

Review for *Social and Cultural Geography* (984 words)

Locating Nordic Noir: From Beck to The Bridge, by Kim Toft Hansen and Anne Marit Waade, Palgrave European Film and Media Studies, 2017.

Viewers of the Danish-Swedish television crime serial *The Bridge* (2011-18) will have noticed the central importance of its specific location to the crime plot and, perhaps, to the overall attraction and mood of the serial. The opening scene of the first season takes place on the iconic bridge connecting Denmark and Sweden. The killer has placed a body (which turns out to be two halves of bodies belonging to a Swedish politician and a Danish prostitute) exactly on the half-way point between the two Scandinavian nations. On the bridge, a Swedish and Danish police officer must find a way to work together across different personalities, languages and national borders in order to catch a killer who seemingly respects no social, moral or geographical boundaries.

The authors of *Locating Nordic Noir* call this serial a ‘meta-Nordic Noir series’ as it makes use of and comments on a host of traits now commonly associated with the contemporary media phenomenon of Nordic Noir. *The Bridge* draws on an already established and popular mode of televisual storytelling, recognizable to viewers both inside and outside of the Nordic region. With its pan-Scandinavian crime plot, the authors argue, it is also a series that comments on developments in contemporary television production where a particular local or regional ‘Danish model’ of production and financing has become increasingly transnationalized or ‘glocalized’. The two-fold ambition of this study is, then, on the one hand to explore the ways in which television drama produced in the Nordic countries share and present a generic Nordic ‘sense of place’ through representations of ‘evocative’ landscapes, cityscapes and soundscapes, and, on the other, to explore how the ‘local colour’ allows them to travel across national, linguistic and cultural borders.

Asking ‘what causes Nordic TV drama series to travel outside of the Nordic region’, *Locating Nordic Noir* investigates, forensically, the roots, circumstances and future possibilities for the transnationalization of television serials. The authors explore first the literary tradition of Scandinavian crime fiction informing the Danish crime serial *The Killing* (2007-12), which is singled out as formative for the global success of Nordic Noir. Perhaps

now most memorable for its anti-heroic female detective Sarah Lund's Faroese jumper, its gloomy Copenhagen cityscapes, iconic modernist architecture and slow-paced twenty-episode first season, *The Killing*, although the product of a small nation's public broadcasting network, has been exported to more than a hundred countries and territories on all continents and was awarded an Emmy for best international drama in 2010 and the International BAFTA in 2011.

One strength of this book is the detailed access it gives to a 'behind the scenes' tour of the at times accidental and at other times premeditated reasons for the series' itineraries and international success. Here the case of *The Killing* is notable for the central role played by the German distributor ZDF Enterprises, who saw the series' potential and sold it to BBC Four for next to nothing, at a time when the BBC was looking for inexpensive programming and a new brand identity by purchasing foreign content. The rest is, as they say, history.

Through this seminal series and subsequent examples of Nordic drama from the Danish political drama *Borgen*, the provincial crime drama *Norskov*, to Swedish adaptations of bestselling crime novels and original tv-drama such as *Blue Eyes*, Norwegian and Icelandic examples and European transnational innovations such as *The Team*, the authors demonstrate how Nordic television drama has been branded internally and externally as representing a particular Nordic sensibility, or brand identity, dependent upon particular ways in which 'local colour', real locations, landscapes and weather, is presented and negotiated.

The book is the result of the four-year research project: What makes Danish television drama travel? (2014-18), and its authors re-trace the rise of Nordic Noir as a global media phenomenon by paying close attention to both on- and off-screen actors and traits: the genre's preoccupation with the troubled domestic lives of morose detectives, depictions of eternally autumnal, cold and wet locations, gloomy cityscapes contrasted to desolate and deteriorating rural environments, permeated by a melancholic cinematography that underwrites the narratives' troubling social themes and indignations. Results from several production and location studies complement the book's exploration of 'imagined places' by including off-screen actors such as producers, location scouts, local funding schemes, distribution networks, tourism boards, producing together a veritable 'topography of Nordic Noir' that involves the ways in which 'real places' are transformed into 'places as character' and 'evocative locations' that serve as an attractive Nordic brand for a global audience and has significant 'brand value for localities' within the region.

Instead of asking what this ‘fuzzy’ genre of Nordic Noir is, the authors employ production studies, location studies and policy studies to ask instead ‘where is Nordic Noir?’ Informed by the spatial turn in media studies, *Locating Nordic Noir* demonstrates convincingly the many ways in which ‘TV dramas produced in the Nordic countries have become very local and very global at the same time’, thereby proposing an essential contribution to a more internationalised understanding of our present ‘third golden age of television’, referred to elsewhere as ‘complex tv’.

However, while it is stressed that transnationalization both drives the development of Nordic Noir and adds value to its content and storytelling, the television phenomenon also involves an increasing commercial and global dynamic, including international co-financing and new streaming services, which challenge the rationale for producing national public service television in small nations. Seeking out a liminal space between the local and the global in the production and dissemination of Nordic Noir, where ‘the success of Scandinavian crime fiction, is, by way of the alliterative and adhesive brand Nordic Noir, used to market products that have nothing or at least very little in common with crime fiction’ (and the Nordic, we might add), it is still up for discussion whether, as the authors conclude, ‘the Nordic does indeed exist’ in today’s thoroughly transnational, commercialised television drama networks.

Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen

School of European Languages, Culture and Society, UCL, London, United Kingdom

j.stougaard-nielsen@ucl.ac.uk