**THEORY OF CULTURE**

**REACTION PAPERS—BEST OF 2021-22**

**Reaction Paper I: “The Squid Game: Why Is It So Popular?”**

**Antonia Antonakaki**

The Squid Game offers the spectacle of violence. Although the standard analysis of the series centers around capitalism, that is that it stands, as a whole, as a harsh criticism of the capitalistic system, I don’t think that this is the reason why it has become the most watched, at the moment, series of Netflix. The games included in the series are children’s traditional games, but in The Squid Game they are rendered brutal, as the players are literally eliminated from the game. We watch blood, heads cracking open, agony, angst, betrayal. Like the Hungers Games, there is an arena with people struggling to survive and be the sole victors. So, we watch it, Freud would say, because we also struggle against society and we are also rendered neurotic like the players because of the harsh society. Based on Freudian ideas again, we could also say that we watch it because we like violence, because it is an outlet for us, an alternative behaviour to the actual violence we could commit if we left our instincts unhinged. So, for Freud this show being watched is a way for society to stay sane, in a sense, to keep the balance.

It is also important to note that the show has received considerable focus because it is Korean, because it is non-European. Americans and Europeans say that it ‘’came out of nowhere’’. This is, in my view, problematic, and it is directly linked to our view of Asia, Korea here, as the Other. It’s like, ‘’Woah, who could have thought, *they* make good shows as well?’’. Although the show deserves the focus it gets (the aesthetics/settings are incredible, the actors are great), I think we should be aware of our view of it as a product of ‘’The Other’’, and how this affects our attitude and opinions towards it.

**Stelios Vagianos 1563201900015**

The first thing coming to mind is Freud’s theory of the Id and that of Fray Bartolome de Las Casas’s writings (Otherisation).

Freud’s theory of the Id, of our primal desires, can be applied not only to the show itself, but to the viewers. The Squid Game is currently the most watched show worldwide despite its cruelty and raw imagery. It is, however, not popular “despite” this, but because of it.

Society, our super-ego, does not allow us to participate or indulge in such acts of violence and selfishness. However, we need a way to painlessly indulge in these primitive instincts and watching a show where our most animalistic needs are met is the reason why such a broad audience has been drawn to The Squid Game.

As for the theory of Otherness, this can be seen within the show this time. The rich who created the game view the contestants as objects, no different than racing horses on which they bet. (There is a scene in particular where a bidder is disappointed after a player died, because he lost his bet. Not sad, just disappointed about losing money). The dehumanization of the participants also extends to the fact that they have been given, and are referred to using, numbers.

Coming back to Freud, now examining the participants, we can see that when they realize there are no societal rules to stop them, their super-ego “fails” in a way and they give into the selfish instincts that are governed by the Primal Id. Those few characters within the show that hold on to their super-ego and try to remain sociable fail the game and are eliminated in the end.

Finally, if we are to apply Freud’s theory once again, we could refer to a psychotic society which has an over-abundance of the Thanatos instinct. That can be said about the society within the show, as a game of death with dehumanized participants who are treated like betting material can only be considered a sign of a psychotic society.

**Aikaterini Kapralou** **1563201900069**

In “The Squid Game”, we follow several hundred poor, in debt people who are driven to compete in children’s games with the hope that, by risking their lives, they will win millions of dollars. Everyone in the island of the games, from the players to the workers and the VIPS, is Otherized – they are encouraged not to see each other as people but as enemies, shapes and numbers.

All of the players are stripped of their clothes, personal items and names. They are dressed identically and have to use their numbers as their names. They are players, not people. That is why when the players share their names with each other it’s a revolution against the system. They say, “Hey, I’m a person.” By knowing each other’s names, by resisting dehumanization, their deaths become harsher – Sang-Woo’s betrayal doesn’t kill Players 199, it kills Ali, a husband and a father, a person with a family just like Sang-Woo.

Similarly, the workers are all assigned shapes and they are not allowed to show their faces. The players are encouraged to see them as enemies, which is why when this “Othering” fails in episode 2 and the worker taken hostage by the player shows his face, the player can’t kill him. He can no longer “Other” the worker, and can’t bring himself to kill a human being. The worker, however, dies regardless – because for them, resisting “Otherization” and dehumanization makes them useless to the powers that be.

Finally, the VIPS are explicitly said to see the players as race horses, even putting them in numbered labels during the fifth game. The rich and powerful can only bring themselves to cruelly enjoy the suffering of the poor by reducing them to numbers and animals. The room they watch from even includes humans used as furniture, like the woman on all fours acting as a table. Yet the VIPS themselves are in animal masks, implying that by treating people like this they have lost their humanity.

We see, then, how throughout the show “Otherization” and dehumanization is used by those in power to absolve themselves of their guilt. To them, this isn’t real people suffering for their entertainment, it’s numbers and shapes. Through this process, and through the “divide and conquer” method of pitting the players against the workers, the VIPS ensure the continuation of the status quo and their own sick entertainment. As the show makes no attempt to hide its critique of capitalism, it is my belief that seeing a heightened version of their own struggles is what made the show appeal to so many people.

**Elisavet Aslanian 1563201900013**

According to Freud, all people are seeking pleasure. In order to achieve satisfaction, someone can either opt for ways to feel happy or produce a system in which they could avoid dissatisfaction. He also suggested that culture, even though was once manufactured to protect individuals, it is in fact, a contract against our instincts. Thus, it pressures us.

The T.V. show “The Squid Game” became so popular because it is a kind of palliative measure for people to gain happiness momentarily, without being displeased by guilt. When someone watches others getting murdered, they unconsciously gratify their aggression-driven instincts. Nevertheless, they have done nothing themselves which would otherwise be considered a crime.

Moreover, it is a way for the viewers to identify themselves with the protagonist and his race towards both survival and affluence. It also takes away the sense of responsibility towards other civilians. It suggests that it is not someone’s fault if others are ‘dying’ as long as they succeed. ‘Death’ can be a metaphor for a person losing her/his job or facing health issues.

The reason behind the show’s popularity could be the freedom it subconsciously provides to the mediocre woman/man to, not only strive for more, but to also be ignorant to others’ fate. For Freud, this is how cultural mechanisms function. In this manner, people become civilized at the prize of sacrificing their primitive instinct for the predictability of experiencing small and momentary, but more frequent, pleasures. The show grants the satisfaction of people’s inner aggression instinct, giving them the pleasure they, at that time, desire.

Overall, Freud noted that since culture suppresses our innate inclinations, we feel intense anxiety. Civilized individuals need to renounce their primal urges and nature to be accepted. This stifle of emotions will cause anxiety and for people to cope, they need to find ways to release the tension. One way to do so is by watching a series like “The Squid Game”.

**Aggeliki-Christina Gerogiorgi 1563201900028**

The Squid Game is a Netflix series that can be criticized through cultural theories. Initially, The Squid Game has a lot in common with De Las Casas text, specifically, the Strong against the Weak motif (Europeans - Native Americans). The Strong wear red (dominance colour) and the Weak green (weak colour). Furthermore, they were treated like animals or, even worse, like toys. They killed them without guilt, just because they are poor (so basically it is like they do not exist). Native Americans also were treated like this because they were something different from the Europeans (culture clash). The game part is also interesting and similar. The “Reds” do not intend to kill, but rather to make fun of the people, thus they put them into a position of playing games but with increased stress on the id (Freud), because if they lose, they die. They amuse themselves via torture as Europeans did to N. Americans.

The games themselves are children’s games and that makes participants even more inferior, (for Reds Greens are toys, anything but not humans). They make them into ‘others’, something different than them, to normalize their actions. Interestingly enough, they kill them shortly after their loss because they do not want to hear their screams, voices etc and feel guilty (or their logical arguments), same as in De Las Casas’s text.

**Ermioni Avgoustoglou 1563201900014**

The Squid Game, a brand-new Netflix show that has over 111 million viewers worldwide on the edge of their seat, is well-known for its gruesome and gory scenes in which people fight in a death game. But why is this show so popular? Why would 111 million Netflix viewers want to witness a gory and bloody show like this?

The answer to this question can be found in the very essence of the human mind, namely what Freud called the “id”. The “id” is driven by two forces: Thanatos and libido. These two are subdued by the mind’s superego, namely all the imposed social rules, that are so integrated in people’s minds that affect how they behave. The id’s libido and Thanatos are all the human primal instincts. More precisely, the Thanatos drive is the human primal desire to eliminate whoever stands in your way to achieve your goals. This is exactly what happens in The Squid Game. Contestants are killing each other in order to be the last one standing and finally win the cash prize. This way, viewers witness something that they cannot perform in real life, a killing game. Since this kind of game cannot be played in the real world, it seems very exciting and provoking to the viewer. It is only a fantasy, so their id is relieved without performing the atrocity. Furthermore, The Squid Game portrays a world of disorder, anarchy, everyone can kill whenever they want the other contestants. This way, the libido drive of the mind of the viewer is also relieved and satisfied by experiencing the disordered society of a death-game, without actually participating in it and thus destroying the real society they live in.

By watching this show, viewers break the primal taboo of murder and thus satisfy their id. Consequently, people’s neurosis because of the repression that civilization causes them as it represses their basic instincts, is in a way cured during the hour they watch the episode. For this reason, this show offers a major satisfaction to whoever watches it.

**Christina Papageorgiou (1563201700140)**

The Squid Game is a new TV show that has become a sensation among the public all around the world. There is good reason why this show has become so popular among us apart from its good production, acting, and the characters.

The first reason I can think of, and probably the most important one is the fact that, as a show with raw violence, it satisfies our deepest and darkest instincts and desires, and provides an opportunity for our id to come out, play, and relax from being oppressed during parts of its lifetime. Our super-ego and our culture’s super-ego prohibit us from committing murder or taking another human being’s soul. However by watching this show, we get absorbed and put ourselves in this “survival-of-the-fittest” situation.

On the other hand, in a very twisted and disturbing way, it provides a mirror image or our cultures and societies, and the way they behave towards one another. There is no denying that putting people with shared characteristics in an “arena” and asking them to compete against each-other in order to keep their lives and earn money, is not going to lead to them forming teams and working together. On the contrary, it is going to create chasms between them and turn them against each other. This concept is something that we have seen before during colonisations, where the settlers have turned the natives against each other in order to make their job easier. Now, I haven’t watched “The Squid Game” yet, however I’ve heard that the participants of these games are not only poor, lower-class people, but also former prisoners. Be that the case or not, this group of people is still almost always considered a burden by the powerful members of society, so it makes perfect sense that such a scheme would be developed so that the powerful rid themselves off that burden in an easy way, with no blood on their hands, simply by appearing as a saviour who is going to give the winner a chance at a better life.

On the surface, “The Squid Game” may appear as another TV show that features gore and an original plot, but it underlines problems that society still has to solve, and that have been around for centuries.

**Aurora Aliko 1563201900006**

The Squid Game has become so popular because it allows us to identify both with the players and the creators of the game. According to Freud, the human mind consists of the conscious, subconscious and the unconscious part. The latter’s mechanism is the ID which has two principles: Eros and Thanatos. Maybe, the TV show is popular because we see players that are forced to act based on their ID which contains their fears, desires etc. Another mechanism of our mind is the superego which is related to the social norms we have to follow. However, the superego doesn’t exist in this game. This is a game that has no rules or civilization because people act based on their instincts. The show takes advantage of our need to react against culture and its neurosis and offers us an experience of being ‘ID driven’. We identify with the players because we also wish to disobey social norms and act based on our instincts (ID). We feel as if we too can kill and eat whoever we want. The more ID driven we are the more chances we have to win.

On the other hand, some viewers may identify with the rich people who supposedly invented this game. These people turn players against each other and enjoy watching them die. This may be related to the fact that most people would rather oppress than be oppressed. By dividing players, like the colonizers did, it’s easier for the creators to oppress them. History has taught us how painful the experience of being the ‘other’ is and that’s why we enjoy seeing them die. We want to identify with the rich people and tell ourselves that we are better than the players because we would never participate in the game.

This show is also popular because it reminds us of the real world and the years of colonization. We cannot forget what has happened because of the Invisible Bullets that go both ways (oppressed and oppressors). In the same way, players will never be the same after this experience. They have all changed and the effects of the game (just like colonization) are still visible and long lasting.

Therefore, this show is popular because it is based on our natural instincts as well as the experience of the real world.

**Reaction Paper Il: “Eurovision: An Analysis”**

**Eirini Vitsaxaki (1563201900021)**

The original concept of Eurovision was to unite the countries of the European Union. To give them something similar to talk about, to bond.

However, it is obvious that Eurovision is not about accepting the differences between each nation but instead making everyone similar to the other, since more and more countries now present songs in English or use pop sounds and themes similar to the ones people liked in the previous years to have more chances to win. This is what Adorno was talking about when he said society and culture aspire to make everyone the same.

Another thing he was right about, even prophetic we could say, is how social media manage to manipulate the audience. Eurovision is a striking example of the above since television and social media have the role of the advertiser mentioning the event over and over again, discussing the songs, the styling of each artist, making an essentially meaningless event a huge deal. This leads the majority of people to get interested and start watching it as well. And suddenly, other major problems seem meaningless in front of who has the best song or who is the most well-dressed.

Manipulation can also happen through the songs presented in the event, since sometimes they refer to issues such as patriarchy, immigration, love, politics, racism etc. However, this whole event cannot make someone essentially happy. It is just a temporary pleasure to distract the audience from their everyday lives, to make them engaged with more trivial things for a while giving them, at the same time, the impression they are happy.

Finally, like Adorno had also said, events like this, just like movies and soap operas often try to speak to the audience presenting characters that resemble them. That way, it is extremely usual to listen to songs about ordinary people from ordinary people who go through difficulties, who were once poor and sad. That way, people feel connected to the songs and the performers and feel happy for their lives.

**Eirini Dipla (1563201900045)**

Every good European citizen that respects themselves knows of the song contest Eurovision. Flashy performances and songs that trigger happiness enter our miserable homes every year to give us a sense of happiness and exciting anticipation.

Through the years, this song contest has changed quite dramatically. Even though songs and performances used to be somewhat unique and creative, sharing each country’s culture with the rest, performances now are repetitive and utterly boring. Based on giving people cheap pleasure and happiness with an expiration date, the entertainment politics behind it proves how this is just another form of work in the industry of gaining profit. Profit that is earned under the disguise of sharing culture and promoting peace (while also allowing imperialists and terrorists, e.g. Israel, in the contest) to the wide audience. Every year, mass-produced songs with no distinct sound and, either sappy meaning about the singer’s unfortunate life events or cheerful lyrics that get stuck in your head for the next decade, performances and appearances that resemble each other are viewed to us and we play the role of the judge. Artists are degraded and simply views as products, while individuality and originality are nowhere to be seen. Of course, with the aid of social media this fest influences our lives for whole weeks, and manufactured happiness, pre-shaped by the industry, is ready to be served to us, who lack critical skills and await momentarily happiness to ease our daily routines.

To quote Adorno, “the pop has destroyed every sense of culture” and has rendered high class “unfashionable”, as Eurovision, which is rubbish deliberately produced by those with power for those with no power, is merely just another business.

**Maira Katsianou (1563202000280)**

To participate in Eurovision or not? This question for most countries is a definite Yes. But why? What does this contest signify? Does it supply us with food for thought or is it just an illusion of entertainment to fulfill our unhappiness as Adorno would say?

As for Adorno, Eurovision is a product of cultural industry. What a paradox. It nurtures consumerism through the media and advertising. Eurovision does not nurture our souls. It is an impoverishment of aesthetic matter. It is art in a commodity, where the culture is a homogenized one. All participants use the same language for songs, due to globalization. It creates a state of mind where there is desire for pleasure- endless entertainment. Singers, as Adorno would say are anti-heroic characters and the audience are the docile people who follow- who are satisfied by the special effects of a performance or the intriguing singer.

However, Eurovision is not only just culture industry or entertainment politics, where uniformity and a remote system are the goal to achieve consumption. According to Barthes, it could also be the connotation of how countries are in constant competition. It is not about which song should win; the whole competition is defined by submerging political, economic connotations. The dynamic culture dictates its significance. If we analyze the syntax of it, Barthes would say that we view a reality where qualities are sold so as to manage the psyche of the audience.

Eurovision can also be seen from a different perspective. It is the result, as Williams would say, of the residual value of past organizations into the present. Nonetheless, many claim that it is a programme of inferior quality, just ridiculing much and each country’s heritage as the countries do not depict their own identity but a more appealing one to the dominant culture, that is pop culture. In a way, singers are part of the system, deprived of their voice- attempting to express their creativity but the dominant authoritative culture that dictates that money is the mere goal, deters them from being themselves.

To sum up, I acknowledge the fact that Eurovision is an international contest and that there is an audience that adores this programme. To my mind, yes, we can accept what is offered to us for our pleasure- but we should always have a critical eye and avoid getting brainwashed.

**Antonia Antonakaki (1563202000273)**

The Eurovision song contest ‘’begs’’ to be analyzed through the ideas of Roland Barthes. Barthes studied the mythology that pervades everyday life, the semiotics of everyday life. What is interesting about Eurovision is that it was established as another peace-keeping institution, after WWW II. The idea appears wholesome: European nations joining every year through music in a contest. Music is to bring us together, to show how we are more than our differences. All that is very wholesome, but Barthes would disagree. If we are to analyze Eurovision based on his ideas, then the whole innocent competition becomes a battlefield. We might not have an actual war among us, but for one day, each year, we have a symbol for one. Like in actual war, there are alliances: Greece votes for Cyprus, Sweden for Norway, and nobody likes Britain. The message we get is that of unity and solidarity. The myth though, what is really behind all that, is that of a European war. Next year, there is going to be an American version, as well. I think this will be another very fertile field for semiotic analysis based on Barthes’ ideas.

It would also be interesting to approach Eurovision from a Horkheimer-Adorno point of view. The song contest is, without a doubt, pop culture. Each year we get the same thing, and there is a reason why people complain that all songs are the same. The formula is standardized, because apparently that is what the target audience likes, so the producers can very well claim that they simply serve the needs of the audience. In the end we all watch and enjoy this very standard process. Adorno would say that we become complacent because of it, that we learn how to also abandon our individuality, that we learn to accept content uncritically. If that’s dangerous, and bringing the two theories together, then could we say that not only does Eurovision make up for the lack of actual war, but also that it neutralizes us, that it makes us forget about the actual war that is global politics?

**Angeliki-Christina Gerogiorgi (1563201900028)**

The Eurovision song contest is a contest between many European (mainly) countries for the best song. The idea behind Eurovision was for countries to make songs that represent their country in the best way possible and offer a beautiful aesthetic result. As the years passed, Eurovision became a victim of globalization, mimesis and of course politics. As Horkheimer and Adorno stated, art cannot be non- political at all, so many songs throughout the years have been political (e.g. Ukraine's song “1944” which also won first place) and they succeeded through that aspect but others like Greece’s entries of 1995 and 1976 e.g. were not successful in passing to Europe the messages they wanted.

Eurovision also is a show of low culture for various reasons. First of all, the staging is more important than the song itself. Countries are spending every year lots of money for dancers, clothes, special effects etc and are not focusing on the song itself which of course should be the main concern. Most of the times the winner songs are mainstream especially after the 80’s and predictable (of course there are exceptions e.g. Norway’s entry 1995) Secondly, the critics are objective and promote certain countries, not to mention the televoting which is mostly a take and give operation between neighboring countries. Eurovision on the other hand, has some good things to offer. Although it promotes dominant culture patterns (as per Raymond Williams), it also give viewers the opportunity to see beyond their culture. Very often alternative or even residual cultural patterns are shown and bring awareness to viewers (e.g. taboo issues: Conchita’s win (2014) or Dana International’s win (1998) and also different music genres (e.g. slavic songs, yodelling etc).

**Andreas Kalogriopoulos (1563201900067)**

The Eurovision Song Contest began after WWII as a way to unite a broken-up Europe via music. Since the ’50s many countries have joined and withdrawn and music as well as stage presentation have evolved and changed dramatically.

With new technologies (e.g. LED screens) and a will to give a showstopping performance, Eurovision has become something more than merely songs. Now along with singing, the costumes, dancing, lights, smoke machines and overall weird performances are also assessed in order to decide the winner and/or the successful entries.

Nowadays, for better or for worse, with all the above in mind, as well as 40+ songs being released each year for the sole purpose of participating in the ESC, we could observe a phenomenon of production of mass art, mass culture that has gone to become an industry. Eurovision is heavily capitalized nowadays and Horkheimer and Adorno could argue how this contest is a part of an industry of culture, producing standardized, mass, pop culture; in its turn, this standardized culture produces standardized people. Attesting to that are millions of Europeans tuning in to watch Eurovision every year and listen to -more or less- the same songs with a definitely pop beat and rhythm. We know what we expect to listen to, almost every single song is something non-memorable and generic, yet we still enjoy them. Because -based on the industry of culture theory- we have so much exposure to that kind of musical culture that we’re accustomed to it and we end up finding it amusing; this standardized kind of music, although repetitive, attracts us every time, as if it were something new and unique. But that is normal because capitalism profits off of this kind of industry, so why would someone try to convince us it’s wrong or that we’ve become standardized ourselves?

Although I think we can sometimes relax and enjoy easy to comprehend produced art, we can draw information from theoreticians and see how capitalism has industrialized music, and a concept which started to unite people. We can see how now it doesn’t unite us really, but rather creates uniform people.

**Chrysa Vlachouli (1563201900024)**

The Eurovision Song Contest taking place every year in a European country is a musical competition that is supposed to strengthen the bonds of European nations and unify its people. If someone were to look at Eurovision and analyze it from Barthes’ point of view, its cultural significance would become apparent. Despite the constant infighting and disagreements between elected officials, despite countries having very heightened tensions, Eurovision is the one time in a year where, almost, all of Europe, plus some political allies, come together to enjoy a musical spectacle unlike any other. While European citizens are the main target audience, it still shows non-Europeans how united and content with each other “we” are. Two countries could be one step away from war yet the contest acts as a parade to showcase European greatness to both its citizens and to foreigners.

Additionally, the idea that Eurovision promotes each country’s culture is also simply visuals. Just like Williams proposed, the dominant western pop culture constantly overpowers original culturally rich entries. With few exceptions each year, most participants present low effort pop songs with repetitive lyrical themes. One the other side of the spectrum you have songs that are connected to different cultures yet far less countries take that approach. And it is quite funny as “counter-culture” participations do not necessarily perform worse, but unfortunately people prefer to put out safer options than options that would make them stand out, out of fear of being ridiculed.

**Reaction Paper IlI: “Santa Claus” or “The Rise of the # Movements”**

**Chrysa Vlachouli (1563201900024)**

With the rise of social media usage by all social groups internationally, the idea of having endless information on an issue with just one click seems very interesting. And that is exactly what hashtags aim to do. Instead of having to go out of your way to hear what other normal folk think about a certain subject you can just click on a word that showed up on your social media feed. Combining this with the recent rise in interest in social justice you have the perfect tool for online activism. If we look at this from Weber’s perspective, it reminds us of how people try to escape the iron cage by using cage logic and tools. That is not to say that hashtags like #metoo or #BLM are not helpful in raising awareness on their respective issues but more so that it only scratches the surface of deeply-rooted problems. While large masses of people engage with these “activism” hashtags, very few take more practical action to dismantle the oppressive systems that are upheld by capitalism.

Noting where such hashtags are more popular is also interesting. A lot of these hashtags like #BlackLivesMatter or #StopAsianHate come from America. Thinking back to Szklarski and the hatred that people globally, including Americans themselves, hold for America, it is no surprise that online posts relating to racial or gendered injustice are filled with aggression. America paints itself as a progressive paradise, where all are free and equal, yet time and time again it fails to live up to that expectation.

**Aikaterini Kampoli (1563201800277)**

Santa Claus has been a predominant figure for more than a century in Christmas days. Even though many people believe it is a religious figure (it has its roots in religion) it is more a figure created by American capitalism and consumerism. The myths and legends of the world have been cancelled by the Coca-Cola company, who was actually the creator of Santa Claus form as we know it today. The fat kind old man, wearing that silly red suit was originally created for the soft drink commercials and it dominated the world. It is no accident that his uniform is in the exact same red color as the bottle of our “favourite” drink. Even though we have in front of us a product, the matter of issue here is more the factors that made it dominate. It sells the dream of Christmas, the happy lifestyle, the life we want to have, which none of it is real. It is a fake American dream sold and a way to promote the consumption of products, besides the soft drink. The authority is dominating here not through politics but through the promotion of the dogma more goods lead to more money and at the end less humanity. The modern world celebrates Santa Claus and Christmas, but loses the real spirit of Christmas. What is presented as exceptional, is nothing but an iron cage, in which many are trapped and unable to see it anymore. We feel obliged to follow, we make choices that we think are our own, but in reality are what culture has imposed on us, and it is difficult to see the deception since we are born and raised thinking that deception is real.

**Evangelia- Nefeli Drosou (1563201900050)**

Santa Claus is a prolific figure that’s been around for centuries, with each culture having its own rendition of the man who lives in the North Pole and manages to deliver goods to all the nice children of the world in one night. But why, when we have St. Nicolas in the Netherlands and Agios Vasilios in Greece, is the Santa Claus in the Coca-Cola advertisement the first thing that comes to mind when someone mentions him? Well, the answer to that question can be found in the origin of that version of Santa Claus.

This version of Santa wasn’t born in a small village in Cappadocia or by grandmothers telling their grandchildren stories in villages in Europe. It was born and more fittingly, created by Americans, in America for Coca-Cola, so they would drive up their sales during the holidays. So, what did Santa have to do with a sugary beverage? Absolutely nothing is the answer. But I believe that it was precisely the fact that this Santa was created in America that catapulted him into stardom across the world.

The red-clothed, bearded chubby old man we all know as Santa is the epitome of what Stephen Fender calls “American exceptionalism”. America’s a nation driven by capitalism and technology and considers itself exceptional because of that. It’s more so a belief rather than a fact, as all things in culture are, but America thinks of itself as such and so it has signified itself. And of course, that’s why we have this Santa, who didn’t exist before the 20th century and in the span of a decade, he became the only known rendition. Americans thought of their culture, their version of things as superior to Europe’s and the rest of the world’s, and that is exactly how they marketed their version of Santa Claus. For Americans there never was any other Santa; as Fender stated, they based their exceptionalism on them being pure, because they were cut off from Europe. And their Santa Claus wasn’t like the European, who was not chubby and all-merry; he was American, exceptional with always a laugh and a belly full of food. He was a true American.

And because of the power they had, their belief of themselves as exceptional; Coca-Cola and America as a whole, imposed through capitalism *that Santa* to the entire world, with now children in India paying for a Coca-Cola so they’ll fell the exceptional American Christmas spirit that Coca-Cola sells for 1 euro a bottle. Those historical conjectures that were seen through this lens of culture significance and created American exceptionalism, all add up to the Santa in the Coca-Cola truck who bring gifts to the whole world- from America of course.