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Abstract

This study sets out to understand how journalism is represented in the Danish fiction series *Borgen* and the Spanish series *El Caso: Crónica de Sucesos*. The aim is to provide an understanding of how journalism is conceptualized in non-American fiction. Through textual analysis, we found out that *Borgen* (years 2010 and up) represents a generational and evolutionary conflict in which journalistic values are restrained by political and commercial imperatives reflecting challenges in Danish journalism. As such, this series criticizes the free press myth—commonly found in American fiction series. *El Caso* (1960s) also engages with this myth through the representation of journalism practices embedded in Spain's Francoist regime that balance public and political-religious interests. However, *El Caso*

smooths over this conflict to illustrate how journalists cleverly overcame the censorship of the Catholic church. Both series explore the gendered and cultural obstacles of their respective contexts and eras.

Introduction

From *All the President's Men* to *Shattered Glass* and *House of Cards*, the representation of journalism in U.S. American popular culture has been profoundly analyzed. Echoing the free press myth, fiction movies and series tend to reiterate a discourse that enhances the importance of an independent press for the good functioning of the American democracy. This myth employs recurrent journalism characters and narratives, such as the conceptualization of journalists as “heroes” and “villains” and the exploration of journalistic tensions, such as objectivity versus subjectivity and commercialization versus informing the public ([Ehrlich 1997, 2005](#); [Ehrlich and Saltzman 2015](#); [Ghiglione and Saltzman 2005](#); [McNair 2011](#); [Zynda 1979](#)). Generally, myths tend to smooth over such tensions through the solidification of the status quo. However, they are also capable of criticizing and consequently challenging the status quo

itself. By imagining what journalism is, and what it should be and could be, fiction movies and series engage in both preserving and challenging the professional authority of journalists ([Ehrlich 2005, 2006](#); [Lule 2001](#); [McNair 2011](#)).

In an era in which journalism is changing because of an increase in commercialization and digitization, and is confronted with corporate cutbacks, charges of bias and declining trust in news media, understanding how fiction engages with the professional authority and practices of journalism becomes even more important ([Ehrlich and Saltzman 2015](#); Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism 2023). From a cultural studies perspective, popular culture plays a significant role in negotiating journalistic meanings and in shaping public opinion on journalism. But even though journalism is facing challenges worldwide, research into this topic is generally oriented toward Anglo-American fictional representations of journalism. As such, which myths about journalism are disseminated in non-American fiction remains mostly unexplored. A study into journalism fiction consumed in Flanders (Belgium) of [De Wulf Helskens et al. \(2023b\)](#), for example, pointed out that Flemish

audiences noticed a difference between fiction produced in the U.S. and in Flanders in how the above-mentioned myth is conceptualized (if the free press myth is conceptualized at all). Therefore, research into the distinct crystallization of different journalism myths in non-American fiction is needed. Especially because of the very different journalistic cultures of countries outside of the U.S.

[Hallin and Mancini \(2004\)](#) configured different media systems depending on the specific political and historical context of a country. Their theory consists of three models which were later tested and updated. Even though there is some discussion on adding additional models and categories ([Brüggemann et al. 2014](#); [Büchel et al. 2016](#)), the three original (nevertheless dynamic) models still remain relevant today. For this paper, we will specifically focus on the media system in Spain (Polarized Pluralist Model, later Southern Model) and Denmark (Democratic Corporatist Model, later Northern Model) which significantly differ from each other and from that of the United States (Liberal Model, later Western Model). By researching journalism fiction produced in these two countries, we set out to provide insights into how

representational practices of journalism are different and/or similar in countries with a media system and journalistic culture that is distinct from that in the U.S. By doing this, we aim to add a different perspective to existing research on the representation of journalism.

With this objective in mind, this paper sets out to understand how journalism practices are represented in one Danish fiction series *Borgen* [The Castle] (2010-2022, Netflix & DR) and one Spanish fiction series *El Caso: Crónica de Sucesos* [The Case: Chronicle of Events] (2016, *Plano a Plano* & RTVE). *Borgen* is a drama series produced by the Danish public broadcaster (DR) and later also aired on the streaming service Netflix. The first three seasons were broadcast between 2010 and 2013 and were later followed by a fourth season in 2022 which was a co-production of Netflix and DR (Danmarks Radio, the Danish public broadcaster). The series was written by Adam Price, and it centers around politics in Denmark and its intersection with journalism. On the other hand, *El Caso: Crónica de Sucesos* (from now on referred to as *El Caso*) is a Spanish series produced by *Plano a Plano* and RTVE (Radiotelevisión Española, the Spanish public broadcaster) and created by and

starring Fernando Guillén Cuervo. It ran for one season on La 1 and it centers around two investigative journalists working in the 1960s in Madrid for a popular newspaper in Francoist Spain. Both series won several awards for respectively “Best Fiction” (*El Caso*), “Best Danish Television Series” (*Borgen*), and “Best International Series” (*Borgen*).

Utilizing critical textual analysis, we analyzed the first and last season of *Borgen* (thirty-eight episodes) and the first and only season of *El Caso* (thirteen episodes).¹ Both series employ a distinct perspective on journalism embedded in their specific context of production, hence posing an interesting subject of study for this paper. We opted to use a textual analysis method as it is commonly used for studying popular culture artifacts. The method consists of an in-depth reading of both series by focusing on different narrative and audiovisual parameters ([Dhaenens and Van Bauwel 2023](#); [McKee 2003](#)). For this study, we mainly focused on the narrative in conjunction with the theoretical framework of the free press myth (*supra*).

We found that both series engage with different journalistic practices contextualized in the specific historical

contextualized in the specific historical, political, and societal context of the respective countries. Whereas *Borgen* critically engages with the commonly reiterated free press myth to exert a critique on increasing challenges for contemporary Danish journalism, *El Caso* smooths over tensions between the public, commercial, and political interests to illustrate how journalists countered oppressive (political and religious) powers during Franco's regime. Before elaborating more on the results, we start by shortly delineating the specific media systems of Denmark and Spain which are crucial for the understanding of the representational practices in both series analyzed.

The Danish Media System

Denmark, and more generally the Nordic countries, is characterized by two distinct political structures: democratic corporatism and the welfare state. These structures refer to a political organization based on a multi-party consensual system in which the state is responsible for basic welfare tasks resulting in a high taxation and a large public sector ([Ahva et al. 2017](#); [Weibull 2007](#)). Echoing the models of [Hallin and Mancini \(2004\)](#), this political organization

influences directly how the country's media system is structured. Similar to other countries in the DCM, Denmark had an early development of a strong mass press, used to have a high degree of political parallelism which has declined since the 1950s, and maintains a high degree of journalistic professionalism.

Comparatively, there is a big role for the state in regulating and funding the media industry in which operational freedom co-exists with press subsidies. The public broadcasting services (PBS) remain strong, even in the age of upcoming commercialization, and have embraced their role of social responsibility. Nevertheless, economic, political, ideological, and demographic changes have put more pressure on this system resulting in a more liberal media system in Denmark. More specifically, party influences and press subsidies have decreased, the role of the newspaper industry is diminishing, and more private radio and television channels started to compete with public broadcasting

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this has led to a decline of more than 25 percentage points in TV news viewership (59% in 2023) and 32 percentage points in

print readership (17% in 2023) (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism 2023).

This fits the claim of [Hallin and Mancini \(2004\)](#) that countries will adopt characteristics of the liberal model (e.g., the United States and the United Kingdom). However, the authors also stated that because of the specific historical and political context of countries, it is unlikely that they will ever fully adopt a liberal media system ([Hallin and Mancini 2017](#)). This is the case in Denmark, where the media system has proven to be quite resilient against these new pressures. Press freedom, journalism education and institutional self-regulation in the Nordic countries remain amongst the strongest in the world and are higher than those of other countries in the DCM such as Germany and the Netherlands ([Olesen 2020](#)).

Public broadcasting services have succeeded in surviving the increasing pressures, both through the support of press subsidies and by continuing to be considered “a trusted news brand” by its audience ([Nord 2008](#); [Olesen 2020](#)). The overall trust score of Danish media was 57 percent in 2023, which is the same level as in 2015. In 2023, the Danish public broadcasters *Danmarks Radio* and *TV2* remained the most trusted news

and TV2 remained the most trusted news brands with trust scores of 83 and 79 percent, respectively. Furthermore, Danish media score relatively low on media polarization and, together with Finland, they have the smallest percentage of people who believe that news media favor commercial interests before the public interest ([Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism 2022, 2023](#)).

Moreover, Danish public broadcasters, specifically DR, do not only perform well when it comes to news media but also when it comes to television production. Danish television drama series have known substantial domestic success since the late 1990s ([Degn and Krogager 2017](#)). This success has also become increasingly international as a consequence of the development of new production methods. In short, since the beginning of the twenty-first century, Danish television productions have started to adopt strategies of U.S. television while simultaneously grounding these in the public service mindset of the Danish public broadcaster ([Redvall 2013](#)). “Nordic Noir” and Danish television series can be considered intensely successful both in domestic markets and internationally—most so in the UK, Germany and Australia. By 2013, the British drama series *The Killing*

(2007–2012), *Borgen* (2010–2022), and *The Bridge* (2011–2018) had been exported to as many as 120 countries constituting a significant counter-flow of television content ([Degn and Krogager 2017](#); [Redvall 2013](#)).

The Spanish Media System

The Spanish media system has evolved rapidly since [Hallin and Mancini \(2004\)](#) defined it, almost twenty years ago as a Polarized Pluralist model—together with Greece, Portugal, Italy (and to a lesser degree, France). Spain, similar to other countries in this model, slowly entered the European democracies after a cruel civil war (1936–1939) and thirty-six years of a military regime led by General Francisco Franco until he died on November 20, 1975. After the war, the “Press Movement” created by Franco to agglutinate all regime-friendly newspapers was dissolved, even though the press kept being influenced by its tight regulatory framework and a strong censorship wielded by the Catholic Church during three decades (1940–1970). The latter gave these press companies (in both print and radio) a “public” character, even though they were grounded on private capital and investments ([Ibarra 2013](#)).

Consequently, this created a small but nevertheless influential press which is characterized by a relatively low press circulation mainly aimed at the political and cultural elite. As such, the majority of the Spanish population has been and still is dependent on audiovisual media which were only liberalized at the end of the eighties ([González et al. 2010](#); [Hallin and Mancini 2004](#); [Papathanassopoulos 2007](#)). Today Spain is, since 1982, a consolidated democracy with a wide variety of newspapers, most of them with a written style and focus that is biased toward a political ideology—something that is widely known by Spanish readers ([Binderkrantz et al., 2017](#)). Two giant commercial audiovisual groups, Atresmedia (owners of TV channels Antena 3 and La Sexta) and Mediaset España (owners of Telecinco and Cuatro) and one public (RTVE) broadcaster (and its two TV channels, La 1 and La 2, and five public radios), constitute the top national broadcasters—followed by regional TV and radio news and newspapers, that started throughout Spain since 1982. A recent study shows that when it comes to credibility and trust in news, Spanish audiences prefer Antena 3, followed by its regional or local newspaper, and RTVE in third place (Reuters

Institute for the Study of Journalism 2022, 27).

Spain has a unique and successful television market, for news, reality shows, and for fiction production. Despite the late launch of its national public television channel TVE (in 1956, public radio has existed since 1937) and the delayed implementation of open commercial television (1990), Spain nowadays plays a leading role in the European audiovisual scene. According to the European Audiovisual Observatory (EAO), Spain ranked fourth in 2020 in the export of series—after the United Kingdom, Germany, and France. It also positioned itself as the third series producer in the world, after the USA and the United Kingdom ([EAO 2020](#)).

The road to this accomplishment hasn't been easy, though. During the first decades and until 1990, the Spanish society was used to the established habit of watching the regular TV transmissions of two public national channels, *La 1* and *La 2*, which together became *Televisión Española*, TVE. This was a “hybrid” model of public television, unique in Europe due to (a) the censorship that prevailed during Franco's regime (1939–1975), (b) its funding system (through advertising from its very first years

(through advertising from its very first years, with no license fee ever implemented), and (c) to its audiovisual production: mostly limited to contests, musical shows, and adapted versions of classical theater plays ([Ibarra 2013](#), 146).

A deeper cultural strengthening of the different Spanish regions and cultures came through regional television production, in 1982 to 1983, but it definitely took off when the first commercial channels Antena 3 and Telecinco started operating in 1990.

Commercial broadcasters started investing 5 percent of their income in the production of Spanish films, a rule that became mandatory through a governmental decree in 2004. This is a measure that proved to be profitable, as Spain has a relevant “second market” in Latin America due to the use of the Spanish language ([Arriaza Ibarra and Navarro 2022](#)).

The distinctness of Spain and Denmark’s news media and the success of their television market again reiterate the importance of studying non-American television productions about journalism. In the next paragraphs, we will discuss the results of our analysis of, first, the Danish series *Borgen* and second, the Spanish series *El Caso*.

Reading Journalism in Borgen

The Danish political drama television series *Borgen* (Danish for “The Castle”) refers to the nickname for Denmark’s parliamentary building and underlines the series’ focus on the intricate lives of politicians, media spinners and reporters. The first season centers around the character Birgitte Nyborg (played by Sidse Babett Knudsen) who is elected prime minister and decides to execute this role in her own distinct way.

The series explores the complicated tension between media and politics in which, on the one hand, politicians attempt to influence the media’s narrative through their spin doctors or by purposely misplacing information, and on the other hand, journalists attempt to critically counter that politically informed narrative. This results in a delicate balancing act in which both parties defend their own principles and agenda— which in the case of journalists consists of protecting the principles of a free, non-partisan and critical press—but also have to beware of not pushing too hard when nourishing the relationship with each other.

The press is illustrated as a strong institution that can have a profound influence on the functioning of the Danish parliament. By

covering certain stories and choosing certain narrative angles over others, they steer the political focus and shape how the political power game is played—especially as politicians are shown to rely on press coverage for information on both their political competitors and partners.

Politicians are clearly aware of this profound press influence and therefore occasionally attempt to use it in their favor. In episode 6 (S1), for example, Kasper Juul (played by Pilou Asbæk), Birgitte’s spin doctor, asks the series leading journalist Katrine Fønsmark (played by Birgitte Hjort Sørensen) to ask a specific question during a press conference which works out in the favor of Birgitte’s political agenda.

However, Birgitte as new and first woman prime minister does set out to create a more honest relationship with both her voters and the press by introducing more transparency regarding political decision-making and communication. In episode 9 (S1), for example, she reprimands a colleague for suggesting to “accidentally” spill coffee on an important document to prevent the press from receiving crucial information. Still, Birgitte has to work within the framework of a political system that has historically not been organized this way which ultimately

restrains her objective of a more transparent political landscape.

The often intricate relationships between politicians and journalists (in which politicians end up working in journalism and journalists in politics is not uncommon) complicates this balance even more.

Journalists tend to be represented as conflicted about these relationships that can often be situated in a gray area of ethical journalism. Katrine, for instance, used to be in a relationship with Kasper who now works for Birgitte. Even though she tries to maintain a fair distance between herself and Kasper, she often finds herself in ethically questionable terrain and faces scrutiny from her colleagues who do not condone her (now non-romantic) relationship with the prime minister's spin doctor. Furthermore, she quits her job as a journalist for a while to work as Birgitte's new spin doctor to later return to journalism.

This narrative illustrates the complex relationship between politics and journalism in which the objectivity, autonomy and political independence of journalists can be questioned. Moreover, it is also a gendered narrative in which the series addresses how woman journalists are more frequently shown in and reprimanded for being in

shown in and reprimanded for being in relationships with sources (even when they do not want to be). This regularly pushes them in a “whore frame” (sic) that represents them as sleeping their way to the top echoing research of [Ghiglione and Saltzman \(2005\)](#), [Painter and Ferrucci \(2012, 2015, 2017\)](#), and [De Wulf Helskens et al. \(2023a\)](#).

Nevertheless, Katrine is represented as a rebel who follows her own gut-feeling instinct and fights the more rating-oriented focus of the media company she works for. Her character is used to defend the democratic ideals of journalism against commercialization (fortified by the poster of the 1976 American movie *All the President's Men* displayed in her apartment). She tends to do investigative journalism and in discussions with her colleagues on which perspective to adopt for a news item she defends the more critical approach. The latter is often framed by her colleagues as “too journalism school” after which she accuses them of taking the “PR approach.”

She especially argues with her boss Torben Friss (played by Søren Malling) who is the head of news media and gets caught between the commercial goals of the media company and the journalistic ideals of his journalists. This represents a common narrative of the individual truth-seeking

narrative of the individual truth-seeking reporter who fights with the editor (and by extension, with a rating-obsessed media company). Katrine does so in a quite competitive environment in which always being available and “stealing” the assignments of other journalists is a common practice. Eventually, she decides to quit her job as a journalist when she realizes that to continue working for the network would mean that she has to betray her journalistic ideals.

The series ingeniously goes on with this narrative in the last season, in which Katrine replaces Torben as head of news. She continues to defend her journalistic ideals, but now she has to do so in an even more complex journalistic environment by dealing with increasing levels of commercial pressure, a skewed relationship with politics, being short-staffed, and the influence of new technologies including social media. The series illustrates how social media have changed the mutual dependency of politicians and journalists in which the power balance is now skewed in favor of politicians.

(Younger) politicians are represented as users of social media to form their political *persona* and narrative. By doing so, they bypass traditional media channels echoing

bypass traditional media channels cementing the mediatization of politics that has become more profound in the last decades (Olesen 2020). In episode 4 (S4), Torben addressed the fact that politicians refuse to talk to the media about serious issues by calling this a relatively new democratic problem. Furthermore, the influence of social media on journalism is also represented as a gendered issue. In season 4, Katrine has to deal with a social media backlash in which she is called a “tyrant” and “power-hungry bitch.” In this respect, the series illustrates how women journalists such as Katrine are framed as “bitch” (sic) playing into [Schippers \(2007\)](#) conceptualization of pariah femininity. It also shows how this complex reality can break journalistic ideals—in this case, those of Katrine.

The narrative underlines an illusion of editorial independence as the board of the media company—and more generally, commercialism and government policies (in terms of press subsidies)—indirectly force Katrine to change the editorial content of the news department into something she no longer supports. The evolution between the first and last season of *Borgen* reflects changes in the Danish media and political landscape in which the critical watchdog role

is being redefined (Olesen 2020) and the characteristics of [Hallin and Mancini's \(2004\)](#) liberal model are adopted even by public broadcasters.

Borgen does not only frame this as an evolution in journalism but also as a generational conflict in which younger journalists start with democratic journalistic ideals only to lose them as they advance in their careers. Now that Katrine is head of news, she supervises a younger reporter Narciza Aydin (played by Özlem Sağlanmak) who—similar to how Katrine opposed Torben—opposes Katrine which turns into a quickly escalating conflict. Narciza, a non-white and non-straight journalist, represents a new generation of (women) journalists who are not only more conscious about their work-life balance but also more diverse and politically correct, something that clashes with traditional journalistic values of independence and objectivity and journalistic norms of working late and sacrificing the personal/family life for a career.

The last season follows a similar narrative to that of the first season in which the younger journalist goes off script to defend her own ideals and the older supervising reporter disagrees; finally, this leads to the first one

...progress, many, and leads to the first one
being fired (and eventually rehired). This
underlines the ambition of a new generation
of journalists who fight the system to defend
their journalistic ideals, in contrast to the
realism of an older generation of journalists
who are confronted with the complex reality
of working in the media which has forced
them to give up on their ideals. Katrine
eventually ends up in a burn-out situation
and decides to leave the media sector—
something that symbolizes the death of her
journalistic ideals and the toll this takes on
the mental and physical health of journalists
to pursue those ideals in this changed
journalistic environment. As such, the series
paints a pessimistic picture of the media
industry in which journalistic ideals have
always been restrained by commercial and
political pressures.

Reading Journalism in El Caso

El Caso: Crónica de Sucesos (Spanish for “The Case: Chronicle of Events”) is based on the real, successful weekly journalistic publication that was published in Spain during the first decades of Franco’s regime, which lasted from 1939 to 1975. The real publication started in Spain on 11 May 1952 and its last issue was published on 24

September 1997. For forty-five year (particularly until 1987, when its founder and editor Eugenio Suárez left its direction), it became a best-seller in newspaper stands all over Spain. The series *El Caso* provides good reasons for this success:

A. The first one is due to its focus on blood crimes and scandalous events, but in a “nonsensationalist way” ([Rodríguez Carcela 2013](#))—despite that they were real crimes in all cases; the publication *El Caso* became the first one in Spain to openly report on these blood crimes, even when censorship limited this to only one bloody crime per week.

B. It also promoted what was called “street journalism” [*reporterismo de calle*], which describes how journalists approach the crime scene shortly after a crime is committed, interviewing people and possible witnesses and writing details sometimes unknown to crime investigators as part of their journalistic labor, that often became internalized as a “quest for the truth” rather than simply a job.

C. Despite the somehow gruesome style of its main covers and headlines, the publication *El Caso* followed an ethical “golden rule” that avoided sensationalist information nor the temptation to give false

details to its readers, thanks to the good name and professional prestige of Eugenio Suárez, founder and director until 1987, and finally

D. Back in those years written newspapers and publications were highly appreciated and welcomed in Spain, as they served as the main source of “entertainment” as television started only on 28 October 1956 with a three-hour daily transmission, and radio broadcasting was focused mainly on live music played in the radio station.

Even though the series presents a dramatized version of what happened at the publication during that time, it provides valuable insights into how screenwriters perceive journalism during Franco’s regime. The series, aired weekly on the public broadcaster TVE from March to June 2016, illustrates the crime events in a city that had adapted to a new social order after the Civil War (1936–1939). In the place and period shown (Madrid 1966), Spain still has many barriers, both internationally and internally, partially because its society was dominated by the Catholic church and very scarce possibilities for doing anything intended to go beyond a stable job (for men) and getting married and having many children (for women). As such, it portrays gender roles as

women, as such, it portrays gender roles as an issue that is continuously put into question. Still, this forced stability gives room for an amusing and yet somehow suspenseful narrative in every episode of *El Caso*.

The narrative of the show, which even includes some comedy and drama situations in which the main and secondary characters get involved, was rated PG-16 but is basically a family show. The series relates the journalistic and personal lives of all its seven main characters who incarnate the journalists who work in the newsroom of the weekly newspaper *El Caso*. However, it focuses mainly on two characters. The first one is Jesus Expósito (played by Fernando Guillén Cuervo, actor and creator of the series), a disillusioned former police detective who, after all the blood and violence that he sees as a police officer, decides to quit and become a journalist instead, as he believes that he will perform better trying to merely inform about crimes instead of having to solve them. The second main character is Clara López-Dóriga (played by Verónica Sánchez), a high-society married young woman, a wealthy and educated daughter of a Spanish minister who “rebelliously” wishes to work and be independent instead of simply staying at

home.

Not surprisingly, given the submissive role that women were given in the first decades of Franco's regime ([Arriaza Ibarra and Berumen 2019](#)), *El Caso* is a clear representation of a gendered narrative in which it shows how women journalists, as well as women in general who looked for a paid job, very frequently had to face lots of obstacles, both legally (as an example, the first divorce law was approved in Spain in June 1981) and socially, through the general disapproval of people—sadly, many times also in their inner circles. Still, the two main characters portrayed in the narrative, Jesús and Clara, get along well after his initial refusal to take her as a capable work partner.

Furthermore, as the series advances, they slowly manage to create a bond of friendship that motivates them to start their own research to help police officers find the perpetrators in every crime they report (something that clearly did not actually happen when the real publication was out in the streets). By doing this, the series becomes a mix of “accidental” investigative reporting and gives some resemblance to an Agatha Christie's mystery-solving play. This happens especially thanks to Clara's

happens especially thanks to Clara's intelligent mind and deductive analysis that she puts in every crime that she writes about, which in the latter episodes is crucial not only for overcoming the first misconceptions about her job as a professional woman journalist but also as a clear "helping hand" to the policemen who are in charge of solving the crimes.

These two detectives play important characters as they maintain with both Jesús and Clara a love-hate relationship throughout the series, first asking them to leave immediately once they arrive at a new crime scene and refusing to give them more information than strictly necessary, but finally recognizing their important role as journalists who can also be of assistance. In this series, contrary to *Borgen*, the tension between investigative reporting and commercial success does not exist, as it is clear to all characters, fictional and realistic (also when the actual publication was published), that the main purpose of *El Caso* was to be commercially successful, but always with the ethical aim of avoiding sensationalism. The problem that they faced, however, was political-religious in the form of censorship from the Catholic Church, which appears and disappears in the series as a problem that is solved.

There also is an interesting shift in the narrative when Clara, recently married, discovers that her husband is actually homosexual (something strictly forbidden and socially disapproved during Franco's regime), and after discretely divorcing him, she slowly falls in love with police officer Miguel Montenegro (played by Francisco Ortiz), the young and handsome detective in charge of solving the crimes that she writes about as a journalist. This romance grows slowly and discretely, thus having the acceptance of their families and colleagues, and—in contrast to the other analyzed series, *Borgen*—does not have any influence on her independence as a woman journalist.

Jesús Exposito, on the other hand, is at the beginning of the series in a romantic relationship with the police coroner Rebeca Marín (played by Natalia Verbeke), but he gradually gives up on her so that she can marry chief police officer Antonio Garrido (played by Antonio Camacho), whom he considers will be a better husband. The wedding takes place in the very last episode, just before Garrido moves to another city, but he gets to the church bullet-injured as he comes from stopping the last criminal of the series. In this case the romantic “finale” is put aside and, despite several disputes

and jealousy scenes, Jesús finally becomes friends with both his former lover and Garrido, whom he knew from the years when he was a policeman. With this, the series smooths over tensions, not only between the press and government official and their intricate (romantic) relationships but also between their journalistic values and the external pressures they had to face, thus presenting a rather idealized image of journalism at that time.

Conclusions

Both Danish and Spanish television series *Borgen* and *El Caso* engage with different journalistic practices contextualized in the specific historical, political, and societal context of their respective countries and times. We want to underline that the narratives in both series show many similarities to those found in studies on American journalism fiction including the entanglement between journalists and government officials, a generational conflict between idealistic and cynical reporters, the obstacles faced by women journalists, and an emphasis on an independent and professionalized press ([Ehrlich 1997, 2005](#); [Ehrlich and Saltzman 2015](#); [Ghiglione and](#)

[Saltzman 2005](#); [McNair 2011](#); [Zynda 1979](#)).

In the case of *Borgen*, this even includes a discrete nevertheless explicit reference to the American journalism movie *All the President's Men* again underlining the similarities.

On the one hand, these similarities point to an overlap in journalistic cultures and their accompanying—specifically normative—discourses which transcend the different media systems as put forward by [Hallin and Mancini \(2004\)](#). The free press myth has an explicit normative function in which journalists are expected to be watchdogs constituting a modernist journalistic discourse ([Peters 2015](#)). This discourse is not solely “American” but is also present in varying degrees in other journalistic cultures adapted to the specific context. On the other hand, this finding can be partly explained by the cultural capital that American fiction has received worldwide both narratively and through the adoption of American production techniques such as in the case of *Borgen* ([Redvall 2013](#)). However, this does not mean that the series analyzed simply present a copy of well-known American journalism themes.

First, the political drama *Borgen* implicitly plays with the idea of the “American” free

plays with the idea of the American free press myth (Ehrlich 2005, 2006) to then subvert it. It does so through the representation of the tensions between younger journalists—with big journalistic ideals sometimes labeled as “too much journalism school”—and the broader and more realistic journalistic system, in which those ideals are restrained by political and commercial imperatives. Instead of smoothing over these tensions as is often done in American fiction, the series illustrates how those disillusioned journalists eventually either leave the profession or stay in the profession giving up on their ideals altogether. As we analyzed both the first and fourth seasons, we discovered that this is not only represented as a generational conflict but also as an evolution in Danish journalism, in which characteristics of Hallin and Mancini’s liberal media system are increasingly being adopted.

As such, *Borgen* exerts a critique toward this frequently reiterated free press myth—even though the Danish media system has proven to be relatively resilient to commercial and political pressures and could be considered one of the countries in which journalism is still most closely situated to this idea of a free press. Its critical exploration of the

Danish press as a commercial and political institute, strikingly in the context of a strong public broadcaster, sets it apart from many American representations of journalism and illustrates the Danish television industry's adoption of a public service mindset ([Redvall 2013](#)).

Second, *El Caso* similarly engages with the free press myth contextualized within the Francoist regime in which the narrative is set. The series engages with different conflicting values as it presents an ideal of the journalists' mission, who have to balance investigative journalism attempting to serve the public interest with commercial and political-religious imperatives. Especially the freedom of expression—in terms of censorship—and social restraints characteristic of Franco's regime are narratively explored.

However, opposite to the journalists in *Borgen* those in *El Caso* do not fight commercial and political restraints to earn their place as protectors of the public interest. Here journalists work hand in hand with police officers and both journalists, Clara and Jesús, become romantically involved with a police detective and a police coroner, respectively, even though Jesús finally decides to make a "sacrifice" and let

...finally decides to make a sacrifice and let her marry a chief police officer with whom he thinks she will be happier. Professionally speaking, in *El Caso* police officers eventually accept the help of journalists and recognize their importance in solving crimes.

Consequently, the series tends to smooth over the tension between these different values in favor of representing journalists as crusading reporters who aim to serve the public interest which is very much in line with the American free press myth.

Nevertheless, the series' narrative exploration of how journalists negotiate and finally resolve censorship during Franco's regime—whether religious or political—contextualizes this myth to Spain's specific journalistic culture in which (political-religious) bias and commercialism are more embedded from the outset. As such the series is set apart from American fiction, albeit in a less pronounced manner than in *Borgen*.

Third and last, not only do both series narratively explore the obstacles that journalists encounter when trying to defend their journalistic ideals but also do they represent this struggle as a gendered issue. Here we found little variation from American journalistic representations pointing to similar gendered struggles in newsrooms

gendered struggles in newsrooms across the three countries. *Borgen* explores representations of women journalists in which they are framed according to the common “bitch” and “whore” (sic) stereotypes ([Saltzman 2003](#); [Schippers 2007](#)). Women in journalism are often accused of “sleeping their way to the top” and of being mean and “bitchy”—especially if they hold a senior position. By engaging with these stereotypes, *Borgen* narratively reiterates but also sheds light on the obstacles that women in journalism encounter.

So does *El Caso*, however not regarding romantic relationships but mainly in relation to the dominance of the Catholic church and the Francoist regime during which the narrative unfolds. It represents the legal and social obstacles that women constantly had to fight to be considered worthy journalists. Nevertheless, the leading woman journalist in the series succeeds in winning the trust and respect of her social environment by relying on her outstanding journalistic skills indicating a change in newsroom culture. *Borgen* also engages with an evolving journalistic newsroom culture, in this case, characterized by a better work-life balance and more collegiality, specifically in relation to a new generation of (women and

minority) journalists who is more conscious about their well-being. Even though both series illustrate the awkward transition between different, often clashing, newsroom cultures, they also underline that evolution in journalistic norms and values is not necessarily a bad thing.

Through this case study of the representation of journalism in a Danish and Spanish television series, we set out to contribute to existing research on this topic which has been mainly oriented toward the United States. Even though our analysis is based on a case study and cannot be used to make conclusions about the representation of journalism in Danish and Spanish fiction in general, it provides valuable insights into how non-American fiction (critically) engages with the free press myth by exploring the political(-religious) dimensions embedded in the countries' respective media systems. As such, we have illustrated that even though there are many similarities between American and non-American representations of journalism, these cannot be interpreted independently of the specific historical, political and societal context in which the narrative is set. We hope that this study will inspire further research that contributes to the

understanding of how journalism is conceptualized in fiction in non-American contexts.

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Footnote

1. As analyzing all seasons of *Borgen* was practically unfeasible, we decided to analyze the first and last seasons to be able to recognize an evolution in the series' representational practices. For *El Caso*, only

one season was available for analysis. The series was originally planned for two seasons. However, due to the bad audience results of its last episodes, it was limited to only one, from 15 March to 7 June 2016, with thirteen weekly episodes programed in prime time.

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