

Nov 04, 2016 by *Alvin Snyder*

Hollywood, Bollywood, and the Iraq War ^[1]

More movies are produced in Bollywood than in Hollywood, or anywhere else on earth. Some 900 films per year are released from Bollywood, in the teeming commercial hub city of Mumbai, known for centuries as Bombay, in India.

Bollywood films, mostly racy romantic and adventure sagas running three hours or more in length, can also be seen on regional satellite TV channels, which show the cultural-fare-without-borders to audiences everywhere, from everywhere.

But the tale to be told doesn't stop there. Today's digital satellite channel technology, which provides multiple audio tracks for language translations, provides additional commercial markets for television offerings of all sorts, from Latin soap operas to hard-hitting documentaries about the Iraq war. The world's diet of cultural fare from satellite TV has become remarkably rich and diverse, clearly the beginning of an era of "worldcasting" of remarkable proportions, one that's arriving almost everywhere and in a hurry.

The European Broadcasting Union (EBU) tells Worldcasting that Bollywood sells TV programming to transnational services such as British Sky Broadcasting (BSkyB), "serving Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi diasporas in the UK."

Hollywood, not Bollywood, films and movie star features are still the most popular for TV audiences worldwide, and co-ventures between producers on different continents are flourishing. E! Networks is teaming up with British Sky Broadcasting for a re-enactment of the Michael Jackson trial, in case you haven't seen enough of it. The Los Angeles-based E! Networks claims to be "the world's largest producer and distributor of entertainment news and lifestyle programming."

Close behind, and in many places ahead of Hollywood, is the telenovella, the Latin soap opera, popular even in Eastern Europe as early as the late 1980s, where it still flourishes. Telenovellas are now exported to more than 130 countries. All 318 episodes of the telenovella "Rebelda's Way," have aired in more than 40 countries. DVD's are now being distributed with telenovellas and other Spanish programming by Mexico's Grupo Television SA, Venezuela's Cisneros Group, and the U.S.'s Univision Communications. Major U.S. retail stores carrying the DVDs are Wal-Mart, Target, Best Buy, and Hollywood Media Corporation in Los Angeles.

TV France International has a near monopoly of TV program sales to French-speaking Africa, while BBC Worldwide calls itself Europe's No. 1 exporter of television programs. Last year it produced more than 600 hours of new programs, with most of the sales going to the U.S. market.

Programming from the BBC, especially nature programming and news, is helping the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) to stay on the air during its current labor dispute. Canadian broadcast unions accuse the CBC of trying to break the industrial strike by using

BBC material. (Toronto Globe TV critic John Doyle wrote that Canadian viewers might tune in to watch BBC news as a "novelty," but would soon tune out when cricket games began, in favor of looking elsewhere for Canadian news.)

Even educational TV programs are finding their way into prime time worldwide. The co-produced "Man's Odyssey," and its sequel "Homo Sapiens," by France TV 3 and Belgian national television RTBF pre-sold to 10 leading broadcast networks, says the European Broadcasting Union, as an example of how "educational programs can make it to prime time and, more importantly, attract huge audiences ... no topics should be considered as being innately boring."

TV audiences in Iraq are also being exposed to a range of program subjects from producers outside the country, via the U.S.-funded satellite TV channel Alhurra, which is not shying away from controversial programming to gain audiences in the Middle East. Although most of its broadcast schedule features news and current affairs programming, acquired programs provide "spice" to Alhurra's daily TV schedule, according to Bert Kleinman, president of Alhurra's parent Middle East Broadcasting.

Kleinman told Worldcasting that during the afternoon Alhurra's programs are oriented toward women, who enjoy Hollywood shows like "Inside Actors Studio," acquired from America's Bravo TV, plus programs purchased from others in such fields as travel, nature, health, and personal fitness. "Health and medicine are the big issues," says Kleinman, who stresses that audiences look to the U.S. for the latest trends in these subjects. Documentaries have been purchased from A&E (Arts and Entertainment), the History Channel, BBC, Nova, Granada TV (Britain), and others.

But in evening prime time, says Kleinman, when the man in the family is home from work (men, he said, decide what shows are watched in the evening in the Middle East), Alhurra's program schedule turns more toward news, current affairs discussion programs, and hard-hitting documentaries such as those acquired from the Frontline program, produced at Boston's public broadcasting station, WGBH-TV.

One such documentary, "Rumsfeld's War," produced by WGBH-TV with the Washington Post, focuses on the Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and the U.S. military in Iraq. In its description of the program, Frontline says that "With the United States Army deployed in a dozen hotspots around the world -- on constant alert in Afghanistan and taking casualties almost every day in Iraq -- some current and former officers now say the army is on the verge of being broken. The man responsible, according to those officers, is a secretary of defense who came into the Pentagon determined to transform the shape of the military."

Despite Hollywood, Bollywood, and telenovellas, there's a war going on.
