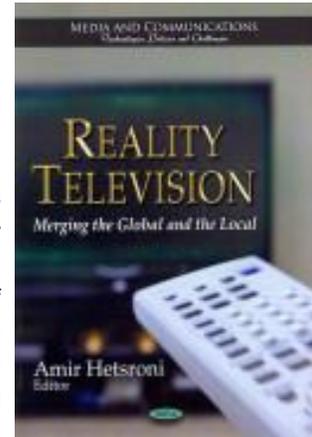


Amir Hetsroni (Ed.), **Reality Television: Merging the Global and the Local**, New York, NY: Nova Science Publishers, 2010, 295 pp., \$110 (paperback).

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With the rapid proliferation of formats across national borders around the world, reality television provides a rich set of discourses for exploring the global intersections of cultures and media. The richer of these studies moves beyond the critiques of reality television formats as forms of cultural domination into questions of not only local productions but also participant representations, audience responses, and media coverage. This proliferation of reality television and its popularity result in multiple edited collections on the subject. **Reality Television: Merging the Global and the Local**, Amir Hetsroni's edited collection, joins *The Politics of Reality Television: Global Perspectives* (Kraidy & Sender, 2011) and *Global Television Formats: Understanding Television across Borders* (Oren & Shahaf, 2011) in examining these issues across texts.



Hetsroni, associated with Ariel University Center in Israel, positions his collection as different from other collections that he finds “too general” (2010, p. 1) such as Murray and Ouellette (2009) and Holmes and Jermyn (2004) by claiming that this anthology offers “a culturally sensitive examination and a cross-cultural view” (p. 2). A brief preface collects an uneven set of overviews of the chapters therein, with some introductions consisting of abstracts and others of the first few paragraphs of the actual chapter. Hetsroni’s brief introduction that follows offers a slightly more sustained and focused overview that suggests the difficulties in defining reality TV but then backs away from taking on that task. He next clarifies the purpose of the chapters in their focuses on the representations, audiences, and overall appeal within the different countries studied.

The core of the anthology consists of 14 chapters divided into four sections: North America, Europe, The Middle East, and Cross-Cultural Studies. As the section titles suggest, the national identities under consideration remain heavily North American and European, and the Middle East section features Israel mostly and Turkey once. The cross-cultural studies also rely heavily on these same countries, though Lewis (2010) addresses Singapore in her study of makeover television (pp. 201–206), and Grimm (2010) includes Brazil as part of the data in his detailed chapter (pp. 211–258). Though no single volume can be representative of the entire globe, the absence of South America or the rest of Africa as sustained studies is an oversight here.

Reality Television: Merging the Global and the Local offers several strengths through its inclusion of multiple methodologies, analyses on audiences and media responses, cross-cultural format comparisons, and somewhat unique local shows. While some collections bring together multiple chapters

that use a single method to analyze different phenomena, this collection offers chapters using a wide array of methodologies to raise multiple questions about the discourses surrounding reality TV and global questions. While multiple chapters from some authors do focus on texts, several others focus on show participants and audiences. In "Do You Know Who Your Friends Are? An Analysis of Voting Patterns and Alliances on the Reality Television Show Survivor," Hayes and Dunbar (2010) analyze the behavior of show participants to explain why some people get voted off. In "Reality Television and Computer-Mediated Identity: Offline Exposure and Online Behavior," Stefanone, Lackaff, and Rosen (2010) conduct surveys of the targeted reality TV audience to find connections with their television viewing and online behaviors. Moving to offline communications, Bilandzic and Hastall (2010) analyze interpersonal communication, as connected with the show *Big Brother*, using an extensive survey of German audiences with 945 responses among people ages 18–65. Specifically, they looked for how people talked about the show when it first appeared in Germany. Their addressing such a broad age range is a strength, as many studies focus on university-level populations due to their profit potential (Hill, 2005). Though an important point, studying populations outside universities is important as well.

Other chapters analyze the media's responses to reality shows. In "Reality vs. Reality TV: News Coverage in Israeli Media at the Time of Reality TV," Abend-David (2010) considers the relationships between reality TV and news in Israel, observing how reality TV in particular influences news coverage. He makes a particularly important observation that is helpful to understanding one of the fundamental tensions in trying to define reality TV—its supposed representation of the "real." Abend-David writes, "[T]he gap between reality and reality television is narrowing, as the news—not less a form of entertainment than other programming—is adopting some of the techniques and styles of reality programs" (p. 116). Hetsroni's own chapter, "The Praise and the Critique on a Nasty Format: An Analysis of the Public Debate Over Reality TV in Israel," delves into the Israeli public's praises and critiques of reality TV.

Still other chapters address the different formats within cross-cultural contexts. Some of the more popular formats addressed include *Big Brother* and *Idol*. Livio's excellent chapter, "Performing the Nation: A Cross-cultural Comparison of Idol Shows in Four Countries," addresses the differences in the popular singing contest in England, the United States, Canada, and Israel through the name adaptations, judges, participation, and social class. Lewis' strong chapter, "Mobile Makeovers: Global and Local Lifestyles and Identities in Reality Formats," also focuses in part on the United States and England but further includes Australia and Singapore. West's delightful chapter about historical reality shows follows a similar pattern in its focus on England, Australia, and the United States.

Though many chapters draw on the familiar global formats and the nuances of their manifestations across different countries, Volcic and Andrejevic (2010) take a different angle in their chapter titled "Slovene Reality Television: The Commercial Re-inscription of the National." While popular franchises such as *The Bachelor* and *Big Brother* did appear on Slovene television, they all were outperformed by *The Farm*, a local reality show. In a young country with a growing broadcasting system, *The Farm* demonstrates how national identities become shaped and reshaped within the contexts of commercial interests. The show appealed to the ideals of the nation, yet, interestingly, follows a format created by a Swedish production company.

As much as this collection makes some contributions to the study of reality TV and globalization through its stronger chapters, some weaknesses do appear. A key addition to this volume would be an introduction that covers some of the foundational ideas that connect the fields of globalization studies and television studies, particularly reality TV studies. Whereas key terms such as "hybridization," "glocalization," and "formats" appear throughout the chapters, an introductory chapter summarizing these key ideas and situating the contributed chapters within them would be helpful to readers who are unfamiliar with one set of scholarship or the other. Even though "reality TV" gets a brief definition in the introduction, Hetsroni explains his resistance to expanding further:

[I]t seems to be that above all reality TV is a primitive concept, which means that we know it when we see it, but it is difficult to write down a definition upon which the scientific community and the public agree. (p. 1)

Therein lies a missed opportunity to bring together these different definitions into a discourse that provides a foundation for connecting this volume's chapters more effectively, as the chapters do include a fairly cohesive set of reality TV shows.

Other weaknesses derive from the book's strengths. While the chapters study more popular reality TV formats, too many essays focus, in whole or in part, on *Big Brother*. The diversity of methodologies and theses in these chapters create a sense of incoherence across the volume, a weakness that a honed introduction might have helped. Further, while some essays proved strong in writing and scholarship, others proved uneven in these areas.

This anthology is intended for academic audiences, with scholars, graduate students, and advanced undergraduate studies among the most suitable. The book could be applicable for a range of media studies courses, including ones about reality TV, television studies, and global media.

In all, Hetsroni's collection offers a breadth of studies that show the diversity of inquiries into the global phenomenon of reality television. Some unevenness exists among the chapters, and the volume does require a stronger editorial voice to make it more cohesive. Nevertheless, *Reality Television: Merging the Global and the Local* still offers an array of interesting perspectives that illuminate reality TV formats and of their audiences.

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