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# The Showrunner's Touch: *The Killing* Revisited

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## Abstract

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This chapter studies the ways in which Nordic noir classic *Forbrydelsen* (DR 2007–2012) was remade in the USA as *The Killing* (AMC/Netflix 2011–2014). The chapter argues that looking to the production and especially the adapting showrunner on the remake provides perspectives that have been overlooked in existing research on this particular adaptation process, and that using such a strategy may be key in studying other television series remaking processes as well. Concretely looking to the adapting showrunner's experiences and preferences may explain changes from character to plot level, including shedding new light on what has been read as “American” obsessions with psychological explanations and culturally based hostility toward bad motherhood.

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## Keywords

Adaptation

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Showrunner

Authorship

*Forbrydelsen*

## *The killing*

This chapter studies the ways in which the Nordic noir classic *Forbrydelsen* (DR 2007–2012) was remade in the USA as *The Killing* (AMC/Netflix 2011–2014).<sup>1</sup> As a form of adaptation, the remake depends on the engagement of a key creative practitioner, who sees in the material potential for translation that will address a new audience. This chapter argues that the role of the showrunner is a role in which such engagement is meaningful. But the showrunner and his or her vision have been overlooked in existing research on the television adaptation process. Close analysis of the adapting showrunner's experiences and preferences may illuminate salient textual changes between texts. In the adaptation of *Forbrydelsen* to *The Killing*, such analysis helps explain changes in character and plot, while shedding new light on what has been read as an “American” obsession with psychological explanations and culturally based hostility toward bad motherhood (Hellekson 2014; Akass 2015). Further, the methodology and interpretive approach employed here may be suggestive for the study of other remake processes.<sup>2</sup>

### AQ1

*Forbrydelsen* has been a favorite case in recent research on complex television (Mittel 2015) and Nordic noir, primarily with a focus on the series' putative qualities, as an example of Nordic noir and its international appeal (Agger 2012; Creeber 2015; Waade and Jensen 2013; Dunleavy 2014; Bondebjerg and Redvall 2015). Less scrutiny has been devoted to the transformation of *Forbrydelsen* to *The Killing* (Hellekson 2014; Akass 2015). Notably for my purposes, the role of the showrunner has received surprisingly little critical attention, not least this role in Nordic television production. But analysis of the showrunner's impact on the remake sheds new light on the transformation process, where theoretical and deductive arguments have been the main mode of textual comparison so far. More attention should be paid to the adapting showrunner in remake studies of television series. The reason for revisiting this popular case with this methodology is to bring to bear an interview conducted by the author with the production showrunner of *The Killing*, Veena Sud. It sheds new light on the transformation process and should be read as a testimony to the importance of looking to the work and views of the adapting showrunner in remake studies of television.

Although the adapting showrunner is a new object of scholarly attention, this article in contrast relies on traditional methods. Comparison of text-based properties and the contexts of reception and the media system remain essential for this article, as for remake studies more generally: How do the original text and the remake resemble each other? Where do they differ? If a remake was well received by audiences and critics, which parts of it did they praise? Were they the same elements that the original had been praised for? Which parts did they not like and why? How did the remake adapt to the new television system? Throughout the analysis, I continually address such questions, drawing on perspectives from David Bordwell et al. (1985) and Jason Mittell (2015).

Between 2001 and 2007, DR succeeded in winning the prestigious international Emmy award three times: with *Rejseholdet* (Unit One, 2000–2004) in 2002, with *Nikolaj og Julie* (Nikolaj and Julie, 2002–2003) in 2003, and with *Ørnen* (The Eagle, 2004–2006) in 2005. Nevertheless, *Forbrydelsen* arguably marked the real international breakthrough for DR production. Weissman (2012) highlights *Forbrydelsen* as Danish television drama's claim to fame in both the UK and internationally. It was a domestic success, and the series was quickly sold to many other countries—for instance, it was screened on ZDF in Germany already in 2008. *Forbrydelsen* was exceptional in its ability to do well in English-speaking markets such as the UK, normally a great challenge for subtitled television. Andrea Esser makes a convincing argument that the way had been paved **breakthrough** through earlier screenings of *Wallander* (2005–2010) on BBC4, but she underlines that the real **breakthrough** came with *Forbrydelsen* (Esser 2017). It was aired in a subtitled version on BBC4 in 2011. The show inaugurated a trend of successful, subtitled Danish television drama in Britain, which was covered enthusiastically by the British press. Eventually, British readers and viewers came to embrace other representations of Denmark, including a wave of British books on “hygge” and other constructions of Danish national culture (Higgins 2016). Although Danish television series have also been exported to the USA (*Borgen*, for example, has been available through cable operator DirecTV), American broadcaster AMC allegedly thought it more profitable to purchase the rights to *Forbrydelsen* and do a remake. *The Killing* premiered on April 3, 2011, on AMC. After being canceled several times, the show was resurrected for a fourth and final season by Netflix, eventually becoming a “Netflix original,” despite being developed first by DR and later by

AMC.

The first 20-episode season of *Forbrydelsen* served as the foundation for the first two 13-episode seasons of *The Killing*. Little, if anything, from the subsequent original seasons made it into the remake's third and fourth season. Furthermore, my interview with *Killing*-showrunner Veena Sud suggests that she had not seen the second and third seasons of the original show (Sud 2015, 7). On this basis, comparing the first season of the original and the first two seasons of the remake yields the most relevant interpretive perspective. A comparison of the later seasons can nevertheless reveal the different paths taken by the shows and how these differences might have been affected by location. As such, they provide an interesting perspective, and I shall involve them to some extent. Furthermore, the reception context of original and remake is crucial in analyzing the remaking process. As Kim Akass (2015) points out, *The Killing* began well in terms of ratings and reviews, but suffered a significant drop in viewership after the first season. The following analysis will consider some of the possible reasons for this, as these reasons might contribute to understanding the implications a new location, cultural context, language, and television system can have on a remaking process.

## AQ2

This chapter highlights the significance of the showrunner, but studying authorship in television is complicated. All television productions are made by collectives of people, and most showrunners work in collaboration with other writers, forming writers' rooms, and therefore clouding questions of authorship. However, Jason Mittell points out that "most showrunners earn their authorship by both responsibility and management for countless leadership decisions and thus are regarded as the primary authorial figures within an intensely collaborative medium" (2015, 92). Also, according to Mittell, the writers' room typically emerges *after* the showrunner has had some time to develop the concept alone (89–90). Mittell compares the showrunner to the film director, indirectly making a link between studying the showrunner and auteur studies. Auteur studies have also been carried out in television drama, illuminating the significance of individual manuscript writers, such as; Dennis Potter in the UK (Cooke 2015). However, these auteurist perspectives have not been used in television remake studies, as laid out in what follows. Finally, as Caldwell points out, maintaining a critical eye is crucial when talking to people "above

the line” in the entertainment industry (2008, 1). Thus, statements from the showrunner are not accepted at face value—instead, they are critically used in conjunction with an analysis of the textual and contextual levels of the cases, combining methodologies to generate more cogent analysis.

## Plot and Genre

The first season of *Forbrydelsen* relates the investigation of the murder of Nanna Birk Larsen, a Danish teenage high-school girl. At the same time, it is a story of power and sacrifice: of an obsessive female detective, who gets things done at all costs, leaving her personal life in shambles; and the rising municipal politician Troels Hartmann (Lars Mikkelsen), who ascends to Copenhagen’s office of Mayor, while sacrificing his ideals along the way. The series spanned 20 episodes of 55 minutes each, broadcast in the spring and autumn of 2007 with a break during the summer. One of the key characteristics of the series is its narrative focus on the murder of a teenage girl, which serves as the main story engine for the entirety of the 20 episodes—calling to mind Laura Palmer’s murder in David Lynch’s *Twin Peaks* (ABC 1990–1991). This setup means that the dramaturgy is dominated by red herrings. *Forbrydelsen* continuously hints that this or that person is the killer, but then a new piece of evidence turns up, absolving the suspect but incriminating a new one. When the murder mystery is finally solved it turns out that a close friend of Nanna Birk Larsen’s family, Vagn, is the killer. His motive is racism. He appears to have been motivated by misunderstanding and anger that the teenager was planning to run away with a boyfriend of color. In the climactic moment, Vagn is killed by the murdered girl’s father. This effectively puts the father in jail, away from his remaining two children and his wife, completing the family’s tragedy.

In terms of genre, *Forbrydelsen* is primarily a crime drama. A media text’s pick of genre and how it communicates this choice sets certain expectations with the audience, and whether or not these expectations are met has implications for the reception (Gemzøe 2016, 157). On the one hand, the producers of *Forbrydelsen* sought to engage the audience with the idea that the various temporary suspects committed the crime, yet on the other, any member of the audience somewhat versed in the crime genre would likely expect the killer to be revealed either at the end of an episode or at the end of the series. That the latter is the more probable option is hinted at in the marketing and title of the show. The original

was launched as a 20-episode crime story, which various reviews and press comments make evident (Zacharias 2007; Libak 2007). Furthermore, the direct translation of “forbrydelsen” is “the crime,” with the singular strongly indicating that the show revolves around one salient crime. In this way, *Forbrydelsen* engaged in a contract with the audience. The series asked its audience to be patient with the solving of the main plot and, in return, promised to entertain while slowly unraveling the mystery. The question was if the viewer would accept such a contract. Most television detective series will usually reveal the murder by the end of an episode, which classics such as *Inspector Morse* (ITV 1987–2000), or all-time detective classic Sherlock Holmes in its various iterations on television, exemplify (e.g. *Elementary* on CBS 2012–). One could argue that television audiences of 2007 were used to quick payoffs in the crime genre. Then again, crime novels have asked readers to accept similar premises for decades. A reader of a 400-page crime novel knows all too well that the identity of the killer is not found on page 74. The original showing of *Forbrydelsen* demanded even more of its viewers, however. The 20 episodes were divided into two clusters of 10 episodes by a summer break lasting six months, signaling to viewers that after the spring season they would have to wait up to six months for closure. The original’s impressive ratings indicate that viewers accepted these ostensibly demanding premises (DR 2007).

*The Killing* stayed true to the original series in terms of structure and plot in the beginning of the first season. The pilot is a highly similar remake of the original first episode. Likewise, the following episodes also delve into the same initial suspects—the high-school friends, the school teacher—before entering the political realm. The remake does start to deviate at a point. A notable change can be found at the level of character—in the nature of Sarah Linden’s partner. Sarah Lund’s partner Meyer in *Forbrydelsen* is in many ways orderly and has a certain drive. Sarah Linden’s partner Holder, the reimaged Meyer, wears baggy clothes, hoodies and seems more relaxed and, more unkempt than his Danish counterpart. For example, he smokes marijuana with some school girls in the second episode of the series to get information from them. The change is the first example of the new showrunner leaving a personal signature on the translation process. When Veena Sud did the script for *The Killing*, she had recently spent time with narcotics detectives in Los Angeles. She used that experience to rework Meyer into detective Holder, imagining him coming from

narcotics but wanting a fresh start (Sud 2015, 3). Also, she detected sexism in the relationship between the detectives in the original. Based on her personal working experiences with men, she cut that from the remake: “I work with a lot of men. They don’t sit around saying sexist things to me. We fight over things that we don’t agree on. I wanted to see more of that” (Sud 2015, 4).

However, the most important change between original and remake takes place at the plot level, occurring just before the first season finale. Just as in the original, the municipal politician, amidst a demanding campaign, becomes the prime suspect. But *The Killing* takes the twist one step further. In the final episode of the first season, Sarah Linden arrests the politician, for a while letting the audience think that he is the killer and that the mystery has been solved—which would also fit very well with a season finale. However, in yet another twist during the final minutes of the season, the audience learns that the politician probably did not commit the murder, suggesting to viewers that they would have to wait another season to find out the killer’s identity. This irritated and angered many in the audience, and viewership dropped by half (Akass 2015). Seen in light of this outrage, the final plot twist seems questionable, but it can hardly explain the drop in viewership by itself. The marketing of *The Killing* may have been a contributing factor. The 20-episode length of *Forbrydelsen* made it immediately evident to the audience that they would have to watch 20 hours of television to find out who the killer was. In contrast, *The Killing* was launched as a quality series much like AMC’s previous prestigious television series such as *Breaking Bad* and *Mad Men*. AMC’s audience did not know when the killer would be revealed, but the outrage after the first season strongly suggests that they were expecting closure after the first 13 episodes. Prominent figures within AMC have even suggested that they marketed the show in a problematic way: Both the president and the head of original programming for AMC after the season finale said that if they could have done anything differently, it would have been to manage expectations (Sternbergh 2012). Sud recognized that the problems in the reception of the format were in part brought upon them by the fact that they had to expand the number of episodes and seasons to make the show fit the American television system. Nevertheless, she primarily attributed the problem to “American” impatience: “There’s not a lot of tolerance for waiting in the States,” she said (2015, 8).

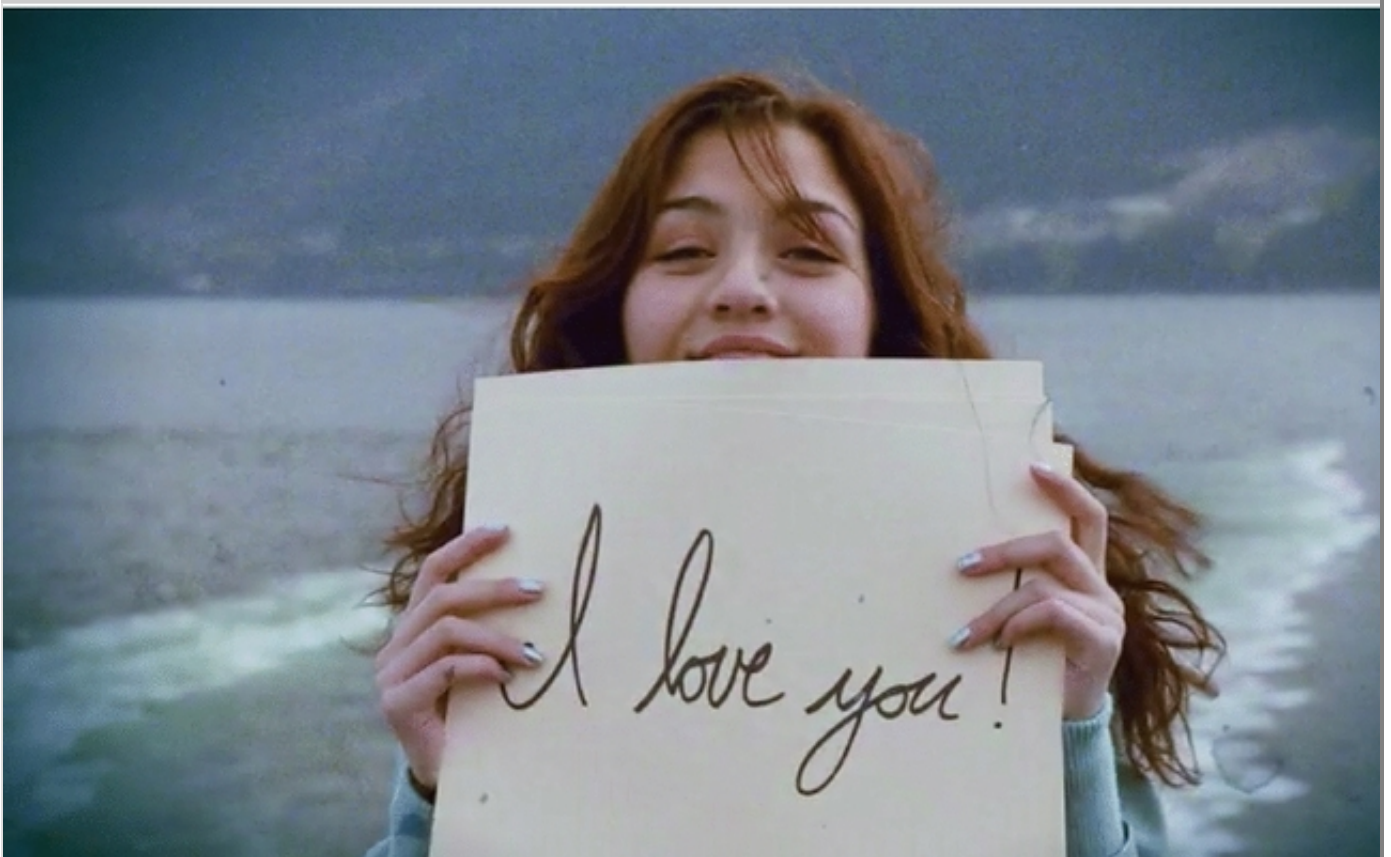
The second season of *The Killing* progresses in part like the original’s second



cycle of ten episodes, but the new setting begins to impose itself increasingly on the series. Seattle is known for its rich history with Native Americans, and the series introduces a subplot delving into this topic, which I shall further expand on in a discussion of location analysis below. The ending is also changed in several important respects; in the most important among these, the killer is the teenager's aunt, Terry. With the crime genre being so focused on the result, and certainly no less in a 20-episode series with only one killer, the choice to change the killer seems reasonable. Actually, Sud used her idea of "American" preferences to explain why she had changed the ending. She found that "Americans" were highly "focused on the result," and she did not want her audience to be able to look to the Danish original to find out the identity of the killer (1). However, it is interesting that the murder turns out to be of a different nature in the remake. In the original version, the girl is killed by a deranged racist, who, in turn, is killed by the girl's father. Given that this results in another murder and the incarceration of the father, this ending is entirely dark. Furthermore, Lund's partner, Meyer, is the victim of a senseless killing. In contrast, in the remake, Linden's partner, Holder, lives. The girl, Rosie, while certainly a victim of human ambition and greed, is ultimately killed by accident. Additionally, she gets to leave behind a video in which she expresses her longing to see the world and her love for her family. In an intensely emotional scene, the family watches the movie, smiling and crying. Her father does not become a murderer. The remade ending has more of a bittersweet quality to it, in some ways changing the tone of the series (Figs. 13.1 and 13.2).

### **Fig. 13.1**

Rosie's video and bittersweet good-bye in episode 13 of the first season of *The Killing* (2011–2014)



**Fig. 13.2**

The family's reactions to Rosie's video in episode 13 of the first season of *The Killing* (2011–2014) include smiles and tears



### AQ3

In previous research, I have documented a tendency in Hollywood cinema to make efforts to ameliorate tragic events, focusing on personal development and achievement before death, always steering clear of the complete tragedy. For example, Jack has, in a way, fulfilled his role as savior before he dies in *Titanic* (1997), Maggie has proven her worth and stood up to her abusive family before dying in *Million Dollar Baby* (2004), and the protagonists in *American History X* (1998) and *Into the Wild* (2007) change for the better and learn profound lessons before dying (Gemzøe 2014). There are important differences between movies and television series, but there are also similarities. It does not seem unfathomable that *The Killing* could be influenced by the production culture of Hollywood. This argument is validated by the final episodes of the final seasons of *Forbrydelsen* and *The Killing*: The Dane Sarah Lund ends her career a vigilante and fugitive from justice, cut off by her estranged son. By contrast, Sarah Linden is reconciled with her son and a romantic interest is suggested.

Veena Sud rejected the notion that she had felt any sort of pressure to make *The Killing* less tragic (Sud 2015, 6–7). Even if there was no pressure, however, an

important factor was Sud's personal experience with grieving families: "I was interested in a family's grief, because I had spent some time with families whose children had died, including a good friend of mine. I was very interested in making sure we encapsulated that" (2015, 3). If Sud knew people, including one of her good friends, who struggled with the aftereffects of losing a child, it might have seemed opportune to create an ending in which a family copes with such a loss—and insensitive to end with a family essentially destroyed by the death of their daughter, as in the original *Forbrydelsen*. A later statement in my interview with Sud adds weight to such a reading.

When you're writing characters, you fall in love with them. You want good things to happen to them, even if you know that you have to lead them down a dark road. So, the gift we were able to give this family that we cared about was the video of their daughter saying goodbye. (Sud 2015, 6)

Sud may have avoided the total tragedy because it was too reminiscent of a real-life tragedy close to her, and because she had fallen in love with the characters in the process of writing them. Sud herself did not think of her ending as brighter or lighter. She felt that she had torn the heart out of the family, because Terry, who accidentally killed the girl, was a trusted family member. However, so, for that matter, was the murderer in the original.

The murder riddle in *Forbrydelsen* is the primary story engine, but other narrative threads in the series are also of importance. Politician Troels Hartmann is campaigning to become the next mayor of Copenhagen, but his campaign suffers a setback when it becomes entangled with the murder investigation. It turns out that his personal advisor has been tampering with evidence and consistently lying to the police. *The Killing* largely keeps this plot intact. The personal advisor does the dirty work of the idealist politician, in the beginning without the politician knowing about it, but ultimately with his tacit consent, forming a critique of society and its corrupt power structures.

However, the remake does not emphasize the politics and power struggles as much as the original does. Further, the societal critiques and layers fade into the background in subsequent seasons of the remake, which are not based on the narrative of the original series. The third and fourth seasons of *The Killing* are interested in society in that they depict problems with homelessness, for example, but unlike in the original's subsequent seasons, the political dimension

is mostly discarded. This choice was largely based on Sud's idea that Americans were uninterested in politics:

Americans are not that patient with politics. At all. And so, we had to really steep that story in as much personalities and personal conflict as possible. And over time we started to realise: This story is about a man. It's about a character. It's less about struggles for power. Because I guess Americans – including ourselves, the writers and myself – aren't that interested in that. (2015, 4)

This is a noteworthy statement for several reasons. First, whether “Americans” as such are indifferent about politics can certainly be questioned. Even if one assumes that by “Americans,” Sud means Americans watching television series, the truthfulness of the statement does not seem evident. Political television series such as *The West Wing* (1999–2006), *The Newsroom* (2012–2014) and *House of Cards* (2013–) have had considerable success with American audiences. Second, the line between “Americans” and Veena Sud, including her team of writers, seems to blur. When seen in light of the information Sud provided, the changes to plot and structure seem to be clear evidence of a showrunner effect on *The Killing*: The Holder-character, the healing gift to the grieving family as well as the seemingly random constructions of an “American” indifference to politics and “American” impatience can be read as Sud's signature on the remade series.

## Character Development

The protagonist in *Forbrydelsen* and *The Killing* is the lead detective, Sarah Lund/Sarah Linden. The original Sarah Lund was so popular in the UK that Sofie Gråbøl, the actress playing Sarah Lund, made a cameo as Lund on UK hit sitcom *Absolutely Fabulous* in 2011 (1992–2012) (Gilbert 2011). Gråbøl went on to appear in both British theater plays and serial fiction (Berglöv 2014; Nielsen 2014). Sarah Lund's different incarnations have also received scholarly attention from Karen Hellekson (2014) and Kim Akass (2015). Both scholars argue that she is changed in the remake because of a difference in American cultural norms compared to Danish ones. They do not, however, necessarily agree on how she changes, or at least their focus is different.

Karen Hellekson presents the idea that cultural norms related to the justice



genre may have affected the remake. Her analysis is based on a comparative analysis of the main characters. She argues that, while the remake's Sarah Linden does resemble the original's Sarah Lund in most ways, she is different from her in one key aspect: In the original, the audience is never told why Lund is so keen on solving the case. Hellekson reads this lack of explicit motivation as a sign that Lund is motivated by the desire to solve the crime and find the truth because it is the right thing to do. According to Hellekson, Lund expresses goodwill as defined by Immanuel Kant, where Linden, her American counterpart, is motivated by childhood trauma and personal phobias (Hellekson 2014, 132). Hellekson goes on to mention four different recent American television series in which the main female protagonist is, in some way, motivated by childhood trauma, concluding that, "Although it's not possible to make sweeping generalizations about the nature of Danish versus American TV from this case study, the protagonist's change hints at culture-specific notions of what would be acceptable to an audience and what motivations might resonate with them" (2014, 138). Accordingly, this change in the main character alters the whole point of the series: "In *The Killing*, the solving of the crime shines less brightly because the moral imperative is not universal or communal but individualistic and ultimately selfish. By insisting on a personal context, *The Killing* undermines the larger point of *Forbrydelsen*: that it is possible to act out of duty, with good will, for universal principles that hint at a better humanity" (2014, 139).

#### AQ4

With this statement, Hellekson unknowingly points to aspects of DR fiction's concept of the double story, which demands that the series have an ethical and/or societal dimension, and argues that this ethical layer is removed in the remake (Redvall 2013, 67). However, it can be debated whether the larger point of *Forbrydelsen* is, in fact, that it is possible to act out of duty, bearing in mind that the series also points out how power corrupts in the political realm. Statements made by Piv Bernth, head of drama at DR 2012–2017, add weight to the part of Hellekson's analysis suggesting that American cultural norms affected the remake. In a 2012 interview, Bernth commented on *The Killing*, stating her disapproval of its "American" desire to explain everything about Linden. According to Bernth, part of Sarah Lund's attraction was her mysterious nature and past, allowing the audience room for individual

interpretation (Nielsen 2012). One could also read Lund's motivation to solve the crime as generic: That is what detectives do (Bordwell et al. 1985, 20).

Hellekson suggests that differences in societal structures could be the cause of the change, pointing to a contrast between American individualism and Danish welfare-state collectivism. Karen Povlsen makes an argument in the opposite direction, contending that Lund's choice to sacrifice her family for her career could be read as the dismantling of the welfare state and an echo of neoliberalism: A woman has to choose between career and family, she cannot have both (Povlsen 2011, 97–98). It is important to note that Povlsen is comparing Danish and Swedish police procedurals, while Hellekson is, in contrast, comparing Danish and American.

I would like to question Hellekson's notions about what would be acceptable for the *audience* when, as far as I can see, the real issue is found in the *production* of the American series. If Hellekson is right, would it not be the scriptwriters and perhaps the producers, rather than the audience, that seem to have a preference for female leads motivated by personal stakes ~~rather than the audience~~? As far as we know, the US audience might never have been exposed to a female protagonist solely motivated by Kantian goodwill. Talking to Sud, it became apparent that the emphasis on psychological explanations came from personal experiences and curiosity:

I was so curious about Sarah Lund. I wanted to know about her past. I wanted to know where that person came from – what damage, what brokenness, what got her there. I've spent a lot of time with female detectives in homicide and sex crimes, and they're fascinating. They live in a very violent world, mostly male-dominated, and every single one of them have these distinct personalities and interesting backstories. That's been my experience with female cops, so I wanted to give that to this character too. (Sud 2015, 5)

Of course, one could ask from where did Sud's curiosity originate? Was it a result of her individual tastes and preferences, or was it a result of her American upbringing and life in the USA in general? Such a comprehensive question is, to be sure, beyond the scope of this chapter. In this context, however, it suffices to say that a different showrunner without personal experiences with female cops might have chosen not to focus on the personal background and story of Sarah

Linden, or perhaps chosen to depict it in a different manner.

Kim Akass has a different perspective on the remade series and its main character (2015). She argues that “while the first few episodes of *The Killing* stray little from the original, motherhood and parenting soon become the focus of the adapted version” (748). This is an interesting perspective, because Sud also pointed out to me that motherhood was important (Sud 2015). Akass’ argument resembles Hellekson’s in that Akass also draws attention to the emergence of Linden’s troubled past in foster care. The difference is that, while Hellekson sees Linden’s past as evidence of an American obsession with personal, psychological motivation, Akass sees it primarily as a way of explaining Linden’s failings as a mother, in that she was abandoned as a child, and poor maternal skills are inherited from one generation to the next. Furthermore, the third season of *The Killing* thematizes homeless children and teenagers, thus inevitably [deal](#) with their neglectful parents, especially mothers, as Akass argues. Finally, the fourth season depicts boys in boarding school and military academy degenerating without a mother’s love. All of this is read as a reproduction of American culturally based hostility toward any mother that does not devote her life to her children, preferably sacrificing her career along the way (Akass 2013, 2015).

Although there are nuances to Akass’ reading, that motherhood is “the focus” of *The Killing* is debatable. After all, the first two seasons depict the events around the murder of a girl who dies because she coincidentally witnesses political corruption. That is the central narrative, and the crime and the motives behind it have nothing to do with child rearing, even if it is a subtheme in the series. The subsequent seasons are certainly interested in problematic parenting, and perhaps mothers are judged more harshly than fathers. Akass recognizes but attributes little significance to the fact that Linden is reconciled with her son in the end of *The Killing*, while Lund in *Forbrydelsen* fails at every chance of reconciliation and is ultimately never forgiven by her son. Finally, as Povlsen points out, Sarah Lund in the original *Forbrydelsen* never manages to combine family and career, mildly suggesting that women cannot have both.

While creative practitioners do not have final say on the way their media texts are read, I can say with some certainty that Sud had hoped her show would not be read as a product of American culturally based hostility toward bad mothers.



In fact, Sud wholeheartedly agreed that “Americans” could not stand the notion of somebody being a bad mother, and she wanted to challenge that construction by bringing the imperfect Sarah Linden to American television screens (2015, 3). This is interesting, as Sud, in practice, verbalizes the same observations Akass made in her 2013 article on depictions of motherhood in the USA, adding weight to Akass’ analysis that a culturally based hostility toward working mothers does, in fact, exist in the USA. When asked about her attraction to *Forbrydelsen*, Sud responded:

The attractions were many. A strong, female protagonist who was uniquely powerful and obsessed. My frustration is, in American television, until Sarah Linden existed, there was this Barbie Doll-type female lead – with exceptions, of course. There have been great American crime stories like *Homicide* and *Cagney and Lacey* where the women leads were actually allowed to be flawed, without make-up, allowed to look like real cops. That’s few and far between. I think it opened a door, bringing *The Killing* to the United States, and having this radical notion of a female lead not wearing make-up, not talking about her kids, being a bad mother, being bad at relationships, being very much what the male anti-hero is in every American television show. It’s the first time in a very long time a woman was allowed to be that way. That was my immediate attraction to the original – that Søren and the Danish audience were so accepting, brave and cool to like a woman like that. I just crossed my fingers and hoped we could do the same thing here. (Sud 2015, 2)

According to Akass, Sud failed to do so, among other reasons because *The Killing* implies that Linden’s lack of abilities as a mother are inherited from Linden’s own mother’s absence and failings, suggesting that bad mothers breed bad mothers, shaming them (2015). As discussed above, however, Sud put in Linden’s troubled past to satisfy her own curiosity about the character, and because Sud felt that she had some good material from her talks with, and research on, female police officers, which she wanted to include. As such, in the first and second season of *The Killing* at least, the apparent shaming of bad mothers seems to be unintended and partly stems from changes made in accordance with Sud’s personal tastes and experiences, rather than being inspired by American culturally based hostility toward working mothers.

## Conclusions

Combining elements from auteur, remake and production studies, this chapter has demonstrated a number of changes that can be directly linked to the person primarily responsible for translating the show: Veena Sud. These observations show how Veena Sud's personality—her interests, tastes and individual experiences—impacted the remade format, in part explaining what has been read as an “American” obsession with psychological explanations and culturally based hostility toward “bad” motherhood. While the personal touch is unmistakable, Sud frequently makes sweeping statements about Americans and uses these to explain the changes in question. Some of these statements are based on constructions found elsewhere, such as the existence of culturally based hostility toward bad/working mothers in the USA, which was also described in Akass' work. Other statements are broad, bordering on stereotypes, such as the notion that Americans are focused on results, impatient, or uninterested in politics. These statements can certainly be interpreted as honest beliefs, or American cultural norms as they are interpreted by Veena Sud. Treating them as such provides evidence suggesting that the adapting showrunner's views motivated her choices as a creative practitioner. Analysis of her statements can be connected to textual changes. One could of course also adopt a critical approach. Considering the importance of coming across as a success in the American entertainment industry, the statements can be interpreted as excuses. Veena Sud may be shifting blame onto the American audience instead of recognizing and admitting that miscalculations in marketing and in accounting for the new media system of the show could have been made, as my analysis indicates. In such a reading, the unverifiable constructions of national tastes and preferences expressed by Sud have less to do with national culture and more to do with basic human defense mechanisms and surviving in the US entertainment industry. Read either way, Sud's signature on the remake is unmistakable, illustrating the potential of the showrunner effect, and in a way challenging existing frameworks: National categories are certainly used in adapting a scripted format such as *The Killing*, but they are filtered through the subjective perceptions especially of the primary creative practitioner on the show-.

## Notes

1. I refer to *Forbrydelsen* to designate the DR-produced Danish series that aired between 2007 and 2012, and I refer to ~~The Killing~~ *The Killing* to designate the AMC/Netflix-produced American cable series produced and aired between 2011 and 2014.
2. This chapter is based on research that is developed on a larger scale in my study *The Showrunner Effect: System, Culture and Individual Agency in American Remakes of Danish Television Series* (Gemzøe 2018).

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