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## The glocalization of *The Daily Show*

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### ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the domestic success and international growth of *The Daily Show* (TDS) targeting specifically the Jon Stewart period (Comedy Central, 1999–2015), It then focuses on the glocalization of the program resulting in an official Dutch version *The Daily Show: Nederlandse Editie* that appeared on Dutch Comedy Central in 2011 and two contrasting unofficial versions, *Al Bernameg* (Arabic: البرنامج) broadcast on CBC/OnTV Egypt, 2011–2013 and then MBC MASR in 2014, and the *Heute Show* that has been on ZDF since 2009. This article concludes that the glocalization of TDS allowed a faux news satire show with universal appeal to take advantage of an emerging global media environment shaped by cross-cultural exchanges between the global and the local. By comparing and contrasting the three foreign versions, a blueprint for a sustainable glocalized TDS franchise emerges: a stable political environment, local relevance and the protection of a public channel.

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“[Jon] Stewart has become so popular that many people yearn for their own version of *The Daily Show*” (Rogak, 2015, p. 154). This quote perfectly encapsulates the international influence of *The Daily Show* (hereafter TDS) from 1999 to 2015 when Jon Stewart was the host. The show was not only a huge domestic success but an international one as well. Furthermore, it spawned a variety of international adapted foreign versions. Despite numerous studies (Anderson & Kincaid, 2013; Baumgartner & Morris, 2006; Baym, 2005) as well as a few articles that dealt with foreign versions of TDS in *News Parody and Political Satire Across the Globe* (Baym & Jones, 2012), the actual specific phenomena created by these new foreign format adaptations of TDS has not yet been fully explored. This is surprising as TDS is by far the most dominant show regarding the amount of effect-based and content analysis studies. (Burgers & Brugman, 2021)

This article seeks to remedy this by exploring key research questions linked to understanding the factors that led to the show’s rise in popularity and the specific trajectory of its success. Popular TV shows in the US, even if they garner international success do not necessarily become international franchises. How can we account for TDS’s ability to generate and inspire one official and diverse unofficial spin-offs? What strategies did

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these foreign versions implement to combine the global and the local, i.e., a “glocal” new hybrid form? This term glocal is derived from glocalization a term coined by the sociologist Roland Robertson to describe “micromarketing: the tailoring and advertising of goods and services on a global or near-global basis to increasingly differentiated local and particular markets” (Robertson, 1995, p. 28). In the context of the media and specifically television programs, this means “tailoring” the global appeal of a program to the local consumption of the specific viewers in one country or region.

This article posits that the success of TDS is rooted in its timelines, its universality and finally its capacity to be glocalized: i.e., adjusted and tailored to each market, thereby expanding an international media landscape shaped by cross-cultural exchange. This renegotiation between global and local result in the opening of new cultural spaces or as the academic scholar Darling-Wolf puts it “the global, national, and local are mutually constituted in contemporary popular culture (Darling-Wolf, 2015, p. 21). Among the possible foreign adaptations of TDS, three were chosen: (1) *The Daily Show: Nederlandse Editie*, an obvious choice because it is the only official TDS spin-off; (2) *Al Bernameg* (Arabic: البرنامج) an unofficial version, deemed important because of the strong political link to the events of the Arab spring as well as Jon Stewart’s direct involvement, which is rare for an unofficial version; (3) *The Heute Show*, because it is the closest in terms of name and format, but also longevity as it has been on the air since 2009.

These three programs cover official and unofficial versions of TDS, diversity in media transmission (Network television, YouTube, public television) but also geographic diversity taking the viewer from the USA to Europe, then Africa and finally settling in the Middle East. We sought to understand and analyze each version through the lens of glocalized format adaptation. Before looking at the three glocalized versions of TDS, it is important to look at how TDS became a domestic and then international success.

### **Domestic success: creation and history of *The Daily Show***

The initial inspiration for TDS was not comedy but news. CNN planted the “seeds of what years later would become *The Daily Show*” in the brain of future co-creator Lizz Winstead in 1991 (Winstead, 2013, p. 98). She felt that the cable channel was selling the first Gulf War as spectacle, an enthralling video game with its own theme song. She saw in this news spectacle the premise for a satirical news show. A few years later in 1995, she brought this idea to Comedy Central when she was hired as head writer for a new late-night show that would start in 1996. Doug Herzog, the network’s president, wanted to pattern this show after ESPN’s *SportsCenter* (Smith & Stewart, 2016, p. 11), which would appeal to young male viewers. So, Herzog hired Craig Kilborn of *SportsCenter* as the host of the new show and enlisted Madeleine Smithberg, who he knew from her work on *Late Night with David Letterman* and *The Jon Stewart Show* to help Winstead create what would become *The Daily Show*.

In accordance with Winstead’s vision, TDS satirized the familiar format of the serious Walter Cronkite-esque newscast and blended it with the late-night TV talk show format, seen on programs like *The Tonight Show*. After only three years Kilborn left TDS to replace Tom Snyder on *The Late Late Show* (Carter, 2011, p. 101) and was himself replaced by Jon Stewart. The new host of TDS made two major changes: first the show would now have a clear political point of view and purpose and second the random mean-spirited tone that

could punch up or punch down, or not punch in any particular direction would have to go (Rogak, 2015, pp. 61–70). Stewart wanted to attack the powerful, not the weak with his signature style of faux news and biting political satire.

The new host was perfect in this role as he drew from his experience as a stand-up comic to deliver jokes as he was delivering the news. Stewart's previous stint hosting *The Jon Stewart Show*, a 30-minute late-night talk show on MTV had also allowed him to hone his interviewing skills. By “borrowing equally from the traditions of the authoritative nightly news and the entertainment talk show” (Baym, 2005, p. 262), this new version of TDS became an award winning powerhouse.<sup>1</sup> Three years later the audience had tripled since Kilborn's departure reaching an average viewership of one million Americans (Levin, 2003).

There are several factors that can explain why TDS grew to be so successful in the US, especially with the 18–49 demographic. First Stewart's political point of view was optimally positioned to take advantage of the aftermath of the election 2000 controversy.<sup>2</sup> As traditional news media had lost prestige, viewers turned instead to TDS which reflected the public zeitgeist at that time: “the *Show's* coverage of the Republican and Democratic conventions helped put both the show and Stewart on the map. ‘[I]n the year 2000 Jon Stewart officially became a public intellectual,’ said Robert Thompson, director of the Bleier Center for Television and Popular Culture at Syracuse University” (Rogak, 2015, p. 78).

Second, technological developments had given viewers instant access to media via YouTube and the Internet. The wide use of YouTube especially had a direct effect on TDS as Smith noted “YouTube launched quietly in February 2005. *Daily Show* clips were perfect for passing around on the web the day after they had aired, swelling the show's viewership beyond what was captured by traditional Nielsen ratings” (Smith & Stewart, 2016, p. 149). As the length of these excerpts could be short this fit in perfectly with the American public's short attention span. Moreover, an all access— all device media environment is more favorable to young people who will more likely watch TV on their computer, tablet or smart phone whenever they want as opposed to the traditional method of appointment TV where you have to be in front of a TV set at a specific time.

Third was the growth of the audience. In the early period of TV history (1950s-1990s) the number of available TV channels went from three (ABC, CBS, NBC) to hundreds, while the viewership went from a limited number of American households to an international audience. And finally, the erosion of clear borders of hard and soft news or what Baym refers to as the blurred borders of the media environment (Baym, 2005, p. 262). As media studies scholars Michael X. Delli Carpini and Bruce A. Williams said “... the form and content of news and entertainment [have] come to resemble each other more closely” (Delli Carpini & Williams, 2001). This new media environment was rife for a hybrid politainment (politics + entertainment) late-night program. A respected news journalism vacuum emerged as young people became more disillusioned with traditional news media and politics in America. TDS and Jon Stewart were positioned then to fill this vacuum.

### **International success: *The Daily Show: Global Edition* and international correspondents**

As TDS became increasingly popular in the US and to accompany this growing global interest, Comedy Central sold CNN International (CNNI) the rights to broadcast the show globally. On July 10, 2002, it was announced that CNNI would air a 30-minute

weekend version of TDS called “*The Daily Show: Global Edition*” (TDS-GE) which would start on September 21, 2002. TDS-GE would feature clips from TDS editions shown during that week, the new international show would be “the first non-news entertainment program according to CNN International general manager Rena Golden” (Petrozzello, 2002).

Tony Fox, the spokesman for Comedy Central, explained the rationale for the cable channel’s decision to broaden the audience of TDS: “We think that the content of the ‘Daily Show’ will work on an international level because of the ubiquitous nature of news today” (Petrozzello, 2002). Despite the compression of five days into a 30-minute “best of” TDS for each week, the tone and the content would remain exactly the same. Undoubtedly, this selection process allowed CNNI to choose only the parts that would most likely resonate with a global audience, while keeping the US relevant parts only for the US show. Consequently, TDS-GE became part of the marketing strategy of “glocalization employed by contemporary TV enterprises seeking global markets (MTV, then CNN, and now others)” (Robertson, 1995, p. 40).

This unlikely marriage between CNNI and Comedy Central led Jon Stewart to quip: “If you can make it in Bahrain, well, you can make it in the United Arab Emirates, from what I understand. . . .I’m not sure (CNN) realizes that we’re actually making fun of them” (St, 2002). Despite Stewart’s misgivings the carriage of TDS-GE by CNNI would prove to be pivotal in the dissemination of TDS into restricted markets that had either limited internet access or a limited selection of international satellite channels.

Not only was the Global Edition bringing TDS to an international audience, but it also encouraged the producers of the show to incorporate this international aspect into the program itself. First, they hired two Canadians, Samantha Bee (2003–2015) and Jason Jones (2005–2015). One year later two members of the United Kingdom were also added: the stand-up comic John Oliver (2006–2013) and the actor/comedian Aasif Mandvi (2006–2015). People of international origin infused the show with an outsider’s viewpoint. Author Kliph Nesteroff remarked about the TDS correspondents “. . . John Oliver, Samantha Bee, when you are outside of the United States, you can almost see the United States better than the United States can see itself” (Carter, 2020, sc. 18:46).

After the departure of Oliver in 2013 for *Last Week Tonight* and Samantha Bee in 2015 for *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee* TDS needed new international blood. Consequently, one year later in December 2014 Trevor Noah (2014–2015) made his debut on TDS as a correspondent (Smith & Stewart, 2016, pp. 337–338). The show also hired American correspondents who were more diverse and international looking like Olivia Munn (2010–2011) whose mother is Vietnamese, Al Madrigal (2011–2016) who is of Mexican and Sicilian descent, Jessica Williams (2012–2016) an African American and Hassan Minhaj (2014–2018) a first generation American born of Indian parents. These changes allowed for increased representation and diversity on the show as Akbar Ahmed, a professor of Islamic Studies at American University, noted how the show was able to connect to the international community of Muslims: “He got guests like Musharraf. He, later on, got Malala [Yousafzai]. He had me, but he also had people like Aasif Mandvi and people like Hasan Minhaj. So people are seeing, ‘Well, these guys are just like us.’” (Smith & Stewart, 2016, p. 264)

TDS incorporated these new more diverse looking correspondents while keeping up its credo to use “jokes to tell the truth” (Smith & Stewart, 2016, p. 264) and this was what contributed to TDS’s domestic success but also its interest for foreign countries as evidenced by the creation of official and unofficial international spin-offs.

### The Netherlands: The Daily Show—Nederlandse Editie

In 2011, nine years after the launch of TDS-GE, *The Daily Show: Nederlandse Editie* (The Daily Show: Dutch Edition)(hereafter TDS-Dutch), the only official version of TDS was launched via glocalized format adaptation. But before the viewers could watch TDS-Dutch, they were first introduced to the original TDS on Dutch Comedy Central. In April 2007, one of the channel’s programming advisors recommended broadcasting TDS and told the local newspaper *Leeuwarder Courant* (“Dat Wordt Lachen,,” 2007): “As stand-up comedians we are of course happy that we no longer have to watch Jon Stewart on a small screen device, but on TV.”

Then, four years later, the TV station had five hours more broadcasting time per day (beginning from 3 p.m. instead of 8 p.m.); hence, there was extra room for new local productions. On January 31, 2011, TDS-Dutch premiered on Dutch Comedy Central. The host of the show was Jan Jaap van der Wal, the programming advisor mentioned earlier who recommended broadcasting TDS on the Dutch Comedy Central channel. The comedian was already well-known as team captain on *Dit was het Nieuws*, the Dutch edition of the British satire show *Have I Got News for You*. TDS-Dutch began with a three-week trial to demonstrate its relevance for the channel, after which a continuation (or cancellation) would be considered.

In the interviews leading up to the first episode of TDS-Dutch, Van der Wal stressed that although he was a big fan of Jon Stewart, the newly produced show would not be a one-to-one copy of the American version (Takken, 2011a). Nevertheless, on multiple occasions he said that the show is a “tribute” to Jon Stewart, and he visited the original show in New York a few times to talk with the producers and learn from their experience. There were clear similarities between TDS and Dutch-TDS: The host wore a suit, sat behind a news desk, interacted regularly with correspondents, and the same design was used (made possible because it was owned by the same parent company).

Furthermore, glocalized format adaptation meant emphasizing “local relevance.” Differences in the media landscape between the two countries also influenced its content. Whereas the original TDS was said to be a countervailing force in the polarized US media landscape, and against FOX News in particular, the Dutch media were much less partisan—making such a role less relevant. Accordingly, Van der Wal predicted that instead of relying a lot on TV news (as in the USA version), their show would refer much more to newspaper coverage. Broadcasting on the politically neutral Dutch Comedy Central had an advantage, according to the host, because it would appear more neutral on that channel than if aired on public TV (Donkers, 2011).

In 2011—and for a long time afterward—the Netherlands had no daily news satire show; all earlier attempts (“De Nieuwste Show” on Nederland 3, a public television channel in 2007–2008, and “Comedy Central News” on Dutch Comedy Central also 2007–2008) had failed. Van der Wal attributed these failures to the fact that the comedy writing teams were too small and of extremely poor quality. To circumvent this, TDS-Dutch put together a strong team of comedians who, years afterward, almost all would become well known in their own right.<sup>3</sup> However, this team was still much smaller than what Van der Wal had

witnessed when he visited the set of TDS (Donkers, 2011). Budgets for TV productions are smaller in the Netherlands, as smaller audiences translate into smaller ad revenues. The show received mixed reviews in the weeks after it began to air. Whereas the quality newspaper *NRC* praised the initiative, one recurring criticism from other media was that it was not timely enough, noting that several topics were two weeks old.

The humor itself was also criticized as not being funny enough. The highlight of the first episode was, according to the newspaper *De Telegraaf* (“Graal,” 2011), a guest appearance by Jon Stewart (recorded at the New York studio), who gave his official blessing to the show. Some critics remarked that the interview with Jon Stewart was a painful moment for the host Van der Wal himself, because Stewart outperformed him in wittiness. In this interview, Stewart already wondered about the Dutch edition’s future: “Will it become *The Monthly Show*?”

Another frequent problem, besides the content, was simply the difficulty for people to find the Dutch Comedy Central station on their TV, because it is a marginal channel that very few people watch. Hence, regarding ratings, the show attracted 136,000 viewers (1 in 125 Dutch citizens) (Stolker, 2011) with its first episode, which was still above average for a show on this channel. Moreover, this was proportionally more than TDS in the United States that draws on average 1.5 million viewers (1 in 200 US citizens). The director of Comedy Central North-Europe, already before the show, mentioned that quality not ratings would be decisive for the show’s continuation: “If few people watch but we find the show fantastic, then we will continue” (Takken, 2011b). The show, additionally, made real-world impact: an item about children with down syndrome in TV shows was quite controversial (Beerekamp, 2011), and one item about Parliamentary questions was even discussed in Parliament itself (van Gelder, 2011).

Altogether, Van der Wal considered TDS-Dutch a success as the show made (in his view) major improvements in the first three weeks (van Gelder, 2011); it succeeded in demonstrating that it is possible to make a daily satirical show in the Netherlands. After the first season, the host said that he and his writing team wanted to continue with the show and that they would soon meet with Dutch Comedy Central to discuss this (van Dalen, 2011). Whether these talks actually took place or not is not borne out by any documentation, but the fact is that the “Dutch Edition” did not make it past the test run of 12 episodes and no new seasons were broadcast. The reason for its cancellation appears to be that Dutch Comedy Central decided to not produce its own programs any longer and that the channel aimed for a different target audience (Albers, 2013).

One conclusion, which was shared in many media newspaper and magazine articles, is that TDS-Dutch was not given sufficient time to fully develop itself with only three weeks (i.e., twelve episodes). It took the original version (and even Jon Stewart) many years for it to reach the popularity, quality, and level of impact that it eventually achieved. Producing high-level attractive satire, simply, requires patience from the host channel—and this was not given to the program in the context of *Comedy Central* in the Netherlands. Therefore, although customizing the global content to local culture was important to make the program palatable to Dutch viewers, local media pressure would turn out to lead to its demise.

## Egypt: *Al Bernameg*

Although the official Dutch version did not fare well unofficial versions of TDS where the format is followed closely but without a licensing agreement have been more successful. This was the case of *Al Bernameg* in Egypt where TDS-GE was instrumental in its creation. The country had limited foreign channels; so, they could not watch TDS on Comedy Central or a sister Comedy Central channel as the audience in the Netherlands was able to do. However, they could watch CNNI and thus, TDS-GE, which caught the eye of a new fan: Bassem Youssef who remarked “CNN is boring, except that it carried *The Daily Show* ‘Global Edition’” (Smith & Stewart, 2016, p. 264). Youssef would go on to host an unofficial Egyptian version called *Al Bernameg* (“the show” in Arabic) and become known thereafter as the “Jon Stewart of the Arab World” (Palmer & Parry, 2015).

The audience of the program was mainly young globalized Egyptians (El Gabry, 2014) aware of its local and global culture. Youssef also embodied this spirit of glocalization as he was incredibly modern and loyal to the spirit of TDS but at the same time highly anchored in Egyptian popular references from an intercultural standpoint.

Even if *Al Bernameg* was not the first political satire show in Egypt, it marks, in reality, the progress of an Egyptian cultural movement of imitation that found in American culture a way to modernize and change Egyptian society. This program was unique and innovative in the Egyptian media landscape and garnered impressive success in that country, while sparking a visible echo in several other Arab countries. It was the most watched show across the region, with 30 million viewers every week (Paget, 2018). Jon Stewart invited Youssef to appear several times on his show and declared on the occasion of Bassem Youssef’s selection among the 100 most influential people in the world by *Time Magazine*: “I am an American artist and Bassem Youssef is my hero” (Stewart, 2013).

*Al Bernameg* filled a huge void, created by the silencing of Egyptian satirists who have not been allowed to criticize the monarchy and Egyptian politicians since 2014.<sup>4</sup> Nothing related to God, sex, government or social taboos (Berah, 1987) was permitted. The reasons for censorship have always been religious and political, but the decisions of the censors followed primarily a political agenda. Gamal Abdel Nasser, Egypt’s second President (1956–1970) used Egyptian cinema and media to promote his socialist model and his pan-Arabism in the 1960s. Anwar Sadat, Nasser’s successor (1970–1981) promoted a liberal policy of economic openness to foreign capital in the 1970s, and Hosni Mubarak, the next Egyptian president (1981–2011), tried for more than 30 years to convince the people with a façade of democracy. Politics therefore has the last word with the Egyptian censor, even over Al-Azhar, the greatest religious authority in Egypt.

When *Al Bernameg* was launched, Egypt was experiencing unprecedented times of political unrest and uncertainty which opened a new window of freedom of expression that contributed to the success of Bassem’s program. The show emerged as another democratic means to vent popular frustration outside of the long sitting protests in Tahrir Square.

Jon Stewart and his *Daily Show* shaped Bassem Youssef’s perception of political satire (Store, 2017), which had a huge impact on *Al Bernameg* in 2011. Youssef acquired a thorough understanding of American politics and the way Stewart constructed his political criticism. He also started to master Egyptian politics inventing a new brand of Egyptian political satire inspired by TDS and at the same time adapted to local Egyptian humor.



He successfully “Egyptianized” America and “Americanized” Egypt through his show and illustrated the cultural globalization of the Egyptian youth ongoing since Sadat and his open-door policy of economic liberalization in Egypt. The outside appearance was very American because Jon Stewart’s imprint was very easily recognizable in the setting, the style and the political approach, but the humor and the questions addressed and the obstacles to their free expression were very Egyptian. Youssef who embodied the clash between liberals and Islamists in Egypt, was accused, numerous times, of insulting Islam and mocking President Mohamed Morsi (2012–2013). The main targets of the show were indeed the Muslim brotherhood leaders and preachers. He scrutinized their speeches and ridiculed them drawing on popular culture and Egyptian jargon. Contrary to most Egyptian TV shows, Youssef addressed his audience in Egyptian Arabic, a colloquial dialect, instead of the traditional Classical Arabic. This colloquial dialect is the popular language spoken on the streets. The show’s language was full of outrageous satire, swear words and sexual innuendos. He also frequently alluded to popular jokes, famous ads to sharpen his message. For example, in season 2 episode 20 he sang “My Dear Homeland,” a famous Nasserist operetta to attack the Muslim Brotherhood for their close ties with Qatar.

One of the most popular episodes<sup>5</sup> dealt with President Morsi’s visit to The National University of Science and Technology campus in Islamabad to receive a Ph.D. The show parodied Morsi’s outfit, speech and English. The satire in this episode was biting and outrageously funny and above all, the first of its kind in the Middle East. The impact of *Al Bernameg* on Egyptian politics was so great that it occupied all public and media outlets.

The force of Youssef’s version of *The Daily Show* lies in its popularity among the Egyptian and Arab youth. He became popular on YouTube and had immense success on most of the popular social media in the Middle East, above all Facebook and Twitter. He satisfied a whole generation’s craving for freedom of speech and transgression by giving voice to their thoughts after generations of silence.

Faced with the incontrovertible success and the growing influence of his program on the politics in Egypt, *Al Bernameg* was suspended in 2013, after the coup d’état of the Egyptian army, again raising many questions about media freedom in Egypt. Many have criticized Youssef for facilitating the end of the democratic process with the coup and the departure of Mohamed Morsi. The latter was, indeed, a “favorite target” of Youssef and the army did not react until Morsi’s hasty departure and his replacement by Abdel Fattah El Sisi in May 2014. A couple of weeks later, the host announced the end of the show due to “overwhelming pressure on both the program and the channel airing it” and had to flee Egypt with his family. The same highly popular political satire used against Morsi was no longer allowed by the new military regime. The window of free expression had now been closed shut. Political satire through *Al Bernameg* was too radical for the Egyptian regime and could only be tolerated in the brief period of political chaos and uncertainty. As soon as the military regime retook power laughter was replaced by fear. Bassem Youssef declared in 2017:

Comedy and satire are always a thorn in the side of authority. What makes it work here [in the USA] is that authority is forced to accept it, or at least doesn’t have the power to shut it down. But back in Egypt, the Islamic regime and the military regime are quite similar. It’s just that one

of them is more brutal than the other. In the Middle East, tyrants live on fake respect and fear. Someone making fun of them will shatter the very thing that they hide behind. You can't be afraid of someone you are laughing at. This is why both have very severe reactions to satire. They want you scared not laughing at them.

It didn't change anything in my work. I knew my days were numbered so I better go out with a bang. (Store, 2017)

Humor is a very serious matter in Egypt and can be very risky. Youssef was sued numerous times both by the Islamist regime of Morsi as well as by the military regime of Al Sissi. He also received several death threats and finally “tired of struggling” (Kingsley, 2014), he left Egypt putting an end to his show. Youssef was considered a threat because *Al Bernameg* was more than just a show, it was an expression of an activist movement aspiring for freedom of expression and political emancipation.

The show's sharp satire mirrored the Egyptian mood at the time of the “Arab spring:” blunt, raw, explosive and very Egyptian. The expression *awlād al-nukta*,<sup>6</sup> or Sons of Jokes was again revealed through his show. Although a convincing version of TDS, *Al Bernameg*'s display of Egyptian jokes and satire brought a local Egyptian flavor to TDS, targeting very powerful media men and high ranked politicians from different, often opposing, political movements but with one thing in common: corruption. In this case the glocalization of the format made the show explosive and unsustainable.

### Germany: *Heute Show*

The *Heute Show*, contrary to *Al Bernameg* and TDS-Dutch, was actually featured in Baym and Jones's book (Kleinen-von Königslöw & Keel, 2012). Another difference is that Germany was the only “host” country where the coauthors lacked direct access to information and research. Due to this specificity, two interviews were included to supplement our discussion and analysis. The first is with the coauthor of the aforementioned article on the *Heute Show*, Professor Katharina Kleinen-von Königslöw. The second was conducted with Stephen Denzer the production coordinator for the *Heute Show* from 2010–2019. These two interviews were crucial in providing more context and a better understanding of the creation of the German version of TDS.

The *Heute Show*, unlike *Al Bernameg*, the other unofficial TDS version explored in this article, was never perceived to be a great danger by the German government. It arose from a different context. The *Heute Show* was broadcast on the German public-service channel *Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen* (“Second German Television”) or ZDF for short. ZDF was wary and—unlike what happened with TDS-Dutch—took a more tentative approach by launching the *Heute Show* (“The Today Show”) monthly during the first season in 2009. In 2010, during the second season, it was given a weekly slot on Friday night at 11:00 pm and has held that spot ever since.

In Germany, where the aging population has become problematic, the glocalized format adaptation had to take this into account. Kleinen-von Königslöw said that the impetus to create the *Heute Show* was ZDF's search for a younger audience, coveting especially the 18–49 demographic and this was also confirmed by Denzer: “The average viewer of ZDF is 61 compared to 46 for RTL viewers.” Programming *Heute Show* has thus been a strategic decision to appeal to younger viewers through intelligent, sophisticated political satire, and

at the same time to underline the “public value” of the channel (Kleinen-von Königslöw & Keel, 2012, p. 70). The show is able to underline public value by increasing German youth’s interest in global and local politics. TDS and programs like it were thought to have brought a growing number of politically disinterested young voters to the polling booths in the US. This is especially important for Germany as there has been “a decline in party membership and voter turnout over the last decades” (Kleinen-von Königslöw & Keel, 2012, p. 71). Moreover, German youth as of July 22<sup>nd</sup> 2008 had access to TDS-GE via Comedy Central on German TV in English with German subtitles (Anzeiger, 2008) or they could watch the original TDS online.

The *Heute Show* was launched the following year in 2009. Denzer explained that this link was not necessarily direct as they were initially influenced by other shows, and they had wanted to do this show already since 2002.

**Interviewer:** TDS-GE was brought to Germany in 2008, was this instrumental in the creation of the *Heute Show*?

**Stephen Denzer:** No, I had seen TDS with Jon Stewart much earlier in 2002, but a public channel like ZDF takes a long time, and I was not able to put together anything at that moment. In 2007, we started a satire show called *Die Neues aus der Anstalt* (= “News from the [Mental] Institution”). But we were not only inspired by TDS, but also by the Australian satire show CNNNN and the British satirical program *Have I Got News for You*.<sup>7</sup>

ZDF, as discussed above, launched the *Heute Show* in order to attract a younger demographic. They achieved this goal and had good ratings, as evidenced by the episode that aired on June 6, 2014, the highest-rated episode so far, with 3.90 million viewers and an overall market share of 25.1%. That episode also racked up 1.57 million viewers and a 23.5% market share in the target 14–49-year-old demographic. The latest statistics from ZDF indicate that the *Heute Show* is ranked 1 out of a total of 36 programs on ZDF for October 29<sup>th</sup> in the 14–49 year demographic with a market share of 23.4% and 1.47 million viewers.<sup>8</sup> Although when observing the live audience on TV, one notices that the viewers are old, meaning that the demographic appeal has not changed, Denzer explained that this is merely due to the fact that people under the age of 30 make up only 14% of the German population, the majority being between 50 and 60.

The *Heute Show* was not meant to be an official spin-off of TDS for as Denzer explains, the creators wanted to make substantial changes that reflected the specific German mentality.

**Interviewer:** There is actually one official version which is a Dutch show that didn’t last very long. However, the *Heute Show* is an unofficial version. Was this a conscious choice made by ZDF?

**Denzer:** Yes, because we made some changes and we wanted to make a deeper dive into the German mentality and the history of German news. For example, we have one character, who is still on the show, named Ulrich Von Heesen an old grumpy man. He is there because we wanted to reference for the audience a well-known German journalist,<sup>9</sup> who is very well known that they could relate to. Another example is the character Tina Hausten, at ZDF there was a real anchor named Bettina Schausten. We took her as a role model that everyone knows. So, the audience can make the connection between the real anchor and the fake one we have created. So, this is an example of how we adapted the show to the German mentality. And the second thing, for example, the whole way our show was built was to be very fast paced. We had three reporters, we had different kinds of films in it—whereas Jon Stewart was the host and that was the whole show. Oliver Welke was smart enough to say, “I am not as well-known as Jon Stewart, I’m not on a niche channel, I am on ZDF, so I want to make this an ensemble show

not a show that revolves around the host.” That was the second biggest change. We have this construction called center-eccentrics. In the middle you have the normal host, the anchor. He is a funny ironic sarcastic guy. Around him the characters are all crazy in some way, like Gernot Hassknecht, who is screaming all the time, not behaving like a normal news reporter.<sup>10</sup>

There is not only this difference with the regular TDS, but as Kleinen-von Königslöw and Keel point out “the show was allowed to model itself as closely as possible on the main newscast of ZDF which is called *heute* (‘today’)—the title *Heute Show* is thus a play on [words involving] *The Daily Show* and the main regular newscast” (Kleinen-von Königslöw & Keel, 2012, p. 71). Despite efforts to adapt the *Heute Show* to the German mentality and a conscious effort to distinguish itself from its American counterpart, numerous similarities help the viewer identify the *Heute Show*, in the end, as a glocalized German version of TDS.

The host, Oliver Welke, uses the same faux outrage reactions and humor as Stewart does when reacting to news over his shoulder. The visual format is the same as the huge desk placed in the center of the studio. And they even have some of the same reporter characters, like Albrecht Humboldt (Alexander Schubert), who plays the Stephen Colbert right-wing pundit role on TDS before Colbert left to use it on *The Colbert Report*. Humboldt is an outside reporter and only member of the *Kirchenredaktion* (German for church editorial staff) who presents conservative viewpoints in a satirical and over-the-top manner. The previously mentioned Gernot Hassknecht works himself into a rage the same way that Lewis Black did on TDS’s “Back in Black” segment.

However, unlike in TDS, or as we saw earlier with *Al Bernameg*, the *Heute Show* will not be as biting nor as revolutionary, hewing closer to Horatian rather than Juvenalian satire.<sup>11</sup> Indeed when Jon Stewart’s name is brought up, Germans immediately think of Jan Böhmermann rather than the *Heute Show* host Oliver Welke, who is referred to as a “Teddy Bear” by Katharina Kleinen-von Königslöw. Stephen Denzer initially contested this description, seeing Welke as the German Jon Stewart and Böhmermann as the German John Oliver, because the satirist concentrates on only one subject like Oliver does on *Last Week Tonight*. Nevertheless, he conceded that Welke is indeed like a Teddy Bear and gets more sympathy whereas Böhmermann is harsher and more sarcastic.

They also had differing views about the effect of the *Heute Show* on Welke’s career. Kleinen-von Königslöw felt that it had not really contributed to making him more popular whereas Denzer felt it definitely had. However, there is one thing they both agree on: the *Heute Show* was heavily inspired by TDS in terms of format and spirit which led to a very glocalized format adaptation.

## Conclusion

As we have seen via the three foreign versions of TDS, glocalized format adaptation is an important vehicle for renegotiating the *global* to suit the needs of the *local* or what Robertson defined as the push and pull of homogenizing and heterogenizing forces (Robertson, 1995, p. 40). The media scholar Marwan Kraidy noted that “format adaptation reflects a new relationship between ‘culture’ on one hand and ‘social structure’ on the other hand. In order to overcome local cultural specificity, format adapters have to include into their work cultural elements that appeal to local audiences” (Kraidy & Murphy, 2008, pp. 347–348). This means, focusing more on newspaper coverage in the Netherlands, using colloquial Egyptian language in Egypt,

and referencing specific well known journalists in Germany. These new and adapted versions of TDS are examples of new hybrid forms of culture that are the product of the intermingling of the global and the local. Furthermore, Darling-Wolf lists the news as one of the media spaces that has undergone globalized hybridity “in which the global, national, and local are constantly and simultaneously (re)negotiated in the production, distribution, and consumption of popular cultural forms” (Darling-Wolf, 2015, p. 166). These new cultural forms, thus, create new imagined ways of mediating the world through a local lens or as the globalization theorist Arjun Appadurai argues “Such media transform the field of mass mediation because they offer new resources and new disciplines for the construction of imagined selves and imagined worlds” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 3).

TDS therefore successfully expanded internationally first via TDS-GE on CNNI and then through glocalized versions which spawned new imaginary worlds and new forms of popular culture. It took advantage of an emerging global media environment and technological advances that allowed for distribution to a global audience. Moreover, its content and format, the faux news satire show, has universal appeal. As Stephen Denzer from the *Heute Show* explained in his interview: “it’s always good if you have a format that everybody knows and watching news all over the world is basically the same. A news parody—and this is a big and huge advantage—is so easy to understand.”<sup>12</sup>

This universal appeal combined with local renegotiation allowed for the adaptation of TDS with varying degrees of success, in a wide variety of countries with different distribution methods and contrasting political situations. In Egypt, the volatile regime-changing situation led to the creation of *Al Bernameg* but ultimately also to its end. However, in stark contrast, the *Heute Show* is still on the air no doubt due to the political stability of Germany.

By contrasting and comparing these three foreign adaptations, a blueprint for a sustainable glocalized TDS franchise emerges: a stable political environment, local relevance and the protection of a public channel that does not have to worry about short term profit and can take risks by allowing a show to develop and grow.

## Notes

1. During Stewart’s period the show won 23 prime time Emmy awards and 3 Peabody awards.
2. The news media had declared that Gore had won Florida and declared him the winner of the election, then they said that Bush had won Florida and declared him the winner, then they finally stated that because Bush’s margin was 537 there would be an automatic recount.
3. Merijn Scholten, Owen Schumacher, Peter Pannekoek, Sander van Opzeeland, Niels van der Laan, Daniel Arends, and Kees van Amstel.
4. Censorship officially began in Egypt in 2014.
5. Season 2, episode 29.
6. Used to refer to Egyptians among Arabs for their sharp sense of humor.
7. Interview of Stephen Denzer by the first author, November 1, 2021.
8. This information comes from figures and statistics provided to the first author by Rahul Dasgupta of ZDF.
9. He is most likely referring to Claus Kleber the recently retired anchor of *heute-journal*
10. Interview of Denzer.

11. Satire can be grouped into two main categories: Horatian, derived from the Roman Satirist Horace (65–8 BCE) which tends to be playful mocking humor, or Juvenalian satire based on the writings of the Roman satirist Juvenal which is quite harsh and critical.
12. Interview of Denzer.

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