

Tasha OREN y Sharon SHAHAF (Eds.)
Global Television Formats: Understanding Television Across Borders
Routledge, New York/London, 2012, 392 pp.

In their introduction to *Global Television Formats: Understanding Television Across Borders*, editors Tasha Oren and Sharon Shahaf argue that, even in our current globalized world, the study of television formats remains focused on the mainstream axis of Anglo-American programming. As a counterpoint to this, *Global Television Formats* has a clear multicultural vocation that aims to follow the path undertaken by some academics in recent years, with the purpose of “de-westernizing” (p.1) this area of television studies. In order to do so, the different chapters in this collective work extend the analysis of television formats to various countries across different continents. Some of the authors who participate in this book (such as Martin Nkosi Ndlela and Oren herself) are also members of the Media Across Borders Network. This group, which was established at the University of Roehampton in 2012, aims to create an international network of scholars and professionals who work on the adaptation of cultural products across different media. Within this framework of increasing interest in transcultural transfers of media content from a broader, worldwide-based perspective, Oren and Shahaf have brought together seventeen authors to address some of the main challenges presented by the international flow of television formats.

Almost every author who contributes to this book draws from the ground-breaking studies on format developed by Albert Moran. Taking Moran’s theoretical grounding as a starting point, *Global Television Formats* pushes the concept of format adaptation a bit further, expanding the different perspectives from which this complex phenomenon can be analysed. In order to do so, this book is divided in four sections, each of which provides a specific vantage point on format adaptation. This four-part division offers an ultimately cohesive overview of different notions that must be taken into account when studying formats as a central part of television practice.

With the collective title of ‘Theorizing Format’, the first section of this book focuses on establishing a series of conceptual foundations, approaches and tools that can be used in the analysis of format adaptation. Some of the chapters in this section do so by drawing theoretical conclusions from the peculiarities of specific formats, such as Dana Heller’s essay on reality dance programmes. ‘The Format in Historical Perspective’, the second part of this book, gives a general overview of the presence of formats throughout the history of television. As Oren and Shahaf point out in their introduction, it is essential to analyse the evolution of format adaptation, because “a historical perspective on format’s use internationally makes clear the extent of format’s central role in shaping television history and its current textual and industrial conventions” (p. 10). The third section of this book, ‘Case Study: The Idol Franchise’, focuses on the paradigmatic format American Idol and analyses some of its many transnational adaptations. Lastly, the section titled ‘Local Articulations and the Politics of Place’ looks at the role played by global television formats in complex processes of cultural, political and economical transformation. In order to do so, the contributing authors analyse cases from countries such as Libya, Saudi Arabia, China or India.

While it would be impossible for this review to mention every chapter in the book, it does seem necessary to highlight certain contributions. For instance, Vinicius Navarro underlines the revealing idea that every adaptation is always a performance, since “performances are both reproductive and creative gestures. They are imitations that do not simply copy an ‘original’ but also generate new and differentiated versions of it” (p.30). Then, Chiara Ferrari presents a thought-provoking examination of the global-local dynamic in her analysis of the 1950s Italian quiz show *Lascia o Raddoppia?*, which was an adaptation of the American *The \$ 64,000 Question*. According to Ferrari, the Italian show managed to “include genuine manifestations of local identity within a foreign formula” (p.145). The collective analysis of the Idol franchise also sparks some rather engaging ideas, such as Biswarup Sen’s statement that “reality television functions as a difference engine” (p. 207). That is to say, this specific type of global format seems to be the perfect vehicle to propel a re-creation that is culturally different. In the final

chapter of *Global Television Formats*, Oren briefly establishes a much-needed typology of television formats, distinguishing between “narrative-based”, “procedure-based” and “indexical” formats (p. 368). Oren also concludes that “through its particular ability to invoke a local specificity within global textual exchange, the contemporary format provides us with a clear-cut example of television’s specific cultural work in an expanding media environment” (p. 379). As many authors have also remarked throughout this book, the global format does not destroy or overtake the local elements of any given country. Quite the opposite, as format adaptation (and the cultural, economical and narrative negotiations that it entails) contributes to the articulation of local identities while enriching the universal format.

In conclusion, it could be said that *Global Television Formats* is a volume that allows the reader to comprehend not only the complexities of the format adaptation process in a multicultural world, but also its impact on both a global and a local scale. The study of a variety of cases from different continents serves to depict the applicability of certain theoretical concepts (such as the constant dynamic between the local/specific and the global/universal, the notion of the ‘original’, or the articulation of cultural identities) that are still at the centre of the academic debate in this field of study. Even when the emphasis on certain ideas might feel slightly repetitive, every chapter in this collective work sheds some light on different aspects of format adaptation as a global phenomenon. It should be pointed out that most chapters in this book cover what Oren refers to as “procedure-based” formats. With some exceptions (such as Yeidi M. Rivero’s article on the sitcom *¿Qué pasa U.S.A.?*, Tony Schirato’s essay on sport formats, or Joseph Straubhaar’s work on telenovelas), the chapters that look at different case studies tend to focus on quiz shows, reality programmes and talent contests. This small drawback, which seems to be widespread in the academic study of television formats, calls for the need to expand format research on what Oren calls “narrative-based” and “indexical” formats. In spite of this, *Global Television Formats: Understanding Television Across Borders* is an essential work in the field of format studies, and it establishes a solid base from which scholars and postgraduate students can further their research on the adaptation of television formats across the globe.

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