

## **What's Stopping the (Global) Flow of Television?**

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This question, like Arjun Appadurai's scapes, changes shape as you look at it from different perspectives. If you're an American television executive, trying to recoup investment on an expensive production by distributing your product to as many spots on the globe as possible you might frustratingly find that the price of your show or its cultural specificity are scaring off potential buyers and restricting flow. Comedies that are based on particular American cultural interactions, for example, tend not to garner the same transnational audience numbers as action shows or soap operas. Shows that hew too close to cultural anxieties, such as the X-files in the 1990's, don't flow over the globe as well as programs with more general subject matter. (Though *Lost* challenges this assumption.)

If, on the other hand, you are an Egyptian producer hoping to secure a contract with a local television station to broadcast your serial, it's easy to think that *nothing* is stopping the global flow of television. Everywhere you'd look, including local broadcast television as well as satellite broadcasting, you'd find another example of the seemingly unimpeded flow of global television: American serials and comedies; American action/adventure shows and movies; Latin American, European and Turkish serials; Indian movies; and most pernicious: transnational Arabic language serials (some even in the Egyptian dialect) coming from other Arab countries and from non-territorial transnational satellite broadcasters.

In addition to the specifics of individual forms of programming, larger more ideological issues also interrupt the flow of global television. Nationalism and associated cultural constructions including religiosity remain chief amongst these. Despite the technological impulse of transnational satellite television to flow across borders, despite the economic infrastructure that exists to propel this flow, and despite the apparently unceasing desire of global audiences to consume global products, the flow of cultural production is nonetheless impeded by the other-than-capitalistic nationalistic impulses of various states, religious groups and viewers. I argue that in the Arabic regional context these impediments include legislation against the participation of "foreign" Arab actors in "Egyptian" television productions, Saudi (largely ineffectual) prohibition of consumption of racy Lebanese productions, or the prosecution of a Lebanese man for "witchcraft" after using his low-budget satellite show to predict the future. This kind of legislation and moral campaigns impede television, but like a rock in the middle of a stream only temporarily divert the flow, not stop it. Instead, I argue, they push the consumption of transnational television into a private sphere and thus create an increasing gap in the Arab world between public and private culture.