



**Parahyangan Catholic University**  
**Faculty of Political and Social Science**  
**International Relations**

*Accredited A*

*SK BAN –PT NO: 468/SK/BAN-PT/Akred/S/XII/2014*

**Popular Culture in International Relations;**  
***A Content Analysis of Netflix's Black Mirror***

Undergraduate Thesis

By

Zena Aqilla Darmawan

2015330098

Supervisor

Sukawarsini Djelantik Ph.D.

Bandung

2019



**Parahyangan Catholic University**  
**Faculty of Political and Social Science**  
**International Relations**

*Accredited A*

*SK BAN –PT NO: 468/SK/BAN-PT/Akred/S/XII/2014*

**Popular Culture in International Relations;**  
***A Content Analysis of Netflix's Black Mirror***

Undergraduate Thesis

By

Zena Aqilla Darmawan

2015330098

Supervisor

Sukawarsini Djelantik Ph.D.

Bandung

2019

Faculty of Political and Social Science  
International Relations Course Study



**Thesis Validation**

Name : Zena Aqilla Darmawan  
Student ID : 2015330098  
Title : Popular Culture in International Relations; A Content Analysis of  
*Netflix's Black Mirror*

Has been examined in Thesis Defense of Bachelor Degree  
On Friday, January 11th 2019  
And declared as **PASSED**

**Team of Examiners**

**Head and member of thesis defense**

Sapta Dwikardana, Ph.D. : \_\_\_\_\_

**Secretary**

Sukawarsini Djelantik, Ph.D. : \_\_\_\_\_

**Member**

Albert Triwibowo, S.IP., M.A. : \_\_\_\_\_

Validating,

Dean of Faculty of Political and Social Science

Dr. Pius Sugeng Prasetyo

## Statement Letter

I, whom signed the statement below,

Name : Zena Aqilla Darmawan

Student ID : 2015330098

Department : International Relations

Title : Popular Culture in International Relations;  
A Content Analysis of *Netflix's Black Mirror*

Hereby affirm that this thesis proposal is the result own research which has not been proposed for the same purpose by any other academics or party. All information, ideas, and facts, are being referred to the valid reference and cited officially in accordance to the valid scientific writing method.

I, declare this statement with full responsibility and I am willing to take any consequences regarding this entire research if this research was found to be valid, or if this statement was found to be untrue.

Bandung, January 11th 2019

Zena Aqilla Darmawan

2015330098

## ABSTRACT

Name : Zena Aqilla Darmawan

Student ID : 2015330098

Title : Popular Culture in International Relations; A Content

Analysis of *Netflix's Black Mirror*

---

In the twenty-first century, there had been a significant shift in the area of technology and mass media. In which both has merged together to form an entirely new concept based on those respective aspects, by the name of 'new media'. Internet, for instance, has quickly turned into a powerful source of influence and information without borders. Contents in the internet are made to be mass produced and consumed by a large portion of the world's population which led to the creation of certain shared beliefs amongst the people. Unfortunately, that element of popular culture had been overlooked as a subject of research in the study of international relations. Ergo, the author intend to analyze further the relevance and interconnectedness of popular culture in international relations using qualitative content analysis method. To answer the questions on how popular culture help understand towards IR issues through the content analysis of *Netflix's* online series *Black Mirror*, the findings will be implementing Critical Theory as the theoretical frame of reference. By the end, it could be concluded that popular culture does play an important part in international relations. Not only it could encourage an understanding of relevant issues through media such as movies, books and music, it could also be an approach to raise awareness on issues that are not usually notable to many. Popular culture was built on new media platforms which attract massive audience, therefore it is able to build consensus, norms, and form a reflection to international relations.

Keywords: Popular Culture, Critical Theory, Mass Media, New Media, Content Analysis

## ABSTRAK

Nama : Zena Aqilla Darmawan  
NPM : 2015330098  
Judul : Budaya Populer dalam Hubungan Internasional; Analisa Konten  
*Serial Netflix Black Mirror*

---

Di abad ke-21, sudah terjadi banyak perubahan dalam industri teknologi dan media massa. Dimana keduanya bergabung menjadi satu kesatuan dan membentuk sebuah konsep baru yang dinamakan 'media baru'. Internet misalnya, dalam waktu yang cepat dapat berubah menjadi sumber pengaruh dan informasi yang besar tanpa batas. Konten dalam internet diciptakan untuk dikonsumsi secara besar-besaran oleh kebanyakan populasi di dunia yang menghasilkan keyakinan bersama. Namun, budaya populer seringkali dipandang sebelah mata sebagai subyek riset dalam studi hubungan internasional. Maka dari itu, dalam karya tulis ini penulis ingin menganalisa lebih jauh mengenai relevansi dan keterkaitan budaya populer dalam hubungan internasional menggunakan metode kualitatif analisa konten. Untuk menjawab pertanyaan bagaimana budaya populer dapat membantu pemahaman terhadap isu-isu hubungan internasional melalui analisa konten serial *online Netflix* berjudul *Black Mirror*, hasil analisa akan menggunakan Teori Kritis untuk dijadikan referensi teori. Pada akhirnya, penulis menemukan bahwa budaya populer memiliki peran penting dalam hubungan internasional. Tidak hanya untuk pemahaman akan kasus-kasus hubungan internasional melalui film, serial, dan musik, tetapi juga untuk meningkatkan kesadaran akan isu-isu yang kurang diperhatikan. Budaya populer disajikan dalam format-format media baru yang menarik banyak massa. Maka dari itu, budaya populer dapat membentuk suatu keyakinan bersama, norma-norma, dan membentuk cerminan dari hubungan internasional.

Kata kunci: Budaya Populer, Teori Kritis, Media Massa, Media Baru, Analisa Konten

## PREFACE

First and foremost, the author would like to thank God Almighty for the opportunity, strength, and knowledge to finish this undergraduate thesis. Without the guidance and blessings He had given, the author would not have been able to compose an undergraduate thesis with the title of “Popular Culture in International Relations; A Content Analysis of *Netflix’s Black Mirror*”. This undergraduate thesis was specifically made to fulfill the criteria and condition for earning a bachelor degree in International Relations Course Study, Faculty of Political and Social Science, Parahyangan Catholic University.

Hopefully, the undergraduate thesis would be able to facilitate the readers and is capable of transferring knowledge as well as build an understanding toward the issue related. However, the author is fully aware of the imperfections of the research. Therefore, the author is open to any constructive criticisms nor meaningful suggestions with the intention of the further development of this undergraduate thesis and future researches.

Bandung, January 18<sup>th</sup> 2019

Author

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

### ***Ibu, Ayah, Eyang, & Kakak***

I would like to dedicate my six months of hard work to all of you. Without the endless love and support that you gave me, this undergraduate thesis would not have been possible. Thank you for always being there for me throughout this journey. For always supporting me in anything that I do. For always believing in me. And for the endless prayers you send me. I acknowledge that this is far from enough for me to repay all of your kindness but I will continue to do my best to make you proud.

### ***Mbak Suke***

Thank you so much Mbak Suke for the guidance the past six months. You've made it so much easier for me to finish this undergraduate thesis and I couldn't have done it if it wasn't for you. I didn't submit my name to any supervisors but I am thankful that I ended up to be supervised by you. I'm sorry for the unintentional mistakes I've made during the past six months. I wish nothing but the best for you and your future endeavours.

### ***Hilda Elvina & Azka Nur Ramadhina***

Bbs, you have no idea how grateful I am to be able to surround myself with such positive beings during the end of my uni journey. You two pushed me not to slack and to be my best self during the process of writing this research because of how motivated you guys are! I don't think it would have been as easy doing this if I wasn't surrounded by the two of you. THANK YOU. I'll cherish you forever. I'm definitely going to miss our endless coffee shop hangs and random food adventures.

### ***Asih Radhianitya***

Wifey, thank you for being a constant supporter in the past 3,5 years. I have never met anyone more like me in my entire life. We're like two peas in a pod. I am happy that I've found you in this journey and I hope we'll stay in touch even after we've gone to our separate paths. I love you always!!! Xx

### ***Nindyo Setiawan***

You know why you're here! Love you Nindy, thank you for everything ☺

### ***The Barudax***

Hi loves, I admit I don't have that many friends in campus and I am very thankful that I'm stuck with this bunch of crazy ladies (that means you too, Andri :P). I wouldn't trade you for any other people. Glad to have all of you to turn to whenever I feel troubled. I hope we'll cross paths again someday! If you haven't finish, I hope you'll be done with all this soon. I'll be waiting on the other side.



### ***Coffee Cult***

Honestly, what would my uni life be without you?! Everyone knows that this is practically my second home. I've had endless cups of iced cappuccinos, americanos, iced chocolates, earl grey teas & plates of pastas. I hope years from now when I come back to Bandung, you'd still be there so I could reminisce the good old days!

### ***Tysha, Maya, & Karissa***

Tysh, I would like to personally thank you for opening the door to a whole new world for me. For all the friends you've brought into my life. For inviting me to Kuy & A. I will never forget that one Zomato meet-up that led me to you. The reason you're here is because you gave me an extra life outside campus that kept me sane. The people that excites me to go back to Jakarta each time. Also, for introducing me to Maya and Karissa. The two people that have been a huge part of my life the past year. Thank you my dumb & dumbest. I love you all so much!!!!

### ***Dzaky Sirat***

Dear son, thank you for always supporting me, listening to me, and being my go-to friend whenever I need someone to do go out with. I hope you won't forget me once you're in Japan with all your waifus. I am so thankful for you. I like how I could be completely myself around you. We tolerate each other's weirdness and that is PRICELESS!! Hahah. ALSO, I'm still waiting for that birthday cake.

### ***Rizka Wardhana***

Despite everything else that happened, thank you for sticking by my side since day one. You've been a part of my narrative for such a long time and I am truly grateful for that. We literally grew up together. Sorry I'm such a bad friend sometimes but I hope you know that you mean so much to me. I may not say it as much should but honestly, THANK YOU!

Last but definitely not least, I would like to say thank you to everyone involved in the making of this undergraduate thesis and in my uni journey. I am thankful for each and every one of you. Because without you, I wouldn't be who I am today. Good or bad, the experience I've had with you is something I would never take back. I'm sorry I couldn't include all of your names, it could be longer than the thesis itself but I'm sure you know who you are. I wish you nothing but the best in life!

See you when I see you ☺

## TABLE OF CONTENT

<b>Abstract</b> .....	i
<b>Abstrak</b> .....	ii
<b>Preface</b> .....	iii
<b>Acknowledgment</b> .....	iv
<b>Table of Content</b> .....	vi
<b>Table of Image</b> .....	viii
<b>Chapter I: Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>1.1 Background</b> .....	1
<b>1.2 Identification of the Problem</b> .....	3
1.2.1 Focus of Research .....	4
1.2.2 Research Question .....	5
<b>1.3 Objective and Utility of Research</b> .....	5
1.3.1 Objective of Research .....	5
1.3.2 Utility of Research .....	5
<b>1.4 Literature Review</b> .....	6
<b>1.5 Theoretical Framework</b> .....	8
<b>1.6 Research Method and Data Collection Technique</b> .....	14
<b>1.7 Structure of the Study</b> .....	14
<b>Chapter II: Popular Culture in International Relations</b> .....	16
<b>2.1 Overview of Popular Culture</b> .....	16
2.1.1 History of Popular Culture.....	19
2.1.2 Types of Relations between Pop Culture and IR .....	20
<b>2.2 American Pop Culture</b> .....	22
<b>2.3 <i>Netflix</i> and New Media</b> .....	23
<b>Chapter III: Pop Culture in International Relations; Case Study of Black Mirror</b> .....	28
<b>3.1 Overview of Black Mirror</b> .....	28

3.2 <b>Black Mirror Episodes</b> .....	32
3.2.1 <i>National Anthem</i> .....	33
3.2.2 <i>The Waldo Moment</i> .....	36
3.2.3 <i>Nosedive</i> .....	37
3.2.4 <i>Hated in the Nation</i> .....	39
<b>Chapter IV: Analysis</b> .....	43
4.1 <i>National Anthem</i> and David Cameron's #Piggate Case .....	43
4.2 <i>The Waldo Moment</i> and Trump's Election .....	52
4.3 <i>Nosedive</i> and China's Social Credit System .....	56
4.4 <i>Hated in the Nation</i> and Robotic Drone Bees .....	61
<b>Chapter V: Conclusion</b> .....	65
<b>List of References</b> .....	69

## LIST OF IMAGES

Image 2.1	Who’s watching? Feature on <i>Netflix</i> .....	26
Image 3.2	Charlie Brooker; Writer of <i>Black Mirror</i> .....	29
Image 3.3	A Scene from <i>National Anthem</i> .....	35
Image 3.4	A Scene from <i>The Waldo Moment</i> .....	36
Image 3.5	A Scene from <i>Nosedive</i> .....	38
Image 3.6	A Scene from <i>Hated in the Nation</i> .....	40
Image 4.7	<i>Call Me Dave</i> by Lord Ashcroft.....	44
Image 4.8	A Scene from <i>The Riot Club</i> .....	45
Image 4.9	Group photo of <i>The Bullingdon Club</i> .....	48
Image 4.10	Charlie Brooker’s <i>Twitter</i> Page.....	51
Image 4.11	<i>Black Mirror</i> ’s tweet and Donald Trump.....	54
Image 4.12	Tweets from Election Night.....	55
Image 4.13	Social Credit System Infographic.....	57
Image 4.14	Anna Haldewang’s Smart Bee Drone.....	62

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background

In the 21st century, international relations does not only focus on traditional issues such as security and economy. With the rising of globalization and accessibility of the media, popular culture, or commonly known as pop culture, becomes a huge part of international relations that is somehow inevitable. Media plays a huge part in everyday life as much as it does in the international system. Both traditional and new media impacted the world massively. Globalization led to the phenomenon of Global Village. The term will be explained further in the theoretical framework but it mirrors the world's current situation because on the internet, people become the citizen of the world. The boundary between countries is no longer limited to physical borders as there are no borders *yet* on the internet. Information and culture transfers freely across countries and citizens of the world could meet without the limitation of time and space.

One particular media that creates a massive impact in this modernization era is social media. Social media itself has evolved its role in becoming an increasingly important subject in the academic world. It is a tool that could be used to network, promote and influence.<sup>1</sup> Social media is an online platform that allow people to share and communicate; which include applications or websites such *Facebook, Instagram*

---

<sup>1</sup> Ramos, Elisa. "Social Media as a Marketing Tool & Its Impact on Politics." *Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences*, 2015.  
[https://www.theseus.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/87648/Ramos\\_Elisa.pdf?sequence=1](https://www.theseus.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/87648/Ramos_Elisa.pdf?sequence=1).

*Twitter, YouTube*, so on and so forth.<sup>2</sup> It quickly became one of the cheapest ways to promote and gain profit for doing business. The internet creates a new global marketplace for older medias to digitize content. Traditional medias like newspapers and magazines are slowly migrating contents online.

Online streaming platforms like *Netflix* and *Hulu* are also trouncing pay TV companies as it is much more accessible from multiple gadgets. These online streaming companies started making original shows, series, and movies competing with hits on TV and the cinemas.<sup>3</sup> Currently, *Netflix* is on top of the online streaming business. With a huge round of selection of movies, *Netflix* can compete with other online streaming platforms. Since it was first founded in August 29th 1997, *Netflix* started its first original show back in 2013 with the infamous *House of Cards* and reached over fifty million subscribers in 2014 with stock price over USD 400 share.<sup>4</sup>

One of the many hit series that will be looked further in this undergraduate thesis is *Netflix*'s online hit series called *Black Mirror*. The series had launched four seasons with a total of nineteen episodes since December 4th 2011. *Black Mirror* is a British science-fiction anthology series that consists of stand-alone episodes of a futuristic dystopian world in the modern society. It shows the unexpected consequences

---

<sup>2</sup> Nations, Daniel. "Serious Question: What Exactly Is Social Media?" *Lifewire*, Lifewire, [www.lifewire.com/what-is-social-media-explaining-the-big-trend-3486616](http://www.lifewire.com/what-is-social-media-explaining-the-big-trend-3486616).

<sup>3</sup> Spangler, Todd. "Netflix, Hulu and Other Streaming Services Trounce Pay TV on Customer Satisfaction." *Yahoo! News*, Yahoo!, 22 May 2018, [www.yahoo.com/entertainment/netflix-hulu-other-streaming-services-120044828.html](http://www.yahoo.com/entertainment/netflix-hulu-other-streaming-services-120044828.html).

<sup>4</sup> "A Brief History of Netflix." *CNN*, Cable News Network, 21 July 2014, [edition.cnn.com/2014/07/21/showbiz/gallery/netflix-history/index.html](http://edition.cnn.com/2014/07/21/showbiz/gallery/netflix-history/index.html).

of new technologies that are most likely to appear in the near future.<sup>5</sup> A Dystopian genre is a tool to awaken as well as educate people of what's to come if there is no serious action taken to take care of a problem. In this case, *Black Mirror* highlights the inseparability of humans and technology and the fact that it is more of a curse than a blessing.<sup>6</sup>

## 1.2 Identification of the Problem

International relations mostly reflects state to state and hard politics issues. Subject like popular culture had been excluded from the narrative because most people are not aware of the interconnectivity of pop culture in international relations itself. A much simpler and understandable medium to understand the inner workings of international relations is needed. Through the internet and specifically the media, the masses could see a glimpse of what international relations is about. Mass media delivers messages and influence the minds of millions. When used wisely, it could be a great political tool in order to achieve one's interests.

As a product of the media, popular culture is being underappreciated as an international relations low data even though it has a huge ability to influence.<sup>7</sup> There are many issues that could be addressed through the media such as diversity,

---

<sup>5</sup> Brooker, Charlie. "Black Mirror." *Netflix Official Site*, 25 Dec. 2015, [www.netflix.com/title/70264888](http://www.netflix.com/title/70264888).

<sup>6</sup> Maloney, Devon. "When the Real World Is a Dystopia, Black Mirror Is a Relief." *The Hive*, Vanity Fair, 20 Oct. 2016, [www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2016/10/black-mirror-season-3-dystopia](http://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2016/10/black-mirror-season-3-dystopia).

<sup>7</sup> Caso, Federica, and Caitlin Hamilton. *Popular Culture and World Politics: Theories, Methods, Pedagogies*. E-International Relations Publishing, 2015.

representation, gender equality, global politics and so on. Through popular culture while emphasizing more on motion pictures, this undergraduate thesis wants to help understand the interconnectedness of both realms. Media should not only mirror but should also be able to shape society. Therefore, people are drawn to the media to broaden knowledge and build opinion.

*Black Mirror* was chosen to be the study case of this undergraduate thesis because evolution of technology was very important in international relations. Technology leaves an impact on global politics, culture, economy, security as well as the environment. Modern society and futuristic technology is the main focus of *Black Mirror*. The show successfully brought up relatable topics such as morality, control of the media and politics. Through *Black Mirror*, viewers could see how massively technology could affect human behavior.

### **1.2.1 Focus of Research**

The undergraduate thesis focused on explaining international relations issues through motion pictures to prove the relevance of popular culture in international relations using the study case of *Netflix's* series *Black Mirror* with the limitation of time from 2011 until 2018 and four selected episodes out of twenty. The limitation of time is based on the *Black Mirror* show which started in 2011 and so far the latest episode was released in 2018. Through motion picture, the unimaginable came to life and becomes understandable. The use of an online streaming platform like *Netflix* is most effective as it could be reached easily through plenty of electronic devices with a



screen. From television screens to every day smartphones have the ability to stream Netflix as long as it is connected to internet. *Netflix's Black Mirror* is fitting for the research because of the relevance of the topics observed in the series and the real events of international relations. This undergraduate thesis used critical theory as guidance to further analyze popular culture in international relations through the study case of *Netflix's* online series *Black Mirror*.

### **1.2.2 Research Question**

The research formulate the problem into a research question of, “How could popular culture help understand international relations issues through the content analysis of *Netflix's Black Mirror*?”

## **1.3 Objective and Utility of Research**

### **1.3.1 Objective of Research**

The thesis intends to conduct a content analysis of international relations issues through popular culture using the study case of *Netflix's* online series *Black Mirror*.

### **1.3.2 Utility of Research**

This thesis could be used for future references to help other International Relations students who are interested in exploring popular culture in international relations.

#### 1.4 Literature Review

The first research article used regarding pop culture and international relations related topic is called ‘*Lessons from Westeros: Gender and power in Game of Thrones*’.<sup>8</sup> From the title itself, it could be seen that there are some gender-related messages in the HBO global blockbuster series *Game of Thrones* that the UNSW writers managed to look further into. The two scholars, William Clapton and Laura J Shepherd, noticed that not a lot of textbooks cover issues like gender, power, and authority in its entirety.<sup>9</sup> There had only been brief explanations of feminist theories and its application within IR in several books like *International Relations: Theories and Approaches* and *Essentials of International Relations*. Feminist theories are seen as a separate, or an add-on study when it deserves a much bigger focus. Both writers also believed that when taken seriously, popular culture could be a tool to understand international relations as it contains a rich and varied history with global politics. It could enable a broader range of possibilities and ways of solving an issue that it is currently permitted in IR. International relations must be open to challenging ideas and not discount them solely for the reason that it is based on fiction. Popular culture could deliver different forms of knowledge and new ways of seeing global politics.<sup>10</sup>

The second literature is an article by Ningchuan Wang from the Interdisciplinary Political and Cultural Journal called ‘*The Currency of Fantasy*’:

---

<sup>8</sup> Clapton, William, and Laura J Shepherd. “Lessons from Westeros: Gender and Power in Game of Thrones.” *Politics*, vol. 37, no. 1, July 2016, pp. 5–18., doi:10.1177/0263395715612101

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

*Discourses of Popular Culture in International Relations*'.<sup>11</sup> Same as the first article, it agrees that international relations should not only open its eyes and ears for traditional dominant discourses such as realism, liberalism, neoliberalism, et cetera. This article used *Harry Potter* as a case study and it has more than enough proofs that popular culture could be analyzed to be used as a tool to understand international relations issues. Voldemort, the tyrannical, racist, and dictatorial villain in *Harry Potter* had been compared to past dictators in the real world like Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin. From this movie, even people could grasp and understand the concept without having to learn the traditional discourse. Nichuan Wang repetitively said that popular culture is not just mere entertainment, it can build consensus, norms and reflect global relations. In the conclusion, Wang added, when popular culture is contextualized it could be used to analyze international issues and that popular culture could also be used as a soft power to propagandize ideology.<sup>12</sup>

The last literature called '*Pop Goes IR? Researching the Popular Culture - World Politics Continuum*'. Grayson Kyle referenced several thinkers from cultural and post-colonial theorists like Adorno and Horkheimer (1997), Eagleton (2005), Harvey (1989) and Williams (1985) saying that popular culture is indivisible from politics as it is an important site where power, ideology, and identity are produced. This literature focused on developing popular culture as a subject of research in international

---

<sup>11</sup> Wang, Ningchuan. "The Currency Of Fantasy: Discourses Of Popular Culture In International Relations." *International Studies. Interdisciplinary Political and Cultural Journal*, vol. 15, no. 1, Jan. 2013, doi:10.2478/ipcj-2013-0002.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

relations. Building essential ground works for theoretical and analytical means of popular culture and world politics continuum. Researchers need to go beyond the illustrations of popular culture and analyze the political possibilities and outcomes from it. They argue that the spectacular growth of popular culture and how it circulates a lot faster with the help of internet makes world politics as it is.<sup>13</sup>

From the discussions of the articles above, the importance of popular culture to the study of international relations becomes more understandable. There are numerous to use pop culture as a tool to analyze real events in world politics. The first two journals mentioned used a series and a movie. The first one picked to dissect on gender issues as one of the topics of international relations studies to be analyzed from *Game of Thrones* series, and the other used the diplomatic aspects of JK Rowling's *Harry Potter* movie. This undergraduate thesis would like to use *Netflix's* online series *Black Mirror* to analyze global politics.

### **1.5 Theoretical Framework**

In the 21st century international relations, hard power does not dominate as much as it used to during the World War eras. One of the most influential non-state actor in the 21<sup>st</sup> century would be the media as it plays a big part in the international

---

<sup>13</sup> Grayson, Kyle, et al. "Pop Goes IR? Researching the Popular Culture—World Politics Continuum." *Politics*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2009, pp. 155–163., doi:10.1111/j.1467-9256.2009.01351.x.

system in this era of globalization and the internet.<sup>14</sup> Soft power is on the rise because it comes in a much more approachable and less intimidating way. The government has their own limitations that in some cases it might need the help of other non-state actors. Non-state actors include non-governmental organizations (NGOs), transnational corporations (TNCs), multinational corporations (MNCs) and the media.

In the international system individuals cannot be as powerful as states or any other actors in international relations like multinational companies and/or international organizations. Critical theory is one of international relations core theories that focused on the will to understand social developments of modern state and economic system in order to fight for individual freedom. In the modern discipline of IR, critical theorists from Frankfurt School, specifically Jürgen Habermas, emphasized on social emancipation as a principle to critique the global political order.<sup>15</sup> Andrew Linklater, followed through Habermas' thoughts and believed that critical theory is a tool for the powerless to advance in global affairs. Its aim is to accomplish human freedom through understanding that modernity is an unfinished project.<sup>16</sup> The loopholes in modern society and technology could be a way to achieve human freedom. Individuals in the international system could be a part of the media to raise voices and be heard.

---

<sup>14</sup> Haynes, Jeffrey, Peter Hough, Shanin Malik, and Lloyd Pettiford. "International Relations and Globalisation." In *World Politics: International Relations and Globalisation in the 21st Century*. 2nd ed. SAGE Publications, 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Ferreira, Marcos Farias. "Critical Theory." In *International Relations Theory*, 49-55. Bristol, England: E-International Relations Publishing, 2017. Accessed November 27, 2018. <https://www.e-ir.info/publication/international-relations-theory/>.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

In order to explain popular culture in international relations, critical theory would be the most fitting to use as a tool to answer the research question and reach the purposes of this undergraduate thesis. A diverse school of thought in international relations that served a critical analysis on aspects of social, intellectual and modern life. Emphasizing on one of critical theory's strongest point, the critique on the culture of modern society. It dismantles any form of social life that limits human freedom by believing in self-reflective theories rather than traditional forms of theorizing.<sup>17</sup> Critical theory focuses on cultural aspects that were often forgotten. The shift from economic to cultural focus caused by cultural domination in the modern society made culture more relevant.

Critical theory was strongly against capitalism as it ripped off individual freedom for the purpose of maximum profit that led to economic exploitation. In the modern society, although there might still be invisible classes that divide the blue and white collar workers, there had been major differences made to protect labor's rights. Exploitation in the modern society is intolerable but other variations of it appeared. The twenty-first century version of capitalism started with the industrial revolution. New and advanced technologies helped business owners find the most effective means of production. In many ways technology has changed the old economic system and

---

<sup>17</sup> Burchill, Scott, Andrew Linklater, Richard Davetak, Jack Donnelly, Matthew Patterson, Christian Reus-Smit, and Jacqui True. *Theories of International Relations*. 3rd ed. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. PDF.

eliminated job fields for the need of human labors. These kinds of technology are called as disruptive technology and it affect numerous industries.<sup>18</sup>

Nevertheless, Herbert Marcuse believed that technology is not neutral nor will it ever be as it is able to be used as a means of domination. Technology has the ability to control how individuals perceive things because of its one-dimensional platform, even though some technology could also be two-dimensional. Marcuse did not villainize technology but technology limits user's inner freedom. Back in 1970s mass communication researchers believed that critical theory provides a social political theory to the study of culture. It could help understand the complexity of media. Herbert Marcuse and Jurgen Habermas' theoretical enquiry emphasized the role of communication through the media and the struggle against bureaucracy.<sup>19</sup>

Media is not limited to traditional media like newspapers or the radio. In the twenty-first century, the media could be in all shapes and forms. Movies, series, podcasts, music, and many other forms of the media are used as a way to deliver a message. Therefore, the media is considered to be a powerful non-state actor in international relations. The media has three main roles which are shaping, mirroring, and representing. Media as a shaper means that media has the ability to influence and affect people in the society. Both media shaping and mirroring are linear to one another,

---

<sup>18</sup> Silverthorne, Sean. "How Technological Disruption Changes Everything." Harvard Business School Working Knowledge. May 29, 2001. Accessed December 19, 2018. <https://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/how-technological-disruption-changes-everything>.

<sup>19</sup> Seiler, Robert M. "Media Studies, Critical Theory, and Cultural Studies." University of Calgary. Accessed December 07, 2018. <https://people.ucalgary.ca/~rseiler/hardt.htm>.

but media mirroring does not necessarily try to influence anything. Mirroring is solely an act of reflecting. It shows that the content in the media are the ones that are trending in real life.<sup>20</sup>

The media opens plenty of new doors for international communication. International communication is any form of communication between government-to-government, business-to-business or people-to-people that happen across borders. The term international communication in the 21st century has changed to global communication as it covers a much bigger aspect. The change of name occurs in response to the globalization of communication that includes eroding barriers of space and time because of satellites and the internet.<sup>21</sup> Thus, the media expanded in ways traditional media users might have never thought of. Everything is only a click away if with the right gadget and internet connection. In result of this high accessibility and availability of information, people from all over the world could receive the same information, watch the same movies, listen to the same music and dress according to the ongoing trends at the same time. That shared information and knowledge become popular culture.

Popular culture is an aspect of social life that includes music, films, fashion, games, and everything else that are consumed largely by a group of people in their

---

<sup>20</sup> Hodkinson, Paul. *Media, Culture and Society: An Introduction*. 2nd ed. SAGE Publications.

<sup>21</sup> Hanson, Elizabeth C. "History of International Communication Studies." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*, 13 Dec. 2017, [internationalstudies.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.001.0001/acrefore-9780190846626-e-63](https://internationalstudies.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.001.0001/acrefore-9780190846626-e-63).



daily activities. Popular culture itself is delivered through mass media.<sup>22</sup> The internet and social media take part in spreading popular culture to the masses. International relations could not part ways with popular culture as the study itself is highly interrelated with culture. Popular culture is one of the things that people around the world could have in common and relate to. It creates a shared belief amongst people from different backgrounds.

Pop culture could help increase an understanding towards the inner workings of international relations through multiple types of fictions. Through multiple mediums, popular culture covers international relations core topics like war, politics, gender, race and representations. From there, pop culture in politics could also be used as a way to shift people's perspectives towards certain issues according to the interests of the creator. There had been plenty of movies made to serve propaganda purposes in the entertainment industry. The movie *Rambo: First Blood* played by Sylvester Stallone is a famous example of a propaganda movie made by the U.S. to shift people's perspective toward Vietnam War.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> "Pop Culture: An Overview." *Philosophy Now: a Magazine of Ideas*, [philosophynow.org/issues/64/Pop\\_Culture\\_An\\_Overview](http://philosophynow.org/issues/64/Pop_Culture_An_Overview).

<sup>23</sup> Mendelson, Scott. "'Rambo: First Blood Part II' Was The 'American Sniper' Of Its Day." *Forbes*. May 26, 2015. Accessed November 27, 2018. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/scottmendelson/2015/05/22/rambo-first-blood-part-ii-was-the-american-sniper-of-its-day/#7c86096b50b9>.

## **1.6 Research Method and Data Collection Technique**

A qualitative content analysis method will be used in this thesis. Qualitative content analysis allows researchers to understand social reality in a subjective as well as scientific manner. It could explore the underlying meanings through an examination of topics and themes. The use of qualitative content analysis is to exhibit the dimension of meanings of a phenomena and to describe the characteristics of message behind a content. Data collection through a qualitative content analysis method is found through analyzing the case study of the research itself and other past researches in relation to the topic. Other data will be collected by researching secondary data which includes books, journals, documents, and relevant online articles.<sup>24</sup>

## **1.7 Structure of the Study**

The structure of this research will be divided into five chapters. The first chapter will consist of the introduction into the issue regarding popular culture in international relations background, identification of the problem, limitations of the problem, formulation of the problem, objective and utility of the research, literature review, theoretical framework, research method and data collection technique and the structure of the study itself.

---

<sup>24</sup> Mayring, Philipp. "Forum: Qualitative Social Research." *Qualitative Content Analysis* 1, no. 2 (June 2000): 1-10. Accessed January 14, 2019.  
[http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/~kmacd/IDSC10/Readings/Readings/text analysis/CA.pdf](http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/~kmacd/IDSC10/Readings/Readings/text%20analysis/CA.pdf).

Chapter two will discuss popular culture in international relations and critical theory mentioned briefly in the theoretical framework.

Chapter three will discuss more on the Netflix series *Black Mirror*. It will be divided into two sub-chapters. In the two sub-chapters, it will discuss an introduction to *Black Mirror* and the episodes that are most related to international relations issues and world politics.

Chapter four will be analyzing the *Black Mirror* episodes and its correlation to international relations real events to prove the relationship between popular culture and international relations itself in order to reach the goal of the research.

Chapter five will be concluding the whole research and provide answers to the research question made in the first chapter.