



2017

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Lynge Stegger Gemzøe

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### Recommended Citation

Gemzøe, Lynge Stegger (2017) "Transformations of National Culture in Bron|Broen and The Bridge," *The Bridge*: Vol. 40 : No. 1 , Article 10.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/thebridge/vol40/iss1/10>

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# Transformations of National Culture in *Bron|Broen* and *The Bridge*

by Lynge Stegger Gemzøe

*A Bodtker Grant-Funded Article*

In the fifth episode of the American television show *The Bridge* (FX, 2013-14) a serial killer is on the loose on the US-Mexico border. “What the hell is a serial killer?,” a Mexican drug lord asks one of his employees. The employee explains to the drug lord that a serial killer commits murder out of desire and sometimes lust rather than need. The paradox that a murderous Mexican drug lord might not know what a serial killer is can be seen as a humorous introduction to the rough world of Mexican drug cartels. In their world, killing is a natural and necessary part of doing business. It can also be read as a commentary on the United States, where people are apparently so bored with their suburban lives that killing can become a sport – because the serial killer turns out to be an American, of course. In Denmark it is common knowledge what a serial killer is. Everyone who has seen the films *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), *Se7en* (1995), or one of the other popular American fictional features or documentaries about serial killers frequently shown on Danish screens knows the type. In Danish history there has not been a single serial killer that fits the profile of the meticulous, deliberate mass murderer so often depicted in American productions like those mentioned above. Yet the fact that *The Bridge* is a remake of the Danish/Swedish television series *Bron|Broen*—a show featuring an American-style Danish serial killer and humorous negotiations of the differences between Danish and Swedish national cultures, but no drug lords—suggests that these cultures share some common fears.

This article uses the translation of *Bron|Broen* into an American context as a case study to demonstrate how television allows ideas and concepts to cross borders, assume new forms, and in some cases even return to their origins. The cross-cultural adaptation also raises a great many questions: why use a Danish/Swedish format if you want to tell a story about the drug-related problems on the US-Mexico border? What is the effect of the remake rewriting Sweden as the United

States and Denmark as Mexico? In that case, what happens to the dynamics of the show's use of language, geography, and culture?

FX's *The Bridge* exemplifies a recent trend in which Danish television series have been remade for American audiences. It began with the Danish television show *Forbrydelsen* (DR, 2007-12), which was remade as *The Killing* (2011-14) for AMC in the United States. The Danish/Swedish co-production *Broen* was remade as both the British/French *The Tunnel* (2013 - ) and the American *The Bridge*, while the Danish series *Den som dræber* (2011) was remade in the United States as *Those Who Kill* (A&E, 2014). Persistent rumors also predicted American remakes of *Borgen* (DR, 2010-13), *Manden med de gyldne ører* (TV2, 2009) and *Nikolaj og Julie* (DR, 2002-03). The relatively large number of Danish-produced shows being used as inspiration for American series made it seem like the tables had turned: even though Hollywood has copied dramas from European books, movies, and television shows from its earliest beginnings, these dramas were rarely Danish and had only included a television show on one previous occasion (the 1994 Danish series *Riget*, which was made into *Kingdom Hospital* in 2004). In the 1990s, Sven Clausen, one of the longest running producers at DR (Danmarks Radio), the Danish national public service broadcaster, came to the United States to research how Americans had succeeded in making the television shows that were increasingly invading Danish screens (Nordstrøm 2004, 53). Now American production companies are looking to Denmark for inspiration – a country with a population of 5.6 million. It is unprecedented, surprising, and flattering.

The American remakes of Danish television shows have had varying success with audiences. *The Killing* was the most successful, but despite its initial popularity with audiences and critics alike, the show soon had to fight to survive. It was taken off the air twice, but was resurrected both times, the second time via the commercial streaming service Netflix. *The Killing* ran for four seasons total in the United States. *The Bridge* lasted for two seasons before it was taken off the air due to low viewer numbers and problems fitting into FX's brand (Wayne 2016), despite having earned some critical recognition, including, among other honors, a Peabody Award. *Those Who Kill* was only on the air for one season, while *Nikolaj og Julie* only ever reached the pilot stage, and *Borgen* has still not seen production.

This pattern of reception suggests that remaking Danish television shows in the United States is not as easy as it may seem, which

this article aims to explain. *Bron | Broen's* transformation into *The Bridge* makes for an interesting case as the work already done on the series indicates. Sue Turnbull uses the *The Bridge* as the basis for a discussion of gender roles in crime drama, arguing that the female lead is an example of a female version of both the traditional 'noir' detectives described by Raymond Chandler and the familiar trope of the gifted and isolated detective (2014, 182-83). Like me, Anders Wilhelm Åberg is interested in the implications of exploring national culture in a series. He argues that the national themes is a vital part of the show's adaptability (2015, 92). The series *Bron | Broen* is a particularly relevant object of study in this regard because it is already multicultural in its original form and becomes even more so in its adaptations. The franchise of *The Bridge*, including remakes, encompasses elements of Danish, Swedish, French, British, American, and Mexican national cultures. On the level of content, the show engages with the exploration of differences and teamwork across the Danish-Swedish border, negotiating national stereotypes as well as ethics. While the crime drama elements travel well, however, the intercultural exchanges invite reworking: negotiating national culture and stereotypes with a neighboring country is something that most people can relate to, but they tend to understand the nuances and depths of the exchanges better if their own or a neighboring culture is the one being negotiated.

This article concerns itself with constructions of national culture in television shows, but what does national culture entail? Most of the academic literature on the subject agrees that national culture is a meaningful, albeit socially constructed term with regard to remakes and format adaptation. Beeden and de Bruin write, for instance, that "format adaptations work through articulations of national identity and [...] the success of an adaptation may be linked to its ability to reflect and interpret its new context" (Beeden and de Bruin 2010, 5). They hint at the artificiality of the concept by writing about *articulations* of national identity. In his ground-breaking 1998 book *Copycat Television* Albert Moran discusses what national culture is. His studies of German and Dutch television shows demonstrate that he thinks of national culture as a meaningful, albeit complex category: in one of his case studies, Dutch backpackers identified themselves on the one hand as Dutch fans when watching one series, but on the other hand distanced themselves from other Dutch series and large groups and fractions within Dutch society. Moran rejects alleged ties between for-

mat adaptation and cultural imperialism and supports the notion of national identity as a socially constructed category used by individuals to differentiate between “us” and “them” (Moran 1998, 175).

Anthropologists have researched cultural differences for a long time, using qualitative methods like observation, conversations, and interviews as well as historical accounts as their source of data. In Anders Linde-Laursen’s historical/ethnographic dissertation on Danish-Swedish relations (1995), his material ranges from historical novels to interviews to personal experiences. He differentiates between shared national narratives as presented in books, the media, jokes, etc., and individual experiences that might differ substantially from these generalized narratives. However, according to Linde-Laursen, individual experiences are hard to substantiate during interviews—when asked, most people stick to familiar narratives about themselves and their neighboring countries. In their work on Swedish national culture, ethnologist Orvar Löfgren and historian David Gaunt emphasize that many Swedes are preoccupied with *myths* about Swedes, which are told in different ways depending on who you ask and when you ask them (Gaunt and Löfgren 1984, 7). We continue to tell stories about our neighbors and ourselves, and although these stories are not always true or fitting, they help constitute our sense of national identity. *Bron | Broen* enters into dialogue with such stories, which is both part of its appeal in Scandinavia and part of what makes it difficult to export.

### **Context, Geography, and History**

As mentioned above, the original series is set on the Øresund bridge that marks the Danish-Swedish border, which brings about the bilateral cooperation between the protagonists. The current relationship between Denmark and Sweden is, by all accounts, quite good. The two nations might tease each other from time to time, and certainly do so (Linde-Laursen 1995). Still, Denmark and Sweden have much in common. While there have been wars between the two countries, the last one ended 200 years ago. Both countries are ultimately part of Scandinavia and have, to some extent, mutually comprehensible languages. Outside Scandinavia, Swedes are often mistaken for Danes and vice versa, as Löfgren also reports (Gaunt and Löfgren 1984).

While *Bron|Broen* might suggest a slight Swedish moral high ground (see below), the co-produced series is also a testament to real-life cooperation across the Danish-Swedish border. The Øresund Bridge marks the crossing between Denmark and Sweden. Trains carry passengers across the border every twenty minutes, and many people live in Sweden and work in Denmark or vice versa. Before the bridge opened in 2000, people crossed the Øresund by ferry. Löfgren and Gaunt suggest that a good way to explore what is inherently Swedish is to take the ferry across the Øresund to Denmark and study the Danes and Swedes aboard (Gaunt and Löfgren 1984, 11). While the differences might seem small from the outside, a Dane or a Swede should quickly be able to identify his own countrymen. Their point is that national self-awareness sometimes comes from the comparison with other national cultures—even ones that at first glance are remarkably similar to our own. In *Bron|Broen*, the comparison with a Scandinavian neighbor is a tool to recognize differences between national cultures, even when the differences are exaggerated to the brink of caricature.

The intercultural dynamics are, of course, different in FX's *The Bridge*, where the Swedes are transformed into Americans and the Danes become Mexicans. The series is set near the Bridge of the Americas, which serves as a border crossing between El Paso, Texas, and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua. This area and the area around the Øresund Bridge have little in common, largely because the relationship between the United States and Mexico is so tense. The two countries have been officially at war only once—the Mexican-American war ended in 1848, with Mexico being forced to cede large areas of land to the United States—but the massive flood of legal and illegal immigrants from Mexico to the United States has made the border a conflict zone for decades. In 2000, twenty million people in America were Mexican or of Mexican descent. In 2010, that number was thirty-four million, or 10.9 percent of the total population. That represents a 70 percent increase over the course of ten years (United States Census Bureau 2010). Furthermore, an estimated eleven million unregistered Mexicans live in the United States as well (Passel and Cohn 2016).

The differing political and civic cultures in the two countries contribute to the strains between them. According to Transparency International, the United States ranks sixteenth out of 177 countries on the transparency index, which means that the United States is the six-

teenth *least* corrupt country in the world. Mexico, on the other hand, is ranked ninety-fifth. By comparison, Denmark and Sweden are ranked first and third (Transparency International 2015). High violent crime rates in Mexico are a contributing factor to the waves of emigration. According to Amnesty International, the Mexican cities Ciudad Juarez and Chihuahua are haunted by a series of violent murders of women. From 1993 to 2005, 370 women were killed (Amnesty International 2005). They call it the *feminicidio*. Mexico's problems with corruption and crime have caused many of the country's inhabitants to seek their fortune on the other side of the border, which has prompted America to tighten its border controls.

The relationship between the United States and Mexico is evidently drastically different from the relationship between Denmark and Sweden. Why would the show's American producers choose the setting as United States/Mexico? United States/Canada would arguably have been the obvious choice in terms of finding a geographical and cultural relationship close to the one in the original series. Some of this might be attributed to the tension on the US/Mexican border and the dramaturgical possibilities that this tension offers. However, it also might be useful to consider that the media system has great explanatory power, as Jensen argues (2007). With nearly fifty million people of Mexican descent in the United States, a significant share of American audiences might be interested in a series about cultural exchanges across the United States-Mexican border. Add to this the fact that Fox already distributes content to the Spanish-speaking market via Fox Mundo, and the choice of United States/Mexico might not seem so strange after all.

A remake should presumably attempt to maintain the idea and basic mechanics of the original series, but since the Øresund Bridge and the Bridge of the Americas are miles apart, both literally and figuratively speaking, the American version of *Bron|Broen* has to accommodate this difference in setting. *The Bridge* does follow the major plot points of the original script. The series is still about a serial killer who murders people on both sides of the border in order to exact revenge on the meddlesome male protagonist. The dynamics of the series are still largely based on the challenging cooperation between the laid-back male investigator and his perfectionist, socially awkward female counterpart. But while the broad strokes of the narrative remain the same, almost all the specifics have been adjusted or changed in some

way. The issue of national identity in particular assumes a different, more hostile character.

### Transforming National Stereotypes

In *Bron|Broen*, the main characters' personal traits are key to understanding the larger framework of national culture at play in the series. The two main characters in *Bron|Broen* are the Danish policeman Martin Rohde and his Swedish counterpart Saga Norén. They are complete opposites, caricatures of certain Danish and Swedish traits, and this contrast in personalities generates some delightful bantering and potential character development. The head scriptwriter on *Bron|Broen* was the Swede Hans Rosenfeldt, so the articulations of national culture that the protagonists embody stem from his Swedish point of view, but they reflect widely-held perceptions of each culture from the perspective of the other. Rosenfeldt openly admits that the series thematizes national stereotypes and that Martin Rohde's character is built around Swedish prejudices about Danes: "We Swedes tend to see Danes as laid-back with a mañana mentality. They see us as sticklers and bureaucrats" (Martin 2016).

Martin Rohde personifies what Linde-Laursen defines as "hyggelig dansk folkelighed" (1995, 163) [cozy Danish popular culture], which manifests itself in him being easygoing, caring about local issues, and focusing on having a good time. His spontaneous, charismatic, and emphatic nature, which prompts him to break protocol and let an ambulance through to a murder scene in the first episode of the series, is shown to be his greatest strength. Martin is, however, also a complete mess: he is an immoral, overweight smoker who has fathered five children with different women. His conflicted nature is reflected in the fact that his surname has two possible meanings. On the one hand it means that he has "roots" or that he is grounded or earthbound, which matches his heavy-set build and easygoing nature quite well. On the other hand, it literally means "to make a mess," which also fits with the way in which he messes up other people's lives, his own personal life, and his career during the course of the series. From a Swedish perspective, Martin Rohde would obviously benefit from learning about order, moral values, structure, and the long-term consequences of his actions.



In the FX series, Martin Rohde's Mexican counterpart is lead investigator Marco Ruiz. For all intents and purposes, Marco Ruiz is a Mexican replica of Martin Rohde: charismatic and well-meaning, but hot-headed, meddlesome, and disorganized. These traits were originally written as a humorous, prejudiced Swedish perspective of Danish national traits, but the drastic change in setting puts Marco Ruiz in a different light. After all, this is a character who has to operate in the blatantly corrupt organization that constitutes the Mexican police in the series. Marco's boss, the head of the Juarez police, Capitan Robles, openly plays cards with drug lord Galvan, and, while they are playing, Ruiz has to awkwardly ask permission to work the case in the first episode. The criminals are obviously in complete control. This is the setting Marco has to navigate, and this also explains the real difference between him and his Danish counterpart. Instead of an easygoing Dane, Marco is a character who, for most of his life, has had to navigate tensions between official and unofficial corruption in Mexico. He is shown to be someone who has never asked the cartels for any favors, turns down bribes from the cartels, and risks upsetting his superiors by doing actual police work. One might even go as far as to say that in *The Bridge's* Mexico, being charismatic and well-meaning but hotheaded, meddlesome, and disorganized is better than the norm. The point is that while Marco certainly resembles Martin, and while national cultures certainly are explored in both the original and the remake, Marco Ruiz is—as far as I can tell with my admittedly foreign eye—not a caricature. No humorous exploration of national culture takes place through his characterization, just as the show doesn't include any good-natured cross-border teasing. The focus on the drama and the harsh conditions in Mexico means that the change in setting changes the mood of the series dramatically.

This change in mood and tone can also be detected in changes the female protagonist undergoes. In the original *Bron | Broen* Swedish police investigator Saga Norén epitomizes high moral values, professionalism, and feminine power. She is analytical and sees important plot points before others. She does have flaws: she finds social interaction difficult; she cannot make small talk, lie, or build meaningful relationships with other people; and she follows rules and protocol blindly. This means that she is dependent on her boss to smooth things over when she offends someone. Despite her long blond hair and feminine features, her behavior is stereotypically masculine, as

defined by Connell (2002, 123). She never hesitates to act and she always puts her work before her private life. She is emotionally distant, and in her interaction with men outside work she is bored with dating, small talk, and intimacy. Instead, she uses men for sex, and after her immediate physical lust is satisfied, she loses all interest. One might even suspect that Saga represents a commentary on the ongoing gender debate in Sweden—a thought experiment in which a woman has (for all intents) become a stereotypical man to the brink of caricature. The gender debate, especially the different takes on gender across the Danish-Swedish border, is explicitly thematized in the third season of *Bron|Broen*, in which an outspoken Danish feminist is killed in the first episode, but there are already hints and comments on gender in the first season. Like Martin Rohde's, Saga Norén's name also has a dual meaning. On the one hand it could be a reference to Lars Norén, the Swedish playwright, who is known for his "Swedish gloom" and focus on problematic relations between people. On the other hand, Saga Norén also means "saga of the north." *Bron|Broen* is in other words her saga, her story, which suggests that she is more of a main character than her Danish counterpart, Martin. From a Danish perspective, Saga would benefit from learning about the unwritten rules of social interaction and how to form meaningful relations both professionally and in her personal life. More specifically, one of the themes of the series is that Saga has to learn to tell people what they want to hear sometimes instead of the truth.

Saga's blunt way of handling social situations is used to comic effect in *Bron|Broen*. Her clumsy seduction attempt at a nightclub in the second episode offers an example of this. She fits the model of Swedes adhering to "the system" (Linde-Laursen 1995, 163) perfectly. She is the scriptwriter's way of playing with this thought and at the same time indulging his belief that the Danish audience perceives Swedes as "sticklers and bureaucrats" (Martin 2016). However, Saga shares her workaholic, anti-social ways with other female protagonists in non-Swedish crime series like *Prime Suspect* (United Kingdom), *Forbrydelsen* (Denmark) and *Homeland* (United States), suggesting that dedicated female characters with personality flaws can also be seen as an international trend.

Sonya Cross is Saga Norén's American counterpart in *The Bridge*. Like Saga, she is clever, stubborn, and socially inept. As just discussed, the Saga Norén character can be understood as a commentary on the

Swedish gender debate and myths about Swedish adherence to the system, but since these myths are nationally specific, Sonya Cross's role as a struggling outsider is not necessarily a commentary on American national culture. Like Saga, Sonya is masculine in many ways and also uses men to satisfy her immediate physical lusts. But unlike Saga, Sonya's feminine, emotional side is an important part of her character. The death of Sonya's younger sister plays a substantial role in the series and is part of the reason she ended up in the police force. According to fandom scholar Karen Hellekson, it is possible to distinguish between "different sets of character motivation that may be related to cultural norms related to the justice genre. American protagonists are often provided with a personal motivation" (Hellekson 2014, 132). This emphasis on psychology might be seen as a national American characteristic. The father-daughter relationship between Sonya and her boss Wade, chief of the El Paso police force, is also highlighted: Sonya even lived with Wade and his wife when she was younger. In general, Wade is an important character in *The Bridge* because he is grounded, likable, and functions as the overall voice of reason in the series. One might also argue that, with the look of a laid-back cowboy, a distinct Texas dialect, and a preference for "freedom fries" with his burger, he functions as an archetypal American stereotype. Yet while the character and her relationships in some ways might comment on American national culture, the humorous dimension of her character is lost in translation.

Just as the characters in *Bron|Broen* are partly based on humorous exploration of national stereotypes, their development and the plot can also be read in this manner. In *Bron|Broen*, Martin Rohde is not unique in his somewhat sloppy ways. The rest of the Danish police force is much like him. They keep up appearances—or in the words of the Danish chief of police: "The Danish police could do with some positive PR at the moment, right?"<sup>1</sup>—but they are ultimately depicted as immoral and incompetent, failing to solve murders of prostitutes and handling immigrant uprisings ineffectively. The psychopathic killer is himself a former Danish police officer. In *Bron|Broen*, when compared to the Danish police, the Swedish police are effective, thorough, and not afraid of commitment. They assume primary responsibility for the case and pick up the pieces when the Danish police fail time and again. For example, in the final episode, when Martin's son August is missing, the Danish police force is unable to locate him, but

Saga and the Swedish police are more persistent and find him, albeit too late. If the search carried out by the Danish police had been less sloppy and reluctant, August might even have survived.

Throughout *Bron|Broen* we are given clues that the murderer's actions are a product of flaws in both Danish and Swedish society. The storyline refers to problems of homelessness, immigration, ruthless capitalism, and domestic violence. This type of storyline draws on the Swedish tradition of crime fiction, in which crime functions as a metaphor for more deeply-rooted social problems, a tradition upheld by writers like Sjöwall & Wahlöö, Stieg Larsson, and many others. At the end of the first season we learn that all these cues were only smoke and mirrors to hide the fact that *Bron|Broen* is a story about betrayal and personal vengeance. In *Bron|Broen*, if anything, crime is a metaphor for problems in Denmark involving hotheaded Danes turning on each other. As it turns out, everything is Martin Rohde's fault. Had he not slept with his colleague's wife, and had that colleague not been so easily corrupted and ruthless in his vengeance, none of the murders would have happened. Luckily, Saga Norén and the Swedish police are there to sort everything out.

Over the course of a long television series, some characters learn from their mistakes while others stay exactly the way they were. *Breaking Bad* (AMC, 2008-13), for example, depicts Walter White's transformation from passive bystander in society to active drug lord. *The Wire's* (HBO, 2000-05) McNulty, on the other hand, is completely incapable of change. In *Bron|Broen*, Saga changes for the better, while Martin does not. In the climactic finale of the series, Martin, Saga, and the murderer, Jens, are standing on a platform beneath the Øresund Bridge. Jens is trying to get Martin to execute him. The scene is apparently inspired by the finale of *Se7en* (1995), in which the criminal mastermind *wants* to get shot for his crimes – but also wants to doom the protagonist by making him pull the trigger. Like Somerset in *Se7en*, Saga tries to persuade Martin not to pull the trigger. While doing so she even lies convincingly and thus proves that she has learned something and grown as a person throughout the series.

Martin, however, has not learned a thing. In keeping with his initial character concept, he cannot see that the obvious moral and right course of action is to *not* shoot Jens – both on principle (faith in the system he is a part of) and in practice: Martin might have lost one son, but he is still the father of two kids and is about to become the

father to two more. Thus, if he killed Jens on the bridge he would not only go to jail, but also lose the chance to be there for the rest of his many children for a long time – plus, of course, he would lose his job and consequently not be able to support anyone financially. Furthermore, Jens *wants* to die under the bridge. It is part of his plan. If Martin shoots Jens, Jens wins. So while shooting Jens might satisfy Martin's immediate lust for revenge, it is the wrong decision on all other counts, especially in terms of his own long-term prospects. Martin, unable to see this or learn anything from the last ten episodes and the course of his life in general, tries to shoot Jens, but Saga interrupts by shooting Martin in the shoulder. Jens lives to be sentenced by a court of law, the Swedes save the day, and all's well that end's well. Even afterwards, Martin still has not learned anything, claiming that shooting Jens would have been the right thing to do.

The point of this analysis is not to defend Danish moral values or to discuss the level of corruption in Danish society as compared with Swedish society,<sup>2</sup> but rather to show how the series uses national stereotypes both playfully and critically. Swedish head scriptwriter Hans Rosenfeld teases the Danes by making the Danish "hero" an unchangeable mess and allowing Sweden to save the day. According to Linde-Laursen (1995), Sweden has, historically speaking, played the role of a big brother to Denmark, which in these times of powerful Scandinavian female protagonists is coded as a big sister.<sup>3</sup> Big sister Sweden teases her younger brother Denmark like an older and bigger member of a family might tease her younger sibling. There are also a few rotten apples among the Swedes in the series, however. Swedish journalist Daniel Ferbé is just as bad as the Danes and pays for his arrogance with his life. Social worker Stefan Lindberg is hardly a testament to Swedish high morals, although he does save a woman in peril. But despite such nuances, the overall Swedish claim to the moral high ground is evident. *Bron | Broen* combines traditional crime fiction with a hunt for a serial killer and a medium of cultural exchange in which national-cultural stereotypes are explored and negotiated. But it is both a judgmental glance over the border and a teasing glance in the mirror at the same time, a balancing act *The Bridge* has trouble adapting, as I shall show in the following.

In *The Bridge*, a crucial change to the plot line is that the serial killer, David Tate, is an American and a former member of the FBI. Thus, while everything in *Bron | Broen* could be blamed on the Danes,

in *The Bridge* the blame is shared across the border. Furthermore, David Tate is more of a fallen angel than his Danish counterpart. He wanted to investigate the *feminicidio*, but he was shut down by his bosses in the FBI. In the fourth episode we learn that a member of the FBI is somehow involved in the Mexican sex trade. The Americans are by no means angels and the FBI is depicted as particularly corrupt, but the hero in *The Bridge* is the hard-working regular American police force. *The Bridge* makes a distinction between the kind of semi-excusable evil that stems from the poverty and harsh living conditions in Mexico and the true, inexplicable evil that comes from rotten apples in America, where people ought to know better.

The storyline with the serial killer in *The Bridge* ends in roughly the same fashion as in *Bron | Broen*: Marco tries to shoot the serial killer but is interrupted by Sonya, who ensures that the killer goes to prison. Sonya and the American police save the day, and the Mexicans and the FBI are exposed as the culprits. The ending in *The Bridge* differs from the Scandinavian finale in three key ways, however: first, as discussed above, the blame is placed on both Americans and Mexicans. Second, the *feminicidio* is highlighted, foreshadowing that it will become one of the central themes in the second season. Finally, in the last minutes of the first season of *The Bridge*, Marco Ruiz apparently finally succumbs to cooperation with the cartels and becomes indebted to drug lord Galvan because Galvan promises to help Marco kill the serial killer in prison. Thus, Marco Ruiz seems to join the list of antiheroes that populate American television series, with *Dexter* (2006-) and Walter White in *Breaking Bad* (2008-13) being the most prominent examples.

This analysis of *The Bridge* has shown how much setting—and along with setting, norms and constructions of national culture—matters. The choice of the US-Mexican border as a setting turns *Bron | Broen*, from a noir crime series leavened by humorous explorations of Danish and Swedish national culture into a purely serious affair. The link between the personalities of the main characters and constructions of national traits cannot be convincingly reproduced in *The Bridge*, because the main characters' personality traits do not align as neatly with stereotypes of American and Mexican national cultures. This is not to say that the new dynamics of the series could not or does not work, but simply to note that an important part of the original show is lost because of the dramatic shift in setting and venture an explanation for the effect of that change. By comparison, the British/French remake *The Tunnel* makes an effort to make the humorous exploration

of national culture work with bantering references to British-French wars and the ongoing struggles of the British detective with the French language. One might speculate that this feat is facilitated by the fact that constructions of Danish and British national culture are more alike than Danish and Mexican, and because the relationship between Britain and France more closely resembles the relationship between Denmark and Sweden than the relationship between the United States and Mexico. This goes well with Straubhaar's contention that a given culture will be more susceptible to content from another culture if the two cultures are proximate in their tastes, styles, historical references, etc. (Straubhaar 2003).

### Conclusion

In this article I have argued, based on the main characters' traits and development, that while *Bron | Broen* is a crime drama, it is also part of a dialogue between Sweden and Denmark about their respective national cultures. Seen in this light, one could argue that *Bron | Broen* can be best appreciated by the two national audiences depicted in the series: Danes and Swedes. With its cross-border teamwork, banter across the Danish-Swedish border, and thematization of specific national stereotypes and caricatures, one might argue that it is not what Scott Olson would describe as a *transparent* text, or an easy text to digest for a foreign audience (Olson 1999, 18). Nevertheless, *Bron | Broen* has done well abroad, which at first glance might seem strange. However, by some accounts, one of the claims to fame of Danish television series has been precisely this *lack of transparency*, or the depiction of the fascinating local: non-Danish newspaper articles on *Borgen* never fail to mention the exoticism of the Danes riding their bikes to work.<sup>4</sup> Seen in this light, *Bron | Broen* might attract international attention precisely because of its depiction of local Nordic cultures, even though some of the teasing might be too subtle for outsiders to comprehend. Nordic Noir is fascinating as a production value in its own right (Waade and Jensen 2013), the serial killer plot of the series is very transparent, and its general concept of negotiating national cultural differences with neighboring countries is something that everyone can relate to.

However, while some aspects of a show are relatively easy to replicate in a different national context—such as plot, for example—others are not, particularly aspects that are highly dependent upon the setting. Remaking a drama is much more than “adjusting

the scripts to fit, for example, the local sense of humor” (Aurø 2013). When *Bron|Broen* was remade as *The Bridge*, it was stripped of most of its original local/national content, which may have limited its appeal. *The Bridge* had to go to great creative lengths to exchange Denmark with Mexico. Instead of cross-cultural teasing, it tells serious stories about actual problems in Mexican society. By contrast, the British-French co-production, *The Tunnel*, retains the exploration of cultural negotiations across the British-French border more effectively and humorously than its American counterpart. These contrasting examples demonstrate how the very aspects of a Danish television show that make it a success can be factors inhibiting its adaptation into a new national-cultural context.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> *Bron|Broen*, Season 1, Episode 3: 5 min. 56 sec.

<sup>2</sup> Although Denmark is arguably less corrupt than Sweden, according to “Corruption Perceptions Index 2014: Results,” Transparency International, accessed October 14, 2015, <http://www.transparency.org/cpi2014/results>.

<sup>3</sup> According to Waade and Jensen (2013), powerful, female protagonists are a trademark of Nordic Noir.

<sup>4</sup> See Murphy 2013 or Gritten 2013, articles in the *Guardian* and the *Telegraph*. Also mentioned in Redwall 2013, 153.

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