

THE REPRODUCTION OF SELF-MADE MAN MYTH THROUGH NETFLIX: A
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS ON NETFLIX'S ORIGINAL SERIES

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PLAGIARISM

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

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ÖZET

Netflix, son yirmi yıldaki yaygın ticari başarısının yanı sıra şu anda çeşitli akademik tartışmaların da konusu olmaktadır. Bu çalışma, bir Amerikan medya ve eğlence şirketi olan Netflix'in mottosuna uygun olarak gerçekten "yerel düşünüp küresel mi hareket ettiğini" yoksa Amerika'nın kuruluş mitlerinden birisi olan "kendi kendini yetiştirmiş insan mitini" ve kapitalist hegemonyayı yeniden mi ürettiğini inceleyerek akademik literatüre bir katkı sağlamayı amaçlamaktadır.

Bu çalışmada sırasıyla *Sex Education*, *Elite* ve *Aşk 101* olmak üzere üç farklı ülkede yaratılan üç Netflix orijinal gençlik dizisini incelenerek şu sorular yanıtlanmaya çalışılmıştır: (i) Farklı ülkelerde yaratılan gençlik dizisi türündeki Netflix Orijinal Dizileri'nin anlatıları, kendi kendini yetiştirmiş insan mitini nasıl içermektedir (ii) Bu şovlarda yeniden üretilen kendi kendini yetiştirmiş insan mitinin kapitalist hegemonyayla nasıl bir ilişkisi vardır?

Çalışmada her üç gençlik dizisinin baş erkek karakterinin hikayesi, Joseph Campbell'ın "kahramanın yolculuğu" nosyonu çerçevesinde titizlikle incelenmiş ve yolculuklarının mitin ima ettiği gibi kendi kendini yetiştirmiş insanıninkini yansıtır yansıtmadığına ve bu mitin temel değerlerini taşıyıp taşımadığına bakılmıştır.

Bu incelemenin sonuçları dijital televizyonda "kendi kendini yaratan insan" mitinin sürdürülmesine ve temsiline ilişkin çarpıcı öngörüler içermektedir. İncelenen her üç dizide belli farklılıklar da olsa "kendi kendini yaratan insan" mitinin yeniden üretilmiş olması bu mitin Netflix'in küresel medya endüstrisinin önemli bir aktörü olarak olarak kapitalist hegemonyanın hakim mitlerinin dünya çapında yaygınlaştırılmasında rol oynadığını düşündürmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Netflix, televizyon dizileri, kendi kendini yaratan adam miti, kültür endüstrileri, kültürel globalleşme

ABSTRACT

Netflix is currently the subject of various academic discussions in addition to its widespread commercial success over the last two decades. This study seeks to make a contribution to the academic literature by examining whether Netflix, an American media and entertainment company, truly "thinks local and acts global" in accordance with its motto or instead promotes the myth of the self-made man, one of America's founding myths, and, thus, reproduces capitalist hegemony.

By examining Netflix's three original teen series created in three distinct nations, *Sex Education*, *Elite*, and *Aşk 101*, this study seeks to answer the following questions: (i) How do Netflix's original teen series produced in different localities incorporate the notion of the self-made man? (ii) How does the myth of the self-made man reproduced through these shows relate to capitalist hegemony?

The stories of the protagonists of these three teen series are meticulously analyzed under the framework of Joseph Campbell's notion of the "hero's journey" to see whether their journeys reflect that of the self-made man as the myth and, accordingly, carry the core values of this myth or not.

The results of this analysis provide fascinating insights into the perpetuation and representation of the "self-made man" myth in digital television. The self-made man myth is reproduced, albeit with some differences, in each of the three teen series examined, which makes us believe that Netflix, as an important actor in the global media industry, plays a role in spreading the dominant myths of capitalist hegemony around the world.

Keywords: Netflix, TV series, self-made man myth, culture industries, cultural globalization

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continue an academic journey similar to his successful academic journey.



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1. INTRODUCTION

“For Barthes, myths work in favor of the ideological positions held by the dominant elite, and those viewing or hearing the myth are unaware of the myth’s existence” (Miller, 2007, p. 44).

Two businessmen, Reed Hastings and Marc Randolph, established Netflix as a mail-based DVD rental service in 1997. The business has changed over the course of more than 20 years, from offering DVD rentals over the mail to a global subscription streaming service before becoming a media production firm. Netflix has thus unquestionably offered a distinctive television service in terms of the production, syndication, and consumption of the content. According to McDonald and Smith-Rowsey (2016), this is mostly because it is cutting-edge in the entertainment industry, uses cutting-edge technology to provide TV entertainment to consumers, and modifies their viewing habits.

In addition to its global commercial success, Netflix is now the focus of numerous intellectual debates. Many academics from a range of disciplines, including politics, economy, sociology, cultural studies, media and communications, and international politics, are working to comprehend its ramifications on the economy, society, and individual behaviors.

This study seeks to make a contribution to the academic literature by determining whether Netflix, an American media and entertainment company, truly “thinks local and acts global” in accordance with its motto or perpetuates the myth of the self-made man, one of the founding myths of America, and, thus, reproduces and sustains capitalist hegemony.

This study aims to address the following questions by analyzing three Netflix original series produced in three different countries, *Sex Education*, *Elite* and *Aşk 101*: (i) How do Netflix’s original teen series produced in different localities incorporate the notion of the self-made man? (ii) How does the myth of the self-made man reproduced through these shows relate to capitalist hegemony?

To provide a thorough discussion of the subject, the first part of this study reviews the literature on globalization and culture, television studies and mass media, Netflix and the changes it has brought to the TV industry, myths, and the self-made man myth, in particular, and how media plays a crucial role in its dissemination.

The methodology of this study, which analyzes the reproduction of the self-made-man myth in the protagonists' journeys in the sampled three series, is based on the monomythic scheme of Joseph Campbell's "hero's journey." The departure, the initiation, and the return are the three stages that make up this monomythic framework. Under this analytical framework, the stories of each series' protagonists are thoroughly examined to determine whether they accurately reflect the myth's major ideas and represent the journey of the self-made man.

The findings offer fascinating new perspectives on the myth of the self-made man's persistence and depiction in digital television. The self-made man myth is repeated, albeit in different guises, in various Netflix original series of the same genre, teen series. The details on how this myth is transmitted in each Netflix original series will be provided under the findings, discussion, and conclusion parts of this thesis. I hope this study encourages other researchers to further investigate the presence of hegemonic myths across new media moguls such as Netflix and to make more cross-cultural studies on this particular topic.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this literature review, there will be recent debates on relevant topics to the analysis. These topics include globalization and culture, television studies and mass media theories, the notion of the culture industry, Netflix, myths, and the self-made man myth in particular. In the first part, the history and various definitions of globalization and the major paradigms about the relationship between globalization and culture(s) are provided. In the second part, theories on television studies and mass media, as well as critical schools of thought such as the Frankfurt School and British Cultural Studies, are introduced. Last but not least, a discussion on Netflix and how it has become a part of the culture industry, as well as a section on the myths and the self-made man myth in particular, are included in the literature review.

2.1. Globalization and Culture

2.1.1. Globalization

The term “globalization” has been laid on a great array of theories, debates, and discussions from several domains, ranging from economics, sociology, politics, cultural studies, and anthropology. The onset of globalization is also debatable, and there are some classifications regarding the timeline of globalization, such as Globalization 1.0, 2.0, 3.0, and so on. In the following paragraphs, I aim to provide a brief history of “globalization” and the main debates about the interaction between globalization and culture.

The beginning of globalization is a debated issue. There are many discussions on exactly when the world has been “globalized,” as Guillen (2001) shows in his article. While many argue that globalization began during the 16th century with the circumnavigation of the planet Earth, some historians claim that globalization took off during the 19th century with the advancement of the Industrial Era and the adoption of the global dateline, the Gregorian calendar, and international telegraphic and signaling codes.

Another group of scholars argues that the beginning of globalization dates back to the end of World War II, along with the emancipation of colonies, the emerging of the nuclear age, renewed expansion of trade and investment, and the economic surge of

Northeast Asia. Last but not least, there is a great deal of acknowledgement that the inception of globalization marked the advent of neoliberal ideology in the late 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s.

The phenomenon of “globalization” was first coined in an article called “Globalization of Markets” by Harvard Business School economic professor Theodore Levitt in 1983. Levitt (1984) notices that an increasing number of goods and services are being used in many households irrespective of cultural differences, which marks the notion of global markets. This term has been widely used during the 1980s and 1990s, especially because of the global economy's growth in those decades.

As mentioned above, globalization is a complex, multi-layered, disorderly, and conditional subject. According to Guillen (2001), there are economic, financial, social, political, and bibliographical indicators of globalization. Yet, the definition of Ritzer (2011) captures the general idea about the phenomenon given the commonalities of its different indicators:

Globalization is a transplanetary process or set of processes involving increasing liquidity and the growing multi-directional flows of people, objects, places and information as well as the structures they encounter and create that are barriers to, or expedite, those flows... (Ritzer, 2011, p.2)

Similarly, Guttal's (2007) definition of globalization is more based on tangible experiences that many of us have been undergoing for the past couple of decades. Guttal (2007) asserts that the term "globalization" is frequently used to refer to a range of economic, cultural, social, and political changes that have shaped the world over the past 50 or so years. These changes range from the much-celebrated information technology revolution to the thinning of national and geo-political boundaries in an ever-expanding, transnational movement of goods, services, and capital (Guttal, 2007, p. 523).

It is important to highlight that one must first understand the essence of the revolution in information and communication technologies (mainly) in the last century

in order to speak on any aspect of globalization, as Kellner (2002) underlines. The implosion of technological developments allowed the exchange of people, cultures, ideas, and factors of production such as labor and capital.

Marshall McLuhan, with his notion of a "global village" in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962), arduously defends the importance of media and communication technologies in the making of global culture. The media theorist argues that people will be more interconnected with each other and form a global culture as the use of media and communication technologies advances. According to him, the universality and harmony of the consciousnesses among people as a result of the higher use of advanced technologies would lead to the scaling down of the entire planet into one single unit. This, in turn, would lead to the shrinking of various cultures into a new, emerging, and expanding single global culture (the global village, as it is called), thanks to the extensive use of technological advances.

2.1.2. Culture and Globalization

Similar to the plethora of definitions of globalization, culture has many definitions as well. As the definition of Edward Tylor is a highly cited one, we will take it into consideration in this study. According to Tylor (2004), a person's exposure to culture as a part of a society affects their knowledge, beliefs, arts, morality, law, customs, and other factors.

In this regard, cultural globalization applies to the global dissemination of concepts, meanings, values, and identities. Therefore, the main agencies and domains where globalization and culture are discussed are primarily the mass media, information and communication technologies, advertising, and ways of consumption.

The major paradigms in globalization and culture are (i) *cultural differentiation*; (ii) *cultural convergence* (also McDonaldization, Americanization, and cultural homogeneity); and (iii) *cultural hybridization* across locations and identities.

By "cultural differentiation," one must understand that there are certain separate cultural spheres that have sharp borders, and these borders do not allow any transmission of cultural elements from the other spheres. The main defender of this

theory was Samuel Huntington (1996), who put forth the idea of "the clash of civilizations." He believes that there have emerged a couple of major cultural spheres in the world after the post-Cold War era, and the clashes between them will define the nature of wars instead of the clashes between nations. These spheres are Western spheres and non-Western spheres, the latter of which include Islamic countries, Confucian countries, and non-Islamic African countries. This is to say that the flows between these major cultural spheres are limited or blocked. This led to the preservation of cultural elements within each sphere, which enhanced cultural differentiation across the spheres. In other words, there will be no global convergence or hybridization of separate cultures, according to this theory.

The critics of the notion of the clash of civilizations include Sen (1999); Ash (2000); Russett, Oneal, and Cox (2000); Harvey (2007); Henderson and Tucker (2001); Mungiu Pippidi and Mindruta (2002); Berman (2003); Said (2004); Fox (2005); Noam Chomsky as in TrystanCJ (2007); and Harari (2018). Their criticisms are mostly based on the invalidity and falseness of sharp borders between cultural spheres. These critics defend that this kind of extreme cultural determinism is not realistic due to the absence of distinct cultural boundaries and the presence of diversity in most cultures (especially major Western civilizations such as the US) in today's world.

The second paradigm is "cultural convergence," which refers to the cultural homogenization of societies mostly as a result of capitalist markets and 20th-century modernism. This paradigm can be expressed as "McDonaldization," as Ritzer (2014) suggests, "Coca-Colonization" as Wagnleitner (1994) suggests, or "Americanization," during different periods due to different economic, political, or historical factors, although they represent variations of the same theme.

Cultural convergence refers to the fact that the cultural elements of different nations become more similar or homogeneous to each other. With the rapid globalization of the world over the last couple of decades, cultural convergence is likely to be seen as a natural result. Americanization is described as the mass influence of American culture, its elements, and business models over other countries. It has become one of the hot topics right after the demolition of the Soviet Union in parallel to the rapid developments in the information, communications, and technology (ICT) sector

and the flourishing of many worldwide technology companies such as Google, Microsoft, Amazon, Facebook, Twitter, etc. during the 1990s and 2000s.

Similar to Americanization, McDonaldization, which was coined by prominent sociologist Ritzer (2014), refers to the phenomenon where societies outside the United States adopt the business principles of Western modernization and capitalism through the widespread use of American international brands such as McDonald's. According to this theory, other societies unconsciously adopt the principles of rationality and Fordism while consuming McDonald's products and utilizing the benefits provided with them through the local McDonald's branches, despite the presence of their own local culture. The principles of McDonaldization are predictability, calculability, efficiency, and control. Mass adoption of these principles leads to the homogenization of cultures from all over the world. "Coca-Colonization" is also similar to these terms, whereby the globalization of American culture is realized through popular American products such as Coca-Cola.

The proponents of the idea of cultural convergence are Marx, Weber, and Wallerstein, with their theories on the worldwide spread of capitalism, modernization, and single-track evolutionary progress into one single universalism. It should also be noted that cultural convergence is highly discussed in media studies. These discussions examine whether American media enhance cultural synchronization, as Pieterse (2004) demonstrates. Schiller (1989) and Hamelink (1983) argue that global American corporate hegemony over cultural institutions (including the media) results in the manipulation of mass consciousness and the standardization of other cultures.

Critics of this theory mainly argue that the theory of McDonaldization might not be valid in every country. Pieterse (1996) aims to show that fast food outlets like McDonald's should adapt themselves to the local realities of social and cultural life in order to succeed across the world. Similarly, Talbott (1995) demonstrates that the principles of McDonaldization are not fully working in some major cities, such as Moscow, Russia. For example, some McDonald's branches in Moscow keep customers waiting in line for hours and charge prices three times higher than a Russian worker's average daily income, which are totally at odds with the fundamental principles of McDonaldization. Yan (1997) articulates that local cultures can prevail over

McDonaldization and Americanization through a study that he conducted in Beijing, China. In parallel, Appadurai (1996) argues that cultural homogenization is overtly simplistic as some local cultures can overcome the hegemony of the global culture, and he shows that the presence of interactions between different cultures is quite possible.

This brings us to the notion of "cultural hybridization," which includes global localization, glocalization, cultural heterogeneity, and cultural diversity in local societies. Pieterse (2004) argues that the globalization of culture does not always bring homogenization. He argues instead that the proponents of cultural homogeneity overlook the fact that interactions between cultures, including hegemonic ones, lead to cultural hybridity. He aims to show that cultural differences and globalization go hand in hand, which leads to cultural hybridization. In this context, Featherstone (1990) argues that globalization creates a room for separate cultures to come together, which leads to novel and valuable heterogeneous societies as well as culturally compelled global insights. Ritzer (2010) also argues that external and internal cultural flows connect with each other to make a distinctive cultural fusion.

"Glocalization" lies at the core of hybridization and is linked to the interchange of global and local cultures in different geographic regions. From a marketing perspective, "glocalization" refers to the creation of globalized products or services in favor of local cultures in order to expand the market for these goods and services. In terms of culture, this can be interpreted as the infusion of global culture into different local contexts by utilizing the elements of local culture.

Pieterse (2004) sees hybridization as a product of postmodern views of culture because it is indefinite and open-ended, contrary to the modern, certain, and rational nature of cultural convergence and cultural differentialism. In the future, the hybridized world will continue to mix cultures endlessly. Hamelink (1983) and Pieterse (2004) argue that the mix of markedly different cultural identities will create the richest cultural traditions, as in Sudan, Athens, the Indus Valley, Mexico, and the United States.

There are also some critics of the theory of cultural hybridization. According to Hassi and Storti (2012), the critics argue that hybridization may camouflage the unevenness in the process of mixing and that some kind of distinction needs to be made

to mark the different types of cultural settings. Secondly, some argue that only the superficial elements of different cultures are mixed together, whereas deeply rooted cultural values are exempt from cultural blending and fusion. In other words, what is transmitted is only the peripheral elements of any culture, not the core elements. To give an example, according to the critics, cuisine, fashion styles, shopping habits, crafts, arts, and entertainment styles may transmit across different cultures, but not assumptions, values, and ideas that are firmly ingrained. They continue to be close to their native cultural context instead, as Hassi and Storti (2012) underline.

The American culture has spread all over the world in parallel to the expansion of media imperialism led by the US. Although globalization and culture theories are discussed in the previous section, an outline of the main discussion of American media imperialism is provided here as it would provide an insight on how the "self-made man" myth is spreading globally. The culture industry (and the entertainment industry within), which is largely hegemonized by the large influence of media conglomerates in the US such as Comcast Corporation, Walt Disney Company, Netflix Inc., Paramount, etc., is creating cultural imperialism and helping the dissemination of American culture and myths, in particular. Boyd-Barrett and Mirrlees (2019) demonstrate that the majority of studies on media imperialism have concentrated on the importance of the United States and identified it as the largest media imperialist in the world since the 1970s.

According to Schiller (1976), the American Empire promotes and spreads an American "way of life" over other nations by using its "coercive and persuasive agencies" and its power to do so. Mirrlees (2006) relates Schiller's earlier description of cultural imperialism to Joseph Nye's contemporary concept of "soft power" in international relations. Boyd-Barrett (1977) underlines the fact that media imperialism creates an uneven and disproportional power relationship between various countries and their media systems in favor of the dominant country. Boyd-Barrett (1977) also highlights how corporations that dictate the media in imperial nations like the United States (but not only the United States) also exercise ownership over the media in smaller nations, influencing their production standards, formats, and media business "models" in the process. Despite not being exactly the same, this situation is very similar to the case of Netflix.

Mirrlees (2019) outlines the four aspects of media imperialism, two of which are directly relevant to this study. Mirrlees (2019) suggests that the US media and cultural industries aid the US nation-state's international propaganda, such as "soft power" and public diplomacy campaigns in other countries. Mirrlees (2019) also suggests that American media and cultural products are intentionally or inadvertently operating for the mainstreaming and exaltation of the US Empire through conveying messages and imagery.

The discussions on globalization and culture are ongoing and growing as new forms of cultural flows emerge, as in the case of cultural hybridization. In the next chapters, we are going to elaborate on the development of TV studies, Netflix, and the myth of the self-made man and analyze if glocalization is present in the Netflix series that are chosen for this study.

2.2. Television Studies

2.2.1. Media Effects Theory and the Beginning of TV Studies

The beginning of mass communication studies dates back to the 1910s and 1920s. Before then, communication studies were exercised within several fields of social sciences, including sociology, political sciences, psychology, social psychology, and economics. The foundation of mass communication theories was primarily based on understanding the effects of propaganda and ways of influencing public opinion, which were simply byproducts of states' increased need for surveillance against the emergence of mass societies throughout World War I and the post-war crises. The founding fathers of mass communication theories are Paul Lazarsfeld, Harold Laswell, Kurt Lewin, and Carl Hovland, all of whom were social scientists.

Mass communication theories can be mainly categorized as mainstream or critical. The mainstream theories assume that the media has powerful effects on the audience, which lead to changes in perception, attitude, and behavior. There are several mainstream mass communication theories that put the audience in a passive manner and assume they unquestionably and unconsciously adopt whatever message, symbol, image, etc. they receive from the medium. Prominent examples of the "strong effects" paradigm belong to the interwar years. Laswell (1927) and Shannon and Weaver (1948) assumed that the media had a strong influence over people through their

hypodermic needle theory and Shannon-Weaver model. Other major examples of the strong effects paradigm include, but are not limited to, direct effects theory, agenda-setting theory proposed by McCombs and Shaw (1972), spiral of silence theory by Noelle-Neumann (1974), and framing and priming theory by Tversky and Kahneman (1981).

In addition to these theories of direct effects, there is a multi-step flow theory that suggests that media does not have a direct effect on the audience but rather has an effect on intermediaries such as opinion leaders who transmit media content to the audience. In other words, this theory argues that the media first affect the opinion leaders, who then influence the audiences, accordingly, as stated by Erdoğan (2014).

Yet, one of the major and distinguishing media effects theories belongs to Gerbner and Gross (1976), which is called the cultivation theory. Gerbner and Gross (1976) argue that television advances the alignment of the masses to the established order and that one of the main functions of television is to “cultivate” resistance to change. Although this may appear to be in line with the ideas of mainstream theorists, they did not argue that television instilled certain attitudes and opinions in its viewers. Instead, Gerbner and Gross (1976) assume that television has the distinguished power to create a “large and heterogeneous national community” due to its availability of offering content regularly and frequently as well as its affordability, where its content can be consumed free of charge or at a very low price by all socioeconomic classes. Given this high level of affordability and availability of content, television acquires an authoritative power in determining the norms and what should be legitimized and acceptable in society, which leads to the fact that what is represented on television has implications in real life.

Gerbner and Gross (1976) argue that television repetitively brings out certain ritualized symbol systems, which leads to the cultivation of “facts” of life and standards of judgment on which the viewers base their worldviews. This makes the nature of their studies a bit more critical than the mainstream media effect theories.

This is especially important when it comes to fictional programs. Gerbner and Gross (1976, p. 182) explain this phenomenon as “representation in the fictional world signifies social existence, [whereas] absence means symbolic annihilation.” Similarly,

Gerbner et al. (1980) introduce the “mean world” syndrome to explain a cognitive bias wherein the audience may perceive the world as a more dangerous place than it actually is due to moderate and/or extensive levels of watching violence-related content in mass media. Gray and Lotz (2019) underline that Gerbner's major study finds television's power as that of a storyteller and highlights its central role in cultural storytelling. In his later studies, Gerbner also criticizes US television's insistence on telling stories only of certain types of people and the exclusion of others. In summary, Gerbner et al. (1980) and Gerbner and Gross (1976) aim to demonstrate how television has the ability to cultivate alternate "realities," "identities," "beliefs," and “norms” over the viewers in the case of frequent and repetitive consumption.

As the preceding discussions show, there are some differences between mainstream media effects and cultivation theories. Bailey and Park (2006) observe that while the motivation behind the mainstream theories was mainly to eradicate misunderstandings in communication flows, thereby amplifying the media's effects and helping the media achieve higher profits, the cultivation theory aims to explain the effects of the media on societal norms and values. Another distinguishing feature is the differing perspectives on the impact of television. While the mainstream effects theories assume that television as a variable can directly affect people's behaviors and attitudes, the cultivation theory assumes that television is a cultural storyteller, a narrator of a symbolic reality, given that the norms and values of a society are demonstrated through myths and rituals, as in earlier times, as Gerbner (1998) and Gerbner and Gross (1976) assert.

The cultivation theory has some similarities with the critical theories of media effects. First, they both focus on the importance of power dynamics inside media organizations. They stress how existing power dynamics, such as socioeconomic inequality and prevailing ideologies, are reflected and maintained by media content. Second, both theories recognize the possible impact of media on how people's ideas, attitudes, and behaviors are shaped. They contend that consistent exposure to particular messages and representations can aid in the development of cultural norms and shared perspectives. Similarly, both theories frequently criticize the mainstream media for its support of prevailing ideas, promotion of consumerism, maintenance of

stereotypes, and marginalization of specific groups. A dedicated section on the critical theories of the media effects theory is provided in the following section.

2.2.2. Critical Media Theories and the Notion of Culture Industry

The homogenization effect of the mass media leads us to introduce critical theories of media effects. Critical theories can be categorized under two main schools, which are the political economy school and the cultural studies school, largely represented by the Frankfurt School and the Birmingham School.

The political economy school represents a critical approach to media studies with an emphasis on the production, distribution, and consumption of media. This approach sees media texts as a product of complex interactions between nations, international organizations, economic and political situations, new technologies, cultural heritages, and legal traditions and frameworks. Durham and Kellner (2001) suggest that political economy bases its methodology on empirical research of the real systems of cultural production in order to examine the limitations and structuring influence of the dominant capitalist economic system and a marketed system of culture.

The Frankfurt School similarly scrutinizes the ownership structures within the mass media institutions and criticizes the hegemonic power of the dominant/elite classes over the media institutions as a result of capitalist regimes, but with a stronger focus on their impacts on culture. Adorno and Horkheimer (1982) aim to demonstrate that this is a result of the culture industry, a phenomenon that indicates the standardized and mass production of arts and culture characterized by technological and economic rationality in line with the principles of capitalism. The culture industry reinforces the homogenization effect of mass media through the immediate and constant reproduction of the content and messages within television content, as Wojcieszak (2008) underlines.

According to the Frankfurt School scholars, cultural products like films or television shows do not even try to convey themselves as art anymore, and they are blatantly calling themselves industries (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002, p. 95). These industries operate on the belief that standardized and reproduced forms are a product of people's demands because they are designed to satisfy customers' needs; hence, they

are embraced easily (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002, p. 95). The formulaic structure of films and television programs enables audiences to easily follow them through familiar themes and scenes without paying too much attention (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002, p. 100), and cultural products do not provide audiences any room for independent thought, they say (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002, p. 100).

A more recent major critical school in mass media studies is the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), also known as the British School. The British School is institutionalized as one of the prominent actors that have shaped the history of cultural studies. It encompasses a wide range of social sciences, including English literature, sociology, communications, political science, and economics. It is crucial to recognise that the Center's publications have dominated the area and made critical contributions to academics and public understanding (Turner, 2003, p. 62).

The beginning of British Cultural Studies is marked with the publication of Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1958) as well as Raymond Williams' *Culture and Society 1780–1959* (1966; first published in 1958) and *The Long Revolution* (1975; first published in 1961). (Turner, 2003, p.10). Coming from the English literary criticism (textual criticism) tradition, under the leadership of F.R. Leavis, Hoggart and Williams have applied traditional literary text analysis to other forms of cultural pieces, such as popular songs, films, and TV shows, to better understand the aesthetic and moral dimensions of cultural forms.

Their analysis, however, lacked the ability to establish the social meaning, connotations, and ideologies that cultural forms communicate to the audience. Therefore, the successors of British Cultural Studies, such as Stuart Hall and John Fiske, who are highly influenced by the continental/European schools of thought, which are Marxism, classical sociology, psychoanalysis, structuralism, and semiotics, integrated the social and economic dimension into cultural studies (Turner, 2003, p. 10). By doing so, they were able to connect ideological issues with cultural forms, reflecting how cultural forms transmit dominant ideologies to society. They mainly utilized structuralism, whereby they identified the sets of relationships and the formal structures that frame and enable the production of meaning (Turner, 2003, p. 10).

It is crucial to grasp the precise nature of the Cultural Studies School's interest in these meanings because, at its most distinctive, cultural studies analysis serves a specific purpose: to comprehend how power relations are managed, distributed, and used in industrial societies (Turner, 2003, p. 17). British Cultural Studies primarily rely on Louis Althusser's (1971) claim that major ideological apparatuses are equally important to economic conditions, even though they do not exclusively adhere to Marxist ideology, which holds that culture is considered to be a component of society's superstructure and, as a result, is merely a byproduct of its industrial and economic foundation (Turner, 2003, p. 18). The Cultural Studies School argued that culture is neither dependent nor independent of economic relationships (Turner, 2003, p. 18). Within British Cultural Studies, the primary focus of ideological analysis has been on the media, specifically their definitions of social relations and political problems, as well as their implications for the production and transformation of popular ideologies (Hall, 1980, p. 117, as stated in Turner, 2003, p. 20).

Turner (2003) underlines that the Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies, which was established in 1964, is assumed to be the institution that has reshaped the field of cultural studies. Hall (1980) shows that the CCCS was to direct itself towards cultural forms, practices, and institutions and "their relation to society and social change" (as quoted in Turner, 2003, p. 62). "Hoggart's project of understanding the everyday, 'lived' cultures of particular classes were overtaken by interest in the mass media, which quickly came to dominate the Centre's research and has provided it with its longest-running focus" (Turner, 2003, p. 63). Hall (1980, p. 117) asserts that the Centre moved towards the analysis of the ideological function of the media; within such analyses, the media were defined as a "major cultural and ideological force... standing in a dominant position with respect to the way in which social relations and political problems were defined and the production and transformation of popular ideologies in the audience addressed" (Turner, 2003, p.64).

The end consequence was a focus on the media's ideological "effectivity" (a more generic and indirect concept of the process of decision) rather than its behavioral "effects." This was an inquiry into structures of power and the "politics" of the media (Turner, 2003, p. 64). "Stuart Hall's replacement of Richard Hoggart as director centrally influenced this shift of emphasis" (Turner, 2003, p. 64). Under Hall's

direction, the relationships between media and ideology were examined through a focus on textual signifying structures.

Another prominent figure in media studies and the British Cultural Studies School was John Fiske. John Fiske brought semiotics and television studies together for the first time in history in order to examine the different layers of meaning and sociocultural content. Fiske (1989a) defends that the audience is not passive and uncritical and suggests that, instead, the variety of socioeconomic backgrounds and identities of audiences enables different interpretations of media texts and enables the viewers to produce meaning.

Fiske (1989a) defines two different economies, one of which is the financial economy, and the other is the cultural economy. Within the financial economy, a program is produced by a production studio and then sold to a community distributor (Fiske, 1989a, p. 26). Then, this program produces an audience, which is then sold to advertisers as a commodity (Fiske, 1989a, p. 26). However, within the cultural economy, which is more relevant to our discussion, the audience is the one who produces “meanings and pleasures” (Fiske, 1989a, p. 27). In this economy, the audience is not the consumer but an active agent in meaning circulation, and the original product becomes the foundation for the audience to deduce numerous possible meanings and pleasures from it (Fiske, 1989a, p. 27). According to him, although popular culture (especially film, television, and music) may be an industrialized culture and operate within the dominant capitalist system, it is a “site of struggle” (Fiske, 1989a, p. 20).

2.2.3. Contemporary TV Studies

Last but not least, we will discuss how the critical cultural studies perspective is reflected in contemporary TV studies and the research about the rise of digital platforms. According to Dias and Borges (2017, p. 45), “contemporary television has undergone profound transformations in terms of the apparatus on which it is based and in the very way that people relate to programs.” They say, “This has been happening in the midst of changes that involve questions of technology, the economy, and, at the critical point here, reception” (Dias & Borges, 2017, p. 45). As a consequence, “the

televisual text itself has been reconfigured,” in their words (Dias & Borges, 2017, p. 45).

Dias and Borges (2017, p. 52) go on to argue, “Since the invention of television, the diverse customs and habits of the viewer have been remarkable regarding their interaction with the medium.” They add, “The changes occurring in the customs of the viewer relate themselves in a dynamic way to technology and to the television industry itself” (Dias & Borges, 2017, p. 52). To illustrate, “If before, habits consisted of watching televisual content offered by broadcasters in a familiar environment with joint reception, today we find individual and personalized consumption at any time or place that is not always associated with a broadcaster or channel” (Dias & Borges, 2017, p. 55). The authors conclude, “The practices constructed by audiences have obligated the televisual industry to reinvent itself, providing evidence of the resignification of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic notions of what can be considered ‘television’” (Dias & Borges, 2017, p. 55).

According to Dias and Borges (2017, p. 56), consumer habits influence not only the production but also the methods of circulation of televisual content. “However, just as Hall (2003) points out, it is worth remembering that power is not totally on the side of receptive practices, given that the constructions and negotiations of feelings are also related to the processes of production, the economy, and the ways programs are organized” (as quoted in Dias & Borges, 2017, p. 56). While the authors underline the power of new practices of watching television to change the televisual format, they also stress the power of forms of production to contribute to the shift in it.

In the following section, we will expand on Netflix's role in the cultural industry and share discussions about its impact on conveying the myths and values of a significant group (including the dominant class).

2.3. Netflix and the Changing TV Industry

Netflix was first established as a mail-based DVD rental business in 1997 by two entrepreneurs, Reed Hastings and Marc Randolph. In more than 20 years, the company has changed its business offering from mail-based DVD rentals to a worldwide subscription streaming service and become a production company. While doing so, Netflix has definitely offered a distinct television service in terms of

production, broadcasting, and reception of the content. Netflix has 238 million paid memberships worldwide in over 190 countries as of July 2023 (*Netflix – Overview – Profile*, n.d.). McDonald and Smith-Rowsey (2016) suggests that this is mainly because it is ground-breaking in the entertainment industry as well as utilizing the latest technologies in delivering TV entertainment to consumers and changing their viewing habits.

Netflix changed its DVD-rental business model to streaming media and video-on-demand in 2007. That shift in business enabled consumers to watch TV series and favorite movies on the Web. This was a game-changing move even though it only had 1,000 movies accessible for streaming at the time, compared to 70,000 available on DVD (Wikipedia contributors, 2023a). In July 2010, Netflix signed a deal to stream movies from Relativity Media, an American media company (Wikipedia contributors, 2023a). In August 2010, Netflix reached a five-year deal worth nearly \$1 billion to stream films from Paramount, Lionsgate, and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (Wikipedia contributors, 2023a). In September 2010, the company first began offering streaming services to the international market in Canada (Wikipedia contributors, 2023a). Netflix started providing an independent streaming service in November 2010 in addition to DVD rental (Wikipedia contributors, 2023b).

The introduction of its own original programming, *House of Cards*, in 2013 was a major breakthrough in Netflix's success. Then comes another hit series, *Orange is the New Black* (2013), and more, such as *BoJack Horseman* (2014), *Sense8* (2015), etc. All of these Netflix original series were highly awarded and have attracted millions of new viewers. Moreover, Netflix has popularized a specific form of TV consumption called *binge-watching*.

Binge-watching is an act of receiving whereby the viewer constantly consumes more than two episodes of the same television show (Jenner, 2018; Merikivi et al., 2019; Rubenking & Bracken, 2018; Rubenking et al., 2018; Turner, 2019; as quoted in Kulak, 2020, p.46). Binge-watching became a cultural phenomenon in tandem with the rise of video streaming services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and Hulu between 2006 and 2007, allowing viewers to watch TV content on demand (Wikipedia contributors, 2023b). McDonald & Smith-Rowsey (2016) underline that this led to

accelerated and/or intensified media consumption and was an unexpected development across the media and culture industries.

We will explain the discussions on the practices of reception of Netflix content and the perspectives of mainstream media scholars and critical scholars from the Frankfurt School and CCCS in the following paragraphs. Prior to that, it is critical to demonstrate the production practices for Netflix original series since in this thesis there will be an analysis of three Netflix original series that have been shot and produced in three different countries.

Netflix, like many companies in other sectors, is primarily a profit-oriented company. Therefore, it utilizes big data and analytics when it comes to creating content. According to Zeng and Glaister (2018, p.105), Netflix is able to track its users' viewing patterns, including when they pause, rewind, and fast-forward, as well as their scrolling, browsing, and rating activity. Zeng and Glaister (2018, p.105) claim that all this data helps Netflix identify customer preferences, predict the popularity of its content, and, last but not least, purposefully design content based on the data insights generated from customers.

This is a groundbreaking move in the television industry, as traditional TV broadcasters make decisions about which shows to produce based on estimated ratings and limited information about consumer preferences. As a result, while traditional TV networks rely on instincts and past experience to decide which shows to produce on TV, Netflix's content managers rely on big data gathered from hundreds of millions of consumers due to the company's internet-based nature.

Being an internet-based company and advancing in technology and big data, Netflix is a good example of “convergence culture,” a term coined by Henry Jenkins (2006). By “convergence,” Jenkins (2006, p.2) is referring to the exchange of material across various media platforms, the collaboration of various media companies, and the dispersal of media audiences, who will move practically anywhere to find the entertainment experiences they desire. He challenges the notion that convergence should be primarily regarded as a technological process merging several media functionalities into a single device. “Instead, convergence represents a cultural shift as

consumers are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 3). In other words, Jenkins (2006) analyzes how spectators (media consumers) gather information, re-create information, and, in effect, influence shared values, norms, and culture in a collective manner under the new, tech-heavy, and converged media system in his book.

Netflix is also regarded as an important medium in convergence culture. With the increased capacity of technological devices and streaming services, Netflix can be instantly available on a wide range of devices, from TVs to cell phones and tablets to computer screens. Indeed, Netflix acts as a catalyst for the establishment of convergence culture as it enables spectators to instantly consume, analyze, and recirculate the content based on their own understanding.

2.3.1. Netflix and the Culture Industry

Some scholars argue that Netflix is a part of the culture industry, in accordance with Adorno's (1991) assertion that “the customer is not king,” as the culture industry would have us believe, but rather its object. Sim (2016, p.192) contends that, while Netflix appears to empower viewers by giving them individual freedom in choosing content and flexibility in spectator practices, the company only produces "original shows," which are believed to be watched by a large number of viewers based on metadata generated by tracking subscriber behavior. “*What people want*, therefore, is both quantified and commodified” (Sim, 2016, p. 192). Sim adds the following:

The freedom of choice exercised by what Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer of the Frankfurt School term “pseudo-individuals” resembles Harvey’s (2007) depiction of the neoliberal subject, who prizes “the liberty of consumer choice, not only with respect to particular products but also with respect to lifestyles, modes of expression, and a wide range of cultural processes. (Sim, 2016, p.192)

As expressed before, the Netflix producers also base their decision on which show they are going to produce on the metadata of the consumer’s habits. According to Sim (2016, p. 191), Netflix gave the green light to its first 13-episode original show,

House of Cards, by relying on the metadata of viewer habits. In his words, “Netflix’s faith in *House of Cards* was not blind but methodically guided by conclusions based in turn on its trove of usage statistics compiled on an unprecedentedly extensive level for years” (Sim, 2016, p. 191). He says, “One aspect of this database consists of tagging each and every title in its catalog with an elaborate system of labels” (Sim, 2016, p. 191). According to him, “This produces a complex taxonomy of traits, including genre, content, tone, character attributes, narrative resolutions, and so on” (Sim, 2016, p. 191). He concludes, “Netflix had, in fact, explicitly declared its intention to apply that knowledge in its foray into original programming” (Sim, 2016, p. 191).

Regarding the *House of Cards* example, “Netflix’s data indicated that the same subscribers who loved the original BBC production also gobbled down movies starring Kevin Spacey or directed by David Fincher,” says Leonard (2013). According to him (Leonard, 2013), “Therefore, concluded Netflix executives, a remake of the BBC drama with Spacey and Fincher attached was a no-brainer, to the point that the company committed \$100 million for two 13-episode seasons.” Madrigal (2014) asserts that Netflix has compiled a database of preferred American films. According to Madrigal (2014), Netflix can learn what they should be creating from the data, but it cannot instruct them on how to construct a TV program. So, Madrigal (2014) suggests that Netflix does not make educated guesses about what viewers desire when they produce a program like *House of Cards*.

“When asked about Netflix’s role in exporting American values, CEO Reed Hastings preferred to describe what they do as ‘mutual sharing’” (quoted in Cunningham & Scarlata, 2020, p. 149). “We serve 190 counties,” he said, “and we try to think of them all on the same footing” (quoted in Cunningham & Scarlata, 2020, p. 149). Thus, Cunningham and Scarlata (2020, p. 149) say, “Netflix’s two top executives position the company as a kind of screen-cultural traffic cop, mediating a new multilateralism and pluriform interchange of much more heterogeneous content than any previous account of media imperialism, cultural imperialism, globalization, or glocalisation has offered.”

Cunningham and Scarlata (2020, p.149) suggest that Netflix's continually changing original content commissioning approach validates Sarandos' description of

the company as a repository for the world's material. According to Cunningham and Scarlata (2020, p.149), more than 60% of Netflix's subscribers were located outside of the United States in 2019. In order to scale their investments to match their growth, Netflix has been establishing regional headquarters, production facilities, outposts, and policy teams, as Clarke (2019) shows. Therefore, Cunningham and Scarlata (2020, p. 149) conclude, “Without a doubt, Netflix is now the largest multilingual, multinational commissioner of original scripted screen contents the world has ever seen.”

According to Lobato and Lotz (2020, p. 132) “Netflix is a single company that has direct-to-consumer subscription relationships with 150 million customers worldwide.” They argue, “This makes it arguably more global than any previous screen producer and distributor” (Lobato & Lotz, 2020, p. 132). On the other hand, as admitted by the authors:

to make any claim about Netflix, one must locate it in a particular place—in a country-specific catalog; in a nation-state with particular technological infrastructure, competing and complementary services, and regulatory regimes; and in markets characterized by different audience expectations, preferences, and cultural norms (Lobato & Lotz, 2020, p. 132).

The Global Internet Television Consortium was established by Lobato and Lotz (2020) with the goal of exchanging knowledge regarding Netflix's international expansion and examining how it affects local audiences, authorities, and media incumbents in other countries. “The purpose of this consortium,” in the authors’ words, “as with any comparative research project, was to track the interplay of similarity and difference” (Lobato & Lotz, 2020, p. 134). They add, “Consortium dossiers frequently describe how existing audiovisual distributors—especially national television networks and pay-TV operators—feel threatened by the entry of Netflix into their markets,” which led to “the reconsideration of various policies designed for broadcasters and debates about which regulations and production incentives should apply to internet-distributed services based elsewhere” (Lobato & Lotz, 2020, p. 134). Yet, Lobato and Lotz (2020, p. 134) demonstrate that the majority of nations today also have their own

domestic internet-distributed video services, which are changing the audiovisual industry.

According to Lobato and Lotz (2020, p. 135), “The dossiers revealed enormous variation in national responses.” They suggest that while Netflix has had a significant impact in certain nations, it has had far less of an impact in others much of which depends on existing customs and what is accessible. Lobato and Lotz (2020, p.135) demonstrate that in many countries, like Australia, the relative absence of locally obtained or produced programming inspires a primary critique of the service whereas in other countries such as Germany, the service is valued for its access to unedited, undubbed, and commercial-free US shows. In the authors’ words, “This is a common complaint from screen producers and industry associations in smaller nations, where locally produced Netflix originals are scarce” (Lobato & Lotz, 2020, p. 135). The authors add the following:

The Consortium also observed a number of contentious issues being debated across many countries where Netflix is present, including concern about Netflix’s US content bias, expectations of it upholding censorship standards (including in India, where regulatory disparity between broadcast and streaming television is a major policy issue), and accusations of unfair competition for existing broadcast and pay-TV operators (Lobato & Lotz, 2020, p. 135).

Lobato and Lotz (2020, p. 135) aim to answer the following questions in this regard:

- Is Netflix a global service with local versions, or a collection of national services tied together into a global platform?
- By what yardstick do we judge its global penetration (e.g., reach, popularity, brand-recognition, or revenue)?
- Is cross-national comparison the best way to study Netflix in a “postnational” age?
- Might other geographic units of analysis, such as regions or geo-linguistic markets, provide different answers?
- What new insight does Netflix’s expansion of original series production outside the United States suggest about whether its strategy may be

multinational rather than global but also more complicated than that of a conventional US hegemon?

As Lobato and Lotz (2020) have put it, the multilayered worldwide ecosystem of video services is becoming more complicated, which means that both the findings and the questions themselves are continually evolving.

2.4. Self-Made Man Myth

This section covers the significance of myths both in terms of political and social implications for society as well as the foundations and usage of the self-made man myth. For that reason, after the introduction and importance of myths in a traditional sense for individual and collective consciousness are discussed (mostly under the theories of Jung and Levi-Strauss), the foundations of Barthes' work *Mythologies* (1972), which imposes a more functional role on the myths to create a cultural meaning, will be reviewed in this section.

Following the introduction of myths, the self-made man myth, in particular, is discussed in detail as it pertains to the core of this study. The origins, history, and use of this myth, as well as a discussion on how it is used as a tool for media and cultural imperialism, are provided in the following paragraphs.

2.4.1. What is a Myth?

The Encyclopedia Britannica defines myth as “a symbolic narrative, usually of unknown origin and at least partly traditional, that ostensibly relates actual events and that is especially associated with religious belief” (Vasyl et al., 2018, p. 18). During the early stages of social development, mythology was the only way to understand and interpret natural and social realities, as stated by Vasyl et al. (2018, p. 18). In the authors' words, “Being the first historical type of worldview, mythology embraced all forms of social consciousness —religion, art, science, morals, etc.” (Vasyl et al., 2018, p. 18).

As Cook (2019, p.5) suggests, a significant contribution on the early conception of myths has been made by romantics, including the philologist Christian Gottlob Heyne, the cleric Johann Gottfried Herder, Germany's most prominent playwright and

literary author Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller, and the philosopher Friedrich Schlegel. According to Cook (2019, p.7), Heyne underlines that the myths represent human nature, which is fundamentally the same everywhere despite differing environmental and historical factors. He aimed to comprehend myths in terms of semantic and philosophical concepts.

As Cook (2019, p.9) puts, Herder was more interested in the religious interpretations of the myths. He believed that religious sentiment was the origin of the myths. Deriving from the thoughts of Heyne and Herder, Schiller becomes prominent in the study of myth as he demonstrates significant similarities between myth and poetry, as Cook (2019, p. 16) contends. Last but not least, Schlegel, in his work *Gesprach*, defends the significance of myths in terms of expressing collective entities, as Cook (2019, p.17) puts. Cook (2019, p. 17) suggests that he puts a great emphasis on the mythologies by expressing that a new mythology will capture all the previous mythologies (including Greek mythologies), science, and philosophy into itself.

Key points and ideas for understanding the phenomenon of myth were developed by Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, and Ernst Cassirer (Vasyl et al., 2018, p. 18). While Freud and Jung related myth to latent structures of human consciousness, Cassirer interpreted it as a symbolic form (Vasyl et al., 2018, p. 18). Mark (2023) argues that Carl Jung, a psychiatrist from the 20th century, claimed that myth is an essential component of the human psyche because it helps people find meaning and order in a world that frequently appears to be chaotic and meaningless.

Cross-cultural comparisons also reveal that myths from different cultures have strikingly similar themes, structures, images, and characters (*Culture, Religion, & Myth: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, 2010, p. 284). Trudeau (2021, p. 865) says, “Carl Jung (1875–1961) set a psychological foundation for mythological similarities through the notion of the collective unconscious,” which is “the set of ideas and systems that are not environmentally developed but biologically ‘inherited’ by individuals” (Holm & Bowker, 1994, as cited in Trudeau, 2021, p. 865).

Trudeau (2021, p. 865) adds, “Joseph Campbell (1904–87) supported Jung’s hypothesis of the collective unconscious with the monomyth observation.” As stated

by the author, “In his 1949 book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell tracks the major themes of mythology and deduces a common mythological script” (Trudeau, 2021, p. 865). According to Trudeau (2021) as dreams are the language of the unconscious, myth is the language of the collective unconscious. That is, “Dream is the personalized myth; myth is the depersonalized dream” (Jung, 1959, as cited in Trudeau, 2021, p. 865).

Trudeau (2021, p. 865) goes on to explain, “Northrop Frye (1912–1991), well aware of both Jung and Campbell, innovated the hermeneutic of archetypal criticism, which he applied to myth and literature.” He argues, “In *The Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), Frye bridged modern literature and myth, believing that mythic themes were still prevalent in literature” (Trudeau, 2021, p. 865).

In addition to those thinkers trying to explain mythology through psychology and the literary sciences, scholars in the 21st century have examined the interaction of mythology with culture and ideology. Miller (2007, p.42) argues that according to Kaminsky (1985), the ideology that “controls how we look at reality” is most likely where mythology originated. Miller (2007, p.42), supporting Mumford (1995), also argues that the ideas and belief systems promoted by the dominant elite constitute the dominant ideology, which is comparatively conservative and expresses certain myths about “the veneration of industrial capitalism, individualism, the traditional nuclear family, [and] heterosexual romance,” as well as “identifying and perpetuating a narrow range of ‘correct’ choices in the political, economic, sexual, familial, and other spheres of life” (p. 42). Besides, Miller (2007, p. 42) quotes from Berger (1995) the following: “Further, the functional aspect of ideology is not only stability for the people but also deception, as the dominant class ideology fools the masses into believing certain ideas about their reality, situations, and interests.” Miller (2007, p.42) discusses that as myths are useful for illuminating or resolving disputes, they are associated with the hegemonic ideology that pervades society. Miller (2007, p.42) finally argues that myths serve as a uniting force in stories that can seem disparate.

Although they share nothing in common, the two approaches to the study of mythic storytelling acknowledge that “myth making is a universal cultural process and that the deeper ‘truer’ meanings of myths are not immediately apparent but can be

revealed by theoretical analysis” (Fiske, 1989b, p. 131, as quoted in Miller, 2007, p. 43).

Levi-Strauss studied myth from the structuralist perspective and asserted that myth is “an anxiety-reducing mechanism that deals with irresolvable [sic] contradictions in a culture and provides imaginative ways of living with them” (Fiske, 1987, p. 132, as in Miller, 2007, p. 43). In Miller’s (2007, p. 43) words, “Levi-Strauss proposed that these contradictions were presented in the form of binary oppositions or broad abstract generalizations such as good and evil or nature and culture.” Berger (2003) shows, “Levi-Strauss argues that myths are closely related to language and that, based on Saussure’s division of language into two parts, the *langue* and the *parole*, myths can be broken down for analysis” (as quoted in Miller, 2007, p. 43). The author explains this as follows: “For example, as myths are historically specific, they function as *parole*, or what Saussure describes as a specific instance or event in language” (Miller, 2007, p. 43). According to Miller (2007, p. 43) because myths are eternal and ahistorical, they serve as a universal language that may be applied to the past, present, or future, and additionally, myths exist on a third level that serves as a barrier between myth and simple language. As stated by the author, “This third level of analysis involves identifying the binary oppositions that exist within the narrative of the myth” (Miller, 2007, p. 43).

According to Miller (2007, p.43), while Levi-Strauss believes that culture is uniform and does not consider the potential that myths might have hegemonic control over society, this gap was addressed by Barthes' theory of myth analysis. Miller (2007, p.43) also argues that Levi-Strauss approaches myth in a more general way, whereas Barthes looks for more culturally and historically meaningful concepts and meanings in the story.

Therefore, Miller (2007, p. 43) concludes, “the second approach to studying myth is found within the works of Barthes, who approached mythic analysis from a functional perspective” (Miller, 2007, p. 43). He states, “In this approach, the study of myth begins with semiotic analysis, or how signs and sign systems are organized into relationships, which are then viewed as cultural codes used to create meaning” (Miller, 2007, p. 44). Barthes (1972) was particularly interested about how myth was utilized in industrialized capitalist society, which is frequently characterized by class conflicts. He

also underlines that myths work for the reservation of dominant position of the higher elites in the society and the rest of society is mostly unaware of those ideological myths that elites are transmitting. “Thus, Barthes viewed myth as ideological and part of the power-class structure of capitalist societies” (Fiske, 1989b, as in Miller, 2007, p. 44).

In *Mythologies*, Barthes provides an analytical framework in relation to the political implications that the myths narrate. As Byars (1992, p. 16) says, “Barthes employs a number of rhetoric-based figures to explain the workings of myth; the most useful include identification of the self with the other, quantification of quality, tautology, proverb-as-fact, and the evaporation of history.” Byars (1992, p. 19) adds the following:

Significantly, a group of active verbs emerge from Barthes' analysis: 1) identification eradicates the belief system of the other; 2) quantification of quality reinforces one's own myth symbols and codes; 3) tautology defends its belief as rational; 4) proverb-as-fact accepts its myths as true; and 5) evaporation of history assumes this truth is absolute (eternal).

In his words, “These active rhetoric-based figures disclose how quickly and thoroughly myth statements can become entrenched in the cultural and political order, transforming themselves into a collective analogue of the way a culture chooses to define itself” (Byars, 1992, p. 19).

2.4.2. Self-Made Man Myth and Its Place in American Culture

The self-made man myth has a substantial importance in the realm of American mindset and culture. The concept of self-made man is closely linked to the concept of “being American” and also play a great role in shaping the American society. Referring to Cawelti (1965), Paul (2014, p.368) argues that the myth of the self-made man is sometimes referred to as an “American invention” and a “unique national product” in its hegemonic form, where it initially alludes to expressive individualism and personal achievement. Similarly, according to Kogan (2010, p.1), the concept of the self-made man and the concept of American dream are closely linked as the concept of self-made man is deeply constructed on the democratic principles of freedom and opportunity equality.

Paul (2014, p.367) suggests that the projected economic promises of the "new world" are another significant aspect of American exceptionalism and US foundational mythology, in addition to the ideas of political liberty, religious predestination, and social peace:

Historically, the notion that upward mobility in US society is unlimited regardless of inherited social and financial status has been used to contrast the US to European societies with rigidly stratified social hierarchies, and to support the claim that the American economic system leads to a higher standard of living in general as well as to a higher degree of individual agency and economic opportunity; myth and symbol scholar David Potter, for example, described Americans within this framework of economic exceptionalism as a 'people of plenty' and defined 'economic abundance' as a 'decisive force in US history.' (Potter, 1954, p. 75 as in Paul, 2014, p. 367)

Unfortunately, it should be noted that the promises of the "new world" only pertained to the white males of the time. Paul (2014, p.369) highlights the fact that the eighteenth-century enlightenment subject was white and male; hence, the myth of the self-made man historically only pertains to white men. Another strong link between the self-made man myth and the American mindset is grounded on the concept of classless society. Paul (2014, p.368) shows that the self-made man has frequently been linked to idealized conceptions of a society without classes, or at the very least to a society that permits significant social mobility, based on the premise of competitive equality that is at the core of free market system. Paul (2014, p. 368) further states that the elusive idea of the middle class being "homogenous and proximate" (quoted from Robertson, 1980, p. 260) includes ideas of classlessness in addition to those of democracy, freedom, and equality. However, not everyone in society starts the competition on the same level, which leads to a bias in the apprehension of the concept of the self-made man and competitive equality.

Thirdly, the myth of the self-made man thrives on the idea of social Darwinist logic based on the selection of those who are capable of competing and succeeding in

a contemporary "post-stratificatory society." This is also very parallel to Immanuel Kant's (1983) enlightenment dictum that man will be "what he makes of himself," which later, in Sartre's reformulation, becomes "[m]an is nothing else but what he makes of himself" (Sartre, 1957, p. 10 as in Paul, 2014, p. 369). Therefore, the idea of nation-building in America is highly correlated with the idea of individual success, as Paul (2014, p.369) underlines.

Although the notion of self-made man was already central to the "new world" movement of the 18th century, the popularization of this notion belongs to the 19th century with the advent of Horatio Alger's stories. In Paul's (2014, p. 373) words, "Representations of the self-made man in popular fiction are particularly prominent in this period in the oeuvre of Horatio Alger (1832- 1899), who was not only a prolific writer but also worked as an editor, teacher, and pastor." Paul (2014, p.373) highlights the importance of Alger's stories during the 19th century by demonstrating the allegory function of his books that conveys the resemblance with the young republic's struggle for independence through its young protagonists. Alger's stories were also used to bolster the American way of life while discouraging socialism and communism. "As a 'patriotic defender of the social and political status quo and former advocate of laissez-faire capitalism,' 'Cold War' ideology enlisted Alger," in Scharnhorst and Bales' (1984, p. 152) words (quoted by Paul, p. 374).

Paul (2014, p. 376-77) adds the following:

Alger's long-term influence can also be detected in many other texts, genres, and stock characters in popular fiction, but he did not invent the success story formula and self-help ethic that he helped popularize; a few success stories of the Alger kind had been published prior to the Civil War, among them Paddy O'Flarrity's *A Spur to Youth*, or, *Davy Crockett Beaten* (1834), Charles F. Barnard's *The Life of Collin Reynolds, the Orphan Boy and Young Merchant* (1835), and J.H. Ingraham's *Jemmy Daily, or, The Little News Vender* (1843), and it was in the 1850s that newsboys and bootblacks become common figures in popular literature.

Politicians were among the first to be accepted to represent the self-made man. There were also "real" examples of the self-made man in American society other than

the politicians, such as Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln, Benjamin Franklin, and Andrew Carnegie. Decker (1997, p. xxvii) argues that “the most publicized actors during the late nineteenth century were not politicians but a dynamic breed of entrepreneurs, such as Astor, Gould, Vanderbilt, Carnegie, and Rockefeller.” As Paul (2014, p.379) quotes, according to Decker (1997, p.xxviii), “stories of entrepreneurial success confer ‘moral luck’—a secular version of divine grace—on their upwardly mobile protagonists.”

This is also very related to the fact that capitalism and the idea of the self-made man are highly associated with each other. In societies where the free-market economic system (which we call “capitalism” in daily life) prevails, the level of self-esteem of individuals is highly correlated with the rate of individual wealth and the level of recognition in their society gained by their individual work and endurance. Therefore, psychologic (inner) and economic self-growth and transformation are highly appreciated. Kogan (2010) underlines that the principles of growth and development, which are the key aspects of the “self-made man” concept, are also fundamental to economic individualism. This basically makes the self-made man myth an ideal tool to support and disseminate by the governments and higher elites in capitalistic societies, as it helps them sustain their classes in the society. In Paul’s (2014, p. 386) words, “According to this logic, there is little collective responsibility for the well-being of individual citizens.” Thus, “The illusion of equality—or rather, the equality of opportunity—is at the core of hegemonic discourses that describe social and political hierarchies in American society as temporary rather than structural” (cf. Fluck and Werner, 2003, p. 9).

The conception of self-made man defends the idea that each and every individual has an equal chance to climb the social and economic ladders (again in parallel to the principles of a free-market economy). It is claimed that the ideas of a free-market economy and individualism do not reinforce the inequalities that can be associated with social structures such as caste, class, or patriarchy. Instead, as Kogan (2010) suggests, these are seen as the main barriers to individualization, and a self-made man hero must overcome these barriers. Kogan (2010) also suggests that in autobiographical success stories of self-made men that follow a common story

structure, the protagonist frequently encounters unfairness and deprivation on his journey to a better life.

In addition to the material success and social recognition, some authors have created works that connects the realization of self with the spiritual growth. These transcendentalist writers include those, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. “Self-made manhood is accentuated in yet another way by transcendentalist writers Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, who critically comment on Franklin’s success tenet by offering a highly anti-materialistic and spiritual viewpoint on self-culture and “self-reliance,” as Paul (2014, p.381) demonstrates.

Herman Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story from Wall Street" (1853) is another notable and highly complex (if not enigmatic) 19th-century text that undoubtedly offers a critique of the widely praised culture of self-help, optimism, success, and the self-made man, as Paul (2014, p.381) asserts. The protagonist of the story, a young man, refuses to operate in a rationalized capitalist economy; when his boss asks him to do something, he responds, “I would prefer not to,” according to Paul (2014, p.381). As Barnett (1974) underlines, critics like Leo Marx saw the story as a critique of capitalism (cf. Marx, 1953, p. 605), and Louise Barnett referred to Bartleby as an “alienated worker” in the “numbing world of capitalist profit and alienated labor,” as Paul (2014, p.381) quotes.

There are also other notable authors such as William Dean Howells, Henry James, Edith Wharton, and Theodore Dreiser, who were critical of material success and its repercussions during 19th and 20th centuries. Paul (2014) demonstrates that those realist/naturalist authors explored class and class difference. For example, Paul (2014, p.383) quotes Michaels’ (1987, p. 39) argument that capitalism and the “superabundance” associated with the self-made man are “a violation of the old ways and of the family itself,” and Lapham's bankruptcy is seen as bringing about his redemption in the novel *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, which reflected on the psychological costs of self-made manhood. *The Great Gatsby* (1925), a famous novel authored by F. Scott Fitzgerald and whose titular character is an allegorical figure that “comes inevitably to stand for America itself,” seems to have marked the (preliminary) endpoint of the self-made man's development from a rural to an industrial and finally to a market-oriented and corporate figure, as Paul (2014, p.384) writes. However, the

story of upward mobility of Gatsby involves seeling illegal alcohol and and working together with the immigrant gangsters.

2.4.3. Self-Made Man Myth and Immigration

The immigrant experience has frequently been linked to ideas of upward social mobility and pursuing the American ideal. Paul (2014) identifies four distinct patterns that underlay portrayals of the immigrant experience in American literature and popular culture from the middle of the 19th century to the present to explain the various degrees of affirmation and critique of the myth of the self-made man.

The first category consists of success stories that typically have a happy ending and show successful and well-adjusted (i.e., assimilated) protagonists who are proud of their accomplishments in a society that is typically characterized as rewarding perseverance, hard effort, and discipline, according to Paul (2014, p.386). He adds the following:

Those narratives include early immigrant tales such as Jewish American Mary Antin's autobiography *The Promised Land* (1912) and Arab American Abraham Mitrie Rihbany's memoir *A Far Journey* (1914); and more contemporary texts such as Richard Rodriguez's assimilationist autobiography *Hunger for Memory* (1982) and Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Jasmine* (1989), which features a female immigrant protagonist. Self-made success can also be achieved through physical self-discipline, as Italian American Rocky Balboa's boxing pursuits in *Rocky* (1976) show. (Paul, 2014, p. 386)

Also, he says:

The career of Austrian American Arnold Schwarzenegger, who quite recently published his celebrity memoir *Total Recall: My Unbelievably True Life Story* (2012), points to yet other arenas of self-making; his remark that '[i]f there is one thing in this world that I despise, it's losers!' (Schwarzenegger qtd. in Halberstam, 2011, p. 5) is symptomatic of a cult(ure) of self-made manhood that glorifies the success of individuals and denigrates those who are unsuccessful. (Paul, 2014, p. 386)

Paul (2014, p.386-87) summarizes that the dominant form of the myth of the self-made man is articulated by immigrant voices and tales of the kind described above, and they support exceptionalist views of the US as a country in which anybody can succeed through personal genius, hard effort, and discipline.

Paul (2014, p.387) defines that the second category of immigrant stories, contrarily, is less firmly devoted to the American success mythology and comprises of stories about upward mobility that do not necessarily finish on a cheerful note or look at the drawbacks of success. According to Paul (2014), in fact, success on the outside might also be accompanied by feelings of failure, loss, and isolation. According to Paul (2014, p. 387), those stories include Abraham Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917), Paule Marshall's novels, including *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1957) and Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* (1984).

Paul (2014, p.389) lastly defines the last relevant type as a formula that investigates different ways of creating oneself and succeeding that frequently cross legal boundaries and do not adhere to the most prevalent version of the success myth:

These narratives acknowledge the difficulties of immigrant life in the US that arise from nativist resentments and other forms of discrimination against immigrants that often make assimilation impossible or undesirable, and thus locate success not within the American mainstream but in family- or ethnically-based criminal organizations and in plots revolving around a central gangster figure. (cf. Dickstein, 2009, p. 313 as in Paul, 2014, p. 389).

He says, "A prominent example of this kind of tale is the *Godfather* saga (cf. Mario Puzo's novel and Francis Ford Coppola's film of the same title, as well as the sequels they spawned), which exemplifies an immigrant success formula based on maneuvering at the limits of (and beyond) legality and in socio-economic niches" (Paul, 2014, p. 389). According to him, "More recently, the Godfather formula was taken up in the television series *The Sopranos* (1999–2007) as well as by a host of other series that focus on the self-making of characters conventionally thought of as "criminals"" (Paul, 2014, p. 390). In addition, "Irish Americans also figure prominently in this alternative success myth, for example in Martin Scorsese's *Gangs of New York* (2002),

which dramatizes nativist and Irish gang life against the backdrop of the New York Draft Riots of 1863 and other contemporaneous historical events” (Paul, 2014, p. 390).

2.4.4. Self-Made Man Myth and Race

Paul (2014, 391) also demonstrates that in addition to these tales of immigration, academics of slavery have claimed that the slave narrative, an early African American literary form, might be seen as a revision of the success myth: The author/narrator of the slave tale could be regarded as a subject who has refigured themselves as free people when utilizing a broad definition of the self-made man.

According to Paul (2014, p. 391), the African American freedman or runaway slave becomes the prototypical example of the self-made man who overcomes adversity thanks to his own strength and perseverance, emphasizing freedom and emancipation over ideas of upward mobility and financial abundance. Paul (2014, p.391) suggests that this interpretation also infuses the self-made man discourse with a strong moral sense.

Paul (2014, p.394) says that Hollywood movies are another medium where black socioeconomic mobility and immobility are frequently shown:

In *Driving Miss Daisy* (1989), for example, the African American Hoke (Morgan Freeman) is happy to be employed as a chauffeur by the elderly Miss Daisy (Jessica Tandy), and even though the film acknowledges racism and anti-Semitism, it also affirms a racially stratified social order. (Paul, 2014, p. 394).

He adds a similar example as follows:

The controversially discussed adaptation of Kathryn Stockett’s 2009 bestseller *The Help* (2011), which again portrays African American characters in a position of servitude, arguably similarly downplays past and present racial discrimination and black subordination by way of a sentimental politics of representation. (Paul, 2014, p. 394-95)

Also, he gives the following example:

Another puzzling example that calls for a thorough critique of black representation is *The Pursuit of Happyness* (2006), starring Will Smith as Chris Gardner, a homeless African American salesman and single parent who, against all odds, lands an unpaid internship at a brokerage firm, is then taken on as a paid employee, and finally goes on to become a millionaire. (Paul, 2014, p. 395)

According to him:

Instead of using its premise—unemployment, social insecurity, and poverty in an increasingly finance-driven economy—to formulate a critique of the financial sector in particular and of US society at large, the film thus turns out to be yet another celebration of individualism and self-reliance. (Paul, 2014, p. 395).

Gardner tells his son, “Don’t ever let somebody tell you you can’t do something. [...] You’ve got a dream; you’ve got to protect it. [...] If you want something, go get it. Period.” (Paul, 2014, p. 395). “This “American Dream” narrative may well be described as postracial, if only for the very fact that it does not acknowledge the blackness of its protagonist: Gardner is never interpellated as black and racism is never explicitly addressed in the film (cf. Gerund & Koetzing, 2011, p.203) as Paul (2014, p.395) demonstrates.

Paul (2014, p.395) also argues that African Americans have been fashioned as heroes and heroines through the use of self-making as a cultural script in a variety of fields, including business and entrepreneurship, entertainment, sports, and, less frequently, politics. For instance, Oprah Winfrey, who was up in rural poverty but rose to become one of the richest self-made women in the US, is undoubtedly the most well-known example of a black woman achieving success. According to Paul (2014, p.395) her altruism and the extolled discourse that (not least by herself) frames and elevates her benevolent and philanthropic endeavors serve to support and enhance her personal success myth: Like Rockefeller and Carnegie's strategies, generosity and charity become a component of an entrepreneurial plan that seeks to prevent and neutralize any criticism of structural injustice and inequality.

Barack Obama, whose ascent to the highest office in US politics has frequently been portrayed in accordance with the common narrative formula of the success myth, and he has frequently connected himself with the myth of the self-made man as shown in a speech that he gave in Berlin on July 24, 2008:

I know that I don't look like the Americans who've previously spoken in this great city. The journey that led me here is improbable. My mother was born in the heartland of America, but my father grew up herding goats in Kenya. His father – my grandfather – was a cook, a domestic servant to the British.
(Obama, 2014, February 2 as in Paul, 2014, p.396)

Although he reinforces the myth of self-made man by resonating his story to the white success mythology as in his book *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (2006), he has also occasionally and provocatively criticized the myth of the self-made man such as in the course of his re-election campaign on July 13, 2012 in Roanoke, Virginia, as Paul (2014, p.396) outlines.

As a result, Paul (2014) pinpoints the various purposes for which the myth of the self-made man has been utilized in African American intellectual history, culture, and individual (self)-representations. According to Paul (2014, p.397), for instance, it has been used to promote a positive view of black masculinity and to demand recognition for individual and collective African American achievement, but it has also been used to highlight the limitations of the model of expressive individualism in US society.

2.4.5. Self-Made Man Myth and Gender

Examples of the female version of the myth of the self-made man (a.k.a., self-made woman) exist in American culture and literature as well. Yet, as Paul (2014, p.398) underlines, the female success myth does seem to diverge from the dominant male one at some key places, to which it seems to be tied asymmetrically and in a complementary way. According to Paul (2014, p.398), the foundational story of self-making does not include self-made women, and even more contemporary female role models frequently adhere to a distorted logic that tends to define female success in terms other than work as productivity, more frequently in terms of the kind of work that goes into maintaining and improving one's physical attractiveness.

Women entered the newly emerging consumer economy as customers and as male status symbols, i.e., as passive subjects or rather objectified non-subjects, or not at all, as a result of being interpellated not as producers/workers but as "consuming angels" (cf. Lori Anne Loeb's book of the same name) as Paul (2014, p.399) suggests. This goes in parallel with the patriarchal logic in which women's function is precisely not to become independently successful but to further highlight male success by yielding to men's efforts to change women in accordance with their ideals. In other words, women's upward mobility depended on their relationships to men under the realm of self-made man myth.

Similarly, Paul (2014, p.399) highlights the fact that Americanized version of the Cinderella story is frequently used in American cultural production to inhibit female success. The examples include the following:

Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1901), in which the titular character, a country girl who goes on to become a successful actress, ultimately leaves both male mentor figures with whom she has relations in the course of the novel; Anita Loos's *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1925), which ends with protagonist Lorelei Lee, another provincial girl, marrying into high society; or Garry Marshall's Hollywood romance *Pretty Woman* (1990), which tells the love story between Vivian Ward, a prostitute, and a rich businessman. (Paul, 2014, p. 399).

Paul (2014, p. 401) demonstrates that while there are uncomplicated narratives of upward mobility, they are less common than narratives of self-making that focus on women's physical appearance and the effort required to meet socially prescribed beauty standards. "Overall, female self-making runs counter to the conventional American work ethic" (Paul, 2014, p. 401).

Unfortunately, in more modern postfeminist rhetoric, the term "female self-making" is used more radically to describe self-transformations brought about via cosmetic surgery, as Paul (2014, p. 402) underlines. "Thus, Elizabeth Atwood Gailey discusses as 'self-made' the women who undergo cosmetic surgery on reality television series such as *The Swan*, *Extreme Makeover*, and *Dr. 90210* for 'the promise of status

elevation and enhanced economic opportunity” (Gailey, 2007, p. 109 as in Paul, 2014, p. 402). Paul (2014, p. 402) makes the following quotation, too:

Here, as Gailey points out, ‘[w]omen are either portrayed as material objects—little more than a collection of (often almost cartoonishly) formulaic body parts—or, equally limiting and pathological—as self-exploitative, entrepreneurial agents who are more than willing to use their bodies to ‘get ahead’ (quoted from Gailey, 2007, p. 110) or to have signs of aging or pregnancy and childbirth removed in a spirit of ‘responsible self-management and care’ (quoted from Gailey, 2007, p. 110).

Thirdly, another cultural narrative on women making their own way in the world portrays women as traditional spouses and assigns them a supporting role in their husbands’ making their own way in the world and ascension in society, as Paul (2014, p. 402) demonstrates:

In *How to Help Your Husband Get Ahead in His Social and Business Life* (1953), a book adhering to the prototypical “conformist sensibility of the 1950s” (quoted from Watts, 2013, p. 485), Dorothy Carnegie, who tellingly refers to herself rather as Mrs. Dale Carnegie, counsels wives on how to increase their husbands’ success by making them comfortable at home, boosting their egos, and, most importantly, by not pursuing careers of their own, while she herself de facto took over her ailing husband’s business around the time of her book’s publication. (Paul, 2014, p. 402)

Paul (2014, p. 402) also argues that, in addition to patriarchal notions that women's success is correlated with that of their spouses, there are alternative representations of the self-made woman, such as those in movies, where career women are frequently portrayed as inferior single females. Movie stars like Doris Day portrayed businesswomen who sacrifice their professions for men in many films throughout the 1950s, a watershed decade for gender conservatism. In the 1980s, successful female professionals were also frequently constrained by limited stereotypes:

For example in *Fatal Attraction* (1987), in which Alex (Glenn Close), the successful editor of a publishing company, starts terrorizing Dan (Michael Douglas) and his family after he refuses to continue their affair; Susan Faludi compellingly reads Alex's deterioration as signifying the pathologization of the businesswoman in American culture (cf. Faludi, 1992, p. 112-113): In the film's logic, self-making and professional emancipation lead to the character's psycho-social disintegration because her career cannot compensate for her lack of a husband and family. (Paul, 2014, p.403)

He also gives the following example from a romantic comedy:

The romantic comedy *Working Girl* (1988), in which we follow Tess McGill's (Melanie Griffith's) rise from secretary to successful businesswoman, represents female professional ambition and success rather positively; however, the character of Katharine Parker (Sigourney Weaver), Tess's boss, does reinforce the stereotype of the scheming and callous career woman, and as she is also Tess's major antagonist, she furthermore disavows any notion of female solidarity. (cf. Faludi, 1992, p.128-29 as quoted in Paul, 2014, p. 403)

2.4.6. Journey of the Self-Made Man as a Hero

Byars (1992, p. 21) argues that the "journey" is shown as a crucial component in the formation of American heroes, according to preliminary research into the self-made myth: "The hero may progress from rags to riches, from failure to success, from self-doubt to self-assurance, etc." (Byars, 1992, p. 21). Byars (1992, p.21) adds that Joseph Campbell, Vladimir Propp, and Northrop Frye are the most known theorists that examine the hero and his journey.

Similar to what Paul (2014) asserts about the American way of gaining independence from European monarchies, Byars (1992, p.24) claims that the myth of self-madeness actually demonstrates a set of binaries that were started when British settlers first crossed the Atlantic to the New World. Byars (1992, p.24) clarifies that the established English society split in two over the new American village, where survival required cutting one's way through the forest. He says, "The entrenched (though oppressive) stability of monarchical rule was replaced by the instability of new, perhaps confusing, freedoms that mandated individual determination and initiative" (Byars,

1992, p. 24). The critical element in this story is the presence of personal determination and intervention that are replaced by the traditions. Therefore, as Byars (1992, p.24) summarizes, the rugged, self-made individualist who is skeptical of all authorities other than his own, wary of high culture (connected in his mind to the oppression of kings), and indifferent to academia (which was useless in taming the wilderness) emerged as a new prototype on the American scene.

Byars (1992, p.24) demonstrates that Robertson proposes a tertiary model with three sub-prototypes to define this early American character type: the backwoodsman, the frontiersman, and the pioneer. Byars (1992, p.25) claims that Robertson actually hypothesizes that there is a type of ameliorative process within the larger paradigm, going from the backwoodsman (least civilized) to the frontiersman to the pioneer (most civilized), mirroring the growth of American society generally as it gets more and more “civilized.” To summarize, the virtual heathen emerges from the wilderness, builds settlements, and “civilizes” as a pioneer. This journey is both spatial and mystical, replicating the pilgrim's journey towards morality and God. The untamed forest environment is replaced by the ordered, moral structure of the pioneer home.

In constructing a thorough definition of the self-made hero, Robertson's investigation reveals key organizational components, according to Byars (1992, p.27). He suggests, “The self-made individual is a loner” (Byars, 1992, p. 27) and adds, “He makes a spatial/temporal journey, escaping into the wilderness and reappearing as the new pioneer, ready to build a civilization” (Byars, 1992, p. 27). According to him, “At first, he is unwashed and “uncouth,” disdaining organized religion (and, by association, all academia)” (Byars, 1992, p. 27). However, “his final state is one of moral stability as he takes his place in the community” (Byars, 1992, p. 27). Therefore, he says, “The essential trait of the self-made (pioneer) hero... becomes his propensity for hard work” (Byars, 1992, p. 27). He concludes the following: “In effect, the new American republic stands or falls on this one contingency—whether or not a man is willing to commit himself to intense labor” (Byars, 1992, p. 27).

Byars (1992, p. 31) summarizes the self-made hero's main characteristics in the context of American myth as follows:

- 1) The self-made hero rises from common origins, (Byars, 1992, p. 31);

- 2) Identifying himself as non-aristocratic, the hero values homespun wisdom rather than book knowledge (Byars, 1992, p. 31);
- 3) He sees the necessity of hard work and embraces his work with determination (Byars, 1992, p. 31);
- 4) Hard work becomes a quasi-religious ethic and is therefore deemed a virtue (Byars, 1992, p. 31);
- 5) Virtuous labor is rewarded with success of various kinds (Byars, 1992, p. 31);
- 6) The hero makes a temporal, spatial, and/or metaphorical journey (typically alone), gaining knowledge and/or wealth in the process; and
- 7) Obstacles that impede the journey must be overcome before success is gained (Byars, 1992, p. 32).

In summary, the main features of the myth of the self-made man can be summarized in the following list, all of which could also be said to be the underlying notions of the neoliberal ideology of today's world.

- 1) One is to become the captain of its own destiny.
- 2) Based on the premises of democracy, freedom, and equality, a society that is classless or that allows a considerable amount of social mobility is favored.
- 3) Relying on the Social Darwinist theory, competitiveness among individuals and individual success matter more than collective success.

One can observe the implications of media imperialism explained in Section 2.1 with regards to its power to transmit the myths of the US. Regarding the self-made man myth, which is one of the founding myths of American culture and ideology in particular, there is no study found in the literature. Yet, the ways the self-made man myth is globalized through the use of dominant media industries can be summarized into four patterns. First of all, the celebrity narratives, which frequently promote the tales of accomplished people who have overcome adversity to climb to great

achievement, are circulated by the US media and entertainment companies. Similar to the discussions made in the previous sections of this chapter, these accounts emphasize individual victories while downplaying or omitting significant social, economic, and historical elements that might have played a role in the success of the subject.

Second, programs like reality TV shows and talent shows frequently highlight the idea of “making it” in the entertainment industry through one’s own skill and perseverance. While entertaining, these programs frequently oversimplify the difficult process of succeeding in the creative industries. They provide the impression that success is exclusively determined by an individual’s talent and willpower, ignoring the impact of luck, relationships, and structural biases.

Third, the culture industry frequently links successful people with various products, brands, and lifestyles. It propagates the idea that success and social prestige can be attained by using particular products or living particular lifestyles through advertising and endorsements. This consumerist society upholds the “self-made man” myth by fostering the notion that people can “buy” success and upward social mobility.

Last but not least, the culture industry frequently portrays countries as meritocratic, where achievement is apparently determined by personal talent and aptitude. Characters that succeed against all obstacles by working hard and using their talent are frequently shown in several movies, TV shows, and books. The narrative perpetuates the fallacy that success depends only on a person’s own abilities and efforts by failing to address the structural injustices and hurdles that restrict chances for many individuals.

As a conclusion, the media imperialism that is perpetuated by mainly US media conglomerates, including Netflix, creates a room for the dissemination of American myths, including the self-made man myth, which is the subject matter of this thesis. This kind of dissemination can sometimes be disguised in a global format, such as in the case of Netflix, whose dictum is to “think local, act global.” In the following chapters, three Netflix original productions of the teen series genre produced in different countries will be analyzed to see if both of them carry the myth of the self-made man from the perspective of each protagonist’s journey.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Subject and Purpose

Netflix has become a global company that acts with the motto “think local, act global,” just like McDonalds, Nintendo, and Starbucks. Netflix Original Series productions bring local stories to nearly 238 million members worldwide as of July 2023 (*Netflix - Overview – Profile*, n.d.). As content manager Ted Sarandos says, “Our belief is that great storytelling transcends borders. When stories from different countries, languages and cultures find a worldwide platform where the only limitation is the creator’s imagination, then unique, yet universal, stories emerge that are embraced by a global audience” (Netflix, 2018). However, when looking at some Netflix Original Productions, it is seen that these productions have become standardized content within certain formats, as suggested by the notion of “culture industry” formulated by Adorno and Horkheimer.

Christophe Tardieu, director of the French National Cinema Center, stated that the rise of Netflix is a new wave of globalization. He emphasized that this can be seen as a monoculture that threatens to destroy local cultures, as Erbland (2017) quotes. According to Erbland (2017), Netflix only promotes styles and content that comply with American norms. With this understanding, Netflix also serves cultural globalization with its local productions and brings local cultures closer together.

This thesis aims to analyze whether Netflix presents one of the most prominent myths that established American culture, which is the myth of the self-made man, in a global format within the framework of the culture industry. To test this hypothesis, three Netflix original productions in the same genre (teen drama) from three different countries were selected. Teen drama shows are especially chosen given the high number of young audiences in Netflix's worldwide user base. The teen dramas for the observation are *Aşk 101* from Turkey, *Sex Education* from the United Kingdom, and *Elite* from Spain.

Aşk 101 tells the story of a group of teen outcasts in 1990s Turkey who discover the importance of friendship, love, and their genuine selves as they have to matchmake

their teachers to continue their education. *Sex Education* covers the personal transformation of Otis from a shy and sexually repressed teenager to a confident, self-sufficient, and sexually active boy, whereas *Elite* covers the story of three poor high school students enrolling in the school of rich students and shows the daily struggles between those two groups.

3.2. Limitations

Given that the thesis is a qualitative study with a time limit, only the first seasons of the three shows will be analyzed under the purposive sampling method. “Purposive sampling is widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest” (Palinkas et al., 2015). Also, as the departure and initiation stages are of key importance to understanding whether the main character goes through a transformation that is necessary to validate the self-made man myth or not, the return stage will be bypassed. This decision is also made due to the scope and time limit of this analysis. Normally, *Elite* has 7 seasons, *Sex Education* has 4 seasons (the last season is still in the pipeline), and *Aşk 101* has 2 seasons so far. Hence, only the first seasons of each show are going to be analyzed.

Second, the shows that are selected for this thesis only provide findings based on three countries. The thesis does not provide a comprehensive look at the issue since it does not involve other series from many other countries in which Netflix produces original series for comparison. This avoids having a general sense about whether Netflix transmits a “self-made man” myth through its original series in various countries.

Third, since the main protagonists in each story are male, this analysis could only provide an analysis of the heroic journey of males. However, to provide a more comprehensive analysis, the heroic journeys of female characters should also be added to the analysis.

Finally, there is no audience reception study included in this analysis since it will require more time and effort to find people with at least intermediate knowledge about these shows from three different countries: Turkey, Spain, and the UK. Furthermore, it is important to find audience members in both countries who are

representatives of the general Turkish, Spanish, and British populations. Regarding the extent of such a study, it is extremely difficult to gather such an audience for this kind of analysis. The audience study could provide more insights into whether the potential existence of myths is well received by the audience or not. However, this kind of study could be done by scholars in the future.

3.3. Research Questions

This study aims to address these questions by analyzing three Netflix Original Series produced in three different countries, *Sex Education*, *Elite*, and *Aşk 101*, respectively:

- (i) How do Netflix's original teen series produced in different localities incorporate the notion of the self-made man?
- (ii) How does the myth of the self-made man reproduced through these shows relate to capitalist hegemony?

3.4. Method

The analysis of the self-made man myth will be executed through the protagonist's story arc based on Joseph Campbell's monomyth of the "hero's journey," which consists of three main stages:

- 1- **The departure** is when the hero leaves the familiar world behind. In brief, the hero is living in the so-called "ordinary world" when he receives a call to adventure. Usually, the hero is unsure of following this call—known as the "refusal of the call"—but is then helped by a mentor figure, who gives him counsel and convinces him to follow the call (MasterClass, 2021).
- 2- **The initiation** is when the hero learns to navigate the unfamiliar world. In this stage, the hero enters the "special world," where he must begin facing a series of tasks until he reaches the climax of the story—the main obstacle or enemy. Here, the hero must put into practice everything he has learned on his journey to overcome the obstacle. Campbell talks about the hero attaining some kind of prize for his troubles—this can be a physical token or "elixir," or just good, old-fashioned wisdom (or both) (MasterClass, 2021).

- 3- **The return** is when the hero returns to the familiar world. In this stage, the protagonist feels like he is ready to go back to his world; the hero must now leave. Once back in the ordinary world, he undergoes a personal metamorphosis in the realization of how his adventure has changed him as a person (MasterClass, 2021).

The detailed steps of this cyclical journey are as follows (MasterClass, 2021):

DEPARTURE

1. **The call to adventure:** Something or someone interrupts the hero's familiar life to present a problem, threat, or opportunity.
2. **Refusal of the call:** Unwilling to step out of their comfort zone or face their fear, the hero initially hesitates to embark on this journey.
3. **Supernatural aid:** A mentor figure gives the hero the tools and inspiration they need to accept the call to adventure.
4. **Crossing the threshold:** The hero embarks on their quest.
5. **Belly of the whale:** The hero crosses the point of no return and encounters their first major obstacle.

INITIATION

6. **The road of trials:** The hero must go through a series of tests or ordeals to begin his transformation. Often, the hero fails at least one of these tests.
7. **The meeting with the goddess:** The hero meets one or more allies who pick him up and help him continue his journey.
8. **Woman as temptress:** The hero is tempted to abandon or stray from his quest. Traditionally, this temptation is a love interest, but it can manifest itself in other forms as well, including fame or wealth.
9. **Atonement with the father:** The hero confronts the reason for his journey, facing his doubts and fears and the powers that rule his life. This is a major turning point in the story: every prior step has brought the hero here, and every step forward stems from this moment.
10. **Apotheosis:** As a result of this confrontation, the hero gains a profound understanding of their purpose or skill. Armed with this new ability, the hero

prepares for the most difficult part of the adventure.

11. The ultimate boon: The hero achieves the goal he set out to accomplish, fulfilling the call that inspired his journey in the first place.

RETURN

12. Refusal of the return: If the hero's journey has been victorious, he may be reluctant to return to the ordinary world of his prior life.

13. The magic flight: The hero must escape with the object of his quest, evading those who would reclaim it.

14. Rescue from without: Mirroring the meeting with the goddess, the hero receives help from a guide or rescuer in order to make it home.

15. The crossing of the return threshold: The hero makes a successful return to the ordinary world.

16. Master of two worlds: We see the hero achieve a balance between who he was before his journey and who he is now. Often, this means balancing the material world with the spiritual enlightenment he has gained.

17. Freedom to live: We leave the hero at peace with his life.

3.5. Contributions to the Literature

On the national thesis center of the Council of Higher Education of Turkey, there are 26 theses about different aspects of Netflix between 2019 and 2023. This shows us that Netflix is one of the fastest-rising subjects in the academic domain in Turkey. The topics about Netflix include, but are not limited to, the user experience design, parasocial interaction of the viewers and audience culture, consumption behaviors, gender stereotypes and LGBTQ+ representations, and social media marketing strategies.

In addition, there are some works on the ideological analysis of some Netflix original series, and to what extent Netflix is a culture industry is a topic of discussion. Akın (2020) analyzes the nature of creative industries in Turkey with a reference to Netflix series generated by the world order, geography, and culture of individuals in a context-positioning format. Akın (2020) also reveals that creative industries like Netflix are comparable to the culture industry in that they attempt to change how cultures, people, and societies in powerful countries are. Secondly, Çamur (2020) examines the

two Netflix original series, *Designated Survivor* and *Messiah* through critical discourse analysis. Çamur (2020) determines that the ideology and current politics of the United States are being duplicated using established discourses. According to Çamur (2020), both series elevate American values and develop Islamophobic discourses, leading to the conclusion that Middle Eastern nations are portrayed as foes and Muslims as terrorists. However, no thesis has been published in Turkish academic literature on whether Netflix transmits the "myth of the self-made man" through its Netflix Original Productions.

There are no theses directly relevant to this study in the global literature either. When a search is made with the keywords "Netflix" and "self-made man myth" combined, there are no results provided. Yet, there are a great number of studies on "Netflix" and "the self-made man myth." Given these results, it can be said that this study would be a pioneer in terms of delving into the intersection of Netflix original series and the self-made man myth.

In summary, this study aims to understand whether Netflix reproduces the self-made man myth, which is one of the founding myths of the United States and is an underlying thought of capitalism, in different geographies. The narrative analysis based on Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey is applied to understand whether the story arc of the protagonists in three different Netflix original series from three different countries reaffirms the self-made man myth. In addition, a critical analysis of the implications of capitalism in the story arc of these protagonists is also to be provided. To make an objective comparison, three Netflix original series from three different countries with the same genres were selected by the method of purposive sampling. All of them are teen dramas called *Sex Education*, *Elite*, and *Aşk 101*, from the UK, Spain, and Turkey, respectively.

There are some limitations to this study, as explained above, and it is highly recommended to add a reception study to get a sense of whether the potential myths are received well by the audience in the following studies. In the following sections, narrative analysis and critical analysis for ideological meanings are going to be provided.

4. FINDINGS

In this analysis, three Netflix Original Productions of teen dramas from three different countries, *Sex Education*, *Elite* and *Aşk 101*, in order, are analyzed and the findings are presented in the following sections.

4.1. Analysis of the Self-Made Man Myth in *Sex Education*

In this analysis, I aim at examining whether a self-made man myth exists in one of the most acclaimed teen series on Netflix, *Sex Education*, through the lens of “The Hero’s Journey,” a monomyth. In this monomyth, the protagonist, who is about to undergo a transformative journey or quest, typically faces challenges and obstacles but ultimately emerges victorious and transformed with newfound wisdom or power.

While the self-made man myth and the hero’s journey are not completely identical conceptions, they share some similarities. Both concepts involve the idea of an individual achieving success and/or transformation through their own efforts. The protagonists of both myths have individual determination at most parts of their journey and make a spatial journey, running away into the wilderness, and emerging as the new pioneer, transformed and better off than their initial stage. However, the major difference between the two myths is the essence of the gains made. In the hero’s journey, the hero generally gains newfound wisdom, power, and self-awareness, whereas in the self-made man myth, the essential idea is that the hero achieves success and prosperity and also a new higher status in society due to their hard work and determination.

The similarities between the two notions are that the protagonist faces challenges and obstacles, and both emphasize the idea of personal growth and transformation. That being said, the self-made man myth can be seen as a variation of the hero’s journey, where the protagonist overcomes challenges and obstacles to achieve material success and status rather than a more spiritual and/or transformative goal. This is in parallel with the expressive individualism aspect of the self-made man myth and could be seen as a continuation of the 19th-century Transcendentalist

tradition, of which Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau are two of the most famous representatives.

To understand if there is a self-made man myth underlying the journey of Otis, his motivation and journey will be analyzed by referring to the main stages of the hero's journey. The journey analysis will capture only Season 1 to make a comparable study with the other series examined in this thesis. The hypothesis of this analysis is that Otis' journey perpetuates the myth of the self-made man, whereby Otis could express his own unique individuality and achieve personal success and achievement in his society (i.e., in his high school), like being rich or having a better status in his social environment.

The departure: In the first episode of Season 1, we meet the protagonist of the story, Otis Milburn, who is a 16-year-old highly sophisticated and introverted high school student. In the first episode and in his ordinary world, he is depicted as naturally a loser and ranked lower in the social hierarchy of the school environment. Moreover, there is a more major problem that he has to solve throughout his journey. He is afraid of having sex. He cannot masturbate, and he is still a virgin in a school where almost everybody has already had a sexual experience. His best friend, Eric, and his sex therapist mom, Jean, are well aware of the situation, and both of them are trying to help him in their own capacities.

In the ordinary world, Eric, Otis' best friend and a very joyful black and LGBTIQ+ guy, acts as a mentor on his journey. Eric has already discovered his own sexuality but is also not ranked in the higher hierarchies of the school environment. Everybody is making fun of him as a "tromboner," referring to the fact that he has given oral sex to another male student.

Two fellows are introduced in their first year at Moordale High School. From Eric's point of view, the audience is informed that almost every student in the school has already had a better or worse sexual experience, but not Otis. Eric defines this situation as "*everybody has had sex over the summer except you*" to Otis. Eric highlights the deficiency in Otis by showing other students who are thinking about and/or already engaged in sexual activity and warning him. In addition, he shows

Maeve Wiley, one of the most sexually experienced students at the school, to Otis. Otis has been attracted to her but sees her as unattainable and a member of the highest social value chain.

On 08:22, Eric tells Otis on the opening day of the first year of high school, *“This is a new frontier, my sexually repressed friend. Our chance to finally move up the social food chain. We shall transform from lowly caterpillars into awesome killer whales.”* So, in Otis’s familiar world, he is sexually repressed and also a member of the lower chains of the social food chain, metaphorically speaking. In this sense, this story can be interpreted as one of gaining personal success and achievement, like having a better status in his social environment.

Otis is **called to adventure** as he is asked to provide advice on some sexual problems. Despite not having any sexual engagement, Otis is highly knowledgeable about sexual and romantic issues, ironically as a result of having sex therapist parents. He finds himself relaxing Adam Groff, who is one of the bulliest students in the school, next to Maeve Wiley when Adam happens to have a largely erected penis due to having three Viagras. As Otis and Maeve start talking with Adam, Maeve and Adam realize that Otis has the power to build empathy and fix sexual issues. He understands Adam’s psychological problems and gives advice on how to get over them. Maeve realizes that Adam’s problem is solved as a result of Otis’s advice to Adam. Maeve is impressed by Otis’s talent and offers him the job of running a private sex clinic at the school. This is a critical turn for Otis to become known throughout the entire school and get closer to Maeve.

In episode 2, Otis **refuses the call** when Maeve phones him. He gets so panicked because he sees her at the top of the social chain and implicitly likes her. He drops his phone, makes awkward sounds, and becomes sweaty and panicked. Eric, as his mentor, encourages him to answer Maeve’s call and run the sex clinic with Maeve by saying that *“knowledge is power, power is status, and status means popular.”* This is the **supernatural aid** part of this journey, where the mentor figure provides the hero the **inspiration** they require to answer the call to adventure. With this inspiration, Otis accepts the call and decides to continue running a clinic with Maeve.

With this said, we can see that the hero embarks on their quest, and we can think that Otis **crosses the first threshold** by going to Aimee's (one of the most popular girls in the school) party, where Otis, Maeve, and Eric, as a team, believe that they will become more known as many people would need their service at the party.

Having just passed the critical threshold, Otis introduces himself as giving free sex advice to people at Aimee's party if needed. Although he finds himself very insecure and calling himself stupid as his self-promotion is not well-received by some of the students, Otis accidentally finds himself providing couples therapy to a couple in need.

Yet, Otis is still not completely sure and comfortable with the clinic and this new world. Otis decides to give up on the clinic and his journey, just as Maeve gives up on the clinic after she learns that she is pregnant during the party. Despite Maeve's decision to quit the clinic, many people reach out to Otis and ask his advice on various sexual issues right after the party. So, Otis returns Maeve to the clinic due to the great demand. Maeve gets excited. Otis becomes more confident and sets his own principles for the sessions instead of relying on Maeve's.

Following the success of the party, Otis and Maeve's sex clinic gets popular, and Otis gets more attracted to Maeve. This stage represents the **belly of the whale** of the journey, where Otis shows more willingness to embark on the journey of transformation. Otis and Maeve's relationship is getting stronger as Maeve asks Otis to stay with her during the abortion. Maeve is so happy that Otis stays with her during the abortion, and they get closer as they converse in their personal lives. Unlike the regular pattern of the hero's journey, Otis **meets with the goddess** right at the belly of the whale stage. The meeting with the goddess stage represents the one where the hero experiences serious and unconditional love for someone.

The initiation: As their relationship gets stronger, Otis passes through the initiation stage. He starts facing the **road of trials** stage, where the hero must pass a series of tests to begin his transformation. Otis faces his first major trial with Jackson, who is in love with Maeve, and asks for advice from Otis to help him make Maeve his girlfriend. The other trial is the raising of difficulties in the clinic, where the new

clients—a lesbian couple who are having trouble having a shared pleasure during sex—are asking for help from Otis. Third, Otis is still very inexperienced in sexual engagements compared to Maeve, which sets him back from opening himself up and having a relationship with Maeve.

Regarding the first major trial, Otis decides to stay ethical and return Jackson's money and not give any advice at all. However, while talking to him, he accidentally mentions what Maeve likes and the essential features of her character. So, Jackson gradually appeals to Maeve, which makes Otis's life harder in terms of getting closer to her. At the end of episode 4, Jackson really decides to ask Maeve out and seeks advice from Otis on how to do it well.

Otis, angered by Jackson's love words for Maeve and his bravery about asking out girls, **is tempted** by his jealousy. He goes through the **temptation stage**, where his jealousy leads Otis to abandon his quest. Otis therefore follows Eric's advice of sabotaging Jackson's attempt to appeal to Maeve and suggests Jackson make a grandiose romantic gesture to win her heart. He, for the first time, acts unethically in his journey. Unfortunately, his improper behavior does not pay off, as Maeve accepts Jackson's proposal and kisses him in front of the entire school and Otis.

This puts a distance between Otis and Maeve. Maeve does not talk with Otis on a regular basis anymore. Yet another call for the clinic comes up and urges Otis and Maeve to take action to get together. From a feminist perspective, Maeve feels that they have to figure out who is sharing the explicit picture of Ruby's vagina with Otis. While Maeve and Otis are about to kiss after they solve the case, Otis suddenly yells "*I'm a virgin*" to Maeve, which marks the beginning of the **atonement with the father** stage.

In this stage, the hero confronts the reason for his journey, facing his fears and the powers that control his life. Otis recalls his encounter with his father's sexual relationship with one of his patients when he was a small child. The audience realizes that Otis stigmatizes sex because of busting his father with another woman, and his mom tells him that "*sexual intercourse can be wonderful, but it can also cause tremendous pain. And if you're not careful, sex can destroy lives.*" This makes Otis very anxious and careful about sexual relationships. At this point, we understand that

Otis is going to try to face his biggest fears in this episode, which is having sexual intercourse.

Otis makes a video call with his dad. He talks about his concern about him still being a virgin. His father suggests taking action without any concern and trying to have sex. Even though this creates anxiety for Otis, he considers this option and accepts Lily's offer to have sex. But he gets an anxiety attack when he starts having sex. Yet he wants to try dating Ola, who wants to go out with Otis and is also the daughter of his mom's lover. In episode 7, a school ball where the climax of the season comes up occurs. Otis and Maeve are not keen to go to the ball, but Jackson, Maeve's boyfriend, insists she join him at the ball. At the same time, Otis proposes to Ola that they go to the ball.

At the ball, Maeve gets jealous that Otis is dating Ola and tells her that Otis is still a virgin and is very inexperienced at sex. Unfortunately, Otis blurts out that Maeve is much superior than he is and that she is higher up on the "food chain." He glorifies Maeve by saying that *"I'm like a kangaroo or like an armadillo, whereas she is like a panther, or even a lion"* to Ola's face, and he adds that *"you are like a goat that stands on really steep cliffs"* or *"you could be like a housecat if you don't like goats"*. He continues, *"Maeve's unattainable."* This breaks Ola's heart so much.

Later at the party, he declares his love for Maeve and how he accepts that Maeve is unattainable and learns to live with this emotion by publicly giving recommendations to other students at the school. Maeve gets so attracted to Otis's words about how he likes her. In addition, all of the students recognize that Otis is a relationship coach and very useful in romantic and sexual relationships, as he provides advice to a student who is ready to kill himself in front of everybody to gain attention from his crush.

However, Otis would not like to continue the clinic as he sees the danger of his suggestions leading his clients to accidentally die. Moreover, he thinks that his love for Maeve blocks his progress. Therefore, he declares to Maeve that he wants to give up on the clinic and them as a couple. Maeve would like to dig deeper into the issue, and she tells Otis that they are good together. But Otis tells her that their relationship gets in the way of his life, referring to the conflict he has with Ola.

While everything is going very well, Jackson spoils Maeve and Otis's relationship by revealing that Otis provided advice to him to win Maeve's heart in return for money. This marks the **apostotis** of Otis. As Maeve hears this, she gets so disappointed with Otis that she decides to end the clinic by herself. In addition, Otis realizes that his mom has started writing a book based on his sexual phobias, which makes him embarrassed and angry with his mother. Yet, as the apostotis stage suggests, Otis moves to a state of divine knowledge and is ready to get the ultimate boon, which corresponds to the achievement of the hero's goal.

Otis decides to try a relationship with Ola, so he apologizes to Ola. He also apologizes to Maeve in order to return to the clinic. Not expecting such a sweet apology, Maeve starts liking Otis again. But she eventually sees that Otis is kissing Ola. And after they kiss each other, he eventually succeeds in masturbating. This is where Otis fulfills his objective and answers the summons that prompted his journey in the first place. Otis manages to attract the attention of Maeve and other students by discovering his talent for providing sex and relationship advice to other students and applying it. In parallel to the self-made man myth, Otis achieves success and a new higher status in his own society (his school) due to his hard work and determination. Therefore, we can say that a self-made man myth would be narrated to the audience in the first season of *Sex Education*.

The reason for not adding the return stage of the hero's journey to this analysis is because the return stage is not directly relevant for examining whether a self-made man myth is narrated or not. Actually, the return stage is mostly about the hero giving back what he has learned throughout the departure and initiation stages. This does not mean that there is no return stage in this story. Instead, there is a return stage of Otis' journey, but it is more visible in the beginning of Season 2, where Otis reflects on and shares the learnings of his own journey he has gained in Season 1.

From a critical-ideological perspective, Otis's heroic journey supports the idea of capitalism, which encapsulates the myth of the self-made man. First of all, the journey of Otis can be considered a journey of social mobility at the school, as implicated by Social Darwinism. Social Darwinism reinforces the survival of the fittest in society where only successful individuals (in this case, students) can succeed. At the

onset of the story, there are students who are already more popular, more successful, and/or physically more beautiful than the others at school. This translates into the presence of social hierarchies, basically, and one of the primary motivations of Otis is to climb the ladders of the social hierarchy. He starts his journey as naturally a loser and defines his inferiority with a food chain metaphor as *"I'm like a kangaroo or like an armadillo, whereas she (Maeve) is like a panther or even a lion"* when talking to Ola in Episode 7.

Since the self-made man myth is closely linked to the idea of capitalism, the self-made man myth promotes the idea of self-growth and development, and as a result, associates the self-esteem with the level of individual recognition in the society. Otis starts his journey with a high lack of self-esteem and feelings of futility, in parallel to the initial levels of the protagonists in the self-made man stories. The myth preconditions the feeling of self-esteem and self-worth (BetterHelp, 2023) for protagonists only if they can manage to be an important person or gain material wealth. Accordingly, Otis's journey presupposes a sense of self-esteem and self-assurance if he utilizes his own unique value proposition and gets recognition for this value from Maeve, which is represented at the top of the social hierarchy (at least as Otis describes her as such) and the rest of society.

Echoing the self-made man myth, accordingly, the story of Otis encourages that a classless society is possible and that everyone, regardless of their social and economic background as well as individual traits, can move up to the higher chains of society. However, we cannot give a final statement about whether the social setting at the school ends up in parallel to the utopian visions of a classless society as Paul (2014) defines them since it would be inappropriate to give a final judgment without watching the entire show.

Second, the existence of the "self-made man" myth also prevails in the translation of the individual success of Otis into the success of all students in the school. To give a brief example, when Otis finds his unique individuality and manages to achieve success by providing sex and relationship advice to other students and attracting the attention of Maeve, all the students benefit from his service. After his success, the misconceptions about sexual relationships and sexual health started to

decline in the school. Plus, with Otis's self-discovery and success, many students who get health advice from Otis start discovering their sexual and emotional identities better than before. This can be considered parallel to the core idea of the "self-made man" myth, where society's success and wealth are naturally correlated with the wealth and success of each individual.

Last but not least, the revolt of Otis to his mother and his father is very synonymic to the rise and revolt of early "New World" (US) citizens who originated the myth of self-made man, towards their European higher elite ancestors. As Otis represents the self-made man with the roots of academic knowledge (representing the high culture), he is adamant about creating his own identity and getting recognized in society by his own methods and without the support of his mother or father. Although he gets support from his parents on specific issues such as emotional relationships and his own sexual problems, he does not rely on the success of his parents while establishing his own name at the school. He even gets ashamed of being known as the child of a sex therapist and conceals this fact on every possible occasion. He tries to establish knowledge from his own studies and experiences and/or even Google when he fails to extract the necessary information to fix the problem that his counselees face. Therefore, his journey can be easily associated with the journey of the first European immigrants to the New World, who aim to achieve their own freedom, identity, culture, and nation.

All of these implications suggest that Otis's journey in Season 1 is closely associated with the self-made man myth. Although we do not know if the writers and creators created this show with this motivation, it is barely noticeable that there are a lot of signifiers of the self-made man myth in the narrative of the show.

4.2. Analysis of the Self-Made Man Myth in *Elite*

In this analysis, I aim at examining whether a self-made man myth exists in one of the most acclaimed teen series of Netflix, *Elite*, through the lens of "The Hero's Journey," a monomyth.

To understand if there is a self-made man myth underlying the journey of Samuel, who is the main protagonist of the story alongside Guzman, his motivation and journey will be analyzed by referring to the main stages of the hero's journey. The journey analysis will capture only Season 1 to make a comparable study with the other series examined in this thesis. The hypothesis of this analysis is that Samuel's journey perpetuates the self-made man myth, whereby Samuel could express his own unique individuality and/or achieve personal success and achievement in his society (i.e., in his high school), like being rich or having a better status in his social environment.

The departure: The opening scene of the first episode starts with Samuel Garica Dominguez, the protagonist, in a blood-stained uniform at the indoor pool of the school, looking at someone (Marina) with bare desperation and sorrow. The story then goes into a flashback to four months ago, and the audience starts to understand the plot that brings the characters to this crime scene.

Four months ago, Samuel was introduced as one of the three scholarship students at Las Encinas, which is an international high school that welcomes the young students of wealthy and upper-class families. The school's dictum is to raise the *leaders of tomorrow*. In Season 1, a trophy shaped as the Winged Victory of Samothrace Statue, which depicts the Greek goddess Victory, is introduced to the audience. The student who is the most exceptional in terms of academics and extracurricular activities is eligible to win the award and attend a high school in Florida, which would improve their chances of being admitted to an Ivy League institution.

Las Encinas also offers scholarships to the children of poor or working-class families, such as Samuel, Nadia, and Christian. Samuel is provided a scholarship due to his injury as a result of the roof collapse of his prior school, San Esteban, which is a public secondary school. The collapse of the roof is attributed to the usage of inexpensive materials as a result of budget constraints applied by the construction company, Nunier S.A., which is owned by Ventura Nunier and Teo Roson, who are parents of wealthy students Guzman and Marian (siblings) and Carla in Las Encinas.

Coming from a poor family, Samuel resides in a modest house along with his mother and brother, Nano. He is represented as a moral and innocent young adolescent

as he works a part-time job as a waiter to support his mother and himself due to the imprisonment of his brother, Nano, as a result of committing an unknown crime. Nano is portrayed as nothing but trouble, causing a huge financial and safety burden on his family. He is also indebted to some people from the underworld in the amount of 40,000 euros as a result of the provision of his protection in jail. Samuel and Nano are very different from each other, but Samuel is always supportive of his brother, although he has a significant negative influence on his life and tries to make ends meet in his best capacity.

The reception of Samuel in Las Encinas can be considered the first phase of the **call to adventure**, as he is an outsider, belonging to a lower class compared to the majority of students at school. He is now in a very different environment than his, and there will be a lot of challenges and opportunities ahead. He is depicted as sensitive, insecure, and restrained, and most importantly, he has a lower sense of self-esteem than other scholarship students. Therefore, he sees the environment of Las Encinas as very challenging, competitive, and threatening. He introduces himself on the first day of school as a waiter and says, “(...) *Strange as it may seem to you, sometimes waiters get a seat at the table. But you don’t need to worry. I’m not here to take anybody’s place. You are still the leaders of tomorrow.*” Referring to this quote, his main motivation does not seem like a clear and active one such as being a leader, winning the trophy, or earning the affection of the girl he likes, but to continue his ordinary life and help his family without losing his virtues in the “world of elites.” With this quote, he **refuses the call of adventure** and becomes hesitant to embrace his new position because of the obvious differences between his upbringing and that of his affluent classmates. Due to his poor income, he faces ongoing discrimination, and people from wealthy families, especially Guzmán, despise him. Throughout Season 1, he has great trouble fitting into this new environment.

Acting as a **supernatural aid**, Marina, the sister of Guzman, likes him from his self-declaration and invites him to her 16th birthday party. Samuel is initially appalled by this offer but then accepts it. That night, Nano brings Samuel to Ventura’s house, where they both spray-paint a wall and probably write bad words despite neither of them knowing whom he is. When Samuel arrives at the party, he realizes that the wall they spray painted a night before belongs to Ventura’s house (Marina’s father), which

reinforces the **refusal of the call** stage. However, he passes on to the party and **crosses the threshold**.

Stepping into the party and into the world of others, he is alarmed when Marina's father explains that they have security cameras and have already observed the misbehaviour of Samuel and Nano on the previous day. At the **belly of the whale** and crossing the point of no return, he must accept the rules of the new world of elites and encounter his first major obstacle. Samuel is forced to have photographs taken with Ventura along with the students with scholarships to further Ventura's PR work of concealing the fact that his company is the main responsible for the collapse of the public school of scholarship students. However, Marina, his mentor and love interest in his journey, blames her father for being such a hypocrite and defends Samuel and other scholarship students against her parents. Yet Guzman and Nano start to quarrel, and, in response, Guzman threatens to tell the school about Samuel's wrongdoing as he knows that this action (the spraypainting of their house) has serious consequences for the continuation of his scholarship.

The initiation: In episode 2, Samuel takes off on the **road of trials**, where he faces a series of moral tests to be able to continue his journey. Samuel **meets** Marina, **his goddess** (and mentor and love interest) in his journey in the world of elites, and they collaborate on a project assignment where they should create a video documentary for a social media experiment. After they are done shooting the video, however, Samuel forgets to turn off the camera, and Marina is seen confessing that her father is engaged in shady business transactions and is concealing documents confirming his involvement. Later, as Marina and Samuel discuss Marina's reluctance to expose her father, Marina describes how she came into possession of the records that revealed her father's use of subpar materials in the construction of San Esteban (the collapsed public school of Samuel, Nadia, and Christian).

After Nano observes that Samuel has not locked up his computer and watches the video Samuel and Marina created, he sees Marina admit that her father is in possession of evidence that implicates him. Finding his house ransacked as a result of Nano not paying the debt to the people of the underworld, Nano urges Samuel to use Marina's father's documents for blackmail and sell them for the money that they need.

This is the **woman as temptress** stage for Samuel. He is tempted to betray his “goddess” by his brother in the name of saving his family, which is one of Samuel’s major weaknesses. This is one of the most critical tests that Samuel has to pass, whereby he has to decide which side to compromise with (his family or Marina). He is shocked at first by his brother’s offer and refuses it, but then accepts it and promises to get Nano the papers covertly from Marina to save his family from the people to whom Nano is in debt.

Later, Samuel manages to visit Marina’s house to work on the social media project. He finds an opportunity to search Marina’s house and her father’s office to acquire the papers but is then interrupted by Nadia. He gives up on this quest, although he did not intend to do so. This does not mean that Samuel passed the morality test as such, but it can be accepted that he did.

After that, Samuel and Omar (one of his best friends from the poor neighborhood and Nadia’s brother) plan to organize a party at Samuel’s house. Despite showing reluctance to invite strangers, including Marina and some other rich students from Las Encinas, Samuel cannot resist his brother’s insistence. Marina and Nano start flirting at the party, and they have a sexual affair at the party. After the party, Nano lures Marina to go to her house since he both likes her and wants to find out the secret information about Marina’s dad. They have sexual intercourse, and Nano manages to look through Marina’s father’s computer and other belongings; however, he finds the password is incorrect. At the end of the night, Marina realizes that he is attracted to Nano rather than Samuel.

After this party, Marina gets caught in the middle between Nano and Samuel. She realizes that she is more sexually attracted to and passionate about Nano but also has feelings for Samuel. So she cannot completely ignore Samuel. Being in love with Nano, she decides to provide financial support to him as his debt is increasing more and more. However, Samuel eagerly warns her not to get involved with his brother without knowing that Marina and Nano have slept together. He is approaching **the atonement with the father stage**, where he will face his darkest fears—in this case, the betrayal of his brother.

Being aware that Carla's father has an expensive watch collection, Marina steals a set of Carla's house keys and learns their alarm code while visiting her home. She eventually hands the code and the keys to Nano, explaining that he may pay off his obligation the next day by robbing and selling the watch collection. Nano steals Carla's father's (Teo's) red-banded watch, yet Teo realizes that he got robbed and gets suspicious about Carla's friends.

Meanwhile, Marina and Samuel decide to finally sleep together as their relationship deepens. But afterwards, Marina comes to the realization that she is actually in love with Nano, whom she had slept with earlier. She starts avoiding Samuel, but she doesn't explain why.

As Ventura Nunier (the father of Marina and Guzman) is arrested due to his involvement in the collapse of San Esteban, Carla worries that her father may meet the same end as Ventura and informs Marina that one of Teo's watches contains the proof connecting her parents to the fall. Knowing that Nano has the red-banded watch, Marina becomes terrified and persuades him not to sell it. This gives Nano the notion that instead of marketing the watch to the general public, they should demand money from Ventura and Teo. Carla is initially unaware that Nano is engaged in stealing the watch, but she soon develops suspicions about Marina.

In the meantime, Marina and Samuel learn that she is pregnant, but Samuel realizes that he is not the father of the baby. He asks her who he is, but Marina and Nano do not reveal themselves. After explaining that their child would have a very low probability of getting HIV from his mother (since Marina has HIV+ as a result of her former sexual engagement with Pablo, who is also from a lower-class background and carries HIV+), Nano persuades her to flee with him. He claims he can start a new life with Marina with the cash he anticipates Teo will pay for his red watch.

In Episode 7, Samuel learns that the baby is from his brother, along with the main students of Las Encinas. Arriving at the **atonement with the father stage**, he attacks his brother during a big fight alongside Nano's enemies such as Guzman, Ander, and Polo.

In Episode 8, Marina intends to depart with Nano to Morocco on the last day of school and start a new life to avoid the abortion her father has scheduled for her the following day. Samuel does not want to lose Marina and tries one last time to persuade her to stay. Unfortunately, she ultimately rejects Samuel and sends him back to the last-day party. Samuel cries out to Guzmán, pleading with him to persuade his sister to stay, but Guzmán has grown distant from her and is not interested in Samuel.

A deranged Polo (the boyfriend of Carla) approaches Marina at the pool with the intention of stealing the watch from her in order to regain Carla's affection and trust. Polo begs Marina to turn over the watch as the two engage in a violent confrontation. She declines, and after Marina insults Polo, he strikes her in the head with the trophy in a fit of rage, seriously injuring her. The incident shocks both Marina and Polo, and Marina subsequently passes out in a pool of blood. Polo takes the medal and exits the scene to the locker room, traumatized by what he has done.

As planned, Nano arrives at the pool and discovers Marina bleeding heavily from the head. Marina runs in his direction and dies in his arms. He shouts for assistance but gets no answer. Nano panics and runs away as well, but Samuel sees it and thinks Nano is guilty. Being in the **apostatis stage**, Samuel gains a profound understanding of his purpose as a result of his confrontation. Being very mad at him, he thinks that Nano is capable of killing her and tells the police that Nano is guilty. Therefore, the police arrest Nano.

On the other hand, Guzman accuses Samuel of being responsible for Marina's death because he first brought her to Nano, but Samuel corrects him by saying that he sought Guzman's assistance but was turned down. He bravely confronts Guzman and Lu, who accuse Samuel of whatever happened to them and tell him to leave their school immediately. Samuel tells Lu, "*You've been told so many times that you own the world that you actually believe it, huh? See you in class, Lucrecia; that's if they let you go back.*" This can be considered the **ultimate boon**, where Samuel succeeds in his objective and answers the summons that prompted his journey in the first place.

Although there are big consequences for achieving this state of personality (such as being betrayed by his brother and his lover and being undermined by the affluent),

he gains his own confidence and gets recognized in the world of elites. The entire journey that Samuel embarks on by coming to Las Encinas is that.

Yet, still holding his moral values, Samuel regrets being the sole reason for his brother's imprisonment and tries to figure out a way to get him out of jail with solid proof. He asks for help from Cristian, who is one of his and Nano's best friends from his own background, but since he collaborates with Carla and Polo for fame, he refuses to help him.

Similar to *Sex Education*, the return stage of this series is unsettled as the series is ongoing in further seasons. Therefore, it is not convenient to make an analysis on whether Samuel turns back to his ordinary world with any wisdom from being important in the rich people's world.

From a critical-ideological perspective, the ideology of capitalism that encapsulates the myth of the self-made man is supported by Samuel's hero journey. First of all, Samuel is introduced as a person coming from a very low class and hardly making ends meet for his family. His call to adventure is to become a member of a community of higher-class people. This is a bare "rags to riches" story without an implicit narrative analysis. The bare class difference portrayed in the series also signals "stage zero" for the classless society that the self-made man myth aims to achieve. As the self-made man myth suggests, Samuel has to overcome challenges that prevent social mobility by integrating into the people of a higher class and proving that he can also exist in this environment.

Also, the school, Las Encinas, is highly resemblant to a Social Darwinist environment, which is rooted in the DNA of the USA. The mission of the school is to raise the leaders of tomorrow, and it awards a trophy to the most successful student, which is shaped like the Winged Victory of Samothrace Statue, which depicts the Greek goddess, Victory. The student who wins the award is given the right to attend a high school in Florida, which would improve their chances of being admitted to an Ivy League institution, which symbolizes the idealization of the American way of life more and more without a narrative analysis. This kind of competitive social environment encourages the phenomenon of "survival of the fittest," yet the students coming from

more advantageous socioeconomic backgrounds are more eligible to win the award, such as Lu, whereas successful students who are coming from lower classes and are immigrants, such as Nadia, have to adapt themselves to this new environment by sacrificing some of their own values and working harder to earn the award. Nadia is always mocked for her religion and forced to leave her headscarf to continue her education because of her Muslim faith.

This translates into the presence of social hierarchies in addition to the bare economic hierarchies. However, Samuel's primary motivation is not to move up in the economic hierarchy. As previously mentioned, Samuel's journey can be considered a journey of self-transformation from a more collective person to a more individualistic person. At the beginning of the story, Samuel is introduced as a person who has a great lack of sense of self, is collective-minded, introverted, and shy, and has strong moral values. His only motivation is to sustain the economic and social security of his family, and he is very reluctant to blend into the world of elites. However, this is very opposite to the original idea of the "self-made man" myth, as it encourages the idea of self-growth and development in accordance with the concept of capitalism. In order to emphasize the myth of the self-made man, the writers transform him into someone more individualistic and independent.

The journey of Samuel in Las Encinas transforms him into a more confident, active, recognizable, and prominent figure in terms of the school social hierarchy, which is well encouraged by the idea of capitalism. Even though he is not very eligible to become a leader of tomorrow academically, he becomes one of the most favorite students in terms of social and romantic relationships despite being alienated on a large scale by the elites at first. Yet, by construing capitalism and the "superabundance" connected to the self-made man as "a violation of the old ways and of the family itself" (Michaels, 1987, p. 39, as in Paul, 2014, p. 383), he comes to a point where he can betray his family members. He becomes a critical player in the imprisonment of his brother (even though he is not guilty) due to the death of Mariana. He blames his brother without a valid proof, as he thinks he might do this crime given his prior criminal records and his anger towards his brother because of him betraying Samuel. Unlike his initial stage, Samuel, for the first time, does not protect his brother; instead, he becomes against him and leads him to jail.

The transformation of Samuel mimics the transformation of a self-made man from the least civilized to the most civilized. As Byars (1992) suggests, he starts his journey as a backwoodsman, coming from the wilderness and poverty, and goes to the stage of at least a frontiersman at the end of Season 1. He gets involved in a romantic relationship with the daughter of a very rich family, Marina. He engages in the luxurious social gatherings of elite people and collaborates with them when in need to outplay his brother, a person who comes from the least civilized environment.

Although the series seems to criticize the corrupt neoliberal education system that only favors the rich and elite students while creating social inequalities, it offers an answer to this problem by creating a protagonist who becomes an individualistic and self-made hero like Samuel. This implicitly reinforces the discourse of capitalism by favoring the very core values that are expected to be present in every American and neoliberal individual. In other words, the series underlines the myth of the self-made man as a solution to hamper the inequalities and discrepancies in the capitalist system; however, it only sustains the capitalist and neoliberal ideologies.

4.3. Analysis of the Self-Made Man Myth in *Aşk 101*

In this analysis, I aim at examining whether a self-made man myth exists in one of the most acclaimed teen series of Netflix, *Aşk 101*, through the lens of “The Hero’s Journey,” a monomyth. In this monomyth, the protagonist, who is about to undergo a transformative journey or quest, typically faces challenges and obstacles but ultimately emerges victorious and transformed with newfound wisdom or power.

In this series, the tale of the transformation of a young group of five teenagers is told, and they are all the protagonists of this story. However, I will only evaluate Sinan's journey in this group in order to make a balanced comparison with the analysis of the other series in both qualitative and quantitative terms. Besides, Sinan’s journey is selected as his transformation is one of the most salient in the group. I will ask whether there is a self-made man myth underlying the journey of Sinan; his journey will be analyzed by referring to the main stages of the hero’s journey. The journey analysis will capture only Season 1 to make a comparable study with the other series examined in this thesis. The hypothesis of this analysis is that Sinan's journey

perpetuates the myth of the self-made man, whereby Sinan could express his own unique individuality and achieve personal success and achievement in his society (i.e., in his high school), like being rich or having a better social status.

The departure: In the first episode of Season 1, we meet the protagonists of the story, who are a group of high school outcasts: Osman, Kerem, Eda, and Sinan. Osman is running an unofficial homework business, Eda is kissing with his teacher, Kerem is beating the referee of the basketball match that he is playing at, and Sinan wakes up drunk at a park, comes to the first class of the school, and starts sleeping immediately. All of them except Sinan are represented as committing “illegal” or “disapproved” acts as considered by society. On the other hand, Sinan is represented as a loner, an alcoholic, and lost, but not as a person who is willing to harm anyone but himself. This is because his parents do not show him love and compassion while he is living with his senile grandfather. He feels lonely and unloved. And in the following moments of this episode, Sinan is depicted as very smart and knowledgeable, especially on deep subjects such as philosophy, sociology, and psychology, which are deemed key qualifications for people who are potentially successful in life. However, his knowledge does not come from the formal education system; instead, it seems that he has homespun wisdom rather than book knowledge, as Byars (1992) suggests.

On a knowledge contest organized by the school and to which another school was invited, all these outcast students come together and create a lot of chaos. Necdet, who is the principal of the school and the antagonist of the story, pays so much attention to this contest as it is a PR tool for him to show himself off to staff from the guest school. Osman starts a bet on the contestors among the host and guest students; Sinan, as one of the contestors, runs late to the contest and starts drinking alcohol at the backstage; Eda lures the student who is responsible for the lighting system of the show and takes control of it; and then throws a pencil at Kerem, who gets pissed off and starts beating the students from the guest school. So a big fight among all the students starts off, and the alcohol bottle that Sinan leaves at the backstage causes a fire.

As the inspector warns Necdet about the entire damage done to the students from the guest school, his school gets kicked out of the tournament. This leads Necdet to start the procedure for expelling the four students from the formal education system

and leaving them without a high school diploma. For this to happen, the unanimity of the votes among the disciplinary committee has to be sustained. However, only Burcu Hoca votes against the expulsion, as she thinks that no student should face an excessive punishment like this and does not want to be the cause of the derailment of these students. Işık, who is one of the most successful and exemplary students at the school, is also a member of the disciplinary committee, so she knows who votes against the expulsion.

As these outcasts learn that they earn the right to continue their education because of the one-vote rule, they want to know who is on their side. So, they approach Işık and learn that Burcu Hoca votes in favour of them. However, they also learn that she is being transferred to Trabzon in two months. So they realize that they have to persuade her to stay in order to continue their academic lives. To achieve this goal, they notice that they have to make her fall in love and marry someone. This is a **call to adventure** for Sinan and the other members of the group, as Sinan finds himself on a journey of staying at school while he has no intentions to continue his education. Yet he **refuses this call** as he does not express an interest in his academic career. However, Osman persuades him to continue this journey, as he tells him not to let people like Necdet determine his life path.

So they approach Işık as she loves Burcu Hoca so much and speculates on the idea of love very often. Işık, despite being totally different from the others, joins their team. Işık is the opposite of Sinan, as she has a supportive family and believes that there are real love stories on earth, whereas Sinan and many of his friends do not believe in love and find love “stupid.” Therefore, Işık is the **supernatural aid** in this story, as she is the mentor of the group and the love interest of Sinan. As a result of their brainstorming and research, they find the ideal candidate for Burcu to fall in love with. Kemal, who is the handsome, charismatic, newly attained basketball teacher, becomes the potential partner for Burcu. Therefore, Sinan **crosses the threshold** and starts his transformational journey.

They arrange a rock concert for Burcu and Kemal to hook up. However, the team has to convince Işık’s parents for permission to attend the rock concert, and they pay a visit to her parents. However, during this visit, Sinan feels very bad because Işık’s

mother underlines that their children are the most important matter. Deeply wounded by this issue, he starts drinking and throws himself into the Bosphorus Sea when he goes back home. The audience thinks that he is off the journey, but then he attends the rock concert even though he is late. This is the **belly of the whale stage**, where he decides to continue this journey despite the fact that he has been hit by a major attack. He shows his willingness to keep on; he makes a smart move and locks Kemal and Burcu into a toilet cabin so that they can get closer.

The Initiation: Sinan starts the **road of trials** as he and his team go through a couple of obstacles on their way to making Burcu fall in love with Kemal and vice versa. Kemal spends the night in Burcu's house after the rock concert; they spend a lot of good times together and get closer, but Burcu avoids sleeping with him. Still, Kemal understands this situation and shows respect to her. The next morning, as Kemal gets physically closer to her, Burcu rejects him overtly. So they come to school not together but a bit apart. Also, a competitor shows up for Burcu, Billur, who flirts with Kemal overtly as she wants him so bad. Being a little pissed off by Burcu's sudden negative reaction, Kemal also flirts with Billur in front of Burcu.

Meanwhile, Işık tries to connect with Sinan and delves deeper into his feelings by asking him questions like, *"Does it break your heart not to live with your parents?"* She continues with *"normally people of our age would like to be with their parents"* and *"are you mad at them?"* But Sinan refuses to open his heart to her and avoids her questions with ignorance. When Işık realizes that he is trying to protect himself from any emotional damage by isolating himself from others, he insults her by telling her that she is very open-hearted yet stupid to her face. Yet, Işık shows affection to him by giving him her scarf, and this makes Sinan feel peaceful and safe.

In a short while, Işık writes all the answers and submits the exam paper on behalf of Sinan while she submits a blank exam paper for herself to help him pass the exam. This is the final straw for Sinan as he cannot put up with being in a position to be helped. This is a part of the **road of trials** stage for him, as he refuses the help of his mentor in the journey of being transformed into a new person. He does not want to get out of his comfort zone and gets afraid to make a connection with someone else, as he thinks that

he will go through the same emotional burden as in the case of his relationship with his parents.

So he yells at her in front of the other members of the team just because she helps him during the exam. This makes other team members so angry that they yell at Sinan, and there emerges a big argument among the team members. In other words, Sinan sabotages the operation and the team just because he fails to transform himself. This is another trial for him and for them, too, as it leads to the suspension of their journey.

But after Sinan realizes that he has hurt his friends so much because of his fears, he decides to apologize to Işık and the others and starts playing the game again. He observes the body language and gestures of Kemal and Burcu and comes to the conclusion that they like each other, but they are both proud to make a move. Realizing his own fault, Sinan resumes the operation by persuading the team members that there is still a chance for them to achieve their goals. They reunite and make another attempt.

Another trial is the sudden appearance of the secret fiancé candidate of Burcu, Tuncay. The team does not even know that there is another man in Burcu's life, so they feel bad about their operation at first. Yet they want to remove him from the game. Sinan realizes that Kemal is a decent and good-hearted man, whereas Tuncay is not. Sinan proves it with a so-called "rain test," whereby he tests which man gives his coat to Sinan while standing underneath the rain only with a t-shirt. Kemal confirms Sinan's and passes the test, whereas Tuncay only gives his coat when Burcu suddenly shows up. So they revise their plan to kick Tuncay out of the game. However, Burcu is about to get engaged to Tuncay in a couple of days.

Meanwhile, Sinan gets a fever as he stands under the water for a long time. When he gets to the hospital, the doctors request his parents' approval for injecting an IV. He feels so bad that he does not have his parents with him in this bad situation, and he asks the doctors if he can sign the papers by himself. However, the doctors don't allow it, so he desperately tells them he can bring his parents by himself, but he faints just as he exits the hospital. This is the **atonement with the father** stage, where Sinan

accepts that he feels dead inside and out because he does not get affection and support from his parents.

This becomes a turning point in Sinan's life. Now that he is in the **apostasis stage**, as he dies in spirit, he gets to have the divine knowledge of love, compassion, and bliss. He feels renewed and resists his father when he tries to move the portrait in the house that Işık has loved so much before. He explains to Işık that he wants to study his lessons and graduate from the school. He says, *"I even want to go to college and be a cog in the machine. I want a simple and happy life. From now on, I mean... You feel like your shitty life is worth living. You enjoy every moment and detail. For the first time, I started making plans about my future."* However, Işık thinks that Sinan is making fun of her for being very positive and hopeful about life.

As the team recognizes that Tuncay is a greedy man, Osman swindles Tuncay by using his weakness. Işık organizes a setting where Burcu and Kemal can work together; they lead them to work together for the rehearsals for May 19th, the Commemoration of Atatürk, Youth, and Sports Day, despite the fact that Burcu tries to avoid spending time together with Kemal given that she likes him but she is now engaged. Meanwhile, Burcu realizes that she is more attracted to Kemal than to Tuncay as he sees her more as a housewife than who she really is, and she realizes that she cannot put up with it for her entire life. At the end of Episode 5, Burcu explains to Kemal that she is engaged to somebody else and that she will move to Trabzon in a month. She says that she is going to marry Tuncay and settle there. So, the team's plans are about to be spilled.

As Burcu realizes that Tuncay is the wrong person to be with as a result of Eda and Işık's attempts, she leaves Tuncay and goes to Kemal's house to tell him that she loves him. However, she finds out that Billur stays at Kemal's house, and this lets her down. In the meantime, Sinan makes a birthday surprise for Işık and kisses her underneath the water.

As they approach the **ultimate boon** stage, all the team members unite, and the couples who like each other finally get matched (that is, Eda and Kerem and Sinan and Işık). They understand the value of friendship, acquire the courage to love somebody

else, and most importantly, love themselves. This gives them the power to love and live their true selves. Even though they are bound to be expelled from the school and deprived of controlling their entire lives, they love living and being together.

Being united more than ever, they have the last test to pass. As Burak, who is in love with Eda, gets caught in the middle between Eda and Kerem, he decides to beat Kerem with his gang. Not being afraid, Kerem starts fighting back against Burak and his friends at the newly donated laboratory by a graduate of the school, which is named Necdet Labarotary. This makes Principal Necdet so proud. While Kerem fights back against Burak and his gang, all the team members, including the female ones, join the fight to protect Kerem. After this big fight, the recently donated laboratory falls apart, and the team hospitalizes some of the members of the opposite gang. This drives Necdet crazy, so he calls another disciplinary committee to expel the four of them and suspend Işık. To the extent of the damage they have done, Necdet declares to Burcu that they won't need to gather the unanimity of the votes this time; instead, they need the majority of the votes to get them out of the school.

Burcu figures out a plan to postpone the disciplinary committee. She tells Kemal to turn the fire alarm on. Burcu tells the team members that the unanimity of votes is enough to expel and suspend their academic careers this time. This lets all the team members down, but Sinan undercovers the true feelings of Kemal toward Burcu, given the fact that he immediately follows Burcu's lead to turn the fire alarm on. As a new person, Sinan takes notes for Işık during the classes as her parents ban her from going to school for a week. Then he goes into Işık's house and explains all the subjects that she misses while she is absent.

In the meantime, Burcu and Kemal try to figure out a solution to hinder the process of expulsion and suspension. Eventually she finds a way to persuade the other members of the committee by underlining that each and every individual has a unique story and is very valuable, so it is not appropriate to end their lives metaphorically. She persuades the committee to give them one last chance to accept their apology. This decision gets 11 positive votes and 1 negative vote. Being very angry at this decision, Necdet decides to let them continue their education on the condition that they express their regret and apologize in front of everybody during the flag ceremony. Necdet plans

to make them feel small and hurt their egos. However, the team cannot agree on whether apologizing is the right thing to do. Eventually, they decide to apologize, as it seems the most rational thing to do.

Necdet gets so happy when he sees that all of the team members come to the school with their parents to apologize, and he drafts an apology script for them to read out loud during the ceremony. Another important development is that Sinan explains all the plans they have made to create chemistry between Kemal and Burcu, to Kemal.

During the **ultimate boon** stage, none of them reads the script that Necdet has prepared for them, and all of them refuse to apologize in front of everybody at the last moment. Instead, they opt to select their own words. Kenan underlines as such: *“I’ll put this paper aside and use my own words.”* Even Işık refuses to apologize for who they are. She says, *“No, I don’t regret it. Everything I did was my choice. This is who I am, and I’m not ashamed of it.”* Everyone applauds Işık’s words. Finally, Osman, who was a defender of apologizing at first, even does not apologize. He says, *“Fuck you all. I’m not apologizing.”* Then everybody gets so happy and joins the ceremony. Necdet gets very pissed off as his plans get ruined.

In conclusion, the team protects their individualities against the pressures of authoritative figures such as Necdet and other teachers who vote for their expulsion. Also, they value the significance of loving themselves and others they care about so much. They do it by putting their entire lives at stake. They value self-worth, individualism, and celebrating all the differences.

The return stage of the hero's journey is not included in this study since it is not immediately relevant to determining whether or not a self-made man myth is narrated. Actually, the hero's main goal in the return stage is to transmit what he has learnt throughout the departure and initiation periods.

From a critical-ideological standpoint, Sinan's hero journey supports the myth of the self-made man, with a greater emphasis on the notions of anti-materialistic and spiritual perspectives of the myth. First of all, Sinan and the majority of the team (excluding Işık) are all considered outcasts at first by the authoritative measures and

their social environment (including some of their parents). They are all labeled by the school principal and other students as dangerous, sociopaths, and selfish. The initial introduction of these characters resembles the first sub-prototype of Robertson's American character: the backwoodsman.

As Byars (1992) suggests, the "backwoodsman" is the first stage of the tertiary model. They start their journey from the point of no civilization. They had no interest in having a proper education or even graduating from high school. Most of them do not even know what they want to do with their lives, but Işık, who is the mentor of Sinan and the team, guides them through doing whatever makes them happy. With the assistance of Işık, they start caring about their future and their lives. This leads them to progress into the frontiersman stage and pioneer stage, which are the second and third stages, respectively. At the end of the show, we see that they are all successful and wealthy people. However, the main ideological message that is transmitted to the audience is that spiritual transformation, or so-called self-growth, comes first, followed by material success.

Still, the concept of self-growth can be thought of as a key element in sustaining the current neoliberal system. The neoliberal policies endorse less government involvement in the formal education system as well as in the lives of each and every individual. Fleming (2010) argues that neoliberal economic policies see students more as potential workers so that they need to be educated, not because they need to grow their intellectual, personal, and moral capacity regardless of economic concerns. According to him, it is a concerning fact that the economy determines the education and learning agenda. This leads us to think that if the person protects his/her own individual character, s/he will also achieve material success.

Işık, who is their mentor, shows them how to guide their way through being an individual and living happily ever after by relying on their true inner selves instead of the opinions and judgments of society. Unlike the other four members of the group, Işık is a role model for many students because she is successful, idealistic, and also approved by the authoritarian figures. Her only weakness is to obey the rules of her mother, but she also goes on a transformation and understands that living by the rules

of society does not help her discover her inner self. She finds out that the importance of friendship, collaboration, and love weighs more than being the perfect person.

Moreover, the story of Sinan and the team also resembles the outrage of the first inhabitants of the New World against the monarchy of the Old World. The authority comprises principal Necdet and the other teachers, who support the idea of expulsion of these students, whereas Sinan and his team resemble the immigrants who escape from the authoritarian regime to establish their own New World. Unlike the other series in this analysis, it is worth noting that collectivist values are more encouraged in this story. Sinan's success is highly dependent on the other characters in the team, and they achieve their goals more as a team than as sole individuals. This is probably because each character is portrayed as an equal component in the team and plays an important role with their own strengths. Actually, this also resembles the "self-made man" myth in a way that it encourages each individual to utilize their own unique power and serve the larger society. Another reason for the celebration of collectivism in this story might be the sensitivity to local traditions. Turkey is a more collectivist society than Spain and the UK, which might lead Netflix to make this decision.

Similar to *Sex Education* and *Elite*, the hero of this story, Sinan, has a lack of self-esteem due to the lack of love that his parents have yet to provide. Therefore, this story also carries the idea of Social Darwinism and the sense of power related to the high self-esteem. As soon as Sinan regains his self-esteem when he realizes that he is in love with Işık and he deserves to be loved, he resists his father when he comes home to take the picture that Işık and Sinan care about. After that, he also feels important and critical to the matchmaking operation between Burcu and Kemal. Although it is out of the scope of this study, we see that Sinan becomes a successful writer and wants to publish this story as a book at the end of Season 2.

Last but not least, Sinan's success as an individual is translated into the success of those around him through the myth of the self-made man. In fact, Sinan leverages his knowledge about love and relationships to create a spark between Kemal and Burcu. He secretly gives Kemal clues to better approach Burcu and helps reflect his feelings toward her. As the romantic involvement of Burcu and Kemal directly affects the fate of team members, this can be considered a parallel to the central tenet of the myth of

the self-made man, according to which a society's success and wealth are inextricably linked to the success and fortune of each individual. These all imply that Sinan's heroic journey in season one is somehow linked to the myth of the self-made man.



5. DISCUSSION

The analysis of three Netflix original series produced in three different countries offers compelling insights about how the self-made man myth is portrayed and maintained. Each series underlines a different aspect of the self-made man myth in different contexts, which leads us to believe that the myth of the self-made man is reproduced in different ways in various Netflix original series of similar genre. Each series highlights the influence of hegemonic capitalist ideology, the idea of a classless society as a result of this ideology, and the personal transformation (material or spiritual) that is seen as the building block of this ideology through the self-made man myth encapsulated in the protagonists' journeys.

In the first analysis, Otis, the protagonist of *Sex Education*, sets out on a journey of social advancement and self-improvement, which is consistent with the myth of the self-made man that is linked with capitalism. Otis' drive to advance in society and obtain acceptance is comparable to the notion that success and self-worth are dependent on one's accomplishments and, sometimes, material possessions. Through Otis's ability to assist people and have a beneficial influence on the school community, the series also raises the idea of a classless society, which is aligned with the prospects of hegemonic capitalist ideology. However, the ultimate result in terms of creating a classless society is still up in the air because it needs more investigation in the years to come. He also portrays the journey of establishing one's own identity without relying on the success of his parents, which is identical to the rebellion journey of early immigrants in the New World (the United States) against their European ancestors, who are portraying authority, elitism, and hierarchy.

However, in *Elite*, Samuel's hero journey resembles a more transparent class shift in the society he lives in. Samuel, who comes from a lower socioeconomic background, wants to fit in with that community and demonstrate his abilities there. In the series, a Social Darwinist educational environment is demonstrated, reinforcing the dynamics of "survival of the fittest" and maintaining social and economic hierarchy. Samuel's journey increases his social standing and visibility, but it also serves to show the possible drawbacks of the "self-made man" myth as he betrays his own family in order to achieve personal success. Different from *Sex Education*, *Elite* draws attention

to the corrupt nature of the neoliberal education system and its biased nature in favor of the wealthy. However, the series is far from creating a solution that is outside this system, as Samuel, the protagonist, sustains his own autonomy by owning the core values of this system, which are being a more individualist person instead of protecting his collective and family-oriented characteristic traits.

Finally, *Aşk 101* concentrates on the hero journey of Sinan, which promotes a spiritual and anti-materialistic viewpoint within the self-made man myth. From being viewed as loners, violent, and sociopaths to realizing their genuine selves and growing personally, Sinan and his circle of outcast friends go through a self-transition with the help of their mentor, Işık who is portrayed as more civilized and acceptable by society. This is similar to the journey of the first immigrants to the New World, as Byars (1992) outlines. What is unique in this story is that Işık also transforms her own deficient parts into those of this “less civilized” group and favors independence, freedom, and self-worth rather than conforming to the norms of the authorities. The show promotes the premise that pleasure and personal fulfillment come before material achievement. It also resembles the New World story in that Sinan and his followers rebel against oppressive rulers and build their own “New World.” Last but not least, and similar to Otis’s journey, the positive impact of Sinan’s own transformation on everyone around him is a reflection of the self-made man myth’s interconnection of individual and societal success.

As a result, the concept of the self-made man is prevalent in all three series, although there are differences in how it is portrayed and how it relates to capitalism, social hierarchy, and individual development. These analyses shed light on the ideological stances that underlie these narratives and encourage further investigation of the nuances and ramifications of the “self-made man” myth.

6. CONCLUSION

In 1997, Reed Hastings and Marc Randolph, two businessmen, founded Netflix as a mail-based DVD rental service. In more than 20 years, the company has evolved from providing DVD rentals via the mail to a global subscription streaming service and transformed into a production company. As a result, Netflix has undoubtedly provided a unique television service in terms of the creation, distribution, and consumption of content. McDonald and Smith-Rowsey (2016) argue that this is mostly due to the fact that it is innovative in the entertainment sector and makes use of cutting-edge technologies to give TV entertainment to viewers and alter their viewing patterns.

Netflix is now the subject of many academic discussions, in addition to its worldwide economic success. Many scholars from different backgrounds, including sociology, cultural analysis, media and communications, international relations, and even political economics, are trying to understand its implications on economic, social, and individual levels.

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the academic literature by understanding whether Netflix, the American media and entertainment company, really “thinks local and acts global” in line with its motto or reinforces the myth of the self-made man, which is one of the founding myths of America, and the hegemonic capitalist ideology to its audience across the world.

To provide a comprehensive discussion on the topic, a literature review on globalization and culture, television studies and mass media, Netflix and the change it has brought to the TV industry, myths and the self-made man myth, in particular, and how media plays a critical role in its dissemination is provided in the first part of this study.

This study aims to address these questions by analyzing three Netflix original Series produced in three different countries, *Sex Education*, *Elite* and *Aşk 101*, respectively: (i) How do Netflix’s original teen series produced in different localities incorporate the notion of the self-made man? (ii) How does the myth of the self-made man reproduced through these shows relate to capitalist hegemony?

The analysis of the self-made man myth is carried out through the protagonist's story arc based on the monomyth scheme of Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey. Basically, this monomythical scheme consists of three stages, which are the departure, the initiation, and the return. The journey of each protagonist of each series is meticulously analyzed under the framework of Joseph Campbell's "hero's journey" and looked at to see whether their journey reflects the journey of the self-made man as the myth suggests and also carries the core values of this myth.

The results of this analysis provide fascinating insights into the perpetuation and representation of the "self-made man" myth. The self-made man myth is highlighted differently in each series under diverse circumstances, which makes us believe that it is replicated differently in multiple Netflix original series belonging to the same genre, teen drama. Through the self-made man myth reflected in the protagonists' journeys, each series shows the effect of capitalism's ideology, a classless society as a result of this ideology, and the personal transformation (material or spiritual) that is considered the building block of this ideology.

The main character in *Sex Education*, which is a Netflix original series produced in the UK, Otis, embarks on a quest for social advancement and self-improvement, which is congruent with the myth of the self-made man associated with capitalism. He also depicts the journey of establishing one's own identity without relying on his parents' achievements, which is comparable to the revolt path of early immigrants in the New World (the United States) against their European ancestors, who were resemblant to authority, elitism, and hierarchy back in the time.

However, in the *Elite*, Samuel's heroic journey mirrors a more obvious class shift in the culture he lives in. Samuel, who is from a less affluent background, wants to integrate into that group and show off his skills there. A Social Darwinist educational atmosphere is illustrated in the series, supporting "survival of the fittest" dynamics and upholding social and economic hierarchy. Despite being successful in terms of surviving in this environment, he becomes obliged to transform himself into a part of this system where he favors his own interests more than those of his family.

Lastly, the analysis of *Aşk 101*, a Turkish Netflix original series, focuses on Sinan's heroic journey, which enhances a spiritual and anti-materialistic perspective within the myth of the self-made man. This show emphasizes the idea that happiness and inner fulfillment come before material success, similar to the works of transcendentalist self-made man authors. Finally, the good effects of Sinan's change on everyone around him are a reflection of the self-made man myth's connection between personal and societal accomplishment, comparable to Otis' path.

Since the self-made man myth is more structured around masculinity and male characters, this study also recognizes the need for more scholarly work in gender studies to analyze the intersection of those two areas. Also, scholarly work on gender studies about this myth can change this masculine discourse into a more gender-inclusive one. As previously discussed, self-made woman examples are very rare and, in fact, mostly male-oriented do exist in the history of cultural productions. While self-made stories are not entirely empowering, the generation and discussion of more self-made stories featuring female characters and characters of other genders would be better and more inclusive.

In conclusion, this study suggests that Netflix is very likely to transmit the myth of the self-made man, which is an American foundational myth and one of the tenets of hegemonic capitalist ideology, through its local productions. While producing local content in accordance with the cultural elements of the host country, which is seemingly a glocalization strategy, Netflix is likely to transmit American values such as the self-made man myth and capitalist ideologies throughout the world by exerting its media imperialism effect.

However, it is highly recommended to conduct a reception study to get a sense of whether the potential myths will be received well by the audience in the future. It should also be noted that these analyses are only based on the first season of each show and require continuous analysis for the entire duration of the show. Finally, it is very critical to make such studies at a more cross-cultural level, where more shows from more countries should be added to the research to come up with a more holistic and objective understanding of the subject matter.

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