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## The Show That Refused To Die: The Rise and Fall Of AMC's *The Killing*

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AMC's *The Killing* is notable as the 'show that refused to die'. Cancelled and resurrected 3 times, migrating from basic cable distributor AMC to streaming service Netflix, *The Killing* stands as a good example of how series are increasingly being bought and sold in a rapidly changing TV landscape desperate for original content. With particular attention to the way motherhood is represented in the both *Forbrydelsen*, and *The Killing*, this article asks: Do nationally and culturally specific changes to the narrative of this European acquisition render the US adapted version redundant in Europe?

Ostensibly the transatlantic adaptation of AMC's *The Killing* (2011-14)<sup>1</sup> is a simple tale of the acquisition and adaptation of a nationally successful series for a global television audience. *Forbrydelsen*, created by Søren Sveistrup, premiered in Denmark on 7 January 2007<sup>2</sup> and, beginning its transatlantic journey in Norway in 2007, aired in 32 countries between 2007 and 2014, before alighting on British shores on BBC4 in 2011. In the UK, it entered into a television landscape that had recently lost US TV dramas like AMC's *Mad Men* (2007-15)<sup>3</sup> and new HBO shows (as well as their back catalogue) to exclusive channel, Sky Atlantic HD. Transmitting in the prime 9pm Saturday evening slot on the digital channel BBC4, hitherto primarily devoted to documentaries and Arts programming, *Forbrydelsen* slotted neatly into the timeslot recently vacated by Swedish import, *Wallander* (2005- )<sup>4</sup> and was aimed at the same small, but discerning audience. The dark and broody crime drama with detective, Sarah Lund (Sofie Gråbøl), at its centre attracted record viewers for the channel: soon out-rating the hugely popular *Wallander*, and getting even higher viewing figures than the channel's other breakout import, *Mad Men*.<sup>5</sup>

And yet, the sale and adaptation of *Forbrydelsen* to AMC's *The Killing* is a curious tale of twists and turns that reveals much about the way the US TV landscape is changing as well as highlighting the problems of adapting an imported format to a US TV industry in flux. Looking at the way the narrative of *Forbrydelsen* was tailored to a US TV viewership, with particular attention to how the erratic mothering of Sarah Lund transmogrified into the 'bad' mothering intrinsic to its US incarnation, this article will argue that the cultural differences inscribed into the adapted narrative inevitably impact upon the adapted series' European reception. In order to contextualise this article, I will be looking at a brief history of how the US TV industry developed into an era defined by convergence and digitisation arguing that the story of the adaptation of *Forbrydelsen* to *The Killing*, with its various cancellations and resuscitations, points to the way audiences are now being aggressively targeted by new streaming and delivery sites. While there are examples of shows in the past being saved through audience pressure<sup>6</sup> and while branding has long been instrumental in the appeal to an ever larger audience (Johnson 2012, 143-44), the transfer of *The Killing* from AMC to Netflix shows how small but loyal fan bases are increasingly being used to lure an audience to new forms of delivery systems desperate to break into a lucrative and global television market.

### **Background**

According to Mark C. Rogers, Michael Epstein and Jimmie L. Reeves, the US TV landscape has, since its inception, moved through three distinct eras: 'TV I (roughly 1948-1975), TV II (roughly 1975-1995) and TV III (from 1995-present) with each era defined by market forces (Rogers, Epstein and Reeves 2002, 43). TV I for 'brute ratings and ruled by the "lowest common denominator" or "least objectionable" programming philosophies' (44); TV II which reconfigured "popularity" in terms of the quest for "quality demographics" and promoted 'the development of programming that attracted segments of the population that were most valued by advertisers' (46) and the latest era: TV III in which 'strong brand identification is not only an imperative ... [but] is also widely recognized as an indispensable marketing strategy across the various forms of commercial television services' (48). In 2007 Rogers, Reeves and Epstein argued that, due to 'quality' shows being developed by cable companies, HBO being at the forefront of this revolution, far from being 'fringe' television, the 1990s was a decade in which 'the centre of gravity of American popular television shifted away from the broadcast networks and towards the basic cable sector' (Rogers, Reeves and Epstein 2007, 83). This latter era of television is, for Rogers, Reeves and Epstein, 'probably the final moment in the age of television' (83) a statement that is partly confirmed by the way streaming sites like Netflix and Amazon have recently entered the marketplace to jostle for their place as providers of original TV content.

Rogers, Reeves and Epstein's prediction, that television 'is destined to be overshadowed by a converged set of interactive, virtual and mobile communication media' (83) has not (yet) come true, however, as despite viewers choosing to watch television on a dizzying array of mobile devices, the television programme itself continues to be produced by large TV conglomerates that are increasingly forced to find new ways to attract an audience willing to pay to watch commercial-free TV outside of scheduling constraints. HBO famously led the way in this increasingly cluttered marketplace by producing such quality shows as *Sex and the City* (1998-2004), *The Sopranos* (1998-2008) and *Six Feet Under* (2001-2005). Uninhibited by the restrictions of network television, able to sell their product to a discerning audience willing to pay for the service and leading the way with its high production values, adult-themes and original writing, HBO became synonymous with a new breed of quality TV show. It was not long until other cable channels stole HBO's playbook with Showtime adapting the UK Channel 4 series, *Queer as Folk* (1999-2000) for an American audience (2000-2005) and producing original series like *The L Word* (2004-9), *Weeds* (2005-12) and *Dexter* (2006-13). Other cable channels were quick to follow suit, most notably AMC who bought HBO reject *Mad Men* (2007-15) and breakout winner *Breaking Bad* (2008-13). But, this is not just a story of how cable channels broke into the US TV playing field by commissioning original series as, behind the scenes, the cable companies were increasingly looking to the development of digital delivery in order to secure their place in an increasingly uncertain future of television distribution.

Again it is instructive to look at the development of HBO as a leading brand in the cable distribution market. Although they were a relatively small company to begin with, HBO (backed by Time-Life Cable) broke into the arena of cable

delivery by transmitting that, now famous, hockey game on 8 November 1972 to an audience of approximately 300 homes. While the programme itself was not particularly notable, the method of distribution was and HBO found itself at the forefront of a new way of distributing content as it 'represented a new type of programming for cable, a type of programming that would presage the meteoric rise of the cable industry in the thirty years since.' (Rogers, Epstein and Reeves 2002, 48). At that time cable delivery was only for the re-transmission of television programmes to households that could not receive strong enough broadcast signals and 'existed to facilitate broadcast viewership, not to compete with it' (49). While TV scholars such as Robert J. Thompson argue that it is the network with the lowest audience share that is willing to take risks on its programming (Thompson 1997, 44), behind the scenes it is also often the case that a relatively small network can act as a catalyst to change and take advantage of new and innovative distribution methods. In 1975 HBO did just that and 'operating as an agitator fomenting the satellite revolution' HBO became the first cable company to 'build a national distribution network for television programming using satellite communications' (Rogers, Epstein and Reeves 2002, 49).

Taking an investment gamble on the live televised distribution of the boxing match between Muhammed Ali and Joe Frazier, the 'Thriller in Manila', HBO brokered a deal with RCA to distribute the fight via satellite through its pay-TV offering, the following year it televised the live Wimbledon semi-finals (50). What is important about this development is that while much of the focus on HBO's innovative business practices has been on its subscription only channel and its quality series, most of the groundwork for these innovations had been laid some twenty years earlier, without which its later success in the age of branding would not have been possible. Key to HBO's progress in the field was how the audiences increased with the move to satellite broadcasting: a growth from 9,000 subscribers 'to nearly 200,000 by the of the Ali-Frazier fight' (50). This innovation in distribution was enough, as Rogers, Reeves and Epstein argue, to put pressure on the broadcast TV networks with the result that: 'With added competition for viewers, broadcast networks that had once attracted 90 per cent of television households began to suffer significant audience erosion' (50). In 2002 (at the time of writing that article) the audience share was down to 60 per cent for the networks. This erosion has continued with the primetime network audience falling to below 25.6 per cent share by 2009 with most of the audience migrating to basic cable provision (Gorman 2010). At the same time, many of the Independent Stations have become Network Affiliates and other cable stations have increasingly chipped into the market rising from a 1.9 share in 1999-2000 to 3.1 in 2008-9. It can be no coincidence that the rise of the Internet streaming sites, particularly the launch of Netflix in 1997, are having a considerable impact on a TV audience that is increasingly rejecting the scheduled offerings of major networks for the commercial-free, time-shifted and binge-viewing alternatives offered by streaming sites.

### **Making a Killing**

It is into this rapidly fragmenting TV landscape that AMC premiered the critically acclaimed first season of *The Killing*,<sup>7</sup> Comparisons between HBO and AMC are inevitable. Both made their names by screening uncut, commercial-

free, Hollywood films with their acronyms attesting to their dedication to the filmic nature of their offerings – Home Box Office and American Movie Classics. While AMC maybe a relatively new kid on the original programming block it has, like its movie-themed counterpart, been part of the US television landscape since 1984. Unlike its subscriber only relative though, AMC focused on classic films and earned its money from fees from cable providers maintained by carriage agreements with the channel. Following the launch of Turner Classic Movies (TCM), another basic cable channel in direct competition with AMC's offering of classic movies, the channel was forced to radically re-brand and, in 2002, due to the additional loss of subsidies from cable providers, doubled its advertising slots and began airing programmes that were more attractive to advertisers but, being interrupted with more adverts, less attractive to consumers (Dempsey 2002).

It was not until 2006 that the channel ventured into original scripted programming with its first movie/miniseries that would 'align its identity with more original programming' (Jaramilo 2014, 177). The success of *Broken Trail* (which became 2006's highest rated cable movie earning it 16 Emmy nominations, winning 4) (177) paved the way for AMC's incursion into original programming and, like most success stories before, as a channel with little to lose, AMC could afford to gamble and picked up HBO's reject, *Mad Men*. The irony was that, while the introduction of increased advertising time on the channel enabled AMC to venture into the original series market, at the same time it worked against their cinematic credentials (178). *Mad Men* achieved an unprecedented audience share for AMC reaching ninety-one million households with the first episode reaching 1.6 million. (178). It also became the first basic cable series to win an Emmy for outstanding drama, which it went on to win four consecutive times along with the Golden Globe for Best TV Drama Series for the three years from 2008-10. This success assured AMC's place in cable television history but it was its next series that would consolidate this success and ensure that AMC was considered the next purveyor of original quality TV series. *Breaking Bad* (2008-14) was a global success for the channel and Vince Gilligan's story of a cancer stricken chemistry teacher turned crystal meth cook and dealer, along with the success of the next series, zombie thriller *The Walking Dead* (2010-present), confirmed that AMC, although a basic cable channel, could turn out quality TV series that could rival its commercial-free predecessor, HBO.

The problem came when AMC had to consolidate the success of its three breakout hits. With the end of *Breaking Bad* in sight, the channel found itself looking for new products to continue its success. It would be easy to say that, like the network battle for ratings in the past, AMC tried to play it safe, but the TV landscape has recently come up against further challenges. With some 64 US channels now searching for original material,<sup>8</sup> the battle for acquisition has become even fiercer with competition from streaming channels like Netflix and Amazon. According to Christine Conley at Working Title Film: 'Because there are so many buyers in today's market we're seeing more remakes and format adaptations because there simply aren't enough writers available to develop original programming' (Christine Conley, Working Title films, personal communication, 25 November 2014). In addition, with streaming channels like Netflix enabling viewers to binge watch new series (all episodes of *House of Cards* [2013-present], *Orange is the New Black* [2013-present], *The Walking Dead*

[AMC, 2010-present] and *Breaking Bad* [AMC, 2008-13] were made available at the same time)<sup>9</sup> there is a dearth of new content. In this climate of scarcity it makes sense then for AMC to look to internationally successful series to fill their schedules.

### ***Adapting Forbrydelsen to The Killing***

With a shortage of original material and desperate to find another ratings winner to fill a *Breaking Bad* sized hole in the schedules, *The Killing*, it was hoped, would continue AMC's run of commercial and critical success. The successful adaptations of *Yo Soy, Betty la Fea* (RCN, 1999-2001) to *Ugly Betty* (ABC, 2006-10), Showtime's *Homeland* (2011- present) (from Israel's *Hatufim*, Channel 2, 2010), and HBO's *In Treatment* (2008- ) (from Israel's *BeTipul* [HOT3, 2005-2008]) proved just how successful the adaptation market could be and, despite an even longer list of TV imports that failed to make the grade,<sup>10</sup> the acquisition and adaptation of *Forbrydelsen* to *The Killing* would ensure, it was hoped, another hit for AMC. Filming on the show started in 2010 and the series premiered on AMC in the US on 3 April 2011, only 4 months after *Forbrydelsen* first hit UK TV screens. Comparisons to an earlier police procedural that had been set in Seattle soon became apparent. Whether writer Veena Sud deliberately set out to evoke the long-mourned *Twin Peaks* (ABC, 1990-1), is a moot point but the similarities were immediately remarked upon (Brubaker 2011, Hale 2012): A dreamy, hypnotic tone, murder by drowning of a seemingly popular and uncomplicated teenage heroine complete with the switch from 'Who Killed Laura Palmer?' to 'Who Killed Rosie Larsen?' Coupled with the soundtrack - a curious mixture of music from the Danish series with a *Twin Peaks*-esque feel - comparisons were inevitable. But without 'David Lynch's metaphysical whimsy' (Bianculli 2011) the sentimentalisation of a family overcome by grief for their murdered daughter soon descended into an over-blown melodramatic narrative rather than a complex study of a family torn apart by grief (see Kohnen 2013, 267-272, Staiger 2012).

In addition, AMC would have done well to research the reception of *Forbrydelsen* in its native Denmark, as well as the problems encountered by *Twin Peaks*' refusal to reveal the murderer at the end of season 1 some 25 years earlier, as the outcry caused by the cliffhanger ending of the first season of *Forbrydelsen* in Denmark after only 10 episodes meant that production of the remainder of the series was quickly brought forward.<sup>11</sup> The demands of scheduling in the US, however, meant that 60-minute episodes (without commercial breaks) needed to be adapted to fit around AMC's schedules of 45-minute episodes (with commercials) in a 13-episode season. The choice was stark. Either rush through towards the conclusion of the first season, revealing the murderer, or split the season in two, leaving the audience on a cliffhanger ending that would hopefully ensure their return for season 2. The fateful decision to spread the case over 2 seasons caused an outcry from both fans and critics, was quickly blamed for the loss of some 33 percent of the US audience between the first and second season premieres (down from 2.7million to 1.8million) (Hibberd, 2015), a downslide that continued through to the second season finale that saw only 1.4million viewers tuning into discover who had killed Rosie Larsen, and which led to the series' first cancellation.

In the UK, *The Killing* premiered on Channel 4 on 7 July 2011, 3 months after the end of BBC4's *Forbrydelsen 1*, and 4 months before the beginning of *Forbrydelsen 2*. Despite competition from the original Danish series, initial audience figures looked good with 2.2 million viewers tuning in despite the fact that the BBC4 audience already knew who had killed Nanna Birk Larsen (Julie R. Ølgaard) making it hard to see the attraction for an already-solved crime thriller when 'one of the most important plot devices of a thriller is suspense' (Agger 2012, 41).<sup>12</sup> It was also hard to see how AMC's *The Killing* would fit with a fanbase already in love with Sofie Gråbøl's, Sarah Lund, all Faroese jumper and gritty determination, particularly as Gråbøl's portrayal of a driven woman unhindered by vanity, freed from tired old gendered tropes, particularly those related to motherhood, had been so refreshing. Despite Mireille Enos' Sarah Linden having the same disregard for appearance (with Lund's taste for heavy knitted jumpers) and stoic commitment to solving a case, audience loyalty to *Forbrydelsen* over AMC/Fox's version soon proved just how difficult the reception for this particular drama on UK screens would be as the second season of *The Killing* (as in the US) began 'with fewer viewers on Channel 4 than the original series had on BBC4' (Plunkett 2012).<sup>13</sup>

Adaptation of any series inevitably invites comparisons between the 'original' and its new iteration (McCabe & Akass 2012) but the way the narrative of *The Killing* was modified over the course of four seasons is instructive. For example, the unproblematic treatment of Sarah Lund's haphazard parenting style, continually putting the demands of the case before the needs of her teenage son, are never questioned in *Forbrydelsen* and, in a country where adequate maternity leave and high quality childcare are deemed essential for all families, this is no surprise.<sup>14</sup> American women, on the other hand, enjoy no such luxuries and, in a country with some of the worst maternity benefits of the Western World, the narrative hostility towards the mothers in *The Killing* tells a different cultural story.<sup>15</sup> Little wonder then that a comparison between the way mothering is represented within *Forbrydelsen* and *The Killing* reveals a narrative hostility in the US version absent in the original, particularly towards those women that choose self-fulfillment and/or a return to work after childbirth over domestication.<sup>16</sup> And it is not just the focus on Sarah Linden's 'bad' mothering that sets the tone but the continual narrative denigration of 'selfish' maternity that becomes increasingly darker as *The Killing* moves from the basic cable restrictions of AMC to the relative freedoms afforded by Netflix.

With this in mind, it should come as no surprise that, while the first few episodes of *The Killing* stray little from the original, motherhood and parenting soon become the focus of the adapted version. The location of Seattle (although filmed in Vancouver) provides the perfect backdrop for a dark, brooding series with perpetual rainfall in place of *Forbrydelsen*'s wintry (if wet) landscape. Sarah Linden is about to depart for a new life in California with partner and son Jack (Liam James) until the discovery of a body on her last day on the job in Seattle presents her with a case she is compelled to solve. Teamed with replacement Steven Holder (Joel Kinnaman), a jive-talking detective with his own shady past, and reminiscent of the odd-couple pairing of Lund and Jan Meyer (Søren Malling), the narrative unfolds in more or less the same way as that of *Forbrydelsen*. Prevented from leaving for their new lives, both Lund and Linden are portrayed as women driven to solve the murder at the heart of the

series, both women prioritizing the case over their own lives, including mothering their teenage sons. It soon becomes clear though, through a gradually revealed backstory, that Linden's drive to solve the case and inability to care for her own teenage son is blamed on a childhood spent in foster care after abandonment by her own mother; a justification for her erratic mothering absent from the Danish version. Replacing Lund's mother, Vibeke (Anne Marie Helger), is social worker Regi Darnell (played by Annie Corley), a no-nonsense, straight-talking, woman who hints at the emotional and psychological toll of Linden's obsessive work ethic, an obsession that brought her close to mental breakdown and the loss of teenage son, Jack during her work on a previous case.

It is not only Sarah Linden that bears the brunt of criticism in the first 2 seasons, however, as the narrative repeatedly makes links between bad mothering and troubled teens. Subtle changes to the way the Larsen's react to the murder of their daughter tell us much about how this particular adaptation can be partly understood as 'a barometer for the state of [the] society' at the centre of its narrative (Nestingen, quoted in Agger 2012, 8). When the prime suspect in her daughter's murder case, Rosie's teacher, Bennet Ahmed (Brandon Jay McLaren) is released, Rosie's mother, Mitch Larsen (Michelle Forbes) in a narrative move away from the Danish original, instigates his near-death beating by her husband Stan (Brent Sexton). Stan's terrible retribution and his resulting incarceration, it is suggested, is her fault, as is his subsequent re-involvement with the Russian mafia. Mitch eventually leaves her husband and two young boys and, in another change to *Forbrydelsen's* narrative, takes time away from the family. A move that led to her being named one of the '10 Worst Moms on TV', a list headed by Sarah Linden, who stood accused of 'not actively trying to kill her son, but ... may end up doing so anyway' ('The Ten Worst Moms on TV, n.d.).

With the cancellation by AMC and subsequent resurrection by Fox and Netflix, Season 3 of *The Killing* finds Linden dragged back into an investigation involving the disappearance of Seattle street children, a case that inevitably (for US TV at least) brings with it associations of Linden's own troubled childhood. With son Jack no longer on the scene (now living with his once estranged father) Linden is free to become deeply obsessed in a race against time to save the life of death row inmate Ray Seward (Peter Sarsgaard). *The Killing's* third outing finds Linden's 'bad' mothering temporarily set aside but Danette Leeds (Amy Selmetz), mother of missing teenager Kallie (Cate Sproule), is the picture of neglectful maternity and is squarely blamed for her daughter's fate, guilty of putting her boyfriend, Joe Mills' (played by Ryan Robbins) needs above those of her daughter. Mama Dips (Grace Zabriskie) may have shielded her son's paedophilic activities from the police but it is Danette that is held ultimately responsible for his actions as she slowly realises that her violent boyfriend maybe implicated in the case. As Danette slowly unravels, her 'bad' mothering is compounded by the knowledge that she invited a violent paedophilic pornographer into their home with tragic consequences.

It is not just neglectful mothers that put their children's lives at risk in season 3 of *The Killing* but predatory men like Pastor Mike (Ben Cotton) who preys on the homeless teenagers he purports to shelter and death row inmate Alton (James 'Little JJ' Lewis) who hangs himself in his cell after receiving forgiveness from his siblings for the murder of their parents. In the dark and

twisted world of *The Killing* 3 teenagers, removed from parental care, are at risk from all walks of life, including those that should be protecting them from harm. As Linden becomes more obsessed with the case, her final moments with an increasingly desperate Seward not only reveal his apparent innocence but Linden's feelings of personal maternal guilt towards her son, Jack. In this dark world of serial killing, street children and death row, parental responsibility is held responsible for the perils that befall these children – whether murderous or not – but it is the mothers that are ultimately blamed for their bad choices. The revelation that it is Linden's ex-lover, Police Chief James Skinner, Head of Special Investigations Unit, that is the serial killer compounds this maternal guilt, heavily implied is that Linden is as bad a judge of character as Kallie's mother, Danette, as she rekindles her relationship with Skinner, unaware of his hidden life, before his murderous identity is revealed.

If bad mothering is increasingly held responsible for the terrible fates of the teenage victims in the first 3 seasons of *The Killing*, by the time the series had been cancelled and resuscitated for a third time, this time by Netflix, Linden and Holder would venture into even darker territory. In a narrative liberally adapted from seasons 3 and 4 of *Forbrydelsen*, Holder and Linden, who are both implicated in the shooting of Skinner, are called to the bloody scene of the murders of the Stansbury family. The only survivor, Kyle Stansbury (Tyler Ross) can remember nothing of the incident and this final outing of the series follows the parallel investigations into the murders of Skinner and the Stansbury family. Publicity in advance of the final season assured viewers of the freedom afforded by Netflix, reminiscent of interviews given by David Chase and Allan Ball in the early days of HBO: 'We can curse now,' enthused Veena Sud in an interview with TVline.com 'Holder's not the only one who developed a potty mouth over the hiatus. "Even Linden gets an F-bomb"' (Ausiello 2014). The article goes onto celebrate the joy of the commercial free environment afforded by Netflix: 'in other words, the show's relatively short six-episode season will actually have a running time closer to eight' (Ibid.): 6 hour-long episodes that would allow series creator, Veena Sud, the freedom to delve even deeper into the dark world of maternal denigration.

If Sarah Linden, Mitch Larsen and Danette Leeds were victims of *The Killing's* misogyny, then the freedoms afforded by distribution through Netflix allows an intense hostility towards women who fail to live up to a culture's expectations of maternal duty. In this season it is not only the accusations of bad mothering that Holder repeatedly spits at his partner that are noteworthy, but the way the narrative develops into a melodramatic invective against women that fail in their 'natural' maternal role. St. George's naval college, at the centre of the mystery, consists of male cadets under the care of Colonel Margaret Rayne (Joan Allen), an unsympathetic commanding officer who practices 'tough love' on her charges. Without that nurturing mother, it is suggested; young men descend into an Orwellian dystopia where aggression and bullying are the norm and empathy for others is scarce. At the heart of the case is the gradual exposé of events leading up to the night of the murders and the revelation that, as suspected, Kyle Stansbury is guilty of the crime. Gradually hinted at along the way is the unprofessional nature of Linda Stansbury's (played by Anne Marie DeLuise) tennis coaching and her sexual penchant for young boys, the cruelty of Philip Stansbury (Bruce Dawson) towards his son and the eventual revelation of

the true maternal relationship between Rayne and her charge. Again, while fathers do not escape unscathed from a world in which parental neglect runs amok, it is the mothers that are treated with the harshest narrative treatment as is evidenced by the initiation ceremony that leads to Kyle Stansbury's eventual breakdown and murderous rampage.

If, over 4 seasons, *The Killing's* focus had been on bad parenting and neglectful mothers, the season 4 finale, freed from the constraints of network and cable TV, prove how 'bad' mothers are adjudged when they commit the ultimate maternal sin of sending their sons away to boarding school. Forced to witness yet another initiation ceremony in which boys, left to their own devices, could find evermore inventive ways to humiliate each other, *The Killing* shows just how disturbed these misomaters can be. New recruits, forced to strip and masturbate over a picture of their mothers, with encouragement to: 'come over the face of the woman who loved you enough to send you away', would never have made it past network and basic cable censors. But, in a world in which mothers have been vilified for their shortcomings, this seems like a sad inevitability even if it is doubtful that the audience was actually better off for witnessing a moment like this. Reviews refer to the 'ham-fisted' approach to the family theme contained in season 4 (no pun intended here) and 'the boarding-school unpleasantness' as 'not new ground in its own right, not even by the longest of long shots' (Kirkpatrick 2014). The narrative trajectory of the final season of *The Killing* may show how cultural attitudes can be engrained in a narrative and how industrial context can allow certain portrayals, but the question remains: are such contemptuous attitudes towards mothers and motherhood so acceptable as to go unremarked?

Back in 1975 Laura Mulvey argued that 'the strength of the melodramatic form lies in the amount of dust the story raises along the road, the cloud of overdetermined irreconcilables which put up a resistance to being neatly settled, in the last five minutes, into a happy end' (Mulvey 40). Negative attitudes towards mothers in the world of *The Killing*, unlike that of *Forbrydelsen*, are told through the melodramatic form and it is not surprising that, despite the dark maternal territories the viewer has been taken down, the final episodes of the series work hard to reach a satisfactory conclusion, a happy-ever-after ending that ties up loose ends and glosses over the preceding unpleasantness. Skinner's killers walk free from a police department desperate to avoid scandal, the remaining bodies of the Seattle street children are recovered, Holder makes peace with Kallie's mother, Kyle Stansbury confesses to the crime of familicide and Linden is reunited with her absent mother as well as finding peace with her son Jack. The last scenes find us some years in the future. Holder is separated from the mother of his child and running the local Narcotics Anonymous branch and Linden is travelling, unable to settle, still looking for her place in the world. In a departure from the Danish version that saw Lund boarding a plane, running away from certain incarceration, towards a new life alone, Holder and Linden, this last scene suggests, will become a romantic couple. The world of *The Killing* may have damned the possibility of happy family life, but the movement towards a happy ending for Linden and Holder suggests that there is a hope for the future despite her many maternal failings exposed along the way.

## Conclusion

AMC clearly learnt lessons from the outcry resulting in the lack of resolution at the end of season 1 of *The Killing* and, despite critical acclaim, the decision to end the season without resolution shows how difficult it is to adapt a 22 episode series to the demands of the US TV schedules. Its season 2 premiere reflected the disillusionment of the viewers in the US (and the UK) with only half of its audience staying with the series to find out who killed Rosie Larsen (Outlaw n.d.)<sup>17</sup> a drop that led to its first cancellation. With half the viewers lost it seems a strange decision for Fox to be so determined to save the series but, reluctant to lose out on their investment, they made a deal with Netflix to carry the third outing. With the audience figures remaining low, it was clear that this was a brief respite before the second cancellation at the end of season 3. The decision by Netflix to revive the show for a third time, this time only available as original content on its streaming service may seem a strange one in the face of audience apathy but, viewed in a global context, with a dearth of original content and desperate to break into the mainstream TV market, it makes perfect sense. The audience for the final season of *The Killing* may have been small but it was perfectly formed and happy to invest in the subscription only service, meaning that Netflix could potentially gain over a million viewers in the US alone.<sup>18</sup>

In the world of adaptation *The Killing* is a good example of the way the television market is changing. Netflix, determined to become the HBO of the early twenty first century is aggressively marketing itself as the home of dark edgy original series and, along with Amazon Prime, a purveyor of commercial and schedule free content available for binge viewing in this new global TV marketplace. The rapid consumption that is symptomatic of binge viewing, however, means that the need for new series is becoming more urgent. A show that would have been spread over 12, 13 or 22 weeks, over a period of decade, can now be voraciously consumed in a short space of time.<sup>19</sup> Much like any period of rapid expansion, the gap between audience consumption and content is wide. It would seem that we are entering an era in which adaptation from the European market is a way forward. Whether the US TV market is able to successfully adapt series to suit the cultural expectations of their audience remains to be seen,<sup>20</sup> but with streaming services like Netflix and Amazon Prime entering the fray, willing to buy an audience from cable companies, however small, audiences should be prepared to enter an unprecedented era of European acquisition and adaptation for the US (global) TV market. What remains to be seen, however, is whether the European audience will be able to accept the way narratives are adapted for a US audience. Particularly when, and as I have argued, cultural apathy towards working mothers seems to have changed so little since Philip Wylie's 1942 vilification of American mothers in *A Generation of Vipers*. It maybe that the US audience has grown accustomed to the way mothers are treated on network and cable TV but it remains to be seen whether a European audience will be able to unquestionably accept the judgemental and melodramatic attitudes towards maternity contained in series like *The Killing*, particularly when viewed alongside their original incarnations.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> KMF Films/Fuse Entertainment/Fox Television Studios/The Killing Production. Source: imdb.

<sup>2</sup> Danmarks Radio (DR), Norsk Rikskringkasting (NRK)/Sveriges Television (SVT)/ZDF Enterprises (2009-2012)/Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF) (2009-2012). Source: imdb.

<sup>3</sup> Lionsgate Television/Weiner Bros. (in association with)/American Movie Classics (AMC) (for)/U.R.O.K. Productions. Source: imdb.

<sup>4</sup> Yellow Bird/Canal+/Danmarks Radio (DR)/Degeto Film/Film i Skåne, Mainostelevisio (MTV)/Svensk Filmindustri (SF)/TV2 Norge/TV4 Sweden. Source: imdb.

<sup>5</sup> The first four seasons of *Mad Men* originally aired on BBC4 from 8 August 2010 – 23 February 2011. Sky Atlantic aired all subsequent seasons.

<sup>6</sup> *Star Trek* and *Cagney and Lacey* being two famous examples.

<sup>7</sup> Winning Best Supporting Actress for Michelle Forbes in the 38<sup>th</sup> Saturn Awards and Outstanding Directorial Achievement in Dramatic Series for Patty Jenkins in the Director's Guild of America Awards. In addition, the series was nominated for 19 other awards including 6 Emmys and a Golden Globe for Mireille Enos.

<sup>8</sup> Broadcast (6): NBC, ABC, CBS, FOX THE CW, PBS.

Basic Cable (25): A&E, ABC Family, Adult Swim, AMC, Bravo, Comedy Central, Discovery, E!, ESPN, FX, FXM, FXX, Hallmark Channel, History, Lifetime, MTV, National Geographic, Nick At Nite, Spike TV, SYFY, TBS, TNT, TV Land, USA, VH1. Niche Cable (17): Audience Network, BBC America, BET, CMT, EL REY, Esquire, Fearnet, IFC, Logo, Nuvotv, Ovation, Own, Pivot, Sundance Channel, UP, WE TV, WGN America, Premium Cable (5): Cinemax, Epix, HBO, Showtime, Starz. Digital (11): Amazon Studios, CC: Studios, Crackle, CW Seed, Geek & Sundry, HULU, Machinima, Netflix, Playstation, Popsugar Studios, Wigs.

<sup>9</sup> Although notably later series like *Better Call Saul* (High Bridge Productions/Crystal Diner Productions/Gran Via Productions/Sony Pictures Television/AMC, 2015- ) are being released one episode per week

<sup>10</sup> *Men Behaving Badly*, (BBC, 1992-98), *Absolutely Fabulous* (BBC, 1992-2012), *Coupling* (BBC, 2000-4) and *Life on Mars* (BBC, 2006-7) to name but a few.

<sup>11</sup> The first part of *Forbrydelsen* was originally screened in 2007 (1-20), and is referred to as *Forbrydelsen I*, df. DFI, in contrast to *Forbrydelsen II* and *III* (1-10, 2009 and 1-10, 2012). With thanks to Gunhild Agger for these details.

<sup>12</sup> The killer was, in fact, different from the Danish version but the audience could not have known how the US series would adapt the narrative at this point.

<sup>13</sup> *The Killing* season 2 launched with just over 700,000 viewers and *Forbrydelsen* attracted 815,000 viewers (Plunkett 2012).

<sup>14</sup> Denmark provides one of the most generous parental leave systems in the EU with 'a total of 52 weeks (one year) of leave containing maternity, paternity and parental'. In addition, once the first year of parental leave is over, Danish day care facilities are provided for all children from the age of 26 weeks to 6 years as Danish municipalities recognize that: 'Proper day care facilities are a necessity for women's full time participation in the labour market on equal terms with men' with the Government providing guaranteed day-care facilities with fees linked to income (European Union report, n.d.).

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<sup>15</sup> With no paid leave for mothers in any segment of the work force, only 12 weeks unpaid leave in companies with 50 or more employees and where childcare expenses can be as high as \$16,430 per annum (Desilver 2014).

<sup>16</sup> In a nation that continues to be preoccupied with the so-called 'mommy wars', where stay-at-home mothers are praised and working mothers condemned. See Akass, 2013.

<sup>17</sup> From 4.7 million viewers for the premiere of season 1 down to 2.5 million for season 2's premiere.

<sup>18</sup> Netflix never release audience figures so it is impossible to tell how many stayed with the service at the end of the series.

<sup>19</sup> Many thanks to Harold Grosenthal, Head of International Acquisitions for AMC, for pointing this out.

### Notes on contributor

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<sup>20</sup> Particularly in the light of recent news that Denmark's *The Legacy* (DR, 2014-present) has been acquired for the US network market by NBC/Universal Cable Productions (*nordicnoir.tv* 2014).