

Transnationalization of Quality Programming

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Like “quality” itself, “quality programming” or “quality television” are very much disputed terms in television studies. Beginning with earlier questions about how existing power hierarchies and biases might have informed this term, there has been an on-going quest to unravel its definition as well as its power implications. After all, who defines “quality” is as important as the definition.

It is extremely important to acknowledge that quality programming might refer to different things in different places and times. However, it is equally important to accept that there is a common understanding of quality television between viewers, industry and scholars in Anglo-American television markets today. In other words, hearing “quality television” does conjure up a shared set of indicators no matter how elusive “quality” is. Elliott Logan summarizes these recognizable indicators as “higher production values, a cinematic audiovisual style, complex and controversial storylines, genre hybridity, and reflexivity.”¹

Considering all these indicators, HBO dramas will be the first examples to come to mind when talking about quality programming in the United States. Netflix has followed a similar model—especially devoutly with the platform’s first wave of originals—to establish a quality association previously pursued by cable channels. This model is now travelling even more than it did before.

The overall increase in transnational television flows—mostly in the form of format adaptations, which followed liberalization and privatization of late 1980s-early 1990s—have helped spread content transnationally. Online streaming platforms and their globalization further contributed to the intensity of content flows across borders. International popularity of shows like *Forbrydelsen*, *Borgen*, *Bron/Broen*, *Les Revenants*, *Broadchurch* and their adaptations in the United States as well as in different parts of the world paint a more multidirectional system of flows.

This clearly is true for the United States market for it proves the existence of a greater exposure to foreign content. The shows mentioned above as well as many others reveal an interaction beyond the previous British public broadcasting influence on quality programming. In this context, Glen Creeber elaborates more on how Scandi-noir made an impact on British and American television.² The increasing mobility of British shows—which was an influence in the spread of the limited series format and shorter

¹ Logan, Elliott. “‘Quality Television’ as a Critical Obstacle: Explanation and Aesthetics in Television Studies.” *Screen* 57, no. 2 (2016): 144-162.

² Creeber, Glen. “Killing Us Softly: Investigating the Aesthetics, Philosophy and Influence of Nordic Noir Television.” *The Journal of Popular Television* 3, no. 1 (2015): 21-35.

seasons—and the recent popularity of Scandinavian crime shows—which increased exposure to the crime genre—are other components of this globalizing turn.

Nevertheless, with the exception of Israel, influence on the Anglo-American markets mostly stems from Western Europe since the content coming from these territories has managed to enter these markets. Western European shows have managed to gain a foothold in North American markets to some extent, but the platform of access seems to be decisive for their survival. These dramas—such as *Les Revenants* and *Broadchurch*—do moderately well as finished programs on cable and online streaming platforms. Once they are adapted for network television, though, they fail to get high enough ratings to stay on air.

Furthermore, new centers of production such as Turkey and South Korea have difficulty passing the “quality programming” barriers. Quickly labeled as melodramas or even as soaps, content from these centers are rarely classified as “quality programming.” While accessible online, they have a harder time making it on to network and cable television.

At the same time, local online streaming models in these markets mimic the American model. For example, the original shows introduced by Turkish streaming platforms Blu TV and puhuTV heavily rely on the HBO/Netflix model of quality. Alongside online streaming models, quality programming standards are spreading from the core markets to the rest of the world.

This convergence between transnational content flows, online streaming and quality programming raises very important questions about multidirectionality, power and homogenization in the global TV market. I will end with some of these questions with the hope of hearing your thoughts on them: What is the result of the on-going transnationalization of quality programming? Is there an emergence of a “global quality programming,” which surely has been heavily influenced by the Anglo-American quality standards? What is the role of other interpretations of quality in this paradigm? How much are they bringing into the mix? What are the narrative, aesthetic and generic characteristics this emerging global quality programming? What are the popular themes and subjects? What do these say about the power dynamics in the global television market?