

Examining Trans-media/-national Networks

“Transnational Flows, Transmedia Networks and the Limits of Multidirectionality”

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While the digitalization of content increased the visibility of authorized and unauthorized forms of online viewing, the last twenty years also witnessed an increase in number of authorized transnational television flows. Although television content has traveled across borders before, the course and the content of flows have changed dramatically after the 1980s. Increasing numbers of format adaptations and the rise of new centers of production instigated a new wave of discussions regarding the implications of multidirectionality. Examining these transmedia and transnational phenomena in relation to each other is crucial to understand hierarchies of power in media networks.

Claims of multidirectionality associated with these two phenomena are presented as evidence of change in power dynamics. However, a closer look at the intersection between “trans-media” and “trans-national” in relation to television content still reveals a stratified system. A series of European television shows appearing on cable and online streaming platforms before being adapted for the US market provides an interesting case to understand this stratified system.

While historical connections across the Atlantic smooth the course of television flows between the US and Europe, finished programs originating from Europe have higher chances of survival on cable and online streaming services rather than network television. Examples like *Les Revenants* and *Broadchurch*, which appeared on cable television before becoming available on Netflix and being adapted as formats, raise new questions about what type of content can flow in which direction and on which platforms. As streaming platforms like Netflix, Hulu and Amazon have become new venues of access to foreign content alongside the existing cable channels in the United States, international popularity of shows like *Forbrydelsen*, *Borgen*, *Bron/Broen*, *Luther*, *Les Revenants* and *Broadchurch* paved the way for a new wave of American remakes. Despite the popularity of the originals, *Les Revenants* and *Broadchurch* adaptations, *The Returned* and *Gracepoint*, failed to survive beyond their first seasons on their respective channels A&E and FOX. Similarly, *The Killing*, based on *Forbrydelsen*, had to move from AMC to Netflix to ensure its survival.

Mostly oscillating between streaming platforms and cable channels, which are associated with quality programming, these programs and their format adaptations show how online streaming platforms became an alternative destination for transnational television flows. Although the American remakes of these European shows fail to survive on television, they are still more likely to be adapted compared formats originating from other centers of production such as Turkey and Korea once the overall breakdown of adaptations is considered. In that context, the Anglo-American definition of quality programming becomes an important factor in filtering flows and reproducing existing hierarchies favoring the Western content. This transnational perspective is further complicated by class implications associated with the notion of quality programming, which also reflect the class composition of cable subscribers and paid online streaming service users. While the country of origin influences the entrance of content into the US market, the platform that the content appears on influences which socio-economic class is more likely to access it. Therefore, both transmedia and transnational phenomena seem to point towards a stratified system in case of content entering the US market.

However, exploring these phenomena in relation to each other also requires a survey into unauthorized forms of content circulation. Online sharing and piracy have long made foreign

content accessible to viewers before the rise of paid streaming services like Netflix. Thriving upon fan engagement, these forms of access enable viewers/users to watch content, which cannot make it to the authorized platforms of access. One important example is Korean dramas. Although having difficulty going beyond the pilot stage as adaptations for television, these shows have achieved popularity via online sharing and piracy before gaining importance on paid streaming platforms.

Similarly, Turkish shows, which have been successfully exported to the neighboring region and have been heavily shared online in the region, are having difficulty in entering the US market. While these shows are quickly classified as soaps based on their melodramatic elements, the only adaptation which made it to the American television is actually based on an American novel. *Suskunlar* (*The Game of Silence*), the first Turkish scripted format to appear on American network television is based on Lorenzo Carcaterra's novel *Sleepers*. The book was already made into a film in 1996 with the same name in the US. With the American essence of its conception, *Suskunlar* manages to pass American borders despite its melodramatic characteristics. In other words, Anglo-American standards of quality, which are hesitant to welcome peripheral melodramas, can be bypassed thanks to *Suskunlar*'s American roots.

All these examples reveal how different filters in the American television environment keep on limiting multidirectionality of global television flows. This shows neither transmedia nor transnational phenomena can be isolated from value systems informing hierarchies of power. Therefore, it is necessary to think about how categories like "quality programming" and "melodramas" can reflect value judgments favoring the existing power holders while exploring the relationship between television content and the internet with reference to transnational television flows. In that context, a closer look at different types of content will be useful for deciphering both the extent of transnational multidirectionality as well as the class implications of transmedia content flows.