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Reflections of International Relations theories in selected TV series distributed by Netflix

Abstract: This article demonstrates how Netflix, the current leading SVOD provider, can be a platform of global cultural exchange, which not only provides entertainment, but also offers a critical reflection on international affairs to its subscribers. Despite the fact that most Netflix content is fictional, its distributed and produced films and TV series still portray various theoretical approaches of international relations. This claim is based on the premises of critical discourse, which see our reality in terms of the social context.

The aim of the article is to reveal what principles of main international relations theories (namely realism, liberalism, feminism, constructivism, or other critical theories) can Netflix subscribers find in the selected TV series. Using a visual qualitative analysis as a research method, the authors study five TV series, specifically *Traitors* (UK), *1983* (PL), *Nobel* (NOR), *Pine Gap* (AU) and *Homeland* (US). These TV series were selected with regard to their diverse origins of production, the topic's central focus being politics, security or international relations, and their high ratings and numbers of viewers.

The analysis of each TV series is based on answering three questions, which are used in defining basic premises of the portrayed theories. The following questions are: *What role does the state play as an actor in the international system? What is the dominant cultural identity of the society? What is the status of an individual in a country?*

Processes of forming opinions and building images of social reality are influenced by the context in which the individual acts. As such, cultural exchange can influence the evolution of contemporary media society and thus affect viewers who are indirectly led to critical reflection. The results indicate that the global cultural exchange through the medium of mass entertainment is still driven mainly by traditional theoretical premises.

Keywords: Netflix, TV series, global cultural exchange, realism, liberalism, feminism, critical theories, critical reflection

Introduction

The 21st century is a period of great global changes. Globalization as a trend, which gradually connects all areas of human life and significantly accelerates the flow of goods, services and information, is a major feature of today's society. Despite the fact that the most significant changes are reflected mainly in the economic and security sector,[1] globalization gradually changes the notion of culture and media as well. The new media foster the current global cultural exchange. On the one hand, such exchange gradually transforms culture into a homogeneous global unit, such as in the example of current pop culture and social media trends. On the other hand, the global audience is still very heterogeneous, as it varies in terms of religion, ideology, culture or race; and thanks to platforms like Netflix, this audience is exposed to content that can be understood quite differently.

Netflix, the current leading SVOD provider,[2] can serve not only as a source of entertainment, but also as a learning material or a tool for developing critical thinking, which is important now more than ever for maintaining healthy judgment and self-opinion. This fact can also be used to explore political and international relations from a theoretical and practical point of view in another, playful way.

The aim of the article is to reveal what principles and features of main international relations theories (namely *realism*, *liberalism*, *feminism*, and *constructivism*) can Netflix subscribers find in the selected TV series. The selection of specific series was made in advance, not randomly, but in relation to the following criteria: the theme of the series is close to the issues of international relations, politics or security; the production of individual series is diverse in terms of their countries of origin (*Traitors* — United Kingdom, *1983* — Poland, *Nobel* — Norway, *Pine Gap* — Australia, *Homeland* — United States);[3] also, the authors took into account the evaluation of individual series on portals www.imdb.com[4] and www.csfd.cz,[5] where all the selected series are rated very positively; and last but not least, the selection was also based on the diversity of genres of the series. This sample allows authors to conduct adequate research and obtain relevant results related to the stated aim of the article.

The authors chose visual qualitative analysis as a research method in which they search for individual elements of IR in selected TV series. Each of the theoretical

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[1] Z. Lehmannová et al., "*Global Governance* a její nerovnováha", [in:] *Formování globálního řádu? Globalizace a global governance*, Praha 2010, p. 82.

[2] R. Briel, "Netflix beats all SVOD services in Europe", https://www.broadbandtvnews.com/2019/03/06/netflix-beats-all-s-vod-services-in-europe/ (accessed: 2.12.2019).

[3] *Traitors* — originally released on Channel 4, globally distributed by Netflix; *1983* — Netflix; *Nobel* — originally released on NRK, later on Netflix; *Pine Gap* — originally released on ABC, later on Netflix, *Homeland* — originally released on Showtime, later on Netflix

[4] *Traitors* — 6.6/10; *1983* — 6.8/10; *Nobel* — 8.1/10; *Pine Gap* — 7.2/10; *Homeland* — 8.3/10.

[5] *Traitors* — 70%; *1983* — 71%; *Nobel* — 79%; *Pine Gap* — 70%; *Homeland* — 87%.

approaches is characterized by a specific perception of political and international reality in terms of power, hierarchy, respectively anarchy of the international system or priorities, which are perceived differently by each theory. Basically, the individual theoretical approaches differ in the conception of the state and its position on the international scene, the identity of the state and the position of the individual in the country. Traditional theories (namely realism and liberalism) tend to favor the state as a major player in international relations, while critical theories and feminism emphasize the role of the individual in the system and emphasize their rights and responsibilities. In order to evaluate which elements of the theoretical approaches a Netflix viewer can find in the series, the authors must answer the following questions for each series: *What role does the state play as an actor in the international system? What is the identity[6] of the society? What is the status of an individual in a country?* To preserve the objectivity and the relevance of the research, the series were analyzed several times, both authors performed the analysis separately and then compared the obtained results. Such operationalization provided conclusions that could be further worked on in other, similar research.

The presented analysis serves as a 'guide' for finding elements of IR theories in a given series, which means that in order to have a comprehensive understanding of the issue, it is necessary to watch the series in detail.

1. International Relations theories and concepts

The aim of this section is not to go into deep definitions and descriptions of all international relations theories and concepts. It wouldn't be possible, in any case. However, in order to better understand the analysis, it is required to have a basic knowledge about the field of International Relations. Therefore, it aims to introduce readers from other disciplines or new IR students with those theories and concepts.

International Relations as an academic field of study was established as a consequence of World War I,[7] which dramatically changed the prevailing premises about the international system and politics at that time. Since then, the development of the field has been influenced not only by critical international events, but

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[6] Identity relates to our basic values that dictate the choices we make. The identity principle does not rely on self-interest. On the contrary, members of an identity community care about the interests of others in that community enough to sacrifice their own interests to benefit others. Non-state actors, such as nongovernmental organizations or terrorist networks, also rely on identity politics to a great extent. The increasing roles of these actors — feminist organizations, churches, jihadists, and multinational corporations, for example — have brought the identity principle to greater prominence in IR theory in recent years.

[7] M. Cox, R. Campanaro, "The origins of international relations", [in:] *Introduction to international relations*, London 2016, p. 21.

also other academic disciplines, which in many cases leads to a complex approach to the studied phenomena. Although the founders of IR are claimed to share idealistic premises, the dominant theoretical approach throughout the 20th century was realism in its various springs. With the exception of the traditional theories of idealism (later liberalism) and realism, the discipline was enriched by critical theories during the post-behavioral era. Although some IR scholars characterize constructivism as a traditional approach, it is also considered to be one of the most vocal critical theoretical approaches in the discipline. Along with constructivism, theories such as Marxism, feminism, the English school, postmodernism, post-structuralism, to name a few, are nowadays vital parts of the international relations scholarship.[8]

Realism

> The strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must.
>
> Thucydides, *The Melian Dialogue in the History of the Peloponnesian War*

This statement of the famous Thucydides[9] briefly explains the basis of realism, one of the two basic theories of international relations. Realism came into the world as a comprehensive theoretical concept during World War II,[10] seemingly explaining the onset of the bloodiest global conflict that came unexpectedly after a period of peace and general optimism. Although this approach has been developed only since the 20th century, some works from antiquity are perceived as the foundations of contemporary realism.

Realism in the context of the discipline of international relations highlights the competitive and conflicting nature of the international system.[11] According to realists, the most important thing is the survival of the state, and even moral and ethical principles can be set aside to achieve this goal. Everything is caused by the egoistic nature of the individual[12] and the lack of authority to control and guide states in the international system.

Realism is based on the perception of the nation state as the main actor of IR.[13] Realists accept the existence of other actors (such as individuals or organizations)

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[8] O. Krejčí, *Mezinárodní politika*, Praha 2014, pp. 671–676.

[9] P. Tyson, "Yanis Varoufakis, *And the Weak Suffer what they Must?* Book review", https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/yanis-varoufakis-and-weak-suffer-what-they-must-book-review (accessed: 4.11.2019).

[10] S. McGlinchey, R. Walters, D. Gold, "Getting started with international relations theory", [in:] *International Relations Theory*, eds. S. McGlinchey, R. Walters, Bristol 2017, p. 5.

[11] S. Antunes, I. Camisaão, "Realism", [in:] *International Relations Theory…*, p. 15.

[12] Ibid., p. 16.

[13] Ibid.

but their impact is minimal. Commonly, they see organizations rather as a tool than an actor, through which states can pursue their interests. The state is a unitary actor, whose national interests are at the heart of their activities — in this respect, the rationality[14] of the state as an actor comes to the fore. A rational actor is not afraid to use war as a foreign policy instrument if it is in accordance with the national interest. The system in which we live is conceived as anarchist, which means that states can rely only on themselves.

Liberalism

> XIV. A general association of nations must be formed under specific covenants for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike.
>
> Woodrow Wilson, *Fourteen Points*, 1918

Liberalism is most often perceived by ordinary people as the staple of the current democratic system, characterized by free and fair elections, the rule of law and the protection of human rights. Liberalism, however, as a theoretical approach to the IR, also offers much more important concepts and ideas — one of which is the importance of institutions, organizations and norms in the system, that mitigate the conflicting nature of the world.

The basis of liberalism is the belief that the individual's right to life, freedom and property is a key objective of the state.[15] According to liberal authors, this cannot be achieved in countries where power is concentrated in the hands of strong rulers. Therefore, the authors stress the importance of institutions that protect the rights of the individual by limiting political power.

The authors of liberalism have great reservations about war as a tool for achieving national goals. In this respect, the greatest theoretical contribution to IR — the democratic peace theory arises.[16] According to this theory, it is very unlikely that two democracies would go to war together. There are several reasons for this: democracies tend to respect each other and perceive themselves as legitimate countries for which mutual cooperation is preferable to armed conflict. At the same time, the accumulation of power, including that of military power, is considerably controlled and limited in democracies. Last but not least, democracies share similar values and principles that link them together.

An important departure from realism is the importance of non-state actors, especially international institutions and organizations. Many authors, therefore,

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[14] Ibid., p. 20.

[15] J.W. Meiser, "Liberalism", [in:] *International Relations Theory*…, p. 22.

[16] P.A. Mello, "Democratic peace theory", [in:] *The SAGE Encyclopedia of War: Social Science Perspectives*, ed. P.I. Joseph, Thousand Oaks 2015, p. 1.

separate a liberal direction of thinking from liberalism — called neoliberal institutionalism,[17] or neoliberalism, which claims that states can benefit from mutual cooperation, if they trust each other and that the agreed terms and treaties are honored. Today, it is clear that liberalism is not a 'utopian' theory describing a dream world of peace and happiness as it was once accused of being.

Critical theories

Critical theories are based on a desire to free people from the rule of modern states and the current economic systems[18]. The idea common to both Immanuel Kant and Karl Marx lies in a revolutionary approach to the world — as it should be transformed and modified to serve people, not states. The proponents of critical thinking draw attention to the factors of exclusion that are most visible on the lower levels of the IR system. At the same time, they try to find ways to eliminate the unequal conditions in society and highlight the standards, principles, opinions and ideas that can be a way to improve the adverse situation in the world. Therefore, it is essential that the focus is put not on states, but on individuals and non-state actors, whose problems must be at the heart of current politics and IR.

An important element of critical theories are the universal principles of justice, which draw attention to repressive social practices and institutions.[19] This kind of criticism has a transformative dimension in the sense that it aims to change national societies, international relations and the emerging global society, starting with alternative ideas and practices that remain behind the historical process.

Constructivism

> The structures of human association are determined primarily by shared ideas rather than material forces, and that the identities and interests of purposive actors are constructed by these shared ideas rather than given by nature.
>
> Alexander Wendt, 1999

Constructivists highlight the importance of values and of shared interests between individuals, who interact on the global stage. The core of constructivism is that the essence of international relations exists mainly in the interactions between people, who are called agents, and structures, for example states, or IR systems

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[17] A.A. Stein, "Neoliberal institutionalism", [in:] *The Oxford Handbook on International Relations*, eds. Ch. Reus-Smith, D. Snidal, New York 2008, p. 202.

[18] M.F. Ferreira, "Critical theory", [in:] *International Relations Theory…*, p. 49.

[19] Ibid., p. 51.

and regimes.[20] Anarchy is, therefore, "what states make of it",[21] which means that international anarchy could even be replaced, changed or modified by a different system, if the actors are strong enough and willing to make these changes. Constructivism sees the world, and what we can know about the world, as socially constructed, created of identities, norms and attitudes of people. The power lies inside the ideas, or commonly called norms, which means that the world changes us in the same way that we change it.

Constructivism as a theoretical approach came into being after the end of the Cold War, as a consequence of traditional theories' (especially realism and liberalism) failure to predict the course of the global conflict.[22] According to constructivist proponents, the shortcomings of traditional theories are based on their very foundations — states are perceived as selfish actors, who compete for power and primacy, but the end of the Cold War was ensured by individuals or a smaller group of people, not by states or international organizations. Constructivists observe a shift in emphasis on the impact of the lower components of society on IR. According to constructivists, the social or political reality is constantly constructed, which means that it is significantly subjected to change. The meanings are not fixed, but they change over time, and under the influence of the development of society, so do the opinions and beliefs that actors currently have. This brings a completely different approach to how we perceive the contemporary world and how the reality around us actually works.

Feminism

> IR disciplines men as much as men shape IR.
>
> Charlotte Hooper, 1999

Feminism came into international relations in the 1980s as one of the critical theoretical approaches. The main investigated factor is gender, which is primarily visible in the character of the current masculine political system, in particular by the very low number of women represented in influential positions. Gender — a social construct representing the social division into masculine and feminine — is a factor that significantly affects the identity of society, its character and direction of development.[23] Historically rooted masculinity[24] is perceived as the norm that represents strength, determination, power and success. Therefore, even nowadays,

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[20] A. Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, Cambridge 1999, p. 1.

[21] A. Wendt, "Anarchy is what states make of it: The social construction of power politics", *International Organization* 46, 1992, no 2, p. 395, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2706858 (accessed: 1.11.2019).

[22] A. Wendt, *Social Theory*…, p. 4.

[23] T. Kodičková, "*Gender* a mezinárodní vztahy", *Mezinárodní vztahy* 33, 1998, no 3, p. 74.

[24] Z. Komár, "Feminine rhetoric: Feminine and masculine dimensions in the context of rhetoric, gender and social spheres", *Opus et Educatio* 3, 2016, no 2, pp. 180–181.

everything considered feminine tends to be perceived as weak and vulnerable, which greatly deprives women of the opportunities and chances of taking a leading position in society or even politics.

However, feminism not only criticizes the position of women in society. In the research, feminist authors seek to break down traditional patriarchal stereotypes, whose primary interest is centered on the state as a major player in international relations.[25] In feminism, the main role is played by the individuals, their needs and rights, which traditional IR theories do not reflect as importantly as they should. Very often, authors portray the adverse effects of armed conflicts on the general population, and show global society the importance of focusing on the individuals, groups and possibly non-state actors who are increasingly important IR actors in today's world.

Definition of the main IR concepts

Based on the above defined IR theories, we can summarize a few main concepts, which represent the main points of interest of IR scholars. For instance, the international system is seen as "the set of relationships among the world's states, structured according to certain rules and patterns of interaction".[26] This definition perfectly fits to the basic perception of realism; nevertheless, it requires some further elaboration. Firstly, relationships among states represent only a part of the picture. Other actors must be included as well, such as individual leaders and citizens, who are parts of bureaucratic agencies in foreign ministries, international organizations, multinational organizations, but also terrorist or organized criminal groups. The debate, then, is what is their role and to what extent they are able to actively participate and make a change in the system. Secondly, the rules and patterns of interaction can be defined in terms of international regimes. These regimes represent a set of "implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge in a given area of international relations".[27] Furthermore, regimes "are more specialized arrangements that pertain to well-defined activities, resources, or geographical areas and often involve only some subset of the members of the international society".[28] International society can be divided or united by various identities of states and other actors, which share common beliefs, attitudes, norms, or ideas.

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[25] C. Hopper, "Masculinities, IR and the 'gender variable': A cost-benefit analysis for (sympathetic) gender skeptics", *International Studies* 25, 1999, no 3, p. 487.

[26] J.S. Goldstein, J.C. Pevehouse, *International Relations*, Boston 2014, p. 13.

[27] S.D. Krasner, "Structural causes and regime consequences: Regimes as intervening variables", *International Organisations* 36, 1982, no 2, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2706520 (accessed: 1.11.2019).

[28] O.R. Young, *International Cooperation: Building Regimes for Natural Resources and the Environment*, Ithaca 1989, p. 13.

Thus, identity from the standpoint of international relations is not about self-interest of actors, but rather about the mutual solidarity and companionship in order to solve the problems of collective well-being, such as the climate crisis, terrorism, or poverty. This principle is vital in liberal or non-traditional theories. In general,

> members of an identity community care about the interests of others in that community enough to sacrifice their own interests to benefit others. Non-state actors, such as nongovernmental organizations or terrorist networks, also rely on identity politics to a great extent. The increasing roles of these actors — feminist organizations, churches, jihadists, and multinational corporations, for example — have brought the identity principle to greater prominence in IR theory in recent years.[29]

2. Reflection of International Relations theories in the selected TV series

The visual qualitative analysis itself is based on finding answers to pre-selected questions: *1. What role does the state play as an actor in the international system? 2. What is the identity of the society? 3. What is the status of an individual in a country?* In order to emphasize specific ideas, the authors used quotations directly from individual series.

Traitors

The first analyzed series called *Traitors* is a historical drama whose plot discusses the espionage conducted by a young British woman recruited by the American Office of Strategic Services in order to identify a Soviet spy in the Cabinet Office. The British-produced series was broadcast in 2019 and is so far limited to only one, six-episode season. After analyzing the first series, the three questions conductive of our analysis can be answered as follows:

1. The plot takes place just after the end of World War II in the United Kingdom, which is one of the victorious powers. Despite the victory, the country is struggling with the post-war challenges associated with a weakened economy, which significantly influences the behavior of individuals and the state itself. The episodes repeatedly emphasize the UK's alliance with the US, which could correspond to elements of liberalism, but in the overall context of the series the alliance is built on the mutual need of both sides to win the war, and with Britain's interest in receiving post-war US support. In this notion, the emergence and existence of such cooperation in the international environment is in line with realism that respects such behavior when it comes to strategic state interests. Therefore, the state is perceived as a major actor in the international system, which is also reflected in

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[29] J.S. Goldstein, J.C. Pevehouse, op. cit., p. 6.

the statement "People don't know what they need", as mentioned in an interview between Feef Symonds (a future British spy) and Rowe (an American agent) who offered her an opportunity to fight the communists in the impending war with the Soviets by spying on the British government. Although the war is over, Rowe's perception of the world — "the world is ugly" — indicates that the prevailing emotions in society are fear, distrust, and selfishness, which again corresponds to realistic premises.

2. The identity of the society is firm, determined to endure hard times after the war: "If we don't fight, we won't win. If we don't win, we won't survive". Individual characters suggest that British society prefers activity instead of passivity: "Seems insane to sit around and wait to see if we're going to be invaded or not. I hate passivity". Despite the end of the war, the society remains alert and expects the fighting to continue: "War left England very weak. Economically, structurally, psychologically. And weakness is always exploited. You see that in nature".[30] Although Churchill is considered to be a war hero, he and his Conservative party does not win enough trust because of its policies and results before the war. The Labour party won the elections immediately after the war, and the US is afraid of expanding communism. One war ended, another is on the brink. The USA and the UK are long-standing allies, but the US is afraid of a new system that is being spread across Europe, and also in the whole world.

3. There are three significant characters in the analyzed series. The main character is the British spy Feef Symonds, a young and confident woman, who is trying to achieve her own career ambitions even though she is working against her own country. As the story unfolds, however, Feef discovers that the individual by itself is unable to make any major changes and that she herself has become a tool for achieving higher goals. Her needs and desires have become secondary — at the beginning of the story it is therefore possible to feel a certain touch of critical theories (the emancipation, efforts and struggles of the individual), but the predominance is still on the side of realism.

The second character in the story, Miss Garrick, is a senior civil servant in the Cabinet Office, who defends the interests of women in the postwar period. Her efforts to lead and support the women's movement partially reveal the signs of the first wave of feminism, but despite a relatively high number of women in the story, the characters are surrendered to the interests of the state, their own desires and needs go aside, which is a clear feature of traditional realism.

Perhaps the most realistic character in the story is the American agent Rowe, who embodies the American paranoia of the rise of Soviet influence. This is also

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[30] All of these statements come from a conversation between Feef Symonds and Agent Rowe, in which they argue over post-war reality. Agent Rowe is rather skeptical and pessimistic, stressing that the war never ends and the loser will be the one who stops being alert. Fear, paranoia and distrust in other states are a strong sign of the traditional (realistic) perception of political relations of that time.

indicated by his statement "Russia is why Attlee won the election. Whitehall has been infiltrated by communists". For the sake of state interests, he does not hesitate to overcome moral restraints and even assassinate those who stand in his way. Once again, the individual's subordination to his own state is manifested.

1983

1983 is the first Polish-produced Netflix original series, released in November 2018. In the span of only 8 episodes the story takes place in an alternative time in which communism in Poland never fell, the Iron Curtain still exists, and the Cold War continues.

1. The state's position in the story is very strong. The leading political party maintains tension and fear in the country, ensuring its obedience of the people. The international context goes back to the Cold War era, which still lasts in 2003. The party promotes propaganda and censorship: "On the eve of the upcoming anniversary, the Party wishes to remind all citizens: stay vigilant and report any seditious activity. Don't let terrorists destroy our way of life". The anniversary refers to the coordinated terrorist attacks, which took place in various cities in Poland on 12 March 1983. Even after 20 years, the attacks still resonate in the minds of the Polish people. This horrible event is portrayed as the main reason why communism prevails, even until 2003. At the beginning of the first episode, the international system is depicted as bipolar, referring to the real Cold War. However, the global situation is shown as chaotic. Although the USSR does not play an important role in the story, the USA is portrayed as a world aggressor, waging armed conflicts in the Middle East despite the criticism of the international community. Nevertheless, these two superpowers of the Cold War era are used only to show the position of the leading party in Poland, hence the state as such. Thus, they are used as a background for the main story. From this short description of the state's position in the international system, we can recognize traditional realism. The main interest of the state is to survive and it uses all possible options to do so, although it is based on lies and fear. Fear as the main emotion of realism is present throughout all the episodes. One can find an example of international economic cooperation between Poland and Vietnam, which is emphasized several times throughout the episodes. Although it can be seen as an example of liberal institutionalism, as it accepts the main premises of realism, such a relationship can also be seen as strictly realist, since it supports the balance of power among states.

2. Society is dualistic. The majority of citizens follows the party's regulations and ideas, their opposition — the underground — represents the radical mood of the society that tries to fight against the dystopian regime. The concealment of information and a general misrepresentation of the truth is an omnipresent element of everyday life: "Truth should always come first, especially or those whose

justice has been denied. Truth is the only weapon mortals can use in their fight against the Gods". This phrase, uttered by a university professor, emphasizes the hidden chaos in the outwardly stable society. Such dichotomy can be seen on both state and international levels.

3. The three main characters come from quite diverse backgrounds — law student Kajetan, police investigator Anatol, and the leader of the radical group Ofelia. Despite their strong position in the story, the identity of the individual is forcibly suppressed by the state — any changes in the country are difficult to achieve. The series ends with the status quo introduced at the beginning. Although some more people may know the truth about the terrorists' attacks, that knowledge changes only their own lives and not the lives of the whole society.

Nobel

The Norwegian TV series *Nobel* is the second-highest rated series from the analyzed selection. Broadcast in 2016 with a total of eight episodes, the plot depicts the course of the war in Afghanistan and its social, political and military consequences from a non-traditional perspective. This war-political drama was originally produced under the title *Nobel — fred for enhver pris* (*Nobel — Peace at Any Cost*) with Erling Riiser, a sniper and a commander in the Norwegian Special Forces serving in Afghanistan, as the main character.

1. The story describes the involvement of Norwegian troops in peacekeeping missions during the war in Afghanistan in the context of the current international system. The main objective of the mission is the fight against Afghan terrorists and the protection of the country's population, which represents the traditional battle between good and evil in an anarchic environment. Emphasis in the story is put on the lower parts of society (individual, terrorist group, army), the role of the state as an actor of the international system is considerably lower than in previous series. The peacekeeping mission, as an element, corresponds to the principles of liberalism. However, the last part of the series reveals the behind-the-scenes moves of the Norwegian government, which, despite a long and bloody war, is planning oil exploration operations in Afghanistan. *Nobel* therefore poses a question: what is truly dangerous nowadays — outright war or diplomatic maneuvers aimed at gaining access to natural resources?

2. The identity of the society is strongly feminine — key values in the story are collectivism, family, friendship, trust and respect, with an emphasis on peaceful resolution in situations of conflict. Even though the war takes place outside Norway, the country is exposed to an actual threat and is aware of a possible retaliatory attack. The plot does not emphasize action — it develops slowly, which gives enough space for the presentation of deep conversations, thoughts or dilemmas that the main characters often struggle with. This is again a sign that the needs of the individual outweigh national interests in the story.

3. The focus in the series is put mainly on the problems of individuals and groups — showing the unpleasant side of the war and pointing out issues that traditional theories do not take into account — the examples of which are: a Muslim woman almost beaten to death by her husband, a soldier dying in a car, or a child terrorist, who tries to detonate himself in the city square. The figure of a female soldier or the frequent depiction of the family and its common problems that people deal with everyday correspond to the principles of feminism as well. Likewise important is the profile of the main character — soldier Erling, who is portrayed in the story not only as a soldier but also as a father and a husband — this represents a strong contrast to the traditional perception of war.

Homeland

The most successful series of the selected sample group — *Homeland* — is an American political, spy and conspiracy thriller, which at the moment of writing this article comprises 7 seasons and a total of 84 episodes. It premiered in October 2011 and has received generally positive reviews since then. The story focuses on the main character, CIA operative Carrie, who is suffering from bipolar disorder and who is fighting terrorism with her colleagues from the Agency. At first glance, it may seem that the storyline is straightforward, but indeed the opposite is true — the viewer can be surprised by much more than the constant fight against terrorism. *Homeland* has been popular with viewers, especially because of the dramatic twists that move the story forward at a very fast pace, causing tension and eliciting an emotional response by the viewer. This is also due to a very current topic of the story and a realistically-written script that forces the viewer to ponder real-world dilemmas, like the question: "Is the national interest really above everything else?"

1. Although the story takes place primarily in the US, it has a strong connection with other parts of the world — the Middle East, Russia or Europe. The central theme of the story is the battle between good and evil, with good perceived as a state — the USA, and evil perceived as terrorists, trying to threaten national or international security. However, the viewer is encouraged to question these assumptions — in the first series an American soldier, Brody, because of this moral dilemma, moves to the side of the terrorists and fights against his homeland.

In the analyzed series, the state represents the key actor of the international scene. State interests, goals or plans are placed far above the interests of citizens, while ethical or moral principles are often broken in achieving them. This is reflected, among other things, in the last series to date, in which Agent Carrie joins forces with Russian agents and plans to kill her lifelong colleague, Saul Berenson, for higher state interests.

While the US as a state actor stands firmly and adamantly, a group of terrorists as a non-state actor prove that even a strong country can be greatly threatened, even

from within its own society. The US's strong position as a major state actor corresponds to the principles of realism, but a non-state actor in the form of an increasingly influential terrorist organization indicates that critical theories that recognize the power of non-state actors as well are also present in the story. Another sign of realism is the portrayed polarity between good and evil, and the suggestions that the state is justified in making certain moral mistakes if it acts in its own interests.

2. The identity of society is strongly hierarchical — those who have power, decide, those who does not, obey. Great emphasis is placed on military merits, issues of national interest and the preservation of power — in this aspect, realism is primarily manifested as a traditional way thinking, of supporting military answers to conflict situations. Society does not hesitate to use power to threaten or even kill ordinary people, if it strengthens the power of the state and ensures its international security (for example, in the 7th series the US almost invades nuclear-armed Pakistan).

The plot indicates the strong polarization of society into Us and Them — Us, the good, and Them, the dangerous and evil. The traditional perception of reality lies in the premise that no one can be trusted and anyone, even your best friend, can betray you because of higher interests. This element appears repeatedly in the series — in the relationship between Carrie and Saul, between the members of the US presidential team or within the CIA itself.

3. Despite the predominant position of the state in the series, the story also highlights the role and influence of the individual on state affairs — as demonstrated by the distinctive character of agent Carrie, the American sniper Brody or agent Saul Berenson, who all at first glance stay on the same side of the barricades. The presence of a strong terrorist organization demonstrates that even a non-state actor can have considerable power and threaten significantly national or international security. In spite of this fact, it is evident in many parts of the story that only the state or state authorities have the real power to destroy an individual, if they are deemed a threat to national security. The role of the individual is to strictly obey state orders, and therefore emotions such as love, friendship, or trust must be set aside. Proof of this statement is to be found in a scene in which Carrie, due to long working hours and mental problems, is unable to raise her own daughter and, under pressure from the rest of the family, has to give her up. The state wins against the family. Again, in *Homeland* one can find elements of two theoretical approaches — traditional in the form of realism, and critical in the form of constructivism, with the dominant position of a traditional perception of reality.

Pine Gap

The Australian television series called *Pine Gap* is an international political spy-thriller set around the Australian and American joint defense intelligence facility at Pine Gap, which exists also in reality and can be found south-west of

Alice Springs, Northern Territory, Australia. The series has only one season with six episodes, but nevertheless has a strong storyline and a thrilling plot. It was broadcast on ABC in 2018 and released on Netflix in the same year.

1. The central theme of the series is the strong cooperation between Australia and the USA; their economic, political and military links affect the whole development of the story. A state as an actor has a strong position in the global context, but cooperation between states is welcomed, even requested. However, certain rules must be respected: collective decision-making, balance between the two sides of the alliance, equality on common issues and respect for mutual requirements. From this perspective, we can see mainly a liberal concept of collective security, when an aggressor against one state is considered to be an aggressor against all other allied states, such as terrorist groups and states collaborating with these groups. Although the international system is seen as very liberal with a strong emphasis on mutual cooperation, "realistic" thinking plays a decisive role during escalated situations. For instance, the main characters representing the American side often make the immediate univocal decision without taking into account the position of the rest of the team, mainly those who represent the voice of Australia. These actions could also be explained by the polarity of the system, which is portrayed as multipolar, with one dominating superpower — the USA. The USA is in the position of taking unilateral actions and decisions without thinking about the consequences. Nevertheless, its hegemonic position is restrained by international organizations and their efforts to retain a reputation among other allied states. Moreover, the long-lasting relationship between the USA and Australia with their common values and attitudes in many ways would suggest one of the most solid relations among states in the current international system; however, the main theme of the series can be summarized as "trust but verify".

2. As mentioned above, the USA and Australia share similar values, such as cooperation, collectiveness, peace, trust, and respect. These values are emphasized in the story and reflected in the actions of the main characters. Peaceful solutions to problems and conflicts are preferred and unjustified military interventions are strongly criticized by wider society. Society is shown as a mirror, which critically evaluates actions and activities abroad of both states. Because the main story of the series happens in Pine Gap, the opinion of Australian society is important and shapes future decisions and actions of not only the Australian top brass, but also their US counterparts. For the USA, the existence of Pine Gap is crucial in order to cover the activities in the East Asian and Pacific regions.

3. The series does not highlight the individual and his or her needs or desires — this is demonstrated by the absence of a strong character in the story. Instead, the viewer sees a collective hero — a group of Australian and American agents who make decisions together and act in the interests of the alliance. Despite the friendly relations inside the group, both nationalities are faithful to their homeland and maintain a professional distance to keep relevant state secrets.

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to reveal what principles and features of some of the main international relations theories (namely realism, liberalism, feminism, constructivism) can Netflix subscribers find in selected TV series available on said SVOD. The results of the analysis indicate that, despite the global trend, most of the selected series are produced primarily with elements of traditional theoretical approaches of international relations (especially realism), despite the fact that new approaches are beginning to appear in the series. A strong exception is the series *Nobel*, which uses predominantly elements of feminism, which corresponds to the identity of its country of origin, thus making it significantly more liberal and feminine than the rest of the analyzed series. This shift leads to a gradual change in the critical thinking of the audience, which is starting to be exposed to non-traditional concepts. Nevertheless, the prevailing presence of realistic features, such as a simple division between good and evil in the series can be explained by the entertaining aspect of the series. In order to attract a stable audience, viewers are encouraged to feel a deep connection with the series' main protagonists or even antagonists, and their life stories. In doing so, traditional theories offer better background for a plot with a world good or bad in nature, or with a common enemy, or a common collective problem. Also, they somehow omit the complexity of interconnected networks of global society and regimes, which make reaching a solution by just one group (the main protagonists) almost impossible.

Odbicia teorii z zakresu stosunków międzynarodowych w wybranych serialach telewizyjnych dystrybuowanych przez Netflix

Abstrakt

Artykuł demonstruje, w jaki sposób Netflix, obecny lider rynku SVOD, może funkcjonować jako platforma wymiany kulturowej, nie tylko zapewniając rozrywkę, lecz także oferując swoim subskrybentom krytyczną refleksję na temat stosunków międzynarodowych. Mimo że większość treści dostępnych na platformie jest fikcyjna, filmy oraz seriale produkowane i dystrybuowane przez Netflix ukazują różnorodne teoretyczne podejścia z zakresu stosunków międzynarodowych. Teza ta jest oparta na założeniach dyskursu krytycznego, który interpretuje rzeczywistość w odniesieniu do kontekstu społecznego.

Tekst ma na celu wyjawienie, które spośród teorii z zakresu stosunków międzynarodowych (realizm, liberalizm, feminizm, konstruktywizm oraz inne teorie krytyczne) są przedstawiane subskrybentom w wybranych serialach. Stosując metody wizualnej analizy jakościowej, autorki badają pięć seriali: *Traitors* (kraj produkcji: Wielka Brytania), *1983* (Polska), *Nobel* (Norwegia), *Pine Gap* (Australia) i *Homeland* (Stany Zjednoczone). Wymienione seriale zostały wybrane ze względu na

różnorodne miejsca produkcji, wysoką oglądalność oraz motywy przewodnie, którymi są polityka, bezpieczeństwo lub stosunki międzynarodowe.

Analiza każdego z seriali opiera się na trzech pytaniach, które mają zastosowanie w definiowaniu podstawowych założeń przedstawionych teorii. Pytania te brzmią następująco: jaką rolę odgrywa państwo jako aktor w systemie międzynarodowym? Jaka tożsamość kulturowa dominuje w danym społeczeństwie? Jaki jest status jednostki w danym państwie?

Procesy formowania opinii oraz budowania obrazów rzeczywistości społecznej odbywają się pod wpływem kontekstu, w którym działa jednostka. Z tego względu wymiana kulturowa może wpłynąć na rozwój współczesnego społeczeństwa medialnego i jednocześnie na widzów, którzy pośrednio wykształcają refleksję krytyczną. Wyniki badania wskazują, że globalna wymiana kulturowa prowadzona przez masową rozrywkę wciąż opiera się przede wszystkim na tradycyjnych założeniach teoretycznych.

Słowa-klucze: Netflix, seriale telewizyjne, globalna wymiana kulturowa, realizm, liberalizm, feminizm, teorie krytyczne, refleksja krytyczna

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