THE GLOBAL AUDIENCES OF DANISH TELEVISION DRAMA

**Pia Majbritt Jensen
& Ushma Chauhan Jacobsen (Eds.)**

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Contents

Preface

What makes Danish television drama series travel? This was the research question we asked ourselves following the unprecedented global export of Danish television drama in the early 2010s. The question also became the title of a collaborative research project, funded by the Independent Research Fund Denmark between 2014–2018, with additional grants from Aarhus University Research Fund (2013–2014) and the Carlsberg Foundation (2015–2016). The project engaged a consortium of nine scholars from Aarhus University, Aalborg University, and the University of Copenhagen, who collaborated closely with international research affiliates in a broad investigation of this question. The project was divided into three main areas: the first was related to the production forms and professional practices that lay behind the series; the second focused on their textual characteristics; and the third explored the reception of these series among global audiences. This anthology presents the insights and findings of the global audience study.

The global audience study has been a transformative trip – both literally and figuratively – for all of us. We would very much like to offer our deepest gratitude to all the people in Australia, Brazil, Germany, Japan, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and Denmark that gave their time to talk and share their valuable insights with us. We would also like to extend our special and sincere thanks to Yamila Heram from The University of Buenos Aires for conducting an online survey of Danish drama series' Argentinian audiences.

The global audience study presented in this anthology would have been impossible without the support of the Independent Research Fund Denmark, Aarhus University Research Fund, and the Carlsberg Foundation, as well as from our very encouraging, inclusive, and inspirational principal investigator, Professor Anne Marit Waade. Our appreciation also goes to the highly constructive peer reviewers, our invaluable student assistant, Katherina Vowles-Sørensen, and the always helpful editors from Nordicom: Johannes Bjerling, Josefine Bové, Kristin Clay, Jonas Ohlsson, and Karin Zelano.

Aarhus, December 2019

On behalf of all the contributors,
Pia Majbritt Jensen & *Ushma Chauhan Jacobsen*

Chapter 1

Unfolding the global travel
of Danish television drama series

Ushma Chauhan Jacobsen & Pia Majbritt Jensen

In the early 2010s, it became clear that the Danish public broadcaster DR (Danmarks Radio) was becoming a true global exporter of audiovisual television drama. This was completely unprecedented in the history of Danish television. By 2013, the three series *Forbrydelsen* [*The Killing*] (DR1, 2007–2012)[1], *Borgen* (DR1, 2010–2013), and *Bron/ Broen* [*The Bridge*] (SVT1/DR1, 2011–2018) – a co-production with Swedish public broadcaster SVT (Sveriges Television) and two independent production companies – had been exported to as many as 120 countries. To the surprise of both industry professionals and academics, it appeared that a public broadcaster from a relatively small nation with a language spoken by only 5.6 million people had succeeded in creating what could indeed be termed "a *peripheral* counter-flow" of television content (Jensen, 2016). The counter-flow was peripheral in many senses. First, in terms of the existing centre-periphery structure of the global television industry, Denmark has traditionally played a minor role as an exporter of television content. Second, Danish is far from a significant world language such as Arabic, French, English, Mandarin, Spanish, or Portuguese, which allow and explain the possibilities of wider export and circulation of content between territories; the export of productions in a smaller language such as Danish was thus notable. Third, the counter-flow was driven by a public broadcaster in a market characterised by a strong public broadcasting sector; this challenged existing media economics theories that emphasise competitive and commercial media market structures as more fertile contexts for successful exports. Finally, the counter-flow was creative; Danish television series – together with other Nordic television dramas and films that came to be branded under the popular label of Nordic Noir – had created an idea-based counter-flow. This impacted the forms of production, the narrative themes, and the aesthetic characteristics of series produced in other countries around the world. The successful global export of the three Danish television series appeared to remarkably challenge established theories on transnational content flows of television, which centralise the proximities of geography, culture, ethnicity, nationality, and language as key explanations for why television content flows the way it does.

This surprising and unprecedented situation prompted a consortium of scholars from three universities in Denmark to ask the question: "What makes Danish television drama series travel?" It was a simple question that became the title of an ambitious large-scale collaborative research project, funded by *The Danish Council for Independent Research* in the period 2014–2018, with additional grants from *Aarhus University Research Fund* (2014) and *The Carlsberg Foundation* (2015–2016)[2]. The ambition of the project concerned a broad investigation of the heterogeneous inter-relationships between diverse actors and practices involved in the production, circulation, and reception of Danish audiovisual drama in domestic and international markets (see Waade et al., 2020). It focused on three main areas related to the international success of Danish television drama: production forms and practices; textual characteristics; and reception by global audiences. This anthology presents the insights and findings of the third area concerned with the reception of Danish television drama by global audiences. The contributing authors were either part of the consortium (Eichner, Jacobsen, Jensen) or international consortium affiliates (Esser, Kaptan, McCutcheon, Meleiro) and directly involved in studying audiences of Danish drama series in seven countries around the world: Australia, Brazil, Denmark, Germany, Japan, Turkey, and the UK. A smaller online survey conducted in Argentina by research project affiliate Yamila Heram from The University of Buenos Aires is not included in the anthology but published elsewhere (see Heram, 2020).

The aim of this anthology is to present the plethora of interesting findings that emerged from the audience study. These findings are multifaceted not only in terms of showing the particularities of television landscapes in different countries, but also in showing the different theoretical, conceptual, and methodological angles used by individual researchers. We believe this anthology – with its extensive focus on global audiences – presents a novel addition to the increasing body of scholarly work on the success of Danish television series, to the field of audience studies focusing on the reception of non-Anglophone and non-domestically produced television content, and to the large body of research on Nordic Noir.

Why audiovisual content travels
– proximities and the transnational imperative

The investigation of global audiences takes its theoretical starting point from existing theories of proximities that account for the distribution, acquisition, and viewing of television content in places other than their production origin. These theories have commonly focused on how national, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic sameness or differences between audiences affect circulation (Rinnawi, 2006; Sinclair, 2009; Sinclair et al., 1996). Joseph Straubhaar's notion of "cultural proximity", which describes the "seemingly common attraction that audiences feel for cultural products […] close in

cultural content and style to the audiences' own culture(s)" (2007: 26), is particularly interesting given the export of Danish television drama to distant markets.

Straubhaar's (2007) theory of proximities also includes other proximities such as genre, value, and thematic proximities: "genre proximity" refers to a shared familiarity with certain genres and their structure of storytelling, like the police procedural or melodrama; "value proximity" refers to shared values, such as work ethics or moral codes; and "thematic proximity" relates to issues of, for example, gender inequality or immigration. Although these proximities were valuable explanatory devices in understanding the travel of Danish television drama, cultural proximity had to be especially scrutinised. Considering the recent work of scholars within the field of film and television studies, it is argued that the attraction of cultural products originating from elsewhere is not necessarily motivated by perceived similarities in content and style. Instead, the sensation of experiencing *difference,* or experiencing the "aesthetics of the exotic" strongly motivate acquisition and watching (e.g., Athique, 2014; Khorana, 2013).

The studies in this anthology provide insight into the transnational and transcultural nature of the contemporary media environment surrounding the travel of Danish television drama. Contemporary broadcasting and viewing practices continue to be nationally located and regulated, but they co-exist with complex transnational systems that support them (Athique, 2014). Many scholars agree that corporations, peoples, and practices are entangled in the processes of cosmopolitanisation and transnationalisation (Beck & Sznaider, 2006; Esser et al., 2016) supported by intensified global mobility and the extensive impact of global media. These macro-processes imply the creation of transcultural social spaces that foster interactions, knowledge sharing, and a greater awareness of cultural differences and similarities among people. Transnational and transcultural spaces permit the construction of a multitude of identities and hybrids of social practices that can no longer be overlooked. The contributions in this anthology describe the various ways the transnational imperative influences audience behaviour in routine, banal, and everyday ways.

Much work in media reception and media distribution engages with the transnational imperative in different ways. Ulf Hannerz (1996), Marwan Kraidy (2005), and Giselinde Kuipers (2012) have all discussed the existence of transnational, highly globalised cosmopolitan elites, who share cultural preferences and practices not necessarily associated with their own localities. Athique (2014) critically points out that transnational viewing practices including audience engagement with audiovisual content removed from their own cultural, ethnic, or national context – as would be the case with non-Nordic audiences engaging with Danish series – are very common around the world. Explanations for the travel of Danish television drama series would then fit comfortably within the current transnationally mediated context. It appears that the notion of *trans*cultural proximities is helpful in making sense of how television series produced in a distant and peripheral place such as Denmark might enable audiences in faraway countries to experience them in similar ways.

Studying the global audiences of Danish drama
– the three-leaf clover methodology

The investigation of Danish drama's global audiences embraces a concern for the transnational interconnectivities between people as well as their feelings and perspectives of national, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural senses of belonging. In other words, the audience studies attempt to strike a balance between methodological nationalism (Beck & Sznaider, 2006), that treats the nation state as the point of departure for any explanation, and the awareness that the nation state can no longer serve as the only reference point in light of the transnational imperative of the distribution and reception of audiovisual content.

The research project investigating what makes Danish television drama series travel is considered global as it included seven countries, covering many of the world's largest television markets, on four continents, as well as Denmark itself. Furthermore, the investigations covered English, Spanish, Portuguese, Japanese, and Turkish speaking contexts. In addition to representing a global sample of markets, with different degrees of cultural and geo-linguistic proximity to Denmark, the countries were also chosen because of the extraordinary success of Danish television drama (e.g., Australia, Germany, and the UK); their significant social, cultural, and linguistic differences from Denmark (e.g., Brazil, Japan, and Turkey); their differences in audiovisual translation practices (i.e., dubbing in Germany and Japan contrasted to subtitling in Australia and the UK); and importantly, their differing traditions for the import and export of foreign audiovisual content (i.e., Germany as an import-based market and the UK as an export-based market).

Methodologically, and in order to engage with the transnational and transcultural imperative, our understanding of "audiences" in this anthology is notably extensive. The global audience of Danish television drama is framed within a methodology described as a three-leaf clover (see Jensen & Jacobsen, 2017). The first "leaf" – or grouping – comprises distributors and buyers who act as critical gatekeepers to the importing market (Kraidy, 2005; Kuipers, 2012). Their decisions to acquire and programme Danish television drama are based on personal taste, interests, and dispositions as well as knowledge of the preferences and demands of their viewers and customers. The second leaf comprises professionals acting as cultural intermediaries, characterised by their claims of professional expertise in taste and value as well as being agenda-setters that define good taste and "cool" content (Maguire & Matthews, 2014; Rixon, 2011). Including journalists, television critics, and bloggers, these actors perform important communicative work to disseminate information about Danish television drama that promotes wider viewership. The third leaf comprises regular viewers who decided to watch the series through traditional or digital platforms. Their perceptions and practices are integral to the research inquiry as their decision to watch Danish television drama influences the decisions of distributors, buyers, and cultural intermediaries. The three-leaf clover of interacting actors, all of whom are audiences capable of making

decisions and exerting influence in different capacities, thus privileges an assessment of the interactions and interconnectivities between the three groupings; each of which fuels the circulation of Danish television drama in new markets.

This methodological design has the advantage of allowing a detailed understanding of the transnational distribution and reception of the series as well as the influence exerted by each audience grouping. Another equally important advantage lies in the openness and tolerance of generating rich and diverse forms of data that are crucial to respecting the differences of audiences in various countries on four continents, with different language and cultural fabrics and varying media regulations, systems, and practices. As should be evident from this anthology, the collaborative production of an asymmetric empirical aggregate – thick in some places and thin in others – made by diverse scholars, each with their own distinctive academic, cultural, national, linguistic, ethnic, and geographical background, has been valuable in providing a wide array of critical explanations to assess precisely what makes Danish television drama series travel. For example, empirical work conducted in Australia, Germany, and UK generated interviews with relevant industry people; media coverage collection; audience ratings of Danish series; and extensive interview data. In the work conducted in smaller and peripheral markets, such as Brazil and Japan, where the identification of regular viewers was difficult and where ratings were inaccessible, data gathering was subject to bricolage in the sense of what Lévi-Strauss describes as "making do" with "whatever is at hand" (2004: 7). Whatever was at hand in these cases included formal and informal interactions with all three types of audiences, programme brochures, blog posts, online comments, and an online survey distributed through social media platforms.

Cross-cutting themes

Each contribution in this anthology is contextualised within the framework of a specific country study and uses different conceptual resources to unfold the travel of Danish television drama. There are, however, four cross-cutting themes that contribute to the general understanding of contemporary television audiences and to a more specific understanding of the global audiences of Danish television drama series.

Different historical trajectories and varying intensities

Danish series gained global exposure following different trajectories and with differing intensities. We found, for example, that Australia is a special case in many ways as their Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) imported Danish series long before other non-Nordic markets. This deviates from the general understanding of how Danish drama series travelled to other territories via the crucial "shop window" of the British market, the relative success on BBC Four of *The Killing*, and into markets (Jensen, 2016) such as Brazil, Japan, and Turkey. The series were also received with uneven

interest around the world. In countries such as Australia, Germany, and the UK, the series could be safely characterised as successful among all three types of audiences and generated a large amount of press coverage (Eichner, 2017; Sparre & From, 2017). The interest for Danish television drama series in Brazil and Japan offers a sharp contrast; for example, although the initial broadcasting of *The Killing* on the Japanese pay channel "Super! Drama" in 2012 was an outcome of following international trends and inspired by the decisions made by the BBC, their popularity in Japan was decidedly limited. Furthermore, Japanese and Brazilian press coverage of the series had been scarce (see, for example, Jacobsen & Meleiro in this anthology).

Making the varying intensities of entry and interest explicit allows a nuanced and realistic understanding that resists the generalised and grandiose claims of popularity of Danish television drama at the global level. The intense focus on and recent success of Nordic Noir and Danish television drama in the UK, Germany, and Australia, and the ensuing academic interest in the phenomenon, should not prompt us to hastily conclude that Denmark is following in the footsteps of big exporting markets such as the US and the UK. The story of the global success of Danish television drama is much more nuanced, and perhaps serendipitous.

A global continuum from mainstream to art-house television

Our tracking of the distribution, acquisition, and viewing of *The Killing*, *Borgen*, and *The Bridge* show that the series underwent a transformation from a highly mainstream and ultra-popular primetime entertainment phenomenon in their native country of Denmark (see also Degn & Krogager, 2017) to an increasingly art-house phenomenon for niche audiences the further they travelled. The series attracted audience shares of between 40–60 per cent in Denmark. They occupied popular primetime slots on the public broadcaster channels with audience shares between 7–15 per cent in Germany. Although audience ratings were more modest in Australia and the UK, they were nevertheless impressive for the respective channels broadcasting the series (see Esser; Jensen & McCutcheon in this anthology). Finally, they became an ultra-niche phenomenon in Brazil, Japan, and Turkey (see Kaptan; Jacobsen; Jacobsen & Meleiro in this anthology). In this light, Danish television drama series have impacted the global few. In effect, when the series left the geo-linguistic region of the Nordic countries and Germanic neighbours, they were transformed to what could be termed "art-house television". Like art-house cinema, art-house television can be mainstream in one or several countries but considered artsy, edgy, and niche in others. Furthermore, similar to art-house films, art-house television series win awards at prestigious festivals and become the darlings of critics who articulate good taste in the public domain. And their broadcast on smaller channels watched by niche audiences with certain types of cultural and intellectual capital texture their art-house characteristics. They win critical acclaim; they are considered innovative, and they become related to the evasive term "quality TV" (Jensen, 2016; McCabe & Akass, 2007).

A paradoxical counter-flow to art-house transformation can also be detected, however. Although Danish television drama underwent transformation from mainstream to art-house the further they travelled, they also became highly influencial (with other Nordic drama, particularly from Sweden) for setting a Noir trend for television drama produced elsewhere (Creeber, 2015; Hansen & Waade, 2017). In 2015, for example, an Australian delegation led by Screen Producers Australia, in association with main Australian public broadcaster ABC, liaised with the Danish television industry (White, 2015). In the same year at the international content market MIPCOM in Cannes, one of the most influential international trends within scripted drama content was labelled "worldwide noir" because of the success of Nordic Noir, spearheaded by *The Killing* and *The Bridge* (Jensen, 2016).

Permeating audience groupings and bypassing gatekeepers

Two other interrelated themes that emerge are 1) permeating audience groupings and 2) the bypassing of national gatekeepers. Permeating audience groupings refers to the porous lines between the three types of audiences – for example, how buyers and journalists can also be categorised as regular viewers. The buyer who originally bought *Rejseholdet* [*Unit One*] (DR1, 2000–2004) for SBS Australia did so because she herself got "hooked" on it (Jensen & Jacobsen, 2020; Jensen & McCutcheon in this anthology). Another example is how journalists who reviewed the Danish series in the British press seem to have been watching the series as regular viewers to begin with and then later related them to their reports of domestic politics or fashion (see Sparre & From, 2017).

Related to the permeability of audience groupings is the fact that, in many countries, regular audiences and cultural intermediaries often bypass national gatekeepers and watch the Danish series on various semi-legal or illegal torrenting sites. This was normal practice among audiences in Argentina, Brazil, and Turkey, where the Danish series are not as readily available as in other countries, and often only through subscription video-on-demand services or pay-television (Jacobsen & Meleiro; Kaptan in this anthology; Heram, 2020). However, even in Australia and Germany, some audiences expressed that impatience with waiting for broadcasters to release newer seasons of the series led them to stream the series via unofficial channels. This is interesting in two ways: first, because it indicates the waning power of international distributors, national broadcasters, and other content providers in the face of new digital technologies that make illegal distribution easily accessible; and second, it raises the possibility of a substantial number of global "shadow" viewers of Danish television drama that are not accounted for in the official ratings.

The permeability of audience groupings and the bypassing of national gatekeepers – supported by developments in digital technology – show that no single group of actors is identifiable as overwhelmingly crucial to the global travel of Danish television drama. Instead, individual preferences made explicit through grapevine proximities –

which connect individuals in meshes of media industry and personal networks through practices of *viva voce* [word-of-mouth] (Jensen & Jacobsen, 2020) – circumvent the traditional linear stages of introducing new television content in new markets.

Authenticity, emotional realism, and cosmopolitan sensibilities

Although the study of global audiences was locally rooted in different parts of the world, and in contexts with varying degrees of geo-cultural and linguistic proximity to both Denmark and between each other, two overwhelmingly similar perspectives emerged regarding the reasons for watching the series. These reasons centre on the perceived authenticity and emotional realism present in their textual and narrative characteristics, and on what could be termed a cosmopolitan sensibility that the series evoked in their global audiences. First, a perception of authenticity and emotional realism are recurrent themes and discussed in all contributions in this anthology. Audiences strongly identify with what was perceived as authentic narratives portraying real and important societal and political issues, and authentic characters who appeared to behave, feel, and even look like themselves. Second, all the contributions directly or indirectly suggest that Danish television drama speak to the cosmopolitan sensibilities of close and distant audiences and their interest and desire for being part of a world larger than their own localities. Cosmopolitan sensibility ranges from a "stylistic sensibility" (where audiences clearly want to embrace and become familiar with diverse cultural influences), to a "psychological sensibility" (where they appreciate and value the cultural and social differences), to a more "political-ethical sensibility" (where audiences critique existing societal structures such as gender inequality and the power of the media over politics, against the backdrop of the series) (see also Jensen & Jacobsen, 2020).

The chapters

In chapter 2, "'Othering the Self and same-ing the Other': Australians watching Nordic Noir", Pia Majbritt Jensen and Marion McCutcheon explore how some international viewers of Danish television drama saw a lifeworld and society closer to their own than that depicted in domestic drama series – what they call a dialectic process of "othering the Self and same-ing the Other". This was a particularly salient theme in Australia, but also in Germany and Turkey, for example. Jensen and McCutcheon explain how the dialectic process resulted from a combination of factors, including the "hyper realism" of the aesthetics and character performances in the Danish series; the fairly limited knowledge that Australian audiences have of Denmark; Denmark's reputation as a progressive society worth aspiring to; and the "cultural cringe" viewers instinctively feel toward their own cultural products, such as television series.

Andrea Esser critically reflects on the role that the complex notion of "authenticity" played in the appeal of Danish drama series in the UK in chapter 3, "The appeal

of 'authenticity': Danish television series and their British audiences". Esser frames authenticity in a multi-disciplinary context using cognitive and affective psychology, neuroscience, and screen theory; tourism and television studies concerned with place and authenticity; and early globalisation theories. In the chapter, she argues how the series instilled a feeling of authenticity in global viewers in several ways – most importantly, through the emotional realism of seriality, character complexity, and subjectivity, as well as the external realism of the foreign language, people, landscapes, and places.

In chapter 4, "Brazilian encounters: Buyers and bloggers appropriating content", Ushma Chauhan Jacobsen and Alessandra Meleiro discuss the achievements of the peripheral appearance of Danish television drama series in the Brazilian telescape. After outlining the non-proximities between the Danish and Brazilian contexts, the chapter addresses the motivations of buyers operating in competitive media environments and the activities of bloggers as cultural intermediaries subtly appropriating Danish television drama to promote different forms of conversations. These include critiquing socio-economic challenges rife in contemporary Brazil and spreading their own socio-cultural or political interests and concerns to like-minded individuals connected through online networks and social media platforms.

The meaningfulness and engagement of Japanese audiences with Danish television drama are explored by Ushma Chauhan Jacobsen in chapter 5, "A cosmopolitan tribe of viewers: Crime, women, and *akogare* in Japan". Apart from accounting for the intercultural and linguistic challenges of conducting research in Japan, Jacobsen discusses how cosmopolitan sensibilities influence the experiences of Japanese audiences. She draws attention to the intricate and interdependent relationship between television content providers and their customers; discusses the practices of everyday cosmopolitanism and the *akogare* [desire] of the cosmopolitan housewife; and shows how Nordic Noir crime and mystery genres represented by *The Killing* and *The Bridge* resonate particularly well with Japanese audiences.

In chapter 6, "Sensing authenticity, seeing aura: Turkish audiences' reception of Danish drama", Yeşim Kaptan analyses how Turkish viewers came to regard Danish drama series as authentic and original works of art surrounded by a particular *aura*. This aura is considered significantly distinctive when compared with television drama originating elsewhere, including from the US and Turkey itself. This aura is seen to be irreplaceable and impossible to reproduce, also in the international remakes of the Danish series such as *Cinayet* (Kanal D, 2014), the Turkish remake of *The Killing*. Kaptan thus shows the continued importance of artistic aura and authenticity for viewer experience in the age of digital reproduction.

In the final chapter, "Lifeworld relevance and practical sense-making: Audience engagement with Danish television drama series", Susanne Eichner uses insights from the studies to examine audience engagement using the theoretical concepts of *lifeworld* and *action-guiding themes*. She argues that viewers across the globe valued Danish drama series and engaged with them for similar reasons, such as the authenticity of the stories and characters and the depiction of widely relatable topics like media and politics, female

empowerment, and tensions between family life and career. This, in turn, gave audiences stories with practical relevance to their lives at the specific time of consumption and offered important layers of connections across cultural and national boundaries.

Notes

1. The channel and years of broadcasting for the series in question are referenced at the first mention of a television series.
2. See http://danishtvdrama.au.dk

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Chapter 2

"Othering the Self and same-ing the Other"
Australians watching Nordic Noir

Pia Majbritt Jensen & Marion McCutcheon

Abstract

In this chapter we explore the international response to Danish television drama. Some of our study respondents perceived a lifeworld and society in Danish series closer to their own than they recognised in their domestic series, of which they were highly critical. We understand this as a dialectic process of "othering the Self and same-ing the Other". Though present to varying degrees in other countries, this process was particularly salient in Australia, where Danish series have enjoyed relatively impressive ratings on the Special Broadcasting Service over the past 15 years. We explain the dialectic process through a combination of factors, including the "hyper realism" of the aesthetics and character performances in the Danish series; the fairly limited knowledge that Australian audiences have of Denmark; Denmark's reputation as a progressive society worth aspiring to; and the so-called "cultural cringe" that viewers instinctively feel towards products from their own culture.

Keywords: transnational television, Nordic Noir, Danish TV, international television market, international television audiences, media policy and practice

Introduction

This chapter is an exploration of how some international viewers of Danish (and other Nordic) television drama recognise a lifeworld and society closer to their own than that depicted in domestic drama series. We term this phenomenon "othering the Self and same-ing the Other". This was particularly salient in Australia, where many respondents were highly critical of Australian (and American) television drama, which they thought did not realistically portray emotions, relationships, politics, or gender equality, and lagged behind the reality of what they experience in their day-to-day lives. Contrary to this, they felt Danish series better reflected current societal issues, resonating strongly with their own emotional and societal lifeworlds. This resonance seemed to stem from a perception that characters of Danish television

drama were authentic representations of Danish society, in terms of the characters' questionable actions, range of emotions, faulty personalities, and their "ordinary" physical appearances. Many respondents also resonated with the portrayal of gender roles, particularly those of women. Primarily based on empirical quantitative and qualitative data and findings from Australia, this chapter also refers to data from other countries where similar findings emerged: Brazil, Germany, Japan, Turkey, and the UK. We use data and findings from Denmark to contrast and highlight the international data and findings.

The chapter is structured in seven parts. First, we account for the chapter's methodological underpinnings, and second, the theoretical ones. Third, we situate Danish television drama series in the Australian market where, since the turn of the millennium, Danish series have been quite successful on the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), the country's second (and multicultural) public broadcaster. This is achieved through an historical ratings analysis of all Danish series broadcast on SBS during the period 2001–2016. In the fourth and fifth parts of the chapter, we examine how Australian (and other international) audiences perceive Danish television drama as depicting a lifeworld and society reflecting themselves and their own experiences to a significantly higher degree than American series and, surprisingly, domestic series. This leads to the sixth part of the chapter, where we discuss various explanations for this dialectic process of othering the Self and same-ing the Other, including: the "hyper realism" of the aesthetics and character performances seen in the Danish series; the fairly limited knowledge that Australian audiences have of Denmark; Denmark's reputation as a progressive society worth aspiring to; and, not least, the conditions and traditions of the domestic Australian television market. Finally, in the concluding part, we sum up the findings and theoretical lessons of the chapter.

Methodology

Methodologically, we follow the three-leaf clover model of audiences outlined in this anthology's introduction (see also Jensen & Jacobsen, 2017 for a detailed account of the model). This means that our understanding of "audiences" is not only comprised of regular viewers but also embraces two other audience groups considered crucial to explaining the wide export of Danish drama series. These audiences include: distributors and buyers acting as gatekeepers to foreign markets; and journalists, critics, bloggers, and other cultural intermediaries disseminating knowledge and promoting viewership of the series. In the case of Australia, we implemented the three-leaf clover methodology using three data sources.

We analysed regular audiences quantitatively and qualitatively, using two sets of data. First, we purchased and analysed television ratings data for Danish drama series, similar-genre Australian series, and other foreign-language drama series broadcast in Australia between 2001–2016 (OzTAM, 2016). We also purchased audience and

ratings data by gender, age, and educational attainment and calculated mean audience and share per episode for each series – then we tested for differences between demographic groups.[1] In addition to providing a demographic profile of the audiences of Danish series, the ratings provided important historical background to the increasing success of Danish television drama in Australia, not least when compared with other foreign-language drama.

Second, we held five focus groups with Australians living in the Greater Sydney metropolitan area. A professional agency recruited the 26 respondents in order to secure a wide representation of professions, educational levels, gender, ethnicities, and linguistic backgrounds. This resulted in a sample of respondents aged 25–63, with professions including acupuncturist, lawyer, university lecturer, music teacher, manager, and concierge. Some were bilingual, and some monolingual. Some were recent migrants to Australia (from Serbia, Iraq, and New Zealand), and some could trace their Australian ancestry back several generations. The interviews generated valuable data for exploring the reception of Danish drama from a wide variety of perspectives. Among other things, we explored whether Danish series were perceived as different or similar to series originating elsewhere, and how cultural, social, and political differences between Australia and Denmark were perceived by the audiences.

Interviews with two key gatekeepers at SBS provided a third set of data. One interviewee was former Channel Head Jane Roscoe, who was responsible for SBS's first acquisition of a Danish series in the 2000s: *Rejseholdet* [*Unit One*] (DR1, 2000–2004)[2], plus many of the subsequent series including *Livvagterne* [*The Protectors*] (DR1, 2009–2010) and *Forbrydelsen* [*The Killing*] (DR1, 2007–2012). SBS Channel Manager Ben Nguyen was the other interviewee. At the time of the interview in 2016, he was responsible for the overall programming strategy and green-lighting of foreign acquisitions. As gatekeepers to the Australian market, these SBS executives relied on their own and their audiences' tastes and preferences. With these tastes and preferences in mind, they determined SBS's interest in content on the international market, particularly content from unknown territories, producers, and broadcasters, as has been the case with Danish television drama.

Theoretical underpinnings – homophily, universality, and exoticism

We take our theoretical point of departure in existing theoretical explanations of the global flows of audiovisual content, explanations that have largely been grounded in notions of national, cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and geographic proximity *or* distance. In other words, the closer territory A is to territory B in cultural, ethnic, geographic, or linguistic terms, the more likely it becomes for territory A to export audiovisual content to territory B. If the cultural, ethnic, geographic, or linguistic differences are significant, it becomes less likely that territory B will buy and broadcast culturally distant audiovisual content. Joseph Straubhaar articulates this as "the

seemingly common attraction that audiences feel for cultural products […] close in cultural content and style to the audiences' own culture(s)" (2007: 26). The general idea is that trading foreign audiovisual content in local markets inevitably involves a certain degree of "cultural discount" (McFadyen et al., 2000). Cultural discount implies that a foreign programme loses some of its value when it does not translate as well into the local culture of the new market as it did in its home market because audiences do not fully understand the settings, institutions, cultural values, and everyday life portrayed. Taken together, this causes the audience to identify less with a foreign programme. Elaborations, discussions, and similar arguments about the cultural proximity thesis have come in many guises, and there is a general tendency to consider the movement and viewing of audiovisual content as limited to specific "geo-linguistic regions" (Sinclair et al., 1996) that share similar cultural and linguistic features. Geo-linguistic regions are often geographically close as well; for example, Scandinavia (Denmark, Norway, and Sweden), where audiovisual content is frequently exchanged. When transnational viewing and export flows are theorised, often explanations are found in the degree of shared ethnic, linguistic, or cultural similarities among territories and the audiences populating them (cf., Bore, 2011; Iwabuchi, 2002; Moran & Keane, 2004; Sinclair, 2009). This perspective resonates with the assumptions of homophily, which refer to the spontaneous attraction and trust that individuals experience towards people, places, and ideas that appear similar to their own (Mark, 2003; McPherson et al., 2001).

Rather than pointing to the devaluing effects of difference, other media scholars (e.g., Bielby & Harrington, 2008; Frau-Meigs, 2006; Oba, 2009; Olson, 1999) have embraced the universal as an approach to understanding the transnational distribution of audiovisual content. According to these scholars, we must consider that viewers may share – and audiovisual content may contain – universal or general themes and topics that transcend cultural particularities, and thus appeal broadly to worldwide audiences.

In contrast to explanations found in different types of proximities – or, the opposite, universalities – among cultures, geographies, languages, and ethnicities, another strand of theorisation points to the "otherness" and "exoticism" in foreign audiovisual content as a factor augmenting its appeal outside its territory of origin. Here, it is precisely the distance, or non-proximity, in cultural, geographic, linguistic, aesthetic, stylistic, and thematic elements – or the "aesthetics of the exotic" – that motivates transnational audiences to watch (Athique, 2014). This is exemplified by the "crossover audiences" for world cinema, such as Western audiences watching non-Western movies (Khorana, 2013), or when foreign films or television series gain cult status in another country (Rajadhyaksha, 2003).

Danish television drama in Australia – a growing quantitative success

Since the turn of the millennium, Danish drama programming occupies increasing amounts of screen time on SBS and attracts a growing audience, making Danish drama a vibrant option in the mainstream television schedule in Australia. Australia was the only country – and SBS the only broadcaster – outside of Denmark's wider geo-linguistic region of Nordic and Central European markets to acquire Danish series prior to the success of *The Killing* in the UK. The Danish series *Unit One*, Ørnen [*The Eagle*] (DR1, 2004–2006), *Nynne* (TV3, 2006) and *Anna Pihl* (TV2, 2006–2008) were all broadcast on SBS prior to *The Killing* (which was scheduled on SBS one year prior to its broadcast on British BBC Four). The explanation for Danish drama content finding a ready market in Australia is partly found in the remit of SBS, which was established by the Australian federal government in 1975. Its television service commenced in 1980 and is now available across Australia through a free-to-air service and on-demand streaming website and applications. More than half of its programming is in languages other than English, and its multi-lingual programming is made accessible to all Australians through the use of English subtitles (SBS, 2015a). SBS thus provides a cultural link for migrant communities in Australia as well as a window to the world for all Australians. With its mandate to reflect and service multicultural Australia, there is no other broadcaster quite like SBS (Ang et al., 2008). However, with only a tiny 0.3 per cent of the Australian population claiming Danish ancestry (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016), the most important reason Danish series occupy increasing amounts of screen time is the simple fact that SBS's viewers seem to *like* them. According to the heads of acquisitions and programming at SBS, Danish drama is highly engaging for SBS audiences and boosts viewer loyalty (personal communication with Ben Nguyen, 28 January 2016; personal communication with Jane Roscoe, 15 April 2015).

The evident attraction of Danish drama has resulted in continuous growth in the hours of Danish content programmed by SBS throughout the 2000s, as shown in Figure 1. Total hours of Danish language programming broadcast by SBS, for example, has increased from 20 hours per year in 2001–2002 to a high of 157 hours in 2009–2010, settling to around 100 hours per year from 2011–2012 (an overall average increase of 15 per cent per annum).

Figure 2 shows that as the number of hours of Danish-language programming broadcast by SBS grew, so did the number of people watching it. Between 2005 and 2016, both the average audience per episode for the first run of a Danish drama series and its average share grew by an average of 3.3 per cent per annum. This growth rate is more than eight times that of the growth in SBS's total annual share for people aged 16 years and over (which increased at an annual average of 0.4% over the same period). Danish drama also tended to attract larger audiences than other foreign-language drama on SBS, though they did not come close to surpassing English-language drama of a similar genre, either on SBS or the more frequently watched public broadcaster ABC.

Figure 1.   Danish drama on SBS: Total hours broadcast by SBS1 and SBS2
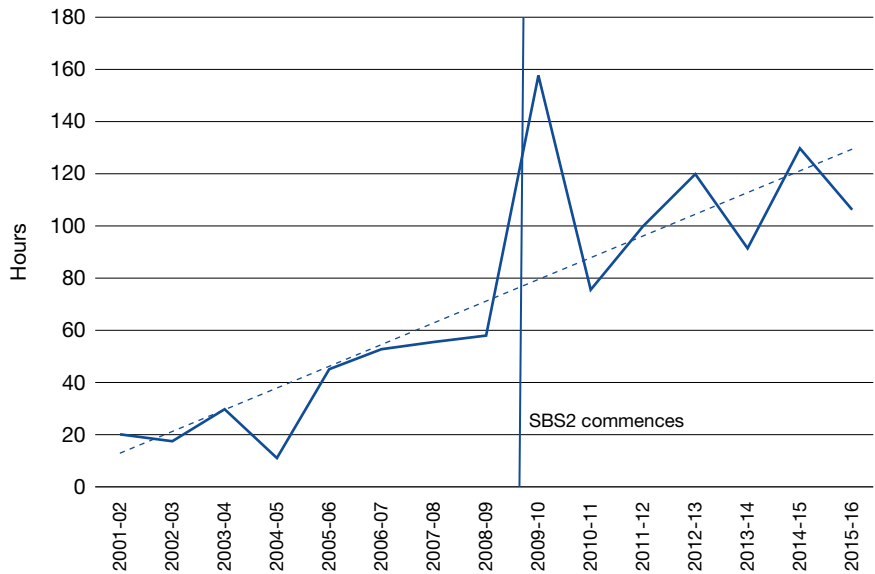
Source: SBS, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015b, 2016

Figure 2.   Danish drama on SBS: Average audience per first-run episode
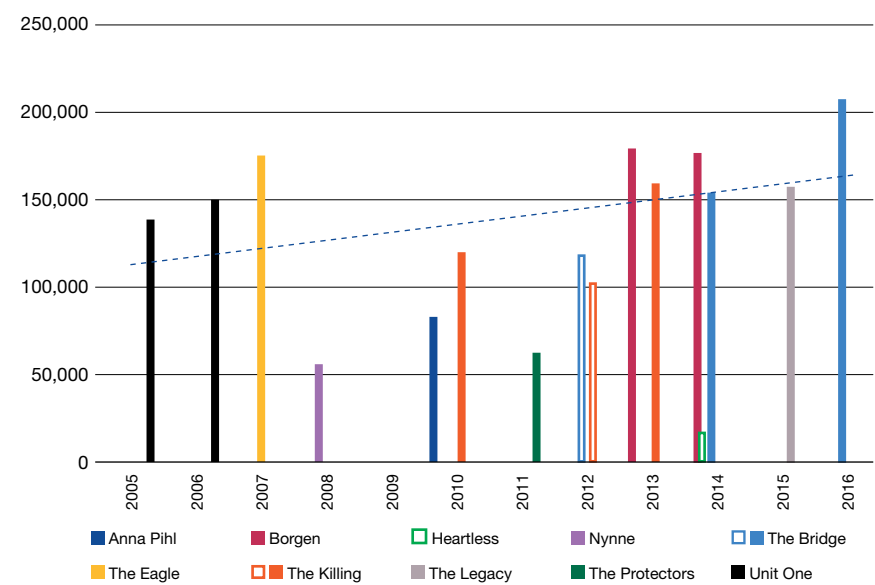
Note: Unfilled bars show audiences for programmes broadcast on the SBS 2 digital channel, which commenced service in 2009.

Source: OzTAM, 2016

How does SBS perceive this observable success of Danish series? According to Jane Roscoe, former head of international content, viewers of Danish drama series started behaving differently in the early 2000s; they were less likely to watch series randomly, and would stay longer and watch seven–eight episodes instead of only one or two (personal communication with Jane Roscoe, 15 April 2015). Viewers simply seemed to connect with the content in a different way. Roscoe also spoke about the look and feel of the Danish series, which were different from other crime drama: challenging but engaging, with difficult issues handled sensitively, gritty and well written, and with a great range of characters, especially strong females (personal communication with Jane Roscoe, 15 April 2015). Overall, these series were obviously appealing to Australian viewers. SBS Channel Manager Ben Nguyen reiterated this when speaking about the performance of Danish drama compared with other non-English-language series:

> We think very deeply about who has been watching foreign-language drama on SBS. And the appeal of the Danish series has been very, very strong. We have tried to step out of that on a number of occasions. We have tried to acquire French series or Israeli series, and Belgian. And generally, the appeal has not been as strong. Something that I don't think we have been able to fully understand or articulate even is: "What is the attraction of Danish series in comparison [to other non-English-language series]?" I mean, obviously there are a lot of things that are attractive about them – the quality, the writing, the production, and the casting – but you know, often these are relatively strong in other national dramas as well.

The above quote illustrates how the specific appeal and popularity of Danish series was a bit of a conundrum; other countries also make great drama, but their programmes did not strike the same chord with SBS's audiences. However, if we delve into the qualitative data from the focus group interviews, during which we spoke specifically to audiences of the three series *The Killing*, *Borgen* (DR1, 2010–2013), and *Bron/Broen* [*The Bridge*] (SVT1/DR1, 2011–2018), a fairly clear picture emerges of their response to Danish television drama compared with series originating in other countries. This was particularly true of series from the US and Australia itself, although a few respondents used French series such as *Engrenages* [*Spiral*] (Canal+, 2005–present) as counter examples.

Same-ing the Nordic Other

Our interviewees' views were grounded in the perception that the three Danish series – along with other Scandinavian series – offer realistic and authentic portrayals of current human and societal conditions. This realism and authenticity very much centre on the imperfectness and, hence, ordinariness of the characters' actions, emotions, and physical appearance, but also on the wider lifeworld and societal issues dealt with in the series. In this way, Australian audiences of Danish television

drama are in fact same-ing the Nordic Other (see also Jensen & Jacobsen, in press). To them, this Nordic Other – be it Nordic people (by proxy of the characters in the series) or Nordic society – is not necessarily alien or exotic. In many instances, it acts as a mirror in which they see themselves via realistic and authentic displays of emotions, actions, and physical appearance, at times assisted by the seeming societal representativeness of the series.

The "perfect imperfectness" of the characters

The perfect imperfectness of characters in Danish television drama was brought up repeatedly by regular audiences. The excerpts below illustrate how the characters' imperfections are strongly tied to feelings of authenticity and realism in our respondents (see also Esser, 2017; and the contributions of Esser, Kaptan, and Eichner in this anthology):

> I think it's why I like most of these things that we're talking about, actually. The characters are not all one-dimensional. They've got good [sides and] they've got flaws. And they're not all bad or all good. They're kind of […] more normal, more realistic. (53-year-old female music teacher)

> He [Martin Rohde, Danish police officer and main character in *The Bridge* seasons 1 and 2] is deeply flawed. He's cheating and it's all like, "you've got a kid and you're just a mess, man". […] It was a great character and […] really good acting, so you had a lot of empathy even though you're like, "man, you're horrible, really" [laughs]. (48-year-old unemployed male)

> [Sarah Lund] doesn't wear any makeup and […] that's appealing. (36-year-old female artist and designer)

The pertinence of the lifeworlds and societal issues depicted

Respondents also often touched upon the realism and authenticity of the societal issues dealt with in the series. For example, one respondent suggested that the series "deal with real issues in a realistic way", and another commented on the way LGBTQ issues are dealt with in the series:

> I find the series to be more real, more realistic, and more relevant to how people live now – say it's contemporary. […] They deal with real issues in a very realistic way, whether it's drugs or sex, or troubled youth. […] And that's what really resonates. […] It's realistic and it's relevant. (50-year-old male concierge)

> I also like in *The Bridge* [how] they are dealing with gay things and transgender things [that are] really relevant right now. They seem to get that better than we do. (38-year-old female working in sales)

The wider lifeworlds of the characters were also commented upon as being highly realistic and resonating with the respondents, especially when it comes to the treatment and representation of female characters. This is evident in the following excerpts:

> The position of power that [Prime Minister Birgitte Nyborg in *Borgen*] is in – and I love the fact that there doesn't seem to be any question [that she's a woman]. It's very, very rarely brought up in the three series. [Her strength] was never questioned […] because she's a woman. It's very rare. […] She was able to just get on with her job. (39-year-old male manager)

> It was just a good interplay between the different women roles [in *Borgen*] and then the husband relationship. (32-year-old female health care worker)

> One of the things I like about these shows is that I find them less sexist in a way. The women in them aren't as objectified as the women particularly in American TV shows. You've got a detective, but she's still hot and her femininity comes into it in a way that affects the character. Whereas often the way that women [in the Danish series are …] just a human being that's doing their job, and they're not necessarily having this weird gender stuff going on. I feel like European programmes are more progressive in that respect. (37-year-old female event organiser)

With the above excerpts in mind, and as already mentioned, we argue that despite the fact that on-screen characters are literally thousands of miles away, many viewers feel extremely close to them and see themselves mirrored in them. In actual fact, the perceived closeness makes Australian audiences enter into a process of same-ing the Nordic Other. The authenticity and realism of the characters, lifeworlds, and societal issues portrayed in the Danish series thus outweigh the distance that audiences, according to existing theories, may feel due to cultural, national, ethnic, or linguistic differences between Denmark and Australia.

Othering the Self

While our Australian respondents connected to a surprising degree with Danish series, they were highly critical of more mainstream English-language (especially American) and domestic series which, in their opinion, did not give a sufficiently realistic portrayal of, for example, emotions, relationships, politics, and gender equality. Some of the previous excerpts revealed this tendency, which will now be elaborated with respect to one theme salient throughout our research: namely gender, particularly the portrayal of women.

This theme was viewed in a black-and-white manner by our respondents, who considered it dealt with in a highly progressive way in Danish series as opposed to Australian and American series, which were seen as extremely reactionary in their treatment of women:

Gender equality, I would say, is a subject that I find interesting. Sometimes I'm not always in the mood to watch *SVU* [*Special Victims Unit*] or even something like *The Fall* because it's just so rape-y. I couldn't watch that series *Outlander* that everybody loved because it kept using this threat of rape as being a plot device. (37-year-old female event organiser)

It's funny just thinking that these women are all – especially in *The Bridge* – they're highly sexed. Versus Gillian Anderson in *The Fall* – she flaunts it, whereas [the women in the Nordic series] don't. There were parts of Gillian Anderson where I was like, "Oh God, give it a rest". (38-year-old female working in sales)

And it's also that sense of vulnerability that [Saga Noren] has, [which is] the same with a lot of the Scandinavian ones. It's strong women leads, as opposed to a lot of other shows that you watch. I think that's quite an attractive thing, because it's […] television written for women. (54-year-old male concierge)

Yeah, definitely, [Sarah Lund is …] obviously very troubled again, an anti-hero, [and] has a lot of issues. But [she] doesn't wear any makeup. It's like, no bullshit about everything and, you know, a strong female character. It's very appealing as a woman to watch something like that. (36-year-old female designer)

It may not be surprising that popular mainstream English-language series such as *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* (NBC, 1999–present), *The Fall* (BBC2, 2013–2016), and *Outlander* (Starz, 2014–present), originating in large markets such as the UK and US, are being othered in this way by Australian audiences. What is maybe more surprising, or at least interesting, is the way in which Australian series seemed to alienate our respondents to a degree that they felt a *stronger* connection with the Danish series than the Australian ones. Australian series are perceived to have fallen behind Australian reality and to not give an authentic depiction of, for example, women's role in society:

I actually think Australian TV is behind reality in Australia. When Julia Gillard was Prime Minister – I think it was in Glebe, the suburb – every one of their leaders from the local mayor right up to the Queen […] was a woman. And that was the only place in the world where everyone in the hierarchy was a woman. So, I think women are probably a lot more equal in reality here than Australian TV would lead you to believe. (39-year-old male manager)

[Australian TV drama] is so illogically inauthentic. We just don't do it the same way. […] We don't have ethnic representation on TV series or appropriate gay and lesbian representation on Australian TV series. […] What's actually making it to the screen isn't representative of what our community is. (37-year-old female event organiser)

Whether or not respondents are right in their claims about Australian television drama is, of course, disputable; they are after all a minority audience who is choosing to watch foreign-language drama rather than nationally produced content. However, the alienation that they feel towards domestic television output, paired with the strong

connection they feel with the Danish series in question, leads them to enter into a process of othering their Australian Self. Many of the Australian respondents displayed an almost knee-jerk negative reaction towards domestic audiovisual content when discussing it in relation to the Danish series. We now explore the possible reasons for this.

Proximate Others and distant Selves
– "hyper realism", "aspiration to modernity", and "cultural cringes"

We suggest that the reasons behind our respondents' perceptions of on-screen proximate Nordic Others and distant Australian Selves are found in a combination of three factors: what one may call the hyper realism of the Danish series; the limited knowledge of Denmark and its brand as a progressive society; and the so-called cultural cringe that audiences in Australia may feel towards products from their own culture. In doing so, we also draw on the empirical findings from other countries in order to compare what the Australian respondents shared or did not share with audiences elsewhere. These countries include Brazil, Germany, Japan, Turkey, and the UK. Findings from Denmark are used to contrast and highlight the international findings.

The hyper realism of Danish (and Nordic) television drama

As we have seen, our Australian respondents were drawn to the authenticity and realism of the Danish series, particularly in terms of characters' emotions, actions, and physical appearance. We argue that this attraction is partly caused by the hyper realism of the series, which is present on various textual levels of the Danish and many other Nordic series. This hyper realism can be seen, for example, in subdued and dark colour palettes, in bleak, cold landscapes, in understated acting styles, and in the development of the characters that incorporate many imperfections and ambiguities. Many scholars have already discussed the aesthetic and narrative qualities of Danish television (e.g., Creeber, 2015; Hansen & Waade, 2017; Nielsen, 2020; Turnbull, 2014; Waade & Jensen, 2013). With these scholars in mind, we use the prefix "hyper" to mean "excessive" or "beyond", being aware that the realism of the Danish series is highly stylised, as highlighted by Hansen and Waade (2017) and Nielsen (in press) in their work on the aesthetics of Nordic Noir series such as *The Bridge* and *The Killing*.

We observed our international respondents interpreting and responding to the realism of Danish and Nordic content in different ways than the Danish audiences we interviewed (cf. Jensen & Jacobsen, in press). The Danish respondents appreciated and enjoyed Danish television series as a fairly mainstream entertainment phenomenon and Sunday evening ritual on DR1 (see also Astrupgaard & Lai, 2016; Degn & Krogager, 2017), but they did not feel a strong engagement with the content *because* it was Danish; they had a nuanced view of it and perceived it as unreal and inauthentic.

A 28-year-old female Danish respondent, for example, criticised the characterisation of women such as Sarah Lund, Birgitte Nyborg, and Saga Norén, saying "the women are always emotionally cold, fucked-up and really good at their work". She observed that they could not, apparently, be good at their work *and* emotionally warm at the same time, which was counter to both her progressive values and her lived reality in Denmark. Other Danish respondents described the characters as "too spacey", "caricatures", "exaggerated", and "stereotypical", and the stories as "unrealistic", "too dark", and depicting a "very bleak society".

The non-Danish audiences, on the other hand, appeared to believe that what they were seeing on-screen was realistic, as well as perceiving it as quality television – even high-brow (cf. Jensen, 2016). Transnational audiences, it seems, were more ready to suspend their disbelief and surrender to the narrative, opening themselves to a stronger connection with the Danish series than the domestic audiences for whom they were originally produced.

Aspiration to modernity
– the progressive brand of Denmark and other Nordic countries

A theme repeatedly discussed by respondents in all studied countries was the appeal of what they considered to be a more advanced and progressive society, particularly regarding gender equality. The desire for their own society to be more like what they saw on-screen resembles what Koichi Iwabuchi termed "an aspiration to modernity" (2002). The respondents' perceptions of a progressive Scandinavia surfaced as they spoke about their own experiences and the depiction of topics such as gender equality, nudity, sexism, and politics in the series:

> Scandinavian women are a lot more… they are different [than what they can be here. In Scandinavia] sometimes guys can stay at home and the women can go to work. They are a bit stronger. I've just noticed from going there, and being there, and also talking to others – they are a lot stronger anyway than here. (26-year-old acupuncturist)

> Well, [Scandinavians] don't have the ridiculous hang-ups about nudity. […] It's also funny to think we'd really struggle in an Australian series for that female lead [Saga Norén] – we wouldn't support it.

> [Interviewer: Why is that, do you think?]

> Sexist culture. (37-year-old female event organiser)

> I was more thinking when I was watching [*Borgen*] about some of the social issues – particularly to do with immigration and refugees, which seemed to be dealt with in a far more humane way. […] And that was definitely like a sort of wish-fulfilment fantasy, especially when we were going through some really brutal politics in Australia at the same time. (48-year-old female university lecturer)

The respondents appeared to feel closely and ideologically connected to the political and ethical "reality" they were perceiving on the screen, demonstrating what Jacobsen (chapter 5 in this anthology) and Jensen and Jacobsen (in press) call a "cosmopolitan proximity" to the Danish series. The Australian respondents identified strongly with what they perceived to be the enlightened politics of the series and regarded this as superior to not only what they saw in domestic television series but also their own lived experiences.

The Australian cultural cringe

In parallel to these reactions, many of our Australian respondents exhibited what is colloquially called the cultural cringe, a term coined in the 1950s by Australian literary critic and teacher Arthur Angell Phillips in an essay arguing that post-colonial Australia should have more confidence in its national culture (Phillips, 1950/2017). The cultural cringe is now more popularly interpreted as a lack of faith in Australian culture, particularly – as Australian artists, musicians, and screen producers routinely pursue recognition and careers overseas to overcome the economics of living and working in an isolated country – in popular culture made primarily for domestic consumption (Hesketh, 2013). Although Screen Australia (the federal government agency charged with supporting Australian screen development, production, and promotion) has expressed a strong belief in the increasing sophistication and diversity of Australian screen content (Screen Australia & Ipsos Australia, 2013), our respondents disagreed. To some extent, this underlines the particularity of our sample, limited to persons who consume foreign-language television.

> But I feel like generally Australian TV is a bit bad. […] I want to like Australian TV more, like if there's something on that someone says is good like *The Beautiful Lie*, I just commit to it, but it's often disappointing. (36-year-old female artist and designer)

> I think the problem with Australian TV is that […] it'll go through a phase. It'd be really good for a year or two, and they'll have a really good run. And then it's shocking for a couple of years, and then it's really good again. […] It really goes in phases and it goes in stages. (39-year-old male janitor)

> [Australian television producers are] copying too much and I think they're trying to use the same formula for success. But they're over-reacting and over-acting in a kind of sense, because they're trying too hard to please the audience, rather than to film naturally, connected to the audience like a more European sort of [style]. (34-year-old male environmental officer)

> I just think Australian characters for me aren't strong. Like, the story might be interesting or something – like the plot that I'll focus on – but I don't think the actor … I can't … I don't know, I just can't watch them act. I don't think the characters are *strong*. (31-year-old female case manager)

Both the perceived realism of Danish television and aspirations to an imagined Nordic society were present in equal measure in the interviews in all the studied countries. While the cultural cringe was at its most prominent in Australia where the expression is a conspicuous part of cultural discourse, our German, British, Brazilian, and Turkish audiences also communicated cringe when comparing their own television drama programmes with the Danish ones. A cultural cringe, or a worrying sense of the inferiority of one's own culture, seems therefore to be a fairly universal trait and not simply a characteristic of a post-colonial society – albeit in varying degrees. Here, we see evidence that cultural cringe may have more to do with the perceived relatability of the unknown Other, rather than any real flaw in the familiar Self, as the international audiences studied here are not compelled to criticise Danish television series as they do domestic programming. International audiences may be ready to suspend any potential disbelief in relation to foreign drama content, believing that it represents a more realistic and better aspiration to modernity than their own familiar domestic drama content.

Conclusion

Using both quantitative and qualitative audience data, this chapter has shown how Danish television series found increasing success through the 2000s with audiences of SBS, Australia's second and multicultural public broadcaster. Starting with *Unit One* in 2005, SBS became the home for Danish television drama in Australia, attracting a growing audience and level of attention that foreign-language series from no other country have been able to achieve. Based on our interviews with Australian viewers, we argue that this particular popularity is due to audiences entering into a dialectic process of same-ing the Nordic Other and othering their Australian Self, driving a powerful identification with Danish series that plays out in two reinforcing ways. On the one hand, Danish series were perceived to be more realistic and authentic in the portrayal of both current human and societal conditions. This resulted in the Nordic Other – be it Nordic people (the characters in the series serving as a proxy) or Nordic society – being not necessarily alien or exotic but rather representing a mirror to the audience. On the other hand, Australian audiences were highly critical of – and distanced themselves from – their own domestic television drama, which did not, in their opinion, realistically portray the emotions, relationships, politics, or gender equality they observe in their own society. This entailed an othering of their Australian Self. Our respondents' perceptions of on-screen proximate Nordic Others and distant Australian Selves are explained by a combination of three factors: the hyper realism of the Danish series; the audience's limited knowledge of Denmark and perception of the country as particularly progressive; and the cultural cringe that some Australians may feel towards domestic cultural products they believe to be inferior to those from elsewhere, traditionally from the UK and US. While the first two factors

were present in the responses of all the international audiences in our study in equal measure, the third was particularly strong in Australia and apparent in varying degrees in the other countries studied.

This combination of factors caused surprisingly strong identification with the Danish series by international audiences. This identification seemed stronger than that exhibited by Danish audiences, who – although generally positive about the series – had more nuanced, less black-and-white views. Our findings thus challenge the theoretical view that audiences identify more strongly with audiovisual content with more proximate cultural origins than with programming removed from them either culturally, geographically, ethnically, or linguistically. Drama series such as *The Killing, Borgen,* and *The Bridge* by no means feel disconcertingly strange or exotic to non-Nordic broadcasters and viewers. On the contrary, these are places where their most distanced audiences feel they might be at home.

Notes

1. OzTAM ratings data is provided pre-aggregated rather than at respondent level. As we did not have access to variance estimates, we used statistical inference tests for aggregated proportions to test the differences in estimated share across demographic groups: z tests for gender as it is binomial and the Marascuillo procedure for the multinomial categories age and education.
2. The channel and years of broadcasting for the series in question are referenced at the first mention of a television series.

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Chapter 3

The appeal of "authenticity"
Danish television series and their British audiences

Andrea Esser

 Abstract

This chapter critically reflects on the transnational reception of Danish television series through findings from explorative audience research in the UK. The multi-modal concept of "authenticity", which emerged strongly from the analysis of the interview transcripts, is used to explore and argue for how "emotional realism" (or the phenomenological process of identification) and "external realism" were major contributory factors in viewers' enjoyment of Danish series in the 2010s. Aiming to advance our understanding of viewers' perception and appreciation of realism and authenticity, I conceptualise the terms in relation to globalisation, the (mediated) tourist gaze, and the cognitive and affective processes that determine viewers' screen experience. I draw on cognitive and affective psychology, neuroscience, and screen theory, as well as theories from anthropology, sociology, and television and tourism studies concerned with globalisation, place, and authenticity. Authenticity is intricately linked with a range of diverse aspects that all contribute to the transnational appeal of Danish television drama.

Keywords: Danish TV series, audience research, authenticity/realism, local specificity and place, cognition and affect

Introduction

In the UK, *Forbrydelsen* [*The Killing*] (DR1, 2007–2012)[1] was launched in January 2011 on public service channel BBC Four to great critical and popular acclaim. Average viewing figures of 534 thousand per episode – already a remarkable success for the digital niche channel – doubled to over 1.1 million for the second season, broadcast at the end of the year. Since then, a notable audience for subtitled television series of around 1 million has formed on BBC Four (Esser, 2017). In addition, other players began offering non-English-language drama. Most notably, "Walter Presents" was launched in 2016 to curate subtitled series from around the world on the digital plat-

form All4, and Netflix and Amazon Prime Video began to increase their investment in "local drama" for transnational consumption. From both a theoretical and industry perspective, the unexpected popularity of non-English-language series that exude place-based specificity is highly interesting. It calls for a revision of theorisations of international television programme flows that for decades have dominated academic and industry discourse alike. According to these theories, local specificity diminishes international appeal (Hoskins & Mirus, 1988) and, consequently, "de-localized" programmes (Straubhaar, 2007) have the best chance of selling internationally.

This chapter attempts to advance our understanding of the unexpected appeal of subtitled, place-specific television series by using findings from audience research to critically reflect on the role "authenticity" plays in the transnational appeal of Danish and other subtitled television drama series in the UK. Various dimensions of this complex yet apparently significant notion emerged from the interview transcripts. The resulting multi-disciplinary framework includes various perspectives and theories. Cognitive and affective psychology and neuroscience (Batson, 2011; Frith, 2007; Shamay-Tsoory, 2011; Watson & Greenberg, 2011) and cognitive screen theory (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008; Grodal, 2009; Plantinga, 2013; Smith, 1995) illuminate the biological and psychological underpinnings of viewers' screen experience and how this creates the pleasure of immersion and perceptions of authenticity. Further theories are included from tourism (MacCannell, 1973; Urry, 1990; Urry & Larsen, 2011) and television studies (Ang, 1982; Fuqua, 2012; Hansen & Waade, 2017; Hsu, 2010; Kilborn, 2003) concerning authenticity and place. Globalization theories are taken from the 1990s – a time when seminal anthropologists and sociologists (Appadurai, 1993; Bauman, 1998; Harvey, 1996; Massey, 1994; Robertson, 1994) reflected on the rise of nationalism and people's growing desire for authenticity and rootedness. These scholars' astute arguments are still pertinent today and can help us understand the current popularity of subtitled and place-based television drama in its wider socio-cultural context. The audience research, it should be noted, was exploratory in nature. There were neither direct nor hidden questions about authenticity or realism. I use the terms "authenticity" and "realism" interchangeably in this chapter, and they emerged as a key theme only during the analysis of the transcripts.

The audience research, carried out late 2014–2016, encompassed focus group interviews and individual interviews including twenty-eight television viewers who had watched and enjoyed watching subtitled television series[2] and three industry executives responsible for bringing Danish and other subtitled television drama into the British market[3]. Moreover, the research included observation of Nordic Noir inspired events and communications from two Facebook fan groups, particularly "Fans of Scandinavian/Nordic Crime/Fiction and Drama Genre" (FoSCFG). By the end of 2016, this closed, non-commercial group launched in October 2013 had 8,000 members and daily postings by the dozen. Finally, two polls on age and access were posted on the FoSCFG page (8 November 2016), and a comprehensive ratings analysis was conducted of the primetime schedules of seven television channels between 2006–2016 (for the latter see Esser, 2017).

Following Robertson's (1994) contention that the local and the global (two theoretical place-holders) are defined by simultaneity and reciprocity, the overarching argument of this chapter is that globalisation – and with it the television sector's advancing transnationalisation – goes hand in hand with the quest for authenticity and the appeal of local specificity. In other words, I argue that for transnational viewers of Danish series, it might be precisely the local specificity contributing to the appeal, rather than diminishing it. The notion of place, which implies authenticity, appeals most strongly in a globalising world. At the same time, representations of unfamiliar yet highly specific places, in spatial as well as temporal terms, appear particularly authentic. Moreover, I propose that the effects of "seriality" and of how our brains process what we see on screen generate immersion, and with this, feelings of familiarity and perceptions of authenticity. In short, local specificity, seriality, and the cognitive and affective processes that determine our television experience are all intricately linked to notions of authenticity; and authenticity is an important contributory factor in the transnational appeal of recent Danish television series.

I will begin by outlining the key theorisations the chapter draws on and then introduce the UK-based research participants and their immersion in Danish television drama, which they perceived as highly authentic. I will then explore two dimensions of authenticity that emerged from the discussions among participants: "emotional realism", caused by the phenomenological processes of identification and transportation, and "external realism".

Television programme flows, transnational audience appeal, and globalisation

Scholarship concerned with television programme flows has long been dominated by de Sola Pool's "preference for the local" thesis (1979), prominently supported by Hoskins and Mirus' (1988) "cultural discount" and Straubhaar's (1991, 2007) "cultural proximity" theses. Together, these theories have led the majority of television scholars to contend that audiences prefer media that are "most proximate or most directly relevant to them in cultural and linguistic terms" (Adriaens & Biltereyst, 2012: 554). And further, by implication, that the "nation-based sense of distinctiveness" that viewers are said to recognise in language, humour, people, and culture not only attracts domestic audiences but conversely diminishes foreign viewers' experience, engagement, and interpretation (Tan, 2011: 347). Two assumptions were inferred from this line of thinking: 1) the international television programme trade would remain restricted to mostly "culturally proximate", "geo-linguistic", and "geo-cultural" markets (Sinclair et al., 1996); and 2) content sells most widely if it is "culturally odourless" (Iwabuchi, 2002), or if it can be "de-culturalized" (Bielby & Harrington, 2008) or "de-localized" (Straubhaar, 2007) during production, distribution, and reception.

This hegemonic paradigm left some phenomena, like the global appeal of Japanese anime and manga, unaccounted for. Iwabuchi (2002) attempted to explain such "exceptions" by alleging that international circulation and reception blur the boundaries of the foreign and the local, leading to gradual familiarisation and the loss of cultural specificity. Whilst this may be true in some ways, this contention omits that cultural specificity, too, could be a possible factor for the transnational appeal of screen content that differs from the domestic norm (Lee, 2018; Napier, 2007; Smith, 2016). This is what I want to address in this chapter.

The concept of "familiarity" is worth exploring and expanding. Iwabuchi is clearly right when arguing that some form of familiarity helps in opening up audiences to non-domestic content, and that familiarity is achieved gradually through international circulation and reception. To this we can add the familiarity that is created through the ongoing transnationalisation of screen narratives, aesthetics, and production values, as has been recently argued in relation to Danish television drama (Agger, 2016; Hansen & Waade, 2017; Nielsen, 2016). Additionally, Straubhaar's (2007) influential conceptualisations of cultural and genre proximity address important aspects of familiarity. But there is more. Familiarity also develops through the effects of seriality and through how our brain processes what we see on screen.

Finally, I attempt to show that familiarity and local specificity are intricately linked to authenticity. Notions of authenticity, it should be pointed out, are based on subjective judgements, constructed on the basis of viewers' experiences, aspirations, social milieu, and the wider context in which viewing takes place. Notions of authenticity refer to perceptions of accuracy of representation ("true-to-life") or of something being true to its essence. Hence, it is futile to ask how authentic something is. Instead, we should ask *who* considers something authentic and why (Leeuwen, 2001; Scannell, 2001).

A range of globalisation and tourism theories can help us understand how the present sociocultural, economic, and political context might contribute to the appeal of foreign drama with explicit place-based details. During the 1990s, anthropologists and sociologists engaged in a heated debate about whether or not the nation state was in decline. Appadurai (1993) and Bauman (1998) argued that migration and the proliferation of international and transnational organisations had weakened nation states. Paradoxically, Bauman added, the demise of state sovereignty popularised the idea of statehood. Opposing common opinion, he asserted that there is no contradiction between the global flows of capital and the proliferation of feeble and impotent sovereign states. On the contrary, the globalisation of all aspects of the economy and the renewed emphasis on the territorial principle, he asserted, seem to be mutually reinforcing. Following Robertson (1994), he suggested that we discard binary thinking based on a tug-of-war between the local and the global, which, Robertson maintains, go hand in hand. One of the consequences of a globalising world, he astutely remarked, is that local specificity gains visibility and traction.

Two other key contributors to this debate, Massey (1994) and Harvey (1996), postulated that globalisation appeared to threaten the uniqueness of places. Massey

noted that "place" seemed to be endangered by homogenising tendencies (for instance, the global spread of McDonalds) as well as heterogenising tendencies caused by the rise in global flows. Similar to Bauman, Harvey contended that in some respects "the effects of mobile capital and ubiquitous mass communications have made place more rather than less important" (1996: 297). Both he and Massey concluded that the perceived threat to place resulted in people's search for authenticity and rootedness. This could be observed, they said, in increasing efforts to make places more distinctive and visible and exhibiting a sense of pride and belonging. The socio-cultural value of place and heritage was noted moreover in relation to tourism. In the 1970s, MacCannell (1973) reflected on the quest for place-based authenticity, remarking that tourists have a desire for "authentic experiences" and participating in cultural "back regions" – physical and imaginative spaces where local cultures are preserved and practiced in their authentic forms. With the growing commodification of culture, Urry (1990) subsequently developed the notion of the "tourist gaze", emerging from the set of expectations tourists place on localities and their inhabitants in their search for authentic experiences. A decade later, Urry and Larsen (2011) added the "mediated tourist gaze" to acknowledge how our increasingly mediated lives produce a new menu of gaze objects, including those offered by television.

In television and film scholarship, textual place-based authenticity and its perception gained traction only in the 2010s (Fuqua, 2012; Hansen & Waade, 2017; Hsu, 2010; Thomas 2012). It is still a marginal – though growing – field of enquiry. For much longer, though, film and television scholars have argued that the perception of "realism" is an important factor for audiences' experiential engagement with fictional stories. Realism, like authenticity, is a multi-modal concept (Busselle & Greenberg, 2000). For fictional stories, it includes "the extent to which stories or their components are similar to the actual world ('external realism') and secondly, plausibility and coherence within the narrative ('narrative realism')" (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008: 256). Even more important, in my view, is Ang's (1982) seminal conceptualisation of "emotional realism", which she developed from her research into the transnational appeal of *Dallas*. Ang's interviews revealed that despite viewers' perception that the series' external world was not very realistic, they felt that the series was "true-to-life". This, Ang argued, was because viewers attributed realness to the characters' subjective experiences and feelings. They could relate to them. In light of subsequent findings from cognitive and affective psychology and neuroscience, today this relatedness is more commonly understood as a phenomenological process, whereby "identification" is defined as "the increasing loss of self-awareness and its temporary replacement with heightened emotional and cognitive connections with a character" (Cohen quoted in Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008: 263). The next section summarises key insights from cognitive and affective psychology and neuroscience to illuminate how our brains process what we observe and, as a result, how we engage with on-screen fictional characters. Ang's label of "emotional realism" is useful in highlighting the "authenticity effect" that comes with such identification.

Authenticity and identification

With the advancement of neuroimaging technology during the past 25 years, functional brain scans have revealed that our experience of screen content is processed by the same brain circuits as those used for real-world experiences. From this, neuroscientists have concluded that screen content offers "a sensory experience that is similar to natural viewing" (Schimamura, 2013: 16). In real life as in film, our consciousness is not based on direct experience but on representations of the world: mental models, comprised of schemata and scripts, that our brain makes of the world and constantly updates, enabling it to quickly process new complex input. Also, as with real-life experience, our aesthetic response to screen content is guided by the highly interdependent dimensions of perception, cognition, and emotion (and action), which work in a feedback loop. For instance, perception begins inside with a prior belief: "My perception is a prediction of what ought to be out there in the world. And this prediction is constantly tested by action" (Frith, 2007: 132). Emotion, on the other hand, is both caused by what we perceive and influences perception. As far as our understanding of other humans is concerned, cognitive scientists propose that we develop, constantly test, and update so-called "theories of mind" (ToM). ToM, which some refer to as "perspective taking", is also deemed necessary for interpreting and understanding other people's emotions; it is believed to account for our emotional engagement with fictional characters and our immersion in fictional narratives (Grodal, 2009; Oatley, 2013; Zacks, 2013).

Empathy, which is a highly complex, multi-dimensional psychological state, can be evoked by ToM when we try to imagine how another human or a fictional character feels based on what they say and do, and what we know about them. Or alternatively, when we imagine how we would feel in their place. In addition to these cognitive processes, empathy involves affective processing in the form of simulation and mimicry. Simulation refers to unconscious efforts to match the mental state of another person with resonant states of one's own. Mimicry occurs when we unconsciously adopt other people's facial, vocal, and postural expressions. Affective empathy results in "emotional contagion", where we feel the same – or, more accurately, similar (influenced by our own experiences and beliefs) – emotions to those of the people we watch (Batson, 2011; Shamay-Tsoory, 2011; Tan, 2013; Watson & Greenberg, 2011).[4]

Cognitive and affective empathy both run on mirror neuron circuits, and the pivotal insight gained from the discovery and study of mirror neurons is that they fire not only when we perform an action but also when we observe another person perform an action, whether in real life or on screen (Frith, 2007; Grodal, 2009; Watson & Greenberg, 2001). This is important for our understanding of audience engagement because it means that watching something is, in a sense, "like doing it, at least psychologically" (Plantinga, 2013: 101). This explains the paradoxical phenomenon that Plantinga calls the "twofoldedness" of viewing (2013: 98): the viewer knows that characters are not real but responds to them as though they are. A second important

consequence is that viewers' immersion in a fictional story might not be caused by perceptions of realism, as previously believed, but that the reverse could also be true: that it is immersion which in fact causes viewers to feel that stories are realistic (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008; Suckfüll, 2013). In any case, the perception of realism, or authenticity, remains a major factor in the enjoyment of fictional narratives. Also, there is nothing to suggest that both cannot be true, and in fact, immerison and perceptions of realism might work in a feedback loop. This idea is further developed below, supported by the empirical data emerging from the focus group discussions among British viewers.

British audiences of Danish television series
– immersion and perceptions of realism

The multi-method audience research that is the basis of the following reflections revealed that most viewers in the UK watched subtitled series on television when broadcast, recorded with a time-lag or via catch-up on BBC i-player. Most viewers had watched several European series recently, and several noted they had watched subtitled films and television series when they were young. For the 2010s, after decades of almost no subtitled content on British television, it became evident that the critical and popular acclaim of *The Killing* played a seminal role in the development of BBC Four's now renowned Saturday-night subtitled television series slot, and hence in opening the door for further Danish and other foreign-language series.[5]

The twenty-eight participants fitted the overall BBC Four audience profile and the profile of those watching subtitled television drama, as identified through the data of the UK's official ratings agency, BARB. The profile was somewhat older, slightly skewed towards females (as for television drama in general), well-educated, and comparatively well-off (Esser, 2017). The youngest participant was a 30-year-old female librarian and the oldest a 71-year-old male psychoanalyst; most were in their late 40s to mid 60s. Several female participants had worked, or were still working, as school teachers, librarians, university lecturers, and/or were involved in the arts in some way. Male participants included, amongst others, a stand-up poet, an acoustic surveyor, a market researcher, and a television sports producer. Most participants had knowledge of at least one other language, either through school, a non-British parent, or because they had lived and worked in another country. Only two had knowledge of a Scandinavian language: a Norwegian singer living in London and an Australian who had lived in the UK for a long time and knew some Danish from exchange studies in Denmark. The vast majority of participants were British passport holders and most, although well travelled and with a cosmopolitan outlook, were firmly anchored in their British localities and lives.

All focus group (FG) participants said they did not mind subtitles, with many pointing out that they forget they are reading. Some stated that watching with subtitles feels like a different kind of watching, "unusual, quite unique". The effort of reading, they mused, requires them to "give it your full attention", with the consequence that

"it draws you in" (Grace & Lorraine, FG 1). This impression was also discussed and corroborated by FoSCFG members:

> *The Killing* was our first subtitled show. We weren't sure because of the subtitles, but after one episode we were hooked. Since then we've watched most foreign shows. There is something about having to concentrate on the subtitles and putting down all distractions that immerses you in the plot much more. (personal communication via Facebook, Jan Huddleston, 1 September 2016)

In academia, the concept of "immersion" derives from literary theory and denotes "deep and joyful engagement" with a text and the reader forgetting the world around them (Eichner, 2014: 14). According to cognitive screen theorists, immersion is essential for viewers' enjoyment of fictional narratives. In particular, it is facilitated by two factors: "transportation" and "character identification" (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008). Transportation involves viewers shifting the centre of their experience from the actual world to the story world. Serialised television fiction, we could argue, supports this process particularly well. It cues viewers for entry through a combination of continuity announcements, snappy credits sequences, catchy signature tunes, and a series of conventional establishing shots of the place they are about to transport into (Kilborn, 2003). The above comments suggest that subtitles, too, assist transportation. Identification as a phenomenological process, on the other hand, is bound to one, or more likely, multiple characters. Smith (1995), in his attempt to construct a comprehensive theory of identification, usefully divides identification into "recognition" (viewers' mental construction of characters), "alignment" (viewers' access to the actions, thoughts, and feelings of characters through ToM), and "allegiance". The latter has an evaluative component and refers to the sympathies viewers develop for or against various characters. These three cognitive processes, together with the affective phenomena of simulation and mimicry, Smith suggests, are the constituent parts of identification.

Emotional realism – identification and authenticity

Much of the free-flowing discussions in the five focus groups, which were guided only by a few general questions, related to the characters and corroborated arguments for the salience of characters and the affect invested in them for viewers' comprehension and enjoyment of screen narratives (Ang, 1982; Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008; Smith, 1995; Tan, 2013). Identification, in the sense of recognition, alignment, and importantly allegiance, strongly showed across all groups both in the quantity of corresponding statements and in the way participants talked about *The Killing, Bron/Broen* [*The Bridge*] (SVT1/DR1, 2011–2018)*, Borgen* (DR1, 2010–2013) and, in one case, *Arvingerne* [*The Legacy*] (DR1, 2014–2017):

> Richard: [*The Legacy*] was full of nuance, the characters are really developed, so you can see all their flaws, and then one minute you think: "You're an arse". And then the next minute you think: "No, you're not, you're actually all right". And then –

Marion: – and you really care!

Richard: Yeah, you do.

(FG 5)

Annabelle: I liked the second and third [season of *The Killing*] because you got to see more of Sarah Lund's personal life. And I really enjoyed that –

Marit: – I think that's why I like it as well.

Anna: Yeah. The child, the mother.

Annabelle: Boyfriends and stuff. Because, you kind of just wanted her to be happy –

Anna: – with the wonderful boyfriend she had. And I kept saying: "*Go to Norway*!" or wherever she was going to. Sweden? "*Go, go, go*!" you know. And then you think: "Who is going to solve this problem? Okay, she is not going to go. *Oh, she's on the plane*! Oh my God, she's gonna go. Okay, she's not gonna go." [laughter]. You sort of get involved in all this.

(FG 4)

Unfortunately, focus groups and interviews cannot establish whether simulation and mimicry occurred at the time of watching. But the animated nature and forcefulness of some comments, like Anna's, suggest that it is highly likely that affective empathy responses occurred at the time of watching.

Identification, and the pleasure it evidently gave many participants, might also explain why the crime aspect appeared to be a much weaker explanatory factor for the appeal of *The Killing* or, in fact, any other crime series alluded to. Not a single participant mentioned unprompted that they liked crime stories, and when finally asked about this omission, a notable number of women said they were not at all fans of the crime genre. Several said they were watching crime series because it is something they can watch with their partners, join in watercooler conversations about at work, or both. For some, their favourite Danish series was *Borgen*. Without crime, they said, this political drama gave them all the human relationships, people's day-to-day problems, as well as insights into the workings of the news media, political intrigues, and power relations. Others' favourite was the first season of *The Killing* because it was "a study of human grief, […] the ripple effect of one action" (Richard, FG 5). Across focus groups it became clear that for most participants, the para-social aspect – which Ang (1982) argued soap operas afford and accounts for the highly positive evaluations of *Dallas* across the world – played a key role in the appeal of the Danish series. Richard Klein, Head of BBC Four at the time, had realised this quality. In his interview, he noted how he had wanted to remodel the Saturday night slot into one offering "posh soap for people who want to drink wine" (personal interview with Richard Klein, 24 February 2016) and how *The Killing* (the first Danish series he bought) suited his intention.

Whether it was the heightened identification that caused perceptions of realism, vice versa, or maybe a combination of both, we cannot know. But the significance of

emotional realism is indisputable. A plethora of comments referred to the characters' "realness" and clearly expressed viewers' appreciation to this effect: "It just felt like they were proper people. It felt… more real" (Annabelle, FG 4). When asked about the appeal of the "strong female characters" – frequently remarked on in academic and journalistic discourse – two participants from the same focus group instantly moved from "strong" to "believable": "Oh well, they are strong as characters. They are believable characters" (Anna, FG 4). "They are interesting and complex" (Marit, FG 4). Lorraine, a pensioner and member of a film club, explained why the first season of *The Killing* was her favourite with the following words:

> Because of the characters' development. It was 24 hours of television that first series, wasn't it? It was three months, two hours a week. And that's unusual isn't it? And the way they developed the people. Because they were people you knew. They were totally real and it just developed at the right pace. I hate being rushed along with things. This was just dramatic, and her character [the grieving mother played by Ann Eleonora Jørgensen] was unique the way it was portrayed. The way she acted it. It was just very different to anything else. (Lorraine, FG 1)

In addition to character complexity, Lorraine's comment highlights two further aspects that caused her and many other interviewees to perceive the characters as unusually realistic. One aspect was the impression that the acting was of high quality: unprompted, several participants noted the "superb" (Judith, FG 4) and "subtle" (Marit, FG 4) acting of Eleonora Jørgensen and Sophie Gråbøl in *The Killing*; another remarked that Pilou Asbæk was an "excellent actor" (Richard, FG 5). We will return to this later as discussions of the quality of acting took an interesting turn. The second, and in my view more important aspect that emerged as important for perceptions of authenticity was the gradual development of the characters and the time viewers spend with them. Reflecting on the appeal of *Dallas*, Ang (1982) highlighted the longwinded narrative structure of the soap opera genre and the focus on characters' subjective experiences and emotions, accentuated by the frequent use of close-ups. These features are also characteristic of *The Killing*, particularly the first season. Annabelle, a linguist, had in fact noticed the heavy use of close-ups and other (undefined) means of evoking affect: "A lot of the story is told without dialogue. A lot of it through… I mean, I don't know the terminology, but you know… What you were looking at rather than what you were hearing. Their faces and stuff" (FG 4). Neuroscience has shown that close-ups do not merely reveal emotions but can also *elicit* emotions in viewers through mimicry and facial feedback. As in real life, this can cause emotional contagion, and it makes the screen experience intense and life-like – in other words, authentic.

To sum up and conclude this section on emotional realism: viewers' engagement with fictional characters is supported by the cognitive and affective processes through which they come to identify. In the specific cases at hand, the prolonged co-experience afforded by seriality as well as character complexity appear to have intensified identification. Of course, individual viewers' personalities, beliefs, past experiences, and

current life situations also impact identification (Frith, 2007; Shamay-Tsoory, 2011; Suckfüll, 2013), particularly allegiance. To explore this in the required depth is beyond the scope of this chapter (please refer to Eichner in this anthology for this). The importance of the above for this chapter is that identification, seriality, and character complexity all support the perception that characters are authentic – true-to-life and true-to-self, or both. Moreover, identification, seriality, and character complexity also all create a sense of familiarity. The fact that viewers do not speak the characters' language does not impede this. On the contrary, reading subtitles seems to facilitate immersion, at least in those cases where the narrative is not heavily dependent on dialogue and reading subtitles does not become too cumbersome.

External realism and the appeal of authentic places

Like emotional realism, external realism emerged from the interview transcripts as an appeal factor of Danish and other subtitled television series. To clarify, external realism refers to the extent to which television images and, we should add, diegetic sounds correspond to what viewers have experienced first-hand, and to what they believe to exist in real life (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008). Language is one important element in this. Several highly similar (unprompted) discussions spanning focus groups and postings on FoSCFG strongly suggest that participants' inability to understand the spoken dialogue contributed to their perception of the characters and the world they inhabit as "genuine" (Marion, FG 5), and that this contributed to the appeal of the series:

> Richard: There is that worry sometimes [when] you're watching it – particularly when you're watching *Borgen*, because there were scenes in the second series, where she [Danish Prime Minister Birgitte Nyborg] has to talk in English. Suddenly they're going into English, because it's somebody from England, or wherever, talking – and I was thinking: Oh, it suddenly got a bit wooden –
>
> Helen: It was terrible –
>
> Richard: – it was really clunky. There was a scene where I thought this is awful actually. This is clunky.
>
> Richard: Is the whole thing awful? [all start laughing, getting animated]
>
> Helen: [interrupting Richard] Birgitte, Birgitte the prime minster –
>
> Richard: – just because it's subtitled we are thinking: This is great. [more continued laughter]
>
> (FG 5)

An almost identical and equally animated discussion took place in the first focus group:

> Lorraine: When they speak in English, because especially in *Borgen*, they kept going into English, and you think, "is this as good as I thought it was?"

> Grace: I know!
>
> [several laughing]
>
> Lorraine: It doesn't work.
>
> (FG 1)

Interesting here is that the majority of research participants live in London, where multiple languages and foreign accents are the norm rather than the exception. Even so, viewers found the introduction of English highly disturbing. One plausible explanation is that we still think of countries as homogenous. As long as the representations on screen conform to our stereotypical schemata, we deem them authentic and accept them willingly. However, if they violate our rudimentary and possibly false schemata, we react with displeasure, laughter, or both.

There might be a second phenomenological explanation, though. It is possible that the abrupt use of a language or dialect familiar to viewers breaks their transportation.

> Mike: [The performances] seemed to be good, and they seemed to sit well within the ways it was directed and filmed and edited, so all seemed good. *And then this guy pops up like…* [author's emphasis].
>
> Lorraine: It's like *Friends*. I don't know if you ever… There was a British actor that went into *Friends* and it was horrendous, and I can't put my finger on why, but it doesn't work for some reason. It is false.
>
> Greg: She was too British. She's too much. It didn't mix together at all.
>
> (FG 1)

In both cases, the "sudden" introduction of a new language (or national dialect) breaks the spatial coherence of the fictional world and, as a result, leads the focus group participants to query its authenticity and with it various other qualities, like the originally applauded acting. The two explanations are not mutually exclusive.

Other important factors of external realism and its appreciation were the landscape, interior design elements, themes, and the appearance of characters. There was a plethora of positive evaluations of characters' "realistic looks": "I mean, [Sarah Lund] is good looking, but she is not *impossibly* beautiful" (Anna, FG 4). "And there was another character, who didn't have to look like a glamour puss, you know" (Alison, FG 3). Several women across focus groups favourably compared the characters' appearance to those "slick", "manicured", and "groomed" (Annabelle, FG 4) looks of the characters in the American crime series *CSI*.

> Everybody [in *CSI*] is so beautiful and burnished and thin and elegant, and yet when you watch something like *The Killing*, you know, half of them are sort of greasy oiks, who've just fallen out of bed, you know, or not made up. That was one of the things I really liked about it. It felt a little bit more realistic. (Isobel, FG 1)

Of course, findings from cognitive sciences and the widespread appreciation of *Dallas* show that realistic looks are no prerequisite for character alignment and allegiance to

occur. Moreover, comments like the above may express little more than participants' often helpless attempts to describe and interpret their diffuse viewing experiences. Hence, we should not overrate these statements. But even so, the large number of statements made to this effect, unprompted and independent of each other, demonstrates that many female viewers noticed and appreciated the "realistic looks" of the female characters in the Danish series.

 Finally, participants noted and positively evaluated the "freedom from clichés" (Roderick, FG 1), the realistic settings, and the contemporary real-life and transnationally relevant themes:

> Min: *The Killing* was really about the far right and immigration problems and, you know, the undercurrent. I think that's what I liked about it as well, because it was so realistic. You know, it wasn't just like a fairyland.
>
> (FG 3)

> Robert: They claim to be realistic and yes, with the storylines in *The Bridge*. I mean, you can question this but they claim to be realistic in terms of, you know, what the office of a police department looks like, and I quite like this.
>
> Helen: Yeah. That is interesting, to sort of see how different countries work and also when you get – you don't quite know how accurate it is but in terms of problems that come up, being European, and seeing other European countries. And they are discussing things like immigrants, and problems with immigrants being integrated with other communities and all that. It is interesting to see other people's take on it, because we only ever get the UKIP, British take on things. And yeah – it's interesting that other countries have similar problems.
>
> (FG 5)

> Isobel: The slightly, sort of sideways thing for me was the fact that I suddenly started to learn about countries – Scandinavian countries, Denmark, and others – that I haven't really thought about much. I had been to Denmark, I had been to Stockholm, but I didn't know much about the people, their way of life. […] I find it interesting that there was sexism in the workplace, and I thought "uh, but it's Sweden", you know. And all of these things are the same. There is corruption in *Borgen*, there is corruption in *The Killing*, and that was kind of like, "oh". It's different, but it's the same. It's the same problems, but in a different setting, and it kind of opened up a whole new world of possibilities for me, that they weren't all as I thought, stereotypically living in this land where everything is fine.
>
> (FG 1)

All three excerpts are reminiscent of the arguments Hsu puts forward in his textual analysis of American series *The Wire*. The explicit attention to place-based detail, including vernacular speech, images, and sounds from the city's "back regions" offers, he says, "a gritty, meticulous, and therefore more realistic alternative to traditional

televisual representations of police work and urban turmoil" (2010: 510). The show "rewards its most careful viewers with access to what they presume to be a trustworthy, unfiltered experience of life in Baltimore" (Hsu, 2010: 510). Both arguments have been corroborated by Fuqua (2012) in her analysis of HBO's series *Treme*, set in New Orleans. Even though my interviewees expressed some reservations about the accuracy of representation, these were as quickly forgotten as they were stated. Min, Helen, Robert, and Isobel were not closely familiar with Denmark or Sweden, and overall each seemed perfectly happy to presume that the series' portrayals of how people live and work, of sexism, immigration, and corruption problems, accurately reflect Danish and Swedish "reality". The same "twofoldedness" that Plantinga (2013) remarked about viewers' conduct towards characters thus seems to apply to these fictional places: viewers know they are fictional but they still engage with them as though they are real.

Regarding Hsu's (2010) and Fuqua's (2012) argument about the "reward" of gaining access to the back regions of unfamiliar places, we should note that like the above, all other comments pertaining to external realism contained positive evaluations. From what is known about the research participants and the profile of British audiences of BBC Four's subtitled television drama, it is fairly safe to speculate that most, if not all, are the kind of people who seek authentic experiences when travelling. Contemporary Danish and other subtitled European series that exude place-based specificity provide these viewers with mediated gaze objects that appeal to their tourist gaze. For this audience, the "foreignness" of the places and their (fictional) inhabitants do not diminish the appeal, as the dominant programme flow paradigm purports – rather, it contributes to it.

Conclusion

It may be the political economy of today's distribution landscape that pushes non-Anglo Saxon place-based drama into the global market (Esser, 2017; Jenner, 2018; Steemers, 2016); however, this push would not work was it not for viewers welcoming such content. As the above comments have shown, they clearly do welcome it in the UK, and they do so in substantial numbers. Phenomenological data of viewers' experience must be treated with caution, of course. There is always the danger that important things remain unsaid or unrecognised whilst others are overstated. Phenomenological data does not constitute hard evidence; nonetheless, it serves as an invaluable exemplary aid to think through puzzling phenomena, like the unexpected transnational popularity of Danish drama series in the 2010s. In the UK, as my findings suggest, the series' appeal owed a great deal to perceptions of authenticity, thus corroborating earlier arguments that realism positively correlates with judgements of programme quality (Ang, 1982; Busselle & Greenberg, 2000). In fact, as with *Dallas*, realism was the favourite criterion amongst participants for passing judgement. Differing from the reponses Ang received about *Dallas*, their references suggested perceptions and positive evaluations of both emotional and external realism.

Emotional realism occupied the preeminent role, suggesting that the Danish series participants referred to – even the crime series – have similarities to soap operas and appeal for similar reasons. Through seriality, character complexity, and close attention to characters' subjective experiences and emotions, these series create perceptions of authenticity and opportunities for heightened identification. Identification is not dependent on cultural proximity, though, because "humans automatically respond with empathy upon observing others due to hard-wired, dedicated neural structures in the brain" (Tan, 2013: 351). There are some constraints that result from viewers' need to rely on schemas from previous experience to create models for the narrative; and this means that, as a rule, some form and degree of familiarity may be required for viewing to be pleasurable. Familiarity through knowledge of the heavily transnationalised crime genre, common themes and concerns, as well as the prolonged exposure to "foreign" characters and the (perceived) life-like places they inhabit, ensure that viewers' cognitive abilities are not overburdened, and they come to embrace the Other.

The foreign language, people, landscapes, buildings, and sounds, I argue, thus did not produce a cultural discount amongst this audience. Quite the reverse: the place-specificity and access to back regions that these series provide seemed to add to their appeal. It made them even more authentic and believable, and it added pleasure by appealing to the tourist gaze. Finally, in considering the wider political, economic, and socio-cultural context, I propose that the appeal of (presumed) authentic local places on screen can be linked to globalisation. Globalisation gives visibility to local specificity and, by increasing our yearning for place, gives it traction. In other words, it is precisely because we live in a globalising world that local places and narratives appeal to both national and transnational audiences. For national viewers, they represent the local and create feelings of belonging, community, and local or national identity. For transnational viewers, they embody Other nations. For both, they re-install the well-known ordering principles in a global world which, in Bauman's (1998) words, appears uncontrollable, unstable, and chaotic.

Notes

1. The channel and years of broadcasting for the series in question are referenced at the first mention of a television series.
2. The twenty-eight participants were recruited in London and Dorset amongst work colleagues, friends, and neighbours, who in turn brought along interested friends, and at two events in London related to Danish television drama: 1) an interview with Sofia Helin organised by the *How to: Academy* in cooperation with the Swedish tourism board, *Scandi-Noir with Saga Norén* (11 September 2014); and 2) the *Nordicana* festival (6–7 June 2015). All participants reported to be quite avid television viewers in general and most considered themselves to be fans of Danish and other subtitled television drama. Only a few engaged with these series beyond watching them, though, which would include going to the above events or reading posts on social media.

3. Richard Klein, Controller of BBC Four (2008–2013); Sue Deeks, BBC Head of Programme Acquisitions, Films & Series; and Jon Sadler, Head of Product Marketing, Arrow Films. The latter, a British distributer of world cinema and cult films, was an early investor in the British DVD distribution rights for Scandinavian TV drama series and instrumental in marketing and cementing the *Scandi-Noir* label through its website, newsletter, social media, and *Nordicana* events (2013-2015).

4. Emotions and automatic body responses in the form of mimicry are two aspects of *affect*; a third is mood, which is defined as a more diffuse experience and, unlike emotion, has no clear referent or cause.

5. *The Killing*, it should be noted, was aided by French procedural *Engrenages* [*The Spiral*] (Canal+, 2005–present) and Swedish crime series *Wallander* (TV4, 2005–2013). These two series were the first subtitled television series broadcast on BBC Four (between 2006–2010) and had begun to build an audience for subtitled television drama. With *The Killing*, this audience more than doubled (Esser, 2017).

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Chapter 4

Brazilian encounters

Buyers and bloggers appropriating content

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 Abstract

This chapter examines the ultra-niche and peripheral appearance of Danish television drama in new markets such as Brazil through three interrelated discussions supported by empirical material produced from interactions with buyers and cultural intermediaries based in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paolo. The first discussion focuses on buyers' motivations for new content. The second discussion considers the perceptions of Danish drama series among regular viewers. The third discussion focuses on bloggers as important cultural intermediaries who view and circulate information about Danish television drama to promote different forms of conversations; for example, critiquing socio-economic challenges rife in contemporary Brazil or spreading their own socio-cultural or political interests to like-minded individuals intricately connected through online networks. The chapter ends with a consideration of how the achievements of the periphery include diverse forms of appropriation by buyers operating in competitive media environments and by viewers and bloggers interacting on new social media platforms.

Keywords: Danish TV drama, Nordic Noir, cultural intermediaries, Brazil, global television

Introduction

Transnational television is characterised by the passage of media content across the boundaries of nationally regulated markets and the practices of cultural intermediaries who mediate and maintain relations between national and transnational spheres (Kuipers, 2011). Unlike the discussions of popularity and success unfolded in many of the other contributions in this anthology, the international circulation and appearance of Danish television drama in new markets such as Brazil can best be described as an ultra-niche and peripheral phenomenon. We engage with this peripherality in this chapter by weaving empirical material produced from interactions and interviews with cultural intermediaries (journalists, bloggers, and cultural producers), viewers,

and buyers and distributors based in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. In doing so, we consider the extent and implications of the appropriation of Danish television drama for different purposes. Although there is ample documentation showing how the global interest in Danish television drama has led to multiple positive outcomes for the television media industry in Denmark (Jensen & Waade, 2013; Redvall, 2013) and for Denmark's cultural diplomacy efforts on the international scene as a producer of high-quality television drama (Jensen & Jacobsen, 2017), less is known about what Danish television dramas do for the Brazilians who encounter them, and how these series serve to further their own interests. Muanis (2015: 91) writes:

> It is impossible to research television without relating television programmes, their analysis, content, form and means of production with technology both for production and distribution, exhibition and dialogue with other media, their political and communication dimensions as agents of a discourse and their relation to their spectator.

In this chapter, we demonstrate an explicit interest in the "spectator" in a broad sense. We understand the transnational travel and reception of Danish television drama as a series of multidirectional processes initiated by the cooperation of the global "merchants" of television series (Havens, 2006); their promotion and publicity engineered by old and new cultural intermediaries such as journalists, bloggers, and advertisers; and the affective engagement of regular viewers who watch them. We align ourselves with the definition of cultural intermediaries as embracing not only established actors associated with specific professions involved in the production and circulation of symbolic goods and services in the cultural economy (Bourdieu, 1984; Maguire & Matthews, 2014; Negus, 2002), but also new and emerging actors that actively use the affordances of new technologies to participate in glocal conversations. Characterised as "tastemakers", "influencers", or "intercultural mediators", cultural intermediaries are not only concerned with media occupations but *use the media* to do their promotional work (Hesmondhalgh, 2006).

At the risk of pursuing a line that may be seen as a form of outdated methodological nationalism, as the global is already part of the national (Sassen, 2010), we wish to emphasise three general and commonly articulated perceptions of differences between Brazilian and Danish society from the outset. We do this to emphasise that hypothetically, Straubhaar's theory of "cultural proximity" that describes the trade and reception of television content by the logic of the "seemingly common attraction that audiences feel for cultural products […] close in cultural content and style to the audiences' own culture(s)" (2007: 26) would be significantly challenged in the Brazilian context given the cultural "non-proximity" between Brazil and Denmark. This non-proximity can be seen in diverse ways, and here we offer three areas of non-proximity.

First, there is a non-proximity of national television histories and practices: this parameter of difference is defined by a strong commercial television regime in Brazil contrasted with a strong public service-oriented television regime – albeit under transformation – in Denmark. Second, there is a non-proximity of national societies with

different intensities of cultural homo- and heterogeneity. Brazilian cultural (or ethnic or racial) heterogeneity is evidenced in a number of categories and words to describe race, ethnicity, or colour: Indian, White, Black, Yellow, Pardo, Mulatto, Cafuso, and Caboclos (Fernandes, 2007). This stands in stark contrast with the homogeneity that is frequently (and often mistakenly) used to point to the nature of Danish society (see Jenkins, 2011). Third, there is a non-proximity afforded by acute differences in socio-economic disparities of Brazilian and Danish citizens. Denmark is seen as a nation promoting equality between genders and social classes, and offering equal access to education and health; Brazil is swamped in socio-economic inequalities – critically documented from both within and outside the country (Neri, 2018; Samans et al., 2015). Although the notion of class distinctions is commonly swept away in Denmark – and many Danes are embarrassed to articulate them – social classes in Brazil are explicitly articulated and commonly used. For example, the Brazilian Institute for Geography and Statistics defines the social classes A–E as "a useful tool for strategists and marketers, as a way to segment the 200+ million people living in Brazil" (Nes, 2016).

We now continue with a description of our methodology followed by three inter-related discussions. The first discussion provides an overview of the appearance of Danish television drama series in the Brazilian telescape with a specific focus on buyers. The second considers the expressions of interest and diverse perceptions of these series among regular viewers. And the third focuses primarily on bloggers as cultural intermediaries who subtly appropriated Danish television drama to promote different forms of conversations. These conversations include critiquing socio-economic challenges rife in contemporary Brazil and spreading personal interests and concerns to like-minded individuals connected through online networks. We end by considering how the achievements of the periphery include the appropriation of Danish television drama by buyers operating in competitive media environments and by viewers and bloggers interacting on new social media platforms.

Methodology

Our methodology was aligned with the project's overall method of "the three-leaf clover" (Jensen & Jacobsen, 2017) where we identified, connected with, and gathered information from buyers, cultural intermediaries, and regular viewers. Our primary interactions and interviews took place in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo in March 2017 where we interviewed television channel executives, journalists who wrote for online and print publications and niche magazines, bloggers, and festival organisers of the Nordic Bridge Film Festival. In addition, we attended the 2017 Rio Content Market in Rio de Janeiro – the largest annual television marketplace in Latin America – and interacted with independent producers, television executives from TV Cultura and Mais Globosat, as well as digital media professionals. We also met with representatives from the Danish Cultural Institute based in Rio de Janeiro and a representative

from DR (Danmarks Radio) who was invited as a keynote speaker at the Rio Content Market. Our interactions in São Paulo included meetings with television industry executives from FOX/FX and Net Now, as well as in-person and Skype interactions with bloggers and other active viewers of Danish television drama in Brazil. The names of all interactants and interviewees are anonymised.

Unlike in other countries where newspapers and magazine journalists have critically reviewed and promoted Danish television drama among national audiences (see for example, Esser in this anthology), we were unable to locate any breadth or depth of journalistic material in Brazil. The Brazilian media, in a traditional sense, is silent on the matter of Danish television drama. However, preparatory work conducted before our interactions showed some references to the Danish series in a number of online forums. Thus, our material also includes references to user-generated content from online social networks that were monitored in 2016–2017 through Brazil's OPSocial platform. This platform is often used by companies to gain information on consumer profiles, behaviour, and preferences in order to shape audiovisual content. The OPSocial tool retrieved 2,870 viewer posts, comments, and shares from several networks, stored in a single account on this platform. Among them, 770 were analysed and coded through the NVIVO software.

Our data, which can best be described as a patchwork of information and small data, has resulted from a bricolage of networking and following potential cues for information. It is important to stress that the nature of the relationship between academic researchers and Brazil's audiovisual industry is often difficult; thus, it is not uncommon for television executives to refuse or simply ignore requests for interviews. Successful connections were largely granted on the basis of previously established relationships of trust. These relationships of trust, however, did not necessarily secure access to reliable ratings offering some indication of the presumed audience. In some cases, company memories were foggy, and our interactants could not remember the details of the Danish series specifically. In other cases, they were neither willing nor able to share them. One company representative explained that their inability to share resulted from a change in company software.

The names of individual bloggers were identified through the digital traces they left on the OPSocial platform. Some bloggers agreed to meet us personally at coffee shops and restaurants to talk about their interest in Danish television drama; others spoke with us through Skype. The written material appearing on blog posts was later retrieved and treated as a form of observable activity, as argued by Latzko-Toth et al., who write, "Content production (writing a tweet, posting a picture) *is* the activity, and the content itself is a trace of this activity" [emphasis original] (2017: 201).

These types of "small data" – collected from an abundance of small talk – were "thick" in other meaningful ways: "It's the sticky stuff that's difficult to quantify. It comes to us in the form of a small sample size and in return we get an incredible depth of meanings and stories" (Wang, 2016: para. 7). We worked with this data – a fragmented tapestry – while negotiating other methodological peculiarities: slip-

pery language exchanges in Portuguese, Danish, and English; explicit rejections of interview requests; and disappointments when promises that information would be sent were broken.

Brazilian encounters – television in Brazil

Renato Cruz (2008) reminds us that since the first broadcast of the World Cup in 1950, Brazil has developed one of the world's largest and most commercial television systems. Brazil is a powerhouse in the production and export of (melo)drama in the *telenovela* genre, which has demonstrated a strong capacity for international export. Telenovelas are seen to provide a "pleasure of viewing" from their ability to invigorate discussions between groups of viewers who use them as "fictional narratives as a sounding board for ethical issues that are difficult to discuss as first-person issues" (Slade, 2010: 57).

In terms of foreign television content imports, the Brazilian telescape displays a concentration of 251 cable channels with largely non-Brazilian content (ANCINE, 2017) and 17.9 million cable television subscribers (as of December 2017) (ANCINE, 2018). One study shows that, out of 92 cable channels monitored in 2016, only 7 per cent of the channels broadcast Brazilian content, while 80 per cent featured international programmes – mainly from the US, the UK, France, and Germany – with a focus on action-adventure television series, feature films, canned programmes, and licensed television formats (ANCINE, 2019). We were informed that the content of Mais Globosat HD was 70 per cent international and 30 per cent Brazilian.

Traditional television broadcasts reach about 55 million households in Brazil and continue to be important. Only four broadcasters account for over 70 per cent of television audiences: Globo (37% market share); Sistema Brasileiro de Televisão (14.9%); Record (14.7%); and Band (4.1%). Ranking fifth by market share, TV Cultura is the only public broadcaster among the top five and the only free, non-subscription channel featuring Danish series, (in addition to educational content from the US and UK, as well as the Czech Republic, Spain, Germany, Japan, Russia, and Italy).

More recently, the demand and penetration of Video on Demand (VoD) services enabled by internet technologies – for example Netflix, Amazon, Apple +, Claro Video, and Net Now – and the growth of over-the-top premium services in Brazil, supplements the complex multi-platform access that Brazilian audiences have.

Danish television drama series in Brazil

The following table (Table 1) provides an overview of the different channels and services in the Brazilian telescape through which Brazilian audiences had access to Danish television drama produced and exported internationally between 2012–2017.

Table 1.   Danish television drama series in Brazilian channels and services

	Launch	Platform	Service
The Killing	2012	Mais Globosat HD	Pay TV
Forbrydelsen	2015	Netflix	SVoD*
		YouTube	FvoD (Free VoD)
The Bridge	2015	Mais Globosat HD	Pay TV
Broen		Globosat Play	Pay TV
		Now/NET	Pay TV
		FX	Pay TV
		Netflix	SvoD*
		YouTube	FvoD (Free VoD)
The Government	2012	Mais Globosat HD	Pay TV
Borgen		YouTube	FvoD (Free VoD)
The Legacy / Os Herdeiros	2015	FOX e FX	Pay TV
Arven	2014	TV Cultura	Broadcast TV
		YouTube	FvoD (Free VoD)
Rita	2017	Netflix	SvoD*
		YouTube	FvoD (Free VoD)

Source: Compiled by the authors

Apart from documenting the different channels and services through which Danish television drama penetrated the Brazilian context, the table draws attention to three additional points. First, apart from *The Legacy* [*Arvingerne*] (DR1, 2014–2017)[1] being publicly broadcasted by TV Cultura, Danish series have otherwise only been accessible by viewers who have the purchasing power to pay for television. Their expectations of good quality are high, as is their comfort and tolerance of images and sounds of different cultures and languages. Second, based on information provided by the viewers we spoke with, the table fails to show that many viewers accessed these series using illegal internet streaming services (e.g., torrent software such as BitTorrent, Pirate Bay, Torrentz2, LimeTorrents, TorrentDownloads, EliteTorrent). Third, the descriptive listing gives no information about the popularity of the series that can otherwise be determined by reliable ratings data. Although TV Cultura shared some basic ratings information for reruns of *The Legacy,* the ratings were strikingly insignificant.

Buyers' search for content

The programme director and acquisitions manager at TV Cultura confirmed that *The Legacy* had been broadcast in a dubbed version according to their official policy of making content accessible to all of Brazil's social classes. An emphasis was placed on *content* and not the origin of production: "The language might be strange but the

geography and the cultural diversity, it's not a problem – some people are looking for something different from their reality" (Interview with TV Cultura, 8 March 2017).

In our interview with the representative of Mais Globosat, we were able to get a basic overview of the complexity of the largest media conglomerate in Latin America, Grupo Globo. The pay channel Mais Globosat falls under Grupo Globo, which also owns the national newspaper O Globo as well as the free television channel Rede Globo – a critical platform for the broadcast of Brazilian telenovelas. Grupo Globo was described by the Content Director at Fox as "The King's Court", in reference to its long history of dominance in Brazil's media market. Although our interviewee did not describe Mais Globosat as a niche channel (unlike Arte, for example), Mais Globosat was described as a "window to the world". Similar to TV Cultura, our interviewee echoed a similar perspective as that expressed at TV Cultura – that the country of origin of drama series was unimportant, and that only content was considered. In these instances, the Danish aspect was of peripheral concern.

The search for lucrative content by buyers occurred through several processes, of which two were made explicit to us: through word-of-mouth recommendations made to buyers, and through television marketplaces such as the Rio Content Market (renamed Rio2C after 2018). An executive at Claro Net described the former in the following way:

> How do I know that content exists? Because someone at a personal level in social media recommended me and as curator, I took her advice and I love it […] There is no language barrier here because the content is subtitled, the people who usually watch this kind of show is upper class, or high medium class… so for me, if I have to choose between watching a show in subtitled or dubbed… subtitled of course. (Interview, 16 March 2017)

Global television marketplaces are described as exuberant, paparazzi-filled sites for the aggressive business exchange of new television content (see Bielby & Harrington, 2008; Havens, 2006). In comparison to the MIPCOM marketplace held at the Palais des Festivals in Cannes that we had attended earlier, the annual Rio Content Market, although the largest of its kind in Latin America, was a more informal and low-key affair, hardly noticeable outside the Windsor Hotel where it was held. The focus in 2017 centred on black voices and the asymmetric representation of black media professionals. Global television marketplaces always have specific themes, but the theme of Nordic Noir, to which Danish television is related in international marketplaces, has never featured at the Rio Content Market.

The 2017 event did, however, include a speech delivered by DR Kultur channel's documentary representative at a market and pitching session. Apart from describing DR's market shares, genres, and objectives of the public service channel, the speech outlined the ambition of DR to engage in increased transnational co-productions. Questions from the audiences included: how can you do the co-production in Brazil? how would the money work? and how does pitching of product happen? (provided by

session moderator). The speaker largely evaded concrete issues of capital investment and focused instead on promoting DR as an intrinsically credible partner by appropriating the international success of its television drama series that he described as having "strong characters" and "surprising stories". He continued:

> DR is a national broadcasting company in Denmark, and you have to remember that Denmark is a very small country in Scandinavia, we only is 5.5 million people in Denmark… so, it's smaller money, smaller audience than you see here in South America…DR1 is for locally produced content and also here that we show our internationally famous fiction drama. (Sound recording from pitching session, Rio2C, 8 March 2017)

Apart from this fleeting appearance of Danish television drama at the Rio Content Market, references to this pool of television content – including other examples of Nordic Noir series – were clearly absent.

Our conversations with content buyers impressed upon us that their acquisition decisions were not necessarily based on a deep understanding of audience needs or a committed effort to offering consistently good quality television content. Rather, such decisions were more like calculated responses to key trends in the global television market and opportunistic decisions to appropriate different forms of television content to saturate and quench the demands of a volatile market. For example, the Content Director at Fox was far more captivated by the need to secure lucrative market benefits from the migration of audiences towards VoD. Another interaction with the Director of Programme and Contents for ClaroNet echoed this position and characterised the Brazilian telescape as fiercely competitive; strapped by complex legal regulations; racing to harness new technologies as first movers; experimenting with new business, marketing, and advertising models that capture new technological platforms; coping with the abundance of television content being churned out on a monthly basis; and fixated on the fragile loyalties of viewers. In such a climate, Danish television drama series were only a drop in the ocean – respected for their good stories that appealed to a niche audience, but not quite the subject of unparalleled attention.

Furthermore, he drew on publicity practices and the importance of the American remake of *The Killing* in paving the way for broadcasting the Danish version:

> It's mainly the promotion done by those who bought the shows… because when you have 50,000 titles you decide what's going to be more successful… because you have a supermarket, and you give more attention or less – and if the niche gets no attention it will be close to zero… I think *The Killing* had more audience after the American show was launched… why? Because [the Danish version] got the promotion done after the American show. (Claro Net interview, 16 March 2017)

John Fiske (1987) describes three types of television texts: the first type are the programmes; the secondary texts are advertisements, publicity, and news stories; and the tertiary texts are those generated by the public through word-of-mouth. In many

national contexts (e.g., Australia, Germany, the UK, and Turkey) analysed in this anthology, Fiske's first type of television text, the programme itself, is highlighted as being critical for the acquisition and reception – and indeed, the appropriation – of Danish television drama. In the Brazilian context, from the perspective of the merchants of television, Fiske's secondary texts appear as critical to making decisions about acquisition and audience reception. In addition, Fiske's tertiary type of texts, word-of-mouth, also seem important. We will now consider the role these texts played in the reception of Danish television drama and how they were appropriated for other purposes.

Expressions of interest in Danish television drama

When audiences in the Brazilian context describe their perceptions of Danish television drama, which were articulated during our interactions, they often refer to similar elements as audiences in other chapters in this anthology: the visual aesthetics including landscape ambience; the sense of authenticity (especially portrayed in multilayered, complicated characters); the representation of gender relations and the role of women; and the display of societal challenges. And very often, Danish television drama is positioned as *different* from Brazilian telenovelas.

Danish television drama attracted very little media coverage in Brazil. Three short articles, simply alerting readers to the presence of *Bron/Broen* [*The Bridge*] (SVT1/DR1, 2011–2018) and *Forbrydelsen* [*The Killing*] (DR1, 2007–2012) on Fox/FX, were published between 2013–2014 in the daily newspaper *Folha de São Paulo*[2]. Further mentions were found in the OPSocial database, and although this data was thin in terms of elaboration, some examples (translated into English by us) are given here to show how peer-to-peer communications serve as tools to express interest, evaluate, rate, question, and actively contribute to opinion formation (see Van Dijck, 2009). Some viewers appropriated Danish television drama to express personal opinions on what gave them personal pleasure: "*The Bridge* is cool, with the same dramatic and initial suspense as *Borgen* or *The Killing*" or "Most people do something and I just lie down watching my Danish series". Some asked questions or provided further information related to the series: "Is *Borgen* on Netflix?" or "So *Borgen*'s Katrine appears on *Pitch Perfect 2*". Viewers used the Danish television drama as a way to connect to others ("If you watch *The Bridge* call me, I want to be your friend") and explicitly recommended them ("I recommend the *Borgen* political series. I think you'll love it. It is about the first woman prime minister of Denmark"). An example of a viewer who showed a feeling of connection to a character stated: "There's a character I wanted to be able to take care of and protect. Her name is Saga Norén, from the Malmö Police". Another used sequences to compare the differences in Danish and Brazilian practices: "I'm here to see a Danish series, and I can only wonder about how their teaching is so fucking different to the Brazilian teaching". A less enthusiastic post reflected a recently erupted debate accompanied by an internet campaign voicing the absence of black people in

Globo's new telenovela *Segundo Sol* [*Second Sun*] (despite its location in Bahia state where 76% of the population is self-declared black or brown)[3], by asking: "Why do Danish series fail to respect on-screen racial diversity?" (viewer posts compiled using the OPSocial tool).

Adding to the line of less positive associations, two further comments from our interactions with bloggers express a form of pity for people living in well-functioning and orderly societies. One stated, "they usually seemed bored about their country, […] we are usually more enthusiastic – it's a little bit messy" (13 March 2017), and another said:

> I see very organised cities with very nice gardens, everything well set… I see very polite people, educated people… not that warm, but nice people, respectful people, organisations that work accordingly, doing exactly what they're supposed to do… maybe because of the hard winter… Maybe people a little bit sad, there's not much sunlight. (Cultural entrepreneur, 9 March 2017)

Finally, a comment made by a woman with extensive textual knowledge of non-Brazilian television drama from all over the world critiqued the storylines of some Danish series:

> There is something that intrigues me, and to be honest, bothers me to an extent. It is the fact that plots don't go so deep in their political and social aspects. I have in mind precisely the finales of Bridge (s3) and Killing (s1) These endings were quite disappointing to me, seeing that such complex storylines ended up being resolved as problems of one very disturbed individual. (Private e-mail correspondence, 19 March 2017)

Cultural intermediation

Cultural intermediaries (e.g., bloggers) have been seen as "anonymous heroes" of communication (de Certeau, 1984), playing the roles of mediators and transformative agents involved in the production and circulation of symbolic goods and services in the cultural economy. Their practices construct, validate, reject, or promote cultural objects and representations. Cultural intermediation occurs through practices associated with specific professions involved in the articulation of taste in the fields of journalism, music, advertising, food branding, and arts promotion (see Maguire & Matthews, 2014). Increasingly, the advent of internet technologies – with their affordances of democratisation and participation – allow social media platforms to stand as "an alternative to the top-down structure of the older mass media" (Dahlgren, 2012: 100). Today, the practice of cultural intermediation has been extended to cover the activities of bloggers, vloggers, and YouTubers who choose, select, and express their opinions in diverse domains such as fashion and business (e.g., Jenkins et al., 2013; Kuleva & Maglevanaya, 2017).

Verboord discusses how "the available space for discussing cultural products has significantly increased with the proliferation of the internet" (2014: 924), and how the participatory activities of individuals who use new platforms to share their ideas erode the cultural authority and positions of traditional media critics. However, this newly available space also allows individuals to discuss subjects meaningful to them. An important social media platform is the blog, described by Brainard as "the penny press newspapers of the 21st century, allowing every citizen to share his or her views on the world" (2015: 171). However, blogs display great variation. Rettberg (2014) suggests three major types of blogs: "personal" or "diary-style"; "topic-driven"; and "filter" blogs. For the purposes of understanding the appropriation of Danish television drama by bloggers in Brazil, we focus on filter blogs – those that record the blogger's experiences and "finds on the web" that are filtered from their own point of view. In the following, we give examples of how five different cultural intermediaries appropriated Danish television drama to promote different forms of conversations. This is followed by a brief discussion of the promotion of Danish television drama by the Danish Cultural Institute, based in Rio de Janeiro.

Antonio, blogger and writer for an online magazine

Antonio, a man in his late 20s, had watched all three seasons of *The Killing* by downloading (without being specific about the source) *after* he had seen the American remake and *after* he had heard other people talking about it on the internet. When probed in an interview (10 March 2017) to describe the difference between the original and the remake, Antonio responded:

> The original is more low in… in a good way, you can understand the characters more… The remake is like things are already solved, the original is more… original. I think you understand more the character in the original one.

He pointed to the many Brazilian internet sites focusing on reviewing television shows and movies, supporting our assumption that one way of understanding the impact of Danish television drama was to focus on emerging platforms of discussion and exchange. Antonio saw his blogging activities as a form of independent space where he could articulate and express his views to a smaller, connected audience unlike what was possible in traditional media:

> People like me, they are searching for… I like to know things that are not there every time, when I think there is something important to talk about. In the traditional media it's for a lot of people ,so you have to choose more. In the independent, is not for everyone, it's easier to choose what you like, what you are connected with. I have more space in the independent media. (Interview, 10 March 2017)

Continuing, Antonio pointed to how *The Killing* offered another sort of "reality" to connect and identify with:

> In the end it's all about people and what connects people… it doesn't really matter where it is from, but the personal dramas and the family, even if you are from another reality, you can connect in some way. (Interview, 10 March 2017)

Andressa, blogger and translator

Andressa described herself as self-taught literary translator, writer, proofreader, and blogger. Her blog described her interest in content originating from outside the Anglophone world and focused on the strong female protagonists (something that audiences from other countries have also commented on) and the way the series addressed societal issues:

> It attracted me for two reasons: one, to follow a political drama outside the English-speaking world, in a country about which we know much less than we imagine. Another, to know the story of a strong and interesting female protagonist. […] I found it quite empowering. […] In Brazil, it is happening on + Globosat channel. […]

> Update: I saw the 30 episodes and it's as good as I expected. It unreservedly addresses issues such as colonialism, abortion, legalization of prostitution, public health. (Andressa, blog entry, 2014)

Andressa explained that the point of writing her blog, which she saw as "a personal space", was to spread references and recommendations for ideas that mattered and – in Andressa's specific case – new forms of feminism. Relating to the precarious position of women in leading positions in Brazil, Andressa noted the importance of television shows – that they had the capacity to achieve more than only providing entertainment:

> We look forward to TV shows that really tell a good story… even more than in the movies. But now we have a huge offer of different stories with good characters, and this is worldwide. And we are currently experiencing like a fourth wave of feminism, which is really connected to the internet, also on the streets and in protests, but we are passing information to the Internet and trying to educate a bit women of my generation. (Interview, 13 March 2017)

Echoing Antonio's thoughts, Andressa described how she used her filter blog and the capacity to be present online to display how she captured different types of content with the purpose of promoting her own feminist interests:

> I am part of a group of women who make a website and it's about any type of content that relates to nerd/geek culture from a female point of view and a feminist point of view. We are always looking for TV shows which show women being real people and also being strong and doing things and making things happen… if it doesn't happen on Facebook, it never happened… being online is really important. (Interview, 13 March 2017)

Izabel, journalist and active blogger

Our interactions with Izabel helped to exemplify how individuals use other dissemination platforms as alternatives to the top-down structure of the older mass media and challenge them (Dahlgren, 2012: 100). Izabel worked earlier as a journalist for a Brazilian weekly news magazine – who hired her on the basis of her blog activity – to report on television shows. Being dissatisfied with her task to write "not serious things, just a list of the best thing, the worst thing, what's on Netflix… they want clicks", Izabel left her position. She asserted how "media companies put up structural barriers for the dissemination of quality drama" and considered the establishment of her own blog site (with two other writers) as a space "to write something beyond the obvious" (Interview with Izabel, 14 March 2017). Her goal was to show alternatives to American television content that audiences could engage with. Her appropriation of Danish television drama as an example of these alternatives fed directly into that overall ambition.

Izabel's blog relates *The Killing* to the Nordic Noir genre, which she saw as crucial for establishing "Scandinavian production on the world television map". Furthermore, the blog explains how this genre differs from American productions in techniques, character portrayal, and articulation of socio-political, economic, and cultural issues, as well as how audiences could reflect on the domination of American content in Brazil:

> The term usually defines series that, in the case of the police genre, presents a detective or a team doing investigations (usually of a case per season) without the use of the technological paraphernalia commonly seen in the American productions. In both police productions and dramas, the stories (which feature a cinematographic photograph) are situated in a chilling, melancholic environment, presenting the contrast between an evolved society and heinous crimes (depicted with cruelty refinement and in detail of images) and hypocrisy (in the case of non-police dramas).

> […] In the midst of all this, the series make a harsh social critique of their respective countries (including cultural clashes), without necessarily offering a happy ending. The series offer a plot with a "domino effect" (one situation leads to another that leads to another, […] full of twists and turns, amid present socio-political-economic-cultural issues.

> Despite their success, Scandinavian productions are still not able to establish themselves in the Brazilian market. This is because the channels (open and closed network) are dominated by American production. (Izabel, blog entry, 2017)

Eric, filmmaker and screenwriter, and Renato, journalist and activist

This section presents two further blog posts related specifically to the series *Borgen*, which are similar to the Japanese audiences expression of curiosity towards the representation of a female prime minister negotiating the tensions between private and public life (see Jacobsen, 2018).

The first blog post is written by Eric Bitencourt, who writes reviews for the film and television review website *Pipoca e Guaraná*. Eric refers to *Borgen* as a television series with "the ability to make a whole nation question its values". He further writes that public broadcasting allows for the creation of television content that stimulates controversy:

> In Denmark, television is public, that is, paid for and administered by the government. This has consequences: First, TV has a history of being educational, since, being paid for by taxes and not by advertisers, you do not have to worry about attracting audiences. Secondly, this would make the content sensitive to state interests. But Denmark proved to be capable of producing high-quality content and commercial potential and freedom of expression laws allowed Borgen to create controversy. (Bitencourt, 2015)

The second blog post is written by Renato Guimaraes, co-founder of Together, a communication agency dedicated to promoting social change by mobilising and engaging people, companies, and organisations in social causes. Described as a "journalist and activist for a better world" in the liberal magazine *HuffPost Brazil*, Renato is explicit in appropriating the content of *Borgen* to critique Brazilian politics in his blog, as well as drawing similarities between political arenas, irrespective of national differences. He writes:

> More revealing is the slow, steady, and unrelenting process of initiating the progressive Nyborg to the rituals of power. Especially the greatest desire of everyone who comes to a position like hers: to remain in power. Besides, it exposes the often carnal relations between politicians, the mass media and capital. It is interesting to see that scandals, traps, and corruption are not, by far, exclusive attributes of Brazilian political life. (Guimarães, 2014)

Eric and Renato's blog entries articulate both non-proximities between Brazil and Denmark in terms of television histories (i.e., the commercial contrasted with the public broadcast model) as well proximities (i.e., similarities of the national political arenas). This resonates with Slade's work on the international popularity of telenovelas and Australasian soap operas, where she claims that audience pleasures do not simply lie in the audiences' ability to identify with the characters and stories of televised drama, but more in their ability to see "their own lives through the lens of similarities and differences in the lives portrayed" (2010: 59). As shown here, this understanding may be extended to include lenses of similarities and differences that not only touch audiences in terms of their own biographies, but the socio-political contexts within which their lives unfold.

The Danish Cultural Institute

National cultural institutes are prime sites for intercultural mediation and active promoters of the branded cultural images and expressions of the nation state. The Danish Cultural Institute (DCI) has a presence in 18 countries around the world

promoting knowledge of Danish and international culture by facilitating cultural events involving music, theatre, and dance; supporting artist residencies; and offering Danish language courses. National cultural institutes are, in other words, bona fide instruments of international cultural diplomacy (Paschalidis, 2009).

Our interactions with DCI representatives in Rio de Janeiro revealed that in contrast to the Danish Embassy, which focused on showcasing Denmark, DCI focused on intercultural dialogue. Although aware of the relative popularity of *The Killing, Borgen,* and *The Bridge* outside Denmark, the DCI representatives could only faintly recall *Borgen* having been shown on Mais Globosat. The Facebook site Cultura Nordica, started by a DCI employee, gives a scant reference to the Danish series when alerting visitors to a new Netflix series *The Rain* (2018–present) by writing:

> Have you heard about the Danish television programs "Borgen" and "Broen" that have gained international fame? A new Danish TV program produced by Netflix produced by Natasha Arthy, director of "The Killing", tries to expand this success. (Cultura Nordica, Facebook post, 11 November 2017)

Apart from this slight mention, Danish television drama was not consciously appropriated by DCI for the promotion of intercultural dialogue. When probed about the reasons for this, we were told that DCI privileged concrete interactions – unmediated by screens – between people in their music, art, theatre, and dance projects.

DCI had done more to promote Nordic films than television drama. They supported the film festival *Ponte Nordica* held in Sao Paulo in 2016 where 32 screenings attracted 30–100 guests that, according to the festival organiser, "were either cinema addicts or those interested in music, green economy, social issues and urban development" (Interview, 12 March 2017). Although television drama is currently seen as competing with film in the age of Subscription VoD (Tryon, 2013) (something echoed by the content manager at FOX/X when he spoke about the blurring line between film and television), it seems that films are still considered more representative of a nation's repertoire of cultural products than television series are.

Conclusion

The Brazilian case offers a sober example of a market where the hype about the global popularity of Danish television drama series is subject to a reality check. Our investigations strongly suggested that although Danish television drama series were respected for their good stories, they were not quite the subject of unparalleled attention. If viewer ratings or extensive media coverage in written and online newspapers are assumed to be significant indicators of success, then the absence of these indicators suggest that their appearance in Brazil had limited significance and impact. However, the voices heard in a peripheral market still allowed us to consider peripheral forms of significance and impact, that is, the achievements of the periphery.

Our interactions with buyers of Danish content, who acted in turbulent, intensely competitive media environments driven by a "brutal commercial logic" (Dahlgren, 2012), uncovered attitudes of disinterest in the "Danish" but interest in "content" (Mais Globosat; Fox). The provision of television series options were seen as integral to maintain and reinforce consumption patterns. Danish television drama series were used as a resource that gave further options to customers, temporarily reached new audiences, and filled empty slots. The peripheral market in Brazil thus capitalised efficiently on trending content, whilst Danish producers enjoyed economic and symbolic profit from having their content bought and watched by non-proximate Brazilian audiences.

Our data from the OPSocial platform and interactions with cultural intermediaries – primarily bloggers – also provide glimpses into what peripheral markets can achieve. Danish television drama was appropriated as temporary focal topics to promote different forms of conversations among like-minded people in dense online networks. These conversations included the showcasing of Danish television drama as dialogic ammunition for societal and political critique of the Brazilian context. However, it should be noted that Brazil has its own telenovela tradition – and even though telenovelas were often referred to as overly-dramatic and artificial, they have also been seen as provokers of emancipation and social change (see Vink, 1988). Representatives at the DCI noted the potential of the periphery:

> The poor cannot access a computer and the very rich, they are not culturally curious – but the middle class, with all the political turmoil, have a way to see alternatives that are presented on the screen. (Interview, Rio de Janeiro, 7 March 2017)

Interestingly, our data showed small glimpses of how Danish television drama did this.

Other forms of conversation provoked by the peripheral engagement focused on contrasting the differences in the sense of "reality" in American and Nordic audiovisual genres (see Eichner, Kaptan in this anthology). Other conversations introduced and recommended topics of novelty sourced from places beyond the national or regional. Bloggers not only articulated their own engagement and spread the news of interesting television drama series in their online networks embedded in "spreadable media" (Jenkins et al., 2013), but they also subtly appropriated Danish television drama to promote their own cosmopolitan selves, their careers, and their aesthetic and political interests.

Notes

1. The channel and years of broadcasting for the series in question are referenced at the first mention of a television series.
2. See, for example, Noir nórdico' da Dinamarca tem versões e fãs ao redor do mundo [Denmark's Nordic Noir has versions and fans around the world]. *Folha de São Paulo*. Retrieved April 5, 2019, from https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/ilustrada/2014/02/1419009-genero-noir-nordico-da-dinamarca-tem-versoes-e-fas-ao-redor-do-mundo.shtml

3. See MPT notifica Globo por falta de negros em novela e recomenda mudanças [MPT notifies Globo on the absence of blacks in telenovelas and recommends changes]. *Agência Brasil*. Retrieved April 5, 2019, from http://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/geral/noticia/2018-05/mpt-notifica-globo-por-falta-de-negros-em-novela-e-recomenda-mudancas

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Chapter 5

A cosmopolitan tribe of viewers
Crime, women, and akogare *in Japan*

Ushma Chauhan Jacobsen

Abstract

This chapter explores the meaningfulness and engagement of Japanese audiences with Danish television drama from the perspectives and sentiments of both broadcasters ("those who buy") and regular viewers ("those who watch"). The chapter includes a discussion of the conceptual framework that argues for an equal focus on the mundane practices of "everyday cosmopolitanism", as well as explaining the Japanese notion of *akogare* that refers to a desire for things which are tantalisingly out of reach. The chapter shows how the practices of television companies and the demands of a "cosmopolitan tribe of discerning viewers" are interwoven; it unfolds the figure of the cosmopolitan housewife; and it discusses the different forms of cosmopolitan engagement that viewers express. The chapter also describes the intercultural and linguistic challenges of conducting audience research in Japan.

Keywords: Danish TV drama, Nordic Noir, everyday cosmopolitanism, Japan, global television

Introduction

I heard that Tamaki had watched Danish television drama series, and we were scheduled to meet for a longer conversation about this at a train station in Tokyo. I had earlier sent her some preliminary questions and themes as requested. Tamaki had been introduced to me by a new acquaintance, who had also been introduced through another acquaintance. The day before the meeting, I received an email from Tamaki where she cancelled our rendezvous with the following message:

> I think it's difficult for a stranger to come and meet me at the station. I'm afraid that you'll get lost and I won't be able to give you appropriate directions. We will end up in taking a lot of time and getting tired. (May 2016)

Tamaki had attached notes to her email. She described herself as a single, middle-aged, part-time teacher with a university degree and wrote that she could not afford to travel

abroad. She thought that imported television drama series were mainly watched by "stay-at-home-wives" for "pleasure". In response to a question about whether it was important for Japanese viewers to be able to see foreign drama, Tamaki wrote "Yes, we can look at the world from different perspectives".

Although the imports of television drama series from Nordic countries in Japan is significantly minor in comparison to imports from Anglophone regions, an acquisition manager at the pay channel WOWOW explained that these series were nevertheless "meaningful" for the comparatively few viewers who watched them. This contribution is an exploration into the nature of this meaningfulness, and takes its point of departure from Tamaki's response of looking "at the world from different perspectives" as an example of "everyday cosmopolitanism" in practice. By using statements gathered from a wide spectrum of audiences, the chapter provides a bricolage account of the motivations for and achievements of engaging with Danish television drama for people living in Japan. It also accounts for the intercultural and linguistic challenges of accessing these perspectives and sentiments for scientific purposes.

 Four internationally acclaimed Danish television drama series were shown on Japanese pay television channels between January 2012 and May 2016. The crime drama *Den Som Dræber* [*Those Who Kill*] (TV2, 2011)[1] was shown on WOWOW in 2012. In the same year, the pay channel Super! Drama scheduled the first season of *Forbrydelsen* [*The Killing*] (DR1, 2007–2012), which was followed by two further seasons from 2013–2014. Super! Drama continued showing three seasons and reruns of *Bron/Broen* [*The Bridge*] (SVT1/DR1, 2011–2018), and three seasons and reruns of the political drama *Borgen* (DR1, 2010–2013), from 2013–2016. The series were advertised and marketed through paper pamphlets available in shops in addition to channel websites.

The ambitions of the study on global audiences of Danish productions were prompted by a sudden increase in the export of high quality, non-English television drama series produced in smaller television markets (Creeber, 2015; Jensen & Waade, 2013). To understand this global dimension, the study had to include markets that were traditionally distant – and thus surprising destinations for the acquisition and viewing of Danish television drama series – such as Japan. Japan has a long and successful history in the production and transnational export of television drama in East and Southeast Asia. This has influenced "Japan's conception of being 'in but above' or 'similar but superior' to Asia" (Iwabuchi, 2002: 199). Furthermore, the production and worldwide distribution of popular Japanese culture – songs, jazz, enka, karaoke, manga, anime, video games, films, and "idols" (Craig, 2015) – as well as cultural products based on cuteness-related aesthetics or *kawaii* (Pelliterri, 2018) makes Japan a significant global influencer and exporter of cultural commodities. Nonetheless, the imports of popular culture expressions and commodities, including television content (especially from the US and Korea), is just as intense and has likewise drawn much scholarly attention (e.g., Ang, 2007; Fraser, 2015; Galbraith & Karlin, 2012).

To explore the meaningfulness and engagement of Japanese audiences with television content imported from non-Anglophone and non-Asian countries, I consider the

perspectives of both broadcasters ("those who buy"), and the sentiments of regular viewers ("those who watch"). The notion of cosmopolitanism is used as a "sensitizing concept". Blumer (1954: 7) defines a sensitising concept as giving the user "a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances. Whereas definitive concepts provide prescriptions of what to see, sensitizing concepts merely suggest directions along which to look". I focus especially on what Kendall et al. (2009) describe as practices of everyday cosmopolitanism. This everyday practice is not necessarily "a matter of cocktails or market ebbs and flows" (Calhoun, 2008: 107) traditionally associated with a "stylistic" or "commercial cosmopolitanism" (Athique, 2016: 15). Instead, the notion of everyday cosmopolitanism also attends to the *modest and mundane* ways of practising cosmopolitanism that reside with its more stylistic or commercial forms. I also use the notion of *akogare* – a Japanese word derived from *aku* [place, being] and *gare/kare* [leave], which roughly translates as "desire" (Nonaka, 2018) – to make sense of how Danish television drama series gave pleasure and provided ways of looking at the world for Tamaki and many other viewers.

Data gathering

The empirical material was generated between 2015 and 2016 and covers a wide range of diverse resources including interactions, written correspondence, and conversations on skype and in restaurants. I interacted with distribution and acquisition managers at commercial television stations and analysts at NHK, the Japanese public broadcasting corporation. Further material emerged from interactions with scriptwriters, documentary producers, journalists, media researchers, subtitling and dubbing translators, branding and media representatives from the Danish Embassy, in addition to one focus group interview with three women and eight individual interviews. These encounters took place in Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya, Kobe, and Ikoma as well as at the MIPCOM television marketplace in Cannes. Although I was given access to Super! Drama's viewer profile, no precise details of audience ratings were made available. However, a year later, I received an extract of comments made about *The Killing, Borgen,* and *The Bridge* taken from Super! Drama's online platform, where viewers are encouraged to write about their inquiries, impressions, or opinions. This extract gave access to 194 online comments written from November 2011–June 2016, of which 86 comments were made by men and 108 by women. Other information included the person's age and employment.

Gathering cues and clues was similar to the manner in which crimes are solved in *The Killing* or *The Bridge*, and much of my time was spent pursuing dead ends. Starting with an initial internet search on websites and social media platforms to investigate if, when, and where Danish television drama had been shown – aided by a Japanese exchange student – we found evidence of their broadcasts on the Super! Drama website. All initial email contact with the channel – translated into Japanese – was met with

silence. The exchange student was, however, able to find viewers through *Ameba,* a Japanese blogging and social network platform. We used this opportunity to randomly contact bloggers and conducted three skype interviews in Japanese before my arrival in Tokyo. I was only able to visit WOWOW's offices though a personal recommendation made by an analyst at NHK. Interactions at academic seminars at Keio and Nagoya University gave further access to other media professionals and, surprisingly, to acquisition personnel at Super! Drama.

The technique of on-the-spot networking was the only option in the absence of any prior relationships to Japanese television companies or media professionals. The situation was compounded by the absence of hype-creating paratexts (Gray, 2010) in mainstream Japanese media (unlike in the UK, Australia, or Germany). Furthermore, the challenges of gaining access to information in a Japanese context where "the ideal interview is with a friend of a friend" and where extensive periods of time are necessary to "transform initial, cautious acceptance into lifelong friendly connections" (McLaughlin, 2010: 2) have resulted in a potpourri of data that nonetheless provide a starting point for analysing Japanese audiences of Danish television drama.

The quotes used in the analysis are drawn from my fieldnotes and audio recordings. I have sometimes used professional titles only to secure anonymity and more detailed biographical information when possible. The statements are given verbatim. The interactions took place in different variations of English and Japanese, and an interpreter was present during the interactions when Japanese dominated the conversation. I am certain that the interpretability of conversations would have been richer had it not been for my own incompetence in Japanese. The multilingual situation necessitated a use of "truncated repertoires" and "bits of languages" (Blommaert, 2010) that we had at our disposal to share with one another. The fragmented nature of the types of data, the different locations of interactions, and the intercultural and linguistic challenges of negotiating access significantly restrained and shaped how the perspectives and sentiments of Japanese audiences could be understood, analysed, and represented.

Aspects of cosmopolitanism

Japanese audiences were attracted to the portrayals of different cultural practices and social themes offered by *The Killing*, *The Bridge*, and *Borgen*, as well as to the "sound" of Danish (available in subtitled versions) – as a non-Anglophone sound further textured the authenticity of the images. This attraction stands in contrast to the idea of "cultural discount" that refers to a loss of value in television viewing that occurs when viewers from one cultural context find it difficult to identify with the narrative contents provided by other ones (McFadyen et al., 2000). However, the Japanese context adds to the research suggesting that it is precisely the difference and recognition of the Other in audiovisual productions that provides added value to viewer experience, as well as to the potential for international export (e.g., Athique, 2016).

The versatile concept of "cosmopolitanism" centralises the recognition of difference and the relationship between "Self" and "Other". It also centralises the mobility that is needed to bring the two into a relationship. Employed by a wide range of scholars embedded in diverse disciplines, cosmopolitanism helps to account for the novel interconnectivities of individuals, institutions, and ideas enabled by the processes of globalisation in addition to explaining their implications. The role of global media interconnectivities in facilitating an "enforced proximity" (Szerszynski & Urry, 2002) is well established. The mechanisms and outcomes of these enforced proximities are further reflected in the writings of media researchers who have forged valuable insights relevant to this contribution. These include the interrelationship between cosmopolitanism, television, and neoliberal market ideologies and consumption patterns (e.g., Miller, 2006) and cosmopolitanism and professional communities of practice in television companies (e.g., Kuipers, 2012).

Calhoun (2008) provides a fine example demonstrating the breadth of meanings of cosmopolitanism. As articulated in the following, these embrace political projects and ethical orientations as well as the stylistic and psychological capacities of individuals to desire, appreciate, value, and capitalise from the value of the Other:

> It's what we praise in those who read novelists from every continent, or in the audiences and performers of world music; it's the aspiration of advocates for global justice and the claim of managers of multinational businesses. Campaigners on behalf of migrants urge cosmopolitan legal reforms out of both concern for immigrants and belief that openness to people from other cultures enriches their countries. Cosmopolitan is the first category in the advertisements posted by would-be husbands seeking brides (and vice versa) in the Sunday Times of India. (Calhoun, 2008: 107)

The quote above demonstrates the world-spanning breadth of actors, processes, and ideologies that get caught up in each other in our contemporary global context. At one level, cosmopolitanism refers to a normative position, and privileges the disposition to openness, tolerance, and exploration of the cultural other (e.g., Hannerz, 1996). At another level, cosmopolitanism is increasingly associated with the consumption of products, ideas, and practices of the Other that are strongly promoted by neoliberal market ideologies (e.g., Miller, 2006) and the seductive marketing and branding practices of the "transnational promotional class" (Aronczyk, 2013).

Harvey (2009: 114) polemically writes of "adjectival cosmopolitanisms" and draws attention to the multitude of ways scholars have articulated the concept to explain present-day phenomena. Many examples of these are noted in Sobré-Denton and Bardhan's glossary (2013), such as rooted, traditional, classical, transnational, translocal, post-colonial, methodological, virtual, or post-universal cosmopolitanism. In this contribution, I focus on Kendall et al.'s (2009) definition of everyday cosmopolitanism that embraces a performative approach to "acting, thinking and feeling" cosmopolitan (see Cheah & Robbins, 1998). Everyday cosmopolitanisms are not necessarily "banal or spectral forms […], but represent the gradual and sometimes discrepant infiltration

and uptake of cosmopolitanism into the practices and outlooks of everyday citizens" (Kendall et al., 2009: 100).

In addition, they also suggest that "there should be identifiable 'carriers' who play a role in diffusing or sowing the seeds of cosmopolitanism as they go about their normal business of work, travel and association" (2009: 101). Furthermore, they outline the characteristics of three styles of cosmopolitanism. The first is the "sampling" style, characterised by fleeting temporary contact with difference that demonstrates a desire to seek novel experiences or forms of escape from the everyday. The second is the "immersive" style, which is more strategic in nature and where cosmopolitan objects are looked for as a matter of routine cultural practice. The third is the "reflexive" style, where individuals display a commitment to an ethical or political ethos and to living and thinking beyond the local or national.

I now turn to consider how the practices and outlooks of Japanese viewers display the discrepant infiltration and uptake of cosmopolitanism in the context of buying and watching Danish television drama; who and what the identifiable carriers of cosmopolitanism are; and the extent to which the three styles of cosmopolitanism emerge.

Those who buy

The transnational promotional class plays a significant role in the "circulation, mediation, communication, promotion, and calculation" of the cultural dimensions of nations (Aronczyk, 2013: 39). These critical practices resonate with Kuipers's (2012) description of the activities of the "cosmopolitan tribe of television buyers" whose personal taste and cosmopolitan capital have contributed to introduce Danish television drama to global audiences. In the current media climate of fierce competition and over-abundance of television content, personal recommendations, fragmented rumours, and information on current trends become vital mechanisms to sort, dismiss, or engage with this global overload. In such a context, the workings of the "grapevine proximity" connecting individuals caught in meshes of media industry and personal networks (Jensen & Jacobsen, 2020) enables the cosmopolitan tribe of television buyers to circulate their subjective experiences, opinions, and preferences among each other.

Danish television drama series have been strategically used in the branding strategies for niche channels, such as BBC Four and Sky Atlantic in the UK (see Esser in this anthology). Likewise, *The Killing*, *The Bridge*, and *Borgen* were all shown on the Japanese pay channel Super! Drama, which according to information given in an advertisement (2015), prides itself on "broadcasting a range of favorite TV drama series from all over the world". A closer look reveals drama series primarily produced in the "US and other countries, such as The Blacklist, Breaking Bad, Criminal Minds, Grimm, The Mentalist, Fringe, Law and Order". The Super! Drama channel falls under the umbrella of Super Network Inc., distributing television content that is "subscribed to by about 8,153,100 households, as of March 2015" (Super! Drama public advertisement, 2015).

The channel is accessible through subscriptions to large cable packages broadcasting non-Japanese content, such as J:Com, or through satellite providers such as SkyPerfect. Viewers are encouraged to write their questions and comments on the channel online platform, as in the following example:

> I am sending this message because I wanted to express my gratitude and respect for your decision to broadcast a Japanese version of the long awaited season 2. Thank you so much!! You have proved your spirit and good sense. Super Drama TV in a nutshell. (Male, 40, self-employed, online comment referring to *Borgen*)

The reference to the "nutshell" resonates well with Super! Drama's alignment of television content with the demands of their key audiences that desire American and British content.

Super! Drama's viewer profile, which provides subscriber information made available to commercial clients and advertisers as printed material, states that 57.7 per cent of their subscribers are women and 42.3 per cent are men. Further subscriber information includes age (35 years old and above), annual income (over average), education (44.8% have a university degree), and house ownership (68.6%). In addition, Super! Drama viewers are segmented into employment categories in the following way: housewife (35.6%), students (12.9%), those who work outside the home such as office clerks, service workers, executives, freelancers, physical labourers, and retail workers, (39.7%), children (1.3%), and unemployed, retired, or others (11.8%). Hence, the "housewife" comprises the biggest single category and a central audience – I will return to this later. Other striking features of the viewer profile lie in its accompanying illustrations. Women are portrayed either as shoppers (the consumer image) or as standing in a living room carrying two cups of tea on a tray, while a man sits on the sofa with a book (the service image). In another illustration, a man is shown lying in a reclining chair, a drink in one hand, holding a mobile phone in the other; three other prominent objects in the room include an open laptop, a set of golf clubs, and a small dog. The illustrations show lives of comfortable surplus and a convenient ordering of traditional gender roles reminiscent of a past where television watching was associated with the mass media, the feminine, and the ordinary (Newman & Levine, 2012).

The initial decision of Super!Drama to buy *The Killing* was based on the acquisition manager's curiosity and the difficult-to-dismiss murmurs on the grapevine about the media hype that *The Killing* had produced in the UK. After sampling a single episode, she found that it struck a chord of resonance and explained this as:

> The female character is impressive and the story is interesting […] I wanted to introduce this drama for Japanese people. (Interview with Super! Drama, May 2015)

Furthermore, her shrewd business acumen had pre-empted the desires of viewers as indicated by the following online comment from a viewer:

> The Killing will begin next week and it seems to have had high ratings in Europe and America, so I am looking considerably forward to it. (Female, 38, employee)

Such comments require swift action from broadcasters if they are to maintain their reputation and satisfy impatient consumer demands in a global media climate characterised by the flooding and saturation of television drama series twinned with the fragile loyalties of customers. The following online comments provide examples of such impatience among viewers:

> I request season 2. And make it fast! (Male, 50, employee)

> Because of new year there wasn't a transmission at 8pm on Thursday. The previous time there hadn't even been an announcement about that, had there? That's too cruel. Please air a marathon or something, anything, soon. (Female, 47, housewife)

Not only do customers dictate the tempo of broadcasting schedules, but also the language options. Some noted how they negotiated the enjoyment of authenticity that the Danish language achieved with the need to understand the narrative. The demand for different language options beyond English – which a cosmopolitan viewership requires – compelled Super! Drama to invest in costly dubbing and subtitling services. A detailed online comment read:

> I like foreign dramas and when I watch American ones I care about the local atmosphere and the performance of the actors, so I always watch with subtitles. This time however is my first Northern European drama. I do not understand English, so midway through I recorded it with the voice-over. I am completely drawn into the refreshing development which made me want to watch the whole series with subtitles after all. Please do a marathon rerun with subtitles of season 1 and 2 and then The Bridge. (Female, 39, referring to *The Killing*)

According to the comments above, the association of *The Killing* to "high ratings in Europe and America", the novelty of a type of female character who was "impressive", and the novelty that was felt through the sound of Danish, made these drama series attractive to Japanese viewers. Another critical element of attraction lay in suspense and mystery – or crime.

Although the broadcast of Danish television drama series in Japan broadly challenges conventional theories of cultural and language proximities that influence the import and export of television content between different geo-linguistic regions (e.g., Jensen & Jacobsen, 2017), the appearance of *The Killing* and *The Bridge* harmonised well with the notion of genre proximity. Straubhaar exemplifies melodrama as a genre that has the capacity to reach past cultural differences because of its "oral structures, formulas, and archetypes" (2007: 199). Dunleavy described *The Killing* as "an outstanding example of transnational success for a European originated, foreign language drama" combining "procedural crime" with "family melodrama" (2016: 201). This combination intermeshed seamlessly with audiences in Japan who have a penchant for both elements. The acquisitions manager at WOWOW, the channel that broadcast *Those who Kill*, expressed her disregard of the country of origin. Instead, her interest

lay in following and capturing the Nordic Noir trend, and specifically the suspense and mystery forming it:

> Our audience […] they don't choose drama depending on, you know, either American drama series or Nordic drama series – they generally like drama series […]. Our job is to look for the high quality and very interesting drama series and getting to certain fans […]. So, our audience pays to watch drama series on our channels, so they expect high quality – that is why we are here, and we collect the high quality content from all over the world […]. So, we don't make distinctions by countries but by genres, I told you earlier, so the Nordic Noir has built a certain position in Japan, so when it comes to WOWOW [Premier], we always look for the mystery/ suspense genres, so… which is Nordic Noir. (Interview with WOWOW, May 2015)

Those who watch

The cosmopolitan tribe of television buyers who scout for high quality content cater to a "cosmopolitan tribe of discerning viewers". The Japanese woman Tamaki initially wrote that Danish television drama evoked "enjoyment" and "pleasure" – but what did that actually mean? My interactions with "those who watched" suggested that audiences felt pleasure when a point of resonance emerged from a sensation of encountering novelty or in a feeling of escape from the everyday. This resonates well with a "sampling" style of cosmopolitanism, which is characterised by fleeting temporary contact with difference.

Japan is well known for its profusive production, distribution, and viewing of soap operas. Beginning with productions made by Fuji TV in the 1960s, these melodramas focus on love affairs, marital infidelities, and battles between mothers- and daughters-in-law (Gerow, 2002). They centralise *okusama* [the housewife] struggling to protect the values of the home. In this light, the central female figures in the Danish television series shown on Super! Drama provided an "emotional proximity" connecting individuals at the level of perceived universal affect that transcend cultural differences (Jensen & Jacobsen, 2020) with a curiosity enabled by a felt discrepancy in the ideal of womanhood: Detective Sarah Lund in *The Killing,* who constantly negotiated heart-wrenching dilemmas of balancing her profession with motherhood (but privileged her profession); Detective Saga Noren in *The Bridge*, with her "slightly Asperger's-like mannerism and sensitivity" (Male, 55, self-employed, online comment); and Prime Minister Birgitte Nyborg, who cycled to parliament in *Borgen*. With reference to the latter, a viewer commented online:

> The emergence of female participation in the core of society is extremely shallow and Japan is left behind by other advanced countries. I think this drama will offer a chance to advance toward bettering Japan's antiquated male chauvinism by aiming to build the nation to suit men and women living together as people. (Female, 62, self-employed)

The comments about the presence of strong female protagonists navigating between personal and professional lives, wronged women whose husbands cheated on them, and women who were role models encouraging a restructuring of societal gender relations, were some of the points of resonance expressed by viewers. Other points of resonance emerged from the ways the series portrayed family life:

> [Danish series portray] how parents and children have different relationships to each other than they do in Japan… how married couples also have a different interaction with each other – a different relationship […] how people live together and have children without being married. (Focus group interview)

One viewer took a normative step and denounced the portrayal of female sexuality:

> Thanks for broadcasting one after the other entertaining programs such as Criminal Mind, The Bridge, The Mentalist and others. However, among all of those the feeling of disappointment was strong with The Bridge which I expected more of. Are there always insistent sex scenes in just about all Northern European dramas? I was put off by watching the female main characters' sex scenes. Are these insistent sex scenes necessary? (Male, 52, employee, online comment)

The viewer quoted below reflected the narratives of *Borgen* and the current state of politics in Japan, but tied his point of resonance to another image of the "European":

> At the time of these days when Japan is willfully and gradually exterminating intelligence, the decision to air this drama is a witness of respect for good sense. (It was aimed at colliding with the Upper House Election, wasn't it? Resolute decision). Of recent works, theatrical movies included, this was the most worth watching and it made me conscious once again about the scale of European enlightenment. (Male, 39, self-employed, online comment)

These comments show how viewers connected the narratives and images of series portraying distant places and practices to their own vastly divergent frames of local references.

It is tempting to curtail the cosmopolitan lifestyle to a set of practices and values associated with a jet-set privileged class with financial, educational, and linguistic capital that allows corporeal mobility and the consumption of "distinction" (Bourdieu, 1984). And indeed, this can be detected in the following online comment:

> Hello. The first time I learned about this program was on a flight going abroad. I initially watched the American remake and I was overwhelmed by its allure. Having been disappointed about the decision to run the American version I was very happy when you ran the original Danish version! Please do run the whole series. Furthermore, I would be happy if you arranged a subtitled version as well. Thank you very much. (Female, 28, employee, referring to *The Killing*)

However, the "going abroad" element did not necessarily provide the general rule for motivating viewership:

> I think people have the experience of going abroad and […] studying the language [….] Housewives, watching very much cable and satellite [….] The working people have not time to watch TV, but housewives [...] have more time. (Interview with Super! Drama, May 2015)

Supporting this observation, a housewife interviewed through skype described her viewing experience in the following way:

> Dramas from America are using many colours. Moreover, one story only takes 45 minutes so I can watch it smoothly. However, the Danish one is an hour without commercials, so I have to prepare for it. I have to go to the bathroom before watching it since it has no commercials in that whole hour. Also, if you look away, you cannot follow the storyline anymore. As I don't know the actors/actresses in the drama, I cannot guess who the criminal is. (Female, 50)

Those who watched had not necessarily studied or travelled abroad. The fact that 26 per cent of the comments sent to Super! Drama came from women who position themselves as "housewife" or "other – retired" requires asking what a cosmopolitan housewife looks like. Certainly, a curiosity or an appreciation of different places, people, and practices emerges as an essential dimension. This is shown in a rather straightforward online comment below:

> I'm really grateful that you are always offering interesting and enlightening works […] I'm especially interested in works that reflect the condition of a country's society. (Male, 23, self-employed)

However, appreciation for the Danish series can come from other interests too. A scriptwriter who had written a number of popular television dramas in Japanese told how the skill of "writing emotion" in Danish television drama had impressed her and was probably an element of novelty for many viewers too. Another interviewee, who had studied in Denmark and called herself a "busy working woman" used the word *akogare* to explain why the housewife watched the series:

> In my opinion I just think they use it as information, no. But I think that many Japanese people [referring to housewives], they have a – *akogare* – just a moment, I do not remember the word – yeah, longing. Longing to other cultures, other people. (Female, 38)

The word *akogare* is derived from the Japanese *aku* [place, being] and *gare/kare* [leave] and roughly translates as "desire". Nonaka (2018) describes *akogare* as a commonly used word among Japanese speakers to refer to a dream job or an idol. She writes that *akogare* feelings seem to emerge "only when the target was indeed *tantalizingly out of reach*" [emphasis original] (Nonaka 2018: 10). References to *akogare* could be detected in an interview with a female viewer:

Last week The Bridge just finished, so I remember it freshly. I watched it from the first season and I thought that the female detective looks cool, but her partner is fat, old, and a not handsome man. Why is he so popular among women? In season three, her partner changed to younger, cool man. I like it. Not only his appearance, but also his character attracts me. I feel depressed, so I watch it to escape from reality. Her new partner lost his wife and his two daughters – I hope he doesn't turn out to be a murderer and go out of the drama – I sympathise with his depression. (Female, 48)

The direct reference made to "escape from reality" echoes well with Hastall's (2017) explanation of escapism as a frequently reported motive for audiences to temporarily disengage themselves from troubling thoughts and unpleasant mood states into absorbing and entertaining moments. If viewers were escaping their reality, they were simultaneously coming into contact with the difference of the Other.

Audiences of Danish television drama in many regions of the world express how textual, narrative, and production aesthetics texture the series as authentic portrayals of social life (see Kaptan, Eichner in this anthology). Calloway-Thomas (2010) reminds us how media promotes both depreciatory and elevating images through filmic, televisual, and other modes of framing. Frames make specific images present whilst absenting other images, usually by using the language of bifurcation: rich-poor; young-old; boring-exotic. As extensively discussed in Hansen and Waade (2017), the scenic representations of Northern Europe as a place of mellow, dark colours with landscapes, climate, and people filled with melancholy was frequently commented on during the interviews. For example:

I really like Northern European dramas and when I turn them on and see them I know immediately if it is from Northern Europe because it is very grey. (Female, 34)

The recognised bond between language and authenticity (Coupland, 2003) also made an impact. Not only did the visual frame provide a novel look, contrasting the "Dramas from America [that] are using many colours", but the sound of Danish played a critical role in promoting the realness viewers experienced in subtitled viewing (see Jacobsen, 2018 for a longer discussion). This is illustrated in the following example from an interview:

I watch it with subtitles because I really want to hear the person – like what they actually say, I want to hear their voice […] so Danish sounds like this, it works like this, it feels like this. (Female, 34)

The "greyness" of Northern Europe was taken literally, as were the images of strong women and feeble men, good-looking interiors, gender equality, and relaxed and informal attitudes. These aspects of Danish television drama all helped to frame the realness of distant people and places – sometimes kindling *akogare* for places and practices tantalisingly out of reach.

Conclusion

The four Danish television dramas shown in Japan from 2012–2016 on WOWOW and Super! Drama were certainly appreciated as interesting and high quality. They cannot, however, be associated with Lotz's (2014) notion of "prized content". In the Anglophone and German markets, such content became appreciated and prized through intense media attention supported by hype-creating paratexts (Gray, 2010). Similar to the Brazilian context (see Jacobsen & Meleiro in this anthology), Danish television drama series were a drop in the ocean in comparison to the deluge of American and British television series offered. In accounting for the international popularity and global reach of Danish television drama series, it becomes important to document their limited penetration in regionally powerful markets such as Japan, which has a long history of vibrant domestic television production, powerful transnational distribution networks, and is itself a master in the global export of popular culture expressions. The crime genre played a key role in the decision to broadcast *The Killing* and *The Bridge*; as quintessential examples of Nordic Noir, the series found themselves in the right place at the right time. They resonated well with Japanese viewers' penchant for televisual suspense, mystery, and crime as exemplified in the following online comment:

> Just wanted to say that I was waiting for season 2, I feel happy, and I feel scared... When I watched "The Killing" it was like being seized by something. Captured by some big entity. Because I had the sort of feeling of not being able to escape as when you're having a nightmare. (Female, 41, housewife)

Exploring the meaningfulness of a limited phenomenon need not restrain us from considering the possible achievements for the companies who bought the series or for the viewers who watched them. The travel of Danish television drama is broadly understood as being directed to niche channels and niche audiences (see Esser, Eichner, Heram in this anthology). This is certainly the case for Japan. It can be suggested that although this travel is patrolled by the cosmopolitan tribe of television buyers (Kuipers, 2012), they act in symbiosis with the demands of a cosmopolitan tribe of television viewers. If cosmopolitanism is defined as the encounter and recognition of difference through both corporeal and imagined or mediated mobility, this definition includes the everyday and ordinary practices of engaging with difference through curiosity or concern by "dilettantes as well as connoisseurs" (Hannerz, 1996: 103). The empirical data from the Japanese context gives evidence of some immersive – but primarily traces of an everyday cosmopolitanism (Kendall et al., 2009).

Pay channels such as Super! Drama need to scout for cosmopolitan content, which become cosmopolitan by virtue of sounding and looking different, to satisfy viewer demands for novelty. This type of content becomes especially attractive if it simultaneously resonates with a genre that is locally valued, such as mystery and crime in Japan. It was essential, and a matter of routine business practice, to follow international trends and developments in the global television market to maintain the reputation and brand of

the channel as a broadcaster of "a range of favorite TV drama series from all over the world" (Super! Drama public advertisement, 2015). The demands and power of the cosmopolitan tribe of viewers – which in the Japanese case significantly included the cosmopolitan "housewife" – were evident in the avid comments that demanded reruns, marathons that allowed binge-watching, and costly subtitled or dubbed versions. Thus, the "gradual and sometimes discrepant infiltration and uptake of cosmopolitanism into the practices and outlooks of everyday citizens" (Kendall et al., 2009: 100) thrives and grows from a multidirectional symbiotic relationship between broadcasters and viewers. Both parties are identifiable carriers sowing the seeds of cosmopolitanism as they go about their everyday practices of work and pleasure.

The "sampling" and "immersive" cosmopolitans engage with the cultural Other on their own terms, most frequently as consumers. This relates well to Miller's (2006) work on television cultures being tightly wrapped with neoliberalist consumption patterns, and to what Athique calls "mediaculturalism" – or "the visual equivalent of an overseas holiday or learning to enjoy foreign foods" (2016: 105). Although cosmopolitanism comprises the mobilisation of bodies *and* imaginations to travel further, mediated encounters rarely lead to a more accurate understanding of distant people, and they do not necessarily provide good reasons to change the Self. As a woman in the focus group interview said of the family relationships shown in Danish television drama: "It is interesting to watch. But it is more for the purposes of understanding differences and not to copy them". The feeling of being engaged and looking at the world from different perspectives – as Tamaki wrote to me – was primarily temporary and fleeting. Sometimes they were expressed as a form of curiosity, sometimes as awe and wonder, sometimes as disgust, sometimes as *akogare,* sometimes as a moment of escape – but despite these variations, they were always expressions of different forms of engagement with difference.

Note

1. The channel and years of broadcasting for the series in question are referenced at the first mention of a television series.

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Chapter 6

Sensing authenticity, seeing aura
Turkish audiences' reception of Danish drama

Yeşim Kaptan

Abstract

This chapter reconsiders Walter Benjamin's conceptualisation of "aura" while applying his concept to the viewing experience of Turkish audiences watching Danish television drama. Based on qualitative audience research, I show the significance of the concepts of "aura" and "authenticity" for the Turkish viewers' engagement with the Danish television series *Forbrydelsen* [*The Killing*] as an auratic object. The audiences did not see or find authenticity or aura in remakes of the drama series originating elsewhere, including the US or Turkey. The aura was considered entirely irreplaceable and impossible to reproduce in Danish series' various international remakes, of which the Turkish remake of *The Killing*, *Cinayet*, was naturally an important point of reference. I thus show the continued significance of artistic aura and authenticity, even in the age of digital reproduction.

Keywords: aura, authenticity, Danish TV drama series, reception studies, Turkey

Introduction

The desire for "authenticity" has emerged as a modern phenomenon (Smelik, 2011) as well as a problem of modernity (Hardt, 1993). As a significant and complex concept, authenticity has been extensively discussed in the media and communication scholarship from various critical and analytical perspectives (Coupland, 2001; Fuqua, 2012; Godfrey, 2018; Hall, 2009; McDermott, 2018; Rose & Wood, 2005; Scannell, 2001; Van Leeuwen, 2001). In order to better understand the theorisation of authenticity, some scholars engage with the concept in terms of its relationship to "aura" in the media (Bolter et al., 2006; Choo & Currid-Halkett, 2018; Hardt, 1993; Sterne 2007). However, little attention has been given to the connection between aura and authenticity in the context of reception studies.

In this chapter, I reconsider Walter Benjamin's (1935/1968) conceptualisation of aura and its relationship to authenticity in the context of Turkish audiences' experience

of watching the Danish television series *Borgen* (DR1, 2010–2013)[1], *Bron/Broen* [*The Bridge*] (SVT1/DR1, 2011–2018), *Forbrydelsen* [*The Killing*] (DR1, 2007–2012) and the Turkish remake of *The Killing*, *Cinayet* (Kanal D, 2014). While examining Benjamin's polyvalent conceptualisation of aura and its relationship to the notion of authenticity, I specifically scrutinise the discursive constructions of these concepts for a niche Turkish audience who passionately watches and tremendously values the Danish television drama circulating globally. In the age of new media, digital reproduction and dissemination of these Danish television drama series add another layer of complexity to the analysis. The research questions guiding this chapter are the following: How do Turkish audience members construct the concepts of authenticity and aura? What rhetorical resources generate aura and authenticity for Turkish audiences? To answer the questions, I analyse the sentiments and ideas associated with these concepts in interviews and the hypertext online forum and a user-generated content website.

According to Benjamin, aura, as a hallmark of traditional art and as an aesthetic category, has disappeared from reproductive media such as photography and film. Considering Benjamin's "lifelong endeavor [is] to theorize the conditions of the possibility for experience in modernity" (Hansen, 2012: 105), Benjamin also defines aura as an experience, an engagement, and as a peculiar web of space and time – the unique manifestation of a distance, however near it may be (1935/1968). As the result of individual and focus group interviews conducted from 2016–2018 with audiences of Danish television drama in Turkey and analysis of online discussions and digital entries in a popular Turkish online media platform Ekşi Sözlük[2], I argue that based upon their Danish television drama watching experience, Turkish audiences appear to attribute aura to these series. In doing so, Turkish audiences can perceive Danish drama series as high-quality television products and strive to transform them from mundane products of popular culture to auratic and authentic works. In addition, by comparing the original Danish series *The Killing* with its local remake *Cinayet*, I also demonstrate that Turkish audiences seem to simultaneously assign aura to Danish dramas and demand the maintenance of aura in local remakes. Based upon these audience expectations, Benjamin's notion of aura presents a structure for discourse analyses regarding negative audience response to *The Killing*'s Turkish counterpart, *Cinayet*.

The first section of this chapter examines Benjamin's conceptualisation of aura and the concept of authenticity. After developing this theoretical perspective, I describe the study methodology with details of focus group and individual interviews conducted with Turkish audiences in Turkey and, in particular, of the textual analysis of Ekşi Sözlük. The third section of this chapter explores the Turkish audiences' formation and experience of aura and authenticity in the Danish drama series. I investigate how Turkish audiences construct these notions when viewing Danish television dramas by scrutinising their ideas and sentiments on 1) uniqueness and originality regarding aura and authenticity; 2) ambiance and distance in relation to aura; and 3) ordinariness with respect to authenticity. The final section poses some difficulties with Benjamin's presumption that digital reproduction has caused the disappearance of aura. The

experiences of Turkish audiences imply that audiences can indeed feel a sense of aura and foreground authenticity in their reception of Danish television products.

A Benjaminian approach to aura and authenticity in the media

In his seminal work, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Walter Benjamin (1935/1968) examines transformations of audience relationships with art with respect to technological developments in art production. By focusing on the relationship between the work of art (including film and photography), the art object, and the experience of its audiences, Benjamin discusses "outmoded concepts" including creativity, eternal value, and aura that are brushed aside by the transformation by media technologies.

Benjamin analyses and assigns meanings to modern media through a complex and sometimes ambiguous lens. He describes the history of art in three historical stages. The first stage, what Benjamin calls the auratic stage, revolves around limited availability of art objects used in rituals and ceremonies. A ritual-bounded presence of an object creates an "auratic distance" of social dependency (Benjamin, 1935/1968; Sherratt, 1998: 26; 2007:157). The second stage is the autonomy stage, when an art object is no longer bound to ritual (Sherratt, 2007). Instead, the object is on exhibition due to its uniqueness and status as a relic from the past (Benjamin 1935/1968). A painting or a sculpture, for example, is perceived as a unique artwork surrounded with a mystical aura. In the third stage, which is the present time, any art object can be mechanically reproduced in the perfect form, yet the reproduction always lacks "its presence in time and space" when compared to the original (Benjamin, 1935/1968: 220). The loss of tangible "presence" in mechanical reproductions banishes all contemporary media from the realm of auratic distance. According to Benjamin, it is the collapse of distance that is key to understanding the decay of aura in modernity. More specifically, Benjamin argues that art works in the modern era have lost the essential quality of distance generated by social dependency, ritual use, and uniqueness. The desire to engage more closely with aura and to get in touch with its uniqueness catalyses the quest for modern media products. Ironically, from a Benjaminian perspective, in the age of mechanical reproduction the newfound closeness, familiarity, and loss of distance has resulted in deterioration of aura.

As a Marxist scholar and critic who attempts to map out the impact of modernity on artwork, Benjamin thinks that the loss of the aura in relation to art, even "its active demolition" (Hansen, 2008: 355) was a positive advancement in the modern age. For Benjamin, more than anything else aura is a political issue offering great possibilities but also some risks:

> The loss of the aura has the potential to open up the politicization of art, whether or not that opening is detrimental or beneficial is yet to be determined. However, it

allows for us to raise political questions in regard to the reproducible image which can be used in one way or another. (IFS, 2008)

Concurrently, Benjamin problematises fascism's appropriation of aura and the Hollywood film industry for creating aura around artwork or Hollywood stars (Hansen, 2008). Mufti also claims that Benjamin maintains the following:

> The exploration of authenticity and aura is animated by a concern with the rise of fascism, which Benjamin describes as the constellation that responds to the decline of aura by an aestheticization of politics. […] In thus situating fascism within capitalist modernity, Benjamin brings together, on the one hand, the history of class relations and, on the other, the history of the artwork and the loss of aura. (2000: 89)

Therefore, Benjamin underlines the fatal resurrection of aura through the Hollywood star cult and the fascist mass spectacle in the negative sense (Hansen, 2008). Aura, therefore, must be demolished in the era of national-populist and fascist politics. Consequently, in Benjaminian theory, the revival or the loss of aura remains a central political issue.

For Benjamin, irreparable loss means that aura cannot be attributed to or revived in any form of media, including a television production. The loss of distance facilitates the decline of aura, and nowhere does this lack of distance seem more evident than in digitally reproduced modern media products. Now, more than ever before, television productions are readily available to audiences. In Turkey, viewers can buy or download (legally or illegally) media products including films and foreign television dramas. In the virtual age, where instant accessibility is the norm, there is no such thing as spatial distance between audiences and artwork. Mechanical reproducibility, dissemination, and availability of digital media products create a sense of immediacy for audiences who have ubiquitous access to multiple digital copies of films and television series. There is no such thing as being physically distanced from the object anymore – the question is, however, whether this elimination of distance really eradicates aura.

The answer to this question lies in Benjamin's definitions of authenticity and aura. Benjamin contextualises the aura of artworks with their ritual use, social dependence upon said ritual, reverence for the uniqueness of ritual objects, and the perceived distance between these unique objects and the ordinary. According to Benjamin, the perceived distance between the unique and the ordinary generates a sense of aura and gives rise to the assumed authenticity of the object.

Derived from Greek word *authentikos*, authenticity means "origin", "the first source", "real", "valid", "faithful", and "genuine" (Smelik, 2011: 77). Therefore, similar to aura, authenticity pertains to "original", "genuine", "accurate", and sometimes "creative". Benjamin (1935/1968) states that the presence of the original is a prerequisite to the concept of authenticity. That is, authenticity signifies "a narrative of origins or a sense of original" (Umbach & Humphrey, 2018: 1). However, Benjamin also suggests a more complex understanding of authenticity as tied to tradition and ritual: "The

authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced" (1935/1968: 221). Umbach and Humphrey note that objects, too, can be authentic, because they can enable and facilitate access to authentic experience in particular moments or in shared social imaginaries across long periods of time (2018).

In Benjamin's work, the relationship between aura and authenticity is a fuzzy and complicated issue; this relationship is fundamentally ambivalent, yet the meanings of these two concepts are relational. Benjamin argues that aura is "the unique value of the authentic work of art" (1935/1968: 224). The authenticity appears in defining aura as described by Hansen in her article, "Benjamin's Aura":

> Benjamin's aura as a primarily aesthetic category—as shorthand for the particular qualities of traditional art that he observed waning in modernity, associated with the singular status of the artwork, its authority, *authenticity*, and unattainability, epitomized by the idea of beautiful semblance [emphasis added]. (2008: 336)

Put differently, to Benjamin aura implies singularity, authority, originality, distance, and authenticity. Hansen unravels authenticity as a "particular quality" of the auratic objects. Thus, as a broader concept, aura may enclose and presuppose authenticity.

Rickly-Boyd (2012) approaches the issue of authenticity from the perspective of tourism studies. She observes that Benjamin's theorisations of authenticity and aura are primarily object-oriented and reimagines the concept as it relates to experience. Rickly-Boyd further states the implications of Benjamin's concept of aura as "an engagement with uniqueness and authenticity in the context of ritual, extend[ing] beyond the objective to the experiential as authenticity is connected to aura" (Rickly-Boyd, 2012: 271). In other words, by emphasising the connection between object and experience, Rickly-Boyd argues that "authenticity of the experience is a part of an engagement with aura" (2012: 271), and as a consequence, underlines the notions of aura and authenticity as performative and communicative devices. Choo and Currid-Halkett also discuss the two concepts:

> Using film and photography as the prime examples, Benjamin expounded that even if an artistic product loses its originality and authenticity in the process of reproduction—its 'aura'—the viewer is able to have aesthetic interpretations of the reproduced image. […] The value is now created and placed on the experience it brings to the everyday life, the message it delivers and the imagination it evokes. (Choo & Currid-Halkett, 2018: 120)

Therefore, the experience of the viewers and their engagement with the artwork play a significant role in generating aura.

Benjamin defines aura as "an attitude of reverence towards art on the part of the viewer" in his essay "The Short History of Photography" (quoted in Bolter et al., 2006: 24). In this study, relying on the experience of Turkish audiences who watch Danish television drama series such as *Borgen*, *The Bridge*, and *The Killing*, I assert that aura

evokes a sense of admiration and astonishment by means of its attributes of distance, uniqueness, originality, ambiance, and authenticity. The qualitative data gathered from Turkish audiences indicate that Turkish viewers attribute authenticity to Danish television series, resulting in the perception of aura. Although aura and authenticity are closely related – and aura is indubitably associated with authenticity – authenticity does not necessarily imply aura. As will be evident from the individual and focus group interviews in this chapter, authenticity can be generated by ordinariness, a *possibility* of approachability, despite a sense of unfamiliarity and strangeness to an extent. Yet, aura imposes distance, unavailability, and unapproachability. The fascination of Turkish audiences with Danish television series relies on a combination of the extraordinary and the mundane. In other words, as well as uniqueness, distance, ambiguity, and distinctiveness, audiences' sentiments correlate aura with authenticity; however, they associate authenticity with genuine, real, faithful, and the original. Therefore, they attribute authenticity to the ordinariness of the characters and closeness in terms of feeling affinity and familiarity with them. Through active dialogue in online forums such as Forumgercek[3] and Turkcealtyazi[4], fans in Turkey actively and intersubjectively construct[5] the aura attributed to Danish television drama series.

For the purpose of analysing audience reception, I rely on a concept of reproduction that is considerably broader than Benjamin's. Benjamin considers reproduction as a mechanical process not involving creative sensibility. In this sense, multiple prints of a photographic negative are reproductions. I define reproduction as a media product that bears the likeness of previously existing media in regard to visual and aesthetic qualities but does not follow the model so closely that the remake might constitute copyright infringement. I particularly emphasise reproduction of media forms like television series as aesthetic, rather than mechanical, forms of expressions.

Method of the study

To analyse data from various perspectives, this study employs two different qualitative methods: in-depth interviews and textual analysis. Drawing upon a previous project about audience reception, I interviewed thirteen people from March 2016–August 2018 who reside in Turkey and who regularly watch Danish drama series via cryptic file sharing on torrent sites. In addition to one-to-one interviews, I conducted four focus groups ranging between three and five participants in Istanbul and Izmir. Twenty-six participants in total were interviewed face-to-face in individual and focus group meetings. Semi-structured interviews lasted from one to three hours. All interviews conducted in Turkish were recorded, and a professional translator transcribed all Turkish texts and translated interviews into English. Based on snowball sampling (Marcus et al., 2017), participants were chosen among diverse audience members whose ages range from 24–57 years. The occupations of the participants were lawyers, journalists, architects, graduate students, civil servants, professors, engineers, advertising practitioners, bank

managers, and photographers. To respect their privacy and to guarantee anonymity, all participants were assigned numbers; only the age, gender, and occupation of the participants are clearly stated in the study.

I also employed textual analysis to examine audiences' online discussions on a Turkish-language collaborative hypertext dictionary, Ekşi Sözlük, one of the most popular and lively interactive online platforms with more than 700,000 contributors (Yıldırım & Yurtdas, 2016). The contributors of Ekşi Sözlük, who write online comments called "entries", are identified as *yazar* [the author]. Danish drama series have been extensively discussed in multiple entries between January 2011 and December 2018. All entries are marked by the pseudonym of the author, by date, or by date and time of entry. Ekşi Sözlük conceals the author's personal information, such as gender, age, and occupation (Kaptan, 2018). All entries and interviews were analysed using critical discourse analysis (CDA), which is a widely used method beneficial for exploring socially constructed meanings in discourse. Fairclough (1995) recommends CDA as a means of prospecting for linguistic evidence within the text. CDA points to both explicit and implicit meanings in the text; therefore, I carried out CDA of Ekşi Sözlük entries related to Danish drama series to better understand Turkish audiences' invocation of concepts of authenticity and aura.

Turkish audiences' experience of aura and authenticity in the age of digital media

In the age of mechanical reproduction, Benjamin suggested that media technologies "put [the audience] in the position of the critic" (Benjamin, 1935/1968: 240). In the digital age, I witness that Turkish audiences voluntarily occupy this position, harshly criticising readily available Turkish and transnationally distributed American television drama series including *CSI* (CBS, 2000–2015), *NCIS* (CBS, 2003–present) and *Homeland* (Showtime, 2011–present), along with Turkish remakes of Danish drama. As a consequence of digital reproduction and globalised distribution practices, audiences may access international drama, remakes produced in different countries, as well as national television series from their country of origin. Hence, audiences situate themselves in a position of authority. In doing so, viewers located in a specific geographic and cultural context claim power and occupy positions as arbiters of aesthetic and cultural values in the global media landscape. Additionally, audiences voice and share their newfound authority easily through new, online media platforms. This new mode of viewing experience and critical response allow – and even encourage – the same viewer to watch transnational television series and multiple remakes of the original. Multiple viewings may also solidify the viewer's position as an authoritative critic.

The positionality of Turkish audiences in the online space is crucial to the conceptualisation of authenticity and the discursive construction of aura around Danish television drama series. As self-identifying, authoritative media critics, audiences

in the age of digital media reinterpret these concepts in the context of effortlessly reproduced media products. The following exchange in one of the focus groups (FG) between a 30-year-old male electrical engineer and a 39-year-old female mechanical engineer depicts how audiences construe authenticity in relation to the originality and uniqueness of a media product:

Researcher: Well, how would you define [Danish dramas]?

Male subject #1:   [4 second pause] Original!

Researcher: Could you elaborate original please? What do you mean by original?

Female subject #1: Authentic. [giggles] Sorry [for the interruption]. I couldn't stop myself.

Male subject #1:   Unique, I can say. Unusual.

(FG 4, 2018)

In the interviews, the audiences define authenticity by employing various lexicons such as "original," "unusual", and "unique." By these word choices, they designate formulations of authenticity, making distinctions between national and transnational television drama series they consume. Particularly, comments on the "uniqueness" of Danish drama series appeared in many interviews, and this aspect has become the epitome of experiencing the Danish drama as original television series like no other. The audiences do not spontaneously use the notion of aura (with two exceptions) and they rarely use the concept of authenticity. Baecker scrutinises Benjamin's suspicion about the loss of aura:

We accept the thesis that uniqueness of "here and now" of the artwork has been lost […ₓ Benjamin] did not mean by uniqueness that there is nothing in the world comparable. Rather, uniqueness is the condition of the possibility of a work's "here and now". […] Only by being compared to something similar does the uniqueness of a thing become evident. A work of art becomes incomparable by being compared, and it is unique because something comparable also exists. (2003: 12)

In this context, the uniqueness of Danish drama attributed to them by Turkish audiences, stems from comparison of these drama series with several Western and Turkish television series and movies. These audiences are extremely familiar with and conscious of aesthetic codes of the global culture industry which elevate them into the position of critics. In this context, along with uniqueness, audiences often use the term "atmosphere" (the ambience) when referring to the aura of television dramas. The focus group discussion below between two participants, a 40-year-old male bank manager and a 38-year-old female teacher, shows that Danish dramas create a "unique" feel and fall into a distinctive category comparable to certain film genres:

Female subject #2: [Danish dramas are] like indie movies.

Male subject #2:   Yes, there's an atmosphere like in indie films.

Female subject #2: There's an atmosphere like in indie movies. And we're crazy about indie films – I mean we always go to watch, follow them. That's another reason why they picked up my interest.

(FG 3, 2017)

To the respondents, the "unique" feel of Danish television series differentiates them from other transnational series. The uniqueness and the atmosphere, or ambiance, of Danish drama series creates a distinction between the "Other" series and the Danish ones. Uniqueness, and all it infers, becomes the source of aura for Danish television drama series and raises them to the status of independent films. This view of uniqueness supports Turkish audiences' attribution of authenticity and aura to Danish television series when compared with series originating elsewhere. Atmosphere is considered something positive – it is the unique and awe-inspiring quality that earns Danish drama series a place alongside highly regarded indie movies in the minds of many Turkish viewers. Similarly, my 2016 interview with female subject #3, a 52-year-old civil servant, echoes female subject #2 and male subject #2 above, regarding "the atmosphere" of Danish drama series:

Atmosphere is really influential in the Danish series. But I think, uhm, most of those which I like amongst American series are atmosphere series, like *In Treatment*, *Mad Men*. Uhm, series which have a unique aura. I guess it's kind of related with preference – choices. I mean, of course Turkish series and American series are oriented toward popular culture more. I mean, they both have more popular culture elements in them.

Here, female subject #3 emphasises the "unique aura" of Danish drama series and defines it as an atmosphere, a sense of feeling characteristic of some television series. According to Ahmed (2019), aura has an uncommunicative dimension that cannot be fully grasped or explicitly defined. Ahmed argues "aura resists conceptualization because it is something to be felt before it can be understood or theorized" (2019: 101). Hence, it implies sentiments of audiences similar to those stated by male subject #2 and female subjects #2 and #3. Female subject #3 also mentions the interplay between popular culture, aura, and authenticity by suggesting that many Turkish and American television series sacrifice aura and authenticity to gain popularity. These compromising series incorporate elements of popular culture such as featuring worldwide famous actors and providing fast-paced, crazy drama; the Turkish and American series strive to produce popular products rather than authentic and unique content. Therefore, for female subject #3, with few exceptions, neither Turkish nor American television drama series have aura.

It is important to note that the uniqueness of Danish television drama series also alienates some Turkish audiences. One distinctive aspect of Danish drama series is

slowly developing plot lines. Some audiences accept the plodding pace of dramatic development and resolution as a sign of authenticity in Turkish remakes of Danish television drama. Turkish fans of Danish drama have come to expect slowly gathering momentum extending across a complete season. Regarding their uninitiated or unappreciative peers, Turkish fans of Danish television series position themselves as experts – or even connoisseurs – and they use the online forum Ekşi Sözlük to air their critique. Ekşi Sözlük user Selcouth declares that an upcoming Turkish remake of the Danish original version of *The Killing* is destined to fail because "regular" Turkish audiences will not tolerate waiting an entire season for one murder to be solved. Selcouth predicts Turkish viewers will become impatient and bored with *Cinayet* and the television channel will cancel the series despite the small group of loyal viewers (6 January 2014, 16:21). Mockingbird21 reiterates Selcouth's comments and raises additional issues regarding the expectations of Turkish audiences:

> Those who know the original [*Forbrydelsen*] will probably watch [*Cinayet*] for a few episodes. Those who do not may get bored thinking "when will the murderer be exposed?" In our nice country, people only love crime fiction series that expose the murderer in just one episode. Well, maybe not. We'll see when [*Cinayet*] is broadcast. But I think it's so amateurish that it couldn't even be compared to the original. Even the trailer shows this. (29 December 2013, 00:03)

Selcouth and Mockingbird21 presume that most Turkish audiences will not relish the distinctive characteristics they expect in the ideal Danish television series. Considering themselves enlightened viewers, Selcouth and Mockingbird21 uphold these unique qualities as signs of authenticity, and admit these qualities require patience from, and elicit wonder in, select audiences. In their opinion, the controversial qualities of *Cinayet* that make it authentic, despite its sophomoric failings, will lead the majority of Turkish audiences to confusion and will doom the remake to failure. Selcouth and Mockingbird21clearly identify distinctiveness in *Cinayet* from the qualities of authenticity in Danish television drama series and directly indicate the role of these qualities in establishing aura.

Authenticity and aura – ordinary and peculiar

Danish drama series require an investment from the audience. The slow pace and pedestrian nature of the characters may be interpreted by some audiences as dull, but fanciers count the dreary ambiance and ordinary characters among the sources of authenticity in the series. According to Turkish audiences who are favourable toward Danish television drama series, the characters and their mundane representations generate authenticity. The informants in focus groups and individual interviews implicitly or explicitly attribute authenticity and aura to the compelling fictional characters on the screen. In a focus group interview, the following exchange between a 40-year-old

male financial advisor and a 38-year-old female university lecturer exemplifies the aura of protagonists in Danish, Turkish, and American drama series:

Male subject #3:   [In the Danish dramas] the heroes are somewhere between hero and anti-hero, actually.

Female subject #4: Yes. They have a dark side, right.

Male subject #3:   Well, I mean. Yes, not one of them has that superhero aura. They have weaknesses – we know their weaknesses. They have problems, in their work – they have problems with their work.

Female subject #4: Yes. The guy in *The Bridge* had an injured leg I guess, yes.

Researcher: Uh-huh.

Male subject #3:   That's why they're not superheroes who everybody would identify themselves with. In Hollywood series you always want to identify yourself with those superheroes. These series make me adopt an external perspective.

Researcher: An external perspective to what?

Male subject #3:   To the story and the characters. I mean, it's uh, it's harder to feel inside I think, in these series. Or identifying yourself with a character is very hard. Maybe this may be stemming from the cultural difference. At the end of day our culture is different than American [culture] too. But America [Hollywood] makes these more suitable to the whole world.

(FG 1, 2016)

Turkish audiences who appreciate Danish drama series evaluate the approachability and unapproachability of the characters as signs of their authenticity that generate aura. Male subject #3 states that unrealistic or superhuman American protagonists have an "aura" about them; however, this aura of *character* doesn't extend to aura in the series as a *whole*. Interestingly, male subject #3 implies that the ordinariness and banality of Danish characters "lacking aura" appear more authentic, which resulted in aura of the drama. Approving Turkish audiences deem Danish characters to be simultaneously more relatable and less susceptible to popular appeal.

According to my informants, building and sustaining a sense of the ordinary constitutes a major part of what makes the Danish television drama authentic. In television, authenticity sometimes actualises through the representation of the ordinary and the banal. In the context of reality TV and lifestyle series, Jensen (2009) emphasises that one of the distinctive features of Danish television series and adaptations is *ordinariness*. Apart from series in the reality and lifestyle genres, Danish series in general tap into ordinary life, ordinary visual images, and ordinary stories on screen

(Jensen, 2009). However, building and sustaining a sense of the ordinary, which is so commonly expected by Danish viewers, constitutes a major part of what makes Danish drama series "astonishing", "unique", and at the same time "authentic" for Turkish audiences. In order words, ordinariness of Danish life is a key source for creating authenticity in the media products. Yet, ordinary or banal Danish way of life (which signifies authenticity) is "extraordinary" for Turkish audiences. For example, Ekşi Sözlük users Laertes and dystrophin comment on how something as mundane as grey weather creates an ambience for aura (Laertes, 14 February 2014, 23:42; dystrophin, 8 January 2014, 19:40). For these users, "gloomy", "dark", and "thriller" atmosphere is what makes the Danish drama series what they are (Kaptan, 2018). Ordinary weather, a constituent of authenticity, is a source of aura for Turkish audiences. Ordinariness has, as a result, become a key source of aura in Danish television series.

In the case of *Cinayet*, the audience reception indicates that Turkish audiences attribute authenticity and aura to the original Danish crime drama *The Killing*. The audience's sentiments towards these notions in the television series are also central to the Turkish remake's success or failure. Unmet expectations prompt a comparison between the Danish and Turkish versions and dissatisfaction of the audience as stated by Ekşi Sözlük author Sonam:

> When it comes to the acting, Ahmet Mümtaz Taylan and Goncagül Sunar [parents of the victim] really fit and they effectively portray grief over losing their child. But Nurgül Yeşilçay (Inspector Sarah Lund's Turkish equivalent) is a no-no. She doesn't fit the character Sarah Lund who is quite maternal, and she couldn't really convey the same feeling; it is not enough just to stand by chewing gum. Düzyatan [as Jan Meyer] doesn't really fit there. He feels like more of an American police wannabe rather than a rough policeman. Another point that caught my attention is a little detail. In the second episode when Nurgül Yeşilçay is calling the driver in the old woman's house she steps on the scale unwittingly. The scale shows that she's 52 or 54 kilos. I can't remember exactly. When I saw this, I was shocked, apparently this chubby, double-chinned, woman who has huge melons is 52 kilos. Was she weighed on the moon? Then, I paid attention to the same scene in the original. Sarah Lund is a petite woman. No tits, no ass. I was expecting something like 45 kilos, but I was shocked she weighed 57,2. So what I'm saying is, what a complex Nurgül Yeşilçay has! You're not that petite. (18 January 2014, 12:18)

Sonam raises several concerns about the authenticity of the Turkish remake of the crime drama and critiques how it is skewed to meet the sensibilities of the Turkish audience. Sonam's entry is also a good example of the Turkish audience's deliberate point-by-point comparison between the original Danish crime drama (*Forbrydelsen*) and its remake (*Cinayet*), and audience demands for transference of the sense of real and genuine, and of the authenticity of the original drama to the local remake. In addition, in his later works, Benjamin defines aura as "the experience of an expectation or a possibility" (quoted in Rickly-Boyd, 2012: 279). This perspective elucidates

Sonam's reaction to *Cinayet*. The remake frustrates the audience's expectations, jeopardising its authenticity and stripping the media product of aura. Sonam goes so far as to re-watch *The Killing* and *Cinayet* to gather details supporting the sense of disappointment in the remake. Doing so expresses the demand for a high degree of authenticity (genuineness) in *Cinayet's* representation of *The Killing*, in general, and of the character played by Yeşilçay, specifically.

These demands are discussed by scholar Sue Turnbull, who has explored value criteria in crime drama and rightly states:

> The desire for "mimesis" is associated with a more sombre, social realist, documentary approach. […] "A gritty, realist crime drama" adapting a quasi-documentary approach in its bid for *authenticity* may be rated more highly than a crime drama that opts for stylistic excess and/or the reassurance of the formulaic [emphasis added] (2014: 9)

In this vein, I observed that Turkish audiences, including Sonam and face-to-face interview participants, aspire to and claim authenticity. In other words, Ekşi Sözlük authors and study informants severely criticise the drama series and their remakes if they appear incongruous with everyday life and are not conducive to common reality; likewise, they condemn weak reproductions that don't measure up to the ordinariness of the original Danish drama.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I analysed Turkish viewers' engagement with several Danish television series as authentic and auratic objects and aimed to show the significance of authenticity and aura in the age of digital reproduction. I have shown that Turkish audience members who participate in interviews and online discussions attribute aura to Danish drama series and consider them to be authentic and original art forms circulating in popular culture. The techniques emblematic in Danish drama destabilise audiences' experiences by revealing the comparatively dull characters and slow-building plots that typically cannot be found in American and Turkish drama. In this manner, a television drama series, as a historical and cultural phenomenon, can gain privileged status that cannot be replaced or reproduced in the eyes of its audiences. In other words, Danish television drama series have been ascribed aura not attributed to local (Turkish) or transnational television series, particularly American drama or the remakes of Danish television series. According to Turkish viewers, Danish drama elicit authenticity and aura by setting a high bar for audience expectations.

Benjamin (1935/1968) proposed that through mechanical reproduction in the age of modern media, aura – as a peculiar web of space and time and the unique manifestation of a distance – has disappeared. The experience of Turkish viewers opposes Benjamin's view that aura cannot exude from any mechanically or digitally reproduced

object. Turkish audiences, who are familiar with global forms of aesthetic appeal and a variety of media techniques, and who have cultural and aesthetic knowledge leading to understanding of and appreciation for these unique television series, do in fact experience a complex feeling of aura while viewing the Danish drama series. Turkish audiences unaccustomed to slow-building plots, unpredictable story lines, shocking conclusions, and images of a distant cultural milieu attribute a mystical and almost sacred ambiance to Danish drama series. Therefore, aura is created by the audiences' feelings of ambivalence through a dialectic between the familiar and unfamiliar, the approachable and unapproachable, and the extraordinary and banal that fortify distance between the content and the audience during the watching experience. This evidence sustains the position of Gumbrecht and Marrinan (2003) who argue that Benjamin's prognosis for the disappearance of aura has not materialised. They add that "on the contrary, if [mechanical reproduction and aura] don't find themselves in a relationship of mutual enhancement, mechanical reproduction and aura can exist side by side quite happily" (Gumbrecht & Marinnan, 2003: 84).

To sum up, authenticity and aura surround Danish drama, and are created in the eyes of the Turkish audiences through interplay between the uniqueness and ordinariness of Danish drama. While audiences accept representations of the everyday lives of characters on screen as a sign of authenticity, other aspects of Danish drama (uniqueness, distance, ambiance) are counted as distinct and transcendent qualities evoking aura. As manifested in the focus groups, in one-to-one interviews, and through the Ekşi Sözlük discussion platform, with each viewing experience Turkish audiences find authenticity with the mundane in the lives of the characters; yet, they construct and amplify their experience of aura through the unfamiliar atmosphere, a distanced culture, and uniqueness such as the unexpected and unpredictable plot twists and slowly unravelling plot lines. As a result, with the effort of Turkish audiences, aura and authenticity (which is attached to aura) are constructed and re-emerge in the reproducible work of media in the age of digital reproductions.

Notes

1. The channel and years of broadcasting for the series in question are referenced at the first mention of a television series.
2. Comments on Ekşi Sözlük, in the forum "Cinayet" (2017), were retrieved March 14–20, 2018, from https://Ekşi Sözlük .com/cinayet--55882?p=7
3. Comments on Forumgercek, in the forum "The Killing Uyarlamasi 'Cinayet' Ocak Ayinda Basliyor [The Killing's adaptation 'Cinayet' begins in January]" (2017), were retrieved March 13, 2018, from http://www.forumgercek.com/tv-showlari-tv-yarismalari-tv-dizileri-haberleri/105290-killing-uyarlamasi-cinayet-ocak-ayinda-basliyor.html

4. Comments on Turkcealtyazi, in the forum "Yeni yerli dizi 'Cinayet' [New domestic series 'Murder']" (2017), were retrieved March 13, 2018, from http://www.turkcealtyazi.org/viewtopic.php?t=27716

5. My conceptualisation of aura aligns with Adorno's Marxist and materialist interpretation of aura which "stems from the trace of human labor in the Object" (Sherratt, 2007: 174) rather than Benjamin's view which claims aura "stems from other sources" or "may be an internal property of the image" (Sherratt, 2007: 159).

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Lifeworld relevance and practical sense-making
Audience engagement with Danish television drama series

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Abstract

Based on audience data from a global audience study, this chapter considers successful audience engagement with Danish television drama series around the globe through the theoretical concepts of *lifeworld* and *action-guiding themes*. By employing an interactionist perspective that considers media use in terms of social practices and meaningful consumption, the chapter demonstrates how viewers around the globe like Danish drama series and engage with them for very similar reasons: the authenticity of the stories and characters and the depiction of widely relatable topics such as the interconnectedness between media and politics, female empowerment, and tensions between family life and career. It also argues that audience engagement should be considered beyond the logic of cultural proximity/distance. By considering audience engagement within the logics of "practical sense", the relevance to the audiences' current lives, and lifeworlds, a more nuanced understanding of audience engagement can be achieved.

Keywords: transnational television research, lifeworld, Danish television drama, audience engagement

Introduction

In recent years there has been a considerable increase in television content travelling around the globe. The rapid and worldwide success and exploitation by streaming services such as Netflix, HBO, FobuTV, and YouTube has bridged distances and difficulties in accessing cultural products from distant places. The American-based content provider Netflix, for instance, not only enables its viewers to watch American productions, but also provides access to (and increasingly produces) cultural products from most other parts of the world; for example, *3%* (Netflix, 2016–present)[1] from Brazil, *Fauda* (Yes Oh, 2015–present) from Israel, *Hibana* (Netflix, 2016) from Japan, *Dark* (Netflix, 2017–present) from Germany, *Cable Girls* (Netflix, 2017–present) from Spain, *Sacred Games* (Netflix, 2018–present) from India, *One More Time* (KBS2,

2016) from South Korea, and *The Bridge* (SVT1/DR1, 2011–2018) from Denmark. Changing media landscapes, changing technologies, and changing dynamics with new players and constellations of the television ecosystem have led to a situation in which more and more content is needed to fill the multitude of different channels and platforms. At the same time, content providers and the current changes have advanced the accessibility of formerly inaccessible content. As a consequence, Danish television drama is accessible in almost every part of the world and has audiences ranging from the neighbouring country Germany to faraway Argentina or Japan. Danish television drama series are but one example of how series produced in and for a small nation have crossed their national and cultural borders and found audiences in every corner of the world. The phenomenon of travelling television content is not new, having been thoroughly explored in the past (e.g., Liebes & Katz, 1990; McCabe & Akass, 2012; Mikos & Perrotta, 2013; Straubhaar 1991, 2007). Scholars have identified differences in reception and meaning-making processes according to age, gender, or differing (national) cultural codings. Drawing on the worldwide audience data of the present study, this article considers the successful audience engagement with the Danish television drama series *Forbrydelsen* [*The Killing*] (DR1, 2007–2012), *Borgen* (DR1, 2010–2013) and *Bron/Broen* [*The Bridge*] around the globe and irrespective of national culture. It employs an interactionist perspective that considers media use in terms of social practices, pleasure, and meaningful consumption within the concept of "lifeworld" (Habermas, 1981/1984; Schutz & Luckmann, 1973).

From cultural proximity to lifeworld relevance

Previous research on factual (e.g., Galtung & Ruge, 1965) and fictional media (e.g., Hoskins et al., 1997; Straubhaar, 1991, 2007) has sought to explain the appeal of television series outside their country of origin within the logics of culture; models such as cultural proximity, homophily, or exoticism add to our understanding of why viewers experience meaningful pleasure when watching culturally distant products. However, the results of the present study indicate that television fiction provides meaning and pleasure beyond the logics of the framework of cultural closeness and distance. By presenting and incorporating specific topics, Danish drama series appeal to a potentially worldwide audience. The global appeal of pop cultural products is by no means a new discovery and has been examined before, for instance by Liebes and Katz (1990) in their fundamental work on the reception of *Dallas* (CBS, 1978–1991), or in connection with the worldwide success of the film trilogy *Lord of the Rings* (New Line Cinema, 2001–2003), which has been studied by Barker and Mathijs (2008) and by Mikos and colleagues (2007). Such studies teach us that while film and television products can successfully cross borders and cultures, the specific culture involved influences the ways in which such products are received and engaged with by audiences around the globe. For instance, different ethnic groups in Israel enjoyed *Dallas* in a similar fashion but

focused on different structural elements of the story (Liebes & Katz, 1990). Similarly, the large character ensemble in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy allows viewers around the world to relate to and appreciate the films in a similar manner while differing in their character alignment (for instance, viewers from China prefer Legolas, while viewers from the UK like Aragorn better) (Barker & Mathijs, 2008).

Gender, age, ethnicity, and national culture are doubtless influential factors with regard to audience engagement. However, they are also simplifying concepts, constructing sameness based on large categories that are sometimes difficult to identify. The present transnational audience study of Danish television drama series shows how audiences around the globe relate to and feel drawn into the storyworlds offered by recent Danish series for very similar reasons: viewers generally adhere to the realistic and authentic depiction of the storyverse and the characters within it; they appreciate the interconnectedness of crime with politics and media; and they enjoy following the ambivalent – often female – main protagonists juggling their professional and private lives as they proceed over the course of several seasons and numerous episodes to solve their particular obstacle. While our study participants describe similar patterns of textual involvement, some of them believe that this is related to the close cultural proximity of Denmark, while others underline that their interest in the same elements of these series is due to a sense of cultural distance.

Straubhaar, who coined the concept of "cultural proximity" for television formats in 1991, explained in his later work that "cultural proximity must be seen not as an essential quality of culture or audience orientation but rather as a shifting phenomenon in dialectic relation to other cultural forces" (2007: 196). He identifies these other forces as genre proximity, cultural shareability, value proximity, and thematic proximity. He then locates the mechanisms of these proximities within Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "cultural capital" as a structuring force behind the interest in and choice of television series by viewers. Cultural capital (the sources of knowledge provided by education, family, religion, or other personal networks) creates – in alliance with gender, ethnicity, and age – the "possibility space" that enables us to interpret the world around us. But the concept also raises some questions: how, for example, is culture and value distinguished? And are genre formations not the specific cultural expressions of a society?

In the end, cultural proximity remains dominant in Straubhaar's approach (2007) and escapes empirical operationalisation (Trepte, 2008). Our results suggest that thematic and value proximity in the reception of Danish drama series are so important that they should not be underestimated; study participants around the globe relate to the very same topics and themes that Danish series offer them – politics, media, and gender roles. Danish television drama series thus make *practical sense* to their viewers (Weiß, 2001). In other words, our participants were able to engage meaningfully with cultural products regardless of their own cultural belongings. Instead of operating within the logic of national cultures, practical sense-making is located in the social sphere and within an interactionist perspective rather than within culture, referring

to meaningful topics for viewers which resonate with their life circumstances and phases, value-belief systems and attitudes, and central themes of their lives. In short, they resonate with the viewers' lifeworlds. This enables viewers to negotiate urgent topics and relevant themes regardless of how culturally close or distant they might feel to the way of life presented.

Interestingly, audiences tend to *attribute* their textual engagement within the logics of culture with either cultural proximity or distance; they position themselves culturally in relation to the cultural product in question and their perceived or imaginary conception of this culture. From a sociological perspective, the relationship between society and culture can be described as the connection between an organising and interacting structuring principle that produces culture – objects, norms, beliefs, or attitudes. The societal aspect is formed by actual people interacting and communicating with each other, thereby producing – and at the same time bonding with – a shared culture. The distinction is essential, since it illustrates the social constructedness of culture and emphasises the more universal principle of symbolic interactionism. While symbolic communication with verbal and non-verbal language impacts the realm of our imagination, interaction as such happens in all societies, employing and producing multiple cultures. Cultural and social aspects are thus intricately related. Put in Bourdieu's words, "social order is progressively inscribed in people's minds [through] all the hierarchies and classifications inscribed in objects (especially cultural products), in institutions […], or constantly arising from the meetings and interactions of everyday life" (1984/2010: 473).

The distinction between the cultural and the social sphere is important: the social sphere relates to a more universal state of human agency, social action, and symbolic interactionism; and the cultural sphere relates to the expression of these social interactions. Locating differences within the cultural sphere without distinguishing it from the social sphere involves the risk of "essentialist culturalism" (Aksoy & Robins, 2008) – different cultural expressions would thus be located in fundamental human differences, while in fact they are cultural expressions contingent on the very same social interactional processes. The present perspective on audiences and the reception process takes as its point of departure active and acting audiences that are "doing media" (Eichner, 2017) as part of their social, everyday life activities. Audience activities are therefore everyday life practices that are meaningful because they make practical sense to the viewers both individually and socially.

Lifeworld, practical sense-making, and action-guiding themes

The concept lifeworld refers to the perceived reality viewed from the individual's perspective, serving as the basis of sense-making processes and individual agency in the world. As such, it comprises our experience of the world in its material and interactional manifestations with intersubjective ideas, knowledge, norms, and values. The

concept originally gained popularity through Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, and has been sociologically interpreted by Alfred Schutz and later Jürgen Habermas. For Habermas (1981/1984) in particular, the concept of lifeworld bears some resemblance to Bourdieu's notions of field and habitus; fields, according to Bourdieu (1995), point towards specific structured spaces – the political field or the scientific field – which can be regarded as a force within which the actor operates and takes a position. Unlike Bourdieu's fields, which constitute specific thematic areas, the notion of lifeworld encompasses all lived experiences from the subject's point of view, including everyday life experiences as well as non-routinised and exceptional life experiences. According to Schutz, it is "that province of reality which the wide-awake and normal adult simply takes for granted in the attitude of common sense" (Schutz & Luckmann, 1973: 3–5). Both Schutz and Habermas emphasise the social and interactional dimension of the concept in regarding individual experiences as genuinely social. The lifeworld is neither an objective outside world nor a subjective individual world – instead, it is the *intersubjective world* that constitutes the background context of action.

The relevance of the concept for understanding media experience lies in its time-space stratification: the lifeworld is not a universal timeless construct, but constitutes the present world with a past [*Vorwelt*] and a future [*Folgewelt*]. While the lifeworld is the taken-for-granted background for our actions, each action adds to our world experience and thus to our knowledge of this world which, in turn, influences our future actions in the form of a "horizon of expectation":

> Each step of my explication and understanding of the world is based at any given time on a stock of previous experiences, my own immediate experiences as well as such experiences as are transmitted to me from my fellow-men and above all from my parents, teachers, and so on. (Schutz & Luckmann, 1973: 7)

As individuals, we are aware of the ephemerality of this world with a past, a present, and a future. In contrast to this *Weltzeit* [universal time], Schutz also identifies the individual time and social time. The temporality of our individual life courses is influenced by social time, constituting our life phases. Similar to changing needs, motives, and sense-making processes, dominant themes can change according to our life phases: "the individual lifeworld refers to the personal politics of moral considerations of integrity, life plans and self-reflexivity as opposed to, and in confrontation with, systemic boundaries" (Rasmussen, 2014: 53). In this connection, Neumann and Charlton (1988: 21) employ the idea of "action-guiding themes". Action-guiding themes are the structural premises for media reception processes (and other social actions), which are closely linked to the concept of lifeworld and its temporal character. The lifeworld, as an intersubjective realm, with its specific social norms and values (which are time-based in the sense that they depend not only on the situational lifeworld, but also on life phases), consists of actors that act in relation to each other, thereby creating social needs and motivations. These intersubjective needs solidify into themes that bias our actions. While our individual lives are guided and biased by specific "situational

themes" (such as hunger and its connected strategies and tactics to satisfy hunger), persistent situations are guided and biased by more persistent themes. Neumann and Charlton refer to more permanent situations such as gender roles, but they also refer to themes depending on life phases such as parenthood, illness, or coming-of-age as "trans-situational themes" that guide our social actions and therefore our media use. Thus, recipients choose and consume media biased to and based on trans-situational themes that become action-guiding.

The social uses of television

Elaborating this approach, Weiß (2000) aims to understand how permanent themes interconnect with life phases and the lifeworld, thereby affecting media consumption. In combining Habermas' lifeworld approach with Bourdieu's field and habitus, Weiß explains how the theme of "success" as expressed in television formats for young people (for instance, in popular soap operas) impacts and interconnects with the thematic bias of adolescents. The adolescent phase, he argues, is characterised by the need to prepare for the labour market and cope successfully with one's own life project within the central field of labour. At the same time, adolescence is a phase of transition, of instability and inchoateness – the career path has not yet become part of an everyday life routine (Weiß, 2000). Fantasies about individual, successful lifestyles are therefore a central life theme for adolescents that are presented in their favourite television series, and that make practical sense to them.

The lifeworld offers a frame of interpretation and reference for experiences, including media experiences. It is a space of action and experience, grounded upon symbolic interaction, on the basis of which subjects interpret the world. The lifeworld thus acquires a thematic bias, resulting from the themes that influence and guide actions in the individual phases of life. This thematic bias is also contingent on the social fields and available resources in question. The lifeworld, phases of life, and guiding themes are therefore crucial for dealing meaningfully with media and constitutive for social action (see Eichner, 2014; Weiß, 2001).

Considering televisual experiences in light of the lifeworld, action-guiding themes and practical sense-making makes it possible to achieve a more nuanced understanding of the social uses of television. It directs the focus to topics that seem universal, but also locates them within the realm of the social sphere, which is characterised by its specific time-space stratifications and its diverse cultural expressions. It also makes it possible to understand previous research in a new light, for example a study by Herbert Gans (1962) on the popularity of American films among adolescent audiences in Britain. Rather than explaining the success of these films in terms of economic parameters or cultural imperialism, Gans elaborates the specific theme that they offered their young, working-class audience in Britain: "a projection of adolescent aspiration-fantasies" and characters with "working class traits" seeking a middle-class lifestyle (Gans,

1962: 325). In other words, these American films were successful because they met the action-guiding theme of a specific working-class youth culture that many British films were failing to address at the time. This fits neatly into Iwabuchi's (2002) observation regarding the aspiration to modernity that young Taiwanese experienced in the consumption of Japanese music and television. It is also reminiscent of Singhal and Udornpim's approach (1997), which emphasises the significance of common values and themes that address and attract audiences across cultures, as well as connecting with Larkin's (2003) study on the popularity of Indian films among Nigerian audiences and "parallel modernity".

The lifeworld concept helps us to understand why specific themes have the potential for cross-cultural appeal, attracting viewers across different cultural expressions and despite the distances between them. The concept of lifeworld also helps us to understand why many people (but not all) relate in a similar manner to the same topic. The above-mentioned studies are examples of textual engagement that cannot be explained sufficiently with the logic of cultural proximity/distance. As I have argued, they are in fact examples of how topics within fictional media resonate with the action-guiding themes of their audiences. The studies thereby draw on media texts that are consumed within a specific geo-linguistic region (Straubhaar, 1991, 2007; Larkin, 2003) or a specific place (Gans, 1962; Liebes & Katz, 1990; Singhal & Udornpim, 1997). The present transnational study, however, shows that Danish drama series attract viewers from very different parts of the world because they generate a similar interest in all their audiences.

Audience engagement with Danish drama series

Audiences around the globe enjoy Danish drama series because they perceive them as more authentic and credible than American imports or domestic productions (see, for instance, Esser, Jensen & McCutcheon, and Kaptan in this anthology). The sense of authenticity is created through the depiction of current topics and credible characters and through the recurring theme of strong, yet ambivalent, female lead characters. A range of topics are mentioned repeatedly by the interviewees, such as the interconnectedness of politics and media, which is most obvious in the political drama *Borgen*, but also present in the crime dramas *The Killing* and *The Bridge*. The struggle of combining family life and responsibilities with a career and the empowerment of women featured in all three series, but again they were most present in *Borgen*. In the following section, the worldwide data has been clustered and analysed with regard to aspects of lifeworld relevance and the topics mentioned above (and not, as in the individual chapters, per country).

It is striking that study participants around the globe regarded Danish series as particularly authentic and credible, regardless of geographical location or linguistic background. Danish drama series are often compared to American quality series such

as *House of Cards* (Netflix, 2013–2018) or *Breaking Bad* (AMC, 2008–2013), which are also liked by many viewers but regarded as less authentic and real than Danish series. The characters in the Danish series and their actions – as well as the overall setting – are regarded as closer and more relevant to viewers' own lifeworlds. A 56-year-old university professor from Germany claims: "I would say all of us sitting here could be Birgitte Nyborg", indicating that she is all too familiar with the worries of a woman at the height of her career, struggling with her marriage and the double burden of family and work. Authenticity, realism, or resemblance to everyday life is mentioned frequently by the participants in all focus groups. Throughout her interview, one 49-year-old participant (the CEO of a medium-sized company in Berlin and mother of a teenager) emphasises the relevance of *Borgen* for her own lifeworld:

> It's right to the bottom realism. It's authentic, real, drastic, you perceive it as real. Nothing is glossed over. It looks less glossy-styled, it has this realism, closeness to everyday life, to everyday references, to life-worlds that are known.

It becomes clear that authenticity means more than credibility. Authenticity includes an allusion to the participants' own lifeworlds. They can follow and identify the worries and decisions of the characters not only figuratively, but truly, rooted in their own lives as mothers, professionals, or husbands. In contrast to the emotional realism described over 30 years ago by Ien Ang (1985), viewers of Danish drama series do not transfer emotions from a distant, glossy world into their own realities, but perceive the world depicted in these series as being similar to their own worlds. This sense of authenticity and realism is reinforced by the specific aesthetics of Nordic Noir, such as bleakness, darkness, dissonant music, and electronic soundscapes (e.g., Creeber, 2015; Waade, 2017) and the specific staging of a strong but ambivalent female lead character (e.g., Agger, 2011; Eichner & Mikos, 2016; McCabe, 2013; Povlsen, 2011). When characters "are sort of greasy oiks, who've just fallen out of bed, you know, or not made up" (participant, UK group); when they seem "very real without the excesses of the Hollywood TV series" (participant, Argentina survey); or when "shooting here conveyed that darkness, that not being able to see the details" (participant, Turkey group), viewers perceive Danish drama series as more realistic and closer to their own lives.

In other words, the sense of realism and authenticity is independent of the geo-linguistic location of the viewers. Viewers from Denmark, who can draw on their real-world experiences to compare the discrepancies between screen and reality on a daily basis, also notice and appreciate the authenticity and realism in Danish drama series. A viewer from Aarhus, Denmark, explains:

> It is not identification. It's more like something you recognise from politics in your everyday life. I'm generally interested in politics without being politically engaged, but I think that it's important, and I follow a little. What happens at Christiansborg? And how is that exactly? So, I think in this way it was easy to relate to the series. That's how it is. It's a more realistic idea of how politics or everyday life takes place in Denmark. (Female, 59, librarian)

Her comment also refers to the dominant topic of the interconnectedness between politics and media – evident in all three main examples (*Borgen*, *The Killing*, and *The Bridge*) – but most dominant in the political drama *Borgen*. Participants from all over the world connect to this theme, especially when it resonates with a personal interest. For instance, one student of political and social sciences from Germany is particularly fond of the depiction of the interaction between politics and media. Througout the discussion, he refers back to his political interest as a dominant theme in his life that guides his professional career as well as his choices of media consumption. Likewise, a 33-year-old participant from Turkey relates his preference for *Borgen* to his own general interest in politics and his profession as an employee of a daily newspaper; the political themes in *Borgen* motivated him to choose this series in the first place, and the realism and authenticity of the series kept him "tuned in":

> It was realistic. I mean, there are also some elements which pique my interest. Because it's political. The influence of media over politics and country, and how media influence the politics of a country. I mean, how maturely media express the idea of its governing. […] I think that the discipline to not deviate from the core, the real issue – focal point is very good. This kind of seriousness made it easier for me to watch.

The participants often discuss the way politics is portrayed in the American series *House of Cards* and *The Wire* (HBO, 2002–2008). These series were perceived as similarly likable as the Danish ones, but less realistic and less close to people's own reality. Many viewers claim to feel closer to the political system depicted in the Danish drama series than that in American television series.

It is noticeable that the participants who do engage with the political themes in Danish drama series show a general genre preference for political drama, have a strong personal interest in politics, or are involved professionally in politics. When the interest in politics is absent, or when politics is perceived as negative, Danish series – especially *Borgen* – can be perceived as too complex and confusing. A 45-year-old male car mechanic from Germany who grew up in the former German Democratic Republic expresses his frustration with politics, resulting in a lack of interest in political drama as a genre:

> With *Borgen* it's like that… so I don't like politics in general because it's a swamp for me. I've already experienced that for real – politicians. Then I'll rather have a thriller. *Borgen* [is] nice and well done, but ultimately not for me.

His disenchantment with politics emerges throughout the interview, solidifying into a persistent action-guiding theme. It also resonates with his repeatedly expressed frustration with the West-German political system, reflecting the sentiment of 23 per cent of the inhabitants of the former German Democratic Republic that they were the losers when the two halves of Germany were reunited (Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach, 2014).

A second topic that matters to our participants is the balance between family life and career. The tendency of Danish series to feature female lead characters leads to

a particular story development with specific tensions that would not emerge in the same way with a male protagonist (Eichner & Mikos, 2016). For many participants, this is a noticeable and pleasurable effect; it allows women as well as men to reflect on their own agreements with potential future or actual partners. One 26-year-old female research assistant from Berlin says:

> For me, the central theme that catches me is this woman in this position. It works for me because it's a woman and not a man. What does a woman do, how does she cope when she and her husband are suddenly no longer on an equal footing? What about the children? I have weight issues, but I am the prime minister. How does my husband handle it? Can they do it, or can't they?

Here, the resemblance to this young woman's own lifeworld (she is just starting her own professional career) is more figurative and similar to the emotional realism experienced by *Dallas* viewers that Ang (1985) has identified. However, the topic provides various points of connection from different lifeworld perspectives. In one discussion group from Turkey, the participants perform a reality check by discussing some of the tensions arising for Birgitte Nyborg owing to the fact that she does not have a nanny – a situation which is not unusual in many European high-income households:

Participant 1: Well, of course, I mean the prime minister's child falls ill and they have to bring the child to work –

Participant 2: – of course, of course.

Participant 1: Well, I mean there're no people to look for, care for the child. That evening I –

Participant 2: – if they don't pay for it, yeah.

Participant 1: Well, they take turns. Their homes don't change for example.

Participant 2: Yeah, yeah, yeah!

Interviewer: They don't build a palace.

Participant 1: They live in the same cramped place!

<div align="center">(Female, 48, civil servant, Turkey; male, 38, associate professor, Turkey)</div>

This dialogue focuses on the way Danish social reality is depicted in Danish television series, with fair wages and family-friendly working hours allowing a life independent of paid help and enabling both partners to pursue their own careers. But as *Borgen* clearly shows, this also creates tensions in the negotiation of gender roles. What is important here is that the series allows middle-class audiences from other cultural backgrounds to connect and relate to the family life depicted in a tangible way. Neither the prime minister nor most of the secondary characters could be described as extremely wealthy (although the multi-millionaire Freddie Holst in *The Bridge, season 3* is one exception in terms of Danish series as a whole), and the logistical problems

arising when a child falls ill, thereby making a busy week even harder to get through, are understood by viewers around the world. One 40-year-old participant from northern Germany points out:

> But maybe these characters also rank on the same level with the viewer, so that people think, "Yes, they also have these problems, how would I do that with the kids, with the job? How do I reconcile it all? What happens when I'm ill…?" […] Maybe that's what brings the characters closer and makes them more human and familiar, because sometimes they have such problems that very normal people have at home. (Male, chef)

When the topic depicted is not a central theme in the viewers' lifeworlds, it will be disregarded or rejected during the reception process. When asked directly about her feelings regarding the depiction of characters who have to juggle family life and work, one female participant from Sydney answers: "Well, we don't have kids so that aspect didn't exist".

While the two topics mentioned above (the interconnectedness between politics and media and the struggle to combine family life and career responsibilities) depend a good deal on the particular life phases and dispositions of the viewers, the topic of women's empowerment and gender roles offers the vast majority of the study's participants a point of connection. The emphasis on women – as shown in the cast of protagonists and supporting characters or the role reversal of Saga Norén and Martin Rohde in *The Bridge* – engages the viewers by appealing to and often resonating with their values, beliefs, and attitudes regarding gender and society. The topic is central for the viewers' engagement with Danish drama series – "That's the great thing: the men are entirely in the supporting roles. They are the supporters and the women are at the forefront. I think this is genius", as one 56-year-old female participant from Berlin puts it.

The Killing and *The Bridge* feature strong but lonely and edgy female investigators who sacrifice their family lives for their careers. *Borgen* offers a more complex arrangement of the female cast. Alongside the main protagonist Birgitte Nyborg (the prime minister), the journalist Katrine Fønsmark (who is involved in a complicated relationship with spin-doctor Kasper Juul) serves as the second driving character in the narrative. A range of female side characters such as the senior journalist Hanne Holm or the politician Pernille Madsen complement the character ensemble. While women are not overrepresented in *Borgen*, the general underrepresentation of women on screens otherwise (Prommer & Linke, 2017) ensures that *Borgen* is perceived as distinctly female. The strong female characters came up in most focus groups and were appreciated, and exemplified, for instance in this comment from one of the British focus group participants:

> The character was a female character who's a little bit odd. A little bit awkward in some respects, but brilliant in other respects. They are all sort of like very strong female leads. Flawed, but strong. Yeah? And I like that. I like strong women who are flawed, and men who are vulnerable [laughter]. (Female, 64, university lecturer, UK)

There are obvious lifeworld connections to the topic among several participants. Some – primarily female – participants claim to have studied or otherwise engaged in feminist theories or feminism (Australia, Germany, Turkey). One female participant, an executive employee in the steel industry, can relate in particular to the struggle of the lead characters, having to assert themselves in a male-dominated working environment. One 30-year-old industrial management assistant displays a special awareness of the topic which is triggered by the fact that his friend is writing a PhD dissertation on the subject of power imbalance. Several participants like the fact that the Danish series refrain from depicting their female characters in a stereotypical or sexist way (e.g., Australia, Turkey). The similarities between our different nationally based focus groups in discussing and negotiating gender roles within society, as well as their own positioning within that discourse, are striking. At the same time, there are differences within the country-based focus groups with regard to the perception of gender roles depending on education and social environment. While most participants are highly educated, often employed in the academic world or in a managerial position of some description, the participants from northern Germany come from a very different environment. Most of them are employed in blue-collar jobs (they are chefs, car mechanics, storemen, or shopkeepers). The discussion of gender roles and gender equality is less important for some of these participants. One 33-year-old female postal clerk from Germany tries to avoid the discussion of gender equality as such; while enjoying the narrative of the series, her values and attitudes with regard to gender roles remain traditional:

> It would be bad if all men were oppressed feministically. If they are all sitting at home with a beautiful scarf and a face mask. I think that would be very bad. A man should also be allowed to remain a man. He must be free to go out and cut down a tree.

A closer consideration of the dominant topics in the Danish drama series reveals that the driving factor in attracting the interest of audiences can be traced in their lifeworlds. In other words, the life phases in which audiences are situated determine which topics they are interested in – although some topics can also outlive the different life phases. This is particularly evident with regard to the topic of family and career, which does not resonate with viewers for whom family and career has little significance. The topic of women's empowerment, on the other hand, resonates strongly with nearly all participants. Redvall (2013) points out that specific Danish production circumstances and the specific production culture of the Radio Denmark organisation allow – and even demand – topics of social relevance to accompany the primary plot in television fiction produced within the Danish public broadcast system. "Double storytelling" (Redvall, 2013: 55) thus enriches the textual layers of a series, offering more potential thematic points of attachment for audiences. Understanding the interrelationship of text and audience through the logics of lifeworld rather than the logics of cultural proximity/distance allows us to understand the cross-cultural appeal of cultural products with a more nuanced perspective on the particularities of

reception that are not exclusively rooted in cultural sameness or differences, but in the more encompassing aspects of the lifeworld.

Nonetheless, cultural proximity/distance is still an important concept to which our participants referred repeatedly. While viewers outside Denmark do not usually recognise the specific country of origin of a series, they have an idea about the broader region. Based on its specific aesthetic style and on the local specificity of the places depicted, a meaningful connection is made to an actual existing location and its image (Eichner & Waade, 2015). Our focus groups came from different locations, but Scandinavia was recognised by all as a mark of quality in television series, distinguishing Scandinavian productions from American and domestic productions. The recognisable elements of Nordic Noir served as a form of regional branding adding value to Scandinavian series (Weissmann, 2012). Some audiences (e.g., UK, Brazil) regarded the use of the original language accompanied by subtitles as an important textual marker of regional branding; while other audiences regarded aesthetic and story-related elements as strong regional branding. The recognition of a specific region is important for audiences on several levels: first, because location adds meaning to the text (Eichner & Waade, 2015); and second, because it allows audiences to position themselves culturally in relation to the text. Participants from Germany in particular highlighted their cultural proximity to the neighbouring country of Denmark: "Concerning political topics, in Germany we're closer to *Copenhagen* and *Borgen* than to *House of Cards*", said one participant from Berlin. Remarkably, viewers from northern Germany place even more emphasis on their regional proximity to Scandinavia. One participant mentioned the black humour in Danish television drama: "It appeals to me as a North German. I think people from Bavaria do not consider this that funny".

On the other hand, participants from Turkey and Australia underlined the cultural otherness and exoticism evident for them in Danish drama series. A participant from Australia tried to explain the general sense of exoticism: "Scandinavian countries are… I would use the word exotic. They are just more different. You know, there's so many Italians in Australia, they're just not very different you know? But Scandinavia …". The Turkish participants were even more explicit, as this one who refers to the "otherness" of Danishness:

> Their lifestyle and our lifestyle in our culture… so it won't be like their family lives are very different than ours. But they don't have that warm, sloshy neighbourhood – I mean everyone has their own secular life. They don't have close-knit connections. Because of that, since they don't feel that warmth, I – we, our people won't like that, I think. Because we always search for sympathy, a warmth, something like ours, that's how it is. The importance of sticking to the rules, and that detectives are only bending them a little while trying to solve things, but still doing it by the book. I mean, we're different than that too. We'll find a way and do it. So, as I said, social life, family life, and business understanding is quite different from ours. That's why I'm looking at it as cultural difference. (Female, 38, lecturer)

As stated initially in this chapter, audiences clearly tend to *attribute* their interest and engagement in the series within the logic of culture – either within cultural proximity or exoticism. They position themselves culturally towards the cultural product and towards their perceived or imaginary conception of the respective culture of origin. Importantly, this does not change the attraction of Danish television series or the shared interest in the topics that they present. To some extent, we can conclude that the exotic nature of Danish television series for non-Scandinavian viewers supports the idea that television is a cultural forum, as described by Newcomb and Hirsch (1983/2000) in the 1980s. Topics presented in a fictional television series appeal to us not because they are simply or solely similar to our own views, cultures, or norms, but because they allow us to negotiate specific topics relevant to our current situation. They make practical sense, meaning that they present a topic that moves a specific viewer(ship) at a specific time in their life and within a specific cultural context.

Audiences consciously ascribe meaning to texts based on their feeling of cultural proximity or distance. Interestingly, the mode of textual engagement via lifeworld-relevant action-guiding themes is not affected by the sense of cultural proximity or distance. So it seems likely that audiences attribute cultural proximity or cultural distance to the text itself and to their version of the imagined Other. What has become evident in this study is that audiences engage with Danish television drama series primarily because they can relate to the topics and characters with which they are presented. This sense of closeness is created through authenticity and realism; the authenticity makes it possible to transfer specific local problems to one's own lifeworld. The specific topics thereby provide a *lifeworld relevance* across socio-cultural particularities at a specific time in history. Closeness, therefore, must be considered beyond the logic of cultural proximity.

Conclusion

This chapter set out to examine audience engagement with Danish television drama series by applying the concept of lifeworld. Its point of focus has been interactionism – not culture. It is striking that viewers around the globe like Danish drama series and engage with them for similar reasons. Audiences see a specific quality in Danish drama series based on authenticity, convincing characters, good acting, and an original storytelling technique. These characteristics distinguish Danish series from American series and domestic productions. Danish series are perceived as authentic owing to their characterisation, setting, and depiction of society, making it easier for audiences to relate to relevant topics such as the interconnectedness between media and politics, the tension between family and career, and women's empowerment.

The data in this study and previous studies indicates that audience engagement does not depend on cultural differences or the logic of cultural proximity/distance. However, as argued in the introductory chapter of this anthology, the concept of cultural proximity can help us explain the cultural factor of television content and its

audience at the intersection between class and environment. Athique (2016) argues that cultural proximity can be related to Pierre Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital: the more cultural capital, the less effective is the logic of cultural proximity; and the less cultural capital, the more effective it becomes. Niche audiences and cosmopolitan taste communities therefore exist across other taste formations, and the cultural capital of viewers would therefore influence if the cultural mechanisms (with aspects of the national and the sub-national) or the other mechanisms of textual relation are more effective (Athique, 2016: 123). This is further conflated by aspects of banal transnationalism (Aksoy & Robins, 2008; Jensen & Jacobsen, 2017) and banal nationalism (Esser et al., 2016) as mechanisms of attribution.

This is in line with the concept of action-guiding themes in people's lifeworlds. The closer a media text corresponds to the current and dominant action-guiding themes of its audience, the more relevant it becomes. These themes can be regarded as the result of the *practical sense* of media reception, depending on the logic of practice, as employed by Bourdieu (1980/1990). In the analysis of text-audience relations, action-guiding themes are thus a key to understanding the appeal of a media text for a particular audience. Media content is in fact often consumed in a cross-cultural context and within the logics of proximity, but also outside those logics – they are meaningful because they have practical meaning within their audiences' lifeworlds. The lifeworld concept thus allows the consideration of the individual within the particular time-space stratification encompassing factors such as cultural practices, age, gender, or education, but also the viewer at the intersectionality of the individual and their lifeworld. The reason why audiences around the globe watch Danish television drama series may be that they feel culturally close to them, but it is often because they perceive the content as relevant to their current lifeworlds.

Danish television drama series offer their audiences rich layers of connection across cultural and national boundaries. Either accidentally or deliberately, these series hit a *Zeitgeist* nerve by offering multi-layered textual universes that emphasise a specific place and society while presenting widely relatable themes such as the interconnectedness of media and politics, women's empowerment, and the struggle and tension between career and family. The specific way in which the society is depicted makes these texts more authentic to audiences – regardless of where they are from – and supports the engagement of these audiences with topics of *practical relevance* at the specific time of their occurrence.

Note

1. The channel and years of broadcasting for the series in question are referenced at the first mention of a television series.

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The Global Audiences of Danish Television Drama

Following the surprising and unprecedented international export of Danish television drama in the early 2010s, this anthology explores the reception of these series among global audiences by tracing the travel of the series to seven different countries: Australia, Brazil, Denmark, Germany, Japan, Turkey, and the UK. Each contribution differs in terms of its theoretical and methodological position and reflects the diverse backgrounds of the researchers and types of data collected. As a whole, the anthology provides insights on global audience research in an age of multi-platform and multi-directional media flows, as well as on the complex nature of contemporary audiences located in different parts of the world. The anthology offers a novel contribution to research on Danish television drama, the international circulation of audiovisual content produced in non-Anglophone contexts, and the phenomenon of Nordic Noir for both students and scholars.

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