

Interrogating an Anglo-American Context in Media Studies

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“Alien Residents” – Visible and Invisible Barriers for “International” Scholars Working In the U.S

As an international TV scholar doing graduate work and then becoming faculty in American universities while studying a non-Anglo broadcast system, I’ve constantly found myself confronted with a set of preconceptions about the significance, the nature, and the proper foci for my research. For example, when I first came to the U.S to do graduate work on television, I was frequently surprised to hear people describe my research as “international”. After all I was overwhelmingly dealing with one national broadcast system, Israeli television. Having done my BA and MA work in Tel Aviv University the “international” label of course never came up –I was simply studying the national media in the country where I was working. For that reason the “international” label, applied so automatically to my work by well-meaning colleagues, always seems to represent to me more than anything else, my own sense of marginality in American-centric academia.

On the other hand I often find myself appalled by the immense U.S/U.K-centric “blind spots” characterizing key work and discussions in the field. A really trivial example happened a couple of years back when *Flow*, the online journal, came out with a special survey, asking television studies scholars to rank their favorite TV shows. If I remember correctly, that poll was supposed to trigger a discussion of the place of personal taste in TV scholarship. While it was of little surprise that the shows ranked in the poll were mostly American (the few exceptions to the rule were U.K shows, but only those aired locally in the U.S), I was still a little disappointed, especially given the self-proclaimed reflective nature of the enterprise, that this cultural specificity was never explicitly noted. Instead, it went on totally exnominated, working to reestablish U.S/U.K-centrism as the norm in the field.

I wind up posting a response to the poll, perhaps a bit provocatively naming some of my favorite Israeli shows alongside some U.S ones. While I am sure it made me come across as both grumpy and self-righteous my (partly successful) intention had been to provoke some discussion about this ongoing, unconscious, and perhaps inevitable (?) marginalization of us “internationals”, who live and work in the U.S and the sense of frustration that accompanies our inherent outsider’s position in the field of TV Studies that we wish to see as our academic home.

In many ways, my ongoing dialog and engagement with both the beliefs and expectation regarding my work and the disregard for none-U.S perspectives have been crucial for my development as a television scholar working in the U.S. As the *Flow* poll story begins to reveal, the question put forth in this roundtable has a very personal dimension for none U.S/U.K television scholars, such as me, who are working, teaching, attending conferences, and/or publishing, not to mention trying to get tenure in dominant Anglo-American locations.

Little known to our colleagues who are not burdened with (inter)national otherness, this difference is one of the most profound issues “international” scholars have to deal with as they figure out their path in American academy (which offers us

opportunities of both employment and academic freedom many of us cannot hope to enjoy in our homelands). In conferences, publication, and the job market, we have to figure out how our work is being read, and in what way we can play to the strengths of our marginal positions to market ourselves as desirable academic commodity.

One of the ongoing issues is the ethnic and national fetishization of “area studies” in American academy. This essentialist categorization so crucial in both the organization of academic units and university press catalogs can prove very tricky to navigate, especially when you try to break through and across your “otherness” and connect intellectually and institutionally with colleagues and publishers.

My response thus wishes to invite participants to collectively reflect on and interrogate the professional, political, and ideological implications that these “personal” issues represent, and the influence they have on the kind of work being done by “none-U.S.” scholars working in the U.S. Also – I wish to encourage honest debate amongst both “Anglo” and “International” scholars about the way we “read” each other’s work and the state of the field as we publish, hire, recruit graduate students, organize conference panels and edit scholarly publications. What are some of the visible and invisible barriers faced by none “Anglo” scholars working here? What can be done to increase awareness to these and facilitate dialog?