Dramas of the Authoritarian State. The politics of Syrian TV serials in the Pan Arab market

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This research work analyses Syrian TV drama (musalsalat) in the context of a liberalized autocracy, such as Bashar al-Asad's Syria appears to be. It particularly focuses on a time frame which goes from Bashar al-Asad’s rise to power in 2000 until the outbreak of the Syrian uprising in 2011; and it reflects upon the mechanisms through which this TV drama was produced, and on the special bond that was forged between the cultural elite of Syrian drama makers and the political elite of the President’s seemingly reform-minded circle.

Moreover, it examines how disciplinary and pedagogical messages were elaborated and put forward for the Syrian public, at the same time being commodified for and promoted on the Pan Arab market. By adding the Pan Arab dimension to the analysis, Syrian TV drama has been placed within a broader framework where local politics are forced to adapt to the requirements of a regional market controlled by Gulf states’ media proxies; yet, at the same time, the needs and concerns of the Pan Arab market are also required to deal, directly or indirectly, with Syrian political powers.

Through the selection of case studies taken from those Syrian musalsalat whose narrative, storyline, characters, and production history clearly manifest one or more aspects of this regional-local dynamics, the research work aims at providing an overview of the power relations that mutually shape and re-shape the production and distribution of media on the Syrian and Pan Arab market.

Moreover, this work is an attempt at shedding light on how these power relations are of a dynamic nature and tend to be reconfigured and rearranged in light of crisis factors; such as the ongoing Syrian uprising, that has forced the political economy of Syrian TV drama into a new phase, the implications of which will only become fully manifest in the years to come.