

Rezensionen

Abu-Lughod, Lila: *Dramas of Nationhood. The Politics of Television in Egypt.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005. 319 pp. ISBN 0-226-00197-0. Price: \$ 22.00

Within a broad context, Abu-Lughod addresses Egyptian television programs and melodramas of the 1980s and 1990s focusing on two sets of viewers, rural women and domestic workers from rural backgrounds, in Cairo. She also interviews a more elite population that includes producers, writers, scriptwriters, stars, journalists, and critics.

The book is composed of 8 chapters, in addition to the conclusion, that are divided unequally into three parts. The first part, "Anthropology and National Media," consists of two chapters on methodology and the ethnography of a nation. Abu-Lughod treats the relationship between the elites who produce national television "for imagined audiences" and the various subaltern viewers as a series of encounters mediated by class, gender, and national ideology. However, by focusing on "some marginal social groups" (12), middle class viewers are rendered insignificant for an ambitious study aiming to explore the impact of television on the formation of Egyptian national identity. This goal contradicts the conclusion of the book in which it is purported that the purpose of TV dramas is to generate a political agenda suggesting ways to turn the nation into a just state. The researcher states that the TV serials entertain marginal communities and "seek to draw them into the nation, but do not suggest how they might transform their nation-state to make it a more equitable or just place" (245). The intricate relationships between a foreign ethnographer and native subalterns could have been better illuminated were they not oversimplified by the researcher. Is it enough for a foreigner to be accepted by natives simply for showing a common interest in watching TV serials? The author, perceived by an Egyptian woman as a foreigner, said, "Television bonded us. And this bond began to *separate* me from other foreigners, people who generally, *as the villagers knew*, did not follow the Egyptian television melodramas they loved" (30, emphasis added).

The second part, "National Pedagogy," consists of two chapters dealing with education, rural illiteracy, development, and the problem of feminism. The author maintains that Egyptian TV melodramas are very much part of the state's plans to shape Egyptian identity through national pedagogy. These miniseries generate a

sense of nationhood by attracting the whole population of Egypt to their TV sets at particular times. Television provides everyone – men, women, the old, young, rural, and urban – vivid stories of their cultures as well as others. The author argues that Egyptian TV serials, in drawing upon modernist literature, are often concerned with political and social issues in such a way that they serve as a device for an ideology of developmentalism, idealizing education, progress, and modernity as a way to evade the nation's stagnation and backwardness. However, television serials trigger controversial issues such as rural underdeveloped condition, women emancipation, or the challenge of radical Islam.

The third part, "The Eroding Hegemony of Developmentalism," includes four chapters explicating topics such as the features of Egyptian melodrama, the ambivalence of authenticity, managing religion in the name of national community, capitalist consumption, and the state's abandonment of social welfare. The author points out that treatments of religion in television drama confirm the predominance of the nation stating that defining "good and bad Islam" (165) depends on and upholds the value of national integrity.

The researcher chooses to judge TV serials against the real lives of TV viewers formulating inconsistent generalizations moving from the life history of one person, an impoverished, divorced, and isolated woman (Amira) who works as maid in Cairo, to the whole nation of Egypt. To be more specific the writer claims that she discusses "the life stories of a woman who was extraordinarily enmeshed in the world of television and radio serials in order to suggest how we might trace the distinctive affective and narrative forms of melodrama into forms of personal subjectivity in Egypt" (120). The author endeavors to draw a connection between Amira "as a subject" and television melodramas claiming that Amira "made herself the subject of her own life stories." "Amira," she asserts, "was the one whose tales took most clearly the form of melodrama" (126). If this is true, there is another problem embedded in Amira's life story through which the author's criticism of feminists and the intelligentsia, as well as of the serials' scriptwriters and producers, "whose basic problem is a middle-class bias" (83), is unjustified. Methodologically, rather than relying on interviews with TV viewers, the writer depends heavily on interviews with intellectuals and feminists, toward whom she finds herself "simultaneously sympathetic to and un-

comfortable with their projects” (82). Furthermore, the author’s involvement in the emotional aspect of TV and real-life melodramas has made her create what can be called melodramas within melodramas, a subjective view of ethnographic facts.

The book shows that subalterns, who find in religion, or Islam, an alternative to secularism, do not acknowledge privatization and do not participate in capitalistic projects. For them, they find more sense in the lessons from the mosque. However, the author does not elaborate the challenge the mosque presents to the government’s pedagogical system especially when she states that Amira “described her own recent efforts to attend literacy classes not through government programs but through the mosque, which was now taking over many of the services that the state used to provide” (103f.).

Ethnographically, the book would have been more convincing had the author dealt consistently with melodramatic serials and nonmelodramatic TV programs. In a tune akin to that of Amira, a mother from an Upper Egyptian village is quoted as saying, “We are a soap opera!” (124), however, the anthropologist, in another context, stresses the significance of a specific nonmelodramatic TV program being watched and “liked as much as the serials (which are, as one woman said, ‘only acting’)” (97). Is this a sort of Geertz-like thick description the anthropologist tries to present after criticizing many of the studies of popular culture for not offering “profound insights into the human condition” (30)?

Some core themes of the media, especially those related to Islamism, terrorism, popular culture, education, and consumerism in Egypt, are not new topics. Anthropologists have been addressing them for more than a decade. Moreover, some of the topics, not cited in this particular book, were addressed earlier by the author in her article, “Television and the Virtues of Education: Upper Egyptian Encounters with State Culture” (N. Hopkins and K. Westergaard [eds.], *Directions of Change in Rural Egypt*. Cairo 1998: 147–165). Conducting fieldwork in Egypt for more than two decades should have made the anthropologist aware that Anwar al-Sadat was the third not second president of Egypt (165). Despite these flaws, the book is a complementary contribution to media and gender studies in the Middle East in general and Egypt in particular. el-Sayed el-Aswad

Andrewes, Janet: *Bodywork – Dress as Cultural Tool. Dress and Demeanor in the South of Senegal*. Leiden: Brill, 2005. 240 pp. ISBN 978-90-04-14107-0. (African Social Studies Series, 7) Price: € 66.00

Vor zwei Jahrzehnten haben Ethnologen und Sozialwissenschaftler Kleidung und Mode in Afrika als neues Forschungsthema entdeckt. Im Gegensatz zu ihren Vorgängern, die sich mit Textilien als passiver Materie beschäftigten und dabei insbesondere deren ästhetische und technische Eigenschaften analysierten, erkannte man nun die herausragende soziale Rolle von Kleidung, Kleidungsstilen und Mode, d. h. ihre Funktion als Kommunikationsmittel und dynamisches Bindeglied zwischen In-

dividuum und Gesellschaft. Dieser neue Ansatz führte zu einer großen Zahl von Veröffentlichungen, die in Fallbeispielen die symbolische und semiotische Wirkungskraft einzelner Kleidungsformen in unterschiedlichen historischen und kulturellen Kontexten herausstellten. Sie führten den produktiven, selbstbewusst gesteuerten Umgang mit Kleidung als soziale Strategie vor, die nicht nur Identitäten abbildet, sondern auch einfordert, in Frage stellt, provoziert, pervertiert etc.

Nun sind vor kurzem zwei Bücher herausgekommen, die diesen Forschungstrend wieder in eine andere Richtung lenken. Der von Kuchler und Miller herausgegebene Band (*Clothing as Material Culture*. Oxford 2005) wendet sich erneut der Materialität der Textilien zu, während Janet Andrewes ebenfalls vom Primat der handelnden Subjekte Abstand nimmt und Stoffe, Kleidungsformen und Stile neu bewertet und sie nicht nur als Mittel und Fläche für Kommunikation und Ideenrepräsentation betrachtet. Anstatt wie bisher üblich zu untersuchen, wie Leute Kleidung als Ausdrucksmittel für ihre eigenen Zwecke einsetzen, richtet die Autorin den Blick darauf, was die Kleider mit dem Körper machen, wie sie ihn in seiner Bewegung, seiner Gestalt, seinem Ausdruck und seiner Bedeutung beeinflussen oder konditionieren. Für sie ist der Körper ein wesentlicher Bestandteil der Kultur – und nicht nur als Zeichen, sondern als konstituierendes Element –, dessen Verfassung durch die Kleidungshülle mit bestimmt wird. Die Körperhaltung, Gesten, Bewegungen gehören zu dem Gesamtkorpus, der die Kultur einer Region, eines Volkes ausmacht, während die typische, konventionelle Kleidung, die genau in diesem Kontext getragen wird, den Körper darin unterstützt, den gesellschaftlich angemessenen Ausdruck anzunehmen. Auf der Ebene der Kleidungserfahrung wird soziale und kulturelle Identität vermittelt und hergestellt. Und in diesem Sinn spricht die Autorin von der “formative function” von Kleidung, die weit über die bislang diskutierte symbolische Wirkungskraft hinausgeht.

“This book looks at the encounter between dress and body,” heißt es ganz lapidar auf dem Buchumschlag, doch dahinter steckt ein ambitioniertes Programm, das Andrewes auf souveräne und überzeugende Art und Weise in ihrer empirischen Studie umsetzt. Die Grundannahme liegt nicht darin, dass der jeweilige Kleidungsstil den Körper prägt und ihn formt, vielmehr stellt sich die Untersuchung die Frage nach der Art der jeweiligen Beziehung zwischen den beiden Agenten, die sich nämlich unterschiedlich gestalten können. Dabei stützt sich die Autorin zum einen auf den eher soziologisch ausgerichteten Forschungsansatz, der zwar auch auf den Zusammenhang zwischen Kleidungsverhalten und Identitätsbildung ausgerichtet ist, aber, so Andrewes, Kleidung im Grunde genommen nur als Oberfläche und Repräsentationsmittel behandelt und damit die Wirkung auf den Körper völlig ausblendet.

Zum anderen holt sie sich ihr theoretisches Rüstzeug aus der Sozialanthropologie, insbesondere von Bourdieu und Jackson, die beide dem Körper eine zentrale kultur-reproduzierende und -konstituierende Rolle zuweisen, insofern als sich in ihm und durch ihn die herrschenden