible' and 'looking for less valuable things than they used to.' Indeed, it is a lesson he considers almost totally lacking in *Star*. Hence, his confession that he would love to work for one of the other emerging publications in Syria – Shabablek or Al Ghuerbal – which are completely divested of any of the 'slutty' images Ahmed detests.

Ahmed's story is significant not just because it shows how *Star* is unsettling patriarchal values, but because it points to the common perception that youth magazines necessarily seek to condition young people socially and morally. This is, in part, due to the long legacy of tight government censorship in Syrian print media and the concomitant association of print with state- and nation-building. But it is also specific to the agenda and outlook of *Star* itself. For example, all of the interview-based articles – *Star interview, Sport Star, Real Star* – include a question, most often positioned as a kind of moral conclusion, which asks 'stars' what they want to say personally to *Star* and Syria's young people. Most complement *Star* on its cultural mission and call on Syrian youth to have confidence for the future. Moreover, Carole

actively promotes the magazine's didactic role in giving the youth 'information' in a 'light way.'[208] 'Come on guys, see the world!' she says, rallying Syrian youth to *Star*'s self-appointed role.[209] Ahmed interprets her aim as feeding young people 'the facts covered with junk food,' and he argues that the magazine was formed to 'restructure how youth think.' What Ahmed's position demonstrates, in other words, is *Star*'s attempt to replace patriarchy with an emerging kind of privatized corporatism. By selectively employing the vocabulary of Western celebrity fantasy – representations of women (and men) as apparently free to express themselves through dress – *Star* magazine offers a set of guidelines with which young Syrians can locate the proper path to modernity. Thus, through its content and dynamics of production, the magazine seeks to replace patriarchal and parental roles with a different authority structure based on a secular discourse of consumption and professionalism. I will first describe some of the ways in which a privatized corporatist consensus is achieved within the staff, and will then outline the contours of the magazine's corporatist discourse.

Building the Corporatist Consensus: Yousef and Carole See Eye to Eye

Building a consensus amongst the *Star* writers is a crucial task for Carole, not least because it ensures the viability and integrity of *Star*'s didactic mission and discourages both conservative dissent regarded as backward and liberal behaviour deemed rebellious. The fact that the only explicit threat to this consensus emanates

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[208] Interview 8 December 2005
[209] Ibid

from Ahmed's conservatism indicates that *Star* does not actually intend to grant social capital to unruly youthful behaviour, despite its part use of the vocabulary of 'freedom.' In other words, the message is not that sex, drugs, and rock and roll are cool. Rather, the message is for young people to consume, to interact, and to pursue careers in ways which their parents may find uncomfortable at first, but which ultimately lead to a better, brighter Syria in which professional success and cultural confidence are the norm. Perhaps the writer most solidly bound into Carole's consensus is Yousef.

Despite seeing Yousef on two occasions at *Star* meetings during the summer 2005, it was not until December on my second study visit that I actually had the opportunity to meet him.[210] Following a Tuesday meeting I attended, I invited as many writers as wanted to join me for a coffee the following Thursday to discuss their role in the magazine. Most received my invitation positively, but Yousef was particularly keen, and even suggested a location: Inhouse Coffee in Mezze. When he arrived, I was already there chatting with two younger members of the team, Ghalia and Lina. They soon scuttled away, as the more confident and affable Yousef, a 20-year old Business Administration student at Damascus University (DU) of Muslim background who joined the team initially as the guitar player for a promotional event, commanded a deeper knowledge of the magazine and showed a greater willingness to talk. He was accompanied by Dina, a female friend from the meeting whom Yousef had only just introduced to the magazine. Dina, 22 years old and studying English Literature at DU, was extremely self-assured and effusive, and proved herself very comfortable speaking in English, so we settled on my language, not theirs. We were

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[210] 15 December 2005

soon joined by Mona, Dina's older sister, who, though long involved in *Star*, was much less out-going than the others. I directed the conversation, asking questions and writing notes as we discussed, but I tried to give them space to express themselves.

Having heard Carole's endorsement of social experimentation two days before in which she urged her writers to try everything up to drugs, Yousef seemed in particularly confident mood to challenge parental constraints. 'We should try everything to have an experience in life,' he said, since 'a person doesn't know [what's right and wrong] before trying.' When I asked what exactly he meant by 'experience' he mentioned parties and 'living on the edge.' This sounded more like the sex, drugs, and rock and roll of Western rebellious youth culture, but his views were more complex than this. When we considered the value of meetings, Yousef spoke positively of Carole who apparently allows them to voice their opinions freely. But the extent to which meetings involve consensus building and peer conformity around Carole's ideological axis soon became apparent. Yousef said that *Star* writers share essentially the same set of opinions because they all want to be free. Their determination to judge right and wrong for themselves, according to Yousef's account, hinged on Carole who 'knows a lot about life' and is therefore in a position to determine 'how we should think and what's right and what's wrong.' Individuality is subsumed by the consensus Carole, as social peer *and* mentor, is able to construct so that arriving at an independent judgement depends on either Carole's endorsement or peer consent at *Star* meetings, a process which encourages the affirmation of bourgeois feelings of class superiority. Thus, Yousef and Dina talked at length about the Syrian class system in which the educated middle classes are the bringers of modernity and freedom. The educated middle classes who 'want their children to be

free, to do what they believe in' are wedged between, on the one hand, the backward

lower classes 'stuck with old traditions' which 'we should delete, erase form our

lives,' where parents 'choose the future partner of their son' and 'plant stuff in his

mind' so that 'he will be choked,' and, on the other hand, the rich society of the upper

classes who 'talk about nothing' except 'having two cars.' The point here is not to

claim that Western rebellious youth culture, in contrast to Syrian youth culture in

Star, prioritizes individuality over conformity, which is patently not the case. Rather,

the extent to which *Star*'s corporatism encourages rebellion through social

experimentation has set limits; *Star* seeks to encourage young middle class Syrians to

challenge patriarchal authority, but patriarchy itself can be stigmatized, in this case, as

a set of backward social values located in the lower classes. In other words, *Star*

rarely, if ever, encourages young middle class Syrians to challenge middle class

authority figures.

Ahmed, then, as a middle class male sharing so many of the codes of a middle

class consumption lifestyle – his dress, his accessories, his interest in basket ball –

emerges as a particularly sharp thorn in Carole's side. He is the anomaly in the

group: the one who openly affirms the formulation of patriarchal values which *Star*

seeks to relegate from its pages and its writers' social outlook. Ahmed, therefore, has

to be sidelined. This helps to explain both why Ahmed is so isolated in *Star* meetings

and why Carole and Yousef were so severe in their criticism of him. Thus, for

Carole, Ahmed is an 'extremist' who I should not have sought as a representative *Star*

writer, whilst for Yousef, Ahmed is 'a very old fashioned guy' who apparently thinks

his mother will find him his future wife. That Ahmed explicitly told me during our

earlier meeting that he would find his own partner in life, ask her to marry him

directly (rather than asking her father first), and also make no obligation on her to

wear the hijab implies that the impression of Ahmed as a fanatical defender of

outdated values has been exaggerated within the *Star* team. Indeed, on many relevant

issues, he in fact shares in the Carole consensus (though he rarely would admit this).

For example, when I asked Carole about notions of love and sex in Syria, she

responded by claiming her team of writers accepts that love and sex 'are one unit,' as

if this was an important aspect of the team identity and togetherness.[211] Carole, it

seems, would be surprised to hear that Ahmed agrees with this consensus. In my

interview with him, he claimed that love traditionally followed marriage in Syria, but

no longer should.   Yet, despite the complexity of his views, Ahmed is labelled as

'stubborn' by Yousef because 'he doesn't have the skill of discussing things.'

Yousef's view of Ahmed is testimony to Ahmed's alienation from the group due to

the threat he presents to the core principles of the group consensus. His views are

simply too conservative and his criticism of Carole too unsettling to the *Star* agenda.

Hence, for *Star*'s corporatist mechanisms to make headway, Ahmed has to be painted

as the dogmatic patriarch beyond the pale.

Carole should not be seen as the sole architect of this privatized corporatism,

rather as the vehicle for its growth, consolidation and dissemination. This

corporatism should be thought of as a complex tendency which combines both an

authority structure into whose ranks young people should be urged and a diffuse

discourse comprising principles, rules and legitimations on which that structure is

built. Carole herself, whilst deeply involved in harnessing the operation of this

corporatism to certain professed ends, is not some grand *manipulatrice* commanding

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[211] Interview on 8 December 2005

events from on high, duping those below her so as they consume without reflexion and partake inexorably in her domination. This equation might characterize the power attributed to the generals of the 'culture industry' so central to the drastically pessimistic imagination of the neo-Marxist Frankfurt School.[212] But it would be a thoroughly misguided equation in our explanation of Carole's role in *Star*. Both Carole and *Star* magazine are just small cogs in the machinery that is attempting to accomplish the privatization of authoritarianism in Syria. As in all social histories, this machinery is liable to break down, to be disturbed from within and to produce unresolved outcomes for new contests to emerge.

Central to this thesis is the idea that authoritarianism in Syria, compelled by perceived threats both internal and external, is in the process of transforming the genesis of its domination. A regime that had previously sought control of symbolic production, of media, and of youth itself in order to maintain its power now seeks to regenerate the basis of its authoritarian rule through private means. Hence, the manufacture and dissemination of pro-regime national symbols and the production of media output that can compete regionally and bolster the Syrian national cause is taken up by private companies. The corporatism described in this chapter is one more case of the privatization of authoritarianism. Corporatism is a word often used in political science literature to define the machinery of the *state* in Syria, rather than to consider the role of *private* companies. As Hinnebusch argues, the enormous state institutions and organizations established under Hafiz al-Asad – the bureaucracy, the Ba`th Party, the army, the many intelligence services, the popular youth organizations – had the effect of incorporating and mobilizing large sections of society into the

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[212] Adorno and Horkheimer, in During ed., 1993: 31-41

machinery of the state and created networks of patronage in which individuals and groups competed against each other rather than mobilizing against the state.[213] But despite their size and apparent strength, these associations were 'internally undemocratic' and 'powerless vis-à-vis the regime to become effective instruments of mass political participation'.[214] As Perthes argues, they served only to reinforce regime power.[215] The Ba`th Party, which in the 1970s boasted a membership of one in thirteen Syrians,[216] provides two crucial functions to the maintenance of regime power: first, it channels the upwardly mobile into a structure which focuses their energies on further refining their commitment to the regime; second, it provides institutional mechanisms for continuous socialization of citizens along lines which benefit the regime.[217] This process begins from an early age as young Syrians are encouraged to join the Revolutionary Youth Organization (*Ittihad Al-Shabiba Al-Thawri*) where they attend training camps, perform infrastructure development tasks, and pursue 'the struggle against feudal and bourgeois mentalities.'[218]

The tasks facing the regime today are to generate new wealth and harness new media to Syria's national benefit. These tasks are hard to integrate into the system of state corporatism as it stands. Indeed, they are hard to achieve in an economy which largely avoided the *infitah* policies that oversaw the privatization of state-owned industries, like banking and mining, in Egypt. What is needed is a privatized corporatism welded from similar networks of patronage which can reproduce itself for the future. The outlines of this approach have been in the making for over ten years. As Heydemann notes, Hafiz Al-Asad sought to 'enhance the process of capital

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[213] 2001: 80-87
[214] Perthes, in Kienle ed., 1994: 52
[215] Ibid
[216] Hinnebusch, 1980: 146
[217] Ibid: 145
[218] Ibid: 149-150

accumulation' while at the same time 'minimizing the political instability that disengagement brought about' so that 'liberalization becomes merely another means to maintain the existing system.'[219] But the approach has been pursued with renewed vigour in the last five years in the rein of Bashar Al-Asad. With increased threats from foreign media, a tense regional and international political environment, and domestic dissidents, and unable to re-establish a cult of personality to match the rule of Hafiz Al-Asad, Bashar's Syria needs more than ever new mechanisms to solve old problems. The privatization of corporatism is that new mechanism.

It is my contention that *Star* represents the early stages of a developing privatized corporatist discourse. It is emerging from the tectonic shifts produced by a strategy which views that authoritarianism must stay, but the means of its domination must change. Young people are no longer to be socialized to struggle against 'bourgeois mentalities,' but are to be encouraged to pursue bourgeois lifestyles and professions. Crucially, such lifestyles and professions are not only to be presented as valuable, but possible and attainable within today's Syria. In other words, the emerging privatized corporatist discourse discourages any questioning of the regime because it imagines that all that could be revered or desired is readily available within the current political framework. Progress means the invalidation of backwardness coupled with the pursuit of self-generated middle class modernity. Young people are to be awarded for being good consumers, productive industrialists, and regime supporters by working their way up the professional corporate hierarchy, a hierarchy which at its pinnacle involves close contacts of blood and patronage between business and regime leaders. Experimentation in the realms of consumption and work

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[219] 1993: 81-82, 79

experience is encouraged, but criticism of those devoted to the system, particularly authority figures within it, is certainly not. *Star* is both a mechanism for this privatized corporatism (it works upon the *Star* writers) and a vehicle for its dissemination through society (it seeks to work upon *Star* readers).

The Privatized Corporatism in Text and Image: the Contours of a Discourse

The consensus built around Carole is legible in the texts and images of the magazine. It is this consensus which provides form and coherence to the discourse of the magazine, and underscores its corporatist guidelines. Readers are offered a know-how with which to navigate their professional and lifestyle choices – a passport enabling them to play their role in furthering a specifically national modernity.   The magazine's corporatism has two essential features: first, it sets limits on what can and cannot be said and questioned, in part by offering positive models to be valued, and second, it is didactic, providing cogent but simple answers to adolescent angst, the unintelligibility of the world, and problems of morality. In both, it seeks to provide a replacement for parental role models and constraints, whilst denying politics as a reasonable realm for the exploration and transformation of social life. In a sense then, *Star* magazine offers the reader the chance to become a modern and successful individual by way of a discourse of corporatist constraint.

One of the most striking aspects of the Syrian content is it appears to be almost entirely devoid of criticism or irony. The commercial and acting professionals

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who dominate the early sections of the magazine – *Star Interview*, *Real Star*, and

Double Star – are not only unthreatening, they are presented, without exception, as

successes rather than failures. This can be explained by the fact that the magazine

sets them up as national heroes, role models to be emulated, young winners making a

good job of it. Hence, its portrayal of professionals is remarkably one-dimensional;

there is very little probing into sensitive topics (as in the Lebanese *L'Interview*) and

'stars' are allowed to present themselves as positively as possible. In *Real Star*, for

example, questions such as 'what do you dream of,' 'what is your slogan in life,' and

'what were the steps to your success'[220] are general and give the business

professionals displayed the platform from which to present themselves as successful,

confident, and powerful. Any investigation of professional inadequacies, social

problems, disputes, corruption, and flailing careers (the bread and butter of

provocative journalism, not to mention paparazzi-based journalism) has to be

sidelined. Indeed, the 'stars' on show, as well as the professions and lifestyles they

represent, cannot be mocked. This dynamic should in no way be read as some

specific Syrian cultural trait; on the contrary, Syrians showed a huge appetite for the

insightful and cutting irony (Figure 18; see

http://users.ox.ac.uk/%7Emetheses/WeymanThesis.htm#Fig18) of master cartoonist,

Ali Farzat, whose short-lived private newspaper Al-Domari regularly sold out. The

lack of irony in *Star* magazine betrays its unwillingness to interrogate middle class

role models and lifestyles, and demonstrates that the magazine is geared to promoting

an unremittingly positive vision of both.

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[220] From Issue 32, 16-22 July 2005, pp 8-9. These questions are typical of *Real Star*.

Bibliography

This has an important repercussion: displays of youth sub-cultures which might be seen to threaten the national modernist agenda can only qualify for a feature by being overtly deferent to *Star*'s corporatism. An interview with actor Milad Yusuf demonstrates this dynamic very clearly (Figure 18; see

http://users.ox.ac.uk/%7Emetheses/WeymanThesis.htm#Fig18).[221] Yusuf, who is performing in a musalsal, *Hajiz al-Samat*, about a group of young bikers who are fans of hard rock music, works hard to persuade the reader that the apparently rebellious sub-culture is not in fact threatening to society. Claiming that 'part of the role of actors and Syrian drama' is in 'correcting prevailing myths in society,' Yusuf makes two arguments about the sub-culture: first, he maintains that young bikers are just as normal as the rest of Syrian society, describing them as

> 'students of intelligent behaviour, who love the country and who cooperate with it fully in every way, all of whom have specialised work, proven financial security, and are not a burden on society as some people think;'[222]

second, he asserts that the sub-culture to which these young people subscribe is actually as capable of originality, skill, and finesse as 'our Eastern music' or any high culture. Describing hard rock as a 'highly developed music demanding high technical abilities' since it is 'a creative music by distinction,'[223] he effectively claims it can be incorporated into Syrian national culture and valued within the same terms of reference. Perhaps most tellingly, he vehemently denies that young bikers are guilty of 'Satan worship,' arguing that as 'part of our youth' these young people have no connection with such 'perverted groups.'[224] Finally, to prove that such sub-cultures can be accepted into the fold, Yusuf is pictured in costume on a Harley Davidson style

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[221] *Star Interview*, *Star* issue 40, 10-17 September 2005: 4-6
[222] Ibid: 4
[223] Ibid: 5
[224] Ibid: 4

motorbike wearing black T-shirt and jeans, leather gloves, and sunglasses. To guarantee his credibility, he is also pictured in conversation with *Star* staff wearing a more acceptable crisply ironed white shirt. The juxtaposition of the two images is a metaphor for the article – beneath the exterior expressions of rebellious youth identity, young bikers are as normal, decent, and devoted to the national cause as any other. In *Star*, any behaviour that cannot be reconciled within the national image is systematically placed in the category of foreign deviance or in that of local traditional backwardness. There is no 'authentic' deviance.

In addition to rigid norms governing who can be the legitimate focus of a *Star* feature and how they can be presented, there are also well-established norms of censorship governing suitable topics for investigation. The ability of regime censors to limit discussion in print of sensitive issues is so ingrained that journalists and state officials alike repeat the tenets of censorship like a mantra. These tenets have come to be known in Syria as the 'three red lines' and cover, quite predictably, the three no-go areas of politics, sex, and religion. *Star* writers, Ahmed and Yousef, were equally as versed in the 'three red lines' of censorship as their editor and manager, Carole. Indeed, perhaps unsurprisingly, I was again acquainted with the intricacies of the three red lines during an interview with Ahed Abuzeid at the Ministry of Media.[225] In each case, although I brought up the issue of censorship, my interviewee outlined the three red lines entirely independently. The consistency of response shown by state official, editor and the amateur writers points not only to the fact that print censorship is entrenched in Syria, but also to the active role *Star* writers play in enforcing the bounds of what they can write. *Star*, then, is itself a mechanism of control on the

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[225] 17 December 2005

bounds of speech. Of course, as some *Star* writers argued, a censored magazine is better than no magazine at all. Indeed, in the long-term it may provide a site for contests and voices the regime finds deeply unsettling. The point is, however, that so far the magazine has sought to elaborate on, rather than diminish, the ongoing relevance to public life of the three red lines of state censorship; it has sought to obstruct and drown out voices emanating through new media, such as the internet and satellite television, which *are* deemed threatening to regime control. *Star*, to borrow from Wedeen, 'clutters public space'[226] with what it does not say; it is a text deeply loaded in the denial of politics and the de-legitimization of self-questioning.

It might be argued, as Twitchell has argued, that popular culture makes no attempt to engage with politics or religion, rather to sell what sells because it entertains.[227] Yet, *Star* is not simply an artefact of the kind of popular culture Twitchell charts. Rather, it is a self-confessed manual in youth education devoted to 'introducing youth work' as it says in its first Syrian-content issue.[228] So it might seem that *Star*'s readers would benefit from pieces examining religious authorities, answering readers' questions about sex, or discussing possibilities for increasing youth participation in politics. But none of these is possible, not just because they might contain the seeds of future threats to regime power and its role in shaping social life, but because they unsettle the very purpose of *Star* magazine – to help produce a new generation of compliant young Syrians who aspire to a middle class consumption lifestyle and professional achievement within the bounds of sustained regime authority. The magazine, then, provides the blueprint for youth regeneration within guidelines of constraint.

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[226] 1999: 6
[227] 1992: 43
[228] Issue 30, 2-7 July 2005: 1

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Star, whilst largely written by young amateurs, is nevertheless determinedly

didactic. The features which further *Star*'s didactic function most overtly are *Real*

Star and *Double Star* which display professionally successful figures, including

women, and detail the secret to their success. *Real Star* is a double-page spread

focusing on the personality, education, and career of a different professional each

week, whilst *Double Star* comprises two full-page photographs of other 'stars' with

details of their hobbies, studies, and career. The questions *Real Star* asks aim to

persuade the reader to aspire to corporate ideals, to value education, and to understand

their personality as a resource:

'What do people say about your personality?'
'Why did you study?'
'What are your next plans?'
'What are the areas of work that you have become absorbed by?'
'What are the areas of work that you have tackled courageously?'

Not only do these questions reinforce the idea that being fulfilled in life is to be

professionally successful, they also confirm that middle class identity is founded on

aspiration. For male 'stars', the article uses a font based on handwriting to make the

role model seem as personable and approachable as possible, but simultaneously

establishes him as an authority figure by way of pictures of the 'star' at work – often

in an office environment – answering the telephone, signing documents, and typing on

the computer. In the office environments I observed space is geared to projecting the

manager's centrality in it. Managers use the office to affirm their position relative to

other employees, exploiting tools at their disposal – buzzers for summoning

secretarial staff, telephones, televisions – to signal alertness and control. By

presenting the professional as both powerful and approachable, *Real Star* seeks to

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persuade the reader not only that it is right and possible to aspire to such a role, but that self-empowerment requires the reader to emulate the 'star' on display (Figure 20; see http://users.ox.ac.uk/%7Emetheses/WeymanThesis.htm#Fig20). Women, though rarely the focus of *Real Star*, are displayed differently. Pictured in their homes, they are seen as role models because they have succeeded in establishing a warm domestic environment replete with the paraphernalia of modern bourgeois living – luxurious sofas, lavish furnishings, candles, and paintings (Figure 20; see http://users.ox.ac.uk/%7Emetheses/WeymanThesis.htm#Fig20).[229] Representations of this sort are not new; rather the construction of women as managers of the domestic space has a long legacy in the modern Middle East[230]. What *Star* does is combine two codes – the professional and the consumptive – which are two complementary sides of the same know-how in middle class prosperity and achievement.

Other didactic material is a result of a complex relationship in which Carole commissions and selects articles but frequently refers to the young writers' interests for ideas. The writers are role models throughout the magazine; their dress, their enthusiasm, their ambition all combine to provide the reader with a coherent package in how to be successful and young in a modern secular Syria. Moreover, they are responsible for writing the two pieces which might be understood as the magazine's editorial comment. These two pieces are mirrors of one another: the former opens the magazine in English whereas the latter closes the magazine in Arabic, yet both deal with the same issues of romantic love, morality and fulfilment in life. These commentaries encapsulate the magazine and provide its moral shell. Indeed, they

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[229] See issues 33, 23-30 July 2005: 8-9; 35, 6-13 August 2005: 8-9; 42, 24 September-1 October 2005: 8-9
[230] Najmabadi, in Abu-Lughod, ed., 1998

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function so unmistakably as small parables on life to help the reader negotiate life's

traumas and obstacles that they might strike the Western reader as patronizing in the

extreme. Taking the angst of adolescence very seriously, they are written as if the

reader unavoidably shares similar concerns and problems as *Star* writers. A typical

formula identifies a problem in life, questions why it should be so, and concludes by

offering the reader a bite-size maxim to take away. For example, one of Aladdin's

opening editorial pieces could hardly begin on a more morose note: 'Is life worth it?

Is life worth our tears?'[231] Devoid of context, this rhetorical gambit could potentially

divert the reader to the wrong answer, 'No.' But Aladdin is on hand to provide

reassurance and comfort, cajoling his audience to 'cheer up, we have to convince

ourselves that this life is great.' As is so often the case in *Star*'s editorial pieces, the

guidelines offer routes to contentment which remain ungrounded in social or political

action. So we arrive at the moral of the parable, unmistakably indicated in red print,

which reads, 'Always remember that we only live once. But if we do it right, once is

enough.' Aladdin, and by extension *Star*, provides a resolution to angst, and therefore

a ladder to personal confidence and fulfilment.

Concluding aphorisms of this kind, highlighted in red, are not uncommon in

Star editorials:

'Don't be so busy thinking about how could you be happier and forget the
blessings we live every day, hour, or moment…'

'[Winter] is truly a beautiful season. Try to live it and think about it positively
for one time only, and you will see how much you will love and appreciate it.'

'Kindness is the noblest weapon which you conquer with.'[232]

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[231] *Star* issue 38, 27 August – 3 September 2005
[232] *Star* issues respectively 44, 8-15 October 2005; 53, 10-17 December 2005; 47, 29 October –
1November 2005

Raya Saba goes as far as offering the reader '21 rules 2 be happy' which not only seek

to build the reader's self-confidence, reminding the reader to 'spend time alone' and

'remember … respect for self,' but also elaborate a secular moral code which can

replace religious codes.[233] Thus, the reader is told to 'take immediate steps to correct'

a mistake and 'give people more than they expect and do it cheerfully.' And, as if this

wasn't enough to chew on, the reader learns how to be truly fulfilled in life:

> 'Love deeply and passionately. You might get hurt but it's the only way to
> live life completely.'

Many of these editorials recycle slogans and even whole tracts from internet sites.

Plagiarism is one way in which the magazine is constraining: it validates and endorses

a process in which the writers look to simple answers for solutions, rather than self-

generated thought and political action, and recycles them, along with their validation,

through society. One of Yousef's English-language editorials does just this, churning

out aphorisms which call on the reader to have hope and live life to the full:

> 'Work like you don't need the money, love like you've never been hurt, dance
> like no one is watching and live like it's heaven on earth'[234]

Yousef's aphorisms deny the acknowledgment of impossibility or failure, and

therefore negate practical lived realities. Moreover, the aphorisms turn on binaries

which do not reflect lived struggles and hardships: 'if it's good, it's wonderful. If it's

bad, it's experience' and 'everything is okay in the end, if it's not ok, then it's not the

end'. These binaries (predicated on the idea that all lived experience is positive and

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[233] *Star* issue 45, 15-22 October 2005
[234] *Star* issue 36, 13-20 August 2005

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valuable) are not only false, they seek to divert readers from the possibility of improving their material and social lives through political action. In other words, they remove practical visions of critique and self-generated change from the map by offering unattainable goals devoid of local or historical actuality.

This sloganeering reoccurs throughout the magazine. In *Real Star*, *Double Star*, and *Sport Star*, professional and amateur successes are asked to reveal their slogan for life. These often validate hard work and a sense of social conscience, but also equip the reader with what seems to be a simple set of maxims which provide a passport into the world of professional fulfilment. Clearly, they are intended as part of the secular ethical and social code *Star* seeks to give its readers which can replace 'backward' religious moral codes which are incapable of adapting to the modern world envisioned. Indeed, they are the flip side of a code which dominates the latter pages of the Syrian content, a code which, on the one hand, encourages bourgeois consumption as the key to fulfilment in life (rather than religious observance), and, on the other, points to hidden texts within the natural world as a secular explanation for why things are as they are. The Syrian content is riddled with endorsements for consumption, not only in advertising, but also in the articles *Star* writers produce. Thus, readers are informed about types of home gardens, how to keep beautiful, and how the way they dress can help reduce their defects.[235] In addition, pieces such as *Star Kitchen*, *Top Music* and *Top Movies* outline the contours of a productive and fulfilling bourgeois lifestyle. Perhaps even more common are articles which posit certain invisible meanings in human interactions and the social world. *Star* thus discloses for its readers the relationship between eye colour and personality, the

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[235] *Star* issues respectively 44, 8-15 October 2005: 56; 32, 16-22 July 2005: 42-43; 34, 30 July – 6 August 2005: 40

hidden meanings of colours, how to discover yourself from your date of birth, how the way we apologize depends on our star sign, and how our voice points to our psychological state.[236]   In addition, a four-page feature championed by Carole, *Star Elak*, offers readers an explanation of their palm and a detailed account of the personalities of all children born on each of the days in the week of issue (Figure 21; see http://users.ox.ac.uk/%7Emetheses/WeymanThesis.htm#Fig21). By providing readers with a secular tool kit for understanding the world about them, these texts seek to subvert and replace religious explanations of meaning. Moreover, they explain the world as a system of incontrovertible signs in which outcomes are the products of fate. In this vision, political action is rendered unnecessary and futile.

Conclusion

Star is testimony to the emergence of a new privatized corporatism in Syria which endorses a bourgeois professional and consumptive lifestyle as a means of ensuring regime stability. This privatized corporatism provides an authority structure (as well as a legitimating discourse) which aims to replace traditional patriarchal family structures and state-based institutional corporatism. Because this corporatism is wedded to the regime, cultural practices deemed threatening or incompatible are marginalized as deviant either for being 'backward' (as Yousef would describe patriarchy) or for being foreign (as Milad Yusuf describes hard rock). Unlike in the hugely popular satirical newspaper Al-Domari, the privatized corporatism evident in *Star* eliminates criticism of middle class authority figures within the fold. Hence, a

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[236] *Star* issues respectively 33, 23-30 July 2005: 26; 35, 6-13 August 2005: 40; 38, 27 August-3 September 2005: 40; 47, 29 October-1November 2005: 40; 48, 2-12 November 2005: 52

discourse emerges wielding the vocabulary of meritocracy and aspiration towards new mechanisms of constraint.

5

Conclusion

Down at Inhouse Coffee: *Star* Magazine in its Site of Consumption

Khalid was in his element in Inhouse coffee. Recounting tales of his sexual exploits, he mused energetically over the motivations for his latest romantic split, his mobile, embedded in the palm of his left hand, periodically alerting him to yet another music download from his 'ex' to which he would intermittently text back, his cigarette lodged between the index and middle fingers of his animated right hand, his strawberry milkshake in Inhouse-branded plastic cup in front of him, his almost seamless narrative punctuated only by here a drag, there a swig. By the time I arrived, he had already been hanging out in the café with his side-kick Abdul over an hour draining two ludicrously expensive milkshakes in the process. Having settled at a centrally located table clearly visible through the stylish glass-paned café front to evening shoppers looking in on the meticulously-designed and clinically-organized space that is the hallmark of Inhouse, Khalid was keen to be seen. Part of being in

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Inhouse is being seen in Inhouse, and Khalid, was both fastidiously groomed and suitably dressed in sharp Western attire plainly marking him out as one of Damascus's wealthy young. Son of a successful car salesman and brilliantly articulate in English, Khalid finds in Inhouse the exclusive space in which to be a young modern Syrian.

Khalid, indeed, is precisely the target consumer Inhouse seeks to attract. He is within the target age range of 18 to 35, he is wealthy by Syrian standards, and he is conversant in the codes of global consumer culture having spent three summers in the UK learning English. I met Khalid first in a quite different location – the suburban environs of Al-Nabk, a small town north of Damascus, where I was staying with the religiously observant cousin of my Arabic language conversation partner. Al-Nabk does not even boast a single café. Little wonder then that Khalid only goes there on short visits to see his family. The Damascus of Inhouse offers him a much more prestigious environment in which to pursue his social life. Part of this is to do with the café's cosmopolitan feel. As Said Al-Jaafari, its Chief Operating Officer, explained to me in an interview, Inhouse seeks to attract Western students temporarily resident in Syria who account for over 20 percent of its sales. These foreigners, of whom I was one, are not out of place in Inhouse; rather they are seen to have social capital which adds value to the brand and rubs off on Syrian consumers there. For example, I was often greeted as a quasi-hero in Inhouse for nothing other than turning up. The staff seemed to love practising their latest English on me. On one occasion, a female server gave me a free promotional CD after I had asked for directions. On another, a group of four Syrian students observed me for some time before plucking up the courage to ask a question. Of course, Western tourists may receive attention

wherever they go in Syria, but in Inhouse, they are seen positively such that a certain social capital is funnelled into the brand. Inhouse is where young Syrians, and not just the very wealthy, can go to be transported to a cosmopolitan world, to feel connected to the pulse of global culture. And everything in the café revolves around this, from the stylish modern furnishings to the expensive cappuccinos, from the predominance of English over Arabic to the ubiquity of the Inhouse brand, from the consumption-oriented iconography of the Inhouse pictograms to the endless music videos on MTV.

Moreover, Inhouse is a place where social norms can be contested. This is partly because the chain itself contests social norms in Syria. The Western-only music television brings images fetishizing and eroticizing youth sub-cultures, thus tagging Western consumerism to visions of youth experimentation and selling the idea that to be young and connected is to pursue kinds of consumption incompatible with the previous generation. As Thomas Frank notes, through developments in advertising in 1960s America, the notion of youth came to be 'an attractive consuming attitude, not an age' which was 'pre-eminently defined by the values of the counterculture' hinging on 'talk of rebellion, and intimations of free love.'[237] In the United States, musical countercultures endowed with rebellious attitude, in-group identity, and disdain for conventions have been sought out and cultivated by advertisers and pop producers. In a world where individuality is defined by consumer identity, this dynamic makes perfect business sense. If being young hinges on a 'consuming attitude' which distinguishes young people from their parents, then countercultures provide ideal resources to shape what young people consume.

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[237] 1997: 118

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Countercultures can thus be presented as young, innovative and 'hip' because they

unsettle established norms. Frank describes this process for 1960s America:

> 'The counterculture seemed to have it all: the unconnectedness which would
> allow consumers to indulge transitory whims; the irreverence that would allow
> them to defy moral Puritanism; and the contempt for established social rules
> that would free them from the slow-moving, buttoned-down conformity of
> their abstemious ancestors.' [238]

Yet, through the far-reaching endeavours of global media and mass marketing,

countercultures such as rap and hard rock have become essentially mainstream in the

Western youth imagination.   This, however, is not the case in Syria where such

genres are widely seen either as unacceptable in or incompatible with Syrian culture.

But their display in Inhouse through MTV and VHR1 hints at the emergence of

widespread social changes in Syria allied to the advent of satellite television and the

internet. If ever will be a time in which countercultures become 'cool' in the Middle

East, it could be fast approaching.

Inhouse is not marginal, but neither is it a chain devoted to mass appeal in the

mould of the Starbucks and Costa Coffees of the West – the prices are simply too

expensive and the codes of display too hard to attain for most. Rather, Inhouse is high

prestige. Some of my student friends would only need a weekly or monthly fix of

Inhouse to feel included in its community, although others, such as Yousef, would be

there most days. Yet, Inhouse clearly sets out to exclude some and cordially include

others. This does not just work through pricing but socially as well. As I have argued,

the clientele in part need somewhere exclusive in order to represent the vanguard of

Syrian modernity and youth culture. For example, during one of my stints in the café,

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[238] Ibid: 119

a customer sitting near the glass-paned café front objected to a homeless boy looking in at him. Almost immediately one of the numerous members of staff was outside chasing off the boy. A certain privilege and social capital pertains from being seen in Inhouse by those who cannot afford to be there, but this boy was off the scale. His presence – even though outside the café – intruded on the customer's space and undermined the logic of prestige accruing from social display. Another aspect of exclusion concerns the elimination of social codes of public display, religious observance, and political obedience which are the hallmark of public life in most of Syria. When, for example, I asked Said Al-Jaafari why he refuses to screen Arabic satellite music channels in all his cafes – a truly remarkable decision given the popularity of video clip channels, Rotana and Melody Maker, and reality TV formats, *Star Academy* and *Super Star* – he responded by saying 'you can't put something Arabian into the café.' Inhouse locates Syria in the west, seeking to undermine the national modernism which has long retained a place for preserving the authentic national self.

Indeed, Inhouse de-clutters leisure space, removing religious and political symbols and rhetoric, and re-stacking that space with a new iconography and language. Everything is branded - mugs, plastic cups, tissues, plates, ash trays, menus – to an extent largely unseen in any other Syrian leisure establishment (Figure 22; see http://users.ox.ac.uk/%7Emetheses/WeymanThesis.htm#Fig22). Even the servers' bodies provide legitimate space on which to display the brand – each has to wear full green uniform, apron and cap. Metallic lettering adorns the bar boldly pronouncing the Inhouse slogan in English, 'Just a perfect day.' Taken from a Lou Reed song, this slogan further orients Inhouse towards the West. The three pictograms that form the

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core brand, an arrow for 'in,' a house for 'house,' and a mug for 'coffee,' are complemented by a set of further icons designed to reinforce the central themes of the brand. Thus, images variously depict musical notes, someone relaxing in a bath, and a heart to communicate that Inhouse is a place for friends, leisure, and romance. Inhouse branding does not stop there. The chain's slogan is recycled as part of a brand jingle repeated roughly every hour that says, 'Inhouse Coffee day, just a perfect day!' But, Inhouse is less remarkable for what it contains than for what it excludes. Unlike almost all other cafes, restaurants and shops in the capital, it resists displaying images of the President, of the Syrian flag, or of religious verses or icons. The wide glass-paned fronts which are typical of Inhouse provide for a dialogue of two-way display. It provides Inhouse clientele with a lens through which to inspect the cluttered world of authoritarian Syria from a distance whilst simultaneously displaying their social privilege in an active gesture of social differentiation. In this way, the glass fronts magnify processes of social exclusion and further reinforce Inhouse's status as a youth retreat from cluttered public space.

It is into this politically de-cluttered, Western-oriented world that *Star* magazine is put, vying with a host of other media – satellite television, mobile phones, and newspapers – for the attention of young people. In Inhouse, unlike the core business of the American coffee chains it is derived from, most customers spend extended periods of time socializing and relaxing. Hardly anyone comes in to grab a quick coffee on their way elsewhere. This presents an excellent opportunity for the consumption of media products. The centre piece of the Inhouse media menu is the satellite television shown on stylish plasma screens. Set to Western music channels, MTV and VHR1 throughout the day except mornings when Al Jazeera and Al

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Arabiya are screened silently to Western music, this television output provides a window on the West and a set of guidelines for customers to replicate on how to be young, fashionable, and connected. The music allows for an atmosphere and continuity which helps sustain the brand's potency. But the televisions are also used to broadcast MTV recordings of live concerts of major pop stars, such as Elton John and Eric Clapton, in the early afternoon and mid-evening. These concerts combine the flow typical of MTV music videos with the display of spectacle. I noticed the customers of Inhouse to some extent taking part in the drama of these concerts as if they were there in person. For example, during a Brian Adams concert, customers tended to turn towards the television whenever a song finished. Two women sitting near me were visibly astonished by the camera angles which showed the size of the crowd. One muttered 'wow.' Later, when Adams finished a song and brought a fan on stage, again these women were drawn to the television. They too were spectators to a spectacle. On another occasion, I saw a young man counting his prayer beads. Every time the music stopped he would turn to the television and watch still counting. Clearly, the televisions are very important to Inhouse and are capable of alluring customer attention. But there are other media playing the game as well, not least mobile telephones. Inhouse clientele seem to pride themselves on displaying their latest gadgets on the table in front of them. This not only adds social capital to those with enough money to afford expensive phones, but it also allows Inhouse customers to demonstrate that they are socially connected. In other words, even without the latest phone with which to accrue social prestige, young Inhouse regulars must display their phone to prove social credibility. Texting, phoning, taking photographs and sharing music downloads are regular practices which provide additional means for enhancing a customer's social standing amongst peers as well as amongst other

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customers in the café. Finally, it is not unusual to see groups gathered around a laptop computer, either working or discussing videos.

It should be obvious that the print media in Inhouse face very serious competition for the attention of the young clientele. *Star* is one of a number of magazines and newspapers made available for customers to browse for free in Inhouse cafes, but it is the only one which specifically sells itself as a youth magazine. Nevertheless, print is perhaps the only medium through which the nationalist, paternalistic pro-regime agenda of *Star* can realistically access the Inhouse audience within the café itself. *Star* reaches the Inhouse market only because it is distributed to certain cafes, restaurants, VIPs, and hairdressers for free. Carole puts the proportion of magazines distributed in this way at ten percent of the 10,000 print run, although on the UG website the figure is 5,000. The discrepancy points to the difficulties researchers have evaluating distribution and sales in Syria and the Middle East more generally because either the statistics are not collated or they are kept confidential. That *Star* claims to distribute up to 5,000 copies for free only reinforces the idea that it is not only a commercial venture, but also a strategy for conveying a message. Nowhere is this task more urgent than Inhouse, a veritable hunting ground for *Star* magazine.

When I first encountered *Star* in Inhouse early in my summer visit to Syria in 2005, I was convinced the two made ideal bed-fellows. But, through the course of my research, I have come to the view that this is misguided. If *Star* has two young target audiences that it seeks to transform, they are on the one hand the religiously conservative elements of the middle class, and on the other hand the Western-oriented

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bourgeois consumers of Inhouse. To the first group, *Star* preaches conformity to a secular, politically obedient, consumerist society in which patriarchal norms are viewed as backward. To the second group, *Star* preaches something quite different: that professional achievement and a modern, bourgeois lifestyle are not only attainable in Syria, but alive and well today. It reminds readers in this camp that national icons are important, that high culture is necessary, and that morality in part stems from constraining Western influence whilst promoting a self-generated national modernity.

Although the codes of Inhouse and *Star* do align in places – both are broadly secular, both endorse consumption, and both exploit derivative hybrid models to local ends – *Star* seeks to contest some central elements of the Inhouse vision for young Syrians. Firstly, *Star* brings political slogans, regime rhetoric and national emblems into the politically de-cluttered space of the Inhouse café. During the period of intense political crisis over the Al-Hariri affair through November and December 2005, the regime moved to reaffirm mass compliance. It propagated flags and banners in public places; it broadcast overtly political songs on the radio; it developed websites masking as petitions which encouraged 'virtual' acts of obedience; and it re-appropriated advertising space for political sloganeering and symbolic display. Throughout all of this, Inhouse remained almost impenetrable to the symbolic production of the regime. It was only *Star* and UG's lifestyle magazine, Layalina, which successfully breached the fortress of the Inhouse brand to supply messages of state control. In other words, the part-privatization of the regime's symbolic production was crucial in furthering the regime's message into new privately managed spaces.

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Secondly, whereas Inhouse unashamedly orients its customers towards the West, *Star* seeks to draw them back into the national fold. In the Inhouse vision, customers accrue social prestige from consuming cultural forms which are globally mediated through satellite television. In the *Star* vision, such forms are not denied completely, but are constrained into the tight-jacket of nationally focused, morally didactic content. *Star* thus seeks to convince its young Syrian readers that their task is to consume and further products bound up in Syria's pursuit of self-generated national modernity. The underlying claim affirms that the fruits of Syria's secular modernity can be, indeed *are*, superior to those in the West.

But perhaps Inhouse and *Star* are aligned in a broader respect. Both are part of a new formulation in private-corporate practice which is energetically blurring the boundaries between cultural complexes once deemed separate. In other words, the walls which may once have separated bourgeois culture from, on the one hand, the state and, on the other, religion have been in both cases decisively breached. The common factor is the emergence of a powerful privatized corporatism that seems impossible for any cultural complex to ignore. Thus, the Inhouse advert in figure 22 (see http://users.ox.ac.uk/%7Emetheses/WeymanThesis.htm#Fig22) mixes modern pictogram branding with 'authentic' religious inscriptions proclaiming 'Adha Mubarak' (Happy `Id Al-Adha) in a way which parallels the merging of corporate and regime-national symbols in *Star*. Merging religious and bourgeois cultural symbols (a practice which is certainly not new or uncommon in the Middle East) is useful both to those seeking to encourage liberal consumption around religious festivals (such as Inhouse) and those seeking to keep society in check (such as religious preachers who perform on glossy satellite television channels). A similar dynamic is true of the

fusion of state and bourgeois symbols which apparently seem antagonistic but can

work in harmony. Because of this, it is becoming increasingly hard to disentangle the

vocabulary of bourgeois liberalism from forces which seek to keep society in check.

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