

The Reproduction of the Self-made Man Myth Through Netflix: A Comparative Analysis on Netflix's Original Series

Author

İpek Beril Benli^{1*}

Affiliation

¹Master's Program in Media and Communications Management, Graduate School of Social Sciences Yeditepe University, Istanbul, 34755, Turkey.

*To whom, correspondences should be addressed, E-mail: ipekberil.benli@std.yeditepe.edu.tr

Preprint

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; glocalization

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.

RESULTS

In this part, 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.

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 **apostatis** 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 apostatis 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.

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.

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 contestants among the host and guest students; Sinan, as one of the contestants, 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 favor 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.

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.

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.

Preprint

REFERENCES AND NOTES

- BetterHelp. (2023, April 5). *Why Self-Worth Matters And How To Improve It*. Retrieved June 1, 2023, from <https://www.betterhelp.com/advice/self-esteem/why-self-worth-matters-and-how-to-improve-it/#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20American%20Psychological,careers%2C%20relationships%2C%20and%20health.>
- Byars, T. G. (1992). *The theatre of religion: Jimmy Swaggart within American myth discourse*.
- Fleming, T. (2010). *Neoliberalism: The Implications for Lifelong Learning and Adult Education*. Retrieved June 17, 2023, from http://www.tedfleming.net/doc/Fleming_Note_on_Neoliberalism.pdf
- McDonald, K., & Smith-Rowsey, D. (2016). *The Netflix Effect: Technology and Entertainment in the 21st Century*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA.
- Michaels, W. B. (1987). *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism: American Literature at the Turn of the Century*. Univ of California Press.
- Miller, A. R. F. (2007). *CULTURAL VALUES, NARRATIVES, AND MYTH IN REALITY TELEVISION* [Dissertation]. The University of Southern Mississippi.
- Paul, H. (2014). *The Myths That Made America: An Introduction to American Studies*. <https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/20.500.12657/31456/1/627790.pdf>