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## German Quality TV as a Glocal Industry Discourse

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**Abstract:** This paper discusses how television professionals in Germany negotiate the transnational potential as well as the regional, national and local particularities of German quality drama. The central hypothesis is that the practitioners' current industry discourse on quality TV drama bears clear "glocal" traits, as their debates on transnationalisation focus on national or local specificities as well. Drawing on the theoretical concept of glocalisation, the analysis is based on 12 expert interviews with 15 producers, scriptwriters, commissioning editors and directors of recent quality TV drama projects from Germany. First, the article outlines key concepts and methods for the analysis. Subsequently, it describes transnationalism and regionalism in the German-speaking television landscape and among public broadcasters, which are the most important commissioners of German TV fiction. Further, the article deals with industry discourses on foreign sales and transnational distribution. Finally, it discusses the transnationalisation of project networks and individual practitioners on a micro level.

**Keywords:** German television, European television drama, Transnational Television, Glocalisation, Television Series, Quality TV, Media Industry Studies, Television Drama

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## Introduction

Recently, through “platforms that span activities over different countries (and continents)” (Evens & Donders, 2018, p. 3) and the “rapid growth of internet-distributed television services worldwide” (Lotz et al., 2018, p. 35), television has transformed “from a national, largely broadcasting, market to a transnational multiplatform market” (Turner, 2018, p. 137). The German television industry is an obvious example, as it now includes new transnational commissioners, especially in the segment of pay TV and subscription video on demand (SVoD). This has led to the increased production of German-language series. In German drama projects for US-dominated streaming services (e.g., Netflix), the expansion and transnationalisation of the Hollywood film and television industry is also apparent. The economic basis of the global screen industry is shifting “from only being centred in Los Angeles and this is creating more opportunities to make and sell content by others outside of the traditional Hollywood elite” (Meir, 2019, pp. 214–215).

In light of these transnational developments, many television professionals in Germany hope for new commissioning and licensing opportunities, especially in the area of “quality TV” or “high-end” drama. The following paper discusses in greater detail how television practitioners negotiated the transnational potential as well as the national and local particularities of German quality drama from 2016 to 2019, a period shaped by a shift from linear to “linear-delayed or subscription-based viewing” (Afilipoaie et al., 2021, p. 305). The central hypothesis is that the practitioners’ industry discourse on quality TV drama clearly bore “glocal” traits, as their debates on transnationalisation evoked national and local specificities as well.

The simultaneity and interconnectedness of globalisation and localisation processes, which Robertson (2014) and others have labelled glocalisation, emerged in the practitioners’ frequent use of the English term “quality TV”. This term is most strongly associated with transnationally successful serial dramas from the US (e.g., McCabe & Akass, 2007). In the past 10 years, television professionals in Germany have adapted “quality TV” to a national, German context and, by using this concept, have simultaneously dealt with the broader, local and global transformations of the television industry.

The following article views “quality TV” less in terms of particularly “good” programmes (i.e., programmes deemed valuable aesthetically or content-wise) and more as an industry discourse, taking this term back to its roots in the television industry (see Feuer et al., 1984; Feuer, 2007). Here, the term “quality TV” initially referred – as early as the 1980s – to programmes for a small target group that was considered to be of higher quality, primarily for economic reasons. The “élite, intellectual niche audience with high expectations” (McCabe & Akass, 2007, p. 73) was willing to pay a premium price for subscription services and was particularly interesting and hard for advertisers to access. However, this article looks at television fiction from Germany rather than at contemporary US drama since the 1980s, which

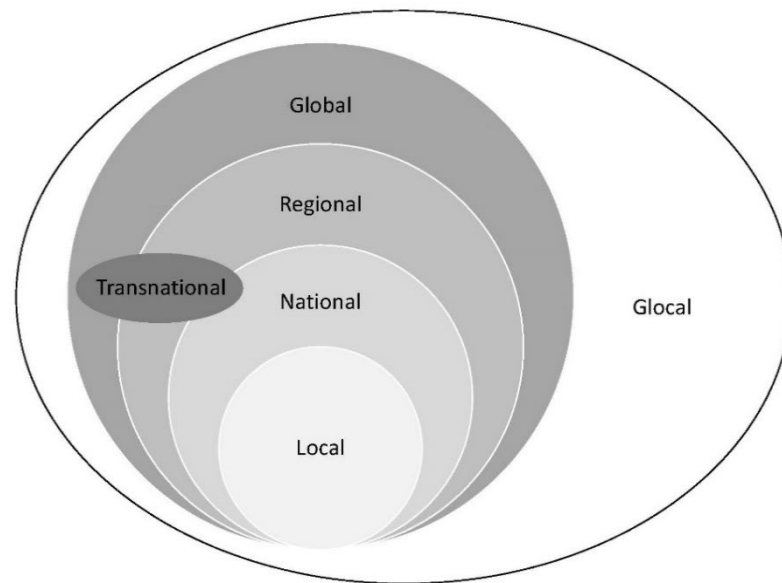
most analyses of quality TV, including the well-known quality TV criteria (Thompson, 1996), have centred on thus far (e.g., McCabe & Akass, 2007). In the specific context of Germany, I approach quality TV drama as both an evaluation discourse in the television industry and a specific programme segment aiming for transnational distribution.

This article first outlines the key concepts and methods for the analysis. Subsequently, it describes transnationalism and regionalism in the German-speaking TV landscape. Then, it turns to public broadcasters, which remain the most important commissioners of German TV fiction, as well as to national commercial broadcasters. In more detail, the article deals with industry discourses on foreign sales and transnational distribution. Finally, it discusses the transnationalisation of project networks and individual practitioners on a micro level along with their national and local peculiarities.

### **Glocalisation and transnationalisation: Key concepts and starting points**

Many recent “quality TV” productions from Germany are characterised by changing and expanding “networked activities and funding solutions involving collaboration among production companies, screen agencies, broadcasters, and other co-funding bodies from a local to a global level”, which Hansen (2020, p. 86) includes under the term “glocalisation”. His adaptation of Roudometof’s scalar model of glocalisation (2016) is helpful for ordering the different levels that emerge in practitioners’ negotiations on quality TV and characterise the contemporary German television fiction industry. Hansen (2020, p. 87) visualises the scalar hierarchy as a circular model running from local > national > regional > global. However, departing from Roudometof, he argues that the glocal is “a *consequence of—and not part of—*processes that oscillate between the local and the global, including the intermediate national and transnational opportunities” (2020, p. 86, emphasis in original). In Hansen’s model, the glocal forms the context of the levels local > national > regional > global, and the transnational is located between the national and the global (see Figure 1).

Other discussions of the term “transnational” highlight that cross-border media communication no longer takes place solely between countries, as “international” implies, but also extends beyond and across nation states and national cultures (e.g., Wessler & Brüggemann, 2012, p. 3). Wessler and Brüggemann (2012, p. 4) also argue that most cross-border media do not have a truly global scope. Therefore, they argue that the term “global” could often be replaced by the term “transnational”, which implies an exchange between individual countries, but not necessarily a worldwide extension. Indeed, most television series only travel to some countries, if any. Given such limits of global circulation, it is logical that television studies have frequently used the term “transnational”.

**Figure 1: Scalar model of glocalisation, based on Hansen (2020, p. 87)**

Still, according to Hansen (2020, p. 85), the concept of transnationalism remains insufficient because it fails to inscribe the important dimension of the local or sub-national, other than the term “glocal”. Following this argument, I regard the industry discourse on German quality TV as glocal. This allows me to also consider local aspects in a television market that is highly shaped by federalism. Moreover, the term “glocal” provides a useful basis for my analysis, as it can point to the different levels, from local to global, that media industry studies can explore (see Evens & Donders, 2018, p. 8).

## Method

The following analysis of the practitioners’ glocal discourse on German quality TV drama relies on 12 interviews with 15 “exclusive informants” (Bruun, 2016, p. 139), as part of a broader production study on the current television fiction industry in Germany (Krauß, 2023, forthcoming). The interviews took place at different locations suggested by the informants, mostly cafés and offices, while one interview was conducted online. The circumstances, including the length of the conversations, depended on the interviewees. As producers, commissioning editors, writers and directors, the interviewees represent key actors in *project networks*, the dominant form of organisation in TV series production in Germany (Windeler & Sydow, 2001). These practitioners were selected through four well-known “quality TV” projects from Germany: *Deutschland 83/86/89* (2015–2020, RTL/Amazon Prime Video), *Babylon Berlin* (since 2017, Sky Deutschland/ARD), *4 Blocks* (2017–2019) and *Dark* (2017–2020, Netflix). Through their professions and these productions, the informants are easily identifiable and, therefore, the interviews were not

anonymised. Having travelled to different countries and being commissioned or co-financed by transnational companies, the four shows illustrate the transnationalisation of the German television market. In particular, *Deutschland 83/86/89* can be seen as a “game changer” (Eichner, 2021, p. 205), as this 1980s Cold War drama helped to create a taste for German TV fiction in English-speaking markets. In *Babylon Berlin*, Europe’s most expensive non-English-language drama when it began (Mikos, 2021, p. 184), transnational orientation played an important role in the early financing stages. The mystery drama *Dark* was the first German drama production by Netflix, allegedly becoming the most successful non-English “Netflix original” during season 1 (Wyche, 2018). The mafia drama *4 Blocks* had comparatively low production costs, was commissioned by the niche pay TV channel TNT Serie (now WarnerTV Serie) and was globally distributed through Amazon Prime Video. Mikos (2021) argues that “the example [...] shows how new players in the German television market cooperat[e] in production and distribution of locally produced and globally distributed transnational drama series” (p. 187).

The 12 semi-structured expert interviews did not focus solely on these respective series. More comprehensively, they also dealt with the quality or state of German TV drama, modes and cultures of TV series production as well as the reception and distribution of German TV series. In the systematic coding of the recorded transcripts (see Meuser & Nagel, 1991), transnationalism and glocalisation emerged as key categories. Again and again, the practitioners dealt with the transnational as well as regional, national and local traits of German TV fiction and its move towards “quality TV” drama.

### **Transnationalism and regionalism in the German-speaking television landscape**

As aspects of glocalisation, transnational and regional traits first came to light when the interviewees referred to the tradition of addressing audiences not only in Germany but also in Austria, Switzerland, Liechtenstein and Luxembourg. The tendency for media markets to expand to territories with the same language and a similar culture (McElroy, 2020, p. 64; Wessler & Brüggemann, 2012, pp. 9–10) clearly manifests in the German-speaking world. This territory exemplifies the region that ranks above the nation in Roudometof’s scalar model of glocalisation (2016, p. 32) and its adaptation by Hansen (2020, p. 87). Traditions of cooperation between Germany, Austria, Switzerland and, to a certain extent, Luxembourg and Liechtenstein, show that drama production and distribution – as well as transnational media communication in general – are oriented toward specific geo-cultural markets, which cross nations but are rarely totally global (Przybylski et al., 2016, pp. 240–241).

In recent quality drama projects, several collaborations have come to fruition in German-speaking countries. One of many examples is *Freud* (2020, Netflix/ORF), a crime television series about the young Sigmund Freud, which was mainly shot in

Prague and first aired on the Austrian public-service channel ORF (Österreichischer Rundfunk, Austrian Broadcasting Corporation) before it was released transnationally by Netflix. However, in some cases, the interviewed practitioners took a critical view of the size of the German-speaking region because, in their view, it leads to an unproductive self-centredness. Edward Berger, one of the directors of *Deutschland 83*, the first season of *Deutschland*, spoke specifically (and with a clearly negative undertone) of a “self-satisfied market that [...] can survive if it produces for Germany, Austria and Switzerland instead of for the world” (personal communication, 26 November, 2018) when he discussed structural reasons for the alleged quality deficit of German series. Berger noted a difference from smaller countries, such as Denmark, which is often referred to in the industry and media discourse on German quality drama. Smaller nations, he and others suggested, are forced to sell their series to foreign territories in order to secure larger budgets. A sense of self-centredness and intense closeness, as observed in past studies on TV drama production in Germany (e.g., Wirth et al., 2001, p. 106), has also been discussed with respect to other larger European markets. For example, Marco Cucco (2018), reflects critically on various obstacles to transnational cooperation in Italy, including “unambitious companies, [...] that are unwilling to take risks and whose objectives do not transcend the limits of the nation” (p. 204). The television and film industry in Germany have similarly been accused of a lack of transnationalisation and, linked to this, of conservatism and a low level of innovation (e.g., Fröhlich, 2010, p. 131).

As far as the transnational networks of the television landscape in Germany are concerned, the country’s size and economic power can be seen as beneficial at the same time. Martin Behnke, one of the writers of the Netflix drama *Dark*, argued that the German-speaking region is an “insanely financially strong [...] interesting market” (personal communication, 15 March, 2018) for foreign and transnationally operating programme providers (when he was asked to assess the status quo of German TV series and their production conditions). In the same vein as the scriptwriter Behnke, many practitioners diagnosed a “gold-rush mood” in German drama production (e.g., Honeck, personal communication, 20 March, 2018) and increased transnationalisation of the German television landscape. Further, against the background of the changed television landscape, they discussed how the transnationalisation of German drama can be accelerated and intensified.

In terms of the advancement of transnationalisation, existing transnational connections can be an asset to producers. Many Germany-based producers are affiliated with transnational conglomerates. Frequently and traditionally, such subsidiary firms act highly independently to adjust to national and local market conditions (see Przybylski et al., 2016, p. 223). However, the producers of *Deutschland 83* and its production company UFA Fiction argued that an existing link to the mainly British Fremantle company played an important role by making the export of their show much easier (e.g., Kosack, personal communication, 29 January, 2019). Both RTL, the German commissioning broadcaster of the first season of *Deutschland*, and the German production company UFA Fiction belong to the Bertelsmann conglomerate

alongside the transnational Fremantle. The exchange within Bertelsmann points to the “networked activities [...] from a local to a global level” brought up in Hansen’s model of glocalisation (2020, p. 86) and to traditions of transnationalisation in the German TV market.

With respect to the increased transnationalisation, Bob Konrad (personal communication, 14 February, 2018), one of the writers of the gangster drama *4 Blocks*, emphasised the new commissioners, especially SvoD services, that have entered the German television market. Through these new players, German television drama also becomes more interesting for production companies abroad. According to Konrad, British producers in particular have started to produce shows for the German-speaking region, under the purview of these new commissioners and distributors. In line with this diagnosis, in 2020 BBC Studios announced the founding of the production company BBC Studios Germany. In 2019, the BBC’s commercial production and distribution subsidiary had already entered into a strategic partnership with German public-service broadcaster ZDF (Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen) to develop and produce “high-end” content. The Mallorca-based crime action comedy *The Mallorca Files* (2019–, BBC One/ZDFneo/France 2) is the first project to emerge from this British–German cooperation and points to the transnationalisation of public-service broadcasting.

### **Public broadcasters as glocal and crucial players in German television drama**

In the practitioners’ discourse on German quality drama, public broadcasters, despite their engagement in co-financing and co-production arrangements, have often served as an example not of transnationalisation but of national and local characteristics or – with a clear negative connotation – of provinciality. “They are still incredibly local. That’s their job”, the scriptwriter Bob Konrad (personal communication, 14 February, 2018) said about the ARD (Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten), the joint organisation for Germany’s regional public-service broadcasters (when I asked him and his two writer colleagues about the possible transnationalisation of the German TV industry). Indeed, the broadcasting mandates of ARD and the additional public-service broadcaster ZDF explicitly include regionalism (Gransow, 2018, p. 217), in the sense of local content and local specifics (distinct from Hansen’s and Roudometof’s understanding of the region ranking above the nation, see Hansen, 2020, p. 87). Such regionalism can be a criterion of “quality journalism” as well and might therefore influence the discourse on the value of public-service media (Mayer, 2013, p. 91). Nevertheless, in the analysed practitioners’ negotiations, the federalism of the ARD in particular often appeared as a problem – a structure causing excessive bureaucracy and complicating screen-writing processes.

But for all their federalism and locality, public broadcasters also have transnational features to varying degrees. In a sense, transnationality is already inscribed in their founding histories, as Britain's BBC was the central model for the organisation of television in the Federal Republic of Germany (Garnarcz, 2016, p. 175). For years, ARD and ZDF have transnationally networked through joint niche cultural programmes with foreign public service partners: In the German-speaking context it is 3sat (a cooperation of German ARD/ZDF, Austrian ORF and Swiss German SRG), whereas ARTE is a joint German–French TV channel. Financial participation through co-financing and co-production by the subsidiaries ARD Degeto and ZDF Studios (formerly ZDF Enterprises) as well as shares in foreign media companies (in the case of the latter) also point to transnational dimensions.

In particular, ARD and ZDF have also been involved as minor co-financiers of Scandinavian and especially Danish series (e.g., Hansen & Waade, 2017, pp. 150–151; Redvall, 2020, pp. 127–128), which are often labelled *Nordic noir* and were frequently discussed in the interviews. For some practitioners, such foreign investments by ARD and ZDF were a controversial topic. For example, Ulrike Leibfried (personal communication, 16 June, 2016), formerly a freelance editor at RTL and now managing director of UFA Fiction, criticised the outsourcing of creativity. From her point of view, the willingness to take risks with co-financing is greater than with internal German productions. One might read this assessment as an almost nationalistic argument, according to which German funds should be spent on German content and should only flow to producers in Germany. First and foremost, however, Leibfried complained about the lack of willingness to take risks, a commonly voiced and long-held criticism of public broadcasters and the German television market in general (e.g., Fröhlich, 2010, p. 130).

### **Commercial television and steps toward transnational “quality TV”: The case of *Deutschland 83***

Several interviewees also criticised the long-standing commercial, ad-funded channels RTL, Sat.1 and ProSieben (run by two opposing media conglomerates, Bertelsmann's RTL group and ProSiebenSat.1 Media) for having been too formulaic and conservative in their original fiction (see also Eichner & Esser, 2020, p. 190; Mikos, 2016, pp. 170–172). However, practitioners involved in *Deutschland 83* praised RTL for commissioning this risky project in 2015. Relatedly, Jörg Winger, the producer and co-writer of the *Deutschland* trilogy, argued that “this kind of quality series” (personal communication, 15 May, 2017) has not existed in Germany before. This assessment can surely be countered by various examples, especially from public-service broadcasting, which has commissioned ambitious ongoing serials (e.g., *Im Angesicht des Verbrechens* [In the Face of Crime], 2010, ARD et al. and *KDD – Kriminaldauerdienst* [Berlin Crime Squad], 2007–10, ZDF). Nevertheless, various production stakeholders stated that *Deutschland 83* was a deliberate attempt to implement quality TV in German television fiction. Thereby, RTL reacted to the



transnational, Western trend of “quality” serials but also to the national debate on the lack of German quality TV. In this regard, *Deutschland 83* shows the simultaneity and interconnectedness of globalisation and localisation processes in the sense of glocalisation.

The domestic viewing figures for this 1980s Cold War drama were below RTL’s expectations, leading German media to regard the series as a flop after its broadcast in late 2015. The disappointing ratings reveal different tensions. Producer Leibfried (personal communication, 16 June, 2016) hinted at the gap between audiences for commercial and public-service television. Indeed, historical miniseries and “event” films at ARD and ZDF, such as the UFA Fiction production *Ku’damm 56/59/63* (2015/2018/2021, ZDF), achieved much higher viewing figures than RTL’s quality TV project *Deutschland 83*. Criticism regarding RTL’s online distribution of *Deutschland 83* indicates a tension between internet-based “catch-up” TV and “classical” broadcasting shaped by nationally and historically grown broadcasting slots. In the meantime, both ProSiebenSat.1 Media and the RTL group have increasingly invested in German drama productions for their respective SvoD services (RTL+ and joyn). However, they have repeatedly failed to distribute their drama originals successfully on their national, linear channels.

Linked to linear and non-linear concepts of television, tensions between national and transnational distribution also came to light. On the one hand, German broadcasters, with their comparatively large audiences, often still rely on a mainstream, mass-audience approach, on linear broadcasting and therefore on procedurals instead of complex storylines spanning several episodes. Thus, arguably, *Deutschland 83* did not succeed in the national RTL environment. On the other hand, there seems to have been a greater demand for “subtitled drama” in European and North American television and streaming markets since the emergence of *Deutschland 83*.

This period drama was initially an image-building programme for the nationally operating network RTL but increasingly became subject to mixed financing from partners from different countries: SundanceTV and Hulu in the US, Canal+ in France, Sky in Italy and Channel 4 in the UK are distributors, which partly co-financed the further seasons *Deutschland 86* and *Deutschland 89* as well. A large part of the budget is said to have come from international sales, which were initiated by the Fremantle distribution company as part of the RTL Group. The industry discourse on German quality TV drama has repeatedly revolved around the linked question of how local drama productions could be increasingly distributed abroad.

## **Exports and transnational distribution**

The desire for transnational distribution and success is not new, as a look at German film history shows. In the early 1930s, German film producers sought to make high-quality *Großfilme* (big films) that also circulated on the international market and

had the chance to become successful on a broad economic basis (Garncarz, 2016, pp. 132–133). But, unsurprisingly, in accordance with the recent shifts related to serial television drama and streaming distribution, the discourse on transnational exports no longer focusses on cinema and the single feature film but rather is tied to serial content and the various platforms available in today's transformed and digitised television context.

In studies on German television, a lack of exports has often been noted and attributed to the tradition of the “total buyout”, according to which producers cede all rights to the commissioning broadcaster. In line with these studies, some of the interviewees (especially Kosack, personal communication, 29 January, 2019) argued that, in giving up all rights, German producers are left with fewer opportunities to generate funds through foreign sales (see also Wirth et al., 2001, p. 106). Thus, they have fewer incentives to attempt to tap into foreign markets and are also less able to invest additional income through foreign sales via foreign subsidiaries (Castendyk & Goldhammer, 2018, p. 38). In contrast, British production companies are said to have succeeded in penetrating external markets, such as Germany, through their local subsidiaries and format sales (Castendyk & Goldhammer, 2018, p. 38), thus strengthening their transnational position.

However, some practitioners also questioned the claim that German drama hardly travels. Indeed, in less “prestigious” non-English-speaking markets and in the daytime programming of various nations, German series have been present for some time. The long-running crime procedurals *Derrick* (1974–98, ZDF) and the daily soap *Sturm der Liebe* (*Storm of Love*, 2005–, ARD/WDR/BR), licensed to more than 20 countries, are particularly well-known and successful examples of drama exports from Germany. *Heimat*, especially the first season, subtitled *Eine Deutsche Chronik – A German Chronicle* (1984, ARD/SFB/WDR), as well as the Rainer Werner Fassbinder drama *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1980, ARD/WDR/RAI) were likewise critically acclaimed beyond West Germany. The interviewed practitioners also repeatedly referred to these two examples when exploring quality drama in German television history and bringing national traditions into the discourse on transnationalisation.

Later event miniseries, such as *March of Millions* (*Die Flucht*, 2007, ARD) and *Dresden* (2006, ZDF), both of which are mostly set during the National Socialist era and originate from the production company UFA Fiction and its predecessor team-Worx, also circulated beyond the German-speaking world (see Cooke, 2016). However, the US distribution of the three-episode period drama *Generation War* (*Unsere Mütter, unsere Väter*, 2013, ZDF), following five young German friends and their different paths through Nazi Germany and World War II, took place only in a few art house cinemas (Scott, 2014). Nevertheless, Florian Cossen (personal communication, 30 October, 2018), one of the two directors of *Deutschland 86*, and other television professionals presented this production as a turning point toward the more widespread distribution of German television drama. Still, harsh

accusations of revisionism, which *Generation War* faced especially in the US (see Scott, 2014) and Poland (see Saryusz-Wolska & Piorun, 2014) due to its focus on young, “good” Germans in contrast to negatively portrayed Polish minor characters, can also be interpreted as a problematic and ultimately obstructive perception of German television fiction abroad. Among the television professionals interviewed, there were equally critical voices about corresponding “event” dramas on National Socialism. Some complained about the formulaic narration and a falsification of history (Borries, personal communication, 21 February, 2019) or feared a thematic narrowing (e.g., Leibfried, personal communication, 16 June, 2016).

*Deutschland 83* and its two sequels, *Deutschland 86* and *89*, with their 1980s settings, pop culture references and strong serialisation, have taken different paths than previous period dramas from UFA, which remained strongly anchored in the television film format by containing only two or three 90-minute parts. Further, *Deutschland 83* represented a change in drama exports from Germany by breaking through to English-speaking markets. *Deutschland 83* was the first German television drama to run on a US channel (Rogers, 2018), albeit only on the niche pay TV channel SundanceTV. However, when broadcast on Britain’s Channel 4 in 2016, the production became the “highest-rated subtitled drama in television history” (Oltermann, 2016), and many English-language reviews were favourable (e.g., Genzlinger, 2016). Several production members of *Deutschland* and representatives of the production company UFA Fiction (e.g., Winger, personal communication, May 15, 2017) emphasised the series’ transnational success, especially in English-speaking markets, while other practitioners relativised or even questioned the show’s great fortune. Gebhard Henke, for example, who was still an influential executive at Westdeutscher Rundfunk Köln (West German Broadcasting Cologne; WDR, a constituent member of the ARD network) at the time of the interview, argued that one could hardly assess the claim that *Deutschland 83* was an international hit: “They don’t tell you that they’re selling it to Lithuania for 1,000 euros; I’m just going to say that mockingly” (personal communication, 8 March, 2018). Henke’s statement might be interpreted as malice from an arguably less transnational or less successful competitor, but it also points to the non-transparency of television exports. The details of licence payments are rarely made public, and so the economic significance of foreign sales of German television fiction can often only be guessed at. When asked about the relevance of this situation, Joachim Kosack (personal communication, 29 January, 2019) of UFA Fiction noted that the individual sums may not be huge but transnational sales nevertheless make an important difference, as the production company can invest these additional revenues into story development. According to this line of argument, export earnings are relevant precisely for funding screenwriting – the production phase, which is a main focus of the industry discourse on German quality drama.

Regardless of the actual licence payments made, the production of *Deutschland 83* represented an innovation for TV drama exports in the German context – on the one hand because it reached the US market, which until then had been closed to German

television fiction, and on the other hand, because the US broadcast took place before the German one. The long-standing rule that a series must first succeed in the German market before being exported to other countries no longer seems compelling. Redvall (2018, p. 148) differentiates between series that are sold transnationally as a finished, filmed and usually already nationally distributed product and those that are still in production during licensing. In Germany, the latter scenario is now also conceivable, where producers think about the foreign distribution from the outset. For *Babylon Berlin*, for example, the “venture capital” (Henke, 2018, personal communication, 8 March, 2018) flows through Beta Film. This transnational distribution company from Germany thus also acts as a producer, “in the certainty that it will be refinanced by international partners”, as noted by Henke (personal communication, 8 March, 2018), who was involved in the development and production of the first two seasons.

This certainty likely stems from the recent expansion of channels and platforms, which surely is not limited to the expanded television landscape in Germany. In Europe and beyond, the demand for series has increased because the various online services must have extensive and varied offerings. In light of digital distribution, broadcasters and platforms can now also include niche dramas in their programming, such as German-language series, which in many countries are only or primarily distributed with subtitles.

Alongside export sales, another scenario has emerged: productions for transnational SvoD platforms, where the transnational distribution is intended from the outset. Individual streaming services – first and foremost Netflix – release series ad hoc in different territories (see Lobato, 2019, p. 69) such that export occurs almost automatically and without the intermediate step of licence trading. This process can be problematic for production companies. Producers at the Berlinale Series Market 2020 complained that Netflix only pays local prices, and they highlighted the loss of additional income through licence sales (Fey et al., 2020; see Krauß, 2020). In the interviews, corresponding criticism of Netflix’s inadequate pay was hardly ever voiced, and if at all, only “off the record”. Probably, the practitioners were careful not to discredit Netflix as a potential or actual partner. Given the period of my surveys (2016–2019), it is also likely that many of the interviewees had not yet cooperated with this player or similar, transnational SvoD platforms and still looked at them optimistically.

Particularly in relation to Netflix, the television professionals also dealt with the question of language. Often, they regarded German language as a hurdle with regard to the transnational distribution of local productions (e.g., Henke, personal communication, 8 March, 2018). However, in this respect, the television landscape in and beyond Germany also appeared to be on the move, following the practitioners’ self-reflections. Are subtitled TV dramas becoming increasingly accepted, even in English-speaking countries, in light of the diversified, transnational television market, facilitated by digital platforms and their option to consume content in different

languages (including various subtitles)? The interviewed television professionals (e.g., Behnke, personal communication, 15 March, 2018) regularly expressed this hope. Such faith stems from the relative success of some Danish series in the UK in the 2010s (see e.g., Eichner & Esser, 2020). “[A]ll non-English is [...] completely exotic, still”, however, emphasised Frank Jastfelder (personal communication, 16 November, 2018), director of original drama productions at Sky Germany. For the period drama *Das Boot* (2018, Sky Deutschland), which had not yet been released at the time of the interview, Jastfelder predicted a comparatively large audience in Sky’s territory of Great Britain, as one of its original languages is English (alongside German and French).

Thus, one strategy to succeed transnationally is to include English dialogue. In fact, English dialogue and English-speaking characters can be found in several contemporary quality drama productions from Germany. For example, *Deutschland 86* and *Deutschland 89* show an increase of English language use compared to the first season, *Deutschland 83*. In *Unorthodox* (2020, Netflix), the follow-on project by *Deutschland 83*’s and *Deutschland 86*’s head writer, Anna Winger, English clearly dominates over German and Yiddish, the other, comparatively exotic language of this miniseries about a young Jewish woman fleeing her ultra-Orthodox community in New York to live in Berlin.

The mystery drama *Dark* represented an innovation in dealing with the language question, as its commissioner Netflix also made an English-dubbed version available in a language area where foreign films and television programmes (excepting children’s and animated formats) are usually only subtitled. But some practitioners regarded *Dark*’s dubbed version in English as a mere “test balloon” (Jastfelder, personal communication, 16 November, 2018) and a clever marketing tactic with which Netflix continued to make a name for itself. It was not seen as a sustainable structure pointing the way to the future or as a way to generally increase the export opportunities for German drama productions.

Discourses on language also affect the production and screenwriting steps. Several quality TV drama projects from Germany have been characterised from the outset by English–German bilingualism in their script development and therefore by a global simultaneity and interconnectedness of the globalisation and localisation processes. Sometimes, writers also primarily wrote treatments, concepts or first dialogues in English. English-speaking consultants were brought in, or editors from non-German commissioners such as Netflix gave notes in English.

### **Transnationalisation of project networks and individuals**

In the meetings with foreign or at least transnationally oriented financiers, economic and creative exchange processes occur in the linked co-productions and co-financing arrangements and in the emerging project networks, alongside a potential

transfer of knowledge (Szczepanik, 2018, p. 168). In screenwriting, approximations of processes from the US industry, and especially of the *showrunner* and the *writers' room* models, emerge, but national specifics also come to light. In addition to such ways of writing and producing television dramas, the interviewed practitioners negotiated how they and their colleagues transnationalise their profiles and cooperation, at the micro level, within individual project networks and screen idea work groups.

At least some players in the German television industry are now taking a more transnational approach to television production. Jörg Winger, for example, the co-creator of the *Deutschland* trilogy, founded Big Window Productions within the UFA group. Under Big Window Productions, he aims to develop both English- and German-language series for transnational distribution. Likewise, Hanno Hackfort, part of the “HaRiBo” writers’ trio behind the gangster drama *4 Blocks*, expressed interest in doing “something in a more international framework” (personal communication, 14 February, 2018). Hackfort referred to communication with a British production company that had shown interest in one of HaRiBo’s ideas but insisted on having a German co-producer on the project as well. Here, the relevance of the national considerations within the context of the tendency toward transnationalisation emerges once again. This brings to mind the theoretical approach of glocalisation and suggests limits in the globalisation or transnationalisation process.

Even *Babylon Berlin* with its immense transnational distribution points to the continuing relevance of national financiers, as all of its investors have their roots in Germany. The contributions of Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg and Film- und Medienstiftung NRW (North Rhine-Westphalia), two large players in Germany’s federal funding landscape, also hint at local dimensions in the funding. Given the concurrency of local, national and transnational money, *Babylon Berlin* can be categorised as glocal rather than just transnational.

When it came to acquiring financiers and licensees for this prestige series, the internationally renowned director Tom Tykwer took on an important role according to Gebhard Henke (personal communication, 8 March, 2018). In this respect, *Babylon Berlin* illustrates that the transnational appeal of individuals, teams, groups and production companies can form an important selection criterion for the composition of screen idea work groups, broader project networks and their promotion through the production company to potential financiers as well as for the commissioning and later greenlighting of projects.

For the first German Netflix series *Dark*, transnational selection criteria were decisive as well. Likely, Netflix selected the production company Wiedemann & Berg for this project because it was responsible for the earlier transnationally successful feature film *The Lives of Others* (*Das Leben der Anderen*, 2006), winner of the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film in 2006. Further, writer Jantje Friese suggested that her and Baran bo Odar’s first work experiences in the US industry,

along with their idea for *Dark* and the notable success of their German cyber thriller *Who Am I* (*Who Am I – Kein System ist sicher*, 2014), were important factors for Netflix in selecting them:

[For Netflix], it was totally great that we had already learned this American way of working. [...] [When] they were looking, [...] [they] had the feeling: Okay, you can [...] somehow work with them, and they speak our language. By that I don't just mean English. (personal communication, 1 March, 2019)

This claim of experience in the US industry as well as those in other interviews (especially Winger, personal communication, 15 May, 2017 and Berger, personal communication, 26 November, 2018) must be seen against the background of “self-interest, promotion, and spin”, which, according to Caldwell (2008, p. 14), generally characterises interview statements by television and film producers. Like Friese, several interviewees seemed keen to appear transnationally versed and networked, at least in the direction of the US and Western Europe.

The transnationality of individual projects and their actors can also play an important role long after the initial idea development and screenwriting when it comes to the evaluation of the first season of a series and the question of continuation. The director and writer Achim von Borries minimised the significance of viewing figures for the linear broadcast of *Babylon Berlin* on the German public broadcaster Das Erste (by ARD network), which some in the media and industry regarded as rather disappointing, claiming that the series was “an international super-success [...] [a] huge thing” (personal communication, 21 February, 2019). The screenwriter Hanno Hackfort (personal communication, 14 February, 2018) stated that recognition abroad should be considered alongside or instead of audience ratings in a national context. According to these arguments, transnationality is thus an important criterion for the evaluation of TV series. In this sense, transnationality is closely related to the debates on quality in German TV drama. Again, the simultaneity and interconnectedness of globalisation and localisation processes, in the sense of glocalisation, comes to the surface.

## Conclusion

The analysed industry discourse on German quality TV drama clearly exhibits glocal traits. While trends in the transformation of television “from a national, largely broadcasting market to a transnational multiplatform market” (Turner, 2018, p. 137) are also evident in Germany, national specificities, such as federalism, continue to shape large parts of public-service broadcasting and media funding (which is increasingly also involved in quality TV drama). Against this background, the practitioners often dealt with global or rather transnational, regional, national and local aspects at the same time when they negotiated the expanded television landscape in Germany with new commissioners, ways of financing and distribution or cooperation in particular project networks.

The simultaneity of global and local aspects also came to light when the television professionals discussed the content and forms of so-called quality TV and the transnational potential of German TV series. Frequently, they tended to argue “the more local, the more global” (as emphasised by the scriptwriter Bob Konrad [personal communication, 14 February, 2018] with an ironic undertone) or pleaded for “local stories [...] with universal problems or universal characters” (Jastfelder, personal communication, 16 November, 2018) when they explored the requirements for transnational circulation. Such an emphasis on both local and global aspects proves once more that glocalisation is a fruitful approach for contextualising the current industry discourse on quality TV drama in Germany in a transformed, digitalised television landscape. In contrast to perceptions of broad globalisation, the glocalisation approach might also help us consider the limits of the increased transnationalisation in German television drama. Many commissioners and their serial productions still mainly serve a national or at least a German-speaking market. Further, when the practitioners explored transnationalisation or drew on foreign productions for comparison, they generally confined themselves to Western, especially Anglo-American and Danish dramas. Finally, when looking at the transnationalisation of German television drama, the corresponding limitation on European and North American contexts and the continual relevance of the nation as a crucial point of reference should not be overlooked.

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