

# The Geopolitics of Nordic Noir

## *Representations of current threats and vigilantes in contemporary Danish and Norwegian serial drama*

Klaus Dodds<sup>I</sup> & Tobias Hochscherf<sup>II</sup>

<sup>I</sup>Department of Geography, Royal Holloway University of London, UK

<sup>II</sup>Media Department, University of Applied Sciences Kiel, Germany

### Abstract

The “golden age” of Scandinavian television has often been associated with Nordic Noir crime dramas, yet many of the acclaimed serials also engage with geopolitical themes such as migration, cross-border crime, military conflicts, and global terrorism. In this article, we examine the ways in which Nordic Noir contributes to discourses on such topics. We look specifically at the dramas *Okkupert* [*Occupied*] (NRK, 2015–), *Ørnen* [*The Eagle*] (DR, 2004–2006), *Nobel – fred for enhver pris* [*Nobel – Peace at any Cost*] (NRK, 2016), and *Kriger* [*Warrior*] (Netflix, 2018–) as they explore potential threats to Scandinavian society and the Nordic welfare state through the distinct figure of the vigilante veteran. Returning soldiers, as we argue, are particularly productive of geopolitics because they are shown to be adept (even well suited) to dealing with the geopolitical uncanny. They, in fact, problematise the positive Scandinavian self-image. While Scandinavian society, as can be inferred from the dramas, has become hypocritical and complacent owing to a very high standard of living, the veterans are the only people adept at responding to threats and crises.

**Keywords:** vigilantes, terrorism, returning soldiers, post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD, television

### Introduction

The rise of complex drama coincided with a “golden age” of Scandinavian television. The opportunities of serial narration or “complex television” (Mittell, 2010; Dunleavy, 2018) – including character-centred plots, multiperspectivity, and long-lasting storylines – have been picked up by Scandinavian public service broadcasters and independent companies to produce a remarkable set of television dramas. While there has been a growing interest in Scandinavian Nordic Noir aesthetics and narratives (Jensen & Waade, 2013; Creeber, 2015), its reception (Degn & Krogager, 2017), and Scandinavian production culture (Redvall, 2013; Gamula & Mikos, 2014; Jensen et al., 2016; Hochscherf & Philipsen, 2017), few scholars have looked at recurring themes of global crises and international relations.

---

Dodds, K., & Hochscherf, T. (2020). The geopolitics of Nordic Noir: Representations of current threats and vigilantes in contemporary Danish and Norwegian serial drama. *Nordicom Review*, 41(Special Issue 1), 43–61. <https://doi.org/10.2478/nor-2020-0015>

This article focuses on several case studies that illustrate ways in which contemporary Danish and Norwegian serial drama engages with migration, cross-border crime, military conflicts, and global terrorism that pose a threat to what is believed to be an advantageous welfare state and open society. These are issues and challenges commonly thought to be “geopolitical” because they directly address the capacity of states and federations of states to regulate their borders, manage national territories and anticipate threats to homeland security (Dodds, 2019). Our conceptual opening part examines how Nordic Noir contributes to lively debates within political geography and television studies about its popular geopolitical qualities in relation to the creative possibilities for and consequence of the television serial (on popular geopolitics as subfield, see, e.g., Saunders & Strukov, 2018; Dittmer & Bos, 2019). Thereafter we take a closer look at the dramas *Okkupert* [*Occupied*] (NRK, 2015–), *Ørnen* [*The Eagle*] (DR, 2004–2006), *Nobel – fred for enhver pris* [*Nobel – Peace at any Cost*] (NRK, 2016), and *Kriger* [*Warrior*] (Netflix, 2018–). The latter three help us to explore further the multifaceted geographies of threat and the potential and scope of the distinct figure of the vigilante. Returning soldiers, who take justice into their own hands, are particularly productive of geopolitics because they are shown to be adept (even well-suited) to dealing with the unsettling world of uncertainty and conflict. We can only provide a cursory look at the aforementioned shows here. Rather than offering a comprehensive reading, our focus is on addressing how a distinctive Nordic Noir geopolitics is assembled through these television serials. Our conclusions touch upon further potential for teasing out a Nordic Noir geopolitics, which we contend is creatively attentive to how political elites and citizens work with everyday information gaps, institutional frailties, and uncertain and potentially threatening geopolitical circumstances. Nordic Noir geopolitics operates in a cultural and geopolitical context that is far removed from the great power capabilities and perspectives audiences around the world encounter via American, Chinese, and Russian protagonists and their infrastructural reach.

### **Popular geopolitics, television serials, and the “geopolitical uncanny”**

Contemporary popular geopolitics of events and circumstances surrounding the war on terror, war on drugs, migration, climate change, Russian military and economic aggression, cyber warfare, and border politics has been found to be implicit in many American productions (see, e.g., Saunders & Strukov, 2018; Dittmer & Bos, 2019), including the much-acclaimed shows *The West Wing* (NBC, 1999–2006), *24* (Fox, 2001–2010), *Homeland* (Showtime, 2011–), *House of Cards* (Netflix, 2013–2018) and, more recently, *Berlin Station* (Epix, 2016–). Yet, Scandinavian series arguably represent such themes differently. Writing about the differences between American audiovisual representations of politics and *Borgen* (DR, 2010–2013), German newspaper critic Rabea Weihser, for example, notes that the Danish drama offers a glimpse behind the scenes of European politics – a glimpse that is perhaps more akin to European viewers’ experiences with leadership and government politics:

What we learned from *The Ides of March*, *The West Wing*, or *The Newsroom* about the political parquet [...] now crosses the Atlantic: Finally the audience is not taken away to far-away power centres of American superpower but to the heart

of a European seat of government. Not only the geographical proximity to the neighbouring Denmark but also cultural and political communality make *Borgen* interesting to the German viewer [translated]. (Weihser, 2013: para. 4)

A strategy that has certainly helped Danish and Norwegian drama in particular is the stress on a “public service layer” or “double storytelling” (Redvall, 2013: 68). First used strategically by DR, this production policy dictates that main storylines are not only entertaining, they have to be closely linked to relevant cultural, ethical, social, or political considerations. As Creeber (2015: 32) puts it in connection with crime drama:

The central crime at the heart of each narrative is simply a motor that enables the whole narrative world to revolve. [...] Although the crimes will eventually be solved, the moral, political and social problems that produced them are not. These are issues that audiences are left to consider long after the final climatic episode has come to an end.

One particular trademark of Nordic Noir is the way it coalesces different public and private spheres. By linking the sociopolitical, economic, and cultural with the private lives of the protagonists, the audiovisual dramas exemplify how the key concerns of today can have an impact on everyday life. In so doing, many of the shows are closely linked to what the first British Director-General of the BBC John Reith had formulated as the public service remit: to educate, inform, and entertain. The important role of public service broadcasting in Denmark and Norway is grounded in the belief that both factual and fictional content play an important role in stimulating public awareness of timely issues. As such, DR has to promote a Denmark “built on values of democracy, equality and freedom of speech” (DR, 2018: 2) while NRK in Norway has “to promote public debate and play its part in ensuring that the entire population receives sufficient information to enable it to actively participate in democratic processes” (Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation, 2008: 1). Many private film and television companies, including Miso Film, Monster Scripted, and Yellow Bird, followed suit in order to sell their programmes to the state broadcasters. Since fictional television is made with such an intention, it ought to be taken seriously (see, e.g., Holbrook & Hill, 2005; Mutz & Nir, 2010; Van Zoonen & Wring, 2012).

The topics television dramas present are thus not merely entertaining, they are meant to fuel debates around them and offer causes for reflection. Even if one is somewhat reluctant to accept the main argument of the cultivation hypothesis – namely that television audiences who are exposed to repetitive values, beliefs, and interpretative models are inherently affected by television in their conception of social realities (see Gerbner et al., 1977, 1980, 1986) – few will challenge the notion that television dramas can impact public agendas or media frames (Hamilton & Shepherd, 2016). Scandinavian serials have instigated broader debates of pertinent political issues such as the Nordic foreign and security policies and relations with great powers such as Russia and the US. Television serial dramas by DR such as *Borgen* and *The Killing* have contributed to public debates about policing, community relations, immigration, drugs, terrorism, and relations with near neighbours (Hochscherf & Philipsen, 2017).

During the first season of *Borgen*, screened prior to the Danish general election in 2011, there was, for example, criticism by politicians – including Uffe Elbæk, then Minister for Culture, and the former Minister of Defence, Søren Gade – that the serial might

influence the Danish electorate (see Hochscherf & Philipsen, 2017). And the criticism did not stop after that. During the popular show's third season in 2013, Søren Karup, member of the right-wing party Dansk Folkeparti [Danish People's Party], renewed claims that *Borgen* actively seeks to manipulate the Danish public. Its treatment of topics as well as its portrayal of a left-liberal female head of state, according to him, are biased and demonstrate just how "DR is a propaganda instrument" and that Danes pay their "licence fee for cultural leftism [translated]" (Karup, 2013, cited in Hochscherf & Philipsen, 2017: 166).

It therefore seems appropriate to argue, as Rachel Gans-Boriskin and Russ Tisinger have done in connection with American drama *The West Wing*, that "when fiction enters the sphere of the 'real,' its messages deserve a greater degree of scrutiny because the embedded messages may have an effect on political decisions with very real consequences" (2005: 110). Against this background, many Danish and Norwegian dramas focus on foreign and security policy issues to allow for follow-up debates and viewer engagement (for a review of Danish serial drama, see Hochscherf & Philipsen, 2017; for other Nordic examples, see Hansen & Waade, 2017).

The dramas we focus on here link a specific fictional plot to actual geopolitical debates on topics such as homeland security, globalisation, migration, terrorism, geopolitics, and surveillance. In so doing, they always offer a double story, a dramaturgy that intermingles a specific plot with more wideranging topics and motifs. The way in which such themes are presented through the gloomy atmosphere of a Nordic Noir-ish landscape and the protagonists' carefully designed middle-class homes makes visible the invisible and acquires an uncanny actuality: international conflicts and geopolitical challenges can affect modern Western societies – even liberal democratic Nordic societies – much more quickly than we might think (see Howell & Sundberg, 2015). Some episodes, however, provide a severe warning that democratic values and social cohesion are very fragile achievements, where particular figures such as the investigative journalist, police officer, or a vigilante is forced to play a decisive role in preserving or protecting those aforementioned liberal values and social order. In this way, television opens up various modes of interaction with geopolitical "as if" scenarios. Kenneth Burke (1966) has described such scenarios as "symbolic action" – that is, the ability of stories to test and eventually reconceptualise our social construction of reality. Fiction – even though it is informed by actual events, anxieties, and desires – offers a playful and tentative version of society and life that constantly invites audiences to feel empathy with fictional characters and imaginatively act out different situations. Books, films, and television shows that in some way or another deal with politics and international relations thus become affective geopolitical simulations – regardless of whether their fictional scenarios are likely or not.

Taking Saunders's article on geopolitical television (2019) as a point of departure provides a compelling entrée into the popular geopolitics of serial television. Building on Glynn and Cupples (2015), his intervention does three things that contribute to the ongoing conversations about popular (televisual) geopolitics.

First, the political economy of popular culture is brought to the fore by addressing profitability and marketability of genre. Serialised drama is not just big business but is also profitable. The Norwegian drama *Okkupert* enjoyed a USD 10 million budget and was the most expensive production ever made in Norway. It enjoyed a second season,

in 2017, after the show premiered in 2015. The show was highly profitable because it was sold to multiple television markets including the UK, Germany, and Spain. It was streamed by Netflix and became available to larger audiences in North America. Digital platforms such as Netflix and Amazon have funded and facilitated the popularisation of foreign language television shows.

Second, the contemporary media-entertainment landscape is co-produced by fans and viewers. Describing it as Television 3.0., Saunders makes the important point that earlier popular geopolitical analyses of film and the movie industry was rooted in an era where audiences watched the latest blockbuster either in cinemas or later via DVD. Popular geopolitics 3.0. is no longer tied to fixed viewing schedules, movie theatres, and material objects such as television screens. Screens are smaller, viewing is by demand, and material objects such as tablets and phones are mobile. Moreover, from social media platforms to Twitter to media sites such as the Internet Movie Database (IMDb), fans have unprecedented opportunities to comment on media shows. Producers are actively cultivating and archiving audience reactions, recognising that “fan data” is harvestable, and public commentary from “official” sources such as the Russian Embassy in Oslo is proverbial “gold-dust.”

Third, there are richer possibilities than ever before to think further about the vernacular qualities of popular geopolitics; in other words, the capacity of serial drama to produce embodied and intimate experiences of the geopolitical (on the concept of intimate geopolitics, see Brickell, 2014).

### **Scandinavian society under threat: The international isolation of Norway in *Okkupert***

The dramas we have chosen to examine have not only explored explicitly geopolitical themes but have also been picked up by newspapers and magazines as agenda setting. In one case, a fictional drama caused a tangible political and diplomatic quarrel when the Russian Embassy in Oslo issued a concerned statement about the Norwegian television series *Okkupert* in 2015. In the words of Leyda (2018: 93–94):

[The drama] taps into contemporary geopolitical anxieties, figuring a slow-building clash between the skilful and subtle assertion of Russian power and the measured but inexperienced Norwegian government, which strives to maintain peaceful diplomatic relations as well as its own state sovereignty in the face of international isolation and escalating pressure.

Created by the best-selling Norwegian author, Jo Nesbø, *Okkupert* invites viewers to imagine a future world where Norway is occupied by Russian military forces at the bequest of the European Union.

Striving for a more sustainable and greener world, Norway is “invaded” because it decides unilaterally to cease exporting natural gas and oil to the energy-thirsty European Union member states. The premise – however unlikely – touches upon two highly sensitive subjects; the geopolitical behaviour of contemporary Russia in a post-Crimea context, and the historical memory of occupation and collaboration in post conflicts. While Scandinavian countries such as Norway might not wish to reflect on collaboration with Nazi occupiers during World War II (and the show does not mention this collaboration

via the Quisling government), Putin's Russia actively reflects on the role that it played by Soviet forces on the "Eastern Front". The Russian Embassy's statement focused on both in its official statement:

Although the creators of the TV series were at pains to stress that the plot is fictitious and allegedly has nothing to do with reality, the film shows quite specific countries, and Russia, unfortunately, was given the role of an aggressor [...]. It is certainly regretful that in the year when the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the victory in the second world war is celebrated, the series' creators decided to scare Norwegian viewers with a non-existing threat from the East in the worst Cold War traditions, as if they had forgotten about the Soviet Army's heroic contribution to liberation of Northern Norway from Nazi occupants. (cited in Kozlov, 2015: para. 2–5)

The immediate point here is not to claim that *Okkupert* is geopolitically realistic or not. Rather it is to contend that the popular or vernacular geopolitics of Nordic Noir is sensitive to and sensitised by contemporary geopolitics. The Russian occupation of Crimea in 2014, in the aftermath of earlier incursions against Georgia, a series of "gas wars" with Ukraine, and suspected cyber-hacking against Estonia, provide plenty of scope for Norwegian and other viewers to tap into what Amanda Rogers (2018) describes as the "geopolitical uncanny". Building on Freud's work on the "uncanny", Rogers stresses how images can generate a liminal state between what is familiar and comforting and what is disconcerting and strange. The uncanny becomes geopolitical in the sense that it has this capacity to destabilise a state of complacency. *Okkupert* trades in the geopolitical uncanny when it works with the idea of the "invasion" by forces to the East being something that has long been imagined and feared by Norwegian, Swedish, and Finnish audiences. So that when it happens in this fictional show, it is both shocking but also oddly familiar.

In his description of "geopolitical television", Saunders (2019) usefully draws attention to the tropic qualities that make it possible. As the Norwegian fictional drama *Okkupert* demonstrates, this is facilitated by building international themes of energy security, climate change, border landscapes, inter-European relations, and everyday geopolitics by working with an imaginary scenario. Regardless of whether viewers find it plausible or not (see the Saunders quote below), the show's popularity was aided and abetted by the "star power" of Jo Nesbø and contemporaneous geopolitical circumstances. Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 provided geopolitical zest to the underlying conceit of occupation. As Saunders notes, the speculative-fantastic qualities of *Okkupert* are tempered by references to institutional sites and geographical landscapes that help build geopolitical worlds for viewers. While *Okkupert* might have speculative-fantastical qualities – with plot-holes that were quickly picked up by viewers and critics – it also trades in what has been called the geopolitical uncanny by tapping past events such as foreign occupation without explicitly referencing (in the Norwegian case) World War II. It also, as the Russian Embassy statement noted, fails to pick up anywhere the historic role of Soviet forces in the liberation of occupied Norway. As Saunders (2019: 715) notes:

It is clear that this series plumbs a number of the country's deepest fears and churns up its darkest memories. [...] *Occupied* presents Norwegians (and by extension, residents of other small states abutting Russia e.g. Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia,

Georgia, Moldova) with an existential crisis more realistic than those presented to American viewers [...] since the scenario is somewhat plausible.

*Okkupert* does not deal with veterans per se but it does explore vigilantism through the Fritt Norge [Free Norway] movement, which commits itself to fighting Russians on Norwegian territory with force. This movement is made up of many active or former servicemen. Rather than showing the group as resistance or freedom fighters, *Okkupert* suggests that the group and its fight are part of the problem rather than the solution, as every action also causes counter actions by the Russians.

### Foreign policy and global crises through television

Our studies of *Ørnen*, *Nobel – fred for enhver pris*, and *Kriger* have not been discussed as prominently as *Okkupert*. Yet, they have been followed by a significant Scandinavian and international audience on television and through streaming providers. They all draw, in one way or another, on geopolitics as a plot device and means of characterisation by dealing with the theme of military service abroad and traumatised veterans who served in Afghanistan or the Middle East. They problematise the five tropes of geopolitical television that Saunders (2019) works with: exotic-irrealist, parliamentary-domestic, procedural-localised, historical-revisionist, and speculative-fantastic. However, these categories, by their very nature, not only prove flexible but also are academically and commercially useful for analysing, promoting, distributing, and capitalising on audience (including academic) preferences (for further details, see Saunders, 2019).

Creatively, our case studies complicate Saunders's geopolitical television typology. *Ørnen* and *Nobel* work with multiple locations (domestic and international), multiple genres (including the action-thriller and police procedural), and multiple personalities and institutions. As other scholars have noted, this is keeping with what has been described as "complex television", which can be both familiar and capable of incubating generic blending or bending (Mittell, 2010). As Mittell (2010: 236) reminds us:

Genre provides a shorthand set of assumptions and conventions that producers can use to make a new program familiar to audiences and easier to produce. Genre often serves as baseline formulas for producers, creating a core set of assumptions and patterns that make the production of so many hours of original programming more efficient and streamlined.

All three dramas that revolve around veterans explore how the returning service personnel try to become a valuable part of civil society through their work for special police units or security outfits. The dramas, thereby, portray veterans as defenders of the Nordic way of life as defined by welfare provision, low levels of corruption, and crime. Lingering in these dramas is a sense in which the procedural and rule-based orders underpinning Nordic societies may no longer be adequate for the new geopolitical challenges of transnational terrorism and conflict. Through the leading protagonists, Danish and Norwegian dramas thereby show similarities to what John G. Cawelti (1975: 532) has described as the myth of the vigilante in American popular culture:

In this myth, the hero is typically reluctant to use violence. Only after it has become absolutely clear to him that that the legally constituted processes of society cannot

bring about justice does he step in and take the law in his own hands. Sometimes the hero's family or friends become victims of an act of criminal violence which the law is unable to avenge. When it becomes evident that the police, the courts, and society in general cannot either protect the innocent or avenge acts of criminal violence, then the vigilante must himself become the law. Since he is only an individual (or a small group without legal authority), his only possible means of securing justice is counterviolence.

Richard Slotkin (1998), another scholar with an interest in the American frontier and the figure of the vigilante, reminds us that if myths endure, then it tells us something about enduring cultural anxieties and fears. All of the above Nordic serials, despite their aesthetic and narrative differences, envision a Scandinavia under threat – a Norden that is not immune to international conflicts and geopolitical questions. They address global challenges and the “blow-back” consequences of foreign policies, namely the involvement in American-led wars on terror, after so many years of quasi-neutrality (on the vigilante in American post-war terror movies, see Dodds & Kirby, 2014; McSweeney, 2018). It is worth bearing in mind that two Scandinavians assumed prominent positions in the post-9/11 security environment, with Anders Fogh Rasmussen (2009–2014, Denmark) and Jens Stoltenberg (2014–, Norway) being appointed secretary-generals of NATO.

The storylines of *Ørnen*, *Nobel*, and *Kriger* help us to answer two issues: First, how do the recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq make themselves felt either in particular Nordic places or via the experiences of particular individuals and their families? Second, what sort of precautions and measures have to be taken in order to fight enemies at home and abroad? Nordic Noir works explicitly with social issues such as racism, immigration, and inequality; it speaks strongly to feminist geopolitical scholarship which draws attention to the relationality of the local with the national and global. Rachel Pain and Susan Smith (2008), in their path-breaking editorial collection *Fear: Critical Geopolitics and Everyday Life*, use the analogy of the double-helix to emphasise how fear and violence work through the intersection of everyday and formal geopolitical spheres. Nordic Noir characters are often depicted as ordinary men and women, working patiently with bureaucratic constraints and procedural mechanisms, to address the spectre of crime and criminality.

### **Your job at home: Veterans as special police agents in *Ørnen* and *Kriger***

What makes our three television serials pertinent is that the source of the “problem” is not the immigrant or illegal substances imported from elsewhere. The source of the geopolitical lies with a different and rather surprising figure: the returning Nordic veteran. Through their common membership in NATO, both Norway and Denmark supported American-led operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Denmark lost over 40 men in Afghanistan, and spent over USD 2 billion in the conflict against the Taleban. Danish political leaders argued that Danish forces were in Afghanistan in order to prevent the Taleban from striking Danish citizens in Copenhagen (Ringsmose & Børgesen, 2011). Norway was one of the first to join the US and UK in Afghanistan, and Norwegian troops were stationed there from 200–2014. Over 9,000 troops served there at some point, and 10 soldiers were killed in action. Norway spent over USD 2 billion on military and aid pur-



poses. Both countries held official inquiries into their participation in Afghanistan, and television documentaries such as the Danish production, *Armadillo* (2010), generated considerable controversy. Named after the Danish forward operating base in Helmand province in Afghanistan, the film depicted some Danish soldiers expressing considerable pleasure in triumphing against their adversaries after a brutal firefight. Political opinion in Denmark was divided at the time, and the reaction to the documentary captured well the ambivalence felt by many citizens, with Danish troops being actively engaged in military operations and caught up in wider strategic narratives and practices related to the American-led war on terror (Macnab, 2010).

The three seasons of *Ørnen* – each of which consists of eight episodes with sometimes overlapping narrative strands – were originally broadcast from October to November in 2004, 2005, and 2006 during Sunday evenings. One of the aspects that makes DR's *Ørnen* interesting is the composition of its main protagonists. The show tells the story of the Danish counter-terrorist and anti-organised crime unit led by the senior civil servant Thea Nellemann (Ghita Nørby). Her mission is to go after criminals who are an imminent threat to society and often act beyond the borders of the nation-state. In doing so, she chooses a team of special agents with past combat experience. As such, both the Icelandic detective chief constable Hallgrim Ørn Hallgrímsson (Jens Albinus) and his close friend Nazim Talawi (Janus Nabil Bakrawi) have served as soldiers in the Middle East. Even if their time in the army is not dramatised, it is very clear from the introductory sequence that contains images from Halgrim's Icelandic childhood and private life, as well as his military training, that these experiences have informed his police work. Images with Nazim during armed peacekeeping missions for the United Nations remind us of the powerful bond between the two men. The juxtaposition of faded Polaroid-like childhood images from the 1960s or 1970s and professional police and military work offers psychological depth to the character from the start. The personal flashbacks suggest that his apparent fear of commitment throughout all seasons stems from the fact that Hallgrim is haunted by a childhood memory. His military and peacekeeping experiences suggest that he is well equipped to take on dangerous criminal organisations and terrorism. What he brings to the job is personal experience, service integrity, and diplomatic knowledge alongside the tactical expertise and weapons training needed in "combat situations".

The character development of the series is important and emblematic of Nordic Noir, which works carefully to build the biography of lead figures and even dwell on those who are ultimately victims of violence and inequality. One common conceit is to juxtapose the plight of characters alongside the privilege and wealth of those living in Scandinavian societies. However, the Icelandic background of one of the lead characters (Hallgrim) acts as a staging ground for a nuanced examination of identity politics and personal choices. His biography provides an opportunity to reflect on how other places shape a person and their outlook on life. The serial narrative structure allows for that biographical richness to percolate through the narrative arc over time.

Although many episodes build on this personal biography, the third season, more than ever, plays at Halgrim's UN and military experience. The second case of the third season revolves around the theme of child abuse. A ring of paedophiles is using the UNICEF-sponsored aid and development organisation for child trafficking. The season finale, moreover, deals with an investigation of a massacre committed by Serbian soldiers

against Muslim civilians during the Yugoslavian civil war. One of the alleged offenders is the former Belgrade head of police Bosco Markovich (Uwe Kockisch), who is now running a private business in Berlin. During the investigation in Berlin, Nazim is shot dead. Troubled by the loss of his colleague and friend, Hallgrim follows the villain and his helpers to Iceland for the season's finale.

Whereas *Ørnen* still clearly differentiates between good and evil – accepting a rather clear-cut dichotomy between Danish humanistic values and integrity and the callous disregard for human rights displayed by foreigners, many of whom come from Eastern Europe – this representation is challenged with later serials. A case in point is the second season of the Nordic Noir *Forbrydelsen* [*The Killing*] (DR, 2007–2012). It revolves around the killing of lawyer Anne Dragsholm, who worked as a military legal adviser and could be connected to a cover-up of a war crime committed by Danish troops during a peace-keeping mission in Afghanistan. When the newly-appointed justice minister Thomas Buch (Nicolas Bro) and his office uncover more evidence for the atrocity, he is put under pressure by members of the government and the administration to discontinue his investigation so as not to jeopardise the passage of new anti-terror legislation. When a second killing of a Danish veteran takes place, there are two possible leads: one favoured by many state officials and members of the public, suggesting that Islamic terrorists might be behind the murders; another, however, intimates that the perpetrator may come from within the armed forces. The latter lead is fuelled by the story of the traumatised special forces soldier, Sergeant Jens Peter Raben (Ken Vedsegaard), who not only claims to have known both victims but also suggests that the officer Per K. Møller, known as “Perk”, has executed an Afghan family. Even though Perk is now dead, someone else seems to be using his identity. On a trip to Afghanistan, police officer Sarah Lund (Sofie Gråbøl) and her colleague Strange (Mikael Birkkjær) uncover the bones of the slaughtered Afghan family, thereby substantiating the claims of a Danish war crime (an issue hinted at in the 2010 war documentary, *Armadillo*). Back home, they now follow a new suspect, the outspoken anti-Islamist Muslim officer Captain Said Bilal (Igor Radoslavjevic) only to witness him killing himself by a detonation before they had a chance to interrogate him (see Hochscherf & Philipsen, 2017: 103). Just when the investigation seems it will remain unresolved for good, Sarah suddenly discovers that Strange gives away a detail that only the murderer would know. Being shot at, Lund finally kills him in a shooting exchange. The interpretation that seems apt here is that the Danish police woman has to clear up the mess that was left behind by Danish foreign policy.

Besides *Ørnen*, the embodied experience of conflict is also integral to *Kriger*, providing not only the experience and resources to tackle problems closer to home but also informing and inflaming haunting memories of that conflict. Afghanistan and Denmark are showed to be cross-fertilised by one another, and earlier Danish political statements – that Denmark was fighting in Afghanistan in order to prevent the spectre of terrorism and conflict coming to Denmark – prove fallacious. The returning veterans brought their experiences of Afghanistan back with them. The very distinction (between the domestic and foreign) that politicians thought they could reinscribe through extra-territorial intervention fails; domestic law-and-order officials want to exploit the professional experience of “Afghanistan” while recognising that the embodied consequences of that professional action are messy, open-ended, and not capable of being procedurally

constrained. If Danish police officers in both dramas do have to clean up the mess, this might be seen as an act of closure, or suturing a “wound”, in the Danish, or Nordic, model of doing things – a return to civilian policing and the eventual resuscitation of the social democratic system. The returning veteran and the legacies that they carry cannot be allowed to continue to be disruptive.

*Krigger* is similar to *Ørnen* in many respects in the manner in which the returning veteran is put to work in the service of the state. It tells the story of “CC” (Dar Salim), a Danish military veteran who returns home and transfers his knowledge and experience into a new role as a police officer in Copenhagen. There is, however, one major difference when compared to *Ørnen*: CC has more difficulties in his return to civilian life than Hallgrim. CC spent ten long years on active military service, making him one of the most experienced and traumatised Danish veterans. He feels remorse over the death of his friend Peter (Jakob Oftebro), who died during the military deployment abroad. In order to come to terms with his guilt, he tries to help Peter’s wife Louise (Danica Curcic), who works for the police, to investigate the dangerous underworld of criminal motorcycle gangs, as a clandestine agent.

The long pretitile sequence of the first episode features a farewell letter, written by Louise’s husband for delivery in the event of his death. The letter is read out as a voiceover sequence showing a cross-cutting montage of close-ups and medium shots of Louise with the letter, scenes at the actual funeral, and episodes from military missions in Afghanistan. The emotional sequence not only introduces the leading protagonists but also sets the tone by introducing the main dilemma of the drama: how can one reintegrate into civilian life after what has happened abroad. As CC puts it in his subsequent speech at the funeral while the coffin is carried by soldiers in their parade uniforms:

Eventually, war always wins. But Peter fought back! [...] He got married and had a son. Louise and Max, they were the love of his life. And yet he gave ten years of his life to military service, genuinely believing he helped make the world a safer place for us all. That was the idealist Peter. He never feared the enemy out there. He loved it, because he knew that the real danger wasn’t out there, it was waiting for us at home: in the restlessness, in the feeling of being redundant, in the silence after the war.

The drama, accordingly, focuses less on Peter and his death as a casualty of war but on what happens to those who remain yet who are marred by their experiences and loss. Louise has to come to terms with her demanding job and being a single parent.

What is at stake for CC is redemption. As with American protagonist Bosch (a former Vietnam veteran) in the drama with the same name (Netflix, 2014–), policing is a way of bringing some kind of personal order back into his life. It also puts him into dangerous social-political situations where his military training remains invaluable. In the Danish case, we are asked as viewers to follow CC’s immersion into undercover work as a way of helping him cope with having lost his friend Peter. The subsequent entanglement with biker gangs in Copenhagen acts as an imperfect proxy for his previous military experience. There is a new conflict for him to immerse himself, where the “rules of engagement” are opaque. He gains the trust of one of its leaders, but a perennial anxiety for both CC and Louise is that their mission will spiral out of control. The first series, running to six episodes, is clearly designed to continue further, but the returning veteran

as a dramatic figure clearly provides plenty of opportunity to consider how “conflict” is to be found both at home and abroad.

### **Disillusioned soldiers returning home: *Nobel – fred for enhver pris* and the crisis of diplomacy and asymmetrical warfare**

The drama *Nobel – fred for enhver pris* was first shown on Norwegian television on 25 September 2016 and subsequently made available elsewhere by Netflix. The production budget was relatively modest at NOK 70 million (approximately USD 8 million) for eight 45-minute episodes (Sørensen, 2016). It was rather well received in the press (see, e.g., Doyle, 2016; Johansen, 2016; Kleve, 2016) and awarded the 2016 Prix Europa Media Award and the Rose d’Or (Pham, 2016; Wijnen, 2017).

Only a few weeks before its premiere on NRK, in June 2016, a commission chaired by former minister Bjørn Tore Godal published a first comprehensive evaluation of Norway’s involvement in the ISAF Afghanistan operation. While positive about Norwegian participation, it found that the efforts fighting the Taleban were rather unsuccessful. Although it states that the Norwegian engagement “was demanding, with a high risk of deployed personnel and extensive use of resources, both civil and military” and that “Norwegian civilian and military personnel have, under difficult conditions, made a good effort”, it nevertheless argues that “Norway, all things considered, has not made a significant difference [translated]” (Government of Norway, 2016: 9). This disillusion and sense of exhaustion is certainly one of the main themes of *Nobel*. While the serial features high production values, its most noticeable trait is the many quasi-documentary hand-held shots, swish pans, and fast zooms that give it an immediate and intimate feel.

The television drama – with the subtitle “Peace at Any Cost” – revolves around the lives of Lieutenant Erling Riiser (Aksel Hennie), a member of Norwegian special forces in Afghanistan, and his wife Johanne (Tuva Novotny), who is the head of the Secretariat at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Trained to fight enemy armies, his unit is now challenged by asymmetrical warfare, nurturing doubts about the purpose of the entire operation. They have first-hand knowledge of how enemy combatants hide amongst local civilians, how alliances are fragile and cooperation with the enemy can be necessary, and they have learnt that the smallest of successes are often quickly overturned. The overall pace of the drama is – despite a number of combat scenes – rather slow; it takes some time for the story to reveal itself.

*Nobel* is similar to Scandinavian contemporary drama more generally: it offers character-centred storylines and is characterised by an overall slow, measured pace. It uses sudden events or physical actions as plot points, but the storylines are also driven forward by new character traits or habits that have either not been known to the audience or become more concrete (on narrative complexity and Scandinavian drama, see Hochscherf, 2019). Just like the leading protagonists, audiences are, for a long time, left in the dark as to what is at stake. All of its characters are developed over a far longer time than a typical film of some 90–110 minutes. Offering a number of viewpoints through an ever growing number of characters, *Nobel* not only explores the geopolitical themes of the war against terror and the struggle over natural resources but also how these conflicts influence people’s lives. In fact, by way of multiperspectivity, the drama

shows how geopolitical questions are not abstract conditions but have, more often than not, personal consequences.

On one of his missions against a suicide bomber at a busy market and a nearby hospital, Riiser accidentally rips off an Afghan women's headscarf. When the woman is violently abused by her husband Sharif Zamani (Atheer Adel), a rich landowner and opium smuggler in the Balkh Province with ties to the Taleban, she is brought to Norway for medical treatment as a political refugee. Yet, the resourceful husband reaches out to her in Norway during a secret visit. In a last-minute effort, Riiser prevents Sharif Zamani from killing his wife in Oslo by killing him. The Norwegian capital has now, through the actions of an estranged husband, become the site for conflict that has begun in Asia. The overarching question is who has used Erling to get rid of Zamani and how deep the military and political leadership is involved in the conspiracy.

The opening sequence set the tone for the storylines of the eight-part television serial. Even before the audience sees anything, a section from Barack Obama's Nobel lecture in 2009, the year he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo, can be heard from the start: "Make no mistake: Evil does exist in the world. A non-violent movement could not have halted Hitler's armies. Negotiations cannot convince al Qaeda's leaders to lay down their arms". What follows is a non-diegetic electro pop song "The Sea" by Norwegian artist ARY over images that rely heavily on motion graphics. The montage juxtaposes images from roadside bombs in Afghanistan tearing apart buildings alongside the painful disintegration of people. One picture shows a dissolving Norwegian flag followed by images of soldiers carrying a dead body in a carpet and a wide-angle shot of the Norwegian capital superimposed by an upside-down Afghan landscape. For Norwegians, their geopolitical world is shown to be chaotic and out of kilter.

The choice of the Obama quote corresponds closely with the main title *Nobel*. In fact, during numerous episodes, we see the head of the Nobel committee at soirees, dinners, and meetings. She is shown to be an acquaintance of Johanne Riiser. In the penultimate episode, we see the two sitting together. The Nobel committee wants some information – preferably "dirt" – on Rolf Inherad (Hallvard Holmen) who is trying to sign the oil deal with the Zamadi family on behalf of the Norwegian government but is deeply involved in the overall conspiracy and who could be a candidate for the Peace Prize. Johanne is asked because she is "one of the few who's got some of the more sensitive information. The information no one wants to divulge until it's too late". When she tells the head of the committee that his budgets were messy and that a lot of money might be going to corruption, she receives a thoroughly disillusioned reply: "That's a profile that fits pretty much all the candidates". An exceedingly bleak statement that summarises the new-found Realpolitik of Western governments.

When discussing *Okkupert*, Leyda (2018: 86) argues that the serial "builds suspense through its interweaving of political and private tensions, including those between nations, between government officials and between family members – these multiple storylines and multiple scales all exploit running motifs of anxiety, guilt, self-interest and betrayal". The same can be said about *Nobel*, which not only takes a closer look at the detrimental impact of the demanding jobs of Erling and his wife Johanne on their relationship and family life, and how they struggle with Erling's father's drug addiction, but also how they become enmeshed in a government scandal. What the dramatic finale, then, asks the viewer to consider is how little it takes for this "conflict" to make itself

felt in particular bodies and places. Norwegian entanglements in Afghanistan are shown here to create vulnerabilities for not only those returning veterans, but also others caught up in military operations. Vulnerability and insecurity have been actively produced by Norwegian state actions and practices. Riiser, in this case, is allowed to redeem himself – and by extension Norway – by his last-ditch saving of the vulnerable Afghan woman (see, more generally, Weber, 2005).

When audiences are introduced to Johanne Riiser at a musical concert in Oslo, she has to solve a delicate situation: the Chinese Minister for Land and Resources, who is in Oslo to sign a very important economic agreement, wants to leave the venue with his delegation after having spotted a Chinese dissident among the guests. Eager to avoid a public scene, the situation brings to the fore the awkwardness of Chinese-Norwegian business and trade interests and their relationship to Norwegian concerns over the state of human rights in China. While the peace-keeping mission in Afghanistan is officially meant to bring political and economic stability to the region, one is left to wonder about the true motivation of the Norwegian government. Politicians, as Erling explains to the widow of a good friend who died on a foreign mission near the end of the second episode, understand little of the actual situation in the conflict zone: “The defence minister is not in Afghanistan. She’s sending us to war without knowing what she’s sending us to”. After a deadly incident later in the fourth episode, another major difference between the military and the political class becomes apparent: the soldiers prioritise their mission of fighting an often invisible enemy and follow protocol, while politicians seemingly think more about the press coverage at home and their own public relations.

The main driving force, however, as is slowly revealed throughout the eight episodes, is the struggle over natural resources – namely oil and gas. Norway is shown to be competing with China over drilling rights in Afghanistan, and the Zamani family owns the land over some of the most promising oil and gas fields. A theme that mirrors closely contemporary news reporting about China investing in the development of Afghanistan’s mineral wealth, including oil, gas, and copper. Norway’s role has been more advisory and working to support the Ministry of Mines in Kabul. It has provided professional advice to the Afghan government regarding the commercialisation of oil and gas reserves as well as on an international bidding process. All of which provoked anger from some American sources that US-military forces were helping others, including China, to exploit this emerging energy market and “free-ride” on the back of NATO intervention (Downs, 2012).

Throughout the first three episodes, the role of “development aid” is slowly problematised. During a visit of the foreign minister in episode four, the real agenda informing the secret negotiations with the Zamani family and local Taleban aide Mullah Ahmed (Mohammad-Ali Behboudi) is revealed. Without the knowledge of the public and other ministries, the Norwegian Foreign Minister wants to sign a deal for oil and natural gas production to provide Afghanistan with energy. The ramifications are far-reaching. Because of security concerns, the public and even parts of the government are left in the dark as to who is present when and where. This deprives many advisors, among them Johanne, of offering their much-needed help and expertise to test some of the financially driven decisions. The more the events spiral into a tragic drama, the more one wonders if security concerns and profitable business deals justify shying away from the Scandinavian model of an open democracy and consensus-based politics.

While Norway is competing with China, which has offered a very similar deal, the situation gets yet more complicated when Mullah asks for money to secure the Taleban cooperation – a dilemma, since payment would count as supporting terrorism. While this seems unacceptable, the more the season progresses, the more it becomes apparent that peace without negotiating with the Taleban is a chimaera. An American government official explains to the Norwegian foreign minister privately near the end of episode five:

I know you can't confirm this, but I know for a fact that you are holding negotiations with the Taleban in Afghanistan. [...] Now it looks like we might have to do the same thing: bite the bullet, talk to them. The Taleban are not going away, and there is no future for Afghanistan without negotiations with them. So we are going to open up a back channel.

The problem about such fragile alliances is trust. The “Fruit for Life” initiative – which is run by Hektor Stolt-Hansen (Mattis Herman Nyquist) who is the offspring of a very rich and influential Norwegian family and has an affair with Johanne Riiser – is used to smuggle opium instead of delivering apples because the vans are under the protection of the Norwegian NATO troops as is revealed in episode six. Some of the problems in Afghanistan, as can be inferred, have their origins in Europe and East Asia. Peace is prevented because too many people benefit from the current struggles and try to bring themselves into position for the time after the military operation – this includes governments as well as corporations and individuals. While China and Norway are competing over drilling rights on the Zamani estate, it is a resourceful and wealthy elite that is operating beyond national boundaries to increase their wealth and power. Besides Sharif Zamani, the Stolt-Hansens are an example of this – it is they who pull the strings alongside governments. Hektor Stolt-Hansen, indeed, is playing both sides and finally works for the highest bidder, regardless of the bidder's intentions or agenda. Hektor acts for himself and his family and respects neither laws nor morals.

In the final episode, it seems as if peace and a treaty for the drilling of natural resources is possible after all. Following a brief meeting during which Rolf Inherad admits that he has sent Erling a text message so that he might kill Sharif Zamani (“It felt like a betrayal of everything we stand for. This agreement is a way out of poverty for the North Province. Should I let it fail because of one guy? Hell no!”), the Norwegian Foreign Ministry has finally brought all parties together in a hotel in Afghanistan. Besides Erling and Johanne, Rolf Inherad, the Norwegian minister of foreign affairs, the head of the Zamani family, and the energy minister of the official Afghan government, the meeting is also attended by Taleban leader Mullah Ahmad. Although the attendance of the Taleban creates tension among the other participants, the contract is eventually signed. All hopes for peace, however, are shattered when a bomb attack kills the Norwegian foreign minister and the Afghan energy minister and injures many others. A close-up shows the contract covered in blood and debris. Erling saves his badly injured wife in a slow-motion sequence. After contradictory political developments and conspiracies, it is but their relationship that seems to matter. While they travel back to Oslo and seem to have put their problems aside, the final scene shows developments five months after the bomb attack: Hektor Stolt-Hansen, a Chinese delegation, and the representatives of the Zamani family sign an Afghan-Chinese deal. Have the Chinese or Hektor ordered the attack on the hotel summit? Considering the various ramifications, the Canadian *Globe*

and *Mail* critic John Doyle (2016: para. 9) summarises *Nobel's* appeal and geopolitical timeliness rather astutely:

What's captivating about the series is the low-key incisiveness. The story doesn't build hyperdramatically, even as it has tense action sequences. It moves slowly, giving space to conversations and thought. What the drama is thinking about is the small difference between the extremism in Afghanistan and the extreme capitalism that drives countries and corporations to take advantage of the earth itself. In the end, it's clear that Erling, good soldier that he is, becomes a pawn in a game about oil and money.

## Conclusions

Long after the topos of the veteran as one of the dominant figures of American film after the Vietnam War, Danish and particularly Norwegian audiovisual culture focuses on the transgressive nature of security personnel, as well as how veterans suffer under the influence of post-traumatic stress disorder. In comparison to other protagonists in Scandinavian drama such as Brigitte Nyborg (Sidse Babett Knudsen) in *Borgen*, the veterans of the dramas considered here are often transgressive of Scandinavian values, ideals, and laws. Yet, they are not necessarily modeled after American representations of lone, disgruntled heroic protectors. By comparison, the protagonists in the above dramas are rather modest, patient, slower, and more austere. While the fictional protagonists offer multifaceted accounts of the experiences of combat, audiences are not left to feel pity for them. The message is a rather different one: while Scandinavian society has become hypocritical and complacent due to a very high standard of living in the social welfare state, the veterans are the only people adept at responding to threats and crises. But they offer a problematic position, because they act as reminders that the legacies of overseas military engagements are messy and open-ended.

Contemporary Scandinavian dramas, thereby, outline a new generation of ex-servicemen and servicewomen that become a cipher for the state of the domestic society and state. Although they more often than not act as outsiders, their presence helps to problematise the vulnerability of the state of the Nordic nations. Because they have been alienated from the social mores of civil society, they can follow their own codes of conduct to defend the very society they find it increasingly hard to belong to. The veterans offer up possibilities for protagonists as well as audiences to ask where, how, and why the social democratic qualities of their societies have changed.

While these feelings of discomfort and dislocation have been lingering for some time, they have taken on an added urgency through the intervention of the returning veteran. Audiences are asked to consider the uncomfortable fact that "conflict" has always been a part of Nordic societies. Beyond the Scandinavian context, moreover, there are many dramas now from other countries that feature veterans in leading roles – including Israeli shows on Netflix such as *Fauda* (Yes Oh, 2015–) and *When Heroes Fly* (Keshet 12, 2018–). But they, of course, are dealing with a very different geopolitical context. Armed conflicts and war are nothing new for Israel and Palestine while, for many decades now, it has been rather unknown in the Scandinavian context. This has certainly changed.

The geopolitics of Nordic Noir deserves further attention. In our case studies, we



used the figure of the returning veteran to explore how the television serial is productive of popular or vernacular geopolitics. While the vigilante has been a popular figure in Hollywood cinema and television series for decades, it is less well established in Nordic popular culture. The returning veteran motif (one that will be recognisable to international audiences familiar with returning Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan veterans in particular) helps to interrogate Nordic societal conflicts and tensions, and poses the question of whether the Nordic model can be rehabilitated for the sake of preserving their respective countries.

## References

- Brickell, K. (2014). “The whole world is watching”: Intimate geopolitics of forced eviction and women’s activism in Cambodia. *Annals of the Association of the American Geographers*, 104, 1256–1272. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00045608.2014.944452>
- Burke, K. (1966). *Language as symbolic action: Essays on life, literature, and method*. Berkeley: California University Press.
- Cawelti, J. (1975). Myths of violence in American popular culture. *Critical Inquiry*, 1, 521–541. <https://doi.org/10.1086/447799>
- Creeber, G. (2015). Killing us softly: Investigating the aesthetics, philosophy and influence of Nordic Noir television. *Journal of Popular Television*, 3(1), 21–35. [https://doi.org/10.1386/jptv.3.1.21\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jptv.3.1.21_1)
- Degn H.-P., & Krogager, S. G. S. (2017). Danish television drama series: A Sunday evening phenomenon. *Critical Studies in Television*, 12(4), 362–379. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1749602017730261>
- Dittmer, J., & Bos, D. (2019). *Popular culture, geopolitics, and identity*. London: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Dodds, K. (2019). *Geopolitics: A very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780199676781.001.0001>
- Dodds, K., & Kirby, P. (2014). Resurrecting the vigilante: Paternal sovereignty, exceptionality and familial security in *Taken* (2008) and *Taken 2* (2013). *Critical Studies on Security*, 2, 245–261. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21624887.2014.887512>
- Downs, E. (2012). China buys into Afghanistan. *SAIS Review*, 32 (2), 65–84. <https://www.doi.org/10.1353/sais.2012.0022>
- Doyle, J. (2016, December 14). If you like Nordic Noir, watch Nobel – Peace at Any Price. *The Globe and Mail*. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/television/john-doyle-if-you-like-nordic-noir-watch-nobel-peace-at-any-price/article33322344/>
- Dunleavy, T. (2018). *Complex serial drama and multiplatform television*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315682310>
- DR. (2018). DR’s public service-kontrakt for 2019–2023. [https://kum.dk/fileadmin/KUM/Documents/Kulturpolitik/medier/DR/ps-kontrakt\\_2019-2023/18-02484-44\\_DR\\_s\\_public\\_service-kontrakt\\_for\\_2019-2023.pdf](https://kum.dk/fileadmin/KUM/Documents/Kulturpolitik/medier/DR/ps-kontrakt_2019-2023/18-02484-44_DR_s_public_service-kontrakt_for_2019-2023.pdf)
- Gans-Boriskin, R., & Tisinger, R. (2005). The Bushlet administration: Terrorism and war on The West Wing. *The Journal of American Culture*, 28(1), 100–113.
- Gerbner, G., Gross, L., Eleey, M. F., Jackson-Beeck, M., Jeffries-Fox, S., & Signorielli, N. (1977). TV violence profile no. 8: The highlights. *Journal of Communication*, 27(2), 171–180. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1977.tb01845.x>
- Gerbner, G., Gross, L., Morgan, M., & Signorielli, N. (1986). Living with television: The dynamics of the cultivation process. In J. Bryant, & D. Zillmann (Eds.), *Perspectives on media effects* (pp. 17–40). Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Gerbner, G., Gross, L., Signorielli, N., & Morgan, M. (1980). Aging with television: Images on television drama and conceptions of social reality. *Journal of Communication*, 30(1), 37–47. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1980.tb01766.x>
- Glynn, K., & Cupples, J. (2015). Negotiating and queering US Hegemony in TV drama: Popular geopolitics and cultural studies. *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*, 22(2), 271–287. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2013.855711>

---

## Acknowledgements

We offer our sincere thanks to the editors of this special issue and the external reviewers for their very helpful comments on an earlier version.

- Government of Norway. (2016). *En god alliert – Norge i Afghanistan 2001–2014* [A good ally – Norway in Afghanistan 2001–2014]. Oslo: Government of Norway.
- Hamilton, C., & Shepherd, L. (2016). *Understanding popular culture and world politics in the digital age*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315673394>
- Hansen, K., & Waade, A. M. (2017). *Locating Nordic Noir: From Beck to The Bridge*. London: Palgrave. <https://www.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-59815-4>
- Hochscherf, T. (2019). Narrative complexity and cultural relevance in the name of public service broadcasting: The cases of Borgen and Herrens Veje. *European Journal of Scandinavian Studies*, 49(1), 156–177. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ejss-2019-0010>
- Hochscherf, T., & Philipsen, H. (2017). *Beyond the Bridge: Contemporary Danish television drama*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Holbrook, R. A., & Hill, T. G. (2005). Agenda-setting and priming in prime time television: Crime dramas as political cues. *Political Communication*, 22(3), 277–295. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584600591006519>
- Howell, J., & Sundberg, T. (2015). Towards an affective geopolitics: Soft power and the Danish notion of 'hygge'. *Environment, Space, Place*, 7(2), 97–120. <https://doi.org/10.5840/espace20157213>
- Jensen, P. M., & Waade, A. M. (2013). Nordic Noir challenging 'the language of advantage': Setting, light and language as production values in Danish television series. *Journal of Popular Television*, 1(2), 259–265. [https://doi.org/10.1386/jptv.1.2.259\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jptv.1.2.259_1)
- Johansen, Ø. D. (2016, September 23). TV-anmeldelse «Nobel»: Modig og ambisiøs [TV review, "Nobel": Brave and ambitious]. *VG*. <https://www.vg.no/rampelys/tv/i/ldyrG/tv-anmeldelse-nobel-modig-og-ambisioes>
- Kleve, M. (2016, September 23). Endelig en norsk tv-serie som fortjener å bli snakket om i lunsjen [Finally, a Norwegian TV series that deserves to be talked about at lunch]. *Dagbladet*. <https://www.dagbladet.no/kultur/endelig-en-norsk-tv-serie-som-fortjener-a-bli-snakket-om-i-lunsjen/63340759>
- Kozlov, V. (2015, August 28). Russia criticizes war-themed Norwegian TV series 'Occupied'. *Hollywood Reporter*. <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/russia-criticizes-war-themed-norwegian-818394>
- Krurup, S. (2013, February 11). Kan vi være DR bekendt? [Can we be aware of DR?]. *Berlingske*. <http://www.b.dk/kronikker/kan-vi-vaere-dr-bekendt>
- Leyda, J. (2018). Petropolitics, cli-fi and Occupied. *Journal of Scandinavian Cinema*, 8(2), 83–101. [https://doi.org/10.1386/jzca.8.2.83\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jzca.8.2.83_1)
- Macnab, G. (2010, June 3). Armadillo: The Afghanistan war documentary that shocked Denmark. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2010/jun/03/armadillo-danish-documentary-afghanistan>
- McSweeney, T. (2018). Tearing down the Eiffel Tower: Post-9/11 fears and fantasies in Taken. In K. Wiggins (Ed.), *American revenge narratives: A collection of critical essays* (pp. 263–284). London: Palgrave. <https://www.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-93746-5>
- Mittell, J. (2010). *Television and American culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mutz, D. C., & Nir, L. (2010). Not necessarily the news: Does fictional television influence real-world policy preferences? *Mass Communication and Society*, 13(2), 196–217. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205430902813856>
- Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation. (2008). *Statement of commitments 2008*. <https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/kkd/nrk-plakaten-engelsk.pdf>
- Pain, R., & Smith, S. (Eds.) (2008). *Fear: Critical geopolitics and everyday life*. Farnham, UK: Ashgate. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315582054>
- Pham, A. (2016, October 24). Top Prix Europa awards to Trapped, Nobel. *Nordisk Film & TV Fond*. <http://www.nordiskfilmogtvfond.com/news/stories/top-prix-europa-awards-to-trapped-nobel>
- Redvall, E. (2013). *Writing and producing television drama in Denmark: From The Kingdom to The Killing*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://www.doi.org/10.1057/9781137288417>
- Ringsmose, J., & Børgesen, B. K. (2011). Shaping public attitudes towards the deployment of military power: NATO, Afghanistan and the use of strategic narratives. *European Security*, 20(4), 505–528. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2011.617368>
- Rogers, A. (2018). Evil™ – Islamic State, conflict-capitalism, and the geopolitical uncanny. *Critical Studies on Security*, 6, 118–135. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21624887.2017.1407597>
- Saunders, R. (2019). Small screen IR: A tentative typology of geopolitical television. *Geopolitics*, 24, 691–727. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2017.1389719>
- Saunders, R., & Strukov, V. (Eds.). (2018). *Popular geopolitics: Plotting and evolving interdiscipline*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351205030>
- Slotkin, R. (1998). *Gunfighter nation: The myth of the frontier in twentieth-century America*. Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Sørensen, P.-O. (2016). Interview: Nobel director: I love getting into people's head and creating drama that is both personal and entertaining. *Nordisk Film & TV Fond*. <http://www.nordiskfilmogtvfond.com/news/>

- interview/nobel-director-i-love-getting-into-peoples-head-and-creating-drama-that-is-both-personal-and-entertaining
- Van Zoonen, L., & Wring, D. (2012). Trends in political television fiction in the UK: Themes, characters and narratives, 1965–2009. *Media, Culture & Society*, 34(3), 263–279. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443711433663>
- Weber, C. (2005). Not without my sister(s): Imagining a moral America in Kandahar. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 7, 358–376. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616740500161094>
- Weihser, R. (2013, November 19). TV-Serie “Gefährliche Seilschaften” – Macht festhalten, Prinzipien loslassen [Hang on to power, relinquish principles]. *Die Zeit*. <http://www.zeit.de/kultur/film/2012-11/borgen-gefahrlische-seilschaften>
- Wijnen, P. (2017, September 20). The Norwegian series “Nobel” won prestigious award before “The Crown”. *Norway Today*. <https://norwaytoday.info/culture/nobel-won-prestigious-award/>