

Melodrama, Identity, and Community in *Forbrydelsen*

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Abstract

The Danish television series *Forbrydelsen* is representative of the successful intertwining of local narratives with transnational media within the scenario of contemporary Nordic Noir. This paper considers the series' stylistic and production values to show how a "medium-concept" narrative, with its hybridization of genres, portrays highly debated social issues and raises a nationwide public discourse on them. The mingling of genres (melodrama and *noir*, sensational and crime fiction, and so on) produces a complex narrative that revolves around the wounded body and psyche of the female detective. The melodramatic mode of representation generates a dystopic vision of the contemporary world, visually depicting violent clashes between the individual and the agents of power, and the morally ambiguous compromises such clashes create for the nation.

The television drama has increasingly attracted audiences and actively contributed in defining this medium's contemporary aesthetics and narrative scenarios. The television series is one of its most popular products, globally establishing the standard for hegemonic narratives and fantasies. It is able to cross the boundaries usually defined by national markets and travel along new cultural flows. This essay will consider the specific case of the Danish series *Forbrydelsen/The Killing* (DR, 2007-), whose success will be considered as representative of the necessary intertwining of local narratives and transnational media. As a product of Danish public service broadcasting, it has to address relevant issues for a lively national discourse, e.g. the intertwining of political and economic powers, gendered positions and trajectories, the opposition between justice and revenge, etc. Its stylistic choices, complex narrative, and problematic representation of the main character, Sarah Lund (Sofie Gråbøl), will therefore be analyzed, as these elements propose a specific interpretation of Danish public discourse and are part of Nordic Noir as a whole, contributing to its global impact.

This brand, known by various names across Europe (*Nordicana*, *Scando-noir*,

Polar Polaire, *Schwedenkrimi*, etc.),¹ is deeply related to the prevailing narratives and aesthetics of American *film noir*, from its birth in the 1940s up to its recent iterations in film and television. In *Forbrydelsen*, this relationship is particularly evident in the choices of location and lightning, with its preference for urban landscapes immersed in rainy autumn weather and the dominance of blue and gray light. However, Nordic Noir can also be considered in light of some reflections on classical Hollywood *noirs* and *gangster films*.²

An important renovation in the Nordic iteration of *noir* is the significance accorded the female body as the melodramatic expression of pathos, evincing a specific declination of the sensational. These narratives are grounded on the intensified representation of bodily experiences, with specific attention to gendered violence.³ Beyond *Forbrydelsen*, consider Lisbeth Salander (Noomi Rapace) in the *Millennium* trilogy (Niels Arden Oplev and Daniel Alfredson, 2009) or Katrine Ries Jensen (Laura Bach) in *Der som dræber/Those Who Kill* (TV2, 2011), both of whom react to several physical and mental traumas; likewise, there is the detached, challenging behavior of Saga Norén (Sofia Helin) in *Brøn/Brøen* (DR-SVT, 2011-). These characters participate in the creation of complex genre relations, where detection is disturbed by intense private emotions, sexual desire distracts women from their investigations, and the thriller genre superimposes to narratives of familial grief.

Contemporary narratives intertwine the genres mixing with a multiplication of storylines and the extension of narrative arcs; sometimes, they even spread throughout the wide transmedia environment dominating the entertainment industries. However, they still reach most of their users by the means of the traditional television broadcasting, therefore negotiating their complexities with audiences still accustomed to the use of conventional narrative genres and forms. In particular, they play with audience expectations of thrillers, polarizing the central contradiction between institutions and individuals, and emphasizing the private suffering caused by the blindness of social organizations. The main female characters in these series are associated with national institutions, either by trying to escape from their control (Lisbeth) or actually belonging to them (Katrine, Saga, and Sarah are policewomen); as such, their bodies become expressions of the transit between public and private discourse in Denmark. While the characters are rooted in a specific location, they are also part of the cultural

¹ Olof Hedling, "Notes on Nordic Noir as European Popular Culture," in *Frames Cinema Journal, MondoPop: Rethinking Genre Beyond Hollywood*, no. 6, 2014, pp. 201-214, <http://framescinema-journal.com/article/notes-on-nordic-noir-as-european-popular-culture/>, last visit 5 February 2015.

² For example, Nestingen analyzes the transition from social bonds to individualism in Nordic public discourse as a transgression of the law, using Robert Warshaw's 1948 analysis of the *gangster film*; Andrew Nestingen, *Crime and Fantasy in Scandinavia: Fiction, Film, and Social Change*, University of Washington Press, Seattle 2008, pp. 79-80.

³ For the relations of melodrama and sensationalism in visual narrative, see Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts*, Columbia University Press, New York 2001.

flow dominating the global scenario, especially considering that all of them have counterparts in the adaptations of these series produced in the United States.⁴

Transnational impact and trans-genre narrative

The migration of these stories across the Atlantic comprises a strong argument in favor of a global interpretation of their narrative and stylistic issues. That said, I wish to focus on the intra-European circulation of the ‘original’ series, produced in the context of a “small nation,”⁵ yet disseminated in many other markets with different economic impacts in each case. Comprising a shift from the idea of an international market to a transnational dissemination of content, these series serve as examples of certain changes in the global media economy that have emerged in recent years.⁶

In the case of the Nordic Noirs, the television series are intended for transnational markets from the very beginning: they are often coproduced by several European companies and are part of the wider distribution of popular products all over Europe. For instance, *Forbrydelsen* is produced by the Danish DR, with the participation of the Swedish SVT, German ZDF, and Norwegian NRK. This transnational economic effort creates a wide network, which allows the series to be sold to many other countries. Moreover, the convergence of different narrative and production traditions stimulates the creation of stories that can attract different audiences and engage them at various levels. The proliferation of characters and of their possible relations can be read through this lens, as it enlarges the possibilities for identification and emotional involvement. Great importance is accorded to diegetic expansion, generating wide “story worlds” that replicate the multiplicity of the audience’s everyday experiences.⁷ The intertwining of different genres in particular produces an investment in a metadiegetic, transmedia universe, where the “constellated communities” theorized by Altman⁸ for film genres are increasingly part of a circuit revolving around multiple interests.

⁴ In the US versions, Lisbeth Salander is interpreted by Rooney Mara in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (David Fincher, 2011); Katrine becomes Catherine Jensen (Chloë Sevigny), a member of the Pittsburgh Police Department in *Those Who Kill* (Fox, 2014-); Saga translates as Sonya Cross (Diane Kruger) in *The Bridge* (FX, 2013-), set on the US-Mexico border; and Mireille Enos plays Sarah Linden, a Seattle police detective in *The Killing* (AMC, 2011-). *The Bridge* was also adapted as *The Tunnel* in 2013, a coproduction between Canal+ in France and Sky Atlantic in the UK, set in Folkestone and Calais, with the French actress Clémence Poésy playing the detective Elise Wasserman.

⁵ The definition of Denmark as a “small nation” in terms of its film and media production has been developed by Mette Hjort, *Small Nation, Global Cinema: The New Danish Cinema*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis-London 2005.

⁶ Jean K. Chalaby, “From Internationalization to Transnationalization,” in *Global Media and Communication*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2005, p. 30.

⁷ Jeffrey Sconce, *What If? Charting Television’s New Textual Boundaries*, in Lynn Spigel, Jan Olsson (eds.), *Television after TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, Duke University Press, Durham-London 2004, pp. 93-112.

⁸ Constellated communities “cohere only through repeated acts of imagination;” Rick Altman, *Film/Genre*, BFI, London 1999, p. 161.

Such a complexity of interests and narrative scenarios was part of the concept of *Forbrydelsen* from the beginning. It had to not only respond to global changes in television storytelling but also adapt to DR “dogma.” The Danish broadcaster relies on the idea that its duty is to tell “stories that are not only entertaining but which also contain larger ethical and social connotations.”⁹ The main crime story in each season of *Forbrydelsen* is therefore mingled with political drama, the grief of the victims’ families, the roles and responsibilities of state institutions, economic crisis, and so forth. Each storyline is geographically and culturally situated, addressing an issue considered sensitive in Danish public discourse; however, these issues are also part of a wider discursive formation, shaping the transnational cultural citizenship generated by contemporary global media.¹⁰

Crime fiction is particularly apt to respond to the interfacing between genres as conceptual categories and the circulation of public discourses they produce.¹¹ It originated in modern, urban societies as an instrument to correctly interpret the world and organize its chaos;¹² however, it also presents the possibility of delving into ‘immoral’ behaviors since it continuously depicts the violation of laws and norms.¹³ The Nordic variant of *noir* is always attentive to the social and political implications of crime narratives, highlighting the complex consequences of each act, whether publicly allowed or prohibited.¹⁴ The DR’s “double storytelling” rule is part of a wider set of genre norms and conventions that tries to depict the multiplicity of everyday life.

This “double storytelling” played an active role in the development of *Forbrydelsen*, as its creator, Søren Sveistrup, completely rethought his original concept of a miniseries in eight episodes about the murder of a young girl. He extended the storylines to produce a longer series with more narrative paths, inspired by the idea of the butterfly effect in chaos theory as a diegetic structure for a “tale of destinies.”¹⁵ The thriller is, therefore, just one of several genres used

⁹ Eva Novrup Redvall, “‘Dogmas’ for Television Drama: The Ideas of ‘One Vision,’ ‘Double Storytelling,’ ‘Crossover,’ and ‘Producer’s Choice’ in Drama Series from the Danish Public Service Broadcaster DR,” in *Journal of Popular Television*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2013, p. 230.

¹⁰ Joke Hermes, *Re-Reading Popular Culture*, Blackwell, Oxford 2005.

¹¹ Jason Mittell, *Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture*, Routledge, New York-London 2004, pp. 12-13.

¹² Katrín Jakobsdóttir, *Meaningless Icelanders: Icelandic Crime Fiction and Nationality*, in Andrew Nestingen, Paula Arvas (eds.), *Scandinavian Crime Fiction*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff 2011, p. 48.

¹³ Torben Grodal, “Crime Fiction and Moral Emotions: How Context Lures the Moral Attitudes of Viewers and Readers,” in *Northern Lights*, vol. 9, 2011, pp. 144-145. The readability of the world granted by crime fiction has been pivotal for the Italian media studies debate on contemporary television narrative; see the round table “La nuova serialità televisiva. Tavola rotonda sulle nuove forme di serialità televisiva e sulla questione di un nuovo approccio critico,” in *Cinergie*, no. 13, March 2007, pp. 4-5.

¹⁴ Barry Forshaw, *Death in a Cold Climate: A Guide to Scandinavian Crime Fiction*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2012.

¹⁵ Eva Novrup Redvall, “‘Dogmas’ for Television Drama: The Ideas of ‘One Vision,’ ‘Double Storytelling,’ ‘Crossover,’ and ‘Producer’s Choice’ in Drama Series from the Danish Public Service Broadcaster DR,” cit., p. 230.

to construct the narrative path of the series. Suspense, the detection and pursuit of the villain, and the “dialectical relationship and the contrast between the calm and collected exterior and the underlying abyss of calculation and instinct”¹⁶ are only portions of a wider plot. Political drama and melodrama, with their specific affective qualities, also play significant roles in audience engagement.

Narrative complexities: echoing Twin Peaks

With its wide narrative arc, it took a whole year and 20 episodes to discover the killer of Nanna Birk Larsen in the first season of *Forbrydelsen* (originally aired January to March, and then September to November 2007). The second and third seasons consisted of 10 episodes each, aired in Denmark from September to November in 2009 and 2012, respectively. The ability to trace the consequences of characters’ actions within an extended temporal arc, not limited to a one-hour episode, produces, on the one hand, a narrative anchored by emotional peaks or situations; on the other, it permits the development of multifaceted characters constructed through tortuous affective paths.¹⁷

This kind of narrative structure, along with the murder of a teenager, which constitutes the starting point of the series, echoes one of the first complex television narratives: *Twin Peaks*, the two-season television serial created by David Lynch and Mark Frost, originally broadcast from April 1990 to June 1991. The show can be defined as a *serial* rather than a series: a series is characterized by self-contained episodes while a serial creates an ongoing narrative, often connected by cliffhangers at the end of each episode.¹⁸ In contemporary television, however, the distinction between series and serial is increasingly blurred: in the proliferation of storylines with complex narratives, each can be quickly eradicated, completely transformed, or even renewed after being considered exhausted, thus maintaining the “ecological” health of the narrative world.¹⁹

The connection between *Forbrydelsen* and *Twin Peaks* also includes the “Nordic” setting, as the latter was set in cold, rainy Washington State in the United States. Moreover, *Forbrydelsen*’s advertising campaign was initially based on the question, “Who killed Nanna Birk Larsen?” echoing *Twin Peaks*’s “Who killed

¹⁶ Gunhild Agger, “Nordic Noir on Television: *The Killing* I-III,” in *Cinéma&Cie*, vol. 12, no. 19, Fall 2012, p. 42.

¹⁷ Regarding multilayered narrative in the television serial and the revolution introduced by *Twin Peaks*, see Kristin Thompson, *Storytelling in Film and Television*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge-London 2003, p. 133.

¹⁸ John Ellis, *Visible Fictions. Cinema, Television, Video*, Routledge, London 1982, quoted in Veronica Innocenti, Guglielmo Pescatore (eds.), *Le nuove forme della serialità televisiva. Storia, linguaggio, temi*, Archetipolibri, Bologna 2008, p. 18.

¹⁹ For an introduction to “ecology” in media studies, see Claudio Bisoni, Veronica Innocenti, Guglielmo Pescatore, *Il concetto di ecosistema e i media studies: un’introduzione*, in Claudio Bisoni, Veronica Innocenti (eds.), *Media Mutations. Gli ecosistemi narrativi nello scenario mediale contemporaneo. Spazi, modelli, usi sociali*, Mucchi, Bologna 2013, pp. 11-26.

Laura Palmer?” Finally, the closing credits of each episode of *Forbrydelsen* made an explicit visual reference to *Twin Peaks* by zooming out from a closeup of the murdered girl, replicating the famous snapshot of Laura Palmer. In *Twin Peaks*, however, the camera’s starting point for the closing credits was a framed picture of the teenager as prom queen; in *Forbrydelsen*, there is just an unframed, unsaturated closeup of Nanna fading in from the black. In this way, the Danish thriller emphasizes the lack — or at least the weakening — of social and cultural codes. At the same time, the murder is completely rooted in the phenomenal, physical world, unlike the metaphysical, mysterious developments of *Twin Peaks*.

One of the main differences between the two shows concerns their respective production contexts: *Twin Peaks* is an “authorial” product from the early 1990s that was later labeled “quality television,”²⁰ while *Forbrydelsen* is explicitly part of the “medium-concept” style proposed by Andrew Nestingen for contemporary Nordic Noir. In his definition, these filmic and television products “use the dramaturgical structures and continuity style of genre film and the excess characteristic of the art film;” moreover, such excess is used to direct the audience’s attention toward “extrafilmmic, sometimes politically significant, issues.”²¹ In this sense, great importance is attached to the resonances between visual style and narrative themes. For example, the inability to see clearly through rain and mud becomes a metaphor for the inability to sort innocence from guilt, truth from falsehood. Moreover, the truth about the murders, eventually discovered by Sarah Lund, is always shattering, elusive, and ambiguous.

As with previous complex narratives, the multiplicity of issues, themes, and questions raised by the narrative of *Forbrydelsen* is controlled through visual and stylistic homogeneity. In this sense, *Twin Peaks* was one of the first series to mingle soap opera-like parallel storylines and the sensationalism of bodily excess with other, more “respectable” genres — such as *noir*, crime, and American gothic — creating a sense of unity through highly competent camerawork, editing, and music.²² *Forbrydelsen*, however, is one prominent product among many

²⁰ For the author as a “brand label of quality and exclusivity,” see Janet McCabe, Kim Akass, *Introduction*, in Id., *Quality TV: Contemporary American Television and Beyond*, I.B. Tauris, London-New York 2007, p. 10. On a similar note, see also Máire Messenger Davies, *Quality and Creativity in TV: The Work of Television Storytellers*, in the same anthology, pp. 171-184. Thompson goes as far as considering *Twin Peaks* “art television”: Kristin Thompson, *Storytelling in Film and Television*, cit., pp. 106-140.

²¹ Andrew Nestingen, *Crime and Fantasy in Scandinavia: Fiction, Film, and Social Change*, cit., p. 73. For the idea of “medium concept,” see also Pia Majbritt Jensen, Anne Marit Waade, “Nordic Noir Challenging ‘The Language of Advantage’: Setting, Light, and Language as Production Values in Danish Television Series,” in *Journal of Popular Television*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2013, pp. 259-265.

²² For such a wide definition of “quality television,” see Sarah Cadwell, *Is Quality Television Any Good? Generic Distinctions, Evaluations and the Troubling Matter of Critical Judgement*, in Janet McCabe, Kim Akass (eds.), *Quality TV: Contemporary American Television and Beyond*, cit., p. 26. For the multiplicity of narrative genres proposed by *Twin Peaks*, see the special issue dedicated to the serial in *Literature/Film Quarterly*, vol. 21, no. 4, Fall 1993.

in an ongoing sharing of complex narratives that has taken place between the United States and Europe over the last 15-20 years. The “Søren Sveistrup thriller,” therefore, uses crime fiction conventions, an authorial mood established by DR dogma regarding the “one vision,”²³ and mixed genres, all of which accounts for much of the series’ worldwide success.²⁴

Between melodrama and detection: prolific hybridizations

The moral ambiguity of the contemporary world, the inexplicableness of its cultural patterns, and the ongoing battle between legality and illegality are at the core of *Forbrydelsen*’s narratives and investigations. They find an original expression in the stylistic dual focus that characterizes the series. On the one hand, there is a logical path concerning the solving of the crime, in line with the visual conventions of *noir*; on the other, the series is punctuated by emotional eruptions, which openly menace the detection process and lead to visual excess. One example of this dialectic occurs in the middle of the first season: a possible breakdown in the investigation results in the horrific and prolonged beating of the suspect (a Muslim teacher), conducted at the beginning of episode 9 by Nanna’s father, Theis, and his friend Vagn (the actual murderer). Much of this episode is dedicated to the terrible act and its consequences for the Birk Larsens, even though this situation will have no further role in the detection.

The emotional outburst leading Nanna’s father toward revenge is just one of many affective peaks punctuating the narrative, also expressed through the trajectory of Sarah Lund’s character. Over the course of the three seasons, she repeatedly becomes obsessed with certain clues and suspects, much like other detectives in the crime fiction tradition. However, she is repeatedly proven wrong, and her errors have terrible consequences (e.g., the murder of her partner Meyer in the first season, the alleged murder of little Emilie in the third). Within her body, we find the representation of state institutions (she is a trained detective), the inappropriateness of her emerging desires (she is often involved with married or otherwise problematic men), and her refusal to recognize feelings and emotions lurking just beneath the surface. In this sense, Sarah is representative of many other Nordic detectives, with a dark outcome produced by the dystopic, neoliberal setting of contemporary Denmark.²⁵

The dialectic Sarah embodies — between the logic of detection and the power

²³ Eva Novrup Redvall, “Dogmas’ for Television Drama,” cit. The credit “A Søren Sveistrup’s thriller” appears at the beginning of each episode.

²⁴ *Forbrydelsen* has been aired in many countries — Germany, Japan, UK, Australia, Poland, Brazil, and others. Most data about its broadcasting are available on the English Wikipedia page dedicated to the series: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Killing_\(Danish_TV_series\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Killing_(Danish_TV_series)), last visit 16 February 2015.

²⁵ Karen Klitgaard Povlsen, *Gender and Geography in Contemporary Scandinavian Television Crime Fiction*, in Andrew Nestingen, Paula Arvas (eds.), *Scandinavian Crime Fiction*, cit., pp. 89-99.

of emotion — weakens as the series progresses in favor of sensational and melodramatic outbursts. This trajectory is expressed through the lighting style of the series: Sarah is often framed using backlights, which seem to create strong contrasts between light and shadow while actually blurring the boundaries between visible and invisible. Backlighting is especially used during emotional moments (affective confrontations between characters, hunting for the killer in dangerous settings, etc.), underlining the illegibility of the characters' motives and trajectories. Sarah displays incoherent behavior in both her private and professional life: in the first season, the audience never learns why she is obsessed with the case to the point that she renounces her fiancé and then her son. In the same way, we never completely understand her motives for pursuing some clues and not others, what her mental associations are, or what deduction processes lead her to repeatedly pursue the wrong men (at least six times in the first ten episodes). In the end, we can no longer completely trust her abilities as a detective or her capacity to read the world at large. Such doubt is confirmed at the end of the third season when Sarah transforms from detective to avenger, from police officer to executioner.

The dominance of melodramatic rhetoric in *Forbrydelsen* replicates, in the context of 21st century television, the emergence of melodramatic imagination in the theater and novels of the 18th century. For Peter Brooks, the excess pathos and moral radicalization of such novels and theatre gave new shape to spiritual values, which had become fragmented and desacralized in the modern world. “The melodramatic mode,” he writes, “exists to locate and to articulate the moral occult.”²⁶ However, in the 18th century the clashing of moral forces translated into a radicalization of the possible positions and an “incessant struggle against enemies [...] branded as villains, suborners of morality.”²⁷ In contemporary society, the changed paradigm denies the possibility of a unique interpretation of the world, and the transcendent struggle between good and evil cannot take place. Goodness is nowhere to be found — in neither the family nor the state — in a world dominated by neoliberal greed and individualistic desires, and crime fiction is the perfect expression of such a dystopia.

The prevalence of a “hyperbolic mode”²⁸ of representation — dark shots, the heavy use of blue filters, frantic camera movement, labyrinthine settings — visually translates the impossibility of attaining a definitive truth, and flourishing emotions dominate the characters. At the narrative level, the melodramatic flavor affects the investment in multiple storylines, sometimes only weakly related to the murder. As Melanie Kohnen notes in her analysis of the first season of the American version (whose plot is pretty similar to that of the Danish version), *The Killing* “prioritizes melodramatic moments over constructing a linear narrative

²⁶ Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*, Yale University Press, New Haven-London 1976, p. 5.

²⁷ *Ivi*, p. 15.

²⁸ *Ivi*, p. 9.

that leads to a definite ending, i.e. the revelation of Rosie's murderer."²⁹ Moreover, the deferred solution — evident in the longer first season — demonstrates that *The Killing's* (and *Forbrydelsen's*) narrative is strictly related to the delayed rhythm of the soap opera.³⁰

With its melodramatic mode, *Forbrydelsen* participates in the ongoing disruption of the dichotomy between "primetime soap," made for a female audience and "marked by stylistic excess and trashy sensibility," and "quality drama," masculine in focus and appeal and considered "serious, socially engaged, and more aesthetically mature," as noted by Jason Mittell.³¹ Contemporary television serials are generated through a constant hybridization of these oppositions and foster strong emotional engagement, yet they still present "characters as social and political actors, as players within a larger scheme, not just as emotional individuals."³² Interestingly, Mittell suggests that *The Killing* (the American version) actually fails to maintain the audience's interest in the proliferating storylines and characters. He believes that not revealing the murderer's identity in the season finale fails to meet the expectations created by the paratextual promotion surrounding the suggestive question, "Who Killed Rosie Larsen?"³³

The wounded body of the nation

However, in the Danish broadcast of *Forbrydelsen*, there was only a minor drop in viewership between the end of the first half of the first season in March and its reprise in September, which recovered after few episodes.³⁴ This shows that the audience found the multiple storylines absorbing and participated in the characters' emotions as well as the public discourse surrounding the events. The series assigns great importance to the preservation of social structures and the

²⁹ Melanie E. S. Kohnen, "'This Was Just a Melodramatic Crafest': American TV Critics' Reception of *The Killing*," in *Journal of Popular Television*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2013, p. 271.

³⁰ Kristen Warner, Lisa Schmidt, "Reconsidering *The Killing* as Feminine Narrative Form," in *Flow*, vol. 14, no. 3, 2011, <http://flowtv.org/2011/07/reconsidering-the-killing/>, last visit 15 February 2015.

³¹ Jason Mittell, *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*, New York University Press, New York 2015. A draft for peer review is available at <http://mcpres.media-commons.org/complextelevision/>, last visit 16 February 2015. My quotes are from the chapter "Serial Melodrama," par. 22.

³² Sarah Cadwell, *Is Quality Television Any Good? Generic Distinctions, Evaluations and the Troubling Matter of Critical Judgement*, cit., p. 27.

³³ Jason Mittell, "Killing Surprises," in *Just TV*, 20 June 2011, <https://justtv.wordpress.com/2011/06/20/killing-surprises/>, last visit 15 February 2015.

³⁴ Episode 10 had 1,678,000 viewers for its first airing in March 2007; episode 11 (aired on 23 September) only had 1,371,000, but the number constantly grew during the second part of the season, reaching 2,107,000 viewers for the season finale on 29 November. Data collected by TNS Gallup and published on [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Killing_\(Danish_TV_series\)#Episodes_and_ratings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Killing_(Danish_TV_series)#Episodes_and_ratings), last visit 16 February 2015.

private and public articulation of communities (i.e., the family on the one side and governments and institutions on the other). The relevance attached to emotion, and its role in community construction, produces a collective reflection on morality and ethics, reproducing Brooks' paradigm for melodramatic imagination. According to Nestingen, in *Nordic Noir* "we often find an individual officer whose depiction thematizes, dramatizes and heightens the conflicts in the novel, soliciting moral judgement about the characters and the conflicts narrated" because "melodramatic narration well suits the project of contesting the morality of the welfare state's transformation under neoliberalism."³⁵

The series' stylistic excess and the melodramatic body of the main character are used as instruments to portray the problems produced by neoliberalism and globalization in the social-democratic Northern countries. The wounds on the officer's body are inflicted on the body of the Nation.³⁶ This is particularly evident in the finale of the second season when the (deviant) agent of the army secret service almost kills Sarah Lund, after they had been in love and partners in the investigation for many episodes. The representative of the national military power thus tries to eradicate its civil counterpart, and to concentrate all the decision power in the hands of the army. Finally, in the third season, it is Sarah who loses control of her body. She is sexually and romantically involved with another officer (already married), and in the last episode she executes the killer because he will never be prosecuted. Her character becomes increasingly involved with her obsessions, and the frantic effort to solve the crime becomes a failed attempt to unravel her own tortured emotions.

Her hunt for the killers in each season translates visually into a constant and almost pointless movement across Copenhagen and its neighborhoods. As the series proceeds, the opposition is no longer between the family home and the palaces of power, as could be supposed in the first episodes. Quite the opposite, *Forbrydelsen* represents "the collapse and even lack of homes and the invalidation of the families."³⁷ The intertwining of police procedural with political thriller and melodrama produces an opposition between the body of the detective and the city, between her emotions and the network of lies and intrigue enveloping those in charge of the city (or even the nation). Even if the mayor or prime minister are not actually involved in the murders, they — and all other politicians and economic tycoons — are morally responsible for the ambiguous compromises and are always guilty of unethical behavior.

At both a visual and narrative level, *Forbrydelsen* strictly links public and private. While it makes evident the "nationalization of the domestic and the do-

³⁵ Andrew Nestingen, *Unnecessary Officers: Realism, Melodrama and Scandinavian Crime Fiction in Transition*, in Andrew Nestingen, Paula Arvas (eds.), *Scandinavian Crime Fiction*, cit., p. 172.

³⁶ For the body in melodrama, see Peter Brooks, *Melodrama, Body, Revolution*, in Jacqueline S. Bratton, Jim Cook, Christine Gledhill (eds.), *Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Screen*, BFI, London 1994, pp. 11-24.

³⁷ Gunhild Agger, "Emotion, Gender, and Genre: Investigating *The Killing*," in *Northern Lights*, vol. 9, 2011, p. 120.

mestication of the national” that is at stake with television,³⁸ it also shows its perverted aspects. The DR interprets its “public service” mission not as a national pacifier, but as an instrument to produce lively public debate on problematic issues involving every aspect of contemporary power relations — from actual politics to economic globalization, from crime to gender issues, and so on.³⁹ The ambiguity of the public scene is aptly expressed by *Forbrydelsen*’s multiple settings, each precisely located on the city map. The creative use of locations produces a specific “combination of a precision in place, and a symbolic loading of space,”⁴⁰ which conveys the constant relations between the private-particular and the public-universal already individuated in the representation of Sarah’s body and in the broader visual melodrama.

In conclusion, every level of *Forbrydelsen* is involved in a complex hybridization of narrative genres and modes of representation, creating a multilayered visualization of contemporary communities in Copenhagen. The main character burdens herself with the most tragic obsessions crossing the global society, and her body becomes a synecdoche for the whole nation, put in constant danger by other representatives of power, who are more or less deviant. The melodramatic mode of representation produces, therefore, a visualization of the moral and cultural clashes that dominate both public and private spaces, and the solutions to the crimes are always problematic and uncertain. *Forbrydelsen*’s success across several countries is attributable to its ability to relate visual complexity and excess with a multilayered narrative, the individual with the community, and the local with the global.

³⁸ David Morley, *At Home with Television*, in Lynn Spigel, Jan Olsson (eds.), *Television after TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, cit., p. 312.

³⁹ See the 2013 statement from DR cultural director Morten Hesseldahl concerning the political drama *Borgen*: “And yes, of course it is great that DR’s dramas have ambitions to influence the Danes. Influence them to participate in the public debates. Influence them to engage with society’s challenges. Influence them to think for themselves by putting relevant issues on the agenda. This has certainly always been our ambition. And not to provide glossy entertainment;” quoted in Tobias Hochscherf, Heidi Philipsen, “Speaking for and to the Nation? *Borgen* and the Cultural Viability of Public Service Broadcasting in Denmark and Germany,” in *Journal of Popular Television*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2013, p. 247.

⁴⁰ Gunhild Agger, “*The Killing*: Urban Topographies of a Crime,” in *Journal of Popular Television*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2013, p. 236.