

Methods for Studying Non-U.S. Television

“Transnational Television Formats as a Means to Study Non-U.S. Television”

Ibrahim Er, *University of Maryland, Baltimore County*

My interest in non-U.S. television involves particularly the study of **television format adaptations** across cultures. These are programmes with a set of predetermined and invariable elements that allow different producers around the world to remake and adapt the same programme at different times, or simultaneously, for different viewer groups. Formats, in this sense, can be seen as “deterritorialized” texts contributing to the ever-evolving global media market. However, the predetermined and invariable elements of a global format provide (*re*)producers only with a “recipe” for reconstructing their *own* (localized) versions of a format, insofar as the minimum programme standards set by the initial producer(s) are met. To put it another way, producers that remake transnational formats hold the right to (*re*)interpret and (*re*)localize programme content to a certain extent at their discretion for a higher success rate, depending on the dynamics of the local (national) media industry, binding state policies, prevalent characteristics of the target viewer group, and other sociocultural and technical factors. It is, therefore, of equal importance to understand that the deterritorialized nature of formats is always complemented by a “reterritorialization” process through which a format finds itself a new “home,” and gains a fuller and often hybrid (*glocal*) meaning. The adaptation process is completed and finalized only when and after the format is re-interpreted and reproduced for a new viewer group, and blended with a *local* culture where globalization happens idiosyncratically.

Within this scope, television formats open up a promising avenue for researchers to study non-U.S. television. As programmes that are reproduced based on an already-culturally-shaped television production in another country, format texts stand out as **content-rich “cultural” artefacts** through which we can access not only to the semiotic (multimodal) work of a particular designer (producer) but also to a myriad of local sociocultural, political, economic and industrial factors that govern the media producer’s selections and decisions at the time of reproduction. In other words, *transnational* format texts as adapted by *local* producers serve as a detour for international researchers to access and study various aspects of regional (television) cultures that are inaccessible or hard-to-access otherwise (such as local industrial conventions, cultural “reception” of a foreign media text, ideological interventions, and economics in a country). Because local producers are bound to comply with such local standards and expectations to a great extent when reproducing a foreign text, the reinterpreted format text becomes a visible and discursive manifestation of the local (social) values, state policies, industrial dynamics, viewer expectancies, and so on.

To sum up, I argue that transnational remakes of global TV formats are crucial for the analysis of non-U.S. television because each society is narrativized by its media industry (channels) idiosyncratically based on the political and industrial dynamics, and sociocultural expectations. By conducting cross-cultural analysis of textual divergences between the different versions (adaptations) of the same TV formats, we can bring to light many societal unknowns about the analyzed cultures based on our findings within the communicative forms. By focusing on these culturally shaped and meticulously retuned texts *per se*, we can indirectly study how an already-existing foreign format is received by a different viewer group, as well as how media is constructed and regulated within that particular country, because the (*re*)producer of a transnational format has to take into account the hegemonic discourses and ideologies both at the state and societal levels within her/his country, and adapt the format accordingly to the relevant receiving culture. In the roundtable discussion, I will bring in examples particularly from the case of Turkey and the Turkish television, where television programming relies heavily on transnational (mostly Western) formats; and show how one can find traces and markers of sociocultural and political dynamics within format adaptations.