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Scandinavian Crime Fiction

Scandinavian crime fiction is a pertinent example of the ‘intrinsic transnationality’ of crime fiction.¹ Writers from the small nations of this peripheral North-European region have adapted foreign genres for their local cultures; the Nordic region itself, due to its proximate cultures, societies and languages, constitutes its own transnational system of translation and audiovisual co-production; and local crime fiction from the region has been successfully marketed and received abroad as exhibiting somewhat exotic ‘Nordic’ traits, as signalled in the widely used moniker ‘Nordic noir’. This chapter will trace how Scandinavian countries have gone from mostly importing foreign-language crime fiction to becoming, in the twenty-first century, the ultimate exporters of the genre. The argument and analyses of cases in the following will consider this transnationalization within three interwoven perspectives, aiming to show 1) how Scandinavian crime writing has adapted international genre traits to local concerns; 2) how notable examples of the genre have engaged with an increasingly transnational world; and 3) how novels and television series have been disseminated and re-appropriated within transnational networks. A central argument of this chapter is that Scandinavian crime fiction is inextricably bound up with transnational and transmedial networks of influence, appropriation and innovation.

In other words, Scandinavian crime fiction exhibits the traits of what Louise Nilsson, David Damrosch and Theo D’haen term a “glocal” mode of literary creation and circulation [...] highlighting vernacular and national discourses that, with the novels’ translation, spread to a cosmopolitan audience for whom the works become ambassadors for their country of origin’.² Danish critic Karen Klitgaard, for instance, has argued that what may be said to be inherently Scandinavian about the Scandinavian crime novel is that it has been particularly good at adopting dominant (American and British) genre conventions and ‘relocat[ing] them to a welfare society’.³ However, what is often overlooked is the extent to which modern Scandinavian crime fiction – from Swedes Mai Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö’s police novels in the 1960s to more recent Danish television procedurals – engages with current geopolitical conflicts and conditions through a particular small-nation appropriation of international generic formulas.

Puzzle Crimes for the People’s Home

Although, as Peter Messent states, ‘there does seem to be a certain distinctive quality to the detective fiction of this entire region’, the history of the Scandinavian crime novel is intimately connected to appropriation, adaptation and translation.⁴ In Sweden, a domestic tradition proper took shape in the 1950s, spearheaded by popular authors such as Maria Lang and Stieg Trenter, whose foregrounding of Swedish locations, character types and culture made Anglo-American crime genres more familiar to a domestic audience and, through a surge in translations, to a wider Scandinavian readership.⁵ Swedish crime novels, as well as those by Dane Else Fischer and the Norwegian Gerd Nyquist, modelled themselves primarily on the inter-war British whodunit (*pusseldeckar* in Swedish), whose titillating crimes in idyllic small towns appeared fitting for a nation that was beginning to see itself as an egalitarian, social-democratic ‘people’s home’ (*folkhem*) – a safe Swedish welfare state in an insecure and polarized Cold-War world. According to Sara Kärrholm, the Swedish puzzle crimes of the 1950s functioned as a

contemporary ‘moral saga’ about the ‘defiance of evil in the welfare society’ and external threats, where good citizens aided the police in restoring a peaceful idyll.⁶ A good example of this use of the genre is Astrid Lindgren’s young-adult detective novels about master detective Kalle Blomkvist – who would later be referenced by Stieg Larsson in the form of his journalist Mikael Blomkvist.

Norway witnessed a golden age of crime fiction as early as the 1910s and 20s. We might think of Sven Elvestad, alias Stein Riverton, who published ninety novels whose local Norwegian crimes were widely translated. In 1967, the publishing house Gyldendal launched its ‘svarte serie’. Modelled on the famous French *Série Noire*, this black series marked a turn away from the golden age detective story towards the socially engaged crime novel that would become a Scandinavian trademark. The svarte serie is an example of how translation and the importing of genres played a significant role in the formation of a domestic and regional tradition: the first forty-eight novels were translations of mostly Anglo-American thrillers (e.g., Patricia Highsmith), as well as Mai Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö’s Swedish police novels.⁷ It was not until 1973 that David Torjussen (Tor Edvin Dahl) became the first Norwegian in the series. While his contemporary police novel is indebted to Sjöwall and Wahlöö, his corpulent detective has been likened to Georges Simenon’s *Commissaire Maigret*. The sympathetic, un-heroic police detective is now a staple of Scandinavian crime fiction.

It is now generally agreed that the police novel has been the dominant crime genre in Scandinavia. Readers, particularly outside the region, expect Scandinavian procedurals to offer authentic representations of everyday life and a critique of the demise of the welfare state and its fading ideals of social responsibility, collectivism and egalitarianism. Their imagined inherent ‘Nordicness’, furthermore, raises the expectation of cold, desolate locations, and portrayals of overworked melancholic detectives with failing family relations, narrated in a brooding, pessimistic tone.⁸ Certainly, while such traits are found in other traditions and regions, ‘combined in the Scandinavian crime novel’, as Paula Arvas and Andrew Nestingen note, ‘they form a unique constellation.’⁹

The Police Novel and the Locked Room

These ‘Nordic’ characteristics are to a large extent the legacy of Sjöwall and Wahlöö’s ten-volume *Roman om ett brott* (1965–1975, *Novel of a Crime*). Internationally canonized alongside the dominant Anglo-American forerunners in the genre, Sjöwall and Wahlöö added a distinct voice to the genre by using the police novel as what Wahlöö described as a ‘scalpel cutting open the belly of an ideologically and morally bankrupt bourgeois model of the welfare state’.¹⁰ They understood that the police novel could be employed as a vehicle for critiquing what had become, to them, a ubiquitous Swedish idealization of post-war progress; a social-democratic confidence trick that had, from their Marxist perspective, led to deepened social inequality, rampant consumerism and a violent police state exercising control through social engineering.

The police novel was not a new or particularly Scandinavian genre. Sjöwall and Wahlöö’s novels, with their gritty realism and probing views into the private lives of their detectives, were inspired by Ed McBain’s police procedurals, several of which they translated into Swedish. However, while exploiting the procedural’s conventional focus on the dogged workings of a police investigation, Sjöwall and Wahlöö used the police novel to explore the entanglements of ordinary citizens and systemic social structures. They did not intend merely to use the genre, following John Scaggs’s definition, as ‘a powerful weapon of reassurance in the arsenal of the dominant social order’, but instead as a way to challenge understandings of crime and the social order from the inside.¹¹

By 1966, Per Wahlöö had formulated their ideological premise for the series, namely to ‘analyse crime as social function and its relation to [...] the various moral life forms around that society’.¹² It is notable that one such ‘moral life form’ is the detective Martin Beck, who, in contrast to McBain’s detective Steve Carella and Simenon’s Maigret, not only struggles with the ills of society but also those of his own private life. The melancholic police investigator is periodically tormented by stomach aches and lives in a loveless relationship with his wife, whom he will later divorce. His deteriorating private life and ailing body became a model for Scandinavian writers, who have tended to use the everyman detective as a metaphor for a deteriorating welfare utopia. Egalitarian and peaceful on the surface, his is a country of socially alienated citizens, who have lost their trust in the state and its representatives in law enforcement. Beck’s own personal crisis comes to a head at the end of the seventh novel, *Den vedervärdige mannen från Säffle* (1971; *The Abominable Man*, 1972), when he is shot and severely wounded. Sjöwall and Wahlöö’s bleak view of law enforcement and their often sympathetic depiction of criminals as victims of the state is here illustrated by the fact that the shooter is a former police officer seeking revenge for the death of his wife in the custody of a ruthless, fascist colleague.

In the next novel, *Det slutna rummet* (1972; *The Locked Room*, 1973), a traumatized Beck has been left out of the police squad’s investigation of a bank robbery. Instead, he is given a curious case of a man who has been shot dead in his flat, which was found locked from the inside with no trace of a gun at the crime scene. The conscious metafictional play with the classic motif of the locked-room mystery is employed in what becomes the novel’s dual investigation of the crime puzzle and the existential condition of Martin Beck. He gradually realizes that the motif is as much referring to his own personal ‘locked room’; he is, the narrator tells us, ‘on his way to becoming a recluse who had no desire for others’ company or any real will to break out of his vacuum’.¹³ Beck’s alienation, however, initiates a social awakening, as he notices he is by no means alone: ‘Observing people all around him, he gained the impression that many of them were in the same predicament he was, though they either didn’t realize it or wouldn’t admit it to themselves.’¹⁴ The welfare state appears rife with victims like him: ‘the so-called Welfare State abounds with sick, poor, and lonely people, living at best on dog food, who are left uncared for until they waste away and die in their rat-hole tenements.’¹⁵

Curiously, Sjöwall and Wahlöö’s presentation of a dystopian Swedish welfare state from the inside, so to speak, had much in common, albeit from a very different political standpoint, with the bleak portrayal of Sweden in contemporary British-South African journalist Roland Huntford’s book *The New Totalitarians* (1971). However, while Sjöwall and Wahlöö paint a dystopian picture of Sweden, the systemic violence of the state is largely related to the political and cultural influence of an imperialist and consumerist America. This is apparent when the social violence committed by urban planners in the name of the welfare state is compared to that of American neo-colonialist exploits in Vietnam:

Why don’t they blow the whole of Stockholm to bits in one go instead of doing it piecemeal? They ought to do what Ronald Reagan or whatever-his-name-is said about Vietnam: Asphalt it and paint on yellow stripes and make parking lots of the goddam thing. It could hardly be worse than when the town planners get their way.¹⁶

The popular geopolitics in Sjöwall and Wahlöö’s ten-volume *Novel of a Crime* conform to a contemporary left-wing trope, where the moral vacuum of the West is contrasted with utopian idealizations of the communist East. In *The Locked Room*, the novel’s sympathies clearly lie with the naive vigilante bank robber Monita, who is portrayed as another victim of alienation and exploitation; she eventually escapes Sweden to Yugoslavia to begin a better life with her daughter.

Despite its dystopian portrayal of Sweden, *Novel of a Crime* also takes the shape of a sentimental novel of education. Beck's existential and social awareness is formed in an idealized national space. He pieces together the puzzle of *The Locked Room* and breaks out of his isolation when he meets Rhea Nielsen, the landlady in the building where Svärd, the dead man in the locked room, lived. She embodies a communal, egalitarian and seemingly more authentic vision of a 'people's home', a place where the inhabitants 'must feel they belong together and that it's their home'.¹⁷ Rhea, an avid reader of crime fiction, eventually provides Beck with the solution to the locked-room mystery, and as he falls in love with her she also brings him out of his own isolation: 'At the same time he was breaking into Svärd's locked room he was also breaking out of his own.'¹⁸ The locked-room mystery is, therefore, central to the novel's sentimental narrative of Beck's existential, sexual and political awakening, and to his 'homecoming' in Rhea's version of a traditional Swedish 'people's home' based on moral obligations of cooperation and trust.

The adaptation and renewal of the locked-room mystery is woven into the contemporary police novel not only as a way to tell a local Swedish crime story through the use of an internationally well-known formula; it also points nostalgically to Swedish crime novels of the 1950s in which moral citizens, such as Rhea, could contribute to the restoration of social harmony by assisting a good police officer in solving crime riddles and, in the process, restore faith in communal belonging, if not in the capitalist welfare state, which is presented throughout the series as being beyond repair.¹⁹

Sjöwall and Wahlöö's police novels have resonated with international crime writers such as Ian Rankin, Val McDermid and Deon Meyer; in the Nordic region, they have influenced writers such as the Icelandic Arnaldur Indriðason and Norwegian Karin Fossum. Important as they have been, it was in the early 1990s that Scandinavian crime fiction had its major international breakthrough in translations, and film and television adaptations. This came in the form of the Dane Peter Høeg's *Miss Smilla's Sense of Snow* and the Swede Henning Mankell's Wallander series.

Policing Across Borders

Mankell's Wallander series (1991–2009) continued in the tradition of Sjöwall and Wahlöö's police novel with a social conscience. Kurt Wallander is, like Beck, a Swedish everyman police inspector, whose crime-solving skills are contrasted with his difficulties in maintaining good interpersonal relations and a healthy body and mind. Prone to melancholia, he develops diabetes and eventually dementia; illnesses that reflect his deep sense of homelessness in a new, more violent world he is ill-equipped to comprehend. Wallander realizes, again like Beck, that he shares his sense of alienation with others:

Wallander realised that he was not alone in his feelings of uncertainty and confusion at the new society that was emerging. We live as if we were in mourning for a lost paradise, he thought, [...] but those days have irretrievably vanished, and nor is it certain that they were as idyllic as we remember them.²⁰

Wallander's nostalgia for a utopian Swedish welfare state is revealed in momentary bursts of doubt: collective memories of a better elsewhere prove false (it has perhaps always been a 'nowhere'), and a Sweden emerges that is not that different from a global 'anywhere'. Wallander's melancholy also relates to his own trauma and wounds, such as those inflicted by a stabbing when he was a young cop, his teenage daughter's attempted suicide and his divorce. The internal life and body of the cop, again, serves to reflect wider social dysfunction in the welfare state. As such, his series is an investigation into a broader 'Swedish anxiety' (about

race and racism) and functions ‘as a kind of mouthpiece for growing insecurity, anger and healthy insights about the relationship between the welfare state and democracy’.²¹

Where *Novel of a Crime* reflected a polarized world of competing Cold-War ideologies, it is significant that the Wallander series is mostly set in the town of Ystad on the Baltic coast, a permeable borderland between Sweden and the wider world. In this liminal space, border-crossing crimes such as organ trafficking (*Mannen som log*, 1994; *The Man Who Smiled*, 2005), human trafficking (*Villospår*, 1995; *Sidetracked*, 2000), Swedish mercenaries in the Congo (*Den femte kvinnan*, 1996; *The Fifth Woman*, 2001), and an international conspiracy to destroy the financial system in *Brandvägg* (1998; *Firewall*, 2004) challenge the very possibility of distinguishing clearly between the local and the global.

In the first Wallander novel, *Mördare utan ansikte* (1991; *Faceless Killers*, 1997), racism takes centre stage. The novel begins with an attack on an elderly couple in their farmhouse outside of Ystad. The man is found murdered, but the woman lives long enough to describe the perpetrator as ‘foreign’. Wallander is fearful of what will happen if this becomes publicly known – refugee camps in the area have already been subjected to racist attacks. While most of the criminal investigation sees the police following false leads, dealing with hate crimes and a dysfunctional immigration system, the killers do in the end turn out to be foreigners, though perhaps not ‘visibly’ so, as they are two fair-skinned opportunist Czech criminals, who had exploited Sweden’s relaxed border controls. The killers are, nevertheless, foreigners, which could be seen to confirm Wallander’s anxiety about border-crossing Eastern-European criminal gangs. His many prejudices have led some critics to read the novels themselves as reactionary and reproducing a xenophobic world view that the author himself purports to critique.²² Against this view, other critics consider the Wallander novels more cosmopolitan in their presentation of global inequalities and race, pointing out that ‘Swedishness’ and ‘foreignness’ are presented as ambivalent notions in the series.²³ In *Faceless Killers*, this ambivalence is already suggested when the investigative team debate what the old woman could have meant by the word ‘foreign’. Wallander’s colleague Rydberg suggests: “‘Maybe they looked un-Swedish. Maybe they spoke a foreign language.’ [...] ‘What does an ‘un-Swedish’ person look like?’” asked Wallander.²⁴

Adding to the confusion of what at first appears to Wallander as an emerging amoral and more brutal age arriving in Sweden from the outside is the fact that the male victim turns out to be less than a model Swedish citizen. During the Second World War he had made money collaborating with the Nazis, which he later used for secret payments to a mistress and their illegitimate child. The novel’s open-endedness prompts the reader to re-examine the central questions of who the real victims and perpetrators are, and what, in turn, distinguishes the domestic from the foreign.

A sustained critique of growing anti-immigration sentiments and lack of diversity in a globalizing Norway is found in Anne Holt’s Hanne Wilhelmsen series of police novels.²⁵ Like Sjöwall and Wahlöö, Holt employs the locked-room mystery as a national allegory in *I222* (2007; *I222*, 2011). An explicit homage to Agatha Christie’s *And Then There Were None* (1939), the setting is, however, stereotypically ‘Nordic’. When a train is derailed in the mountains between Oslo and Bergen, Wilhelmsen and a diverse cast of Norwegians, including a Muslim couple and a right-wing television personality, take refuge in a snowbound hotel – ‘a little piece of Norway. Which [...] was bound to lead to a crime sooner or later’.²⁶ Besides its playful appropriation of the locked-room mystery, which in Holt’s treatment is never fully resolved, the motif functions as a ready-made frame for a recognizable Scandinavian narrative of personal and national isolation and trauma. Having survived a gun shot in the line of duty, the now ‘retired’ and wheelchair-bound Wilhelmsen reflects on her disability. Much like victims of racism and homophobia, she has been ‘othered’ socially. At the same time, however, she exploits her outsider perspective: ‘The most important thing about the wheelchair is that it

creates distance.²⁷ This separation from her fellow castaways is what allows her eventually to solve the locked-room puzzle, to reassert herself as a detective and to see through the social and cultural conflicts that play out in the hotel, and by extension in Norway, when they erupt in xenophobia and violence.

Mankell and Holt deploy the police novel as a tool to critique national and global structures of social and racial inequality and injustice. While rooted in a typically bucolic Swedish locale, Wallander and the crimes he and his team of detectives investigate are often entangled with distant locations, as suggested by the fact that several of the novels' brief prologues are set in the 'Global South' before the action moves to Ystad. This is one of the reasons why Slavoj Žižek has suggested that Mankell's police novel is a 'perfect illustration of the fate of the detective novel in the era of global capitalism'.²⁸ The Wallander series illustrates how setting has become bounded by 'a particular provincial environment' as a 'dialectical counterpart' to the globalized world, where, Žižek concludes, 'a detective story can take place almost anywhere'.²⁹ However, while Žižek is right to suggest that Wallander's use of locations illustrates a polarized world of global inequalities, between a privileged Sweden and a global elsewhere, it might be more productive to see Wallander as a firmly located everyman detective, complete with xenophobic tendencies, nostalgia and anxieties, who nevertheless adjusts his moral compass to transnational entanglements with others and is in the process changed by them. We might think, for example, of Wallander's engagement with the 'dark geopolitics' of post-apartheid terrorism in *Den vita lejoninnan* (1993; *The White Lioness*, 1998).³⁰

As migration and racism in the multicultural welfare state became an overarching theme in Scandinavian crime fiction in the 1990s, critics have questioned whether the genre is used to critique or merely reproduce internalized anxieties of foreign others from a position of Nordic privilege. Homelessness, transnational crimes and encounters with strangers in a globalizing world are central tenets of Jo Nesbø's police novels featuring the cynical and alcoholic detective Harry Hole. While in many ways a classic hardboiled sleuth, Hole is a recognizably Scandinavian cop: his disintegrating health and family relations are symptomatic of a violent, inscrutable world encroaching on his Norwegian home. From the series' beginning with *Flaggermusmannen* (1997; *The Bat*, 2012), Nesbø signals that Hole's world is a thoroughly globalized one. As Murray Pratt has observed, the Hole novels 'extend, from Oslo's airport, ports, politics, histories and trade routes, throughout a globalized and networked international crime scene'.³¹ The first two novels in the series take place almost exclusively outside Norway, and throughout the series Hole references a cosmopolitan world of popular culture and geopolitics as he restlessly traverses the globe from the opium dens of Hong Kong to Rwanda. The result is a globalized crime thriller that sets up 'a broader set of debates about how local and national values intersect with international perspectives'.³²

In *The Bat*, Hole is sent to Sydney to investigate the murder of a compatriot. Sydney is shown from the tourist's perspective: 'a set of Aussie staples that a Norwegian readership would expect to find: boxing, Aboriginal culture, transvestitism and the gay scene, and the icons of Sydney's tourist circuit'.³³ Encounters with two key Aboriginal characters, one a detective, the other a boxer, may suggest that Hole is to embark on an educational journey to gather knowledge about the plight of Indigenous peoples, which will eventually provide him with the solution to the crime. However, this is complicated by the fact that the killer, who targets random blonde women as revenge for the suffering of the Indigenous population, turns out to be the aboriginal boxer Robin Toowoomba. Since Toowoomba is himself a victim of systemic racist injustices, the reader inevitably sympathizes with him. In the end, the novel remains ambiguous as to its presentation of racial inequality in Australia as it is filtered through Hole's restless, globalized gaze.

Ellen Rees has noted Nesbø's curious failure to make explicit the obvious comparison to Norway's suppression of its own indigenous population, the Sami, particularly as Hole's deceased mother is of Sami decent and the issue of Sami rights was prevalent in Norway at the time.³⁴ A Norwegian reader may, of course, pick up on this parallel without the need for a prompt. The question remains whether Nesbø's globalized police novel reproduces the vilification of the socially disadvantaged at a safe distance from home, or whether the reader is meant to face an uncomfortable, less politically correct consequence of Scandinavian crime fiction. For there is a tendency to understand victimization and perpetration as the products of systemic violence and as racial injustices reverberating as far from a seemingly innocent Norway as it is possible to set a novel.

The Hole series has successfully travelled abroad, selling more than 33 million copies, albeit with almost a decade's delay and in a different sequence in English translation. In 2017, *Snømannen* (2007; *The Snowman*, 2010) was adapted into an English-language film. This dynamic exchange of 'local content', at first in Nesbø's already globalized police novels and subsequently through various translation and adaptation networks, challenges a reading of the series from a clearly demarcated national or even regional perspective. Essentially, a novel like *The Bat* reads differently in Australia when read through its local context, belatedly, out of sequence and in translation.

Similarly, having been translated into more than forty languages, in the US and the UK Mankell surprisingly became, according to Barry Forshaw, 'the market leader' and 'the standard bearer for foreign crime in translation'.³⁵ In the English-speaking world, the Wallander series became synonymous with the global popularity of Scandinavian crime fiction following the British television adaptations *Wallander* (BBC One, 2008–2016), filmed on location in Ystad. The British adaptation demonstrates a wider trend in the reception of what has become known as Nordic noir – a term that was initially coined outside of Scandinavia to denote a popular range of subtitled, quality Nordic television drama appearing in the first decades of the 2000s.³⁶ As observed by Anne Marit Waade, in the case of the British Wallander adaptation, 'the story about Kurt Wallander is supplemented by the story about the local colour of Scandinavia seen through British eyes'.³⁷ This is visible in the first episode, based on the fifth novel, *Villospår* (1995; *Sidetracked*, 1999), which opens with Wallander driving through a landscape of yellow rapeseed fields under a cloudless blue sky, the colours of the Swedish flag. With a cast of mostly British actors, the BBC Wallander consciously employed locations and aesthetics to enhance the series's 'Swedishness'.³⁸ Yet, this view of the novels as grounded in a homogeneous national space poses questions about what kind of Sweden and whose Sweden the series represents. Wallander asks himself similar questions throughout the novels.

Genre and Gender Hybrids

Swedish and Norwegian crime writers were not alone in using the crime novel as an analytical tool to reassess the Scandinavian welfare state and collective anxieties about multiculturalism and globalization in the 1990s. Such anxieties are also at play in the Dane Peter Høeg's genre-hybrid, postcolonial crime thriller *Frøken Smillas fornemmelse for sne* (1992; *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow*, 1993), which became an international bestseller, not least due to intensive marketing campaigns exploiting its exotic Arctic location and its adaptation for a widely distributed English-language film in 1997. In the novel, a contemporary national identity crisis linked to Danish colonial guilt is embodied in the Greenlandic-Danish glaciologist Smilla Qaavigag Jaspersen. Despite her ethnic hybridity, she is recognizable as a Scandinavian anti-authoritarian and socially alienated heroine. Estranged from her family, she prefers the

comforting logic of mathematics to messy human company and carries the traumatic loss of her Greenlandic identity.

Smilla becomes involved in the investigation of what she believes to be the murder of her Greenlandic neighbour's child Isaiah. When his lifeless body is found on the snowy ground next to their block of flats in Copenhagen, Smilla does not believe the police's theory that he simply fell from the roof by accident. Noticing subtle traces of his footprints in the snow, she believes that Isaiah was running away from someone he feared more than heights. Smilla's investigation into Isaiah's mysterious death turns into an intricate unravelling of colonial history and, not least, an investigation into her own family history and conflicted sense of self. She realizes that the death of Isaiah is a small-scale version of the larger forces and catastrophes of the colonial relationship between Denmark and Greenland. In this, Smilla's 'feeling for snow' is not only an aid to her as an amateur detective; her sensibility enables her (in contrast to the always anxious and aghast Wallander or the cynical Hole) to understand the systemic violence and the precarious life of the Inuit under Danish rule that led to Isaiah's death.

While *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow* is unique in Scandinavian crime fiction for its exploration of colonialism, the detective's private life in Høeg's novel, as in other examples discussed here, reflects wider social conflicts. Smilla's internal exile mirrors a suppressed national guilt – an uncomfortable past (and present), which has left the country incapable of adjusting to a globalized world, where the fluid, mobile and eccentric periphery has become the new normal: '[t]here's nothing "local" left anymore [...]. If something happens in Greenland, it's connected to something else in Singapore.'³⁹ The connection between the original Greenlandic crime scene, towards which Smilla travels on board the ship Kronos in the novel's second part, which takes the form of a science-fiction eco-thriller, and the wider world is central to understanding the avalanche of events that led to Isaiah's death. She uncovers a scientific conspiracy to conceal the presence of a meteor and a deadly parasite deep in the Greenlandic tundra. This parasite, she believes, 'can live anywhere' and poses a catastrophic risk to humanity if the Danish scientists succeed in bringing the meteor aboard the ship as they intend.⁴⁰ The local and the global, and the individual and the collective, are intimately linked in Høeg's novel and converge in Kronos, the novel's dystopian vessel of personal, national and global risks.

Like Wallander, Smilla is a self-diagnosed melancholic. Both are 'homeless', foreign bodies mourning idealized pasts. However, while Wallander's physical wound represents a trauma that keeps his anxious mind from understanding the social transformations of a globalizing Sweden, Smilla's existential and cultural wounds set in motion a series of events that allow her to explore her own precarious location and to confront her own lost childhood through her investigation into Isaiah's:

I think about what has happened to me since Isaiah's death. I see Denmark before me like a spit of ice. It's drifting, but it holds us frozen solid inside the ice masses, each in a fixed position in relation to everyone else. Isaiah's death is an irregularity, an eruption that produced a fissure. That fissure has set me free. For a brief time, and I can't explain how, I have been set in motion, I have become a foreign body skating on top of the ice.⁴¹

There is, as in Sjöwall and Wahlöö, a sentimental streak to Smilla's liberation, as the novel's title also suggests. We might think of Leonard Cassuto's understanding of the centrality of sentimentalism to the hardboiled detective, who 'relies on reason only in concert with intuition – that is, feeling'.⁴² Smilla's 'feeling for snow' depends not on her scientific reasoning, but, importantly, on her ability to create emotional bonds with others and to have the courage to explore the discomforts of guilt, to confront the abuse of the most vulnerable in society, and to commit herself ethically to the 'foreign bodies' of a globalizing world.

Høeg's employment of a hardboiled female amateur detective in a genre-hybrid crime novel points to the fact that even though the police novel is a dominant form, Scandinavian crime fiction has diversified and blended a wide range of genres.⁴³ The best-known example of hybrid genre writing in Scandinavia is arguably Stieg Larsson's global bestseller, the *Millennium Trilogy* (2005–2007), which employs an arsenal of subgenres, including the clue-puzzle, serial killer thriller, hardboiled detective novel, action thriller, financial thriller and true crime.⁴⁴ Larsson's indebtedness to international crime writing is visible in his references to Sue Grafton, Val McDermid and Sara Paretsky, all of whom are read by the journalist detective Mikael Blomkvist, and to Dorothy Sayers, associated with the old industrialist Henrik Vanger, who asks for Blomkvist's help to solve what is explicitly referred to as a locked-room mystery on the island of Hedeby.⁴⁵ The trilogy is also related to a wave of Scandinavian crime fiction written by women since the 1990s, with novels by Liza Marklund, Camilla Läckberg, Karin Fossum, Sarah Blædel and Elsebeth Egholm, which, like the *Millennium Trilogy*, explore topics such as violence against women, family dysfunction, gender inequality and child welfare.⁴⁶

In *Män Som Hatar Kvinnor* (2005; *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, 2008) Larsson follows in the tradition of the Scandinavian crime novel with a social conscience with his effective use of documentary devices such as statistics about violence against women. This gesture towards documentarism must, however, be held up against his conscious and ironic play on crime genres and, not least, on the fictional universe of Astrid Lindgren.⁴⁷ The 'Pippi Longstocking' figure of Lisbeth Salander, the anarchist with the dragon tattoo, is contrasted with the investigative journalist Mikael Blomkvist, nick-named after Lindgren's amateur detective Kalle Blomkvist. At the beginning of the first novel, his seemingly spotless morals and professionalism are cast into doubt when he is convicted of libel following undocumented exposés in *Millennium* of the shady international speculator Hans-Erik Wennerström. His subsequent invitation to investigate a locked-room mystery far from Stockholm is, then, simultaneously a welcome distraction from the media scandal and, at the same time, an opportunity to 'play' detective with the hope of re-establishing himself as a trusted journalist and obtaining the documentation he needs to prove his case against Wennerström.

However, the driver of the *Millennium Trilogy*'s global fame is arguably its hardboiled Goth super-hacker heroine, Salander, who eventually joins Blomkvist on Hedeby. It is Salander's personal vendetta against a corrupt, misogynist welfare state, which has, against the international image of Sweden's superior gender equality, allowed systemic violence against women, that forms the narrative arch over the three original volumes. Blomkvist and Salander eventually uncover that the locked-room mystery of Harriet Vanger's disappearance involves two generations of Nazi serial killers in the Vanger family. The larger scale of the crime drama gradually merges with Salander's personal traumas: her loss of independence and traumatic mistreatment since childhood at the hands of corrupt doctors, a rapist state-appointed guardian and an illegal faction within the Swedish Security Service, who gave her abusive father, a former Russian spy, immunity and protection.

The developing relationship with Blomkvist, and his traditional welfare-state values of trust, procedures and collaboration, provides the narrative with a sentimental storyline. Having lost her faith in the paternalistic welfare state, Salander must put her trust in Blomkvist in order to regain her financial and legal independence; at the same time, she must provide him with protection and information to help him solve the locked-room mystery and eventually provide the sources he needs to incriminate Wennerström. As such, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* is reminiscent of Sjöwall and Wahlöö's genre-conscious *The Locked Room*, albeit with a significant reversal of gender.

Critics have pointed out the questionable means by which Salander helps restore the balance of social justice. Through a mix of hacking, international bank transfers, vigilantism

and identity theft, she fights, as Nestingen has formulated it, ‘neoliberalism by using its tools more skilfully and more ruthlessly than the corporations’.⁴⁸ Salander’s private vendetta against a corrupt welfare state appears to reproduce the symbolic violence of the individualist and competitive society, which she is seemingly called upon to destroy. Although a morally dubious vigilante, according to Yvonne Leffler, ‘[a]s a combination of threatened victim, revenging computer hacker, and feisty avenger she is paying back for her lost childhood’.⁴⁹ She avenges both crimes committed against herself and those committed by ‘men who hate women’, including Wennerström, who, she discovers, is a spider in his own global cyber web.⁵⁰

Given that she is cast as ‘the perfect victim’ against Nazi serial killers and rapist representatives of the state, readers may be excused for empathizing with her choice of methods to obtain justice for herself. However, Blomkvist’s exposure of Wennerström is questionable, as his revelations depend almost entirely on documentation hacked and stolen by Salander. In the end, we are left with a novel that, on the one hand, endorses and nostalgically longs for a traditional ethics of a welfare state promoting trust, collaboration and equality, and, on the other, illustrates that in an age of neoliberal capitalism such values may only be restored by replicating the systemic structures that crushed trust in the welfare state in the first place.

The Scandinavian crime writers explored so far appropriate and revise available crime genres in order to explore the legitimacy of a welfare state faced with transnational social injustices and crimes. They do not, however, use crime fiction unambiguously to restore a past social order, as in the clue-puzzle tradition, to contain the criminal other, as in the ‘paranoid’ hardboiled mode, or as a social placebo that will contain all threats to society and reinstall trust in the state, as is typical of the police procedural.⁵¹ These novels do gesture through their hybridity towards a more ethical, more harmonious, and less violent past; however, they immediately deconstruct such utopianism through, for instance, Wallander’s ambivalent morals or Salander’s dubious methods and, not least, their hybrid use of crime genres. The decomposition of stable national frameworks also includes the decomposition of stable narrative forms.

Television Cops and Social Dysfunctions

The ambiguous relationship between the values of the welfare state and the advent of a more individualistic, competitive society, between victims and perpetrators, and between the bounded nation and an increasingly transnational world are also the ingredients that informed the twenty-first-century television crime serial in Scandinavia and its global dissemination.

Following the socially engaged tradition of the Scandinavian police novel, the Danish television series *Forbrydelsen* (2007–2012; *The Killing*) is, over its three seasons, set in a contemporary Denmark with storylines exploring political corruption and racism (season one), the war in Afghanistan (season two) and the local effects of the global financial crisis (season three). At the centre of this turbulent world stands Sarah Lund in her worn jeans and famous, gender-neutral Faroese sweater. Her dedication to solving the murder of Nanna Birk Larsen in the first season of the series leads her constantly to postpone her departure from the Copenhagen police force to join her Swedish fiancé with her son in their future home in Sweden. The dramatic crime plot is also here reflected in the private story of the investigator. Lund’s inability to engage empathetically with her own family is in stark contrast to her compassion for the victims. Gunhild Agger has called this compulsive behaviour the ‘invalidation of home’, which forms a wider pattern in the series, including the infiltration of the victim’s family home by the killer.⁵² The murder, which propels the father to take revenge, results in the final dissolution of the family, symbolically captured in their future home, which has been left unfinished as a ruined idyll slowly rotting away.

While we are at first led to believe that the killer will be found within the corrupt political system of Copenhagen, it is revealed that a close friend and employee in the family business killed Nanna to protect the family from the shame of her relationship with a 'foreigner'. The fact that the grieving family had the killer in their midst all along and in the end responded with vigilante vengeance renders the family itself suspect. According to Bruce Robbins, this temptation to rescind 'the state's monopoly of the legitimate use of violence' makes the grieving family 'the main onscreen bearer of lack of trust in the state, which they accuse of failing them in their hour of need'.⁵³ Against the threat of diminishing trust in the welfare state stands Sarah Lund. Despite her brilliance as a detective, she is, nevertheless, a complicated figure for the state, who finds herself constantly on the fringe of the police collective and fails in her attempts at socialization.

The socially dysfunctional female detective has become a recurrent figure in Scandinavian television series. Saga Norén, the detective in the Danish-Swedish co-production *Broen/Bron* (2011–2018; *The Bridge*), is another social outsider who 'suffers' from an inability to respond empathetically to people around her: she asks inappropriate questions, shows no concern for other people's feelings and neurotically follows rules and regulations to the dismay of her laidback and sociable Danish colleague Martin Rohde. Her lack of empathy and anti-social behaviour are, nevertheless, personal and professional traits that enable her to solve a series of crimes that blur the borders between the social and the personal.

From the outset, *The Bridge* is a narrative of transnational encounters and hybridity. The crime centres on the composite body of a Swedish local politician and a Danish prostitute found straddling the Danish-Swedish border on the middle of the Öresund Bridge. The murder initiates an investigation in which the two detectives must collaborate across their personal, cultural and linguistic differences. A series about borders, *The Bridge* transgresses not only the physical borders between nations, but also between social order and monstrous others, between normalcy and deviance. These are repeatedly blurred in the series in the form of the socially dysfunctional detective and the (deceptively) socially conscious terrorists, who seek to draw public attention to the welfare state's inability to prevent homelessness, cruelty to animals, pollution, prostitution and gender inequality.

The crimes in the series conflate the personal with wider social and transnational themes. In the first season the case of a serial 'truth terrorist', on a mission to avenge social injustices, turns out to be a disturbed former friend's personal vendetta against Rohde, who had destroyed his family. The second season focuses on a case of serial eco-terrorism. In the third season the killing of a number of civil-rights activists is not, as is first believed, motivated by a right-wing influencer, but is instead a young man's carefully planned revenge on his biological father and those who had wronged him as a child growing up in foster homes. The insecurities of a globalized, post-welfare-state world are the smokescreen for the enduring crime themes of revenge and jealousy, and the trail of broken families includes the detectives' own.

Saga Norén's inability to set personal and familial motives above the state is in Robbins's view another example of 'a refusal of that kind of "normal" social relationship that would ordinarily permit and even encourage state corruption: favoritism, cronyism, collusion with private economic interests, and so on. These are exactly the charges that Nordic noir is usually taken to be levelling at the welfare state'.⁵⁴ As such, the anti-social detective can be viewed as the welfare state's ultimate hero, as she effectively dispels her own bonds of dependence associated with the family, which both in *The Killing* and *The Bridge* is presented as a source of violence and vengeance. On the other hand, at the end of three seasons of both crime serials, their welfare-state morals are arguably compromised when faced with the stereotypically deviant postmodern serial killer. Lund, for instance, has by the end lost all faith

in the state and justice. When she takes the law into her own hands and executes a child molester, she sacrifices herself and her dreams of family and home.

Transnational Scandinavian Crime Fiction

These series exemplify a key tenet in the Danish Broadcasting Corporation's (DR) approach to the production of domestic television drama called 'double-storytelling', which ties in with the tradition of the Scandinavian crime novel with a social conscience. According to Jakob Isak Nielsen, DR set about to 'build a so-called "deeper layer" into their stories that address social and ethical dimensions', which was meant to resonate with current events and sociocultural issues at the time of production and would localize the serial in a socially and culturally specific Danish context.⁵⁵ However, the domestic and international success of Scandinavian crime fiction demonstrates, much like the modern Scandinavian crime novels explored in this chapter, that 'adaptation and appropriation have been integral to the invention, sustenance, and rebranding of national and Nordic literary and television traditions as Nordic noir'.⁵⁶ The success of the Scandinavian television serial occurred simultaneously with the international popularity of what has been labelled 'complex TV', characterized by high production value and narratives exploring a number of contemporary moral and social concerns. For *The Killing*, for instance, DR appropriated American production practices and looked to forerunners in the genre such as *NYPD Blue* (1993–2005) to make Danish television drama in 'an American way'.⁵⁷

Essentially a 'glocal' reinvention and remediation of the Scandinavian police novel, the international success of Scandinavian crime drama, or Nordic noir, suggests that its inherent 'Nordicness' has 'turned into a set of identifiable stylistic and narrative tropes that, as a result, extends beyond the Nordic region'.⁵⁸ Constituting, according to Pia Majbritt Jensen, a veritable 'peripheral counter-flow' in the dissemination of television series across the globe, Scandinavian crime drama has been remade to serve other local contexts: *The Bridge*, which aired in 157 countries, was relocated to the tunnel connecting the UK and France in *The Tunnel/Le Tunnel* (Sky, Canal 5, 2013–2016) and the Bridge of the Americas between Mexico and the US in FX's *The Bridge* (2013–2014); it was adapted to a setting across Estonia and Russia (NTV, 2017) and inspired the German-Austrian *Der Pass/Pagan Peak* (Sky Deutschland, 2019).⁵⁹ *The Killing* would go on to have a notable influence (one usually reserved for Anglo-American formats) on television series produced outside the Nordic countries, such as *Broadchurch* (ITV 2013–2017), *Hinterland/Y Gwyll* (S4C 2013–2016) and *Shetland* (BBC 2013–) in the UK, the Czech HBO Europe drama *Pustina/Wasteland* (2016), the German Netflix series *Dark* (2017–), and the UK production *Fortitude* (Sky Atlantic, 2015–2018), set in an imaginary Svalbard with *The Killing*'s Sofie Gråbøl in the role as Governor Hildur Odegard.⁶⁰

As an inherently transnational and increasingly intermedial genre, in written form or produced for screens, Scandinavian crime fiction or Nordic noir combine the local and the global in particular ways. The examples discussed here have all travelled and incorporated cross-border genre traits and applied them 'to create characters and fashion stories that resonate locally' in and outside the Nordic region.⁶¹ In the twenty-first century, Scandinavian crime fiction has become a major cultural export that is not only written by Scandinavians for Scandinavian audiences, but also encompasses non-Scandinavian writers, translators, television and film producers and a global audience of readers and viewers.

NOTES

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- ⁴ P. Messent, *The Crime Fiction Handbook* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), p. 177.
- ⁵ A. Nestingen and P. Arvas, 'Introduction', in A. Nestingen and P. Arvas (eds.), *Scandinavian Crime Fiction* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011), p. 4.
- ⁶ S. Kärrholm, *Konsten att lägga pussel: deckaren och besvärjandet av ondskan i folkhemmet* (Stockholm: Brutus Östlings bokf Symposion, 2005), p. 64.
- ⁷ H. Skei, *Blodig alvor. Om kriminallitteraturen* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 2008), p. 167. See also N. Nordberg, 'Det forbryterske samfunn. Om norsk kriminallitteratur', in K. Heggelund and N. Nordberg (eds.), *Kriminallitteraturen* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1978), pp. 136–157.
- ⁸ See Arvas and Nestingen, 'Introduction'. Note also the Nordic imaginary in the title of the first English-language survey of Scandinavian crime fiction, B. Forshaw's *Death in a Cold Climate: A Guide to Scandinavian Crime Fiction* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).
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- ¹⁰ P. Wahlöö, 'Grisen är ett gåtfullt djur', in *Tryckpunkter: 23 författare i egen sak* (Stockholm: Nordstedts, 1967), pp. 174–181.
- ¹¹ J. Scaggs, *Crime Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 98.
- ¹² Cited in M. Tapper, *Swedish Cops: From Sjöwall and Wahlöö to Stieg Larsson* (Bristol: Intellect, 2014), p. 81.
- ¹³ M. Sjöwall and P. Wahlöö, *The Locked Room* (trans. P. Britten Austin) (London: Fourth Estate, 2011), p. 156.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, *The Locked Room*, p. 235.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, *The Locked Room*, p. 25.
- ¹⁶ M. Sjöwall and P. Wahlöö (2002), *The Laughing Policeman* (trans. A. Blair) (London: Orion, 2002), pp. 70–71.
- ¹⁷ Sjöwall and Wahlöö, *The Locked Room*, p. 174.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 277.
- ¹⁹ For a parallel discussion of the involvement of the citizenry in safeguarding the revolutionary order in Cuba, see C. Uxo, 'Crime Fiction and Authoritarianism', in J. Allan et al. (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Crime Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2020) pp. 388–396.
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- ²³ See A. Stenport, 'Bodies under Assault: Nation and Immigration in Henning Mankell's *Faceless Killers*', *Scandinavian Studies* 79.1 (2007), 1–24 (p. 3); and A. Nestingen, *Crime and Fantasy in Scandinavia: Fiction, Film, and Social Change* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), p. 244.
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- ²⁸ S. Žižek, 'Parallax', *London Review of Books*, 25/22 (2003), 24.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.
- ³⁰ See J. Stougaard-Nielsen, 'Wallander's Dark Geopolitics', *Nordicom Review*, 41.1 (2020): 29–42, DOI: 10.2478/nor-2020-0014.
- ³¹ M. Pratt, 'Detective Harry Hole', in B. Forshaw (ed.), *Detective* (Bristol: Intellect, Crime Uncovered Series, 2016), pp. 90–99 (p. 90–91).
- ³² *Ibid.*, p. 92.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, p. 93.
- ³⁴ E. Rees, 'Norsk skyld i Jo Nesbøs *Flaggermusmannen* og *Kakerlakkene*', in J. Bakken and E. Oxfeldt (eds.), *Åpne dører mot verden: Norske ungdommers møte med fortellinger om skyld og privilegier* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2017), pp. 163–180.
- ³⁵ B. Forshaw, *Death in a Cold Climate: A Guide to Scandinavian Crime Fiction* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 21.

- ³⁶ See J. Stougaard-Nielsen, 'Nordic Noir in the UK: The Allure of Accessible Difference', *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, 8.1 (2016), DOI: 10.3402/jac.v8.32704.
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- ³⁸ A. Waade, 'BBC's Wallander: Sweden Seen Through British Eyes', *Critical Studies in Television*, 6.2 (2011), 47–60 (p. 48).
- ³⁹ P. Høeg, *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow* (trans. F. David) (London: Vintage, 2005), p. 218.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 399.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 205.
- ⁴² L. Cassuto, *Hard-Boiled Sentimentality: The Secret History of American Crime Stories* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 13.
- ⁴³ K. Bergman, *Swedish Crime Fiction: The Making of Nordic Noir* (Milan: Mimesis, 2014), p. 108.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 130; and Tapper, *Swedish Cops*, p. 251.
- ⁴⁵ See Messent, *The Crime Fiction Handbook*, p. 233.
- ⁴⁶ See J. Stougaard-Nielsen, 'Nordic Queens of Crime 1990-2013', *The History of Nordic Women's Literature* (7 October 2016), <https://nordicwomensliterature.net/2016/10/07/nordic-queens-of-crime-1990-2013/>.
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- ⁴⁸ Nestingen, *Crime and Fantasy*, p. 180; see also Messent, *The Crime Fiction Handbook*, p. 239.
- ⁴⁹ Y. Leffler, 'Lisbeth Salander as a Melodramatic Heroine: Emotional Conflicts, Split Focalisation, and Changing Roles in Scandinavian Crime Fiction,' in B. Åström, K. Gregersdotter and T. Horeck (eds.), *Rape in Stieg Larsson's Millennium Trilogy and Beyond* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 51–66 (p. 59).
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- ⁵¹ Scaggs, *Crime Fiction*, pp. 46, 75, 98.
- ⁵² G. Agger, 'Emotion, Gender and Genre: Investigating The Killing', *Northern Lights*, 9.1 (2011), 111–125 (p. 120).
- ⁵³ B. Robbins, 'The Detective is Suspended: Nordic Noir in the Welfare State', in Nilsson et al. (eds.), *Crime Fiction as World Literature*, pp. 47–57 (p. 52).
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 54.
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- ⁵⁶ L. Badley et al., 'Introduction: Nordic Noir as Adaptation', in L. Badley et al. (eds.), *Nordic Noir, Adaptation, Appropriation* (Cham: Palgrave, 2020), pp. 1–14 (p. 4).
- ⁵⁷ See Nielsen, 'The Danish Way'.
- ⁵⁸ K. Toft Hansen et al., 'Down These European Mean Streets: Contemporary Issues in European Television Crime Drama', in K. Toft Hansen et al. (eds.), *European Television Crime Drama and Beyond* (Cham: Palgrave, 2018), pp. 1–19 (p. 11). We may add to the already mentioned examples of the British Wallander adaptation and other non-Nordic remakes of Scandinavian television series, David Hewson's British novelization of *The Killing*, Scandinavian crime fiction that does not take place in Scandinavia as in Norwegian writer Vidar Sundstøl's Minnesota trilogy; and novels written by British writers such as Quentin Bates and Michael Ridpath.
- ⁵⁹ A. Hill, 'Saga's Story: Emotional Engagement in the Production and Reception of *The Bridge*', in Toft Hansen et al. (eds.), *European Television Crime Drama and Beyond*, pp. 269–284 (p. 271); P. Jensen, 'Global Impact of Danish Drama Series: A Peripheral, Non-commercial Creative Counter-flow', *Kosmorama*, 263 (2016), <https://www.kosmorama.org/en/kosmorama/artikler/global-impact-danish-drama-series-peripheral-non-commercial-creative-counter>.
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- ⁶¹ J. Chalaby, 'Reflection I: Transnational TV Formats: Making the Local Visible and the Global Invisible', *Critical Studies in Television* 8.2 (2013), 54–56 (p. 55).