

Global Maladies, Local *In Treatment*: “Quality” TV Fiction Formats, Glocal Forms of Prestige, and Cumulative Cross-Cultural Dialogues

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With the rise of television formats in global television, several studies have examined the economic, political, and cultural aspects of this media product’s production and circulation. This study analyzes the complex path of a television drama series from a local critical and popular phenomenon to a global “quality” fiction format, focusing on the transnationalization process of the format of the Israeli program *BeTipul* from its arrival in the United States to its adaptation and reception in Canada, Argentina, Brazil, and Italy. The study emphasizes the cross-cultural dialogic attributes of the quality fiction format, which support a strategy comprising both mutual benefits and competition, as opposed to the allegedly “odorless” or “neutral” features of reality and game-show formats.

Keywords: television formats, fiction genre, global television, cultural translation, quality television

When the television series *BeTipul* first aired in August 2005, no one expected that a few years later it would be a best-selling television format sold, adapted, and produced in three dozen countries, making the Israeli television industry a world leader in television format exports. A 30-minute daily series filmed in a single location, *BeTipul* depicts a weekly dialogue between a therapist and his patients. Despite its unorthodox structure, dialogic nature and rhythm, *BeTipul* quickly won both popular and critical praise.

This study analyzes the complex path of this fictional television drama series from localized phenomenon to global quality fiction format. What transnational connections and discursive devices turned *BeTipul* into an attractive asset for geographically and culturally distant television industries and cultures? How do local adaptations relate to earlier versions produced around the world? How do local producers and audiences interpret the “quality” features of the formats? This study centers on those questions, preceding its findings with the theoretical background on fictional television, global formats, and cultural adaptations.

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"Quality" Television, the Global Economy of Formats, and Cultural Adaptation

The discursive construction of *BeTipul* as a "quality television" series stems from two interconnected processes in global television: academic cultural studies work in the field of communication, and a major transformation in the television industry. In the 1980s, scholars began rejecting more textual and ideological approaches to television, instead regarding television contents as more complex constructions containing multiple voices and subject to competing interpretations (Fiske, 2002; Hall, 2010; Morley, 2003). In this period the study of soap operas and telenovelas thrived, labeled by some scholars as sites of everyday resistance and contestation (Ang, 2005; Liebes & Katz, 1993; Tufte, 2000; Vink, 1988).

The discursive construction of *quality television* has been present since U.S. television's inception, but the 1980s saw a body of television productions sharing several features crystallize into a discernable genre (Thompson, 1997). This decade turned out acclaimed television series such as *Hill Street Blues*, *Twin Peaks*, and *Thirtysomething*, intensifying the distinction between "highbrow"/"quality" and "lowbrow" television. Aesthetic choices like realism and social sensibility, production procedures centered on the author-writer, large production budgets, and "quality demographics" are some key features of the "quality TV" formula (Feuer, Kerr & Vahimagi, 1984; Thompson, 1997). Commercial broadcasting channels produced the aforementioned series, but it was cable television that aimed to capture a more affluent audience and thus fully exploited the notion of quality content. The U.S. premium cable network HBO's slogan "It's not television; it's HBO" is a well-known example of a conscious branding strategy designed to valorize the network's products by taking advantage of a historically rooted derogatory discourse about the television medium (Leverette, Ott & Buckley, 2009; Lotz, 2014; Santo, 2009).

The European television industry, like those of several developing countries, generally associated the concept of quality television with public service broadcasting. However, privatization of the media market and competition with private broadcasters led to a perceived loss of quality in public television (Bourdon, 2004). According to Tamar Liebes (2003), the Israeli media began producing television series in greater quantities in the context of market-opening policies and neoliberal reforms in the 1990s. To avoid a flood of lowbrow or "cheap" television content, the regulatory authority compelled private channels to produce at least 150 hours of quality television content yearly (Bargur, 2011; Lavie, 2015). In practical terms, the Israeli interpretation of quality television incorporates many of the features previously described by Thompson. However, as the Israeli market is relatively peripheral and limited, it emphasizes the value of locally produced television content over cheaper imported formats or canned content (Lavie, 2015; Thompson, 1997). I will later show how HBO's commercial and aesthetic product orientation contended with the regulated, economically constrained Israeli television content when the U.S. network decided to produce *In Treatment*, its own version of *BeTipul*.

The process that moved the industry toward television audience fragmentation and creation of the quality television concept in the 1990s also brought the transnationalization of television formats, spurring widespread claims of homogenization of television contents (Bourdon, 2012; Chalaby, 2011; Moran, 1998). Jean Chalaby (2011) described television formats as an inherently transnational cultural product because a "programme becomes a format only when it is adapted outside its country of origin" (p.

295). The global market for formats emerged from a confluence of contradictory forces, such as the transnationalization of media corporations, the globalization of professional knowledge and practices, and regulations created by nations to protect their cultural identities and local industries (Oren & Shahaf, 2012). Silvio Waisbord (2004) observed that the global flow of television formats “responds to programming strategies to bridge transnational economic interests and national sentiments of belonging” (p. 368).

According to Iwabuchi (2002) and Chadha and Kavoori (2015), the canned programming that filled the TV schedules of developing nations during the 1960s and 1970s prompted arguments about cultural and media imperialism (Tomlinson, 1991), whereas television formats have been perceived as neutral or odorless in terms of national-cultural identity (Chadha, 2015; Iwabuchi, 2002). However, as McCabe (2013) and Weissmann (2013) sensibly pointed out, producers, broadcasters, and audiences do not experience television formats as *tabulae rasae*; rather, each such actor approaches a new production with knowledge of earlier format versions produced in other countries, or at least of commentary and other information about the format’s journey across the world.

Although television formats are modified to suit local customs, languages, and cultures, some questions explored in this study concern the national-cultural aspects of TV formats: If TV formats are not, as McCabe (2013) and Weissmann (2013) have argued, odorless or neutral, what patterns structure the circulation and reception of television formats? What specific transformations do original texts undergo when transported to other cultures?

Albert Moran (1998; 2009a) identified processes analogous to the circulation and translation of television formats in the practice of translating the Bible from Latin to indigenous languages in the 15th and early 16th centuries. This homology between sacred scripts’ and television formats’ translation and diffusion seems to go beyond the textual dimension, penetrating into historically constituted spheres of knowledge and power. The translation of formats is a nonviolent, commercially oriented practice very distinct from the violent, coercive translation and imposition of the Bible on indigenous people, but a similarity lies in the asymmetrical power relations between producing and consuming/purchasing countries. What relationship, then, evolves between the preachers/experts from the producing countries and the indigenous/local labor? What attributes do preachers/format producers need, if believers/network managers are to consider them trustworthy “prophets” of evangelism/ratings? What is the balance of power between preachers/format producers from the periphery and the high church hierarchy/high-ranking managers of international or U.S. entertainment corporations?

Television formats are attractive to local television producers who see demonstrated audience success in the country of origin as a guarantee of high ratings for future productions. In times of strong competition between broadcasters, economic instability, and institutional pressure within the network structure, purchasing formats seem an enticing strategy for coping with uncertainty in the television industry (Chadha, 2015; Chalaby 2011; Waisbord, 2004). But is audience popularity equally prized regardless of nationality? Or are some national audiences considered more telling than others, for instance by broadcast managers contemplating where to invest their resources? Anthony Pym has asserted that

cultures and countries with larger markets may have more power than others to impose changes to the adapted texts (Pym, 2004, p. 40).

Conway (2012) noted that most studies on global television texts have built on two unconnected fields: adaptation studies and political economy. Following Conway's approach to telenovela adaptation in the U.S. market, this study examines the intersection between cultural adaptations of television content and the political economy structuring the circulation of television drama formats. To this end, it focuses on a specific drama format, *BeTipul*, following its journey from a relatively peripheral television industry and market, Israel, to its adaptation and reception in the global television market.

Research Structure and Methodology

This study's aim—to track a format's trajectory from its original version through its passage to different countries and cultures—presents some methodological challenges. A solely textual analysis of the various versions might identify changes from the original version but meanwhile overlook important context in the adaptation and reception process. Following Mittell's (2001) criticism of an isolated textual approach to studying television genres, I decided to look at the *BeTipul* format as the outcome of "complex interrelations among texts, industries, audiences and historical contexts" (p. 7). The actual shows remain an important source of information, but from this study's perspective it is the paratext (Genette, 1997, p. 3), produced by local printed press in the form of critical reviews, audience ratings, interviews with producers and actors, and updates on the format's sales around the world, that provides the essential tools for grasping the format's transnationalization process.

This research is based on a qualitative analysis of press articles about the Israeli, U.S., Canadian, Brazilian, Argentinean and Italian incarnations of *BeTipul* and is divided into two main sections. The first section backgrounds the emergence of *BeTipul* and narrates the intricate process that led to U.S. television network HBO's purchase of the format in 2006. The findings in this section rely on qualitative content analysis of 60 printed press articles published from 2005 to 2014 in the Israeli newspapers *Haaretz*, *Yediot Aharonot*, *The Marker*, and *Calcalist*. Information obtained from the Israeli press was also corroborated by information found in the U.S. press, as detailed in the next paragraph. *Haaretz* is considered a highbrow, liberal daily newspaper read by center-left-wing elites. *Yediot Aharonot* is the second most widespread and influential paper among the middle and lower classes. Articles in both papers contained reviews and interviews with the producers, writers, and actors of the series. The daily business newspapers *The Marker* and *Calcalist* offered abundant information on the economic aspects of *BeTipul*, such as the negotiations and transactions with HBO and the international sales of the format.

The second section examines the adaptation and reception of the *BeTipul* format in the United States, Brazil, Argentina, Canada (Quebec), and Italy through content analysis of relevant articles in leading newspapers and magazines in each country. This section aims less to detail the changes made in each local version than to analyze both shared and divergent adaptation and discursive strategies in the format's global journey.

Listed below are the local adaptations analyzed in this article and the sources examined:

- *In Treatment* 2008–2010 (USA—HBO), based on content analysis of 50 press articles published between 2007 and 2012 and retrieved from online database archives of the following U.S. newspapers and magazines: *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Boston Globe*, *The New Yorker*, *Variety*, *Time*, *USA Today*, and *Newsweek*.
- *En Terapia* 2012–2014 (Argentina—TV PUBLICA), based on content analysis of 50 press articles obtained from the online archives of the following leading Argentinean newspapers and magazines: *La Nación*, *Clarín*, *Pagina12*, *Perfil* and *Noticias*.
- *Sessão de Terapia* 2012–2014 (Brazil—GNT), based on content analysis of 50 press articles on the series published in the leading Brazilian newspapers *Folha de Sao Paulo*, *Estado de Sao Paulo*, *O Globo*, and *Veja Magazine*.
- *En Therapie* 2012–2014 (Quebec, Canada—TV MONDE), based on content analysis of 30 press articles on the series published in the following online French-language Canadian newspapers: *La Presse*, *Le Journal du Montreal*, *Le Devoir*, and *Le Soleil*.
- *In Treatment* 2013–2014 (Italy—SKY), based on content analysis of 30 press articles on the series published in the following Italian newspapers: *Corriere della Sera*, *Repubblica*, *La Stampa*, *L'Espresso*, and *Il Tempo*.

The “Bible’s” Journey From the Holy Land to the Mecca of the Television Industry: Informal Networks and Internalized Cultural Predispositions

The *BeTipul* series was very successful in terms of audience share and impact on the Israeli public sphere. Broadcast via a cable channel from 2005 to 2008, the series earned high praise from television critics for its innovative format, intelligent scripts, and brilliant performances by the actor in the leading role of the therapist (Harlap, 2011; Shaked, 2005). *BeTipul* was created and produced for a local market, so its intrinsic qualities and audience success do not explain its transformation into a global format. Most studies on television formats have emphasized the role that international television programming markets play in the global circulation of television content (Moran, 2009b; Moran & Keane, 2006; Waisbord, 2004). Public events are undoubtedly a fundamental element of today’s television industry, but their main purpose is to facilitate deals with known, established players in the field.

Analysis of *BeTipul*’s transnationalization process deepens understanding of television content flows because it illustrates the crucial role of informal networks and internalized cultural predispositions in the flow of scripted television formats. In his seminal work on cross-cultural communication and translation, Anthony Pym (2004) argued that internalized cultural predispositions, “evolved from countless individual decisions over many generations,” are perhaps more valuable in the decision-making effort than “explicit professional calculation” (p. 6). Just as international television festivals and events open doors to

a wealth of information and an overwhelmingly vast TV format market, internalized cultural predispositions based on ethnic, cultural, and geopolitical proximity may provide a road map for business transactions in the TV format industry.

Several sources credit Noa Tishby, a young Israeli actress and singer trying to develop her acting career in the United States, for passing *BeTipul* on to American television. In 2005, at the height of *BeTipul*'s first season, she heard about the successful series and decided to try to interest American producers in the format. She contacted Hagai Levi, the series creator and producer, requested a disc with subtitled episodes, and played them for her agent, Steven Levinson, co-owner of the Leverage Management Company. Levinson showed Tishby's disc to Ari Emanuel, co-owner of Endeavour Talent Agency. Emanuel took it to Carolyn Strauss, president of HBO Entertainment, who was immediately interested in the series format (Kaminer, 2008; Nevo, 2010; Rochlin, 2008; Schechnik, 2007).

Both the Israeli creators and the American producers emphasized what they saw as the main reasons for the format's appeal in the U.S. television industry. They lauded the format's innovative structure of five new episodes a week, blending a soap opera/telenovela programming schedule with the "prestige" of a highbrow television production. They also stressed the extremely low production costs: each episode of *BeTipul/In Treatment* cost 5 times less than the average television series produced in the U.S. industry (Levine, 2009; Shargal, 2006). As HBO Entertainment President Strauss argued: "We felt 'In Treatment' was unique on several levels: its format, its content and its execution. For all those reasons and more, we felt it was an excellent fit for our original programming schedule" (Kalman, 2007).

The reasons detailed above explain the economic and corporate rationale behind purchasing the format, but here I would rather focus on less tangible, maybe more decisive factors leading to the format's arrival on the U.S. small screen. First of all, *BeTipul*'s "discovery" by American producers was due to evolving networks of social agents navigating mixed cultural, ethnic, economic, and political factors who connect the U.S. and Israeli entertainment industries. The case of Noa Tishby, a fortuitous and fundamental player in the *BeTipul* transnationalization process, is illustrative. Tishby, as a promising young Israeli celebrity, decided at age 24 to pursue an acting career in Hollywood—to be the next "Julia Roberts," in her own words. However, her acting career did not take off. Perhaps her plans were naive, but Tishby had taken that step because she possessed qualities compatible with those of a "Hollywood star" (Segal, 2012, p. 70). She was beautiful, spoke English, was familiar with American culture, and had a network of American contacts before she left for the States. That same sense of compatibility or "cultural proximity" that led Tishby to pursue an acting career in the United States also convinced her that *BeTipul* could appeal to the U.S. television industry.

The perception of "compatibility" between Israeli and American culture is further nurtured by internalized cultural predispositions that may make American producers, many of Jewish background, more receptive to Israeli products. In the specific case of *BeTipul*, several articles in the Israeli press emphasized the powerful American Hollywood talent agent Ari Emanuel's role in connecting the Israeli producer Hagai Levi, represented in the United States by Noa Tishby, with HBO (Schechnik, 2007; Shargal, 2006). Ari Emanuel and his older brother Rahm Emanuel, mayor of Chicago and former chief of staff during Obama's first presidential term, are the sons of an Israeli pediatrician and former member of

the Irgun, a right-wing Zionist paramilitary group in Mandatory Palestine. The Israeli press frequently covers the professional careers of the two Emanuel brothers as influential American Jews of Israeli background (Izicovich, 2012; Ari Emanuel, 2013). This subtle but explicitly drawn connection is perceptible in series creator Hagai Levi's narration of *BeTipul's* journey to America.

Even before she (Tishby) saw the series, she asked me to present it to Leverage, the production company that represents her in Los Angeles. She presented the project; the company appeared interested, and from then on everything went very quickly. Leverage also owns a talent agency, Endeavor, which represents Larry David, Michael Moore and Conan O'Brien. The owner of Endeavor is Ari Emanuel, a Jew of course, and his family once lived in Israel. He approached many media corporations with the idea. (Shargal, 2006, p. 18)

Two important assumptions underlie Levi's description of *BeTipul's* journey to the U.S. television industry: that many high-level players in the U.S. entertainment industry have Jewish identity, and that Emanuel's Israeli background is relevant to the story being told. However, caution is warranted in evaluating the role of intra-ethnic networks during the later years of the *BeTipul* format. The internal cultural commonalities Levi alludes to when commenting on the ethnic and national background of U.S. entertainment industry agents facilitate communication but are not strong enough to ensure a successful transaction. Access to key figures in the U.S. entertainment industry through professional and informal networks is crucial as a first step, but the product offered must also possess unique features that appeal to market niches.

The evolving informal networks and cultural affinities among Israeli and American producers were crucial in bringing the *BeTipul* format to the U.S., but it was HBO's purchase of the Israeli format that turned it into a coveted global commodity. The HBO deal both boosted the format's sales around the world (Shargal, 2006) and more deeply affected the Israeli media industry by opening the global market to other Israeli television and cinema productions (Shenar, 2007). For example, Moli Segev, the Israeli television producer who sold the *Mesudarim* series format to the Fox network in 2007, explained that "without *BeTipul*, they wouldn't have succeeded in selling the format to anyone" (Ari, Schechnik, & Bahrir, 2007, p. 6).

The media content's origin in a relatively peripheral market and subsequent success in the highly competitive international television market are not basis enough to declare a reversal of old asymmetries in the media landscape or a major change in the global flow of media products. However, *BeTipul's* global journey may lead to more complex thinking about the relationship between a media center and a wide range of peripheral actors, such as producers and consumers of media content. As I will show later, much of *BeTipul's* global appeal resulted from the contradiction of being simultaneously American and not.

To add even more complexity, *BeTipul's* "quality" reputation evolved internationally in accordance with the format's adaptation to local sensibilities and perceptions. The next two sections analyze the adaptation of the *BeTipul* format's "quality" features to fit local contexts, and the dialogues that evolved among the format's various national producers and audiences.

Glocal Forms of Prestige and Shared "Western" Cultural Repertoire

This section's focus is on what appear to be constituting features of "quality" fiction formats: the centrality of the series author as the "creative genius," and an anti-commercialism discourse that is transplanted along with each local adaptation.

Although *BeTipul* was very much a collective creation, its creator and producer, Hagai Levi, emerged as an outstanding creative genius in the Israeli media sphere and later in the international press, even reaching international celebrity status (Shenar, 2007; Tzach, 2005). He was widely interviewed by international media before launches of local adaptations; audiences worldwide came to know his face; and his tortuous personal history and therapeutic background were extensively exposed in print (Ferreira, 2012; Kassam, 2010; Levin, 2008; Respighi, 2011).

Levi's omnipresence in the international media landscape and *BeTipul's* format reputation as an art form contradict the stereotype of TV formats as prepackaged formulas backed by an industrial logic. In some ways, Levi's relationship with "his creation" resembles that between elite fashion designers or chain restaurant gourmet chefs and their unique, personal products, which are also produced for mass consumption. Referring to *BeTipul's* adaptation for Holland Television, Levi expressed frustration:

The Holland version was produced by the same company that produced Big Brother, so this is how it looks. While it's true that we were the ones who sold them the format, I do still care. Even in McDonalds Israel, they came to supervise the people in charge and check if the menu they offer suits the chain's brand. (Nevo, 2010, p. 12)

Analysis of Levi's public image as it appears in the international press reveals two recurrent discursive topics that accentuate the prestige and artistic value of the format and its creator, obscuring the commercial and industrial logic behind the production. First, in an apparently contradictory duality, the universality of conflicts and topics treated in the series is emphasized simultaneously with the particularity of the Jewish-Israeli background of the series and its creator. References to Israel's biblical past, prominent twentieth-century Jews associated with psychoanalysis (Freud, Portnoy's Philip Roth, and Woody Allen), and the celebrated Israeli film industry are presented in a linear narrative articulating the "unique" and "exceptional" origin of the format by way of a shared Western cultural repertoire (Bilodeau, 2009; Maci, 2014; Stasi, 2008). For example, the Italian director of the series *Severio Constanzo* argued: "Israel, America and Italy, they are not such different countries, they belong to western society. And Psychoanalysis belongs to the western world" (Berbenni, 2013, p. 2). In a similar tone, Francois Papineu, the French Canadian actor who portrayed psychotherapist Phillip Jacob in the Quebecois adaptation, stressed the universal dimension of the series' content: "The cases we treat in the series belong to general patterns common to all the world, this is what makes the series universal in its appeal" (Pradier, 2014, p. 1).

The second frequent discursive topic concerns Levi's fierce anti-commercialism rhetoric, which rejects the U.S. cultural industry and American values, denies any material ambitions behind his work, and emphasizes the links between his personal life and his oeuvre (Nevo, 2010; Nuriel, 2014). Each local

adaptation embraced that same anti-commercialism discourse, despite great cultural diversity and large disparities in economic resources, resulting in an antinomy of “quality” vs. “trash” television. HBO’s programming president, Michel Lombardo, explained the investment in the format’s production despite its low ratings as an altruistic move in the spirit of American democracy and as a demonstration of the network’s true identity.

The viewership isn’t as big as we’d like, but creatively the show works so well for us, if we’re true to who we say we are, we had to pick it up. We are not just into the ratings and awards game. We are here to deliver shows with distinct voices. (Levine, 2009, p. 4)

Adaptations outside the United States also emphasized the format’s quality features, particularly the “social realism” of the series, as well as its elaborate text and relatively high production budget. However, they also framed quality in terms of the local binary logic, defining quality TV in opposition to trash TV. Overall, that definition results from the cultural, political, economic, and communication paradigms prevailing in each country.

In the context of a francophone minority population’s struggle to maintain its culture and distinct identity, Quebecois producers and actors explained the production of *En Therapie* by TV Monde as an almost heroic saga, an act of resistance against the hegemony of “toxic” American series (Baillargeon, 2012; Bélair, 2012). The Quebecois press understood quality to be summarized by two overlapping, perhaps contradictory postulates: (a) Quality is expressed by *En Therapie*’s status as a local production made by talented local actors and TV producers, and (b) the quality of the series derives from its truly global, as opposed to American, origin. As one *TV Monde* spokesman said of the network’s audience, “Our viewers love diversity and are interested to know what’s going on around the world” (Bélair, 2012). Unsurprisingly, even though the format’s international career owes its success largely to the American incarnation (Ari et al., 2007; Shargal, 2006), French Canadian producers underlined that their production, “in opposition to the American adaptation that takes too much liberty from the primary sources” (Therrien, 2014, p. 10) was adapted directly from the original Israeli version (Pradier, 2014).

Despite Argentina’s dynamic audiovisual industry, until recently quality TV fiction was mainly produced by commercial broadcasters. The production of *En Terapia* by Argentinean Public Television (TV Pública) was marketed as vivid proof of the Argentinean state’s recovery from damage done by neoliberal reforms. Alluding to internal disputes regarding the economic model adopted during the Kirchner period (2003–2015), the pro-government press highlighted the quality of the series as a symbol of state-led corporations’ capacity to triumph over the noxious commercial logic of private broadcasters (Ferri 2012; Respighi, 2012). In rhetoric more reminiscent of past utopian periods than the Kirchner era with its relatively modest reforms, Tristan Bauer, president of RTA (the public association that manages Argentinean state owned media), proclaimed:

En Terapia is a fiction series that embodies all the aims we wish to fulfill through the public media. It’s a high quality program that tells a story that broadens the topics usually treated by the media, and its content encourages reflexivity among the viewers.

If Trash TV is conceived as a tool for stupefying the audience and putting it on its knees in front of the television set, *En Terapia* connects with an idea of television at the service of the man, his time and his circumstances. (Respighi, 2012, p. 1)

The anti-government press also extolled the merits of the program by emphasizing not only the quality of the original texts and their adaptation to Argentine culture, but also the involvement of the international production company Dori Media Group and the great performances of local actors (Lago, 2012; Mera, 2014).

Brazil does not have a strong public television network, so its version of *BeTipul* was produced by GNT, a cable network channel owned by the powerful Globo Group (Arantes, 2013; Zylberkan, 2012). In the Brazilian context, *Sessao de Terapia* was framed as a quality product contrasted to the much more popular telenovela genre widely watched by the lower classes. Whereas telenovelas and their repetitive melodramatic tones, daily episodes, and semi-industrial production patterns represented normal or lowbrow television, *Sessao de Terapia*, with its self-contained emotions and elaborate dialogues, was their opposite. As Selma Egray, the actress playing the therapist's supervisor, stressed:

We are making an anti-telenovela. When acting in a telenovela, you must cry to show that you are moved. Here, it is the opposite. If you are moved by some dialogue and you show signs that you're going to cry, the director says: "Let's dry this. Dry it, dry it, leave the emotions for the audience." (Padiglione, 2013, p. 9)

This section has shown how overlapping global and local factors determine the format's perceived prestige or quality. If the global prestige of a series is linked to its author's construction as a creative genius and to the global appeal of psychotherapeutic discourse, the local element of quality should be understood as the framing of the format within the particular antinomies that distinguish quality from trash TV. However, as I try to show in the next section, quality emanates not only from each television industry's internal dynamics, but also from the evolving dialogues among different versions of the format produced around the world.

Fiction TV Formats as a Cumulative Cross-Cultural Dialogue

Whereas the perception of game shows and reality television formats as odorless or neutral allows them to be easily transplanted into other cultures, quality TV formats seem more influenced by the original productions and the cumulative history of adaptations around the globe. Dialogue evolves among a format's versions worldwide at every stage of the production. This fluid dialogue spurs mutual learning but also banal nationalism, sometimes transforming local versions into rivals in an imaginary international television industry contest. In this section, I will focus on two key topics feeding this dialogue: adaptation and acting performance.

Scenes that required modification to suit the local reality stimulated ongoing dialogue among critics, producers, and local screenwriters around the world. A particular episode in the original text showed Yadin, an Israeli Air Force pilot, suffering a personal crisis after killing innocent people in a military

action in the occupied territories. This spurred a cross-cultural dialogue in which local adapters and producers voiced their reservations and explained their choices. In the first season of the U.S. version, the format was adapted with few changes and the story of Alex, an American pilot who had killed innocent people in the Iraq War, was heavily criticized for a lack of "cultural congruency" (Franklin, 2008; Heffernan, 2008). Later versions produced in Argentina, Brazil, and Italy intervened more aggressively in the original text, on the advice of the format creator. In Brazil and Argentina, the character Yadin became an elite policeman fighting drug trafficking and crime, whereas in Italy he was a former undercover policeman who had infiltrated a Mafia organization (Guerra, 2012b; Respighi, 2011; Ulivi, 2013). Thus, the criticism of the adaptation of the first U.S. season led to more open adaptation policies elsewhere.

Acting performances are among the most frequently discussed aspects of the *BeTipul* format. Described as an "actor's paradise"—a series tailored for theater actors—the format recruited highly prestigious actors from each local scene, converting local adaptations into luxurious demonstrations of national talent that became a source of pride for the local entertainment industry. I would argue that much of the success recruiting prestigious talent harks back to the pattern set by the U.S. version, which had been broadcast by cable networks in those countries. For local actors, the media, and even the audience, the local versions benefited from the HBO program's reputation and simultaneously prompted comparison with the U.S. version.

When asked if he had seen the U.S. and Israeli versions, Diego Peretti, a prominent Argentinean actor who played the role of the therapist in the Argentinean version replied: "Of course. The first Israeli season was very useful to me. The American adaptation didn't work for me, because American psychoanalysis is more compassionate, more behaviorist than ours. Gabriel Byrne's therapist performance is much more melancholic than mine" (Lingenti, 2013). Peretti's colleague in *En Terapia*, the renowned Argentine actress Cecilia Roth, took a different stance, acknowledging her deep admiration for American actress Debra Winger, calling her "one of my favorite actresses." Despite or maybe because of her confessed admiration, Roth declared that she had not watched Winger's performance, wanting her own acting performance to be shaped instead by "Argentinean reality" (Minniti, 2014).

Brazilian press and producers also engaged in cross-national comparison, mainly against the U.S. version, which had been previously broadcast in Brazil. For example, a Brazilian critique published in *Folha de Sao Paulo* concluded that "in comparison with the American version, the therapist Zecarlos Machado, looks to Brazilian eyes, much more reliable than Gabriel Byrne and Julia de Maria Fernanda Candido, much more provocative and sensuous than Melissa George" (Angiolillo, 2012). Brazilian director Selton Mello, when asked whether he was an *In Treatment* fan, gave the following response: "No, I love TV series. I've followed *The Sopranos* and *Six Feet Under*, but not this one. When I was invited to direct the Brazilian adaptation, I watched many versions. The Romanian adaptation is my favorite one" (Guerra, 2012a, p. 13).

Although the series emerged as a global format only after its U.S. adaptation had aired, local producers and actors generally refrained from publicly acknowledging HBO's production and performances as their source of inspiration. They appear to have kept their distance from the U.S. version for two reasons. First, some sectors of local audiences had already seen the HBO show, so taking inspiration from

more obscure versions was more conducive to developing a novel production. For the audience, much of the pleasure in watching the local versions apparently derived from the combined elements of repetition, novelty, and comparison. Whereas the format structure presented a relatively limited space for innovation, performances by local stars created more opportunity for novelty and comparison. Second, overt praise of the HBO version, particularly in South America, could have been understood as a pro-U.S. political stance and thus had the potential to alienate audiences and critics. In this sense, the fact that the original series originated outside the U.S. entertainment industry allowed local producers to laud the series for its content without seeming too fond of the powerful neighbor to the north.

Conclusions

BeTipul owes much of its global success as a quality television format to not being American, yet still being essentially endorsed by a prestigious American network. HBO's *In Therapy* lent international visibility and prestige to both the format's producers and the entire Israeli television industry, opening the door for other drama and nonscripted television formats' entry into global media markets. Local cable networks had broadcast the U.S. version before the local adaptations were produced, and the celebrated performances of the prestigious actors recruited for the American production inspired the subsequent local adaptations. Many studies have found that television content undergoes radical transformation when adapted globally, but the *BeTipul* format's trajectory seems to question those claims. Although the centrality of the U.S. cultural industry remains a key factor in television content flows, the perception of quality television comes from a delicate balancing of both distance from and proximity to the U.S. media industry.

Two main factors allowed Israeli television producers to make inroads in the U.S. television industry: evolving informal networks among television industry producers based on cultural affinity and internalized cultural predispositions, and the creation of histories framed within an imagined shared "Western" cultural repertoire.

BeTipul's successful branding as a quality format worldwide was partly due to intensive promotion of the series producer as a "unique genius"—a sensitive artist whose cultural-religious background functioned as a kosher stamp for the quality attributes of the series. But whereas the series creator emphasized the "universal" features of the series, each local version incorporated and responded to the particular struggles and paradigms crisscrossing its society, be it an ethnic-cultural minority struggling to maintain a distinct French Canadian identity, or an elite Brazilian cable viewership affirming its distinctive cultural capital against the popular, mass-audience-oriented telenovela genre.

Unlike the allegedly neutral or odorless game-show and reality formats, quality fiction formats appear much more receptive to the influence of the original inspiration, as well as to other incarnations produced around the world. A quality fiction format can thus be seen as the result of an evolving dialogue among the various productions. A quality fiction format's engagement in this cross-cultural dialogue is characterized by a contradictory-complementary dualism comprising both shared benefits and competition: The quantity and quality of international adaptations serve as an endorsement of each new

local production, while producers, actors, and even audiences, each for different reasons, inevitably resort to comparing the various productions.

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