“From Conversion to Convergence a new Paradigm: American Studies Egypt”

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As teachers of American literature we try to create “the intellectual collation “necessary for “understanding and appreciating other cultures in the global context.” In other words we aim at creating what Spivak has called “transnational literacy”. We want to enable our students to engage critically with the world, and cultivate an understanding of what Edward Said has called the “worldliness” of the text, from their own place in the world. Accordingly, approaches to the teaching of American literature from a transnational perspective offering “a version of American Studies that is less insular and parochial, and more internationalist and comparative” (John Carlos Rowe), seemed to take prominence. Nonetheless, the comparative approach, which most American Studies courses in Egypt adopt, is not about coexistence of cultures but rather the domination of one through the discourse of power. This paper proposes a shift in the teaching of American literature from the National conceptual frame work (whether that is the American National, or in my case Egyptian National) to a transnational/global approach that focuses on the universality of human values. It aims at demonstrating how adopting Homi Bahbah’s “convergence” approach to education achieves what he calls the “horizontality of knowledge” as it allows for the simultaneity of different views and stands rather than seeking “consensus” on one given position. Giving examples from classroom practice, this paper will demonstrate how education in a global age needs to negotiate difference to create what Kant calls “the rational respect of all humans”. Furthermore, it will illustrate how the replacement of the binary “us” and “them” by multiple “Uss” creates a balance of power creating space for participating in the creation of public global reason.