

Jolien van Keulen

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AESTHETIC PROXIMITY

THE ROLE OF STYLISTIC PROGRAMME ELEMENTS IN FORMAT LOCALISATION

Jolien van Keulen
Vrije Universiteit Brussel
Pleinlaan 9, 4th floor
1000 Brussels
Belgium
jolien.van.keulen@vub.ac.be

Abstract: Implications of the transnationalisation of television are often studied by focusing on the localisation of the content of formatted programmes. Although television is essentially an audio-visual medium, little attention has been paid to the aesthetic aspects of television texts in relation to transnationalisation and formatting. Transnationalisation of production practices, such as through formatting, implies a transnational aesthetic. At the same time, aspects of style are specific to place, culture or audience. In this article, the localisation of stylistic programme elements is explored using a comparison of two reality format adaptations. It is argued that style plays an important role in the expression of the local in a transnational industry.

Keywords: aesthetics, style, TV formats, transnationalisation, localisation, proximity

1 Introduction: TV Formats and Aesthetics

Over the last few years, the scholarly attention to television formats has intensified. The focus has been mainly on the flows of formats, and on the industry and economy of the format trade.¹ Recently, there has been a growing interest in the content of formats, on localisation and the cultural specificity of adaptations.² Formats are often connected to questions of globalisation, cultural homogenisation or hybridisation. Although television is characteristically a visual medium with a unique televisual cinematography, little attention has been paid to the aesthetic aspects of television texts in relation to the transnationalisation of the medium and the rise of formats.³ In this article, television aesthetics

1 Jean K. Chalaby, 'The Advent of the Transnational TV Format Trading System: A Global Commodity Chain Analysis,' *Media, Culture & Society*, 37, 3, 2015, p. 460–478; Sharon Shahaf, 'Homegrown Reality: Locally Formatted Israeli Programming and the Global Spread of Format TV,' *Creative Industries Journal*, 7, 1, 2014, 3–18.

2 For example: Fien Adriaens and Daniel Biltreyst, 'Glocalised Telenovelas and National Identities: A 'Textual Cum Production' Analysis of the 'Telenovelle' Sara, the Flemish Adaptation of Yo Soy Betty, La Fea,' *Television & New Media*, 13, 6, 2012, p. 551–567; Joost de Bruin, 'NZ Idol: Youth Audiences and Local Meanings,' *New Zealand Journal of Media Studies*, 11, 2, 2008, p. 1–23; Albert Moran, 'When TV Formats Are Translated,' in *TV Formats Worldwide: Localizing Global Programs*, ed. Albert Moran, Intellect, 2009, p. 39–54; Jolien van Keulen and Tonny Krijnen, 'The Limitations of Localization: A Cross-Cultural Comparative Study of Farmer Wants a Wife,' *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 17, 3, 2014, 277–292.

3 Lothar Mikos and Marta Perrotta, 'Traveling Style: Aesthetic Differences and Similarities in National Adaptations of Yo Soy Betty, La Fea,' *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 15, 1, 2012, 81–97.

(also referred to as style) are defined as the combination of technical elements of a television programme: *cinematography, editing and sound*.⁴ I will examine the relevance of stylistic elements of television programmes in the transnational market, by focusing on how these elements are altered, or not, in format adaptations.

The transnational television industry, and specifically the trade in formats, is characterised by an intensive cross-border exchange of knowledge, technologies, ideas and production practices. This exchange is expected to have a certain influence on production processes and their output, particularly on stylistic elements of TV programmes such as camera use and editing. Next to the transfer of production knowledge among producers that formats facilitate, aspects of style – such as camera angles or shot sizes – can be spread internationally through demands made by the licensor and inscribed in the format bible. In this way, formats could be seen as bearers of a universal television aesthetic across countries. On the other hand, format programmes are produced locally and adapted in order to enhance cultural proximity or meet (other) local expectations, goals or limitations. Because local producers have culturally determined tastes and professional standards, and audiences have established preferences and expectations concerning style over time, we can expect stylistic elements to be adjusted. In this article, after taking a closer look at the transnational character of the television industry and the cross-border exchanges in television production and format trade, I will review the literature that argues for a growing transnational aesthetic, while also pointing to the continuing existence of local television styles. The theoretical overview will be followed by an empirical exploration of this dualism through a comparison of the televisual styles of the Dutch and Australian versions of the reality format *Farmer Wants a Wife*. Similarities and differences in stylistic elements are explored to reveal how and to what degree these elements are adjusted in different production contexts. This will enhance our understanding as to what extent television styles are local, and hence play a role in reaching specific audiences in what is effectively a transnational industry.

Data was collected from the complete fourth season of the Dutch adaptation *Boer Zoekt Vrouw* (2004–...) (hereafter *BZV*) and the Australian *The Farmer Wants a Wife* (2007–2012) (hereafter *TFWW*), which were both broadcasted in 2009.

As Jensen has rightly argued, it is important to take into account a country's media system and the market position, role and outlook of the adapting broadcaster when comparing adaptations. Next to sociocultural factors, these have a considerable influence on format localisation.⁵ The Netherlands, we should note, have a dual broadcasting system, originating from a public service-focused system. *BZV* is broadcasted on the Dutch public channel NPO1, by KRO, an originally Catholic broadcasting organisation (one of the many organisations that broadcast on the Dutch public channels). As a public broadcaster, KRO focuses on building bridges and connecting societal groups. It describes its



Figure 1. Promotional photos for *Boer Zoekt Vrouw* (left) and *The Farmer Wants a Wife* (right).

4 David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, McGraw Hill, 2004.

5 Pia Majbritt Jensen, 'How National Media Systems Shape the Localization of Formats: A Transnational Case Study of The Block and Nerds FC in Australia and Denmark,' in *TV Formats Worldwide: Localizing Global Programs*, ed. Albert Moran, Intellect, 2009, 165–186; Pia Majbritt Jensen, 'How Media System Rather Than Culture Determines National Variation: Danish Idols and Australian Idol Compared,' in *Adapting Idols: Authenticity, Identity and Performance in a Global Television Format*, ed. Koos Zwaan and Joost de Bruin, Ashgate, 2012, 27–39.

programmes as respectful, conscious and authentic.⁶ *BZV* is produced by Blue Circle, the Dutch subsidiary of the transnational production and distribution conglomerate FremantleMedia, which also owns the format. Australia's media system, in contrast, can be described as liberal. The Australian version *TFWW* was broadcasted on the Nine Network, a free-to-air, high-rating commercial network targeting a young audience. It is produced by FremantleMedia Australia.

Farmer Wants a Wife was chosen for this analysis because factual entertainment formats are more open and adaptable, compared to more rigid game and talent show formats,⁷ not only when it comes to (cultural) content but especially when looking at style. For instance, on the farms – the format's main setting – camera positions can be chosen freely without restrictions related to studio and décor, and it would be difficult to prescribe them in a format bible. Comparing the Dutch and Australian adaptations is particularly interesting because of the geographic, linguistic, media systemic and sociocultural differences between the two countries. Altogether, if style is local(ised), differences can be expected to become apparent in these two adaptations that stem from the same format. For the analysis, the following elements – based on Bordwell's and Thompson's concept of film style⁸ – were compared: *camera* (positions, movements, angles, zooms, shot sizes), *editing* (pace, cuts, effects) and *sound* (voice-over, music). Although originating in film studies, these elements of the concept are also useful for describing the 'perceptual surface' of a television programme.⁹

2 Transnational Exchange and Expression of the Local

In an attempt to overcome the global-local and cultural imperialism-local appropriation dichotomies that have dominated the debates around globalisation, more and more scholars speak of transnational television, transnational industries and transnational cultures.¹⁰ The concept of the transnational marks the intensification of connections between national industries and multinational conglomerations.¹¹ In this transnational system, TV programmes but also knowledge, practices, creative ideas, financial means and personnel cross borders in different forms and in various ways. Co-productions, annual meetings of executives, television conventions – where buyers and producers gather from across the world, observation of foreign production processes, and cross-border training of producers and scriptwriters are all indicative of the transnational collaboration in television production.

The transnational exchange of practices, knowledge and content becomes clearly visible in formatted programmes. Formats can be seen as 'recipes' for television programmes,¹² captured in a so-called bible that functions as a manual to (re)produce the show in another country or market.¹³ As some programme elements are fixed but others are not, formats can be adjusted to a certain extent to suit the language, culture, media system and other aspects of the new market. Therefore, formats can overcome linguistic and cultural boundaries that could hinder the international export of

6 'Over de KRO-NCRV,' Retrieved on 29 March 2016.

7 Pia Majbritt Jensen, 'Television Format Adaptation in a Trans-National Perspective – an Australian and Danish Case Study,' Aarhus University, 2007; Jensen, 'How Media System Rather Than Culture Determines National Variation: Danish Idols and Australian Idol Compared'; Silvio Waisbord, 'McTV: Understanding the Global Popularity of Television Formats,' *Television & New Media* 5, 4, 2004, 359–383.

8 Bordwell and Thompson.

9 Jeremy G. Butler, *Television Style*, Routledge, 2010, p. 3.

10 Diane Crane, 'Culture and Globalization: Theoretical Models and Emerging Trends,' in *Global Culture: Media, Arts, Policy and Globalization*, ed. D. Crane, N. Kawashima and K. Kawasaki, Routledge, 2002, 1–25; Timothy J. Dowd and Susanne Janssen, 'Globalization and Diversity in Cultural Fields: Comparative Perspectives on Television, Music, and Literature,' *American Behavioral Scientist*, 55, 5, 2011, 519–524; Andrea Esser, 'Audiovisual Content in Europe: Transnationalization and Approximation,' *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 15, 2, 2007, 163–184; Giselinde Kuipers, 'Cultural Globalization as the Emergence of a Transnational Cultural Field: Transnational Television and National Media Landscapes in Four European Countries,' *American Behavioral Scientist*, 55, 5, 2011, 541–557; Joseph Straubhaar, 'Brazil's TV Fiction Export to the Lusophone World: Desire for Shared Cultural Experience,' in *Promoting Alternative Views in a Multipolar World: BRICS and Their Evolving Role in Developing Media Markets*, 9th Symposium Forum Media and Development (FoME), 2013, 61–68.

11 Giselinde Kuipers, 'The Cosmopolitan Tribe of Television Buyers: Professional Ethos, Personal Taste and Cosmopolitan Capital in Transnational Cultural Mediation,' *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 15, 5, 2012, 581–603.

12 Jean K. Chalaby, *The Format Age: Television's Entertainment Revolution*, Polity Press, 2016.

13 Albert Moran and Michael Keane, 'Cultural Power in International TV Format Markets,' *Continuum*, 20, 1, 2006, 71–86.

cultural products.¹⁴ The dual dynamics of standardisation and localisation make the format industry and formatted programmes interesting places to study media transnationalisation.

As a consequence of the intensified trade in formats and the transnationalisation of the television industry more generally, producers increasingly aim for international distribution.¹⁵ It has been argued that this could result in the disappearance of certain (local) issues from the television screen.¹⁶ Because content that is strongly tied to local culture has less value on the transnational TV market,¹⁷ profound culturally sensitive elements are removed.¹⁸ Where it becomes more important to serve a transnational audience, producers “attempt to ‘universalize’ the culturally specific narratives and styles”.¹⁹ In this way, formats could endanger the expression of cultural diversity on television. Citing format scholar Andrea Esser, this raises the following question:

Will television, even though programs are locally adapted, become less local as a consequence? Will the local merely show at the surface, reflected in faces, dialects, locations and some geographically bound conventions but less so in a society’s deeper lying concerns, its dominant values and beliefs?²⁰

This ‘flattening’ or watering down of the local does indeed appear to be the case when differentiating superficial (manifest) and deeper (latent) cultural aspects of format localisation. Above all, ‘the local’ and ‘cultural specific’ are apparent in accents, clothing and landscapes.²¹ In other words, the visual surface of a programme seems to be of great importance to cultural proximity and specificity, perhaps more so than deeper lying elements, for instance, cultural values. Elements manifest in the filmic layer might best be able to express the local in a transnational industry. Looking at the role that stylistic elements (camera, editing and sound) play in making a programme ‘appear local’ thus seems crucial.

3 The Rise of a Transnational Television Aesthetic

The interplay between transnationalisation and localisation has been examined at the textual level with regard to content and representation, with particular attention being paid to the travelling of themes, narratives and genres across borders. But little research has been carried out so far, on the idea that with the transnationalisation of the television industry and the increasing exchange of production know-how and practices, style and aesthetics, too, can be expected to transnationalise. According to Moran, there are three codes that capture the elements of adaptation: linguistic, cultural and intertextual. Intertextual codes refer to “specific bodies of knowledge held by particular communities”,²² and like linguistic and cultural aspects, they determine the local essence of a TV production. It is important that we acknowledge that these ‘bodies of knowledge’ are constantly changing though, and they are transnationalising because one of the key aspects of the format trade is knowledge transfer across borders. “The licensing of a format from elsewhere may trigger a cross-cultural exchange that begins with the readjustment of ways of working in television, whether by camera operator, editor, writer or others”.²³ Sharing ideas about producing television will result in common

14 Silvio Waisbord, ‘McTV: Understanding the Global Popularity of Television Formats,’ *Television & New Media*, 5, 4, 2004, 359–383.

15 Denise D. Bielby and C. Lee Harrington, *Global TV: Exporting Television and Culture in the World Market*, New York University Press, 2008; Serra Tinic, ‘Going Global; International Coproductions and the Disappearing Domestic Audience in Canada,’ in *Planet TV: A Global Television Reader*, ed. Lisa Parks and Shanti Kumar, New York University Press, 2003, 169–185.

16 Esser, ‘Format Is King: Television Formats and Commercialisation.’

17 Waisbord.

18 Joseph Straubhaar, *World Television: From Global to Local*, Sage, 2007; Bilge Yesil, ‘Transnationalization of Turkish Dramas: Exploring the Convergence of Local and Global Market Imperatives,’ *Global Media and Communication*, 11, 1, 2015, p. 43–60.

19 Tinic, p. 170.

20 Esser, ‘Format Is King: Television Formats and Commercialisation,’ p. 166.

21 Van Keulen and Krijnen, ‘The Limitations of Localization: A Cross-Cultural Comparative Study of *Farmer Wants a Wife*’; Alexander Dhoest and Manon Mertens, ‘Ugly Betty, Flemish Sara: Telenovela Adaptation and Generic Expectations,’ in *TV’s Betty Goes Global: From Telenovela to International Brand*, ed. Janet McCabe and Kim Akass, I.B. Tauris, 2013, 99–113.

22 Moran, p. 48.

23 Ibid.

production practices, values and standards, and in the end this can be expected to reflect in the techniques used and in the overall style of TV programmes.

In many divisions of the television industry, it has been argued, cross-border trade has led to transnational codes, principles, attitudes and manners. “Common spaces have developed (...) in which industry members can exchange views and develop relationships. These members also increasingly share common values”.²⁴ Professional sensibilities of television executives worldwide are converging, meaning their commercial and aesthetic judgments are homogenising.²⁵ Buyers in the international television market can be described as “transnational professionals with similar standards, values, manners and even rituals such as annual gatherings in Cannes (...) bonded (...) by shared tastes and styles”.²⁶ TV producers, too, increasingly operate transnationally. For instance, the annual meeting of *Big Brother* producers from across the world “represents the globalization of conceptual ideas and narrative structures”.²⁷ Producers adopt certain quality standards and cultural conventions from powerful TV production centres, including production values.²⁸

Although it is not an entirely new phenomenon, the transnational exchange of know-how concerning television production has become more common. It takes place through the training and swapping of producers, through producers functioning as visiting consultants in international productions, or through the observation of production places and processes by foreign producers.²⁹ These forms of exchange have consequences, including those for aesthetics, quality standards and values. Focusing on *organisational* transnational standards and practices, Kuipers describes the current television industry as a transnational field that is likely to (re)produce transnational aesthetic styles and standards,³⁰ underscored by the apparent unanimity among cultural intermediaries when judging quality.³¹ Apart from studying how styles and standards travel, are established or negotiated, we should therefore examine how these transnational standards and practices impact on, and are reflected in, local productions.

Because of the heightened trans-border exchange in the case of formats, it is here that we can expect a transnational television aesthetic to be most apparent. Often the format bible not only contains the programme idea, content elements or directions for quiz questions, but also includes suggestions for staging, camera angles or music. This mainly seems to be the case for studio-based game and talent shows. For instance, for the Uzbekistan adaptation of the American game show *Family Feud*, local cameramen had to be instructed on how to achieve certain shots.³² In the *Idol* format, décor, lighting and camera positions are standardised in the set design and captured in the format bible.³³

In *Farmer Wants a Wife*, we can identify some transnational features as elements that are inherent in the format. Certain stylistic conventions – characteristic of the reality genre overall – are similar in both versions. For example, the use of a slightly moving handheld camera, which constructs the idea that participants were filmed secretly; enhancing the suggestion that they behave normally as they are unaware of being filmed. Also, in both versions the camera positions contribute to this, when ‘the action’ is filmed from a distance, from behind objects or through windows. In reality TV, style is part of the construction of authenticity.

24 Chalaby, ‘The Advent of the Transnational TV Format Trading System: A Global Commodity Chain Analysis,’ p. 16.

25 Waisbord

26 Kuipers, ‘The Cosmopolitan Tribe of Television Buyers: Professional Ethos, Personal Taste and Cosmopolitan Capital in Transnational Cultural Mediation,’ p. 588.

27 Martin Nkosi Ndlela, ‘Television Across Boundaries: Localisation of Big Brother Africa,’ *Critical Studies in Television*, 8, 2, 2013, 57–72, p. 63.

28 Kuipers, ‘Cultural Globalization as the Emergence of a Transnational Cultural Field: Transnational Television and National Media Landscapes in Four European Countries’; Nickesia Stacy Ann Gordon, ‘Globalization and Cultural Imperialism in Jamaica: The Homogenization of Content and Americanization of Jamaican TV through Programme Modeling,’ *International Journal of Communication*, 3, 2009, 307–331.

29 Chalaby, ‘Drama without Drama: The Late Rise of Scripted TV Formats’; Michael Keane, ‘As a Hundred Television Formats Bloom, a Thousand Television Stations Contend,’ *Journal of Contemporary China*, 11, 30, 2002, 5–16.

30 Kuipers, ‘Cultural Globalization as the Emergence of a Transnational Cultural Field: Transnational Television and National Media Landscapes in Four European Countries.’

31 Ibid.; Gordon.

32 Moran.

33 Yngvar Kjus, ‘Collaborative Reproduction of Attraction and Performance: The Case of the Reality Show *Idol*,’ in *TV Formats Worldwide: Localizing Global Programs*, ed. Albert Moran, Intellect, 2009, p. 122.



Figure 2. Stills from 'secret shots' in *BZV* (left) and *TFWW* (right).

The overall shared framework of the format's narrative and theme results in certain shots and editing that are similar in both versions. For instance, the important role that the surroundings play in depicting farm life and the nostalgia and romanticism of the countryside – which are the core of the format – result in a similar quantity and significance of establishing shots and mood images. These are then similarly edited, alternating with other shots. At the beginning of every episode of both versions, the host speaks into the camera, addressing the viewer, in a slowly panning shot. Both versions show very similar short sequences when switching to another farmer's storyline: close shots of animals and objects on the farm and shots of the sky and the surroundings. The visual content of these shots might be different, but the style is the same.

Much of this is determined by the format bible. But the format package often contains consultancy agreements, whereby the original producers or a flying producer or visiting consultant give a helping hand.³⁴ In addition to the bible it is through this consultancy that formats take specific production know-how “and a specialized awareness of production organization and routines to all corners of the world”.³⁵ Flying producers keep an eye on the local production to make it successful, and to ensure that the format's core elements and characteristics remain the same in every version.³⁶ In this attempt to protect the format as a brand and transfer its success to new markets, the overall ‘look and feel’ of the



Figures 3 and 4. Stills from introduction and transition sequences of *BZV* (left) and *TFWW* (right).

³⁴ Chalaby, 'Drama without Drama: The Late Rise of Scripted TV Formats'; Moran.

³⁵ Moran, p. 43.

³⁶ Martin Kretschmer and Sukhpreet Singh, 'Exploiting Idols: A Case Study of International TV Formats Trading in the Absence of Intellectual Property Protection,' 2010; Ulrike Rohn, 'Small Market, Big Format: Idols in Estonia,' *Baltic Screen Media Review*, 2, 2014, 123–137.

programme is determined by the licensor. This limits the influence and freedom of local producers and thereby supports and spreads a transnational aesthetic. Even if there is room for input from the local production team, how 'local' are their ideas, values, practices and standards, considering the thorough transnational exchange and collaboration?

4 Aesthetic Proximity and the Localness of Television Styles

I want to argue and demonstrate that despite this notable transnationalisation, television styles and aesthetics are (still) local and culturally bound. Because of production traditions in different countries and audiences' familiarity with specific ways of storytelling, genres and 'stylistic instruments', "visual styles must be integrated in the concept of cultural proximity".³⁷ Joseph Straubhaar's concept of cultural proximity indicates that audiences favour media and cultural products that are produced locally and/or feel proximate in terms of language, themes, values or genre. I believe that aesthetics are an important – but often under-exposed – aspect that contributes to the cultural specificity of TV programmes and feelings of proximity. Therefore, the style of formats is, and needs to be, localised too when crossing borders and trying to reach new audiences.

In the transnational television market, aesthetic elements can, and need to be, capable of resonating with different local audiences. For instance the right 'look' and pacing are elements that are essential for finding acceptance by local audiences abroad.³⁸ Lewis stresses the power of cultural differences in programme aesthetics, such as editing pace and commercial breaks, all of which influence the 'cultural style'.³⁹ Aesthetic properties of programming have a certain level of attraction for audiences, or lack thereof. Rohn names such a lack of appeal a 'production lacuna' that arises "when audiences do not enjoy foreign TV formats or programming elements because they do not like the style in which they were produced".⁴⁰ The notion of aesthetic proximity is useful in further understanding and examining this type of cultural boundary in transnational TV production and distribution. Aesthetic proximity, like Straubhaar's layers of cultural proximity, is about the correspondence between producers or the production context and audiences, or between the former and the reception context. In other words, from the production side, style is influenced by culturally defined tastes and professional standards.⁴¹ Equally, "[a]esthetic elements interact with cultural preferences and expectations of local audiences".⁴² If the production style does not match audience expectations and tastes, "the content may appear unusual, strange or even disturbing".⁴³

Culture-based aesthetics are expressed through editing, camera movements, costumes and music,⁴⁴ and through acting style and production values.⁴⁵ A comparison between an American prison drama and a British one showed remarkable similarities with regard to their contents but differences when it came to televisual aesthetics.⁴⁶ Comparable results were found in European drama: "they tell similar stories in similar settings with similar characters," but "on the visual surface heterogeneity rules";⁴⁷ the programmes look very different in the end. This also supports the premise that the local

37 Mikos and Perrotta, p. 85.

38 Denise D. Bielby and C. Lee Harrington, 'Managing Culture Matters: Genre, Aesthetic Elements, and the International Market for Exported Television,' *Poetics*, 32, 1, 2004, 73–98, p. 88.

39 Tania Lewis, 'From Global to Local: Australianizing the Makeover Format,' in *TV Formats Worldwide: Localizing Global Programs*, ed. Albert Moran, Intellect, 2009, 291–306.

40 Rohn, 'Small Market, Big Format: Idols in Estonia,' p. 124.

41 Ulrike Rohn, 'Lacuna or Universal? Introducing a New Model for Understanding Cross-Cultural Audience Demand,' *Media, Culture & Society*, 33, 4, 2011, 631–641.

42 Bielby and Harrington, *Global TV: Exporting Television and Culture in the World Market*, p. 115.

43 Rohn, 'Lacuna or Universal? Introducing a New Model for Understanding Cross-Cultural Audience Demand,' p. 634.

44 Elizabeth Burch, 'Media Literacy, Cultural Proximity and TV Aesthetics: Why Indian Soap Operas Work in Nepal and the Hindu Diaspora,' *Media, Culture & Society*, 24, 4, 2002, 571–579.

45 Heidi Keinonen, 'Kaverukset: Constructing a Sense of Cultural Proximity in the Finnish Adaptation of Hancock's Half Hour,' *Critical Studies in Television*, 4, 2, 2009, 37–52.

46 Robin Nelson, 'TV Fiction Exchange: Local/Regional/National/Global,' *Critical Studies in Television*, 2, 2, 2007, 4–17.

47 Gerd Hallenberger, 'Aesthetic Conventions in European Media Cultures,' *Emergences: Journal for the Study of Media & Composite Cultures*, 11, 1, 2001, 117–131, p. 124.

diversity increasingly shows on the surface only, specifically in visual elements. Next to the fact that “characters dress, talk and behave differently in each country, ... shooting and editing styles of TV fiction diverge significantly”.⁴⁸ It is exactly because of those stylistic differences that viewers can easily identify a programme as typically French or German.⁴⁹

The comparison of *Boer Zoekt Vrouw* and *The Farmer Wants a Wife* exemplifies the notions of aesthetic localisation and aesthetic proximity. First, we can observe many important differences in camera technique. In *TFWW*, the camera work can be described as lively or dynamic; the camera moves relatively often and fast. Shots of the surrounding landscape are spectacular crane or helicopter shots, pans (shots in which the camera turns horizontally), or zooms that depart from, or result in very wide shots, which capture distance. For the Dutch version, camera use can be described as tranquil. *BZV* contains mainly steady or very slowly moving shots. The widest shots capture the farmhouse or the acre, but not the entire surrounding area as in *TFWW*.



Figure 5. Stills from establishing shots in *BZV* (left) and *TFWW* (right).

Another difference is in the use of diary shots during which the Australian farmers and women speak directly into the camera. These shots are not employed in the Dutch version, where the host – who is often on the farm – interviews the participants. For her Australian counterpart, this is different as the country is too large. Thus, different from the Australian version, *BZV* contains many shots specifically framed and edited for these interviews.

When looking at the editing, clear differences also appear. Here, local distinction is primarily demonstrated by pace. The editing in *TFWW* is fast and animated, often switching between shots, scenes, storylines, time and space. Within each episode we return to the storyline of each farmer multiple times. Every episode starts with a quite extensive ‘what happened last week’ of one minute-and-a-half, and ends with the next week’s preview, which consists of thirty seconds with multiple shots per second. The Australian version breaks the chronological order, using flashbacks (sometimes in black and white) and flash-forwards. Moreover, it employs several editing effects, such as slow motion in dramatic or romantic situations and fast-motion or time-lapse shots depicting sunrises and sunsets.

The editing of the Dutch version (see, for instance, the intro of **episode 5**) is slow and steady-paced and it shows the story as a linear narrative, told in a chronological order. Only some of the episodes start with a short recap of last week

48 Ibid.

49 Hallenberger.



Figure 6. Stills from interview shots in *BZV* (left) and diary shots in *TFWW* (right).

or show a few shots of next week's episode at the end. The editing is simple and clear, occasionally using a slow dissolve, but without any spectacular effects.

As for sound, the analysis reveals a difference in the use of voice-over, which is applied more in *TFWW* than in *BZV*. In *BZV*, the host directly reflects on the actions, thoughts and words of the participants during the interviews. In *TFWW* this is done through voice-over, which consists of emotional one-liners, such as "country and city collide" or "the outback is a place of romance and reward, but for too many farmers the rivers run dry". Moreover, in *TFWW* we hear the farmers and women themselves reflect on situations and their feelings in the form of voice-over. In *BZV*, the host leads the audience through the story via voice-over, explaining where the storyline is being picked up, what is happening and what will come next. But there is no use of Dutch participant voice-overs.

Besides the use of voice-over, the use of music differs in the two adaptations. During episodes of *TFWW*, there is continuous non-diegetic sound in the form of mood music. This is mainly instrumental music, often enhancing the romantic or exciting atmosphere of the moment, or simply used as background music. During mood shots, the music is louder, and during interviews or dialogues, it is turned down. *BZV* also makes use of music to accompany the establishing shots and mood images, but during interviews and dialogues there is often no music at all, now and then resulting in (awkward) silences. Overall, in the Dutch adaptation there is a greater focus on what is being said.

The described stylistic variations are the result of different elaborations of the reality genre, mainly manifested in different story structures and different modes of address. The differences can, to a great extent, be interpreted in line with Jensen's explanation of variations in the content of factual entertainment format adaptations, on the basis of the distinction between docudrama and melodrama, and inclusive and exclusive reality TV.⁵⁰ In our case, it seems that the public service-oriented adaptation in the Netherlands aims to be inclusive in its mode of address as NPO1's goal and duty is to attract a broad audience.⁵¹ However, the Australian adaptation is used for commercial goals, which means

50 Jensen, 'How National Media Systems Shape the Localization of Formats: A Transnational Case Study of The Block and Nerds FC in Australia and Denmark'; Jensen, 'How Media System Rather Than Culture Determines National Variation: Danish Idols and Australian Idol Compared.'

51 'Het verschil tussen NPO1, NPO2 en NPO3,' Retrieved on 6 April 2016.



Figure 7. Stills from farmers and women in *BZV* (left) and *TFWW* (right), in *TFWW* these shots are accompanied by romantic music, while in *BZV* the focus is on the dialogue.

targeting a young audience that is attractive to advertisers. The dynamic cinematography of *TFWW* is part of constructing a mode of address based on fascination, while the static style of *BZV* emphasises the everyday nature of the stories and characters, enhancing possibilities for identification. The clear and static camera and editing style in *BZV* emphasises the quietness of the countryside and the ordinariness of Dutch farmers. In *TFWW*, zooms, camera movements, fast-paced editing and constant mood music support and extend the melodramatic elaboration of the reality genre, focusing on atmosphere, emotions and conflict. The edited plot of *TFWW* is very compact, mainly showing highlights, while in *BZV* almost the whole story is told and shown, including everyday chores and situations when nothing special happens. In the Dutch version, more attention is paid to dialogue and story development, uninterrupted by music and editing effects. The Dutch version, it seems, tries to show the farmers as they are and day-to-day farm life as it is. Thus, *BZV* has a more docudramatic elaboration of the reality genre, and aesthetics appear to play a meaningful role in these two different ways of representing reality and addressing the audience.

To a great extent, differences in the media system and an adapting broadcaster might explain the stylistic variations found: docudrama versus melodrama, identification versus fascination, as well as variations in pace and camera movement. But I would like to add that the analysis also suggests that style reveals and contributes to the representation of 'deeper' cultural values and norms.⁵² The distinction between fascination and identification, I would argue, is not just caused and constructed by different broadcasters but is also related to differing imaginations of farmers and farm life in the two countries. Aspects of style co- and re-produce the stereotypical image of Australian farmers as tough, cool and romantic, and Dutch farmers as boring, ordinary and uneasy. This is nicely shown in the slow, extensive sequence of silent shots of a farmer mucking out horse stables, as compared to shots of a farmer watching the sunset accompanied by dramatic music, or walking on his acres in slow-motion. In other words, I am reiterating that even a Dutch commercial broadcaster would probably have difficulties depicting (multiple) Dutch farmers as desirable charmers, and local farms as spectacular places. Camera, editing and sound thus can play a role in the expression of cultural values and norms, even in TV adaptations based on a transnational format.

⁵² For an analysis of these differences, see: Van Keulen and Krijnen, 'The Limitations of Localization: A Cross-Cultural Comparative Study of Farmer Wants a Wife.'



Figure 8. Stills from shots of farmers in *BZV* (left) and *TFWW* (right) demonstrate the role of style in representation.



Figure 9. Stills from *BZV* (left) and *TFWW* (right) demonstrate that style plays an important role in differences between adaptations while aspects of content are similar.

5 Aesthetics, Formats and Transnationalisation

This analysis has shown that aesthetics are an important layer of format localisation. Format adaptations intertwine aspects of transnational and local styles in complex ways, and I have argued here that stylistic variations, too, must be interpreted within the “complex matrix of cultural, economic and circumstantial factors” that must be considered if we want to understand variations in format adaptations.⁵³ Some factors that influence style are fixed and inevitable, for instance through the format bible or through geography, which breeds different landscapes and faces. Other stylistic differences can be explained by contextual production factors, such as the adapting broadcaster or channel’s identity, its target audience and production budget. Examples for this are (the absence of) commercial breaks, flash-forwards and flashbacks surrounding them, or the use of helicopter shots. Some differences regarding camera and editing, seem to point to national ideas about style, and differences in producers’ and audiences’ preferences and habits. Also, the

⁵³ Andrea Esser, ‘Interviews with TV Executives Involved in the German Adaptation, *Verliebt in Berlin*,’ in *TV’s Betty Goes Global: From Telenovela to International Brand*, ed. Janet McCabe and Kim Akass, I.B. Tauris, 2013, 72–82; Eggo Müller, *Not Only Entertainment: Studien Zur Pragmatik Und Ästhetik Der Fernsehunterhaltung*, Herbert Von Halem Verlag, 2011.

analysis suggested that style expresses and constructs different (stereotypical) images of farmers and farm life. Overall, we can conclude that aesthetic differences play a major role in variations of the reality genre and also for particular representations in different adaptations.

Transnationalisation in the form of programmes that are produced in different countries – based on a shared format and transnational exchanges among production personnel –, no doubt generate aesthetic characteristics and stylistic norms that are shared by an increasing number of countries. But at the same time, format adaptations also (still) display local styles and express diversity through style. The question as to whether stylistic differences are conscious production decisions, production habits are grounded in the assumed preferences of local audiences, or are the result of other factors, has to be answered by further research involving production staff. Also, it can probably only be answered on a case-by-case basis. The case study presented here exemplifies the manifestation and meaning of aesthetic proximity, and reinforces the premise that in the current transnational television industry, the local is mainly (and maybe increasingly) expressed on the surface. This article adds to the idea that on the surface, aesthetics are vital elements that express the local, and play a role in making formats culturally proximate for local audiences. It provides an empirical contribution to the transnationalisation debate, arguing that style is a substantial aspect for reaching multiple audiences in a transnational television market, and that it should be considered from a dual, local and global perspective.

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Biography

Jolien van Keulen is a PhD student at the Free University of Brussels, department of Media and Communication Studies, and member of the CEMESO research group. Her research focuses on the transnationalisation of television production and text.