

MARKSCHEME

May 2002

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Standard Level

Paper 1

1. In what ways has television become an integral part of the lives of villagers in Upper Egypt?

[6 marks]

The most straightforward evidence that Egyptian villagers have incorporated television into their lives is the fact that television sets are found in every home, in contrast to the exotic appearance of the village and the poverty that the passage suggests, and that villagers keep their television sets turned on almost constantly. Thus the television set (and the possibility, at least, of watching it) forms a backdrop for all daily activities, even when the set is not within range of sight, as the anecdote about Yamna illustrates. Television is thus an integral part of the material aspects of people's lives in rural Upper Egypt.

Television is also symbolically embedded in the lives of villagers. It is not just the television set and the act of watching it, but also the content of what is broadcast on television that has become part and parcel of village life: villagers feel that the stars of dramatic television serials are somehow their own, that the television serials belong to them, and that they are broadcast for the explicit purpose of occupying leisure moments of their daily lives.

The last paragraph of the passage indicates that the inhabitants of the Upper Egyptian village in question see television, as well as other aspects of modernity and the outside world, as congruent with traditional aspects of their lives. Implicit in Abu-Lughod's description of this attitude is a contrast with the Western tendency to see tokens of modernity as necessarily in conflict with traditionalism, rural lifestyles, and kinship-oriented ways of thinking.

Examiners will differentiate between good and poor answers by determining the extent to which the candidates describe these materials in their own words and following their own order of presentation. In addition, good answers will distinguish themselves by the candidate's ability to adopt an anthropological stance in the presentation of the material, eschewing superficial and pre-analytic commentaries about, for example, putative ruinous effects of television on villagers' lives.

2. Describe and illustrate how Upper Egypt villagers treat television serials in selective and critical ways.

[6 marks]

This question complements the previous question. The first question asks candidates to reflect on the *incorporation* of a token of modernity into their lives, while this question seeks to elicit their understanding of the *transformation* of this token in the process of incorporation. Put more abstractly, Question 1 concerns globalization, while Question 2 is about localisation.

The passage provides cues for an answer to this question that are both specific and general. The specific cues are provided in the vignette about Yamna’s family. She and her sister are not primarily concerned about the differences between the lifestyles presented in *Love in a Diplomatic Pouch* and their own immediate reality (poverty, illness, school pressures), and paid scant attention to the urban, upscale, and cosmopolitan concerns that preoccupy the characters of the television serial. Rather, they retain from the programme only those elements that have relevance to their own lives and values. They read into the television serial a moral commentary about kinship-dominated life as they know it, even though this reading was not intended by the makers of the programme, who sought to develop a psycho-social drama about people whose urban wealth has freed them from the obligations and strictures of village life. Yamna and her sister do not “misunderstand” the television serial; rather, they give it a meaning that makes perfect sense in the context of their own lives.

The passage also provides general information that can be usefully invoked to answer this question. For example, Abu-Lughod states in the first paragraph that television offers unprecedented avenues for women, younger people, and rural dwellers to claim a share of non-local experience, which hitherto had been the privilege of urban men. This can be re-worded as follows: women, younger people, and villagers can treat television in ways that tacitly contest a social order that excludes them from certain privileges, opportunities, and pleasures. This approach represents a critical use of the technology. Villagers also have a proprietary attitude towards the television serials and the actors that appear in them, rather than being simply star-struck by them, even though they do not think of the television serials as the same as their lives and the actors as the same as themselves. These stances are evidence of critical agency, and the distinction they draw between “owning” and “being the same as” the actors bears witness to villagers’ ability to affirm a subtle stance in relation to television.

Good answers will spell out, using the candidate’s own words, some of the arguments spelled out here, although not necessarily all of them and not necessarily in the same order. Of importance in assigning a good mark to an answer is whether the candidate has managed to present the material in an anthropologically informed manner, and has drawn a contrast between this question and the previous one, either overtly or tacitly.

3. **Compare Upper Egypt villagers' response to television with the ways in which members of a different society have responded to an object, technology, institution, or symbol associated with modernity and the outside world.**

[8 marks]

This question provides candidates the opportunity to demonstrate their comparative skills. The situation analysed in the passage can be contrasted with many other possible cases. The success of the comparison hinges on the candidate's ability to sustain a comparison mode of presentation throughout, rather than launching in the description of another case study without referring back to the rural Egyptian case, a strategy that cannot earn the answer more than ***[4 marks]***. Candidates must also clearly identify the name, location, ethnographer and ethnographic present of the comparative material in order to receive ***[4 marks]***. The best answers will touch on both differences and similarities between the two situations.
