REMAKING TELEVISION SERIES: NATIONAL CULTURE AND MEDIA SYSTEM THEORY

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ABSTRACT
This article explores strengths and weaknesses of common methods and frameworks in studying format adaptation, primarily in television series, but with some findings applicable for television entertainment formats as well. The article problematises the way scholarship on transnational remakes of television series, as well as studies of format adaptation in general, tends to focus on using text-based readings of cultural similarities and differences, or on explanations rooted in the media systems, such as a new channel's profile or norms and traditions in the programming interface of a particular channel or country. The article examines the dominant literature and theories on the subject, illustrating that there is an ongoing debate among researchers as to which framework is more powerful and precise in accounting for format adaptation. It becomes apparent that studies favouring the one approach greatly over the other are often comparing apples and oranges. Finally, the article aims to show how existing research most often compares original and remake in their final forms, overlooking the creation process, the dilemmas of the creatives behind the transformations, and the effect their preconceptions have on the finished results.

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1. **INTRODUCTION**

During the last 20 years, transnational remakes of television series have gone from a relatively rare undertaking to an integral part of the global and especially American television industry (Chalaby 2015). Successful examples of this include *Ugly Betty* (ABC, 2006-2010), *Homeland* (Showtime, 2011-2020), *The Office* (NBC, 2005-2013) and *House of Cards* (Netflix, 2013-2018), based on *Yo soy Betty, la fea* (RCN Televisión, 1999-2001, Colombia), *Prisoners of War* (Channel 2, 2010-2012, Israel), *The Office* (BBC Two, 2001-2003, UK) and *House of Cards* (BBC, 1990, UK), respectively. Notice the versatility in both countries and genres, illustrating that very different scripted formats can be remade under the right circumstances. The concept of remaking an already proven success is alluring. Nonetheless, for every successful television series based on a transnational original show, there are a number of remake attempts, which – despite the original format's success – failed to connect with a new audience. Examples include AMC's *Feed the Beast* (2016), Kanal D's *Cinayet* (2014) and many others (see also Turnbull 2015).

Which deciding circumstances affect the adaptation of a television format from another country? In a situation where ideas and scripts for successful television series are a wanted commodity, and television broadcasters and streaming companies alike scramble to keep up with the demand for quality series, the answer to such a question would be of great value to both the academic field of media studies and the television industry at large.

However, while the question might seem simple at first glance, it is complex. Firstly, "television format" covers everything from an unscripted quiz show to an elaborate scripted television series. There can be considerable differences between genres in formats, which is not always reflected in adaptation research. Second, the transfer and translation processes involve considerations of the global-local paradigm. Third, television formats are produced by a great many people under a range of different circumstances, and the producers' choices must adhere to the media systems of which they are a part. These considerations do not diminish the challenge to identify which circumstances are pivotal when it comes to adaptation. This complexity has resulted in different suggestions as to how to identify the key aspects of format adaptation. In this context, I shall primarily focus on scripted formats, drawing attention to the significance of genre. I shall involve the global-local paradigm in a cultural perspective, and I shall consider the production system of which scripted formats are a part, but first and foremost, I have found it illuminating to compare two dominant traditions in the area of remake studies. On the basis of a critical overview of these, the purpose of this article is to highlight strengths and weaknesses of each research tradition in order to assess their potential for complementing each other.

The two different traditions that seem to compete in the studies of format adaptation are the predominantly text-based readings of cultural similarities and differences, and the focus on the workings of media systems, such as, for example, an adapting channel's profile or norms and traditions in the programming interface of a particular channel or country. In their editorial for a special issue of *Continuum* on transnational television remakes, Claire Perkins and Constantine Verevis (2015) introduce these two key theoretical frameworks in studies of transnational television adaptations, but with a slight emphasis on culture (2015: 677). My research seeks to add to adaptation and remake theory by critically revisiting the cultural and media systemic frameworks, which are suggested to be pivotal in explaining adaptation processes. I shall examine under which circumstances each framework can meaningfully be applied, and when such frameworks reach their boundaries and other factors should be considered. Before going into this, some clarification of terminology is in order.

2. **KEY CONCEPTS**

I use the term "remake" to describe a new version of intellectual property within the same medium, e.g. making a new television series based on an old one. According to that definition, a movie based on a book is not a remake. "Adaptation" also refers to new versions of intellectual property, but not necessarily within the same medium. "Adaptation" is used as an umbrella term covering all new versions of intellectual property, including movies based on books and television series based on other television series.

Culture is one of the most disputed concepts not only in media theory, but also in anthropology, sociology, etc. National culture and identity have been examined from a multitude of theoretical positions using very different methods. The literature on national culture and identity in general is vast (Billig 1995, Linde-Laursen 1995, Gaunt & Löfgren 1984) and, at times, divided (Hofstede 2011, McSweeney 2002a, 2002b). For the purposes of this article, national culture is regarded as a social construct, but one which cannot be

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disregarded. Television series are full of national stereotypes as well as national myths and aesthetics, and for most television producers, national borders are very real (Gemzøe 2018). Furthermore, I discern between 'national' and 'local', with the former referring to a nation state, and the latter referring to an area or region within a nation state.

I use the term "media system" in the overall sense established by Denis McQuail:

> The term 'media system' refers to the actual set of mass media in a given national society, despite the fact that there may be no formal connection between the elements. Most media systems, in this sense, are the chance result of historical growth, with one new technology after another being developed and leading to the adaption of existing media. Sometimes a media system is linked by a shared political-economic logic, as with the free-enterprise media of the United States or the state-run media of China. Many countries have 'mixed' systems, with private and public elements, and these may well be organized according to a set of national media policy principles, leading to a degree of integration. (McQuail 2005: 220-221)

3. TRANSNATIONAL REMAKES OF TELEVISION SERIES – A BRIEF SURVEY

During the last twenty years, format adaptation and remake theory have received increasing attention in media research, corresponding to their increasing significance for the television industry. Format adaptation and remake theory have been addressed from macro-oriented angles, adopting historical and philosophical points of view. Examples include works such as Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), which seeks to develop a framework for *all* types of adaptations (theatre play to film, movie to television series, etc.). Moran pioneered format research with his influential *Copycat* TV (1998), which covers a wide range of types, from quiz shows to remakes of soaps. More specialised larger accounts also exist, such as McFarlane's *Novel to Film* (1996) or Verevis' *Film Remakes* (2006).

In general, works on film remakes provide inspiring insights (for example Greenberg 1991, Forrest and Koos 2002, Verevis 2006). Some of their points and taxonomies are applicable for studying remakes of television series as well, such as Greenburg and Leitch's focus on the intentions and purposes of the remake; was it made as an update, homage or perhaps even as an attack on the original? However, while films and television series do share some notable features, they are also different in terms of production and form, which affects remaking processes. A television series is most often created for and funded by a specific channel with a specific target audience (rather than, say, a national cinematic release). Also, in case of a television series remake, the long form almost always results in fundamental dramaturgic deviation from the original. Academic interest in transnational remakes of television series has increased, however, and, at the time of writing, there are several accounts addressing the subject.

Kim Akass' piece on the transformation process from Danish TV-series classic *Forbrydelsen* (DR1, 2007-2012) into AMC's *The Killing* (2012-2014) illustrates how differences in media systems may affect adaptation processes. Akass suggests that problematic decisions in making the series fit the new media system caused the series' initial problems, as the makers stumbled in making the Danish original's two sets of ten episodes fit the American basic cable standard of thirteen episodes per season. Akass also argues that the American remake is changed so that it becomes one of many US media texts with narrative hostility towards bad mothers (2015: 748). However, her focus remains on the media system as the deciding factor in the story about how *The Killing* lost roughly half of its viewers after the first season and repeatedly struggled to be renewed. But are media systems really the appropriate primary context in studying *The Killing*?

Jennifer Forrest and Sergio Martinez's article on the transformation from *Broen* (DR/SVT, 2011-2018) to *The Bridge* (FX, 2013-2014) is completely different in its angle and methodology (2015: 718). Using textual analysis coupled with statements from the creators derived from the DVD commentary, the article in essence argues that the new location of the remake forces the series to change – stylistically and linguistically, of course, but also with regards to the central narrative in the series. It is an article on differences in geography, culture and history and the necessity of change created by these differences, and how *The Bridge* transforms and negotiates the original material to meet this necessity.

These two articles in essence represent the difference between cultural and media systemic approaches to remake studies and illustrate how both are practised in contemporary research on television remakes. Interestingly, choice of method is not discussed in either article.

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Heidi Keinonen (2016) points to the methodological divide in format adaptation research as well and finds that a more holistic, synthesising approach is needed. I completely agree. Keinonen suggests 'cultural negotiation' as such an approach, looking at global influences, local/national television cultures, production cultures, broadcasting cultures and viewing cultures when analysing format adaptation. Such a viewpoint and method is needed and valid. However, Keinonen's work does not explain in which cases it may be more fruitful to emphasise one framework over another.

A book such as Wells-Lassagne's *Television and Serial Adaptation* (2017), which is centred on the same subject, convincingly covers different aspects of remaking television series. However, even in such a work, the conclusions are more philosophical in nature than decisive in singling out which factors affect the process of remaking a television series from another country. This is due to the study's historical, philosophical, macro-oriented nature, and the fact that it is primarily based upon analysis of the texts, lacking production analysis angles. In addition, the book encompasses a great many television series from a range of different countries and production cultures, broadening the arguments, but losing specificity. Wells-Lassagne also states in the conclusion that her work "is but a preliminary study" (2017: 189).

To the best of this author's knowledge, no published research systematically explores the strengths and weaknesses of national- and television system-based frameworks in accounting for format adaptation in the way that I intend to do in the following. In his canonical *Copycat* TV (1998), Albert Moran accounts for aspects of the international format trade while also looking to the textual properties of specific formats and the way in which audiences experience different types of adaptations. The study was ground-breaking, and many of the insights are still valid, as I shall illustrate below. However, it also has its limitations, not least due to its time of production. The study was conducted at a time quite different from the current global media landscape, the characteristics of which Lotz has described convincingly. She emphasises the increasing non-linear forms as well as the "complicated, deliberate and individualized" use of television in the "post network era" (Lotz 2014: 267). Considerations about the implications of choice of channel on specific formats could be expanded, and it does not contain any production studies of specific shows.

In *The Format Age* (2016) Jean Chalaby adopts a historical perspective and makes a key distinction between scripted television formats (TV series) and unscripted television formats (gameshows, reality). He points to the fact that scripted television formats became popular later than unscripted television formats. Chalaby argues that this is a result of three circumstances: 1) They are more complex to adapt on a textual level, 2) they are more expensive to adapt, and 3) because they are more complex and expensive to adapt, they also fail more often than unscripted formats, increasing the risk investors run when financing scripted formats. Since the mid-2000s, however, the transfer of knowledge in scripted format trading has improved and thus more scripted formats have been successfully adapted, Chalaby proposes. He also attributes the rise of scripted drama to an increase in demand in the American television system in particular, and the fact that quality series suddenly emerged from, notably, Scandinavia and Israel. Consequently, Chalaby uses explanations related to culture to account for the differences between scripted and unscripted formats, and why the former did not travel successfully in the late 1990s and early 2000s. He uses explanations related to different media systems to explain why scripted formats did begin to travel from the mid-2000s and onwards. As such, Chalaby shows how cultural and media systemic explanations can complement each other on a macro historical level, but he does not properly discuss why the cultural approach is suitable in the one case, or why the system-based approach is best used in explaining the other.

All of this illustrates the need for a more in-depth consideration of the divide between explanations related to culture and television system when accounting for format adaptation, a qualified account of powers and weaknesses of each framework, and a discussion of which methods accompany each framework best. The following review focuses on literature about adapting scripted formats such as television series. However, a number of publications in adaptation studies, some of them canonical, deal with both scripted and unscripted formats such as game or reality shows. Thus, it is impossible to exclude some discussion about unscripted formats, and what the difference between adapting scripted and unscripted formats might be.

4. THE CULTURE ARGUMENT

There is a strong tradition of focusing on culture – and especially national culture – when analysing travelling formats. The research on unscripted entertainment formats is relatively extensive, however, and sometimes researchers will just assume or imply that the findings of this research can also be

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applied to scripted formats. As will become apparent in the following, sometimes it can, while other times it cannot. In *Copycat* TV, Albert Moran starts off by emphasising the continued importance of the nation state (1998). He positions himself against a popular notion during the end of the last century, namely that a homogenised global culture dominated by powerful international businesses or, in some versions, US cultural imperialism, was dismantling national cultures (Moran 1998:2). If nation states were indeed dissolving and the world was turning into a giant, culturally uniform marketplace, there would be no need for local adaptations of formats. Moran argues that "...such claims seem exaggerated and premature, to say the least" (1998: 2). He points out that in terms of viewership, the 1998 market for internationally circulating television content is vastly inferior to that of programmes only receiving domestic circulation (a point still valid in 2014, see Moran and Aveyard 2014: 22-23), and that the whole international system of television broadcasting was made through agreements between nation states – not powerful corporations.

Moran is not blind to the powers of international commercial actors. Three chapters in *Copycat Television* are dedicated to analysing the international format marketplace and engaging in a case study of Grundy, an Australian-based format-driven company. Nonetheless, Moran makes an extensive study into the connection between format adaptation and sense of national belonging, quoting a wide array of studies dedicated to locating the "Britishness", "Danishness", or other nationality, of a certain version of a format (1998: 75-79). He also delves into his own study of the Australianness of *Prisoner – Cell Block H* (Network Ten, 1979-1986) and the corresponding Americanness of the US remake *Dangerous Women* (Syndicated, 1991-1992). Moreover, Moran touches upon the subject of genre. He contends that certain formats are less susceptible to changes caused by national preferences than others. A short-form game show is arguably less likely to change during format adaptation than a soap opera, which is also something I shall elaborate on below in my discussion of the studies of Beeden and de Bruin (2010), Jensen (2007) and Chalaby (2015).

The idea that national tastes and preferences are key concepts in understanding format adaptation is still widespread, and proponents of such a stance will often argue that effects of the allegedly increasing globalisation are overrated, as is also the case with Moran. Take, for example, Alexandra Beeden and Joost de Bruin's account of the differences between the British and American versions of *The Office*:

> The way in which *The Office* has adapted to the institutional context, culture and humor of the United States, after its success as a British sitcom, illustrates that national identity is a vital part of the global television format trade. While it may appear that the growth of format adaptations reflects the increasingly globalized contemporary world, in fact, format adaptations encourage articulations of national identity and cultural belonging (2010: 3).

The case of *The Office*'s British and American versions is a compelling one, because English is the spoken language in both versions, pointing to the importance of culture and setting rather than language. The original format has been sold to 170 territories all over the world, so it can clearly be appreciated by non-Brits. Still, nationally adapted versions have fared better with audiences outside the UK (Osborn 2011). Beeden and de Bruin's analysis of *The Office* is convincing in its demonstration that the British version does indeed include aesthetics, references and a tone presumably tailored for someone living in the UK rather than someone living in the US, and vice versa with the US version. Having the relative success of the British *The Office* with the British audience and, vice versa, with the American version and its audience, it seems entirely plausible that some of the appeal of the format is indeed related to national tastes and preferences. Additional studies support this notion; Jeffrey Griffin arrives at conclusions similar to those of Beeden and de Bruin, systematically examining what he argues is an "Americanization" of setting, the boss, office staff and dialogue in *The Office* to create a version "steeped in American sensibilities" (2008: 162). Furthermore, *not* establishing a sense of a recognisable national or local setting has been found to be problematic. Sue Turnbull's study of another American remake of a British original, the transformation from *Broadchurch* (ITV, 2013-2017) to *Gracepoint* (Fox, 2014), illustrates this well. Building on Griffin's study of *The Office*, Turnbull notes:

> It may well be that the American *Gracepoint* failed to find an audience, not because it was so different from the original but because it tried too hard to be the same. In other words, far from being a drawback, the cultural specificity of the original *Broadchurch* in terms of the landscape, regional setting and accents, the background grumbles about the weather and politics, resonated with audiences in ways that are inevitably hard to estimate.

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> *Gracepoint*, however, failed to establish the same cultural specificity (Turnbull 2015: 714).

The question is what can be concluded from such studies. Beeden and de Bruin state the following: "Creating this 'cultural proximity' between the program and the national audience is a vital element in the success of any format adaptation, highlighting the importance of national identity in the international format trade" (2010: 17). Nonetheless, is this emphasis on national identity really "vital" to "any format adaptation"? For that matter, are British and American "national" preferences and references really so far apart? If they are, why does Hollywood successfully export thousands of movies to the British market, why do British television channels overflow with US television series, and why could a British movie about distinctly British historical events such as *The King's Speech* (Tom Hooper, 2010) win the Academy Award for Best Picture in 2010 and earn 135 million dollars in the US (Box Office Mojo 2020)? Clearly, under some circumstances, national differences between the British and Americans are of little importance, simply do not matter, or might even be a selling point. Perhaps it was not in spite of its "Britishness", but rather because of it that *The King's Speech* did so well in the United States? As Weissman discusses, cultural difference can be seen as an attraction (2012: 39). The fascination and attraction of a different culture presented in familiar frameworks such as the "American" quality series and the crime genre has also been suggested to be part of the reason why Danish television series originals did so relatively well with foreign audiences (Bondebjerg and Redvall 2015:224).

One aspect missing from Beeden and de Bruin's account of *The Office* is more qualified considerations about the implications of genre. On the one hand, Beeden and de Bruin pay close attention to the issue, continuously discerning between the American and British sitcom genre traditions, pointing out that humour can be a locally based phenomenon (2010: 6), a point also found in Lothar Mikos' work on the German remake of *The Office* (Mikos 2015: 698). On the other hand, they use their one case study from the sitcom genre to make sweeping generalisations across genres about "any format adaptation." However, as Moran and Chalaby pointed out, in the differences between adapting a short gameshow and a scripted television series, genres matter a great deal in adaptation studies. To Chalaby, the difference between scripted and unscripted formats cannot be underestimated, with one of the key points being the knowledge transfer (2015). The buyers and sellers of unscripted formats have developed models in which the transfer of knowledge is a relatively smooth process: "Across all unscripted genres, format buyers have access to full consulting packages that teach them all they need to know to duplicate a show successfully." (2015: 4). Scripted genres, in contrast, face serious challenges in the transfer of knowledge:

> Scripted genres are the most culturally sensitive, and a comedy or drama cannot be reproduced as mechanistically as a game show or talent competition. A straight adaptation of the original, such as a mere translation of the script, will not suffice to make a show palatable to local viewers. Any scripted format must go beyond copycat television and reactualize the script for a new audience. [...] It requires a great deal of talent – and a dose of good fortune – to capture the essence of a comedy or drama and make it work in another culture (Chalaby 2015: 4-5).

On the one hand, Chalaby shows caution in this quote, pointing to the difficulty of making a scripted format work in a new context. However, on the other, his work paints a picture of a television industry that has largely found the keys to successful remakes of scripted content. This is not quite accurate, as the varying success of Danish television series remade in the United States illustrate (Gemzøe 2018). Chalaby's own, primary example of a successful transfer of knowledge is not entirely convincing either. He uses *The Bridge* (FX, 2013-2014), the American remake of Danish/Swedish co-production *Bron/Broen* (DR/SVT, 2011-2018):

> The U.S. production team initially planned to reproduce the melancholic Nordic landscapes and planted the story between Canada and the United States. Once they realized where the essence of the drama lay, they transferred the story to the border between Mexico and the United States. The narco-trafficking between the two countries made the story more current and gave it darker undertones. All in all, the TV industry has a better understanding of the fundamental mechanisms that dictate successful scripted format translation (Chalaby 2015: 14).

The notion that the American production team captured the *essence* of the original drama and successfully adjusted

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it to fit the new setting is a rosy-tinted version of the truth. This can, in part, probably be attributed to the fact that the source on which the notion is based is Lars Blomgren, one of the producers on both the original and the remake of *Broen*. The US version of *Broen* was cancelled after two seasons due to low ratings (Wayne 2016). The showrunner, Elwood Reid, does not think of *The Bridge* as a story of a successful remake. Furthermore, while he was indeed instructed in the nuances of the original format such as the characteristics of national stereotypes used in the series, he largely discarded this information (Gemzøe 2016). Whether or not placing the remake on the border between Mexico and the United States is, in fact, evidence of the television industry's better understanding of format adaptation is also an open question that has been explored elsewhere (Gemzøe 2018). The point is that, while more scripted formats do succeed, many still fail or struggle, and the transfer of knowledge is still a troublesome area. This does not, however, take away from Chalaby's convincing description of the differences between unscripted and scripted genres in format adaptation.

Beeden and de Bruin clearly emphasise national culture in their work on *The Office*, drawing on Moran's work, but also that of Joseph Straubhaar (2007). As previously indicated, they highlight Straubhaar's theory on cultural proximity in their article, quoting him for "Most audiences seem to prefer television programmes that are as close to them as possible in language, ethnic appearance, dress, style, humour, historical reference and shared topical knowledge." (Beeden and de Bruin 2010: 6). They use the quote to cement the importance of national culture in format adaptation, but in the 2007 work from which the quote stems, Straubhaar actually goes to some lengths to point out that his idea of cultural proximity is not nationally bound. The next two sentences in Straubhaar's text, following the quote above, did not make it into Beeden and de Bruin's article. They are: "

> This is not necessarily a national phenomenon. Audiences can be attracted or feel proximities to local culture, regional cultures within their nation, national culture, and transnational cultural regions or spaces" (Straubhaar 2007: 26).

Later in his book, Straubhaar goes on to further nuance the theory, pointing out how a nation can, in itself, be surprisingly diverse. 'American' is not one entity. People in Idaho might think *Seinfeld* (NBC, 1989-1998) is too New York in its outlook and cultural references, and people from Austin and Dallas, while all Texan, might not think of Texas in the same way (2007: 198). Straubhaar also expands and nuances the notion of cultural proximity with those of genre proximity, thematic proximity, value proximity and cultural shareability, all ways of explaining why audiences might appreciate media content that was not originally made for them (2007: 197-202). While Straubhaar's own account of cultural proximity is quite nuanced, at least in the 2007 version, it is often not used that way. Beeden and de Bruin's article exemplifies this, Andrea Esser thinks of it as 'reductive' (2015: 28) and, in Ksiazek and Webster's work on cultural proximity and audience behaviour, this summary of the term can be found: "The tale of cultural proximity, then, is usually told as the triumph of domestically produced media over the alien foreign media privileged in models of cultural imperialism and one-way flows" (2008: 488). The cultural proximity theory is powerful because it is easy to understand, especially in its less nuanced versions, and because it is, in part, proven by television ratings favouring national productions. It also has shortcomings. As Bondebjerg and Redvall point out: "In what way, for instance, can this explain that viewers in many European countries clearly prefer American products to those from closer, neighbouring countries?" (2015: 219).

Beeden and de Bruin also recognise that American sitcoms are widespread throughout the world, but they make no effort to explain why these sitcoms' allegedly "American" humour and cultural references resonate with audiences worldwide (2010: 6). This specific issue has received scholarly attention, however, for example by Scott Olson. He puts forward the notion that American television and film is successful worldwide because of the use of *narrative transparency*; the ability for any culture to project its own values and beliefs into the original text. Texts featuring attributes such as open-endedness, virtuality and production values, to name but a few, are, according to Olson, transparent and thus more prone to being appreciated by audiences from a variety of cultural backgrounds (1999: 94). Olson is not a format adaptation researcher, and his theory seems in opposition to the thought and practice of adapting content. Why does format adaption exist if it is possible to produce texts with *narrative transparency* and make them successful all over the world? However, it does appear unlikely that the American entertainment industry is dominating the global market solely due to higher production budgets and better marketing. The concept of narrative transparency might have some merit, and it has also been used outside of the context of omnipresent American media texts. It has even been argued that Danish

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crime classic *Forbrydelsen* (DR, 2007-2012) to some extent did well with foreign audiences because it featured *narrative transparency* (Dunleavy 2014: 8). However, such a reading invites the question: If it was transparent, why, then, was it remade?

I shall end this overview of the position highlighting the importance of cultural and especially national categories with a few more points from Moran. In his 2009 article, "Global franchising, local customizing: The cultural economy of TV program formats", Moran fully acknowledges that "Home audiences are likely to be mixed, heterogeneous and diverse in their interests and tastes" (2009: 122). Still, in 2009, he continuously stresses the importance and relevance of national frameworks, rejecting notions of the regional or local, because adapting for a local rather than national audience does not make sense economically:

> The ambition is to gather the largest mass audience possible. Hence, even where specific choices have to be made regarding language, accent, ethnicity, religion and so on that will discriminate against various groups in a viewing population, format programming implicitly suggests that its address and appeal extend beyond local communities and attempts to talk to a national audience (2009: 122).

Moran turns to Michael Billig's widely used notion of *banal nationalism* to point to all the unobtrusive, subtle reminders of the national issue that, according to Moran, are present in national versions of formats – reminders, which help constitute a sense of nation, albeit an ongoing, constructed one: "...in an era of rapidly changing features of the television landscape, TV formats continue to anchor their adaptations in the ongoing reality of the national" (2009: 123-124).

This overview of recent attempts to account for format adaptation by using arguments related to culture, and especially national culture and belonging, can be summed up in the following way. Using culturally based explanations to account for changes through format adaptations is widespread in the academic literature on the subject, and paying attention to national culture, in particular, has been suggested to be a key concept in understanding format adaptation. These explanations are, in some cases, justified and powerful. For example, in the case of a format such as *The Office*, Griffin and Beeden and de Bruin's studies seem convincing in their argument that some of the appeal is indeed related to national tastes and preferences (2008, 2010). In other cases, explanations related to national tastes and preferences fall short, or, in some ways, are misleading. The idea that national adaptations are necessary and will always do better than the original text is proven wrong by the texts that transcend their original contexts and do well with foreign audiences. Cultural difference can be an attraction and a selling point.

Whether or not explanations tied to national tastes and preferences are suitable also relates to questions of genre. Some genres are more culturally sensitive than others. It would appear that scripted formats and especially those based on humour are more dependent on regional and national variables than other formats. It is certainly possible to find markers for constructions of national culture in media texts. However, these markers vary in nature, from aesthetics with pictures of national (urban) geography, to mentions of national history, to references to ostensibly national pop culture. The effect of the versatility of these representations is not easily accounted for. In general, studying national culture in media texts presents an array of methodological challenges. For example, how does one sufficiently discern between local, regional and national levels? How does one even define national culture when a nation is filled with people of diverging opinions and experiences, some of them not even born or raised in the country they currently inhabit? The label "American" is generously used in the abovementioned literature, but how does that correspond to the fact that America is one of the most culturally and ethnically diverse countries in the world? These nuances and methodological challenges are often only vaguely accounted for in the format adaptation research. Lastly, a great many of the accounts emphasising national culture as the deciding factor in format adaptation only vaguely or scarcely consider the implications of the specific broadcaster's profile and position on the national and international television market. For some researchers, all of this is sufficient reason to disregard national categories as a meaningful way of working academically with format adaptation. Clearly, other approaches are needed. I shall now explore an alternative way to approach the subject at hand.

5. THE SYSTEM ARGUMENT

As demonstrated above, a great many of the scholars emphasising the importance of national categories have positioned themselves in opposition to globalisation theories. What is interesting is that, in recent years, some format scholars are going back to various theories of globalisation. Globalisation

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was harshly critiqued by Moran (1998: 1-9) and Beeden and de Bruin (2010: 3). However, these researchers are just as insistent in their critique of what, to them, appears to be a dominating discourse of cultural reductionism and essentialism in adaptation theory. For example, in their work on audiences of musical talent show formats, Andrea Esser, Pia Majbritt Jensen, Heidi Keinonen and Anna Maria Lemor are using frameworks of "glocalisation" and the transcultural, trying to find "an approach that avoids falling back on the unproven but widely accepted and perpetuated assumption that the audience appeal of format adaptations lies in the possibility they offer to be nationalized" (Esser et al. 2016: 297). Several of these scholars have published various critiques of national-based approaches on their own.

Andrea Esser, for instance, is adamant in her critique of the national positions. In her article "Defining 'the Local' in Localization or 'Adapting for Whom?'", Esser specifically refers to the abovementioned works of Beeden and de Bruin (2010), Moran (2009) and Moran and Aveyard (2014) as examples of studies that over-emphasise the importance of national categories in format adaptation (Esser 2016: 20). Likewise, Esser contends that the popularity of Straubhaar's theory of cultural proximity is more a result of "deeply engrained cultural essentialism" than empirical findings (20). Esser does admit some potential concerns. She recognises that national frameworks can, in some cases, be relevant (30). She notes that public service broadcasters, for example, are entrusted to "reflect and build the nation" (23), that media policies are often national and that the television industry generously uses national labels such as, for example, "Danish drama". Esser's critique departs from the methodological challenges of using national frameworks that I have listed above, but also the observation that state and nation are not always the same thing. Equally, nation and language are not always intertwined.

The studies on which she builds her critique are varied in nature and cover both scripted and unscripted formats. She draws on Martin Ndlela's studies of the *Idol* format's various African incarnations: *Idols South Africa* (MNet, 2002-), *Afrikaanse Idol* (KykNET, 2006) and *Idols West Africa* (M-Net, 2007) as well as the *Big Brother Africa* (M-Net, 2003, 2007-) (Ndlela 2012, 2013). These adaptations were meant to transcend national borders and language barriers, Esser contends. Recognising that a postcolonial heritage and the emerging nature of the African television market obviously influences these findings, she points to Jensen's study about the effect of the media system in adapting entertainment formats and a study Luca Barra conducted on dubbing of *The Simpsons* (Fox, 1989-) in Italy (Jensen 2007, Barra 2009). *The Simpsons*' first two seasons in Italy were scheduled late at night and the adaptation/dubbing was 'gross and vulgar', targeting a mature audience, but, from season three and onwards, the show was broadcast in the daytime and the dubbing was changed accordingly, censoring, cutting or masking profanities (Barra 2009:516). Esser uses this example to highlight the importance of scheduling slots, implying that target audiences might be more important than national audiences. Esser continues with two German cases: *Betty La Fea* being remade in Germany with a substantially younger cast to cater for the Sat. 1 channel's youthful target audience and, similarly, *Germany's Next Top Model* (ProSieben, 2006-) being remade in an international, young and glamourous way to reflect ProSieben's channel profile. Lastly, Esser points out that studies show that, in particular, young people engage with multiple different versions of entertainment formats they like online, pointing to the importance of global rather than national audiences (2016: 26).

It is a completely valid point that the effects of channel profile, scheduling slot and media system should be accounted for. The question, however, is whether such factors are *more* important or relevant than the differences that can be explained by national frameworks. Esser's work implies that this is sometimes the case, and the examples with the African entertainment formats seem convincing in that regard. It would, however, be interesting to examine the European examples more closely. Take, for example, Barra's article from which Esser draws the scheduling example with the two Italian versions of *The Simpsons* (2009). That article, as a whole, is certainly not an attempt to question national frameworks in adaptation studies – quite the opposite. Barra consequently uses the term "Italianization" about the translation processes, along with "adapting nationally [...] in order to make them accessible to the domestic audience" (509). He demonstrates thoroughly how adaptation processes in Italy more often than not play on, and reinforce, national stereotypes (516) and also how adapters tend to translate even well-known 'foreign' references to something more 'Italian' in order to be safe and to reach a wider domestic audience (513). These are the primary findings of Barra's 2009 study. The scheduling case with *The Simpsons* is merely a slight nuance in the overarching impression of a distinctly *Italian* way of adapting media texts to fit domestic national screens. In a 2013 article, Barra updates the findings, pointing to a recent increase in maintaining original, foreign references (107)

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which Esser also points out (2016: 27). Nonetheless, the national framework remains unquestionably dominant in Barra's 2013 piece as demonstrated by the continued use of the 'Italianization' term along with sentiments such as: "Especially with comedies and sitcoms, every joke must be adapted to the tastes and humour of the national public" (106). Barra's work, if anything, has its departure point in frameworks based on conceptions of national culture, and it is curious that it is used to argue against such frameworks. Moreover, one could question whether it was more important for the audience of the German adaptation of *Betty La Fea* that it had a youthful vibe or that it was 'proximate' in language, aesthetics, references and tone. Lastly, Esser does not fully consider the implications of the differences between scripted and unscripted formats. For example, young Europeans are watching *Canada's Next Top Model* (CityTV, 2006-2007, CTV, 2009) online, but are they watching Canadian drama formats to a similar degree? In fact, outside of countries with traditions of dubbing, are young Europeans watching any foreign non-US/UK drama formats to a noteworthy degree?

Esser writes about both scripted and unscripted formats, but two case studies argue for the importance of media system and especially channel profile in relation to remakes of television series. As mentioned, Akass argues that the change in media system had a substantial impact on *The Killing*, the American remake of *Forbrydelsen*, to which I concur (Akass 2015). Michael Wayne argues that in the adaptation process from *Bron/Broen* to *The Bridge*, the channel brand and strategic considerations of FX were more important than adapting to fit an 'American' audience's taste and sensibilities:

> ...producers were not attempting to repurpose *Broen/Bron*'s narrative for the American audience. Rather, the network wanted to provide its traditionally young and masculine audience with another 'muscular' crime series while appealing to additional demographics in the hopes of expanding the channel's overall viewership (2016).

Wayne's argument is that the adaptation focused on the violence in the series, and that this was supposed to appeal to the traditional viewership of FX. At the same time, the move towards the US-Mexican border and the female lead was supposed to lure in female viewers and a Spanish-speaking audience. However, this effort failed, he argues, because "an autistic female protagonist and a narrative centrally concerned with violence against women" ultimately did not appeal to FX's young and masculine audience (2016). Wayne bases his analysis on excerpts from interviews with producers and showrunners found online. I have the following reservations about his analysis: While it is undoubtedly true that FX thought they could reach new markets by placing *The Bridge* on the US-Mexico border, it is misleading to frame that as evidence of the transforming power of FX's channel brand. My research, and, to some extent, Wayne's own data, indicate that FX was originally very keen to set the show at the US-Canada border and point to Elwood Reid, one of the two showrunners on the series, as the deciding factor in the move to the US-Mexico border (Gemzøe 2018). Moreover, Reid also argued that the shift was made because of reasons related to national culture. There was too little cultural difference between the United States and Canada, he felt: "Canada and the United States? There's no difference. What's going to happen? Are you going to have a debate about socialized health care?" (Reid, as quoted in Wayne 2016: 5). Reid, then, lobbied for the changes not out of considerations related to channel brand or target audience, but rather reasons based on his ideas of national culture and dramaturgy. The producers might have indulged Reid because they thought they could reach a larger (Hispanic) audience. But it is, from my perspective, misleading to use that indulgence as the basis for calling *The Bridge* a "channel adaptation". This does not mean that the channel's brand is of no importance. Wayne's demonstration that FX had a 'masculine' brand and his argument that FX also bought the rights to remake *Bron/Broen* to increase female viewership appears sufficiently convincing. However, it simply does not have any significant impact on the way the show was remade.

In the work on young audiences of musical talent show formats mentioned in the beginning of this section, frameworks of "glocalisation" and the transcultural were suggested as alternative approaches to national categories (Esser et al. 2017: 297). The question is whether transcultural and "glocal" approaches are useful to the same extent in examining scripted format adaptation, or if a "glocal" framework is, in fact, necessary to avoid cultural essentialism and reductionism. Moran and Aveyard would perhaps advise against it. "While the moment for parochial internationalism to achieve any kind of currency has long since past," they write, "it is also clear that the more popular global-local designations struggle to encapsulate the nuanced characteristics of television formats" (2014: 24). However, as discussed, national-based frameworks do fall short in a number of ways. Seen from a certain point of view, frameworks emphasising the local over the national suit the studies of scripted formats even better than those of un-

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scripted ones. A great many of the most successful unscripted formats, such as *The X Factor* (2004-), *The Voice* (2010-), *Idols* (2001-), *Big Brother* (1999-), etc., in some cases may be better captured by national and international frameworks than local ones. They are set in studios that look the same across formats, pointing to the international. Judges, participants and contestants will speak a national language. They might have a local dialect or foreign accent, pointing to the local or the international, but the purpose/structure of the format will always be more important than location: to sing in a singing competition, to "play the game" in *Big Brother*, etc. Even if producers do try to give the format a 'local feel' by using iconic urban geography as a background for the judges, as it has been done in *American Idol*, the show does not need to be authentic in its depiction of the local in the same way that a scripted drama format does. *American Idol* is constructed not as a local, but as a national event – hence the name.

Contrary to this, *The Killing* is set in Seattle and, as a scripted format, it needs to deliver an authentic rendition of the local environment in which its story takes place. This is a huge task that includes accounting for local aesthetics, dialects, customs, laws, traditions, history, etc. Seen from this perspective, scripted formats are more local adaptations than they are national adaptations, especially when compared to certain unscripted formats. There are nuances to this, with formats such as *Jersey Shore* (MTV, 2009-2012) or *The Hills* (MTV, 2006-2010) being examples of unscripted formats that are, in some sense, based on the authenticity of their location. However, even such formats do not need to account for or consider the details of location in the same way that a scripted format does. If somebody has a British accent on *Jersey Shore*, for example, it does not necessarily need much of an explanation. If someone has a British accent in crime fiction series *The Bridge*, it would be strange if it was not accounted for or part of the story somehow. Having said that, *The Killing* and *The Bridge*, while in some ways tied to the local in story and aesthetics, do try to appeal to (certain segments of) a national audience.

This section has discussed the power of the media system, the channel profile, the scheduling slot and the potentially global audience. These perspectives and explanations have proven to be relevant and perhaps overlooked. Whether these perspectives are *better* than frameworks emphasising national categories seems questionable, however – the section illustrates that national-based approaches, while certainly reductive, still seem to hold significant explanatory power in some aspects of format adaptation.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This article has presented and analysed pros and cons in dominant research traditions on format adaptation. Some researchers argue that nuances in format adaptation are best captured by frameworks based on differences in national culture, while others think "glocal", transcultural explanations rooted in differences in media systems best in accounting for adaptation processes. In some cases, the two schools of thought have positioned themselves against each other, sometimes rightfully critiquing shortcomings in the other camp, but at other times tending to exaggerate the explanatory power of their own framework. This article has demonstrated that exaggerations and troublesome generalisations could often be avoided with an increased genre awareness: The difference between scripted and unscripted formats is substantial, but is not always accounted for. Judging from the research this article has studied, it seems that frameworks with their departure point in national and local culture seem to have power when describing certain aspects of scripted formats, such as television series, namely issues of location, language and the characters' (and audiences') frame of references. It also becomes evident that frameworks with their departure point in media systems and the global format trade are nearly always relevant when looking at formats, but are rarely "better" than other frameworks. Rather, the different frameworks complement each other. Finally, in all of these frameworks, the power of individual agency is sometimes overlooked. A single powerful individual can shape an adaptation process immensely, which, as discussed previously, was the case with FX's *The Bridge*. In that adaptation process, Elwood Reid, showrunner on the adaptation, talked the network and his fellow showrunner into a radical change in locations, which fundamentally changed the tone and direction of the remake. This idea has been explored more thoroughly elsewhere (Gemzøe 2018). Researchers always need to show caution, and more nuanced frameworks and understandings related to industrial, cultural and national categories should be developed. This article should be seen as part of this effort, testing the boundaries of frameworks in format adaptation.

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Prisoners of War (Channel 2, 2010-2012)
Seinfeld (NBC, 1989-1998)
The Bridge (FX, 2013-2014)
The Killing (AMC & Netflix, 2012-2014)
The Office (BBC Two, 2001-2003)
The Office (NBC, 2005-2013)
The Simpsons (Fox, 1989-)
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