

Review

Amir Hetsroni (ed.), *Reality Television: Merging the Global and the Local*, New York, NY: Nova Science Publishers, 2010. ISBN: 978-1-61668-315-3 (hbk), 295 pp.

Television in the late 20th and early 21st century has become increasingly intertwined with everyday social and cultural processes. As Bonner points out, television is increasingly involved with the mundane and the ordinary life of 'normal' people, caught in the domestic spaces of their intimacies (Bonner 2003). Very interestingly, this means that the way television is consumed and 'performed' by audiences indicates an erosion of the distinction between the everyday world and the celebrity world, in which common people claim intimacy with the completely mediated identities of such celebrities, through communication technologies and the Web 2.0.

Editor of *Reality Television: Merging the Global and the Local*, Amir Hetsroni writes that 'This is not another collection of essays about reality TV', the volume does not intend to define 'what reality TV is all about' nor to encompass all the various aspects of this globally recognised format. There is no attempt to redefine the field, instead, the book aims to provide 'a culturally sensitive examination and a cross-cultural view' (p. 2) of reality television outside those countries, the USA and UK, generally covered by similar works. For this reason, the collection is divided into four sections: North America, Europe, The Middle East and Cross-Cultural Studies. A transnational perspective, as suggested in the book's introduction, is essential since reality programs are "global media products" that need at least some cultural adaptations to succeed outside their habitués" (p. 2). Though as the section titles suggest the local adaptations of global formats under consideration here are predominantly North American and European, since the Middle East section features Israel mostly (Chapter 7, 8, 10) and Turkey only once (Chapter 9). The final section, which could have been devoted to cross-cultural studies, also seems to rely on these same countries, with the exceptions of Lewis' Chapter 12 (reality makeover shows in Australia and Singapore), and Grimm's study of the Brazilian local adaptation of *Supernanny* (Chapter 13).

Overall, the book addresses a wide range of topics through which the contributors aim to establish an open-ended dialogue rather than presenting a definitive statement on reality TV in global and local contexts. From the transformation of 'ordinary' people into celebrities and the connections between reality TV consumption and online behaviour

(Chapter 2) to the success of *Big Brother* in Post-Communist Countries (Raicheva-Stover's Chapter 3) the authors raise the discussion around media choices for interpersonal communication (Bilandzic and Hastall's Chapter 6) and ethnically-oriented analysis of media's responses to reality shows (Chapter 7 and Chapter 10). Particularly interesting is Motti Neiger's 'Real Love Has No Boundaries?' (pp. 123-136), where the author reflects on the re-adaptation of dating-based reality shows on Israel TV, where 'the conflicts between local and global establish the show's narrative and illuminate the formation of identities' (p.124) in a powerful contamination of tradition, religion, and romantic love.

Other interesting chapters address the issue of television as a source of nationalist representations (Volcic and Andrejevic' Chapter 5 on Slovene television) and as a central stage where national identity is displayed and reconfigured, such as Celenk's exploration of *Singing for a Dream* on Turkish Television (pp. 137-149).

In general terms, the first three sections and the final collection of cross-cultural contributions do provide some excellent contributions to the study of reality TV and globalization, such as Livio's brilliant analysis of the practical manifestations of 'glocalisation' in four different version of the *Idol* singing competition (from the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and Israel). Indeed, the general impression is that reality TV talks about us, through the *mise en scène* of some of the most important psychological factors explaining social and cultural relations: friendship, trust, alliances, national identity, and love among others.

Nevertheless, some elements call into question the general coherence of the volume. First of all, the extensive use of multiple methodologies and critical frameworks, even if scientifically remarkable, makes the volume a rather incoherent collection of bits and pieces glued together without a logical connection. Starting from the Uses and Gratification Theory (Chapter 1) and the Social Cognitive Theory (Chapter 2) the reader struggles with examples of textual analysis (Celenk's Chapter 9), discourse analysis (Chapter 11), programming analysis (Maria Raicheva-Stover's *Big Brother* in post-communist Bulgaria), audience survey research (M. Hayes' and Dunbar's contribution on participants' voting patterns for *Survivor*), and the review of public discourse over the popularity of reality TV in Israel (Chapter 10).

Therein lies a missed opportunity to bring together the different definitions of reality TV into a cohesive discourse providing a foundation for connecting the chapters more effectively. A strong editorial voice is particularly missing at the end of the volume, where a summarising chapter would have been useful to bring together all the various ideas. Instead, Chapter 14's 'Reality Nations: An International Comparison of the Historical Reality Genre' by Emily West introduces a brand new branch of argumentation that is not sequentially connected with the previous chapters and leaves the whole collection with an open-ended question mark.

Overall though, the volume is an important contribution to the fields of reality TV and global/local cultural studies. A closer look at cross-cultural comparisons, taking into account developing trends in South America, Africa or India, would have been appreciated

in terms of a more 'transnational' understanding. Obviously no book can take into account the entire panorama of such a worldwide phenomenon, but nonetheless *Reality Television: Merging the Global and the Local* positions itself as an excellent and refreshing springboard for further discussions.

This book will surely be of interest to an academic audience specialized in Media and Television Studies courses, particularly those interested in the globalisation of television and media, and reality television from a transnational perspective.

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References:

Bonner, F. 2003. *Ordinary television: Analysing Popular TV*. London: Sage.