

**NEGOTIATING BORDER ANXIETIES:  
THE SWEDISH-DANISH SERIAL *THE BRIDGE* AND ITS EUROPEAN REMAKES**

**Rashmi Doraiswamy**

Academy of International Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi

Email: [rashmidee@gmail.com](mailto:rashmidee@gmail.com)

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**I: INTRODUCTION**

**Identity-in-Difference**

This paper analyses the first season of four series that were telecast on satellite television in Europe: *The Bridge*, *The Tunnel*, *Pagan Peak* and *Most*<sup>1</sup> (which means ‘bridge’ in Russian). The narrative of the first, with four seasons, was a Sweden-Denmark coproduction woven around the Oresund Bridge connecting Copenhagen with Malmo in Sweden. It was first released in 2011<sup>2</sup>. It was subsequently released in over a hundred countries including England<sup>3</sup>. The UK series, *The Tunnel*, with three seasons, ran from 2013 to 2018 in UK and France, the first bilingual broadcast show for both the countries. The Folkestone Harbour and Calais were the main locations along with the Channel Tunnel (the series was the first to shoot in this Tunnel).

There were several other adaptations: the US-Mexican *The Bridge* (2013); the Estonian-Russian *Most* (2016); the Malaysian-Singaporean *The Bridge* (2018) and the German-Austrian *Der Pass* (*Pagan Peak* / 2019). The Swedish-Danish and British-French series were playing in UK almost at the same time – such was the fascination for this series. The extraordinary ‘outreach’ of

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<sup>1</sup> I gratefully acknowledge my nephew, Priyaroop Singh, for having introduced me to these serials and for all the help and support he has extended to me for this paper.

<sup>2</sup> The series ran in Denmark and Sweden from 21 September 2011 – 18 February 2018.

<sup>3</sup> The first season of *The Bridge* was broadcast in UK in spring, 2012; the second in 2014; the third was shown in UK from November, 2015 and the fourth from 11 May 2018.

this series across continents points to the importance of the border and border crossings as identity markers in understanding issues of nationality and nationalism in the world today.

A corpse (made up from two separate female bodies) is found placed exactly on the border of two countries. Two detectives from the bordering countries investigate the cross-border murder(s). The idea of border-crossing and the idea of the borderland are what make these adaptation-remakes interesting. There is also the 'internationalisation' of crime, or at least the 'cross-borderisation' of crime, in that just as the investigators move from one country to other, the criminals, too, move and have bases and access to an infrastructure for committing their crimes across borders. The border also allows a framing of similarities and differences between the countries that are divided yet collaborating. These identity-in-differences range from the social and political to individual-psychological issues faced by the characters in the narrative.

### **The Four Series**

All the four European series are different-in-similarity from each other. The first season of the UK-French *The Tunnel* followed most of the plot of the Danish-Swedish version, but the later ones went off on a totally different narrative trajectory. *The Tunnel's* season one follows the Swedish-Danish series quite closely, but does not repeat everything. The differences are a viewer's delight, because they are not only of event, but also of nuance. Elise and Karl's meeting and hug at the end, after the death of his son in *The Tunnel* is one of the most poignant sequences in the four television series. The other two series (*The Bridge* and *Most*) have the female detective meeting her colleague who is recuperating in the hospital from the very shot fired by her to stop him from killing the Truth Terrorist (TT). Both *The Bridge* and *Most* end with the female detective on the bridge driving back to her country (Sweden/Estonia).

The macro narrative signposts in the four series remain the same: the body placed on the border of a connecting infrastructure between two countries, two detectives in charge of the case from two connected counties and the criminal whose crimes are transnational. In *Pagan Peak*, there is only a single body - not a body split into two halves as in the other three. The narrative is shot in the visually stunning alpine mountains and forests. In this, the villain is recognized very early on and his whole counter narrative of a man who, in delusion thinks he is 'saving the earth', is given its own space. As such, it is a very traditional narrative, unlike the decentred one thought up by Rosenfeldt, who wrote the original Swedish-Danish *The Bridge*. *Pagan Peak* goes into myths of the region and creates an ambience of evil that is compelling, but unlike the other three,

draws a lot on nature. The other three remember ‘pure’ nature in only a shot or two, in fact jolting us, and otherwise present nature (whether it is water or something else) as always marked by the touch of human civilization. *Pagan Peak*, therefore, is very different from the other three series. The mountain range is not the same as the constructed bridge/tunnel meant to connect two different countries.

The four series also reflect and emphasise different anxieties about the border.

## II: BORDER ANXIETIES

### *Border Anxiety 1: Integration*

#### **Bridges and Tunnels**

The bridges/tunnel are passageways across international borders. They are also areas under the control of the state. It is the state that the Truth Terrorist<sup>4</sup> directly draws the attention of and challenges, when he shuts off the lights on the bridge to position the two-bodies-as-one across the border. They are passageways that connect two countries that were separate. The borderlands created are coexistent and interdependent rather than integrated, given the differences in the political, social and cultural milieux.

What *The Bridge* sets up through its narrative is a sense of two connected places - Malmö and Copenhagen - that become a subregion by virtue of their connection in the larger region of Scandinavia/Nordic countries. This connectedness through a bridge or tunnel creates an imaginary that overflows the container of a nation-state. Images of Elise and Karl in *The Tunnel* waiting in the tunnel to cross over are in contrast to Martin and Saga driving across chatting away in bonhomie (Martin asks Saga what she did the previous evening; she replies she had sex; he laughs and asks her when she found the time for it). This smooth drive in *The Bridge* makes it seem quite simple and easy to speed over into another country, which is almost like an extension of one’s own. Citizens of a subregion seem seamlessly bound together. And yet, there is a difference: the feeling of being an outsider that suddenly surfaces, as when the male detective wants to buy flowers for a colleague in the other police station, whose birthday it is, and does not have the

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<sup>4</sup> In *Most*, the Truth Terrorist is called ‘*Borets za Pravdu*’, which translates as ‘Fighter for Truth’. This gives the villain a different connotation for a ‘fighter’ could well have noble intentions, whereas a terrorist does not.

required currency. He asks the female colleague for money and buys it (in *The Bridge* and *Most*) and gives it to the birthday colleague saying it is from both of them. The female detective protests saying this is untrue, since she had no intention of gifting flowers to her colleague. This small scene which has little relevance to the crime being investigated, is nonetheless very important for it shows the male detective to be an outsider vis-à-vis currency, but an 'insider' in the foreign police station in terms of social graces. The opposite is true for the female detective: an 'insider' in her own police station by virtue of being a citizen but an 'outsider', because of her lack of social graces.

### **The Body in Two Halves**

The bridge/tunnel that connects carries an invisible international border within it. The Truth Terrorist activates this border and brings it into view by placing the joined bodies carefully on it, with the cut in the middle of the body on the line. When the men come to take the body away, what they had thought was one body, comes apart showing the innards spilling out. This image is a powerful one repeated in *The Bridge/The Tunnel/Most* and shows how the organs spill out helter-skelter from the middle. The visceral quality of the image transcends the deep, dark restlessness of noir. In its materiality it is a metaphor for the bridge/tunnel that is supposed to be stitching over and covering a border, but which in actuality is messed up with so many inequalities, corruption and crimes.

### **European Integration**

The European Union was established in 1993. The Treaty on EU (TEU) formally established EU citizenship for citizens of member states. Since then, the issue of creating a European identity was an important one, with the realization that this identity would have to be forged at an experiential level beyond the establishment of economic and political policies and institutions. A supranational citizenship was being envisioned which was above national citizenship. The global recession and the Eurozone Debt Crisis in 2009 brought the issue of European integration under the Union under a cloud. The possibility of states, that were already members, leaving the Union arose. There were calls for re-nationalisation as against greater integration. Economic integration in the European Union did not immediately translate into political and ideological integration. There was too much diversity in political systems and values. National identity asserted itself above attempts to build

supranational identities. The theory of one territory, one people, one state was too deeply ingrained.

The setting up of a supranational identity had been attempted before in the USSR where Soviet citizens had the dual identity of belonging to one of the constituent republics as well as to the Soviet Union. In the same way, citizens in EU have a supranational identity as well as the citizenship of the country they belong to. This supranational identity, in being abstract, is difficult to form bonds with: “Connecting citizenship to culture and constructing them as ‘European’ makes Union Citizenship look like nationality. Union Citizenship does not necessarily mean to do something but rather to be European”<sup>5</sup>. There was also a softening of borders within the Union and a hardening of borders with the neighbours of the EU, with some even calling it ‘Fortress Europe’, post the fall of the ‘Iron Curtain’.

### **Border Regions**

*The Bridge* deals with two kinds of borders: on the one hand, the periphery of the EU as border (the northern states Sweden and Denmark) and the bridged border between Malmo and Copenhagen, creating a sub-region *within* the larger region of the Scandinavian/Nordic countries, *within* the European Union. There has been a concerted attempt to focus on these borders, despite the fact that the Scandinavian countries are some of the most developed in the world: “By investing in border regions, the EU not only hopes to even out living standards, but to create the possibility of more productive interactions among border populations. Some interventions have been rather imaginative and productive such as the EuroAirport – which simultaneously serves Basel in Switzerland, Mulhouse in France and Freiberg in Germany – or the bridge between Denmark and Sweden (completed in 2000) that has brought Copenhagen and Malmo much closer together”<sup>6</sup>.

In the era of globalization, the region is the buffer between the local/national and the global. Regionalisation becomes an important mode of transnational economic transactions. In this building of connecting links (a bridge or tunnel), what is interesting is that the link is between two cities (which may or may not be the capitals of their respective countries) and so carry the

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Union Citizenship Representing Conceptual (Dis)continuities in EU Documents on Citizenship and Culture’, Katja Makinen, *Contributions to the History of Concepts*, Vol 9, No 1 (Summer 2014), p. 115.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Border Towns and Cities in Comparative Perspective’, Paul Nugent in *A Companion to Border Studies*, Thomas M Wilson, Hastings Donnan (eds.), Wiley Blackwell, UK, 2012, p. 565.

international border somewhere in between. The transnationalism here is an active one, for a subregion between two countries is being established. If the ties become really strong and integrated, the subregion may well become deterritorialized from the country it is a part of. According to James Wesley Scott, "...Euroregions can be understood as spatial metaphors in the sense that they evoke a sense of transnational community, developed in free association and contributing to wider European integration. Cross-border cooperation has thus been promoted by the EU on the assumption that national and local identities can be complemented (perhaps partly transcended) and goals of development realized within a broader – a European – vision of community"<sup>7</sup>. The creation of transnational linkages is seen as promoting the further creation of a supranational identity.

*The Bridge* and its remakes all refer to these regional enclaves within the European Union, where there is not only a link (a constructed bridge or tunnel or a natural mountainous border) but also a common cultural milieu. While the Swedish-Danish link is the most integrated one, the Russian-Estonian region is a problematic one.

### ***Nordic/Scandinavian Region***

The Nordic countries (Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark) have a historical relationship that goes back centuries. The Nordic Passport Union has allowed citizens of the Nordic countries for decades to travel freely across designated borders. The Nordic countries are all democracies, welfare states and some of the more peaceful and wealthy countries on this planet. Within the Nordic countries, there is a further distinction of the Scandinavian countries which includes Denmark, Sweden and Norway.

It flows from this cultural and political bonding as 'Nordic' and 'Scandinavian' that Sweden and Denmark should come up with a co-production like *The Bridge* which captures the imagination of a globalized world that is trying to deal with new issues of identity. Both countries have excellent traditions of auteur filmmaking and series. They also have a distinctive genre of evolved thrillers that go under the name of Nordic or Scandinavian Noir which have cultivated a niche and dedicated audience and readership in Europe and in the world at large. Given the close-knit nature of the Scandinavian countries, a favourable climate exists for the transnational

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<sup>7</sup> 'European Politics of Borders, Border Symbolism and Cross Border Cooperation', James Wesley Scott in *A Companion to Border Studies*, op.cit., p. 91.

exchange of finances and personnel that coproductions entail and the production, distribution and marketing of cultural goods; and the adoption of new technologies would have enabled the conception and execution of a transnational noirish whodunit.

### ***Russia-Estonia Links***

Estonia joined the EU in 2004. It had been part of the Soviet Union before it became independent in 1991. The Friendship Bridge was constructed in 1960 during Soviet times and connected Narva in Estonia with Ivangorod in Russia: “By the end of the 1980s Estonian Narva was a ‘rather typical Soviet industrial town with a predominantly Russian population mostly formed by migrants and their descendants’.... The two cities constituted an integrated geographic and social space. After 1991, as the former administrative border became an international one, Narva has been marginalized due to its geographic location and ‘problematic’ ethnic composition. Ivangorod, the former satellite of Narva on the Russian side, has been cut from the common infrastructure and social network and turned into a Russian border town”<sup>8</sup>. The bridge here is, therefore, a monument to a socio-politically and economically more vibrant past and a comparatively jaded relationship as a region today. The emphasis in *Most* is on transnational cooperation to solve the crimes at hand; it is not aimed at the creation of a regional or supranational identity.

Thousands of Russians found themselves stateless after the fall of the Soviet Union, since Estonia did not offer citizenship automatically to all Russians who were in Estonia after independence. Estonia ran two integration programmes for Russians: the first in 2000 was designed to ‘domesticate’ Russians and produce Estonian-ness in them. The second integration programme from 2008 to 2013 acknowledged that integration was dependent on both Estonians and Russians.

This tension between Estonia and the Russian-speaking population within it is highlighted in the episode about the unjust killing of a Russian’s son in *Most* by the police. In *The Bridge* and *The Tunnel* it is a Muslim migrant’s son who is killed. TT ‘delivers’ the errant police officer who has been let off by the judiciary to the brother and father of the killed youth. They do not take revenge (although TT expects them to) and instead let him go. In the chaos and riots that follow in

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<sup>8</sup> ‘Borders and Memory’, Tatiana Zhurzhenko in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Border Studies*, Doris Wastl-Walter (ed.), Routledge, New York, 2016, p. 75.

this 'alien' neighbourhood within the city, TT in police riot gear and car kills the murderer police officer.

If *The Bridge*, *The Tunnel* and *Pagan Peak* are about collaboration and the creation of the supranational, *Most* is about the post-supranational national. It is about accepting that Estonia is a different, independent country. It is also about accepting that Estonia is now part of the post Cold War world order of being part of the EU and of Europe. If anything, the first series of *Most* is exemplary in not showing any nostalgia for the Soviet past. (The references to Estonia being European is made several times in this season).

*The Bridge* and *The Tunnel* represent countries on the borders of the EU (pre-Brexit). The Russia-Estonia series represent a double border, of being on the border of the EU but also of two countries, one of which is not in the EU. What is also of interest is the role the bridges play as topography. If in the case of both *The Bridge* and *The Tunnel* the issue is one of integration (even if pre-Brexit), in the case of *Most* it is about finding peace after separation, moving on, and accepting the new terms.

### **National Differences**

*The Bridge* is clearly not a narrative that is national with international links (for example, like the *British* spy James Bond, going all over the globe, hunting down political villains who threaten the western world order). Analogous to the body on the border, the narrative in *The Bridge* is split in the middle and belongs to two countries. Its genesis is dual. What, then, is the value of the 'national' in a narrative such as this?

The fall of the Soviet Union, the end of the bipolarity of power relations of the Cold War period, the integration of Europe and the expansion of the European Union along with globalization remain the important political events post-1980s. The nation state as container, as bounded territory, became porous through processes of economic and political globalisation. The state or nation have not withered away. While the mobility of capital was unfettered with the end of protectionism, the mobility of labour became subject to ever more restrictions. There is the rhetoric of a borderless world, but post-1991 more borders have come into being than ever before. There is also talk of post-nationalism, even as nationalist ideologies based on identity politics have resurfaced with a fierceness not seen for decades. Media and communication technologies and the



creation of virtual space further put concept of the well-bounded nation-state that contained its citizens under erasure.

*The Bridge* addresses the issue of the national co-existing with the post-national. On the one hand, it creates a narrative in which the national ‘spills out’, and on the other, shows crime’s outreach into two countries. While the Swedish and Danish detectives ‘cooperate’, the criminal has gone transnational weaving a complex web of crime across borders and getting the detectives to chase him now on this side, now on the other side of the border.

In *The Bridge* we see a representation of what Thomas Elsaesser called ‘self-othering’: “Post-national pastiche as well as self-othering represent more fluid forms of European identity, appealing to audiences receptive to films from Britain, France, Germany or Spain. They can play the role of the non-antagonistic other, against whom a national (or regional) cinema does not assert its identity in difference, but to whom it presents itself as the impersonation of ‘difference’<sup>9</sup>. The outsider fits in, the insider is a misfit. The business of ‘fitting in’ really has to do with larger human graces rather than country or any other marker. This is a post-national identity. There are several conversations between the two leads in *The Tunnel* on the British sense of humour. “You would have liked my sister; she had a sense of humour,” says Elise to Karl in *The Tunnel*. Elise does not laugh at Karl’s jokes because she is a misfit and not because she is French. The national stereotype of Britishness is invoked for Karl (his sense of humour) but Elise is beyond the national. She perfectly understands the self-image the Britisher has of himself as a stereotype and consequently of her as another stereotype and refuses to play along.

In *Most*, Kazantsev at one point tells Inga Veermaa her views are strange, even for a European! In this statement, he ‘others’ her from being an Estonian (her national identity) and locates her on the outer periphery of a supposed Europeaness! In saying this, he simultaneously distances himself from her identity, playing what Elsaesser called the ‘non-antagonistic other’. There is also an example of the antagonistic other in *Most*: The Estonian mother of the runaway teenager daughter tells her, “How many times do I have to tell you not to speak to me in Russian?”

There is an interesting moment of a deliberate ambivalent nationalism in *The Bridge* when the Truth Terrorist calls the journalist he manipulates into writing about his crimes: “Do you

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<sup>9</sup> ‘ImpersoNations’ in *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood*, Thomas Elsaesser, Amsterdam University Press, 2005, p. 72.

understand my Danish?” he asks, through the mike that electronically distorts his voice. The question deliberately fudges its signified which could be: ‘I am Danish and do you understand my distorted voice?’ or ‘I am Swedish and do you understand the Danish I am speaking as a Swede?’ Danish and Swedish are similar languages and the police forces are trying figure whether TT is Danish or Swedish.

### **Border Anxiety 2: Coproductions and Adaptations**

#### **European Media Spheres**

The maintenance of plurality and diversity in the media landscape were the main issues at the time of the formation of the European Union. The issues of national sovereignty and protectionism become important when media companies got bought up across borders. Cultural products, in terms of national values, were entities were ‘lost out’ in these mergers and sales: “Between 1989-90, 81 mergers and acquisitions within the European Community were announced in the media industry; 37 of these affecting television. In 1990 there were some 57 media industry mergers and acquisitions in the European Community, compared with 20 in the United States and 6 in the rest of the world (mainly Japan) although the value of the transactions in the United States and Japan was far greater. It was the degree of merger activity and the concern for media concentration which prompted the European Parliament to call for action”<sup>10</sup>.

The European Commission put forward proposals for a legal framework on media mergers and takeovers to ensure that minimum professional standards are guaranteed in its resolution of 15 February 1990. Freedom of expression was to be guaranteed. Journalistic ethics were to be protected. At the end of 1992 a Green Paper on ‘Pluralism and Media Concentration in the Internal Market: An Assessment of the Need for Community Action’ was brought out by the European Commission.

Globalisation has made the transnational circulation of cultural products, both in terms of new technologies and in terms of mobilities, visible and rapid. Protectionism and technological firewalls have also come into place. National identity has become diffused in this era of global transmission and has found new ways of asserting itself and disseminating information about itself.

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<sup>10</sup> Media Ownership and Control: A European Approach, L. P. Hitchens, *The Modern Law Review*, Vol 57, No 4, July 1994, p. 586.

Narratives, representations, symbols – are simultaneously local and global, and this is nowhere more true than in series that are broadcast in many parts of the world and in particular, series that are coproductions. The remakes and adaptations further amplify how national/regional narratives have taken on global resonance. Genres and forms that embody issues of local-global relevance thus chart paths of legitimate and illegitimate circulation. National sovereignty is not on the wane, but has found ways of aligning and intertwining with regional and global concerns. It has become an important part of global coexistence and is reflected not only in patterns of production and distribution, but also in genre, aesthetic style, etc.

Given these debates about the media since the 1990s in Europe, it is not surprising that the manipulation of the media by the Truth Terrorist is an important theme in *The Bridge* and its remakes. The character of the journalist, controlled by TT, is given a differently nuanced interpretation in both *The Bridge* and *The Tunnel*. His arrogance, his substance abuse, his sudden desire to free a kidnapped child and his pre-decided fate are some of the highlights of how the media is represented in the series.

### **Adaptations**

The adaptations of the original *The Bridge*, which was a very successful serial, were assured of an audience that was new (that is, seeing the series for the first time) as well as an audience that had seen the other versions and was eager to see the differences the new adaptation had to offer. The play of knowing what to expect and the unexpected in the genre of the whodunit is at work here. *The Bridge* has created a criminal who not only zigzags between two countries committing crimes but also manipulates others to commit them on his behalf and broadcasts it on the net to boot!

Coproductions stress the importance of the region precisely in the time of globalization, as a defence against it. The series is a little bulwark of the regional within the processes of globalization. Each version, through production, distribution and the content of a ‘paired narrative’ with a regional topography reaches out to a global audience. In production and distribution, coproductions help in sharing resources and markets, cutting costs, etc. Coproductions can also avail of funds marked for culture in the European Union. There is little that is pristinely ‘national’ in this. National concerns and narratives are no longer paramount. Since it is a coproduction, there is a limit to treading on the other country’s toes. The Swedish-Danish *The Bridge* has Saga Noren

criticize the way the Danish conduct their work at the police station several times before Martin Rohde finally asks her to shut up.

### **Border Anxiety 3: Gendering**

#### **The Detective Binary**

We cannot understand Saga Noren only as an individual, without her binary counterpart, Martin Rohde. The importance of this binary is that gender roles are reversed. What is taken to be ‘normal’ or the norm for men/women has been almost mechanically reversed, to interesting narrative effects. The woman has no maternal instinct (the response to the male counterpart asking if she has any children is always about her not seeing the need for children, and very specifically, as not seeing having children as even a necessary mark of identity of being female). The male, on the contrary, is so fecund that he has five children from three women. In two of the series (*The Bridge* and *The Tunnel*) he has recently undergone vasectomy<sup>11</sup>. On the one hand, there is overvaluation of the reproductive function to a point where medical intervention is sought and, on the other, the undervaluation of the reproduction function. Having a family life/not having a family is the strongest gender reversal in terms of binaries in this series.

The female detective has no qualms about changing her clothes and exposing her torso in the office. She goes out and picks up men at bars for sex fearlessly initiating the process. She is a workaholic and works consecutive days and nights without rest. She calls up her male counterpart at all hours of the night to ask him to get to work on some aspect of the case. She is the stickler for rules, giving in official complaints against her partner for being ‘more flexible’/‘more compassionate’ in allowing a van with an organ for transplant go across the border which has been sealed off as a crime scene (*The Bridge, Most*), or allowing Madame Joubert to come in for questioning at a later date according to her convenience (*The Tunnel*). It is the male who keeps landing up at the counterpart’s office with early morning buns/croissants and keeps offering them to the receptionist or to his partner. The female detective has no such ‘nurturing’ qualities. In *Pagan Peak*, however, it is Ellie Stocker who gets German pastries for Winter, which he curtly declines. It is of interest that only in *Most* does the ‘other’ side also have something that compares

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<sup>11</sup> In *Most* the male detective does not seem to have had vasectomy. This aspect of the protagonist’s life was left out in the adaptation probably because it was not important for Russia, a country with an ageing population and population deficit.

with the buns from St Petersburg that Kazantsev brings with him. In Inga's assistant, Wilma's house, there is cheese that cannot be got in Russia.

*Pagan Peak* differs in its not having the two detectives broadly follow the character traits of the original. The female detective (who is also in lead and in charge as in the other three) is a tough detective, fully capable of insisting and following on leads, but not suffering from any health syndrome (as suggested in the other three series) or from a lack of social graces. In fact, she is so tough, she can herself skin animals that have been hunted and taken down. The male detective suffers from addiction and is into shady deals, and not married or interested in philandering (as the other three were). He does not have a family, so there is no son to be killed by the terrorist. In the finale the male detective is shot at. This detective 'couple', therefore, is more in the traditional mould of an eager/disinterested binary.

In the three other series, it is the male partner who tries to 'teach' the female social graces, which often are 'feminine' graces (accept the flowers given to you, say 'Thank You' to your colleagues, praise your colleagues for work done, etc.).

Saga/Elise/Inga cross gender borders constantly, without any ambivalence or anxiety and without giving it a second thought. The fact of her belonging to the autistic spectrum, for 'lacking social graces', of suffering from Asperger's syndrome is emphasized in popular and academic writings about the serial, rather than being underscored in the serial itself: "Noren may be somewhere on the autistic spectrum, rarely sparing the feeling of others, but her obliqueness nonetheless has something important to tell us about the condition of being female in what Jacqueline Rose has called the 'dark times' while taking us deep into the landscape involving injustice and inequalities"<sup>12</sup>. The male detective, Gedeon Winter in the Austrian-German *Pagan Peak* does not extend the usual courtesies to his German partner, Ellie Stocker, is something of an addict, and is moreover not interested initially in the case. He does not need any explanation for his anti-social behaviour by associating it with some illness. When Stocker tells the Austrian Winter that the body is laid across the border stone, and that his upper body is in Austria and legs in Germany, Winter replies, "Let's be very German and correct. One of us gets the head, the other

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<sup>12</sup> 'Disconnected Heroine, Icy Intelligence: Reframing Feminism (s) and Feminist Identities at the Borders Involving the Isolated Female TV Detective in Scandinavian-Noir', Janet McCabe in *Feminisms: Diversity, Difference and Multiplicity in Contemporary Film Cultures*, Laura Mulvey, Anna Backman Rogers, Amsterdam University Press, 2015, p. 29.

the ass”! In fact, there is a long literary tradition of eccentric sleuths, whose brilliance is in proportion to their eccentricity (Sherlock Holmes, Hercule Poirot, to name just two). Saga Noren/Elise Wassermann/Inga Veermaa, however, do not get accorded the same privilege, although their penetrative, intuitive brilliance, too, matches their eccentricity.

Despite her ‘strangeness’, Saga Noren’s reading of social situations is apt and she has a sharp sense of economic equality. Her commitment to social welfare comes through in her sharp retort to the husband on the murdered politician, Kerstin Ekwall’s plans to charge for library loans: “She would have increased social differences if reading becomes a money matter”. She even admonishes the four businessmen who have been summoned to pay the ransom demanded by TT for the release of the homeless man: “Of course, you stockpile your money and take no social responsibility”. The abattoir owner, Elise goes to investigate says, ‘Wassermann is a Jewish name’. Elise responds by stating that her father was Jewish, her mother – Catholic – but she does not care for such things anyway. What is perceived as ‘strangeness’ in the female detective, actually allows her in all three series to discard identity politics and pinpoint inequalities.

It is finally the undervaluation/overvaluation of the reproductive function that holds the key to the narrative conflicts in the series. When the male detective enters his home in all three series (*The Bridge*, *The Tunnel*, *Most*), he first enters his eldest son’s room. The son is the ‘problem’, always on his computer with a strong dislike of the father and a rebellious attitude, although he usually helps his stepmother out when she needs his help. He is the ‘weak link’ the Truth Terrorist hits on, ensnaring him online in the guise of an ex-girlfriend.

While both detectives have a casual attitude to sex, both of them availing of the opportunity whenever it presents itself, in the case of the man, it is complicated by its effects on his family life. This is the ‘original’ sin in the case of the male detective: in all three series the male detective has slept with the wife of a colleague (TT) many years ago. The affair takes a serious turn and the wife leaves the husband. She is involved in a fatal accident on the Oresund Bridge where both she and the son die. TT then entices the male detective’s current wife. He then murders the son. The loss for the male detective is doubly painful since he has only recently become very close to his son.

There is, therefore, a sexual ethics that the series charts out: the female detective, for all her casual pick-ups, does not endanger the nation and state by indirectly creating an unhinged terrorist. It is the man with his casual philandering who is a threat to the institution of the family, first the colleague’s who becomes TT as a result, and later, a threat to his own family. It is the male

detective who is ultimately responsible for endangering nation(s) and state(s). As the words of the last line in the title song in the Swedish-Danish series ominously state – “For everything goes back to the beginning”. There is also the criticism that parents abdicate their responsibilities towards their children. This comes out very strongly in the sub-plot of the runaway teenage girl and the male detective’s eldest son, both of whom die (in *The Bridge* and *Most*) indirectly as a result of this lack of parental attention at the right time.

### **Female-Male Pairing**

*The Bridge*, *The Tunnel* and *Most* are similar in their narratives with differences.

What is interesting is to see which country in the adaptation gets the female detective and which the male:

<b>SERIES</b>	<b>FEMALE</b>	<b>COUNTRY</b>	<b>MALE</b>	<b>COUNTRY</b>
<i>The Bridge</i>	Saga Noren	Sweden	Martin Rohde	Denmark
<i>The Tunnel</i>	Elise Wassermann	France	Karl Roebuck	England
<i>Most</i>	Inga Veermaa	Estonia	Maksim Kazantsev	Russia
<i>Pagan Peak</i>	Ellie Stocker	Germany	Gedeon Winter	Austria

In the case of two (Sweden-Denmark and Germany-Austria) the female detective is from the larger, stronger, better off country<sup>13</sup>. In the case of France and England, both are of equal valency. *Most* is particularly interesting because Russia is clearly the bigger and stronger country, but it is the male detective who is from Russia.

The female detective in *Most* is played by a Lithuanian actress, Ingeborga Dapkunaite. In her interpretation of the character she makes her seem almost robotic. Her portrayal of Inga’s eccentricity is extreme, more so than Saga or Elise (who is the ‘softest’ among the three). Saga is blunt but not stiff or mechanical.

### **Border Anxiety 4: The Borders Within**

#### **The Truth Terrorist**

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<sup>13</sup> This is only on a comparative scale. Denmark is a serious contributor to Scandinavian noir with its own cult series and strong women investigators. Sarah Lund in *The Killing* is one such.

The Truth Terrorist is a new kind of villain. He is a criminal and a killer, but he does more. He poses questions in the public domain by broadcasting the event or getting it written about by manipulating a journalist. The act of criminality becomes reality television of sorts. What he does is to pose five questions that go into the heart of the Scandinavian countries being ‘welfare’ states. The questions that centre around prostitutes, students, the homeless, the marginalized, the most vulnerable (old people, migrants, children and child labour) - point to the internal fissures within these welfare societies. He further manipulates these fissures by going deep into the contradiction, making it sometimes difficult to choose sides – the Muslim migrant youth who is killed for no fault of his by the police and the riots that ensue; the homeless old man who is held who in *The Tunnel* turns out to have killed someone wrongly when he was younger or who is a terrible bully in *The Bridge*. At other times the issue is so clear-cut and populist (as in the case of multinationals employing child labour) that he actually lets off a kidnapped child every time the mob does what he has asked them to do (via his reality tv) which is to set a specific company on fire. The Truth Terrorist, thus, knows how to exploit contradictions to his advantage. Apart from this, he also is transnational in his criminal activities, working with precision, and it seems, effortlessly, across two countries. He seems to be the master of psychological manipulation.

It is on a bridge that unites two countries and acts as a passage for people to move freely across countries, that he lays two bodies that initially seem as one, of a high ranking woman official and a ‘low’ – in social terms – prostitute/student on the border. This is the first crime – a crime so innovative, not just in this particular narrative we are witnessing, but also in terms of the genre of noir crimes – that grabs the attention of the police and the internet audience of two countries. The first fissure he points to – and the point gets made effectively – is that no one had cared to investigate the missing prostitute until the elite politician was ‘coupled’ with her. The border is the site of ‘everyday performativity’ till it is realized that this is no ordinary crime. It is only when it is realized that the body is not ‘whole’ but is halved and halved with two women from different social backgrounds from two countries, that the actual extent of the performativity of the crime on the border gets acknowledged.

Hans Rosenfeldt, the writer of the original Danish-Swedish script, is master of what I would like to call the ‘escalation of contradictions’. He multiplies everything – the crimes, the countries, the detectives, the police by two and through this manifold cross-border story, keeps us on the edge through the narrative.



It is not just the criminal who is interesting; the range and extent of manipulative crimes is also new in this serial. The criminal ‘mirrors’ the male detective. In fact, he is a far more intelligent and thorough one. His house has the plan, planned over several years, plastered all over the walls, with neatly filed boxes, which even the police stations in two countries do not. He manages to keep the detectives of two countries driving across the bridge, always a step behind him. It is the transnational nature of the crimes and their investigation that is innovative about this serial. This is not about calling out to Interpol or Scotland Yard or some other foreign agency for help to catch a criminal who crosses borders.

The noir component, therefore, is about the cities and regions that create the possibility of such crimes and the protagonists who carry the burden of their deeply flawed personae (whether it is the male detective or the male criminal, who are actually broken mirror images of each other).

All through the series it is the female detective, constantly made to realise how out of the normal she is, who has the sharp intellect to make the most important breakthroughs in the case. It is she who says TT is not a serial killer, that he works alone, and that he wants to teach the police a lesson.

### **The New Villainy**

TT not only kills according to a preplanned project for revenge, but is, through his actions, making borders visible and also obliterating them. He web casts and further disseminates information about his crimes through the media to create a public sphere that is made aware of inequalities and borders within society. The servers he uses are not traceable; the one that can be traced is a police server itself! This coupled with surveillance footage of the city creates a web of images that make the entire city seem like reality television. Here too TT is a step ahead, aware of all the surveillance cameras that allow him never to reveal his face. For TT the virtual world is truly borderless. TT’s actions draw attention to borders within society, but also demonstrate that interior and exterior cannot be distinguished, what with the rapidity of the crimes that get committed across the border. The burning down of factories that employ child labour has spread the ‘public sphere’ that he has created so far and wide that members of the public now respond directly to his calls. He is the master manipulator of the experience of the transnational on a daily basis.

It becomes clear in the end that TT was on a suicide mission to avenge the death of his wife and son. The five truths of the Truth Terrorist that had managed to agitate the public and police transnationally in two countries, was actually just a cover for his own actions of personal revenge. The two countries were involved because the people who had not allowed the punishment through law of the man who had caused the accident that had killed his wife and child on the very bridge that the narrative begins on. According to Mark Slater, the border should not be conceived as a line, but a suture that stitches the inside and outside and in so doing, leaves behind a scar.<sup>14</sup> The mammoth edifice of social issues, constructed by the Truth Terrorist, was nothing but personal vendetta. Apart from the actual people who were involved in the deliberate miscarriage of justice, there is collateral damage in the killing of the young runaway girl, and others (such as the driver of the children's school bus in *The Tunnel*). All this finally leads to TT taking revenge by murdering the male detective's son. The narrative constructed by TT comes full circle.

The border in *The Bridge* is not just a line or a non-place. It does not mean the same or behave in a similar way for everyone. The bridges and tunnel show a space and cities that is connected yet different with differing architectural styles, but make the connected spaces the centre. We do not see them as peripheries. They are borderlands, defined by the connecting bridge/tunnel. This sense is missing in *Pagan Peak*, where the mountains do not give the feel either of connectivity of bustling cities on either side. What it substitutes instead in its place is the sense of foreboding and mystery that the natural landscape provides.

The Truth Terrorist not only activates the invisible border on the bridge/in the tunnel/on the mountain, but also shows how socio-economic borders are everywhere in both the countries. The first incident on the international border was to activate the police into getting involved in a chase meticulously designed and planned by TT. The remaining examine real, physical, virtual, economic and social borders in the cities. Borders between the rich and the poor, aliens and natives are everywhere. The police, criminals, social workers, state and non-state actors - all move across borders freely.

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<sup>14</sup> 'Theory of the / : The Suture and Critical Border Studies', Mark B Salter in *Critical Border Studies: Broadening and Deepening the 'Lines in the Sand' Agenda*, Noel Parker and Nick Vaughan-Williams (eds.), Routledge, London, 2014, p 8.

### III: NEGOTIATIONS

#### Connectedness of Events

*The Bridge* and its adaptations raise different issues for the various regions the series cover, but they also all raise common issues of governance and inequality before law that concern the contemporary world.

*The Bridge* charts the transnational nature of these issues; what concerns one country will concern the other, since it is connected. Solutions to problems have to be sought together.

*The Bridge* and its remakes also inscribe this aspect of being double in the narrative and also in the title in the two languages of the country they cover (the Swedish-Danish *Bron/Broen*; Russian-Estonian *Most/Sild*) with the title song also in two languages.

The transnational narrative also poses challenges in the way a narrative is shot. It could be unwieldy because of the sheer scale of the material involved. The Swedish-Danish *The Bridge* is the most complex in the way the story unfolds. Intercutting and sound bridges play an important role in 'binding' this extensive material.

Film and television companies have long been financing each others' products and sharing personnel. Cinema's influence on the televisual image, particularly in the digital era, is immense. The televisual image has become cinematic. This is reflected in *The Bridge* in the saturation of the image, the consistency of the colour palette and the mise-en-scene. Most significantly, it is reflected in the intercutting and the sound bridges (that link events across space and time), which are used very effectively. TT has unleashed a reign of terror, where even before the police are able to understand one crime, a second one has already been launched, or a second tragedy is unfolding on its own. This requires an 'insertion' of the new event into the already 'matured' previous crime, and an editing principle that manages the new with the old. An example of this is in the theme of Anja, the runaway teenage girl, who is first seen shoplifting. The seedling of this theme is planted in the already developed theme of the homeless in Denmark and Sweden being targeted by TT with Sonja and Bjorg's stories having unfolded. By the time the 'event' of the homeless people has run its course, the groundwork for the next 'event' planned by TT (of Anja and the schizophrenic samurai) has already been laid. The girl who has been rendered homeless, who wanders the streets, without fear or bitterness or sadness, who trustingly spends a few days with the samurai, is one of the most moving episodes in the series because she was not a planned target

for murder. This is not a ‘slice of life’ intercutting, where temporally simultaneous events are being shown; this is much more, where from within the ‘kernel’ of a specific time frame, the next horrific crime will unfold.

### **City Imagery**

The connected cities are industrial ones, developed and bustling with activity. The images of the cities have smoke coming out of furnaces, huge cranes that are being used to build and develop the cities, huge buildings that house offices and homes. The concrete and glass structures of these massive buildings and the small scale of humans against them is emphasized in all the series. The Swedish-Danish *The Bridge* has stunning night images of the cities; lights cast a golden, warm glow. It is indeed a strange twist to the traditional noir imagery of the night that contains the ominous within it. Here the yellow glow of the night imagery is like sunlight, as compared to the bleak light of the daytime. *The Tunnel* has wonderful images of the harbour and waterfront and of huge container trucks that move in disciplined circular formations. *Most* has huge residential complexes from the Soviet period and socialist architecture. In all this imagery of the highly developed industrial cities, which seem to be economically thriving and well connected, there are also the very different enclaves of the homeless and the ‘aliens’. The grocery shops and the ‘connected’ homes of the ‘aliens’ and the mean streets of these enclaves are captured in contrast. The crazed, almost topless Sonja, falling in to the ditch water is one of the most disturbing images of *The Bridge*.

The cities are well connected with the outside not just because of the bridge or tunnel but also because of the parallel speeding trains and water transport that is made visible throughout. *The Bridge* and *Most*, in particular, have moving trains through the city landscape, the latter as a silhouette in the night and the former with a ‘glowing’ train moving like a plump caterpillar in the night. The images of the bridge itself, as of the tunnel, as a huge marvel of engineering, is emphasized in all the three series (*The Bridge*, *The Tunnel*, *Most*). The Swedish-Danish series shows the Oresund Bridge in all seasons, in mist, in the rain and in winter with icicles formed along it. These images of the city are not just fillers between episodes or pauses between events; they serve to stress that it is an economic hub and node, connected to other nodes, in other words, that it is transnational.

## **Conclusion**

The narrative structure of *The Bridge* is top heavy. It raises issues of corruption, misuse of power, migrants and aliens, the homeless, the vulnerable - all in the framework of political, economic and legal equality. The issues raised have global relevance. This massive structure of issues devolves into a narrative of personal vendetta where a brilliant police officer, who believes he did not get justice and has been wronged, goes rogue. He stages his own death and is resurrected with a new, unrecognizable face as a mastermind criminal, who is out to get revenge.

This intertwining of the social with the personal points to the core of the issue the writer and the series are raising: the moral issue of the family that extends to nations, transnations and the world. This is a moral issue, not an ethical one. “He lets everyone down, me, my mother, his (current) wife”, says the eldest son of the male detective to the female detective. “That is the way he is”. It is this indictment that resonates, for it is not just about a father who let his son down, but about the welfare states that let their citizens down, the governance that does not extend equally to all and lets the vulnerable down and so on in a great chain, across borders. While the series ends with the murders being ‘solved’ and the criminal ‘caught’, the tragic import of the questions raised and events unleashed are too great to get adequate closure. The wounds remain, most of all on the father, who had just accepted his failings and was getting closer to his estranged son....

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