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Transnational Europe: TV-drama, co-production networks and mediated cultural encounters

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ABSTRACT This article deals with the social and cultural dimensions of globalization and uses both qualitative and quantitative methods to analyse the effects of stronger European integration on media production and reception. It combines theories and methods from sociology, anthropology and media studies and looks at the impact of TV drama genres on the forming of social imaginaries. The article examines structural changes in production and distribution in the European TV-drama landscape since 2000. On the basis of empirical evidence it is argued that a creative, transnational European network of co-productions has increased the distribution of original and often local stories in Europe. The article analyses examples of some successful European drama series, their audiences and reception. The analysis is discussed in the context of national and transnational media policy and the impact of globalisation. Concepts like “imagined community”, “social imaginary”, “banal nationalism”, and “mediated cultural encounters” are connected to the theory of cultural globalisation. Also touched upon are studies of a European civic and cultural identity next to the national, and the role of media and cultural policy in this development. The article concludes that encounters of the kind we find in different forms of TV drama will make Europe more diverse and richer for a much broader audience. The interaction between the particular and universal in “narratives” on our past and contemporary social and cultural order contribute to a better feeling for and understanding of the “us” and “them” in European culture.

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Introduction

It is an historical fact that Europe has never had very solid and permanent borders. One needs only to look at popular, historical time lapse maps of Europe (for instance, see, <http://www.viralforest.com/watch-1000-years-european-borders-change/>) to see empires come and go, and witness nations disappearing and reappearing in different forms. Living in one of the contemporary nation states in the European Union we may feel that we belong to a social and cultural society with clear borders that is dominated by a particular language and culture. Yet in fact nation states are not very stable, and the EU we know it today, is a very young construction of transnational European collaboration. Established in 1957 the EU as can be seen as a response to two world wars that nearly destroyed or at least threatened to change the European continent permanently. Even after 1957 Europe has been torn by conflicts, for instance the East-West divide. Several dramatic and violent changes in the European nation landscape happened after the fall of communism, and new nations emerged. Europe even now seems very much to be an ever-changing project, still in the making or even threatened by dissolution.

The changing forms of Europe tell us that globalisation, both the more peaceful exchange of ideas and culture and the more violent, is an inbuilt part of all societies. According to David Held all societies have more or less strong, dynamic relations between the local, the national, the regional, and the global (Held *et al.*, 1999: 15). Relations and networks in a specific area will rely on establishing networks and relations that transcend the local-national time and space. This is part of the DNA of all types of societies; it is what defines a more dynamic society, where humans, products and creative ideas flourish. Communication is vital in this process, and in modern societies the mediated forms of communication have increased drastically. Cultural exchange and encounters on local, national and global levels are today imbedded in electronic and digital forms of media and communication. Mediated cultural encounters have become central for transnational exchange between individuals, nation states and institutions. As Eder says, creating borders and integration is a social, cognitive, symbolic and narrative project: “We have to analyse stories and the social relations that are constituted by shared stories (...) to make sense of the embeddedness of cognitive projects of constructing boundaries and collective identities” (Eder, 2006: 257).

Imagined communities and cultural globalization

Even though human beings live in a world where globalization is more intense than ever, and even though we are probably today encountering more information, news, images and stories from outside our normal local-national community, the local and national still play a crucial role. It was Anderson (1983) who coined the term “imagined communities” in a book where he tried to grasp the roots and spread of nationalism. He pointed to the role of literature, art and other forms of culture in the forming of what he called “narratives of identity” (Anderson, 1983: 205). His main point was actually that although we may imagine national identities as rather homogeneous, as being untouched by time, or at least with a core of stable identity within the change, nation states are all but homogeneous. Therefore “narratives of identity” also in more modern, mediated forms, for instance in TV drama series, speak to this forming of an imagined community or some kind of national cultural identity. Contemporary drama series and crime series may address conflicts within this space, and historical drama series may play on historical change and the conflict between past and present. But as national narratives on a certain level, they all speak into this

space of an imagined community, which will have elements of the local, the national, the regional and also the global.

There are other TV genres that play a role for mediated, cultural encounters. One example with a long history is the Eurovision Song Contest, another would be Champions League, or the European Championships in football or hand ball. What we see in such TV genres are clearly ritual, cultural encounters rich on national, symbolic imageries and drama, and such genres probably play an important role for how we perceive other Europeans. As such, sports and entertainment genres like these are certainly interesting if you want to study mediated cultural encounters (see, for instance, Tomlinson *et al.*, 2011). The same goes for important factual genres like news and documentaries. It has in fact often been the case that the lack of real, transnational, European news has been seen as one of the problems with establishing a European public sphere (see, for instance, Koopman and Statham (2010: 125ff) or Kaitatzi-Whitlock (2005)). It is difficult to measure the importance of different genres for European cultural integration and encounters, but there is no doubt that TV drama series constitute an important part of the transnational media Europe, and that such narrative genres speak to a broad audience

Anderson’s original concept of “imagined communities” does not relate to modern media and their role in constructing and spreading narratives of identity. But it fits a theory of mediated encounters in the sense that it makes it clear that even within a national culture there are differences of a social and cultural nature, sometimes also different language communities, which media narratives address. We can think of for instance the Belgian nation divided very strongly in a Flemish- and French-speaking community, or the strong conflicts in Spain with the Basque minority. Media narratives like TV series (or film) become part of this imagined community in the sense that they are seen by a majority of a national audience, they are talked about and reflected on in other media and in everyday life and conversation (Edensor, 2002). In Denmark, for instance, when the main PSB station DR broadcast the original, drama series like the contemporary, political drama *Borgen* (2010–2013), the crime series *Forbrydelsen/The Killing* (2007–2012) or the historical series *1864* (2014) in their Sunday prime time slot, they have a share of the audience of normally between 60–85%. Such TV drama series become the “talk of the town” and opinions about them circulate widely on traditional media, social media and in everyday life talk at home and at work. They do indeed become mediated cultural encounters in Denmark, where they cut across audience segments and social and cultural differences, and as such address Danish society and culture as an imagined community (Redvall, 2013; Bondebjerg and Redvall, 2015a, b). However, such national series, some of them financial co-productions, but creatively clearly national, have had a rather broad, European and further international distribution and success. This indicates that transnational processes in Europe are changing, and that national barriers to a certain degree are weakening when it comes to the traveling of TV drama across Europe.

In his book *Banal Nationalism* (1995), Michael Billig goes further than Anderson in defining what this imagined community really is, and how national identity is constructed internally and externally. His *first point* is in fact that “identity is not a thing; it is a short-hand description for ways of talking about the self and community (...) a form of life” (Billig, 1995: 60). His *second point* is that any form of imagined community and national identity will have a dimension of “us the nation” and “them the foreigners” (61). He refers to sociological identity theory and the stages of this ingroup versus outgroup stereotyping (66): first people categorize themselves as part of an ingroup, then they

learn the stereotypical norms of this ingroup, and finally they assimilate these norms, which then tend to be self-evident and normative. This is an inbuilt, cognitive sociological mechanism in all humans, we cannot escape this sort of ingroup/outgroup mechanism, and as such it does not have to be aggressive, normative, although it certainly can be. Stereotypes are part of our daily life and cognitive apparatus, but stereotypes can be challenged and changed. Getting to know “the other” in reality or through a mediated narrative can lead to renewed patterns of cultural relations and encounters. TV drama as a genre, therefore, fits into this theory of how national cultures are formed by media and everyday life, but also how established cultural imaginaries can be challenged or changed by narratives from other national cultures.

Billig’s theory of banal nationalism is not just important because it takes Anderson’s concept of “imagined communities”, a step further into modern, sociological identity theory, and because it speaks about the everyday life dimension and the role of media. It is also important because he deals more directly with the myth of unity behind a national identity and culture, and with the relation between the national and the transnational. Identity narratives are not just simple unity stories because nations do not typically have a single story (Billig, 1995: 70–71). Even though national narratives have a tendency to speak of one national story, to convey a story of uniqueness and sameness across time, in fact people will speak differently about things they refer to as common. Audience profiles for specific TV drama series (see later discussion) show that series attract different demographic segments to different type of stories. But this is not all; according to Billig the essentialist, ethnic concept of nationality has a problem, because in reality nationalism and national identity and the way it is constructed has a typical mix of “the particular and the universal” (Billig, 1995: 83). We can talk about a universal code of nationhood. So when nationalism or a form of national identity is seen as only something specific and particular to this specific national us, we often find the exact same basic modes of national identity in a particular but similar form in another national us. As Billig concludes:

If nationalism involves imagining an international context, or international order, as well as imagining ‘ourselves’ and ‘foreigners’, then ‘we’ can claim ‘ourselves’ to be representing the interests of this international, universal order: ‘we’ in our great particularity, can be imagined to stand for ‘all of us’, for a universal audience of humanity. (Billig, 1995: 89)

Billig’s theoretical approach to imagined community narratives of a nation points to how strong the nation and national culture and media are even in today’s much more integrated and globalized European society. But by pointing to a more universal dimension behind the national particularities, he opens up for the kind of transnational space we find in mediated, global societies like the present, where national stories circulate much more, and where cultural collaboration across borders is much stronger developed. One might think of national particularity meeting transnational co-production and audiences as a formula for what is developing in Europe right now. One could also point to the very strong role American film and television has played in all the imagined communities in Europe since 1945. Images of the American way of life are very much an integrated part of national audiences and nationally imagined communities in Europe, as a consequence of a very long tradition for mediated cultural encounters in Europe with American film and TV. Looking at patterns of TV drama consumption in Europe as a whole, we also clearly see that some nations, for instance the UK, have a very central place in the cultural imagination of Europeans. UK TV

drama in many ways is the second largest common part of our TV drama consumption in Europe (see below).

This cultural globalization and the forms of transnational cultural encounters are what the American anthropologist Appadurai (1996) has tried to describe in *Modernity at Large: Cultural dimensions of Globalization*. Where others have described media and globalisation in a very critical perspective of media dominance and homogenization (Herman and McChesney, 1997; Miller *et al.*, 2005) Appadurai looks at mediated cultural encounters as potential game changers, as possible scripts for a new life. For Appadurai globalisation among other things is about the mobility of individuals, groups, technology, goods, money, power and so on, and the role of global media. His position is not one of simple power structures and dominance, but also of the work of and importance of imagination and communication as a very strong feature of modern societies, cultures and subjects. Homogenization and dominance is certainly a feature of modern globalisation, but Appadurai also wants to take us into the transformative powers of mediated stories and imagination:

They are resources for experiments with self-making in all sorts of societies, for all sorts of persons. They allow scripts for possible lives to be imbricated with the glamour of film stars and fantastic film plots and yet also to be tied to the plausibility of news shows, documentaries (...) media provide resources for self—imagining as an everyday social project’. (Appadurai, 1996: 3–4)

Globalization of course has many dimensions and effects, potentially both positive and negative, but Appadurai looks specifically at the cultural aspects of globalization, at the effect derived from transnational audiences being exposed to different types of media content form outside their own national culture. He is trying to locate consequences of Held’s more descriptive understanding of globalization “as the movement of objects, signs and peoples across regions and intercontinental space” (Held *et al.*, 1999: 329). Both Appadurai and Held point to globalization as both a challenge and a possibility for national cultures and institutions. It is a challenge, because small and even larger nation states have to adapt to a more global framework, but it is also a possibility because it offers a new market and space for cultural products. This space, or rather spaces, can according to Appadurai be identified as *ethnoscapes*, the modern waves of mobility and migration, *technoscapes*, the modern digital technologies, *financescapes*, the globalization of economy and *mediascapes*, the new more and more global networks of communication and *ideoscapes*, the sphere of political ideas and core values that meet and often clash in global communication.

European integration is in many ways a response to this globalization, a transnational collaboration between independent nation states. But where Appadurai talks about a potential “diasporic public sphere” of a more global nature created through modern media, the discourse on public sphere in Europe is often one of pessimism and democratic deficit or maybe a vague optimism (Fossum and Schlesinger, 2007; Koopmans and Statham, 2010; Risse, 2010). Yet behind all these studies of a potential, European public sphere or some kind of European identity lie the question of the role of media and whether narratives of identity could also involve aspects of an imagined, European community. Europe and specifically the EU is still very much 28 nation states claiming their national identity much stronger than a European one. The media in EU have a strong national base and audience, and transnational networks of production and distribution are slow to develop. We experience too few stories on film and television reflecting the famous

cultural diversity of Europe reflected in EU's optimistic slogan "unity in diversity". European companies and institutions are often too national in their strategy and orientation, and consequently we Europeans have much more frequent mediated cultural encounters with American culture than with a broader European culture.

EU cultural policy and transnational processes

EU is a project of nation states working together on different levels, involving an increased integration and expansion of the transnational dimension. Since 1957 this integration has expanded from a mostly economic integration (the inner market) to collaboration on several social, political and cultural areas. Television was independently of EU organized in the transnational organization European Broadcasting Union (EBU) already in 1950, but it was not until 1980 a broader media and cultural policy began to develop in the EU. Culture seems to be a rather sensitive policy area in EU; it is the area where nation states seem to claim their independence most vigorously. This scepticism towards cultural policy on a transnational level in the EU is reflected in studies of the relation between having a particular national identity versus feeling European and in European surveys. Eurobarometer data show that of the EU population 87% feel mostly national and only 12.7% feel mostly European. However there is a large middle group of people (56%) that feel European sometimes (Fliegstein, 2010: 141). These figures can of course change, and they have changed over time towards a stronger percentage of sometimes feeling European, next to a dominant national identity. But they indicate, that the national identity seems thick and the European much more thin.

Eurobarometer data give us a rather general picture of people's own perception of identity. But the data seem to indicate a lack of strong, transnational narratives in Europe, of European stories that travel widely within European nation states. If mediated cultural encounters are important for the creating of "imagined communities", for becoming and feeling European (Sassatelli, 2009), transnational media and cultural policy is central and so is new structures of co-production and co-distribution of for instance TV drama. In the EU cultural and media policy documents and also among researchers there are conflicting views on the development of more collective forms of a European identity. For Smith (1992) it seems impossible to imagine some strong kind of European culture that can resonate across the different national cultures, and he sees national cultures as much stronger than tendencies towards global, cosmopolitan forms of culture and identity. For him Europe will always just be a "family of cultures" (1992: 67), the sum of similarities and differences of the national cultures that form the union. The national identifications "possess distinct advantages over the idea of a unified European identity. They are vivid, accessible, well established, long popularized, and still widely believed, in a broad outline at least" (1992: 62).

Others like Sassatelli (2009) in *Becoming Europeans. Cultural Identity and Cultural Policies*, see a certain long term effect of those policy documents, programs and activities that have emanated from both the EU and Council of Europe since the 1970s. As these programs have developed in collaboration with national policies, culminating with the unified program *Creative Europe* (2010), a new transnational space for media and culture have at least gained some ground. This program does not impose a European mono-culture onto the different national cultures, but still talks about European culture as a culture of diversity. At the same time the program stresses the importance of culture, media, communication even for the economy, and for European culture in a global perspective. A European cultural policy can create a

framework for stronger production and distribution networks across Europe, and such a policy can enhance transnational, mediated cultural encounters.

Klaus Eder and his research team in Berlin have studied such developments and the consequences of deeper integration, for instance in the book *Collective Memory and European Identity* (2005). When they talk about some kind of European identity they do so in a much more functional than essential way. If European integration continues, they claim, what we will see is a gradual development of different types of identity. They talk about two main forms of European identities: a European *integrational identity*—a more political dimension—and a *European civilizational identity* that is a much deeper cultural, historical and existential kind of identity. What they predict, based on their surveys and empirical studies, is that we will keep seeing a mix of and an interaction between forms of European identification and a national identity. Those two will not substitute each other, but exist in different forms side by side. But they also predict that:

Under the impact of Europeanization, national memories are transformed and restructured by layers of transnational European memory, but not substituted by a European collective memory. A multi-layered constellation model, linking European civilizational and integrational as well as national and regional identities—in constant interaction and interchange. (Eder, 2005: 4)

When in 1982 the Council of Europe established a permanent committee for media issues (Collins, 2002: 12) and in 1984 launched the *Television Without Frontiers* directive, this was partly done for economic, inner market competition reasons, and partly for cultural reasons that had to do with a wider understanding of the role of media on a national and transnational level. The EU is a political organization, and there were different ideologies behind the decision, often described at the tension between the liberalist market ideology and the centre-left more cultural and public service oriented ideology. EBU as spokesman for the strong public service culture in Europe was a strong voice in this debate, later followed by ACT, the European organizations of commercial TV. Looking at what this policy has created in the last 30 years, we see a clear tendency towards a growing transnational, European TV sector, which underscores what Sassatelli (2009: 69) (quoting Delanty and Rumford, 2005) has called a multi-dimensional process of transformation, and the emergence of cross national policies and networks that goes beyond the institutional level of EU. European cultural policies—including the European City Initiative Sassatelli uses as one of her examples—actually create an Europeanization effect.

TV and transnational, European networks

In February 2016 the media industry online news journal *Media Watch* in Denmark reported two things that both indicate the level of new, transnational patterns of collaboration in television. In the first news item we were told about the intention of HBO Nordic to create original TV series to the Nordic market, thus expanding the strategy of HBO Europe. HBO is a global, American player, but try to act on specific regional markets. As a global player, they are aware that local content is popular and can boost their entry on regional market ... As the HBO Europe director Anthony Root expresses it, we want to produce something which "we think will speak to a local public and with a genuine local voice. We have experienced that this is a successful formula for original content in our other European territories" (*Mediawatch*, 2016). The director of the big

Danish-Scandinavian company Nordisk Film, Allan Mathson, immediately picked up on this and tried to position himself as a partner. The article also refers to NETFLIX, which has already in several countries participated in the production of local content. In Norway with PSB station NRK they have made the series *Lilyhammer* (2012), in Denmark they are co-producing the series *Rita* (2012) with TV2, and in France they now make the series *Marseilles* (2016).

The article also mentions the rise of SKY as a very aggressive European player developing series with both ARD in Germany and RAI in Italy. What we see in these cases are new structures of collaboration between global and local players and also between PSB stations and commercial companies. Furthermore we see a continued tendency of film producing and TV producing companies to merge or integrate. The global competition in Europe demands a stronger transnational collaboration on all platforms and with players that may have been more apart before. We also see this in a second story in *Mediawatch* (2016). Here it is reported that Nordic film is becoming a partner with BBC's commercial arm *BBC Worldwide*. This is the direct consequence of the breakthrough of "Nordic noir" TV drama in the United Kingdom. What the BBC does is to create a new company, *BBC Worldwide Productions Nordic*, based in Copenhagen—similar to such companies in France and Germany—in order to facilitate and produce format programs. Even though it is not about TV drama primarily, it indicates the structural, transnational changes going on in the European TV culture.

These articles from *Mediawatch* show that major structural changes in the European media landscape are taking place at present. But co-production is certainly not a new phenomenon in film and television. In fact Michele Hilmes in her book *Network Nations* (2012) defines the history of British and American broadcasting as a transnational history dating back to the radio culture in the 1920s and continuing with television especially after 1945. Elke Weissmann has developed Hilmes' study of UK-US as networked television nations further in *Transnational Television Drama* (2012) in which she argues that the negotiation of national differences in TV drama has become part of a complex transnational context. She points to an interesting contradiction: on the one hand certain nations get very close in creative co-production, yet often distribution, marketing and audience discourses are constructed around the national (Weissman, 2012: 187). However, what is constructed in distribution and reception discourses as national drama is in fact often a result of transnational co-production between established, networked nations. In other parts of the global television culture we find the same historical and contemporary tendency, not least between the public service television stations in Scandinavia. Here, Hilmes' (2014: 1) claim that co-production is "the natural state of film and television" is a very precise description of a tradition dating back to the 1960s and intensified after 1995, adding new partners and creative patterns to the Nordic drama tradition.

Co-production is not necessarily linked to a deep creative interaction at the level of narrative, editing, style selection of characters, themes and so on. Certain forms of co-production can certainly lead to transnationalisation of authorship, script writing or even clearly transnational stories as we see with the Swedish-Danish *The Bridge* (2011) or the British-French remake of it *The Tunnel* (2013). The crime genre on television is one of the genres where European co-production has resulted in quite advanced forms of transnational stories and creative collaboration. *Euro-cops* (1988–1992), a transnational police series made by ZDF, ORF, SRG, RAI, TVE, Antenne 2 and Channel 4, used a structure where the individual channels produced local, national stories in the same format, dubbed to other languages. The series had a common storyline, but the actual creative integration was limited

by local, national versions of the overall concept and storyline. This is quite unlike more recent examples of "natural", transnational cop stories like *Crossing Lines* (2013) or *The Team* (2015). Here transnational crime stories deal with an actual, transnational reality, because police work is often done across national borders. This makes it more obvious to work with a transnational creative team and with actors from different countries in one, coherent storyline, with characters reappearing in all episodes and with a common style and editing.

Crossing Lines and *The Team* are thus examples of a new creative strategy for transnational, European storytelling. They are what one might call "natural" European stories, because they build narratives around institutional structures that are in reality very transnational. But such creative, transnational co-productions involving three or more countries can also cause problems in both production and reception. National ways of directing or different acting styles can collide, and the term "euro-pudding" sometimes appears in reviews and audience reception. In the case of *The Team* it was decided to work against this by making the director's team all Danish. The series had a Danish, German and Flemish cast, and was somewhat successful in several countries; it was also heavily promoted as a new style of transnational European TV drama by the European public service broadcasting organization EBU (see <http://www3.ebu.ch/content/news/2015/01/the-team-public-service-media-co.html>). However, in some countries it was also criticized as a pan-European disaster (Schabus 2015; see <http://ristretto.tv/2015/03/02/the-team-pan-european-disaster/>). 'Euro-pudding' was also used in some Danish reviews, however changed to a positive word "a successful euro-pudding" (Kristian Lindberg (2015); see <http://stiften.dk/kultur/en-vellykket-eurobudding>).

Co-production can additionally take a more financial, technical form between companies and broadcaster with a tradition for transnational alliances, but without shared influence on the story and creative product. The Danish crime series *The Killing* (2007–2012) for instance, co-financed by SVT, NRK, ZDF and DR, was made by an established transnational alliance of partners that are almost always co-financing each other's drama productions. However, the story, the cast and the creative construction of the whole series were mainly a national affair, although strong transnational elements and conflicts are involved at the story level. Such elements are not made though, to please an international audience or the co-production partners, but because the national reality in any European country when it comes to crime, involves global issues. There is no doubt however that the isolated, pure national production is also influenced by the transnational development and the fact that audiences today live in a much more global sphere of television drama consumption.

In theories of transnational media flows it is common to point to cultural proximity or "geo-linguistic regions" as influencing factors on co-production and distribution and the forming of creative media networks (Straubhaar, 1991; Cunningham *et al.*, 1996, 1998). Both theories indicate that in a global world, production networks and distribution still follow patterns related to cultural and linguistic proximity. National media enter into collaboration with partners and regions with which they have an affinity beyond just commercial and economic interests and benefits. As already indicated there is a strong and globally very dominant *English speaking region* (the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States, Australia) of networked nations that also benefit globally by the fact that many countries have English as a second language. If we stick to Europe we can furthermore find a much smaller *German speaking region* (Germany, Austria), the *Benelux-region* (Belgium, Netherland and Luxembourg), and an integrated *Nordic region* (Denmark, Sweden, Norway and also Iceland and Finland). There is a looser *Southern European region*

(France, Spain, Italy and Portugal). There are of course other regional structures, for instance in Eastern Europe. The main thing is that we can see in data on co-production and distribution within Europe that geographical, linguistic and cultural closeness play a role. There is no simple match though, and some of the regions mentioned above have different languages, and other factors are important as well, for instance types of institutional media culture. Finally, established patterns of co-production and distribution can change over time—this is where the EU media policy and regional policy frameworks come in.

According to figures processed and analysed by the MeCETES research project¹ based on data from 13 European countries on co-production and distribution of TV drama series from 2011–2014 we see clear patterns of increased transnational distribution across Europe and also more developed co-production activities. But we also clearly see clusters of regional, collaborative networks that are related to the regions mentioned above (Fig. 1).

What these figures show² is first of all that PSBs show more co-productions involving European co-producers than commercial TV-stations in Europe. Commercial stations rely more heavily on buying American series, and in many European countries, commercial stations show a lower amount of European productions and co-productions than PSBs. In Fig. 2, we can also see that the cluster of networking nations is more centralized, with really only United Kingdom and Germany as big players. The network of PSB-stations (Fig. 1) is much more complex and the number of European co-productions shown is much higher. If we look at the networks from a regional perspective we do find a quite strong Scandinavian network for co-production and a very strong UK–US–Canada network, also involving South Africa and Australia. We can also see a Benelux-network, which although not very strong, is there. And then again, Germany occupies a central position in the network with relations to many other network segments, whereas the Southern European networks are

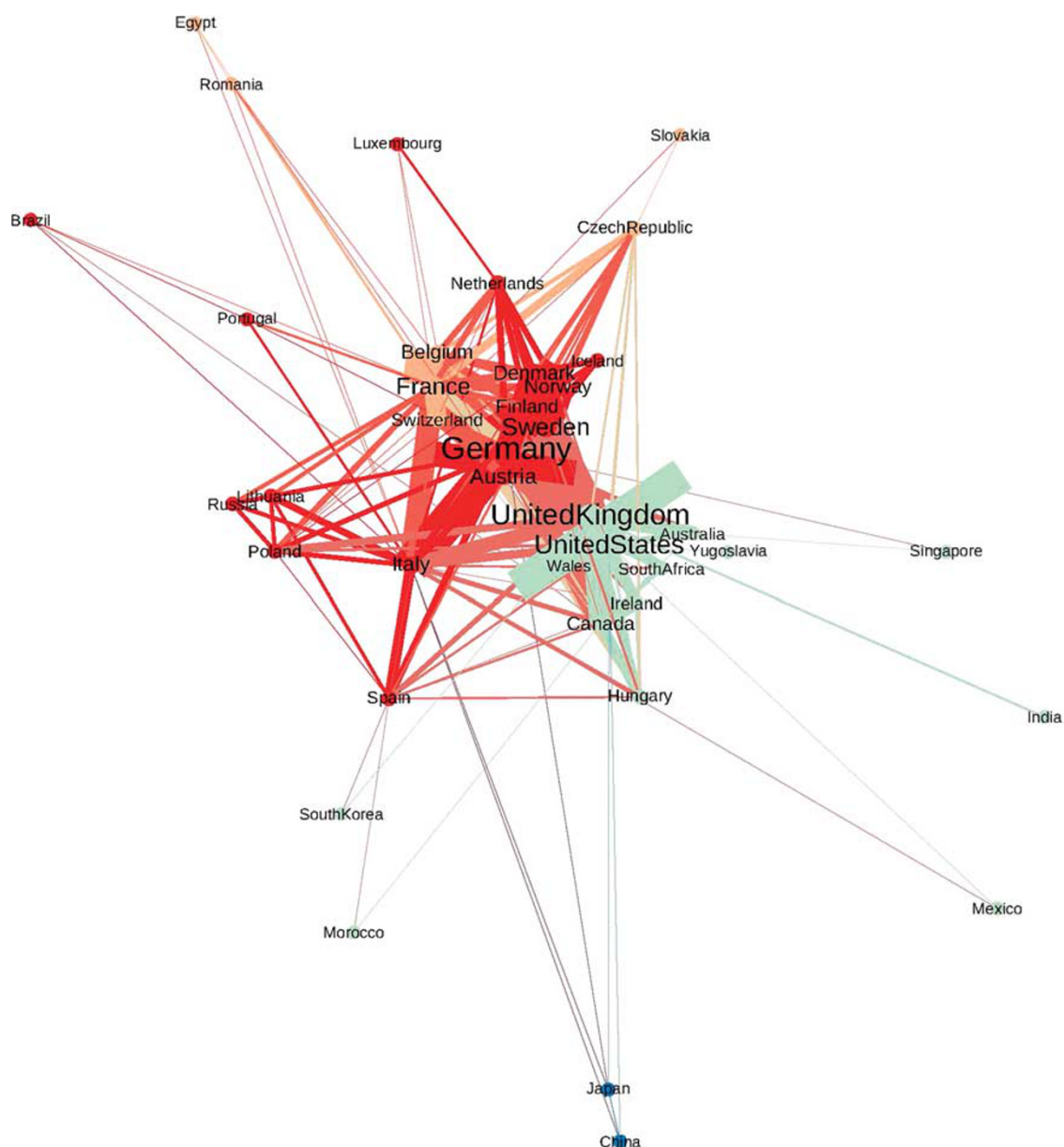


Figure 1 | Network of European co-productions shown on PSB stations based on data of all drama productions with European co-producers shown in 13 countries 2011–2014. MeCETES, based raw data from Eurodata/Mediamétrie.

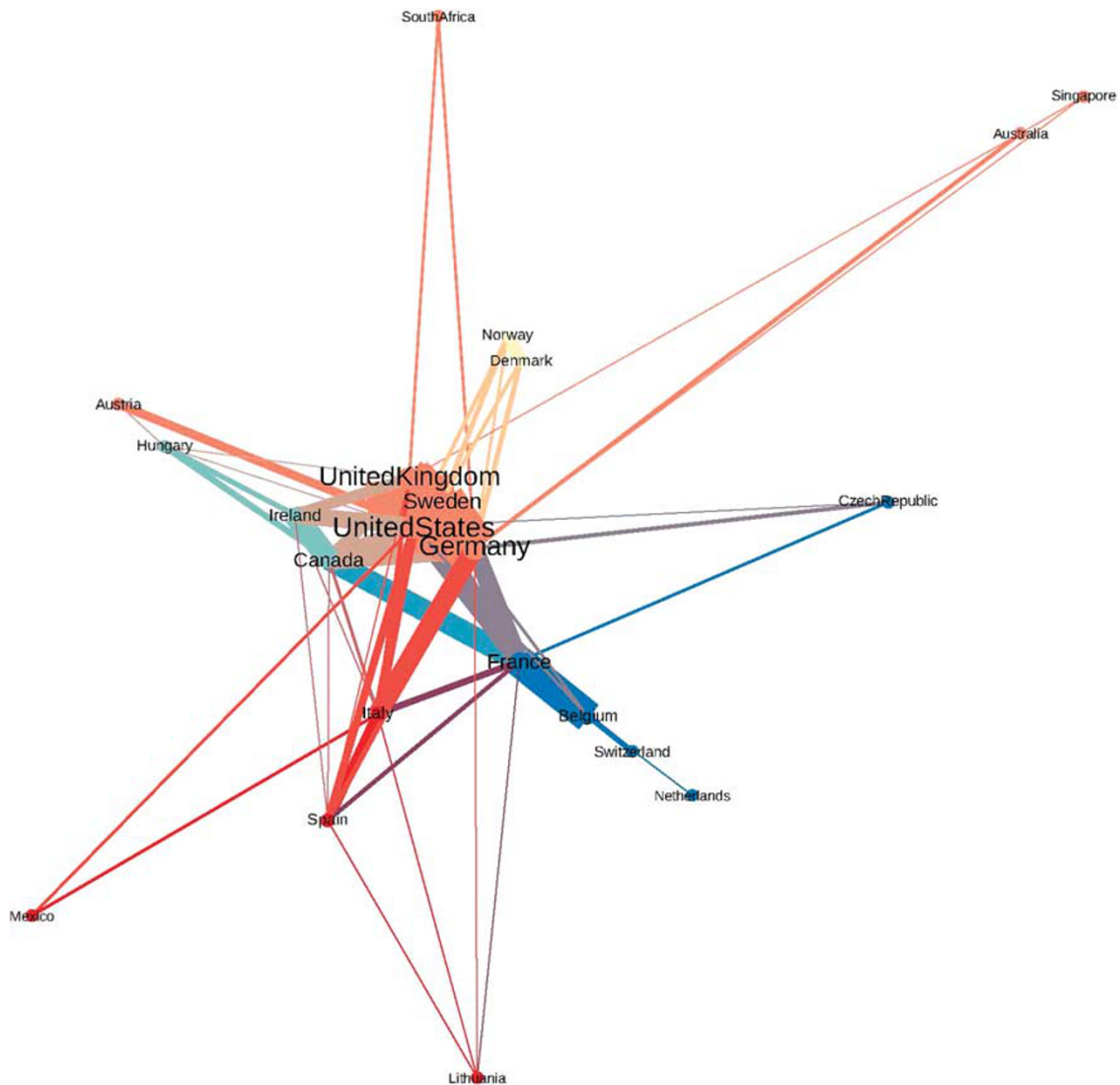


Figure 2 | Network of European co-productions shown by commercial broadcasters based on data of all drama productions with European co-producers shown in 13 countries 2011-2014. MeCETES, based raw data from Eurodata/Mediamétrie.

dominated by France and Italy. The East European network is rather scattered and not very strong, but it is there. What we see in the periphery are non-European network partners, both in the commercial network and the PSB network. They indicate a wider globalisation in European co-productions, but not a very important and dominant influence, when it comes to formalized networks and co-production. The two figures are based on two perspectives. First, the inter-relations between countries are based on the countries of origin of co-producers, and thus which countries co-producing actors come from. Second, the distinction between commercial and public service broadcasters is introduced by looking at which channels the co-productions have been shown on.

As we shall see in the following discussion there is a clear effect of co-production networks also leading to wider European and global distribution. In fact the rise of European co-production since 2000 has led to a rather strong increase in the presence of European TV drama series on European channels, not least in the prime time slot (8:00 –10:30).

If we look at data on the national origin of TV drama series based on data from 2013, reported in André Lange's *Fiction on European TV Channels 2006–2013* (2015), we see a European

non-national share of (21%), a national share (33%) and a non-European that is American share of (46%). This is when we measure all types of TV fiction, not just TV drama series. If we just focus on TV drama series the national and other European share is in fact on the rise and the American share in decline. This tendency is also visible if we just look at prime time, where national and European series have in fact been more dominant than American series since 2005. If we take Denmark as a specific case, and look at just TV-drama series³ from 2005–2014, including re-runs of these series, we see a clear tendency towards a much stronger European and national share. If we look exclusively at the prime time slot, this tendency is clear in the sense that the European and national share is dominant through the whole period (Fig. 4). However, expanding this view and measuring the entire day schedule (Fig. 3), we also see that the European and national share of the broadcast time has increased substantially over the past 10 years.

Denmark, like the rest of the Scandinavian region, has a very strong public-service culture, where a few competing PSB stations dominate. This is one of the explanations for the strong national-European dimension of TV drama series. Also film production has a clear European profile, both in terms of network and

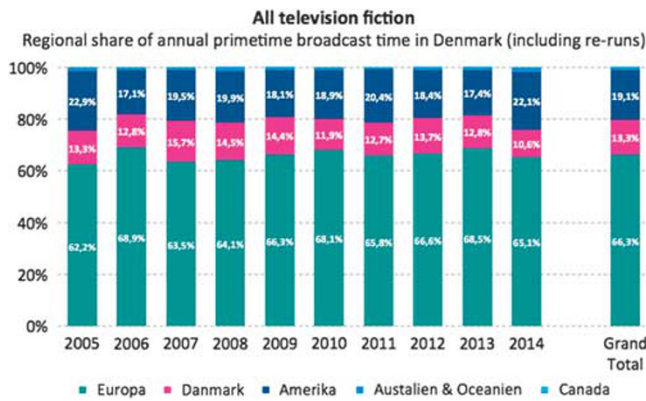


Figure 3 | All TV fiction in Denmark 2005–2014, regional shares of annual broadcast time (including re-runs).

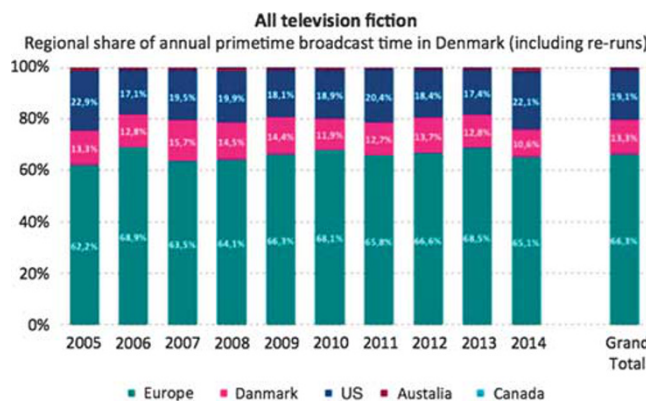


Figure 4 | TV-fiction in prime time in Denmark 2005–2015, regional shares of annual broadcast time.

co-production and at the box office. Denmark and other Scandinavian countries are therefore good cases, if you want to study European, mediated cultural encounters (see below). But what is the case in Scandinavia is also to true for the rest of Europe. It is the PSB channels that primarily secure the broader cultural encounter for audiences with European TV drama series from other European countries than their own. Commercial channels only carry 30% of the European series broadcast, and PSB channels carry 70%. But all in all there is an increase in transnational European series from more countries than earlier. If we take a closer look, the average figures hide big differences between countries. Furthermore, there are European countries that dominate European screens more than others. As shown in Fig. 5, Great Britain, Germany and France have the strongest profile across TV channels in Europe.

A phenomenon like the international success of the so-called Nordic noir wave is not visible in the quantitative overviews. But many observers, including Weissmann (2012), see the recent attempt from UK broadcasters to invest in and import more foreign, European drama productions as a consequence of both globalisation and deregulation with many more channels appealing to the same audience. The co-production venture with *Wallander* (Swedish version 2005–2013, UK remake 2008) is part of this, although it was first shown in its original Swedish version, and then remade in an English version. More important is the rise in import of original, Scandinavian and European TV drama in the form of extended multiple co-productions like the French

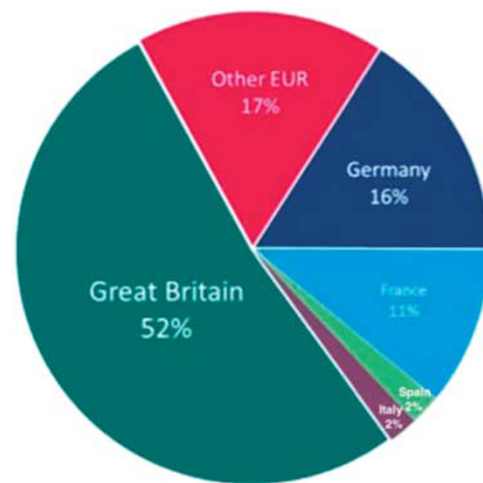


Figure 5 | Average origin of European TV series broadcast on a sample of TV channels in 11 European Countries (2013 data). On the basis of Lange (2015).

Spiral (2005), the Flemish series *Salamander* (2012–2015) and Danish series like *The Killing*, *Borgen*, *The Legacy* (2014) and *1864*, or Scandinavian co-productions like *The Bridge*. Although such series only reach a minority audience on BBC 4, Weissmann sees the arrival of such series as a sign of the need for a broader national mix in transnational, TV drama production and distribution. The reception of such drama shows that they actually manage to set a transnational agenda. The attraction of such drama production seems to be that they are experienced as different from the dominant UK–US traditions. Such drama series create transnational cultural encounters and negotiations—although mostly among the creative elite (Weissman, 2012: 190f).

Even though the Nordic noir phenomenon mostly is a kind of “art TV” phenomenon on sometimes just niche channels, the Danish series have had an amazingly broad international distribution and impact. *Forbrydelsen/The Killing* for instance has been broadcast in more than 100 countries, and most regions and continents, so it goes beyond the closer European regions and countries. Furthermore, even though it is produced in a dominant Scandinavian co-production network and therefore also has its main audience in Europe and on other PSB channels, we also find many commercial and non-European channels. Most of the successful Scandinavian TV drama series after 2000 rely on rather narrow co-production deals, and creative control is mostly in the main producing country. But other types of co-production exist with a much more developed co-production also involving double national stories, like in *The Bridge*, or multiple co-productions on both financing and creative levels like *The Team*.

European heritage and mediated transnational encounters

A major argument in my presentation so far is that original, national content seems to be very popular, both with audiences and in co-producing networks. Co-productions tend to be collaboration on a financial technical level, only rarely on the creative level of story, style and content. *Forbrydelsen/The Killing* is as already mentioned a Scandinavian, German co-production, also involving money from The Nordic Film and TV Fund, but a *single creative co-production control* is allocated to the Danish TV-station DR. *The Bridge* is an example of a *bilateral creative co-production*, where two broadcasters (DR and SVT) and two private production companies, the Swedish Filmlance and Danish Nimbus Film work closely together not just on financing and

production, but also the whole, creative process. The creative team involves persons from both Sweden and Denmark, and the reason for this bilateral, creative co-production is that the story and narrative is based on a cultural encounter between two national cultures. Co-productions also exist as *multiple, creative co-productions*, as already mentioned in connection with for instance *The Team*. There are no data indicating that multiple or bilateral, creative European stories should have a better chance than single creative stories of reaching a large, European and global audience. In fact one might argue that the experience of cultural specificity and local stories fascinate more and generate more genuine cultural encounters than narratives with a European profile.

As already indicated in the reference to Eder and Spohn (2005), a hypothesis on the relation between national and European forms of identity could be that the degree to which we experience narratives from other European countries has a strong relation to how we view ourselves and other Europeans. While crime drama seems to be one of the genres that travel well, it is often assumed that contemporary drama and historical drama are less likely to draw a large audience outside its own natural region. But empirical data from the MeCETES' project on audiences and reception of UK historical drama in other countries, especially Denmark, goes against this assumption. All data show that on a national level, historical drama is very popular with national audiences. In Denmark the top 10 list of TV drama since 2005 series holds three historical drama series, and one *Krøniken/Better Times* (2004–2007) is a very clear number one, with an average share of 85%. Four are crime drama series and three are contemporary drama series. Many of the historical series have really set a national agenda in all media, on all platforms, and they have shaped the historical memory and framework of being Danish.

Even the latest Danish historical series *1864*, which was a success in Denmark with a share around 51% and an average of 1.3 million viewers, despite a very heated political and historical debate about the series, has by now been exported to 21 countries. The export covers 20 very different European countries, but also surprisingly South Korea. The difference between the domestic and foreign reception is quite interesting, because the national controversy tends to disappear abroad. The national specificity of the historical context, and the fact that the events portrayed in the series have a very central place in public life in Denmark, as one of the biggest national historical disasters and defeats, is clearly reflected in the very divided Danish reviews of the series. In contrast to this the more universal dimension of a historical narrative about love and war seems to be more central than the specific, national history. In his analysis of the foreign reception of the series, in for instance Germany, Spain and England, Kim Toft Hansen (2016) concludes that the series is given even very excellent reviews as a master piece compared to the long line of war drama on European and American screens. In his review of *1864* when it was issued as a box set in the United Kingdom, The Guardian's Andrew Collins simply called it "A military Epic that channels the Spirit of *Heimat*" (see <http://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2015/jul/09/1864-box-set-review-heimat-denmark-epic>) and he sees the series as top rank and stunning visually and in the combat scenes. Such reviews were also found in the Danish reception, but all in all a much more critical, political and ideological tone dominated, whereas we see a reception in other European countries taking a quite different position than the national. This difference is also visible if we look at the reception of foreign European series and especially historical drama in Denmark.

Historical drama from other countries, in particular other Scandinavian countries, Germany and the United Kingdom also

has a rather strong profile in Denmark, even though Danes like citizens in most other European countries clearly prefer their own historical drama series. The most popular European series ever—the series with an audience in around 220 countries, seen by more than 120 million viewers—is the US–UK production *Downton Abbey* (2010–2015) (http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/06/arts/television/downton-abbey-reaches-around-the-world.html?_r=1). It is the most award-winning UK historical series ever, and the most watched globally. It is produced by Carnival Film and TV for ITV and as a co-production with the US PSB company Masterpiece Theatre. As a historical series it thus enters into a long tradition for US–UK collaboration in heritage drama, many of them made by BBC and Masterpiece theatre as adaptations of classic English novels. Interestingly enough, what audiences around the world probably see as very English, in fact is a result of a transnational co-production, a long standing tradition of networking. The United Kingdom is, as already shown, a very strong force in Europe, when it comes to producing, selling and buying TV drama. In Denmark, UK historical drama between 2005–2014 take up 53% of all broadcast historical drama (based on first broadcast, not re-runs), more than three-times as much as the United States (16%) and the Nordic countries (8%), and rest of Europe (18%) (MeCETES data 2015). Canada and Australia take up the last part. UK drama is thus clearly the kind of drama most other Europeans watch, if they do not watch their own national or American TV-drama.

Looking into the audience profile and reception of *Downton Abbey* in the United Kingdom, Denmark and other European countries can illustrate which forms transnational cultural encounters take, what dimensions and themes are raised. As Eder (2005) points out: "Europeans telling each other their past is a mechanism of identity construction (...) Collective identity (...) is a learning process in terms of narrating each other's particular past and to this extent creating a common ground in which to see each other as particular others" (213). But as reception case study like this also shows that this identity process goes both ways: the reception in the producing country, is different in some aspects from the reception in another country, but the reception both nationally and transnationally also consolidates and challenge existing narratives of identity and ways of imagining the community you belong to.

Downton Abbey was not sent in the primetime slot used for national drama, but it was placed in early primetime on Saturdays or weekdays in many European countries. The audience share is therefore lower than national primetime drama, not just because of the scheduled spot, but also because foreign drama has lower shares than national drama. But still, in many countries all seasons of the series had a stable and in many countries pretty high share (see Fig. 6.). This also means of course that the share for *Downton Abbey* in the United Kingdom and in Denmark shows the usual difference between a national and a foreign drama (see Figs. 7 and 8). What we see is that the audience in both countries though is 55-plus and more female than men. If we take a broader view of other historical UK-series we find another interesting picture that has to do with high culture historical series, popular mainstream series and niche-series.

As seen (Fig. 9) the top historical series in this period is actually not *Downton Abbey* but *Pillars of the Earth*, based on Ken Follet's bestselling novel and much more of an international co-production German production company Tandem Communication, the Canadian film company Muse Entertainment Enterprises, and the UK- and US- based Scott Free Production. Though taking place in medieval England and based on a lot of seemingly iconic English landscapes and buildings, it was filmed in Austria and Hungary. Furthermore the classical, high culture adaptation of *Jane Eyre* actually had a higher share than *Downton Abbey* and

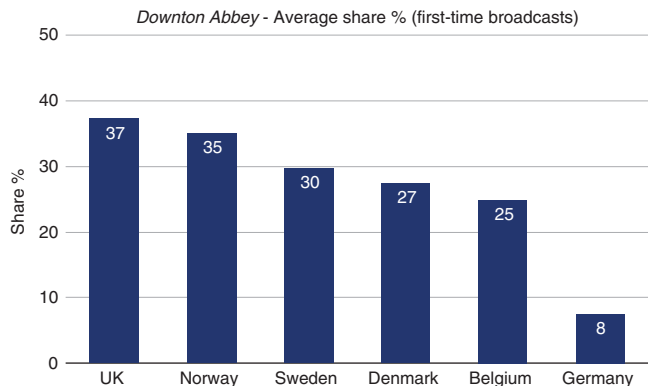


Figure 6 | Average share in six different European countries. Danish TV-meter data, processed and analysed by the Copenhagen MeCETES team.

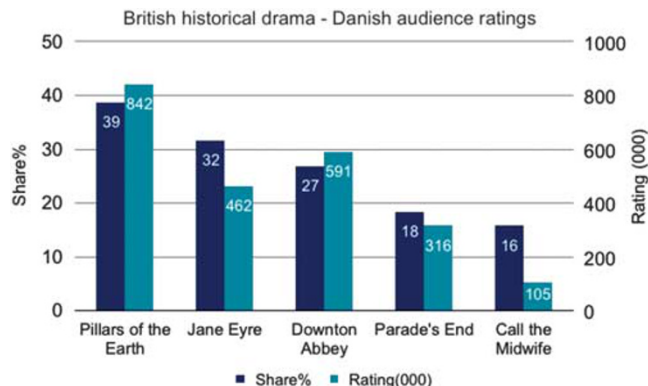


Figure 9 | UK historical drama cases and Danish audience share percentage and ratings (000). Danish TV-meter data, processed and analysed by the Copenhagen MeCETES team.

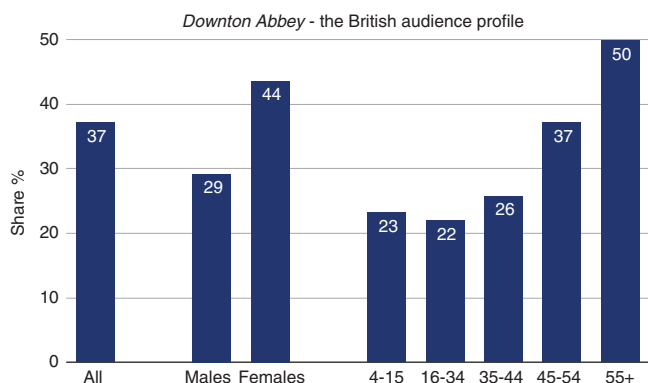


Figure 7 | Age and gender shares in UK audience for Downton Abbey. Danish TV-meter data, processed and analysed by the Copenhagen MeCETES team.

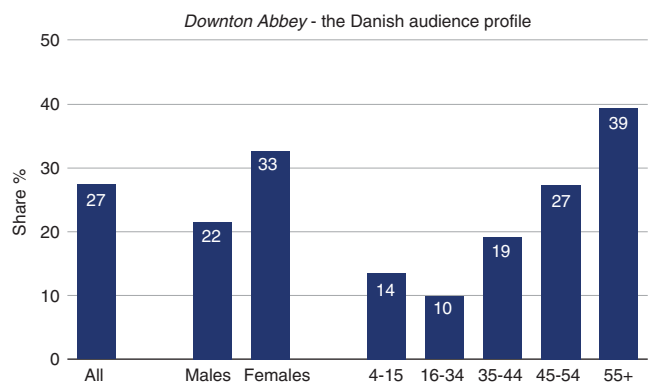


Figure 8 | Age and gender shares in DK audience for Downton Abbey. Danish TV-meter data, processed and analysed by the Copenhagen MeCETES team.

a slightly broader age representation. *Call the Midwife*, a very realist historical drama from the London slums, was extremely popular with UK audiences, competing with *Downton Abbey*, but in Denmark it was broadcast on the niche channel DR2, just as the First World War drama *Parade's End*.

Audience figures and profiles can tell us something about mediated cultural encounters through impact and by revealing which social and cultural subgroups are most likely to be attracted

by a particular historical series. But if we want to go deeper into the content and dimension of such encounters we need to look more specifically at reception, either in the form of focus group or through reviews and debates in newspapers and on social media. We know that *Downton Abbey* has generated millions of comments on twitter, Facebook, Instagram and so on, and that such comments could reveal both national and transnational themes of interest. A study (Lai *et al.*, 2016 [1864]) of online comments to one of the most recent Danish historical TV series, *1864* (2014)—a national success with an average of 1.3 million Danish viewers, and also now exported to more than 20 countries—gives us a good impression of how ordinary viewers argue and discuss. The study deals with the main PSB station DR's own online site and analyses 3,629 comments by 2,219 individuals during the broadcast of the show. One of the interesting findings in this study is the difference between professional, elite commentators and viewers. Despite the fact that the series was much debated among professional critics, politicians and historians for its assumed ideological stance and correctness in factual, historical terms, the viewers seemed more interested in characters, narrative and their personal experience of watching the series, although they were also divided in the evaluation of the series.

Here I will focus on the reception of *Downton Abbey* in the British and Danish press. The analysis is based on a random sample from different, typical newspapers in the period between 2010–14. The total number of British articles is 14,072 and for Danish articles it is just 192. The amount of articles clearly shows the difference between a nation with a population of 53 million and one of 5.5 million, but it also shows that the national interest is much bigger than the transnational. The articles were coded according to the following themes: media business (economy, audiences, politics, technology), social and political issues, nationality–transnationality–Europe, genre–aesthetics–narrative, stars–fandom–life style and other.

There was a quite striking difference not just between the kind of discourse that dominated the Danish and English reception but actually also the attention given to the specific themes (see Fig. 10 and 11). The theme of nationality, transnationality and Europe is dominant in the Danish newspapers, something clearly indicating that the series make Danes reflect upon the national specificities and differences between national and UK-history as it is narrated and represented in the series. The UK reception on the other hand is much more directly linked to an aesthetic, narrative and generic discussion of the series: how good is it, how does it relate to other examples of the heritage genre? But the UK reception

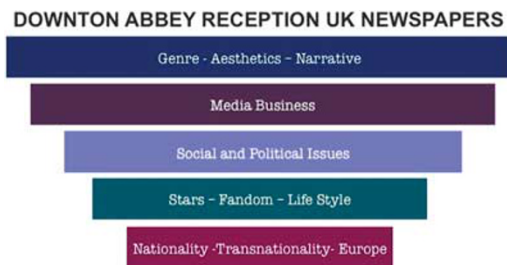


Figure 10 | Themes of reception of *Downton Abbey* in DK and UK newspapers. Data from online newspaper search, processed and analysed by the Copenhagen MeCETES team.



Figure 11 | Themes of reception of *Downton Abbey* in DK and UK newspapers. Data from online newspaper search, processed and analysed by the Copenhagen MeCETES team.

also has media business as a high priority, which means that the articles often discuss how the series was made and how successful it has been globally. It is a kind of “British Empire discourse” returned in a media form, sometimes also related to the somewhat distanced British relation with Europe.

Examples of how such mediated cultural encounters in Denmark related to national and English identities are expressed show a positioning of “Danishness” against “Englishness” often with satirical or critical undertones:

- (*Politiken*, Michaelis, 28 March 2012): Will we ever be finished with the British countryside aristocracy? We despise the French aristocracy as decadent and feudal fascism. We cannot stand German aristocracy, unless they try a dilettante and tragic assassination attempt on Hitler. But British both upstairs and downstairs, blue and red blood, stiff upper lip and nobility oblige—that we Scandinavians can simply indulge in forever.
- (*Politiken*, Michaelis, 30 December 2013): A little Tudor, a bit of Renaissance, baroque towers on lawns bigger than Lolland-Falster (Danish region) all together. (...) The good lord, severe but just, more blue than the election posters of Venstre (Danish Liberal party, recognized by the colour blue), the rather big and formal butler, the doughty cook, the simple minded Irish kitchen maids, blond and down-to-earth, scheming heirs threatening the feudal order, and socialist growing like weed in golf courses

Clearly in those two Danish quotations what happens is that the fictional encounter with a European “cultural other” is reflected as a different culture from ours, but also as a close and fascinating other. At the same time this “cultural other” sharpens the self-reflection of a Danish mind, both in terms of grandness versus smallness, but in that comparison also with some malice against the too grand other. In a lot of Danish comments this cultural encounter is also combining a broader national theme with a

generic comparison. Danish historical drama equivalents are discussed as part of a discussion of national similarity and difference on a generic level. It is a discussion that touches upon the arguments by Billig on the particularity and universality of “nationalism”. This is clear in the two following quotes:

- (*Ekstrabladet*, 15 February 2004): So British it almost hurts. That is why I love everything British—not least the stylish, dramatic and totally arch-English *Downton Abbey*. I am part Nyborg part Læsø, in other words a farmer boy (...) where my parents worshipped wine, cheese and everything French, I am—besides being a proud Dane culturally speaking two parts American and two parts English. *Downton Abbey* (...) is a kind of *Matador*, where the streets of Korsbæk have been substituted with the halls and corridors of a big manor (...) *Downton Abbey* is beautiful as a painting and elegantly narrated (...) following earlier English TV-hits, where being arch-English is a quality in itself (...) where everything is aristocratic, intelligent, mean and completely and wonderfully British.
- (*Kristeligt Dagblad*, 17 February 2012, Nils Gunder Hansen): The English series have special qualities and have good types and characters (...) *Downton Abbey* offers a grand dramatic vision of the shift from the traditional class society and the changes after WWI (...) The grand historical narratives gives us a feeling of historicity (...) they let us see humans as historical beings; individual characters and their lives woven into the larger pattern of a historical period, moving and enlightening at the same time (...) I feel a national pride when Danish series like *Borgen* and *The Killing* can become cult in the UK (...) but there is still some way to go before we Danes develop a grand historical series, which has so far only been created with *Matador*.

The UK newspapers on the other hand do not reflect very much upon the cultural specificity of the series and its relation to other European genres like this. In the media business theme for instance it is the world market power structure that seems to matter in most comments. It is the UK TV-culture trying to achieve world dominance that is the key issue, and here the competition with the US often appears. In *The Telegraph*, *The Independent* and *The Times* the British Empire seems about to return on TV, and in some comments former military and economic power is now substituted with the “soft power” of culture:

- (*The Telegraph*, 19 September 2011, Neil Midgley): “*Downton Abbey* was recently awarded the Guinness World Record for the most critically acclaimed television show, beating the previous holders (...) all of them American (...)”.
- (*The Telegraph*, 19 September 2011, Neil Midgley): “Nobody outside Britain makes country house drama (...) Britain has been a world leader in the sale of TV formats (...) But there’s one small snag that would give the Dowager Countess of Grantham the vapours: Carnival film the London based production company that makes *Downton Abbey* for ITV, has been owned for the past three years by NBC”.
- (*The Daily Telegraph*, 13 September 2013): “In this country we often look to the military to show our power in the world, but British soft power is something which stronger than in almost any other nation in the world”.

In *The Independent* (7 October 2013) this boasting of being a global “soft power”—with *Downton Abbey* rising rapidly in China, the rest of Asia, Russia and Eastern Europe and EU as a whole—is followed a bit surprisingly by the comment, “Not bad for a small island that no one listens to”.

The media business perspective in the UK newspapers is clearly connected to a UK discourse situating the competition between an American and a European challenge. But as figures 10–11 shows the aesthetic theme is the most dominant, the evaluation of the series narrative and style as such, which clearly dominates the more elite oriented newspapers like *The Guardian* and *The Independent*. But social and political issues come in third, and here we find the classical heritage drama discussion of social ideology, class, nostalgia and conservatism. The tabloids, but also the “elite” newspapers, have this discussion high on the agenda, and the basic question raised is why viewers today find it fascinating to look into a past world of strong class differences and lack of rights to women and the underclass. This comment in *The Sun* (15 November 2013) is quite characteristic:

Blue-blooded privilege, magnificent mansions, poor folk knowing their place—*Downton Abbey* should have spurred regular Brits into marching on country piles with our pitchforks. Instead we have taken the aristocratic Crawley family to our hearts, powerless to resist Julian Fellowes’ mix of historical drama and soap opera nonsense (...) with so many characters and plotlines this ITV juggernaut is barely coherent.

Social imaginaries and mediated cultural encounters

In Charles Taylor’s book *Modern Social Imaginaries* (2005: 23) he defines what he calls the European or Western social imaginary based on three key cultural forms: economy, the public sphere and self-governance. By social imaginary he means “the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others (...) the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations”. He adds to this that the social imaginary is not expressed most strongly in theoretical concepts, but “carried in images, stories and legends” and “shared by large groups of people”. He continues by stating that “the social imaginary is that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy”. Anderson’s concept of “imagined communities” and Billig’s notion of the banal, everyday side of any national identity, together with Taylor’s concept of social imaginaries clearly indicate that mediated cultural encounters cannot in any short span of time create new forms of identity as thick as those we often find in well-established nation states.

However, mediated cultural encounters matter, and they matter more and more in our transforming world of globalisation and European integration. Mediated cultural encounters cannot substitute real life interaction with European others, but the impact of US film and media in Europe since 1930 certainly indicates that such encounters leave a mark. What I have described in this article is the rise of a European counter flow to both the national and the American dominance in transnational European television drama. Empirically it is quite clear that different forms of financial and creative co-production are on the rise and that in fact Europeans more often than before 2000 now have mediated cultural encounters with each other through drama series from other European countries. A new kind of creative, transnational Europe is bringing original and often local stories to us, as a result of national strategies, European media policies and structural changes in the production and distribution networks of Europe. If Eder (2005) is right in predicting that an increased European integration, politically and culturally, will not lead to a grand new European identity, but a continued mix of being national and being European, this development is very

positive. Encounters of the kind we find in different forms of TV drama will make Europe more diverse and richer for a much broader audience. The interaction between the particular and universal in “narratives” on our past and contemporary social and cultural order contribute to a better feeling for and understanding of the “us” and “them” in European culture.

Notes

- 1 The MeCETES research project, *Mediating Cultural Encounters Through European Screens* (see www.mecetes.co.uk) is a HERA/EU financed project analysing the production, distribution and reception of European film and TV. Three teams (University of Copenhagen, University of York and University of Brussels) are involved. The project runs from 2013–2016.
- 2 The two figures are based on data from Eurodata/Mediаметrie on all European TV-drama series from 13 European countries between 2011–2014. We have data on 2645 TV-drama productions, which altogether account for 6093 distribution events in this period. The data have been visualized with the use of the network visualisation software *Gephi*.
- 3 This definition includes TV series and mini series.

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Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated during the current study. The data underpinning the figures derive from the sources are indicated in the legends. Some data and information related to the article can be found of the MeCETES project's public website: www.mecetes.co.uk

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