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## Making Multicultural Television:

A production study of NRK's *Norsk-ish* and the *17* series universe

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## Abstract

NRK aims to reconnect with the younger generation, more specifically with a multicultural background, through new and innovative drama productions. The comedy-drama, *Norsk-ish*, and the countdown-drama, the *17* series universe, aims to reach the part of the Norwegian population who grew up having to juggle between two cultures. This master's thesis is a production study investigating NRK's strategies in targeting a younger audience with a multicultural background, and how *Norsk-ish* and the *17* series universe are created to tell a real and relatable story through the characters, setting and plot. Through a mixed-method approach of interviews with key production personnel, close textual analysis of key scenes from both productions, and document analysis of working papers provided by project managers at NRK, this paper discovers significant use of double storytelling and close collaboration between series creators and the target audience the content is created for. This thesis discovers the plot is often framed in Stuart Hall's concept of "the West and the Rest", however, the discourse gets challenged through the perspective that everyone is the same with the same everyday problems. Furthermore, the research supports NRK's ambitions to create more niche-oriented productions to reach specific audience groups, while also being able to reach wider groups outside the targeted group, which is important to their obligations as a public service broadcaster.





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Jar, May 2023.

Cindy Yu Xia



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## 1 Introduction

Everything starts and ends with history. Diversity is a wide practice, and it is about perspective, experiences, insight, and shapes our view of the world. Without diversity, we will all end up in an echo chamber where the same kind of people would agree with each other on everything. Diverse content for a diverse population, it requires a diverse organization who can feature new voices. The examples NRK portrays as a public service broadcaster have inspired many and demonstrates that when the focus is on diversity, they are able to achieve more than that.

For this master's thesis, I would like to investigate original produced content by Norsk Rikskringkasting (NRK) targeting the younger audience living in Norway with a multicultural ethnic background. After the success of the young drama series, *SKAM*, which included a girl wearing a hijab, NRK has continued to produce more content targeting teenagers and young adults with the goal of reaching a wider range of the Norwegian population. As new ways of finding content in contemporary contexts are continuing to emerge rapidly, NRK must repeatedly come up with new ideas and concepts to keep up with the ever-evolving younger generation. For instance, well-known publishing companies, such as Marvel Comics, have noticed that diversity has become an attractive topic within customer consumption (Barlok 2017, 2). Thus, resulting in how Marvel went from the traditional blue-eyed superhero with blonde hair to a teenage Muslim superhero in the comic called *Ms. Marvel*, which was later released as a television series. This trend of multicultural representation suggests a shift in modern production cultures and will be further discussed in this thesis.

What I find interesting is the variety of series and documentaries that has been produced in recent years with a means of both entertaining and informing the younger audience (Sundet 2020, 73), e.g., *Norsk-ish* and the *17* series universe. The drama series, *Norsk-ish*, features three young adults with multicultural backgrounds living in Oslo, where they are experiencing the challenges of living between two different cultures (Thorvik 2020). Furthermore, another drama series by NRK that stands out, the *17* series universe. It is a series that revolves around the youth where the number of the series' name is the age of the characters. In other words, season 1 is called *17*, because the main character is 17 years old, and the fourth season is called *19*, because the main character is 19 years old. The *17* series universe focuses on young people attending high school in Oslo with a foreign background and the challenges they face when wanting to fit in (Rostad 2021).

In this research, my goal is to do a deep dive into content that is originally produced by NRK, as in not bought from another production company, also called external productions (Sundet 2021, 7), and investigate how they are using their productions as a way of telling a story to reach a specific group of young people with a multicultural background. For that reason, I want to conduct a production study on the drama series, *Norsk-ish* and the *17* series universe. It would be interesting to explore how NRK aligned their textual output and strategies into a production. Moreover, a production study would be necessary to further investigate how the film and television industry are contributing to shed light on other cultures apart from the “main country” itself. As a Norwegian-born woman with Chinese parents myself, I found comfort in watching and observing the characters from these drama series produced by NRK, which therefore inspired me wanting to further research and explore the public service broadcaster’s thought-process in creating these kinds of series to reach the minority groups in today’s Norwegian society.

In addition, there is a lack of research in the production study field in aiming for multicultural representation, thus increasing my motivation to contribute to this research area as these kinds of debates have actively been highlighted in recent years. Also, there is only a handful of content produced by the public broadcaster covering this topic. Therefore, further motivates this research to shed light on the gaps of multicultural representation. It is still seen as an overlooked topic of discussion in the media and entertainment industry. One could argue that it is perhaps a topic the industry is trying to avoid considering once this debate comes to light, it will not go back behind the curtains.

### 1.1 The research questions and structure of this thesis

Two sub-questions will guide this master’s thesis to answer the main research question. First, how is NRK using the plot, the characters, and the situation these characters are in to portray and tell a relatable story to a multicultural audience? Second, what strategies is NRK using to approach a youth targeted audience with a multicultural background? In response to these sub-questions this research aims to address how NRK’s drama series *Norsk-ish* and the *17* series universe are produced to reach a younger audience with a multicultural background.

To fill the research gaps presented in the introduction, the structure of this thesis has two main parts. The first part situates the context of my research, and the second part holds the analysis and my substantive findings. In the following chapter, the literature review (chapter 2) will introduce the field of production studies and combine perspectives with various scholarly approaches. Furthermore, the theoretical framework (chapter 3) distinguishes the academic

context for this thesis. Chapter 4 will present my methodological choices in conducting this research. Entering the second part of the thesis, the analysis (chapter 5) presents a mixed-method approach to investigate NRK's strategies and process producing a series targeting a young and multicultural audience. Chapter 6 provides a discussion, pulling together the main topics from the analysis, and finally, in chapter 7, I will shortly point out the main findings while suggesting further research in this field of study.

## 2 Literature and background of what we know so far

As mentioned in the introduction, previous research has been conducted in connection with similar matters, such as in film and comics. However, there is limited research on multicultural television dramas, especially in public service television.

The literature review will start to explore previous research in production studies to build a foundation of the field and connect it to current production cultures influenced by today's media landscape. Furthermore, relevant history of television broadcasting in Norway should be addressed and how NRK's teen drama series, *SKAM*, succeeded at reaching the younger audience, including the multicultural audience, through their choices of storytelling and strategy frameworks. As social media has had a significant impact on the younger generation's everyday life, we must understand how this influences fictional drama production for the public broadcaster to reach a younger audience. Finally, I will contextualize various concepts and discourses that are relevant for the analysis that will be conducted later in this thesis.

### 2.1 History of early production study traditions

The research field of production studies does not have a long history compared to others. In fact, it was formed into its own study through filling research gaps in other fields of the media industry across academic disciplines (Mayer, Banks, and Caldwell 2009, 6). For that reason, it is important to build an understanding of the field. As this thesis will mostly focus on more current production study traditions, the production research conducted before the World Wide Web 2.0 is essential to unearth the change in production culture. To put my production study into the perspective of modern production traditions, the next subchapters will address a few early works by production scholars who have brought value to the field historically, but also, for future researchers.



The study begins with investigating the term “producer” and what it means in the category of media practitioners (Mayer, Banks, and Caldwell 2009, 7). Through a lens of “auteur” studies, film and television producers are perceived as “authors” of their creative work. The notion of producers has been challenged through several approaches to understand the impact they have on social environments. Horace Newcomb and Paul M. Hirsch (2000) discuss television as a cultural forum, in which television does not exist in its own realm and is separated from citizens’ influence. When thinking of creating projects of cultural value, every producer has a goal of making a difference, and by creating that difference, wanting to distinguish themselves for broadcasters and program buyers (Newcomb and Hirsch 2000, 568). Newcomb shows how the most powerful producers achieve success by including personal ideas into their projects and using television as a medium of personal expression (Newcomb and Alley 1983; Newcomb and Hirsch 2000, 568).

Early production study traditions pay close attention to production as lived experiences and focus on how everyday experiences influence, impact and inform the creative work of the producer. Stephen Zafirau (2009) observed how film producers represent themselves in the public eye to gain an understanding of why producers make their decisions. Zafirau argues that “the audience” is a socially constructed idea and that this notion perhaps only exists in a producers’ imagination (Zafirau 2009; Mayer, Banks, and Caldwell 2009, 191). What is suggested in this research is an idea that the audience does not get what they want from producers, but the content is simply guesses of audience demands that producers gather. However, Newcomb and Hirsch suggest that every interpretation of television content people make could be different even though communication depends on shared understanding of meaning (Newcomb and Hirsch 2000, 569).

Lynn Spigel (1992) raises important questions about how television became such a part of our everyday lives and how the arrival of the mass medium changed people’s daily routines (Spigel 1992, 2). Television content creates debate and discussion, thus exploring popular media as a medium of cultural debate is essential in the field of production studies, especially in my research on television’s impact on the younger generation. Supporting Zafirau’s argument, cultural change tends to happen in unstable power hierarchies who need to continuously reaffirm their authority through, for instance, television (Spigel 1992, 8). It is important to remember that everything that is portrayed on television does not necessarily reflect the public’s view explicitly, and therefore, mass media’s assumptions of the public can be inaccurate at times (Marchand 1985; Spigel 1992, 8). Although Spigel’s work is primarily

concerned with feminist approaches to television, her work demonstrates a significant framework of television's impact in popular culture and its function of modernity in the home.

Philip R Schlesinger's (1975) research of the production of BBC news is important in the field of production studies as he examines a specific institution and the contrasts between producers' own discourse and the official institutional rhetoric. His research focuses on different modes of organizational control at BBC. Thus, it is important to take note of the everyday shift in production because of its impact on the organizational power and planning structure at the institution (Schlesinger 1975, 32). Schlesinger's work suggests a certain lack of public service terms in the common discourse of BBC production staff (Schlesinger 1975, 164). However, this does not necessarily mean that public service broadcaster's values are absent, but rather that, in some instances, public service terms would not be implemented into the creative work of a producer. The general problem of how broadcasting stations are controlled, as stated in Schlesinger's research, is interesting when looking at how NRK operates in their divisions for youth productions today, something that will be explored further in this literature review.

These early works of production studies demonstrate the timelessness of the research field as it suggests a means of interrogating broader cultural debates. Questions around the producer are central and essential in relation to genre, institutions, and other connecting factors. It builds a bridge of understanding where production studies come from and how the field has evolved together with the changing online digital culture. In the next paragraphs, I will cover the field of current production cultures, more specifically surrounding public service broadcasting in Norway.

## 2.2 Production study cultures in Norway

Streaming is here to stay in today's media landscape and has had a significant impact on the television industry (Sundet 2021, 2). Previous relationships between the viewer and broadcast television must be left behind as new ones are being formed with streaming. In Sundet's (2021) book about television drama and digital production cultures, the head of external productions at NRK, Petter Wallace, compares the relationship between audience and television with 'love affairs' and argues that the affairs between audience and broadcast television are not ending, but rather, the relationship is experiencing challenges that must be taken seriously (Wallace 2015; Sundet 2021, 2). His main point, which is relevant to this thesis, is that today's public service television productions require new drama strategies, especially when it comes to

reaching out to younger and wider audiences that are influenced by the online streaming culture, which has become a threat to traditional media.

As this research will be exploring what current NRK productions are doing to reach out to a younger audience, more specifically with a multicultural background, we must establish how the production culture has developed over recent years, as well as how production studies have evolved since the production study traditions discussed in the previous paragraphs. Through the last decade, public service institutions have had to grow accustomed to digitalization and media convergence, especially in the realm of expanding their services to new online platforms (Andersen and Sundet 2019, 3). During a time where the online digital social space is rapidly growing, new strategies must be developed to keep up with the younger generation and their media consumption habits that are changing.

According to Syvertsen et al. (2014), public service broadcasters in the Nordic went through three phases when adapting to the use of online platforms. In the first phase, which lasted from the mid-1990s until the millennium, there was no clear strategy in how to handle the emerging internet among the broadcasters, and there was a crucial question mark on if they were going to use the internet. Entering the second phase after the year 2000, they were no longer hesitant and noticed the importance of online activities being integrated to regular radio and broadcast television (Syvertsen et al. 2014, 86). In the third phase, as the year 2010 is approaching, the public service broadcasters work consistently on online digital spaces implemented with traditional broadcasting to create a cross-media platform (Syvertsen et al. 2014, 87). Also, they developed additional sites designed specifically for children and young people (Andersen and Sundet 2019, 3).

This progression through the decades shows the importance of digital platforms and how they are significant tools for smaller broadcasting nations to serve their own population. Syvertsen et al.'s research proves that online services are necessary to keep up with current technological advancements in Norwegian society and demonstrates how productions have had to organize themselves around online streaming, especially when it comes to online youth fiction.

### 2.2.1 Youth production branded as innovative

There was a time it seemed faint that television would have a place on the internet. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, public broadcasters were hesitant over two decades ago, but recognized the extent of growth the internet would soon have. It was difficult to imagine that television would be watched on screens other than what was viewed as an actual

“television” (Lotz 2018, 115). As we are moving towards a new modern-day television, which has gotten Amanda D. Lotz (2020) to discuss ‘the future of televisions’ instead of ‘the future of television’ (Lotz 2020, 802). In contrast to watching an episode of a drama series one would assume was created by a television broadcaster, we are watching internet-distributed video considered as television (Lotz 2018, 115).

Television producers are continuously aiming to reconnect with the younger audiences to reach a more diverse demographic. Although there are limited existing studies on youth television, some studies discovered that the younger generation does not necessarily watch productions labeled for the “youth” (Harrington and Bielby 2010; Sundet 2021, 148). Furthermore, an interesting point was that people in older age groups found enjoyment in watching content that allowed them to reminisce to their own youth and the productions that attracted the younger audiences were international drama series (Kjus 2009, 89). If a production can reach both a younger audience and older age groups, including other target groups, this point is particularly important to a public service broadcaster as they are obligated to provide content to the entire population. To achieve productions with such diversity, innovative strategies are needed.

The television industry is strategically aiming their focus on youth productions combined with the influence of new technologies, which has increased an interest in testing new kinds of storytelling (Andersen 2019; Sundet 2021, 148). There is a noticeable trend in implementing new media platforms, storytelling techniques, and publishing models into productions for the younger generation. According to Krüger and Rustad (2019), this trend reflects the industry’s perception that one must include this new digital culture, especially social media, to serve “tech-savvy” young people (Krüger and Rustad 2019, 74). Current production cultures indicate that to produce content that would be able to reconnect with the younger audiences, it is necessary to follow them to these modern platforms. For that reason, youth production has led television executives and producers to closely observe young people’s preferences as this may function as an indicator of consumption patterns in the future (Sundet 2021, 148).

Considering media trends renew themselves at a constant level, studies clearly suggest that youth production will be a public broadcaster’s biggest challenge in an ever-evolving television landscape. On the other hand, this challenge will offer producers opportunities to think new and creative. Thinking of most youth dramas being the smaller productions, which will be further discussed in this literature review, these kinds of productions are considered the

most innovative as they consider both new media technology and budget friendly solutions (Sundet 2021, 149).

### 2.2.2 How youth fiction is organized at NRK

According to Mads Møller T. Andersen and Vilde Schanke Sundet's article about online youth production in the context of Nordic public service, they argue that NRK and DR are moving towards a certain fourth phase in adapting to the use of online platforms (Andersen and Sundet 2019, 3). This next phase suggests that there is still a digital expansion and that the youth channels are being given higher priority in the online platforms rather than through linear television channels. To understand a production that aims for a younger audience, we must investigate how NRK has chosen to organize their content for the youth as a public service institution.

There are two divisions at NRK that organizes the children's and youth content, NRK Super, which targets 2-12-year-olds, and NRK P3, which targets 13-29-year-olds (Andersen and Sundet 2019, 4). Although NRK P3 is the most relevant division for this thesis, it is important to take note of each division's purposes and how NRK makes that transition between the two. NRK Super launched in 2007 as multimedia division producing radio, television, and online social media content, during what Syvertsen et al. called the second phase, as a result from the digital expansion and international competition from other niche channels, such as Disney and Nickelodeon (Andersen and Sundet 2019, 4). In contrast to NRK Super, NRK P3 was already launched in 1993 and started out as a radio channel. However, as the competition increased from other private and commercial channels, NRK P3 grew its services to an online website (p3.no) and a linear television channel (NRK3) in 2007. Today, P3 is a brand that has two radio channels (P3 and mP3), a wide selection of podcasts, hosts several events and produces a variety of television series (Andersen and Sundet 2019, 4), which includes *SKAM* that will be further discussed in chapter 2.4.

The main strategy between the two divisions is for the growing teens to move from NRK Super to NRK P3. Although NRK's public service mandate does not explicitly require production of youth content, NRK still has responsibility to serve the entire population. Thus, includes the younger generation, and to create high-quality content that reflects Norwegian culture, language, and identity (Andersen and Sundet 2019, 5). According to Andersen and Sundet, the importance of serving the younger generation has been a key priority in over a decade (Andersen and Sundet 2019, 5), which clearly is due to the changing media landscape where young people are replacing traditional media with social media and international online

streaming sites, like Netflix and HBO. As NRK Super and NRK P3 are significant parts of NRK's overall public service mission, they have free passage to reach the goal of attracting the youth. NRK P3 aspires to be a platform that brings young people closer and entertains and challenges them while reflecting reality (Bjørn 2018; Andersen and Sundet 2019, 5).

Andersen and Sundet's research demonstrate how NRK P3 benefited from aiming for one specific target group, and that laying a foundation of their needs for what stories they wanted to portray in their productions contributed to the success of several television youth dramas.

Historically, NRK P3 had less experience with producing "online dramas" compared to NRK Super as they started out as a radio channel. In a time when NRK needed to produce more youth fiction, they had to look outside of NRK P3 to search for capable production personnel. *SKAM* is an interesting example in this context as it was not introduced by one of the divisions, but rather, the two divisions were joined together to create the online youth drama success (Andersen and Sundet 2019, 5), which was the beginning of putting NRK back on the map among the younger generation, as well as the multicultural.

### 2.2.3 The production culture in television drama

When reflecting on how streaming has made significant a impact on public service broadcasting institutions in today's digital society, Sundet's (2021) research on production models in a changing television market suggests three different kinds in which one of them is relevant to this research.

The first model is the kind of production that is "*going big*". What this kind of production aims for is larger audiences and transnational markets through large budgets and high-quality production resources. Second, which has contrasting production values compared to the first model, the drama production that is "*going small*". This aims for a more specific niche-oriented demographic, especially online youth drama, and often has lower budget and smaller production personnel. The third model resembles what the industry would call a "reboot", or "*going again*", and it was created based on previous existing productions (Sundet 2021, 52).

The two television dramas that will be analyzed in this thesis resemble the framework of the second production model. Although this model is called "*going small*", it does not necessarily mean any less of the goals compared to the first model, but rather, there are smaller budgets and smaller audience groups the television drama is aiming for (Sundet 2021, 58). What makes this type of production interesting is how they respond well to NRK's key selling

point of knowing unique information about Norwegian audiences and culture. *SKAM* is a great example of a small production aimed at youth transmedia storytelling. Furthermore, this production model is a part of a strategy to reach a specific target group that are about to separate themselves from NRK (Sundet 2021, 58). These kinds of series represent innovation and contemporary focus, which reflects how NRK aims to reach a younger audience with a multicultural background.

A “*going small*” production invites inclusion and diversity. This type of way of creating something to a specific group suggests a sense of relevance. Moreover, the production model of online youth drama contributes to authentic representation of people that have felt oppression in Norway (Sundet 2021, 60). Through an innovative production lens, which this model motivates, NRK can discover different strategies in how to create new online drama concepts that can reach the younger audiences’ needs.

### 2.3 Public service broadcasting in Norway

NRK being a public service broadcaster, is expected to create something to watch for the entire population where important topics become popular, and the popular, important (Sundet 2020, 72). The goal is, in a ‘perfect’ world, to offer the audience what they need, but also what they want. In Sundet’s paper addressing the production and distribution of the NRK original teen drama series *SKAM*, she argues that the Scandinavian way of approaching ‘public service’ creates opportunities for its institutions to be popular and adaptive in their process of fulfilling their mission as public broadcasters (Sundet 2020, 71). In other words, public service institutions have more possibilities for a production culture creating innovative, high-class content in the contemporary television landscape.

Publicly funded productions are different from commercial and private productions in the sense that they are producing content for their audience as ‘citizens’, and not ‘consumers’ (Syvertsen 2004; Sundet 2020, 71). Thus, gives NRK an advantage where their content is created not only to entertain, but also to educate and reflect on deeper cultural topics. As the younger audience is moving, searching, and finding new types of media, public broadcasters must follow them to serve their audience. NRK has opportunities to create audience-specific targeted content. Moreover, they also notice the trends younger people find of interest through social media, which resulted in their current successes. For that reason, NRK is continuously improving their online streaming site to keep up with the new generation of digitizing analogue content to make their content as accessible as possible (Noordegraaf 2010, 2).

In recent years, topics about the lack of multicultural representation in television and cinema have risen (Christian 2020). Also, NRK has been criticized in the past for their lack of including minorities and that their content does not portray the Norwegian population as it is today (Njie and Jensen 2018). Therefore, analyzing the production and distribution of NRK's recent drama series, *Norsk-ish* and the *17* series universe, is relevant for current debates in today's media landscape.

#### 2.4 "SKAM/SHAME" challenging the younger generation's relationship to NRK

NRK have had previous successes with their fictional productions targeting the younger generations, such as *AFI* (which also portrayed multicultural representation) and *Jenter/Girls*. The public service broadcaster had a significant breakthrough in targeting the younger generation when the youth drama series, *SKAM (SHAME)*, which made its way to the screen, both television and smartphone. What made this series unique was its approach as an online drama that unfolded the storyline through daily video clips, chat messages and the representation of the characters on social media (Magnus 2016; Sundet 2020, 70). Thereafter, the series was hitting the US market in an English-language version as the original series became such a viral sensation on an international level.

What is interesting about NRK's success with *SKAM* is that their strategy did not foresee the popularity it would gain from using various social media platforms. Their aim was primarily to portray Norwegian youth in a realistic way through presenting the series in a novel form that would correspond with the younger generation's media habits more naturally (Faldalen 2016). Also, to create something that would attract the younger generation in Norway who were about to distance themselves from traditional television. The approach used in this series is what Eva Novrup Redvall (2013) calls "double storytelling", which is a quite common approach NRK uses as it fits well with their mission as a public broadcaster. It is storytelling with a double purpose, to entertain and educate (Redvall 2013; Sundet 2020, 73). In other words, the approach is not only to satisfy and amuse the viewer, but also to raise discussion and reflect on deeper cultural understandings. Therefore, NRK succeeds in creating something that catches younger viewers' attention, while educating them on serious topics, such as youth's perspective on sexuality, self-discovery, and religion.

Furthermore, at the time *SKAM* was released in 2015, social media had a significant increase of popularity among younger users as the rise of microcelebrity, also known as influencers, gained more attraction (Marwick 2015, 137). This notion is introduced by Alice Marwick who calls it "Instafame" where microcelebrity is a mind-set and a way of self-



representation on social media using a profile to gain attention and followers (Senft 2013; Marwick 2015, 138). Through clicks and attracting spotlight, the microcelebrity uses social media to grow their online popularity. Therefore, using the online digital space more inclusively in a television series contributes to more visibility, especially among the younger generation as they are already roaming in this online sphere following other popular trends.

Henry Jenkins (2013) views social media as spreadable media. The reason for that is due to the wide spreadability of social media content which is endless (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013, 6). Without comparing the term spreadability to infection, or contamination, it simply demonstrates an understanding in how the digital media industry has made it possible for people using social media to spread ideas, also called user-generated-content (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013, 15). *SKAM* gained significant attraction as the series created content that the younger viewers reposted or recreated into “memes” (Jenkins 2009), thus resulting in user-generated-content going “viral” across social media platforms. By “viral” content, simply meaning content that has been viewed by a large group of people because of the video has become widely spread across an online environment (Burgess 2008, 101).

*SKAM* portrays a transmedia storytelling approach to give a complete engagement experience, resembling what *Dawson's Creek* did, in using an additional online digital environment to further develop the television series' fictional world (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013, 137). In bringing its ‘real-time’ aspect, as well as inviting the audience to actively participate, the series rewards its participants who invest their time (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013, 138). Although NRK managed to create a significant fanbase from *SKAM*, their public service rationale created engaged citizens rather than loyal consumers. Transmedia storytelling encourages viewers to explore alternative perspectives and contributes to a more open-minded way of understanding something, such as what has been said in mainstream media vs. a television series. NRK merges their public service culture into their productions to fulfill their mission of both entertaining and educating for the benefit of their viewers. However, in addition to that, they incorporate a transmedia storytelling approach to create emotional investment to provoke debate and discussion about popular culture (Sundet 2020, 83).

Thus, NRK are strategizing themselves in what they want to create for their younger viewers based on their current media habits. Considering the media content they consume on different platforms is often viral content, it explains how *SKAM* became such a global phenomenon as the content continued to spread online and put NRK back on the map among the younger generation.

## 2.5 The younger generation's everyday use of social media

The rise of social media has made it possible for us to virtually interact with other people. According to D. Gina Graciyal and Deepa Viswam (2021), we spend on average around 80% of our day on various social media platforms, like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and Snapchat (Graciyal and Viswam 2021, 99).

In today's modern digital age, young people find happiness in using these different platforms as a means of communication, because it maintains relationships without having to be always physically present. Therefore, technology and digital media have contributed to a rapid change in human interaction and influenced the notion of social networking into a shift (Kamble, Desai, and Mehendale 2021, 2). Social media has become an essential part of our everyday lives, especially for the younger users, also known as Generation Z (Gen Z).

Snapchat launched back in July 2011, and a characteristic in this platform that attracts users is the sense of privacy where messages are available for a few seconds only (Kamble, Desai, and Mehendale 2021, 2). Another significant feature is the one-on-one conversations between two people and the temporary quality of sending images and videos that may contribute to closer relationships. Moreover, a report by Statista (2018) refers to Snapchat being the most popular communication medium among Gen Z users (Statista 2018; Kamble, Desai, and Mehendale 2021, 4).

Today's media landscape, as stated earlier, is significantly different from other decades. Since the rise of the Web 2.0, the possibilities of having a voice are endless, and suddenly, anyone can have an opinion and publish a post somewhere. For that reason, social media has become a digital environment of communication with others where people share identities and text (Kamble, Desai, and Mehendale 2021, 8). Thus, the Gen Z audience gets to experience a feeling of understanding from talking with others and the opportunity to share their own story through an audiovisual multimedia platform.

The younger generation simply wants to be liked. As a person growing up either with a multicultural background, or going through high school in general, one of the things they desire the most is to feel like they belong somewhere. Therefore, growing up with social media and an everyday routine of constantly taking photos for other people to see and validate does something to a person. For instance, the notion of gathering followers to the hundreds and thousands functions as a motivational force (Marwick 2015, 137). In a way, the need for likes and reactions have become a determining factor in social status. Thus, social media's influence

on the younger generation have enabled this microcelebrity mindset and given a medium of self-representation (Twenge and Cambell 2009; Lee 2005; Marwick 2015, 141).

NRK as a public service broadcaster has a mission to serve the entire population, which also entails the younger generation. Therefore, a part of their strategy is having to keep up with ever-evolving media habits and the people who keep up with new technology every day. Already in 2003, the director of BBC New Media & Technology, Ashley Highfield, pointed out how future television will become unrecognizable and resemble a kaleidoscope (Highfield 2003; Jenkins 2006, 242). In other words, she had already foreseen the multicolored realm that television would become today. The broadcasting space is no longer only linear scheduled by television executives, but it is also streamed online, the audience has much more opinions and the relationship between traditional “monologue broadcaster” to “grateful viewer” does not exist (Highfield 2003; Jenkins 2006, 242).

Reflecting on Highfield’s speech, those statements show to what extent old media has changed after new media’s arrival, and how the participation culture that social media enabled has had a significant impact on today’s television industry. For that reason, proving that public service broadcasting needs to hold onto their younger demographic to stay relevant in the future, especially when other media fail to portray important themes that interest them.

#### 2.5.1 The lack of multicultural representation in mainstream media

According to Clément et al. (2005), mediated communication is becoming an essential way of communicating when it comes to online debates about different ethnicities and cultures. For this thesis, public service broadcasting is the main focus due to its potential to explore the wide variety of language and culture in its home country. Young people on social media have shed light on topics about the lack of multicultural representation in television and cinema. In the long history of American cinema, for instance, white characters were primarily presented as the lead roles. Although today’s mainstream cinema has gotten better at multicultural representation on the big screen, a cast of different racial and ethnic minorities is still being presented in a prejudicial way (Gocsik, Barsam, and Monahan 2016, 67). The way mainstream media, alongside the ever-evolving online digital culture, has transformed from passive to participation culture and has contributed to a more visible way of communicating between cultures across platforms.

Culture is the way we make sense of things (Hall 1995, 188). Therefore, broadcast television can contribute to filling the gap in multicultural representation in mainstream media. It has been argued that media exposure from other cultures increases the possibility of cultural

change (Clément et al. 2005, 400). To be able to make a change, measures must be taken, and different voices must be heard. A television series is an interesting medium to use for this exact purpose. However, studies have shown that young people tend to respond better to content about certain educational topics when it is offered from a streaming service, which is more accessible to innovative storytelling techniques, flexible publishing schedules, and to international markets (Sundet 2021, 3). In addition, they have more appreciation for content that is specific and relevant to topics that are trendy in the media landscape. NRK are systematically working on improving their online streaming service with a “Skip Intro” button and other functions to compete with streaming giants such as Netflix (Re 2016, 161). Through their work on broadening the cultural diversity in their productions, it will be interesting in this thesis to see how they are using previous successes to further evolve their strategies to reach the younger generation.

Mainstream media has been a medium to tell a story for a long time. It is an instinct to share information with someone, create a relationship, and feel heard. Storytellers are the ones who tell stories to awaken memories of something in life that they share, which creates a sense of being together (Frank 2000, 354). Public service broadcasters aim to share stories with individuals who do not share the same memories with a purpose to inform and witness. The notion of exchanging experiences is a form of expression (Frank 2000, 356), and thus, making it a valuable coping strategy in making the world more manageable and purposeful by providing a sense of relatability. In creating a television series about the younger generation with a multicultural background, it invites both people who share the same experiences and the others who do not share that particular experience, but can develop an understanding, which contributes to meaningful reflection.

There are several ways to tell a story about a meaningful memory or experience, and in many circumstances, media competing against each other may encourage and build up one another (Thorburn and Jenkins 2004, 3). In other words, different types of media strengthen each other the same way in how books inspire films and technical developments of mobile phones inspire museums. Thus, the film and television industry together with the World Wide Web can support each other in discovering strategies to redefine themselves and keep up with the growing digital culture among the younger generation (Thorburn and Jenkins 2004, 3).

We are constantly looking at content in several different media throughout the day. The images portrayed in television have a significant influence in our perception of reality and what is around us (Solla and Bovino 2013, 1). According to previous research, it has been shown

that people with multicultural backgrounds prefer media content that connects them to their own cultural group, or community (Ramasubramanian 2016, 334). In other words, minorities living in another country than their ethnic background tend to lean more towards produced content featuring other individuals concerning their ethnic background, which supports the perspective of group-vitality theory (Abrams, Eveland, and Giles 2003; Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor 1977; Ramasubramanian 2016, 334). Watching media content that does not resonate with your own cultural background, therefore, contributes to loneliness and a sense of not belonging. Considering this research claims that it is difficult to evolve as an individual without visible representation of something that one can relate to, this thesis will be tackling how NRK are dealing with these kinds of multicultural challenges in the Norwegian population.

We are influenced by what is around us regardless, and many easily believe what they see on the screen is true. According to Suraj and Smith (1978), they uncovered that foreign students adjusted to American values through television and print media easier than with radio and music (Suraj and Smith 1978; Clément et al. 2005, 414). Although individuals of a minority wish to consume content that portrays a better representation of their own multicultural identity, they are still implicitly expected to adapt to most of the population. Thus, producing written and audiovisual media content focusing on minorities plays an important role in the representation of people with multicultural backgrounds. Producing content that promotes minority identities and redefines the voices of multicultural groups provides larger and meaningful community goals (Ramasubramanian 2016, 340).

To create strategies and content targeting a specific audience, such as the younger generation with a multicultural background, and make it successful, it is beneficial to have a certain understanding of different forms of behavior among TV users. Television executives have found multicultural representation as too high of a gamble and the target audience would be too small for the spotlight (Christian 2020, 458). As mentioned earlier in this literature review, the younger audience tend to invest most of their time watching content online (Solla and Bovino 2013, 3), therefore, one must accommodate the areas they are expected to reside in the ever-evolving digital world.

Today, we live in an age that is constantly producing information, and 90% of this consists of audiovisual content, sound files and images (Karahasanović and Heim 2015, 1). Furthermore, the wide selection of content a television channel has to offer plays a significant role through their everyday interaction with people because it contributes to forming opinions, especially stereotypes (Solla and Bovino 2013, 1). For that reason, public service television has

a critical responsibility when promoting certain ideologies and discourses, especially among the younger generation, as they have a powerful effect on people's everyday lives in the context of media consumption.

### 3 Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an academic context for this thesis, which I place in the field of production studies. It will present approaches that are critical to production models in television drama and alternate readings on discourses and theories relevant to the two productions that will be explored for this research. Several of the authors that are mentioned in this theoretical introduction, such as Paul Ricoeur, Ferdinand de Saussure, Liv Hausken, Stuart Hall and Edward Said, present essential approaches to multicultural production culture in public service broadcasting. Central topics in their works concern hermeneutics and media aesthetics, which will provide an academic framework that will influence the analytical approach for this production study.

#### 3.1 Understanding hermeneutics, semiotics, and media aesthetics

Earlier in the literature review, Newcomb and Hirsch discussed television as a cultural forum and that every individual's interpretation can be different, which raised a concern in how interpretation is perceived in society (Newcomb and Hirsch 2000, 569). Thus, they argue that an understanding of individuals' interpretation of television content is essential. When watching something on the television, the viewers tend to attempt to interpret what they see. The act of showing your own understanding of something is a human instinct that allows for broadening our minds. Hermeneutics means the interpretation of language. It describes the true nature of understanding as integrating what is unfamiliar to us into our own familiar context (Thiselton 2009, 5). In other words, when we understand something, we merge someone else's viewpoint with our own.

The French philosopher, Paul Ricoeur (1970), made significant contributions to the field of hermeneutics. According to Ricoeur, hermeneutics is understanding the link between the self and the symbol, neither in-between themselves, but the dialectical engagement between the two (Ricoeur 1970, 22). Furthermore, he says that we construct ourselves in the narratives of the self that we wish to put together and we wish to create our lives around. We frame these narratives in terms of time, past, present, and future. Thus, texts feed into this self-construction, and that the stories we tell ourselves, the stories we read, the ideas that filter through our lives

are a part of this construction (Ricoeur 1970, 24). Therefore, we create narratives of self in the frame of time.

To unearth how a public service broadcaster creates a meaningful series that targets a minority in a western dominated country, we must allow ourselves to interpret and understand a social memory of a specific group of people. Referencing Ricoeur through Anthony Thiselton (2009), this thesis views hermeneutics as the art of discovering different levels of meaning and that the willingness to suspect and to understand is the two absolute pillars of hermeneutics. Although television has been around for decades, the notion of multicultural representation in Norwegian broadcasting is a rather unknown area that needs further exploration.

In many cases, an image may show one thing, but represents something else than what you see, especially among the younger generation. To communicate something through an image, there are signs used in the language that is being communicated to the viewer. According to Ferdinand de Saussure and his work on semiotics, there are two parts of a sign, signified and signifier (Rose 2016, 113). In general, the signified and signifier usually have a connection with each other, but Saussure argues that the relationship between the two should not necessarily be directly integrated. In other words, it has more to do with different languages and their association with the same signified. The younger generation constantly influences new signs, anything from types of audios to hand movements. For instance, when creating a television series targeting younger audiences, production personnel must keep in mind what emojis they use in text messages as they tend to have different meanings to teenagers compared to adults.

As viewers make their way to the television, or online streaming sites, the aesthetics of the material is essential to further create a connection between the viewer and screen. According to Liv Hausken (2009), audiovisual storytelling has tempo, rhythm, and longevity (Hausken 2009, 34). Filmmakers have seen and heard for the viewer, thus they facilitate for the viewer to see and hear. A key argument in Hausken's work is the perspective of media aesthetics that points the attention towards what we take for granted in the experience (Hausken 2013, 162). This kind of thinking raises discussions of what there is in a certain image to shape our perception that we do not take notice of or talk about, which will be crucial when analyzing the chosen productions for this thesis.

In order to explain the aesthetics that are portrayed on the screen, the works of Liv Hausken (2009) contribute to an understanding of media aesthetics as a research field. In simple

terms, aesthetics is understood as theory about how we understand the world through a historic and cultural lens, and according to Hausken, media aesthetics, as an analytical method, points the attention towards what not only makes an impression, but how the message was expressed (Hausken 2009, 9), such as the *17* series universe using Snapchat and looking at how the platform is expressed throughout the series. Hausken focuses on how media shapes experience and how the expression of media plays a role in what is being conveyed. Moreover, she raises key central questions, such as what something can mean something, and how does that create meaning (Hausken 2009, 10).

Paraphrasing the works of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1964), people tend to think that we look at an image, but that we actually look with, or according to, in a way the image has been constructed for us to see (Merleau-Ponty 1964; Hausken 2017, 62). Thus, an image may indicate one thing, but is created to express something different. For instance, the *17* series universe's portrayal of "the West and the Rest", which will be further discussed in the next paragraph, where there are all these stereotypes of each group, however, when looking according to this image, the viewer realizes they have more in common than first anticipated.

This research is crucial in the sense where this thesis would like to focus on a perspective of not necessarily "what is television?", but rather "how is the situation in this television series utilized for the viewer to watch?". For instance, how Snapchat is utilized in *19* for the viewer to watch and understand young people, like Aisha, or how the homes in *Norsk-ish* are decorated to represent each culture of the main characters' families, something that will be further investigated in this thesis.

### 3.2 The conflict between the West and the East

For centuries there has been an implicit separation between the western and eastern parts of several cities, and in Oslo, the classification of living on the west and east side has contributed to a social split in the population of the Norwegian capital (Buljo 2019). As this split has been a well-known phenomenon in history, this kind of conflict continuously gets portrayed through various types of media, especially in film and television.

By representing minorities in Norway with multicultural backgrounds and the issues they face on an everyday basis, it contributes to raise important debates about how issues of power, representation, stereotyping, racism, and identity are mapped on a divide between the east and west, black and white, "the West and the Rest", which is central in postcolonial media studies (Shome 2016, 246). Furthermore, NRK has a possibility to discuss how these issues and



hierarchies are expressed and contested in the media and popular culture. In creating content that portrays this clear split between west and east in contemporary society, it may contribute to an understanding of the meaning of power and the impact of representation.

Stuart Hall's (1995) discourse of "the West and the Rest" is relevant in this discussion as he argues that it is a site of ongoing struggle. This idea functions as a system of representation and calls up in our mind's eye a simplistic composite picture of what different societies, cultures, people, and places are like (Hall 1995, 186). For instance, "the West" seems to stand for the urban and developed, and "the Rest", in other words, "the non-western" seems to stand for rural, agricultural, and underdeveloped. Thus, this allows us to characterize and classify social groups into different categories, which is connected to relations of power. Therefore, in understanding how the discourse is used as a particular way of speaking and representing "the West and the Rest" as binary oppositions, the viewer gets an insight in how the media can help to construct this discourse.

Moreover, through Orientalist representations, the media can also contest and negotiate this discourse. Edward Said (1978) explains his notion of Orientalism as a powerful European ideological creation and a way for a writer to deal with the "otherness" of the east (Said 1978, 3). Similar to Hall, Said wants to maintain and construct western hegemony. For instance, in *Norsk-ish*, the series raises several questions for the viewer to think about, such as the preconceived assumptions we have of the main characters' cultures and how we think they act and behave. Through the lens of Said's framework, the viewer gets an understanding of the unfamiliar and the strange and that the way we acquire knowledge is not innocent nor objective, but the end-result of a process in which we flex certain interests.

This notion gets challenged in film and television because it seems that some people already have an image or idea of how a person with a particular ethnicity is without having experienced anyone similar in prior. Furthermore, Said argues that the way the west, Europe and the US, looks at the countries and people of the Middle East is through a lens that distorts the actual reality of those places and those people (Said 1978, 6). Thus, explaining how viewing through this lens makes the people of the Middle East appear different and threatening.

Now that the theoretical framework has been established, the next chapter will introduce the methodology chosen to analyze the two productions for this thesis.

## 4 Methodology

The previous chapters have situated my study within the literature of various fields of production study and its nexus with media research. To answer the research questions raised in this thesis, the study relies on the use of a mixed-method approach to investigate NRK's strategies and processes in producing a series targeting a young audience with a multicultural background. In many ways, this chapter describes the connection between the theoretical and practical aspects of this thesis by justifying the research interests pointed out in the previous chapters. There are two sub-questions that I would like to answer to unearth the answer to my main research question. Thus, this chapter that follows explains the methodological and practical research approaches I have chosen with those interconnected fields.

Both television series that will be analyzed in this thesis were already chosen before establishing what research gaps I wished to fill. Therefore, the inspiration of this thesis originates from each of the production's messages to the audience and with me as a viewer with a multicultural background.

### 4.1 Interviews with key production personnel

Firstly, the study builds on insights through interviews and conversations with key production personnel from *Norsk-ish* and the *17* series universe. In other words, the individuals taking part in the interviews are considered as "exclusive informants", because they have certain insights on each of the productions unlike anyone else (Bruun 2014, 30).

For the interviews, the focus in this thesis would be the people involved in the creative aspects of making the productions, which includes those who came up with the idea of the series and who developed it, directed it and edited it. Caldwell (2008) calls this production management in critical analysis (Caldwell 2008, 6). Two directors and two screenwriters will take part in the interviewing process. This selection indicates that I did not choose to interview people in the lower levels of the production hierarchy, such as those doing the camera-crew work (Caldwell 2008, 6). In the TV industry, these people are described as "below the line" workers because their names usually appear at the end of the credits compared to the ones at the beginning who hold copyright, the "above the line" workers (Deuze 2007, 191). The below the line workers are mostly not involved in the development of production, but work on the project when it is time to film. Therefore, the choice of director and screen writers are the most fitting for this production study.

Choosing four people to interview is based on strength in numbers, but also, due to the interesting development of their role. Newcomb and Alley are one of the first to establish the executive producer or director as the “auteur”, as in the author of their creative work (Newcomb and Alley 1983; Caldwell 2008, 16). However, Caldwell states what is the case in both productions in this thesis, which is that the director did not write for the series. In *Norsk-ish* and the *I7* series universe, the screenwriters came up with the idea of the productions and holds the title of series creator as well. For that reason, it is essential to get the insight from both the director and screenwriter to analyze each production process.

#### 4.1.1 The interviewing process

The ideal is to interview each person separately to get as different perspectives and opinions as possible, as well as meeting physically. To be allowed to gather data through interviews, I need to submit an application to Norsk senter for forskningsdata (NSD), since reorganized and named Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research – SIKT. With the help from my thesis supervisor guiding me through filling out the application, I managed to submit it by the beginning of May 2022 and got it approved a few days after submission. As my request for data collection was approved, I began to write emails for each director and script writer from both productions.

Something significant that made this process less challenging than expected was the fact that I am an NRK employee. Thus, as every person that was contacted were NRK employees or temporary employees for specific projects as well, their email addresses were easily accessible through using my own NRK email account. Furthermore, I believe being employed at the same workplace was a beneficial contribution to the positive responses from the production personnel. The interview took place in June 2022 and August 2022 – that is, before and after summer break. When sending emails in mid-May, I did take into consideration that they would likely be going on vacation, or in production for other projects, thus, I made it clear that I would be flexible to when and where the interview would take place. In addition, a significant contribution to that adaptability was the fact that I had the possibility to book a meeting room in-house, which increased the possibility of performing the interviews physically. For that season, all four interviews that got confirmed took place at NRK Marienlyst, two in June and two in August.

As preparation for the interviews, aside from having watched both series, I looked up headlines about NRK and the productions from a selection of various news sources. To get an overview of how others have expressed their opinion about the public broadcaster and two

productions, I did a close reading of the articles and comments that discusses NRK reaching a younger audience with a multicultural background. All the interviews followed a similar structured interview guide and included questions about the pre-production phase, work tasks and the opportunities and challenges they faced throughout the process, including what they have learned from *Norsk-ish* and the *17* series universe. Every interview was transcribed and analyzed thematically with an interest in the production personnel's "self-reflexivity" (Mayer, Banks, and Caldwell 2009, 7). At the end of each interview, I had all the interviewees sign under a permission slip indicating the approval of the data I will be collecting during the interview, which I emailed to them in advance to read beforehand.

#### 4.2 Analysis of working documents

Although being able to directly talk to the production personnel is an important component in making connections between the creator and content, document analysis is beneficial to combine in production research (Mayer, Banks, and Caldwell 2009, 162). Following the interviews with the directors and screenwriters, the study will further investigate the productions based on an analysis of internal working documents and artefacts surrounding *Norsk-ish* and the *17* series universe. These "deep" texts include documentation of strategies, manuscripts, set and costume, guidelines addressing their mission and promotional material, including research they have conducted themselves through interviews they have conducted with their target group. John T. Caldwell suggests that these kinds of sources, calling them "media artefacts" and "deep" texts, are crucial to understand a media production because they offer a different perspective than watching the productions from the screen (Caldwell 2008, 3).

Every piece of documentation was provided by the production leaders from both productions, and they made sure that the information was declared approved to be used for the purpose of this thesis. This has been a good source for understanding the issues of importance for NRK, such as *Norsk-ish's* dogmas of production morale and the *17* series universe's goals for each season in targeting youth in Oslo with a multicultural background.

Instead of being viewed as repetitive and easily defined, television as a medium in a textual form is perceived as extraordinary (Newcomb and Hirsch 2000, 571). As these working documents are being analyzed, I will bear in mind Mayer, Banks, and Caldwell's suggestion of skepticism and reflexivity as a tool for this research process to keep a balanced attitude to production texts (Mayer, Banks, and Caldwell 2009, 5). In this context, they argue that the representations of both research and producer are "constructions". Therefore, the analysis of this thesis will examine each stage of the design, execution and writing up of the projects and

the ‘knowledge’ it constitutes, rather than function as an excavation of the knowledge about *Norsk-ish* and the *17* series universe.

### 4.3 Close visual analysis of scenes

Finally, I have chosen to do a close textual and visual analysis of the series separately. Through Sundet’s research on production models and the three types proposed in her study, this thesis views the two productions chosen for this thesis as a “*going small*” drama production (Sundet 2021, 58). In other words, productions that are aiming at more specific target groups to represent a contemporary focus on the younger generation with multicultural background in Norway.

To distinguish the observations, content’s message, and meaning, the study relies on a critical analysis on significant details and patterns to develop an understanding of the content’s form and craft while taking notes of the plot, characters, and setting. Thus, while watching and observing the chosen scenes, I will highlight key scenes and events that are viewed as turning points, or significant moments, in the representation of young people with a multicultural background living in Norway. In other words, a production study with a qualitative analysis is needed to distinguish in what way NRK align output and strategy into a production, how both drama series are used as a tool of storytelling, and how they are using this as a portrayal and representation of the younger generation in today’s media landscape.

To do a close reading of chosen key scenes from each production, I believe a mixed approach of examining the semiology, hermeneutics, media aesthetics and *mise-en-scène*. In addition, an exploration in how the scenes and characters are portrayed through the lens of Stuart Hall’s “the West and the Rest”, which will also be connected to Edward Said’s notion of Orientalism.

In simple terms, semiology unearths what something stands for, thus a semiological analysis can provide an understanding of how the structure of, in this case, a scene from a television series creates cultural meaning, such as the works of Ferdinand de Saussure and Gillian Dyer’s (Rose 2016, 115) checklist for what signs of humans symbolize. Secondly, semiotics identifies the difference between how signs work and how we use them, therefore, useful in this context because it deals with the aspects we are not aware of, the unconscious. In understanding the semiotic perspectives of these key scenes, I believe this approach will build a solid foundation in unveiling how it unconsciously attracts the audience to the screen.

Furthermore, the choice of hermeneutics is made because it will enable a clear view of the *mise-en-scène*, and deconstructing the scene allows me to gain a better understanding of its

message and ideological meaning. Hermeneutics in film and television is essential to interpret aspects of something in the context of meaning rather than stating them. A mix of Anthony Thiselton (2009) and Paul Ricoeur's (1970) view on hermeneutics and John Gibb's (2002) work on *mise-en-scène* will be utilized. Thus, while putting the scene back together, I believe that will leave space for interpretation, as this scene covers a lot of landscape, and to be able to analyze the scene more in-depth to unveil its deep meaning beneath the surface.

An image, or moving image, shows exactly what there is to show, thus one must look at how the image is portrayed. When we look at something, knowing what we know, it is the portrayal of what we understand that we see. Through the lens of Liv Hausken (2013), and her work in the field of media aesthetics, people tend to focus on what the image illustrates, and underestimate the image as media and the different mediation it constitutes (Hausken 2013, 19). Therefore, for the analysis of the chosen key scenes, this study will look at how the image shapes our perception of the world at the same length as how we change our perception of the image. Moving images have the means to create visual impression and its effects can have concrete meaning in its course of action, character development and subject (Benjamin 1991, 57). The close readings will contribute to unearth how everything is wired together, and what shapes the experience of watching something.

#### 4.4 Ethics of performing interviews and analyzing key scenes

Something to take into consideration before, during and after the interviews is listening to personal information that may arise, such as the production personnel talking about personal experiences. The airport scene in the first episode of *Norsk-ish* is written with inspiration from one of the screenwriters' own experiences as she is of multicultural background herself. Considering consent has been given to share this information to the public, and if there is a societal significance to the information, it would be crucial to include it into the research. As well as when the director talks about his own life as an ethnic Norwegian living in Lier, then comparing that to any of the characters in the *17* series universe, I would want to include that in the analysis as that has a significant impact on the development of the series. In other words, this thesis will not discuss specific details about the production personnel, but rather, I will point out general characteristics that are relevant to the textual analysis of both productions.

After finishing all the interviews, I listened to the audio recordings from the interviews and polished the transcribed interview texts. This way it will be easier to incorporate the insights from the interviews with my analysis of the key scenes from each production. There was an attempt to use the analytical tool, *Nvivo*, without succeeding. A factor to the failed

attempt may have been due to incapable capacity of the laptop used for this thesis. However, this had no determining effect on the analysis of the transcribed text.

Furthermore, I will not reflect on my own personal perspectives in the analysis of the characters, nor the plot of each production in the context of multicultural representation as I am of Chinese descent living in Norway myself.

## 5 Analysis

Thus far, this thesis has made it clear that there is a lack of multicultural representation in mainstream media, especially in the public service broadcasting sector in Norway. In addition, we have learned that reaching the younger generation with a multicultural background is a goal according to their mission as a public service broadcaster. To get a better sense of how already existing productions dedicated to multicultural representation in NRK are dealing with this subject matter, I have chosen two NRK productions for analysis. The series *Norsk-ish* and the *17* series universe. Neither are representing multicultural characters as “criminal” or “marginal”, such as often is the case of news or fiction that would stereotype a certain culture in a prejudicial way (Igartua and Marcos-Ramos 2015, 65).

The key production personnel interviewed for this analysis state that they conducted comprehensive research into the multicultural community in Norway to make the series as authentic as possible. In other words, the series presented in this thesis suggests a more genuine way of representing an oppressed minority in a western society. The analysis is based on interviews with exclusive informants from each production (Bruun 2014), close reading of documents provided by the informants, and close visual analysis of key scenes from the series. The analysis explores significant characteristics, what role they play, how the series are structured in a way that appeals to the younger generation, and how the plot and characters are portrayed to tell a story that is relatable to a multicultural audience. Finally, I will reflect on how the “the West and the Rest” discourse is portrayed in each production while also challenging it.

### 5.1 “We needed someone who SAW us, without prejudice” – the *17* series universe

The key informants that were interviewed from the *17* series universe for this thesis was the director and one of the screenwriters. In this production, the series creators seem to have used this as a medium to tell the stories of, what started out to be, teenage boys of multicultural background, but in the end represented both boys and girls of multicultural background

between the age of 16-19, in which is an age group NRK is struggling with reaching (Mangelrød 2022).

To start off the interview, I asked what the inspiration was that brought forth the idea of the series. From the director's perspective, who directed all four seasons of *17*, *18*, *16* and *19*, Bendik Stalheim Møller explained that he was contacted about the project when the pitch of the series got the final approval to go into production. He envisioned it as a multi-functional plot-dominated series. What he means is that the series is directed towards the multicultural youth and the questionable issue of if you are a troubled kid in Norway, the stereotypical view is to get sent back to their home country to get 'raised correctly' and right education. However, that is not what happens to everyone.

Møller argues that multicultural youth are living just as normal lives as any other teenager in Norway with the same kinds of issues. Therefore, the inspiration of the series is to tell the stories of normal people living in Oslo facing issues in everyday life, but more specifically that every character in focus happens to be of multicultural background. In other words, Møller uses "double storytelling" in this production, which is when the series is produced to entertain, but also, to have educational purposes and to reflect deeper cultural meaning in the series (Redvall 2013; Sundet 2020, 73). The series aimed to be more specific than general. Moreover, the inspiration was to put this specific demographic in a general problem rather than a stereotypical problem.

From the screenwriter's perspective, who also was one of the screenwriters who took part of writing every season of the series, Melike Leblebicioglu Kaveh explained how the inspiration for this series comes partly from herself considering she is of Turkish descent. Kaveh resembles what Barnouw calls a "painter", someone bringing ideas and ways of creating something different from other filmmakers and writers (Barnouw 1983, 71). Like Møller, she also mentioned that, when she was writing at the time, the media shed such a negative light on kids being sent to Somalia and how teenagers, more specifically multicultural teenagers in Norway, are finding illegal ways of earning money quickly. Kaveh wanted to create something that could change the perspective on these themes. In other words, light is her medium. She wants to find ways of shedding light on something that is unexpected and has mysterious dynamics (Barnouw 1983, 72). Thus, suggesting that the *17* series universe is a media-created series, which means that the idea of the production evolved through the media.

Furthermore, she chooses to find a way to demonstrate the challenges people with a multicultural background face in finding a balance between at home and Norwegian culture.



Also, to portray the fact that they are expected to change themselves in Norway, but not the other way around, which is a common characteristic of Hall's discourse of "the West and the Rest". In addition, the series also functioned as a homage to the district of Stovner, Groruddalen and the rest of the east side of Oslo. The director was inspired by that part of the city, therefore, he wanted to portray some sense of pride to the east, thus making clear that this is a normal place for youth to live as any other place. The production personnel wanted to challenge the notion of Orientalism in how the 'otherness' of the east is dealt with.

#### 5.1.1 Telling real stories through fictional characters

Møller and Kaveh is hoping that the series is a complex representation behind all these choices that are being made in a young adult's life, and that it does not have anything to do with the person coming from a multicultural background, but the fact that anyone could end up in that kind of a situation.

This use of storytelling gives the younger generation with multicultural backgrounds a sense of belonging and an authentic voice to listen to (Ramasubramanian 2016, 339). However, it also gives those of the west to open their minds and shift towards the direction letting go of the preconceived prejudices. Therefore, the vision of the series is to create a "series universe" in the sense that there is a whole cast and a different character in focus each season, but everyone has a relation to each other to give a sense of continuity throughout the series, which is of similarity to *SKAM* who also focused on different main characters each season (Andersen and Sundet 2019, 6). Abdi starts the first season, then his best friend, Emra, continues in the second season. For the third season, Emra's little brother, Ibo, continues, and then the final season focuses on Aisha, who is in a relationship with Emra.

Kaveh believes that they managed to create a wide portrayal of the complexity associated with Emra, and that this character brings up several challenges that young men with multicultural backgrounds face in Norway today. Moreover, this series suggests having similar characteristics to the television genre, constructed reality, which obtains storytelling techniques from soap opera and documentary (Chalaby 2016, 14). This type of series usually consists of loose reconstructions of real-life events and based on structured scenarios. However, every character in the *17* series universe are not "ordinary" people reading out scripts to portray a story, but actors, which makes this a fictional drama series with constructed reality characteristics. The screenwriters wanted to portray the characters in a way that points out that this minority in Norwegian society neither feels seen, heard, or understood, thus having to hide behind a facade where you must act tough with no room for showing signs of weakness.

To represent the younger generation with a multicultural background in Norway as authentically as possible, Møller, Kaveh and the rest of the key production personnel visited high schools to interview their targeted demographic in-person. A significant finding was the way they talk and how they write messages on their phones. The younger generation seem to use various social media platforms, especially Snapchat, for different ways of communicating with each other, which will be further analyzed later in this thesis.

Kaveh views the idea of the series as a drama and comedy series, as well as an educational series. Therefore, using double storytelling in this series to build a kind of a bridge between the west and east and get a proper understanding of each other. In other words, multicultural people have watched a series of white people for so many years, now is the time for the tables to turn.

#### 5.1.2 How did NRK handle the *17* series universe production?

This production is produced by NRK, and as a public service broadcaster, I was curious if whether there would be any limitations in filming this series in terms of the lack of similar content from the broadcaster in prior.

I asked if the production personnel encountered any individuals who were against the idea, or in any way, made the creation of the series difficult. Kaveh mentions that it took around two years until the pitch got picked up and got the budget to go into production. However, she also believes that it did not necessarily have anything to do with the idea itself, but that it simply is how it is with pitches in general. Although there were a few questions about certain scenes, etc., Kaveh stated that they were trusted to create something that would speak to the younger generation and had the freedom to do what they felt was needed. Thus, they had the resources necessary to do the research for the production.

A similar answer from Møller as well. On the one hand, the series got the green light to start casting and go into production, as well as the idea was well received in terms of being a series including themes, such as diversity, which is also a significant part of their mission as a public service broadcaster and needs to continuously work with (Medietilsynet 2021, 7). On the other hand, Møller posits that there were some growing pains going into the production of each season. Although it can be argued that it is the same situation with any other series being picked up, when making one season, you do not know if the series will be successful enough to get a second season. As NRK lack drama series including diversity in Norwegian society, there were low efforts to keep that going. This claim may indicate that it seems as if the intention from NRK's side was present, but the actual action of shedding light on the

multicultural minorities in Norway was somewhat faint. For that reason, suggesting that perhaps this was more of a box to check off on a list of things to do. On the other hand, the *17* series universe did last four seasons, which would suggest that the series was well received, therefore, indicating NRK recognizing its potential to become more than only one season.

## 5.2 Too multicultural to be Norwegian, but too Norwegian to be multicultural?

Furthermore, I was fortunate to be able to have the opportunity to interview the director and both screenwriters of *Norsk-ish*. Compared to the other series analyzed and discussed, which finished its fourth and last season in 2020, *Norsk-ish* is still in production where season two will be released around the finalizations of this thesis in 2023. Nevertheless, the conversations with the production personnel of this series gave an insightful view of their goal and portrayal of how they wanted the series to be.

A significant informant in this interview process is Melike Leblebicioglu Kaveh, as she was one of the screenwriters in both the *17* series universe and *Norsk-ish*. However, the development of the idea for *Norsk-ish* was quite different. Kaveh explained that it started out as an idea that she and Bahareh Badavi, the other screenwriter of *Norsk-ish*, brought forth from talking about their own experiences growing up in Norway with a multicultural background.

Badavi explained how they have worked together on other projects in prior and as conversations outside of the workplace slowly evolved into more about personal experiences, they realized how similar experiences they have been exposed to simply by having families from outside of Norway. Although they have families from different countries, there was a lot of room for understanding each other's everyday life experiences as a young adult with a multicultural background, thus discovering that this should be turned into a series to tell these kinds of stories. As the group of multicultural people in Norway is limited, the strategy of social networking with others in the industry is essential in these cases to express meaningful interaction through culture (Castells 2000, 5). Thus, the idea of the series was pitched to a producer at a mingling event organized at NRK where Badavi found a group working with diversity, and with some back and forth, the series got picked up.

Kaveh pointed out an interesting point of how the series was created and stood out to others. It was the fact that it started as a theme. In other words, it did not start out based on specific experience, or character, but rather they had the theme of the series and continued to write out scenes based on their theme, which is the struggle of young adults balancing between

different cultures. This may suggest a kind of a thematic series structure where the same actors are kept while shooting each episode under the same theme.

Thereafter when they got to who would be the director for the series. Terje Rangnes was selected to bring the theme-based series to reality. Thus, when sitting with Rangnes, I asked specifically what drew him towards wanting to direct this project. He pointed out the uniqueness of the stories that would be told and that the characters had interesting traits to them that are not seen much in Norwegian television. Also, apart from the characteristics of the idea that separates them from other productions, he simply visualized it as a good combination of a drama and comedy series. In other words, he saw an interesting drama series consisting of comedic scenes that had something special, which is the theme of being multicultural balancing between two cultures. For that reason, we went into how the key production personnel were going to accomplish that through their film strategy.

#### 5.2.1 The style and theme of *Norsk-ish*

As for the filming style, Rangnes wanted the series to feel as realistic as possible. Therefore, they are using steadicam when they wanted smooth and fast “handheld” shots (Gocsik, Barsam, and Monahan 2016, 257), and regular handheld shots to show movement that may suggest the action of someone moving (Gocsik, Barsam, and Monahan 2016, 223). Using these techniques gives a direct cinema documentary, also known as fly-on-the-wall, influence on the fictional comedy-drama series.

Furthermore, Rangnes explains how he wishes the series to look as authentic as possible. The series is portraying experiences that is happening to both first and second generations of different minorities living in Norway, thus using the steadicam and handheld motions throughout the series is to give an authentic insight to the theme without using voice-over narration (Tseronis, Forceville, and Grannetia 2015, 1381). Rangnes aimed at making an abstract statement about the issues that are raised in the series through the relationship of events to each other through editing. Although documentaries do not appeal to aesthetic sensibility and are aimed at reality and real life itself (Nichols 2010; Tseronis, Forceville, and Grannetia 2015, 1386), *Norsk-ish* is telling a real story about real people experiencing things that are happening in the real world. Moreover, Kaveh and Badavi wanted to write the stories as dynamic and real as possible, and the stories are to be experienced from the inside in a first-person point of view, not from the outside in a third nor omniscient point of view. Therefore, in using characteristics of a documentary with an observational mode (Nichols 2010, 172), the

viewer has more responsibility to determine and establish what is being said and the actions being made in the series.

As the characteristics of documentaries are pointed out in this series, the production personnel use an aspect ratio of 2:1, which is more common in films, also known as cinemascope widescreen (Gocsik, Barsam, and Monahan 2016, 197). In using a cinematic aspect ratio and a bigger lens, we will get to see a wider area without a short-focal-length lens. Therefore, the communities and environments the scenes are set at will appear clearer, and with the 2:1 format, the production personnel argue that the viewer will feel a closeness to the characters in the series.

The lighting throughout the series is to be experienced as naturalistic and realistic as possible. To make an authentic series that gives a documentary, but also, drama series tone, natural lighting is primarily used in most scenes, and other sources of lighting, such as inside a home on ceilings and tables, is used when it seems natural to have it on. Furthermore, the lighting ratio is essential to represent an environment. In other words, they are trying to find a balance between the key light and fill light to make the series look authentic (Gocsik, Barsam, and Monahan 2016, 227). Rangnes states that the intention is to show real lives, not create something new and assume how things look in a dramatized way. However, they also incorporate colors to challenge the lighting ratio throughout the series, e.g., Amrit's bar, in the streets of Oslo and at Surinder's home. In other words, they are using lighting in a way to implicitly emphasize the colorful environments as well.

### 5.2.2 The Dogmas that *Norsk-ish* represents

When creating a series that contains certain themes that may be somewhat sensitive to others, it is important to have principles that can contribute to reaching the goal of a successful television series about "the Rest" in a western society. The production of *Norsk-ish* has 10 dogmas in their concept description of the series, which they viewed as essential to be able to create the series.

First, *Norsk-ish* is always going to be culture specific and realistic. This explains their ambition and goal to produce something that tells the stories of something someone has experienced. In other words, the series is supposed to reach people with similar backgrounds, or people who know others with similar backgrounds, and leave them to think this is their own family or friend. With the use of documentary characteristics, this allows the series to represent voices in the real world that are not heard (Tseronis, Forceville, and Grannetia 2015, 1386).

Although the series itself is fiction, the experiences are real, therefore, telling real and culture specific stories gives the viewer a sense of relatability.

Second, in any situation, there will be a twist. Their series wants to challenge the prejudices in today's society. There is a clear distinction of "the West and the Rest", thus the viewer's expectations are going to be tested. Moreover, preconceived thoughts about the multicultural people in Oslo may prove "the West" have been taught a certain way of thinking about a specific group (Hall 1995, 204). For that reason, the series contributes to an open-minded perspective.

Third, the plot shall be character driven. Fourth, humor is an important tool in characters' behavior and dialog. However, that should not stand in the way of its development. Although the conversations between characters seem light and comedic, it should not be in the way of serious topics, but rather encouraged. As this is a series that brings up serious topics about people with multicultural backgrounds, the use of humor seems to function as a tool to cope with uncomfortable situations and making the content entertaining while educating the viewers (Cantor 1976, 501).

Fifth, each episode will have the main focus on one character. Sixth, in each season, there will be experiments tested on some of the episodes in terms of structure and form to explore production possibilities. In each episode, there is an A, B and C plot structure, also called an overlapping narrative thread. The screenwriters choose a character to be the focus, the A story, meaning the most important part of the episode. However, the B and C story are crucial to parts as well. This will structure the episode in a cause-and-effect sequence of events that occurs over time (Gocsik, Barsam, and Monahan 2016, 238).

Seventh, flashbacks are to be used as a tool to visualize the character's inner conflict and the series' subject matter. In other words, this is a manipulation of time used to communicate something to the viewer which the character does not know the viewer knows (Gocsik, Barsam, and Monahan 2016, 217). Thus, functioning as a secret between viewer and series creators to create a connection. On the other hand, there are no flashback scenes in season one, perhaps this is a part of the experiments they will be exploring for season two from dogma six.

Eight, the goal is not to be instructive or moralizing, but rather the subject matter of the series should teach people to be open minded and feel an emotional connection to the vulnerable and authentic themes that are being raised. Ninth, connecting to emotions is used to build relations with other members of minority groups, therefore, using the voice of

multicultural people to better the representation of the oppressed (Ramasubramanian 2016, 334).

Finally, the series should give the viewer an insight to social and ethical dilemmas while being entertained. One of the several goals for this series was to inform and entertain, thus using double storytelling to accomplish this dogma. In targeting a smaller and more specific target group, such as people with multicultural backgrounds, this approach becomes a key selling point on an international level (Sundet 2020, 73).

These dogmas are established by the production personnel to give a clear vision of what this series will represent. In being culture specific, they will be able to challenge the prejudices of others and each other. Furthermore, the use of humor contributes to entertainment which will keep the viewers' attention and have them in a good mood while being educated about people with multicultural backgrounds and how they live in a western society. Therefore, NRK is contributing to making important topics popular and the popular topics important (NRK 2016; Sundet 2020, 72).

Thus far, in the chapters above I have looked at the intentions and frameworks of how the key production personnel shaped each of the productions. The values and morals of the series creators seem to suggest that the realism in the stories they want to portray are significant contributors in reaching their target audience. In the following chapters, I will continue with a closer reading of the plot and characters starting with the *17* series universe.

### 5.3 Big life choices and changes

The *17* series universe is about the part of the younger generation who is transitioning from being a teenager to having to deal with more adult responsibilities. The main characters deal with normal everyday struggles, such as being torn between the expectations from their family and friends. Therefore, the number of their age is a countdown in each season towards life changing decisions.

#### 5.3.1 The beginning of a series universe – *17*

In the first season of this teen drama series, Abdi and his friends are living a carefree everyday life on the east side of Oslo in Groruddalen (Bergmo 2018). They are living like any other Norwegian 17-year-old, like going out to parties, flirting with girls, and getting into trouble. However, something Abdi is not aware of is that in 17 days, he will be going through a big life

changing event. The series is about being young and having to stand with each foot in two different cultures.

Abdi is the main character in this season. The focus is on guys with a multicultural background and how they live a normal life, but their experience of living in Norway is significantly different from other guys. Although being raised in the same country, they get treated in a way that makes them think otherwise. The portrayal of “the West and the Rest” is essential to get an insight of what most multicultural people from the east of Oslo are experiencing. The West is not a specific geographical place, but a historical construct (Hall 1995). However, this series may suggest an ambition to build a bridge between the two to explore a side of Oslo most people have not seen before.

Moreover, Abdi is worrying about being sent to Somalia by his mother as he overheard her being on a phone call with a friend where she was frustrated about the recent trouble he has caused. Although this may seem a sensitive topic to include in a series, the series creators wanted to show this type of a situation as authentic as possible and to shed a different light on this subject matter compared to the media. Therefore, this season uses attributes of transmedia storytelling to represent a single story about guys with a multicultural background in a different light than various social media platforms and other media (Jenkins 2006, 95).

This series is representing the notion of “the West and the Rest” through portraying how there is an Oslo-West where the ethnic and white Norwegians are, and then there is Oslo-East where the multicultural Norwegians are. However, there are no points that are crossing each other from any side. Thus, the series illustrates a plot that many, for instance, do not relate to, but the ground foundation of the entire story is that all of them have the same life in one way or another. Experiencing a story through a television series, such as Abdi’s, challenges the relationship between the west and east. In other words, Abdi’s story shows how everyone is dealing with the same issues, such as doing well in school, making their parents proud of them, finding love and fighting with their friends.

Telling this story through fiction seems to shed a positive light on the subject matter as film and television are likely to have a more diverse audience (Jenkins 2006, 96). Although the series could have ended with Abdi going on a trip to Somalia with his mother for the summer, the series creators added a hook to try to sell another season. In other words, they included a cliffhanger to increase the desire in wanting to watch more by interrupting the narrative in a suspenseful way (Michlin 2011; Wirz et al. 2022, 2). In the last episode of *17*, it was Emra’s birthday and he had turned 18. As Abdi congratulated him and said, “You are 18”, this line



echoed on repeat. Thus, using Abdi's last line to Emra as an advertisement for the next season, *18*.

### 5.3.2 The series universe continues – *18* & *16*

The second season, *18*, continues with what the previous season started, portraying, and telling the real stories behind the stereotypical headlines that are displayed in the media. Emra has turned 18 years old and stumbles upon challenges when it comes to earning his own money to achieve his dream apartment on top of Barcode in the city center, but that will be impossible if he continues to work at his uncle's vegetable store. For that reason, he wants to make it on his own and ends up being recruited to a criminal gang (Bergmo 2019).

Being a young adult can be difficult. It is the time to take responsibility of your own life choices, being able to communicate with others and find the strength to show weakness. However, it seems like as when 'boys' become 'men' and put pressure on themselves to reach to the expectations of the traditional role of how a man 'should' be, they tend to direct their focus on status, gender roles and a certain "macho culture". Although the idea of being a man, or woman, is something you become and not something you are born with (Butler 1990, 12), the environment one resides in is where you culturally and socially acquire that kind of mindset. It is only natural the perspective of group vitality theory, when you see someone from your community do a certain thing, you would think that is the norm, thus struggle to find another way in handling things.

In this season, Emra falls in love with Aisha, therefore, raising the dilemma of what kind of man he wants to be. Counting down from 18 days, this series raises serious themes that guys of legal age experiences, such as being trapped in a metaphorical prison with their friend group, thus feeling peer pressure to earn money quickly to wear the right expensive clothes and to provide economically at home (Bergmo 2019). Furthermore, the series creators' ambition was to continue the double storytelling through Emra by showing what is going on behind the macho exterior he is putting up. On the other hand, as he makes a bad life decision and ends up getting arrested, his little brother, Ibo, is left all alone and gets thrown into a new environment where he chases after street cred and popularity.

Ibo is 16 years old and is the third season's main character. His family is going through struggles as Emra is no longer there. However, there is no room for being set back, especially in high school. Ibo's focus is on being reaching the top of the popularity scale, because being 16 years old is all about being the coolest (Mosti 2020). To achieve this, the guys believe the

answer is aesthetic appearance and social street cred. The series suggests that if you are on a “russebuss”, you have socially succeeded. In other words, it is all about finding your group, not necessarily for the senior year high school tradition “russ”, but the group simply becomes your people in general. The need of having a group of people in high school to lean on may seem like a kind of safety net, or an indication of someone’s worth.

The series creators continue to tell the stories of multicultural guys at the age of 16 in Oslo-East and how they are experiencing the same things as any other ethnic Norwegian in Norway. Furthermore, the series targets this age group to reflect on these constructed ideals that are created in their community, thus challenges and helps them to act with integrity and create real friendship. The ambition was to provide young guys with authentic and realistic representations of how to deal with certain challenges this age groups face on an everyday basis (Sundet 2020, 74).

In 16 days, Ibo and his friends learn what consequences of acting like a fake version of themselves and chasing social status at the expense of their humanity leads to. In addition, the series portrays topics, like homosexuality among younger people with a multicultural background, and the complex and long-term consequences of juvenile delinquency. By implementing these kinds of relevant topics in fictional content from the public broadcaster, it increases the chance of the younger generation to watch and educate themselves while being entertained (Redvall 2013; Sundet 2020, 73).

### 5.3.3 Being a strong and independent woman – 19

Thus far, all three seasons have had a male main character. Aisha makes a fitting choice to continue the series universe as she was portrayed as Emra’s the love interest in the second season. Considering the viewers already know about her and her relationship, season four creates excitement around what would happen next between Aisha and Emra.

Moreover, this storyline creates opportunities to shed light on how young women with multicultural backgrounds are being treated when unwritten norms from society makes things difficult (NRK Kommunikasjon 2021). Aisha has a goal of being independent and has her own voice. Her older brother, Yusuf, moves back home from London, and the freedom she once had gets taken away. Aisha is living a double life and the trust from her family is based on lies. The drastic measures she is willing to take may suggest a significant need for independence and to shed light on the fact that women are still treated differently. Therefore, this last season of the series raises a significant topic of gender roles and unequal treatment.

Everyone has known about Aisha and Emra since the second season, and somehow, she faces a problem of rumors being spread about them sleeping together. She gets stamped as a whore and he becomes a fuckboy with street cred. It seems that the use of the male gaze, sexualizing the female for the male to watch and use for their own gain (Mulvey 1989, 19), was to strengthen Aisha's desire to be a strong and independent woman. Furthermore, the last season uses a young woman as the main character to portray the dilemmas they experience to unearth challenges they face every day simply because they are a girl. Considering the past seasons target guys, the creators' ambition was to bring the male audience to this last season to enlighten them with a goal for them to take more responsibility for women's equal rights.

The entire series universe is a story that represents many. To be curious instead of judging others. For that reason, the goal of this NRK production is to illustrate that there is no such thing as right and wrong, or black and white. If there is anything to take from the plot is that it is complicated and different shades in between exist too. Although there are discourses that assume and promote the difference between the west and non-west, this series functions as a bridge to connect the two in portraying the fact that they all face the same everyday issues. These strong binaries exist all the way to adult age, which NRK further demonstrates in their productions. *Norsk-ish* is therefore another significant series that raises the same topics, but at a more mature age. In the next chapter, I will address *Norsk-ish*'s approach to multicultural young adults in Norway and the construction of its main characters.

#### 5.4 I am Norwegian...ish

The drama series, *Norsk-ish*, is about three young adults with foreign backgrounds living in Oslo, where they are experiencing the challenges of living between two different cultures (Thorvik 2020). Being raised in Norway their entire lives, they view themselves as Norwegians. However, as second-generation immigrants, throughout the series the characters get to encounter people with different viewpoints of being an "actual Norwegian" in the capital.

Amrit, Fariba and Helin are the main characters of the series. Amrit is Indian, Fariba is Iranian and Helin of Turkish descent. They deal with the common notion of "the West and the Rest". In other words, the western in this series is viewed as a society that is developed, urbanized and modern, and the Rest is the part of the population that does not fit the standards the West has set. Therefore, the West provides a certain sense of how the standard way of a society should be, thus becoming critical against other cultures.

Moreover, the main characters deal with consequences of following the Norwegian way of living compared to their parents (Bøe 2020). For instance, Amrit has a Norwegian girlfriend, blonde hair, and blue eyes. The pair are at the stage in their relationship where they have moved into an apartment together, on the other side, Amrit feels the need to hide his relationship because his mother wishes him to marry an Indian woman. He faces the confusion of what he should, or should not, do in a relationship. Choose an Indian woman to please his family, or the Norwegian girlfriend he truly loves despite cultural differences.

Furthermore, Fariba struggles with her parents' acceptance of sharing a child with a Norwegian man she is not married to. Also, she holds an unstable job as a photographer, which is something her parents also do not approve of. They think Fariba chasing her dreams is a western way of living and jeopardizes her abilities to provide for her son. Helin, on the other hand, followed her parents' wishes to become a doctor. At one point, she wonders if she truly wanted to become a doctor, or if it was the sacrifices her parents made for giving her a good life that convinced her. She also attempts to date a Turkish man to see if that would please both her parents and her wish to stay in touch with her Turkish roots.

#### 5.4.1 Stereotypes combined with normal everyday life

The drama series brings out several stereotypes of how a typical Norwegian views another Norwegian with a multicultural background. However, the series also managed to portray the way a young adult of immigrant parents would react to certain situations.

In the first episode, Norway's constitution day on May 17<sup>th</sup> is celebrated with singing performances, which will be further analyzed in chapter 5.8, and a party afterwards at a friend's apartment. As Helin makes her way through the terrace of the apartment, she manages to approach two people in a deep debate about whether constitution day celebration traditions are forced upon people. After making eye contact, one of the two people immediately looks directly at Helin and points out that she does not wear a traditional folk costume, also called bunad. Her quick response was no and asking what the point is with immigrants wearing bunad. Therefore, the answer seems to suggest a reaction of feeling offended and people with multicultural backgrounds must do various things to fit into Norwegian society. The conversation nevertheless ended with Helin being positive to the day of celebration as she appreciates that people gather and have a good time together.

The creators of the series wanted to create a series that represented how it is to live in Norway being Norwegian, "ish" (Kildebo 2021). In other words, they wanted to express how it is for people with a multicultural background living a life being too foreign for Norwegians,

but too Norwegian to their ethnic roots. Moreover, NRK being a public broadcaster who has a mission to serve the entire population (Sundet 2020), *Norsk-ish* contributes to cover a part of the population, “the Rest”, who has felt oppressed by “the West” where the rest are the main characters.

Topics, such as dating-life, marriage, children, career, and lifestyle, are discussed in the series to get an understanding of how young adults with a multicultural background deal with having to compromise and customize various decisions based on values and morals they are raised with by their parents and the environment they are grown up in. By showing the homes of the main characters’ parents, with influences from their home country, the series manages to portray more broadly how the Norwegian population lives, which will be further discussed in this thesis.

For instance, Amrit’s mother who is from India wears traditional Indian clothing throughout the entire series, which suggests that foreigners do not have to give up their origins, even though living in another country. Moreover, the series also paints a picture that represents acceptance, and in a sense, acknowledges that young adults with a multicultural background are aware of the challenges and are not afraid to go against the stereotypes that have been constructed among people originating from the last decades. Although there is still a lack of multicultural representation, NRK has managed to open a door to more inclusivity in the Norwegian population.

## 5.5 The Characters

The characters of a television series are an essential element of the narrative (Gocsik, Barsam, and Monahan 2016, 201). NRK are working towards the goal of portraying diversity and promoting inclusivity in their productions. Therefore, the choice of actors with any functional role within the plot is determining in the mission of representation of minorities in the Norwegian population. Furthermore, the characterization of each character is a collaborative result of the creative efforts of all key production personnel.

According to Kaveh, the character development was a close cooperative process between the screenwriters, director, but most importantly the actors as well. As all the main cast members are of multicultural background raised in Norway, the ambition was to work together and share experiences to create an as authentic series as possible. Also, the characters’ personalities are created without specific ethno-cultural characteristics to not affect the viewers’ expectations (Igartua and Marcos-Ramos 2015, 74).

### 5.5.1 The *Norsk-ish* Characters

In the character development documents provided by the project manager of this production, each of the main characters have their unique power that will be expressed in series, and given their power, the series creators have established what they want and need in life, as well as what they would need to give up, to demonstrate their personality traits.

Helin is the power of conscience. She wants to find balance in her life. In other words, there is instability between her life in Norway and her Turkish family who seemingly have been more influenced by the Norwegian culture they live in, which has led to confusion in Helin's opinion.

For that reason, it has been established that she needs tolerance. There are several events throughout the series which turns her whole world upside down and she simply does not understand what kind of life morals and choice she has based her life on. Therefore, the need of tolerance is central to Helin because that means the ability to tolerate opinions or behavior that she disagrees with. However, through the journey Helin embarks on in this series, the price she must pay is losing herself. She loses track of what is right and wrong, and perhaps what the series creators means to demonstrate is the sense of losing a part of yourself. The notion of identifying yourself as two nationalities, but suddenly feeling as if one of them has disappeared, which could be the one you thought you related to the most. Thus, in this series, the viewer gets to see a character who is getting themselves back on the path to self-discovery.

Amrit is the power of love. He wants to love another person despite of cultural differences. We find him in a relationship with an ethnic Norwegian woman who he has already moved in with, but without his mother knowledge, nor approval. Although he knows he loves her, he also knows that this could be a cultural collision. What Amrit wants in life is to have a family.

In the series, there is a pregnancy-scare where there could be a possibility his girlfriend would pregnant but turned out to be a false alarm. However, a part of Amrit hoped that the test would be positive even though his mother does not know anything about that part of his life. What the series creators wished for this character was the need of independence. In other words, that he takes decisions for himself and not for others. Throughout the series, he falls into a deep hole of believing he needs to find someone Indian but forgets about himself as an individual and what he needs in life. Therefore, the price he must pay is the future as a father. Although it seems contradicting when what he wants is a family with children, he is on a journey where he is struggling to decide for himself. As he finds out that an Indian girlfriend is not what he wants, his fear of losing his current girlfriend increases, thus jeopardizing his future.

Fariba is the power of ambition. She has goals for herself and tries to take advantage of every opportunity that comes her way. Therefore, what she wants in life is success. In the series, Fariba is in a constant search for job opportunities, and she wants to be good at her work.

Furthermore, she also wants success in being a mom to her son who she shares with an ethnic Norwegian man who has found someone else. For that reason, this character needs integrity. Through her journey in finding success, she stumbles upon different situations where a quality of having strong moral principles and being honest is needed. The moment she finds her integrity to do something, her life starts to take on a better direction. However, as she continues, she will find herself paying the price of losing her direction on her career and family. The attempts of chasing fame and attention gets the best of her and ends up burning bridges with both her parents and possibilities to continue her work as a photographer and writer.

#### 5.5.2 The 17 series universe characters

The characters in this production represents a distinctive character type that the screenwriters have created based on their research on their target group, girls and boys of multicultural background between the age of 16-19 from the east side of Oslo. Although it seems as though the characters would be stereotypical, the extensive research and multiple interviews the key informant conducted to create this series indicates close collaboration to develop authentic and relatable characters for the viewers to connect with.

In season one, Abdi is a Norwegian-Somali 17-year-old from Groruddalen. What he wishes for is to have a balance in his life where he does not need to feel like he is living a double life. However, being pulled in one direction by his family and another by his friends, he will stumble upon challenges in communicating with each of them. He has ambitions to do good in school, live his young life and embrace his multicultural background. Moreover, the authentic stories told through Abdi enables emotional empathy (Igartua 2010, 348). The viewers can feel what he feels, thus becoming actively involved in his story. Therefore, the series creators' aspirations for the character, Abdi, was for him to be a symbol of that bridge the series wants to create between "the West and the Rest".

In season two, Emra is 18 years old, and his family is from Turkey. Characters of ethnic minorities are often based on the news (Galán 2006; Igartua and Marcos-Ramos 2015, 65), thus Emra's story is written to contradict the partial view of reality other medias are portraying of people with a multicultural background from Oslo-East. As the representation of this character could indicate a certain perspective of an immigrant turned into stereotypes

connected with being criminal or marginal (Igartua and Marcos-Ramos 2015, 65), the goal is to tell a story through Emra who is of legal age and made a bad life decision which could happen to anybody regardless of ethnicity and culture.

In season three, Ibo is 16 years old, and also, with Turkish roots. He is at the age when it is time to explore and be curious about different things. High school, finding friends groups, having fun, and most importantly for guys at his age, figuring out “russebuss” because according to them, it determines social status. The character fulfills the viewers need to watch someone they can relate to. In other words, Ibo is someone many can identify with, and the viewers put themselves in his position to share emotional states (Cohen 2001; Igartua 2010, 350). Moreover, the series creators’ ambitions with Ibo were to illustrate that the hunger for popularity is normal and it affects anyone.

In the fourth season, Aisha is 19 years old, and her family is from Iraq. As the only female main character in this series universe, she is the leading character to represent young women with a multicultural background. With characteristic traits, such as independent, tough, and fearless, the screenwriters’ goal is to portray a strong female who dares to challenge the inequalities they face on an everyday basis. Women often encounter theories that tell gender how they should act and what roles that fit you. Aisha is therefore a character that liberates this discourse. In other words, she represents the notion that we should not be bound by sex (Butler 1990, 5). Furthermore, to become the independent woman she wants to be, she resolves to lying to her family. Thus, this character faces identity challenges, and in 19 days, she will learn a lot about who she is among her friends and family.

## 5.6 The Functions of the Title Sequences

In order to make an emotional connection with the characters and their stories, the series must present itself with information about what it is about and transport the viewer into the world of the series (Davison 2013, 8).

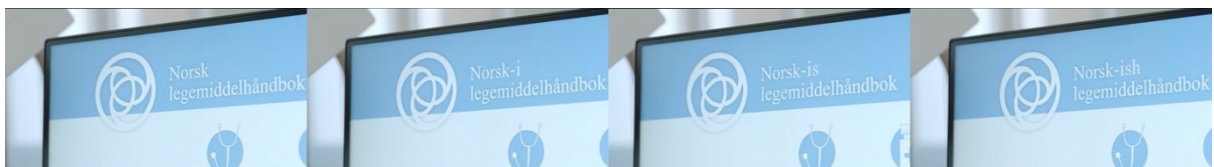
A strategy the production personnel have used to reach out to a certain audience is to create an interesting title sequence, also known as an intro, that grabs the attention to the demographic they are aiming for. As *Norsk-ish* is quite specifically aiming for a multicultural group of young people, they saw perhaps that using humor was the way to go. While the *17* series universe is more of a regular series for a younger audience with multicultural representation in the whole cast. The production personnel aimed at a simplistic intro that looked modern, which is what younger audiences enjoy engaging with. Both title sequences



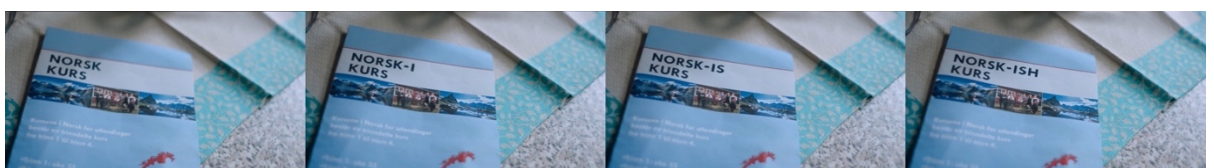
are the short and modern version with a title card (Davison 2013, 7). However, they both have their own version of the short title sequence.

### 5.6.1 The I-S-H

What does it mean to be “Norwegian-ish” (“Norsk-ish”) is the central question and theme in this series. The title sequence in *Norsk-ish* is short, but also, almost unnoticeable and there is no time to skip it. Every episode starts with a scene that functions as an explanatory introduction to what is about to happen, or what the theme is for the following episode. Shortly as the scene is about to end, the title sequence is seamlessly incorporated in the same shot. The camera switches its focus from the character and frames the shot on an object or sign that says “Norsk”, then editing it to say “Norsk-ish”.



First and foremost, it is the title of the series, but also it is to emphasize the theme of the series. Going back to what Kaveh and Badavi used as a method in creating this series was that it is theme-based. They wanted to portray everything that has to do with multicultural people and their struggles of being perceived as not Norwegian enough but have become too Norwegian for their own culture. Thus, finding the middle ground of using the English adjectival suffix “-ish”, which people tend to use when they are unsure, or not confident enough to commit to the word (Nilssen 2015, 50). Although this is a short title sequence, the objects used as the title card are used as signs to signify what the series is about.



In the examples above, there is a Norwegian language course pamphlet that was given to Mehdi from his friend. Furthermore, the different objects used in the title sequence are semiological in the sense that the series creators want the viewer to understand the signs as a message (Rose 2016, 113). The objects that are used, in other words, the signified, to present how it is to be Norwegian, but also, not Norwegian at the same time. Following the works of Saussure, the object and the image do not necessarily need to have an immediate connection to each other, but it gives a bigger picture of how being “Norsk-ish” is viewed in several ways. Therefore, the pamphlet, medicine handbook, passport, beer sign, etc., there is not direct indication that

we are about to witness people who are going to struggle with Norwegian culture, but rather raising the question of what is “Norwegian” without the “-ish”. In addition, they are using these signs as language and text to propose a thought of why people from any culture who have grown up in Norway cannot be considered as Norwegian.

Thus, this title sequence, as simple and short as it can be, is used to introduce the series and its contents with a kind of typewriting style. Each letter is added letter by letter, which may give a retro tone. However, it is a fitting choice as the younger generation in today’s media landscape have an increased interest in vintage styles. Although there could be a possibility of missing the introduction of the series as it is of such a short length, by using the score in the background, and increasing the volume with some distinctive sounds when the title is appearing on the screen, contributes to capturing the viewers’ attention (Davison 2013, 8). Moreover, without the possibility of skipping the intro based on the effectiveness of the title sequence, it seems to contribute to viewers continuing to watch as it eliminates the possibility of them getting bored, or losing interest, and rather gives the episodes a simultaneous flow from the beginning to end.

#### 7.6.2 The Countdown to the Big Event

In the title sequence of the *17* series universe, however, the modern short title card version is used, but in a countdown format. According to Kaveh, this countdown functions as a preparation for a big event and the number of episodes is based on the series title, which is the age of the main character, and also, the number of days the whole season is taking place. Thus, counting down from day 16-19 to day 1, which also signifies how many days there are left until the big life changing event.



Compared to the previous title sequence format, this is a separate introduction to the series with a single-colored frame and a number in the middle of the screen rolling to the number of the season’s name, then changes to the number of days, in other words, episodes, that are left until the finale. The sound in this title sequence is a kind of ticking-sound that accompanies the rolling motion of the numbers, going quick when there are many numbers to roll through and slow when there are few numbers to roll. Furthermore, this function contributes to not necessarily an essential characteristic in contemporary high production value, but a contingent

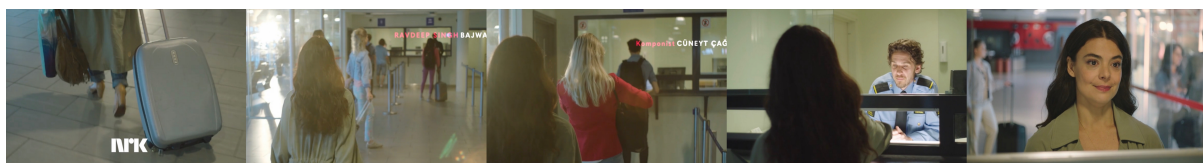
characteristic (Nelson 2007; Davison 2013, 8). The use of such sounds may get more attention in an unforeseen way and provide better concentration for the viewer.

The younger generation's concentration abilities might be lower than it used to be before the rise of social media. This target group uses social media on an everyday basis where short videos are the norm (Graciyal and Viswam 2021, 100), thus making their attention difficult to hold onto as they are used to being entertained in 30 seconds rather than 45 minutes. Therefore, creating a short title sequence that clearly presents a countdown to a big event gives excitement and action to the younger viewers. The element that makes this title sequence exciting is the mysterious tone the number in the middle of the frame has, because the viewer does not know what the countdown is leading towards. There is an option to skip over the title sequence. However, it is short enough for the viewer to not skip as it also functions as a reminder of how long until the big event happens.

The originality of the title sequence gives the younger viewers something to look forward to as they are being transported to a realm of stories about how it is to grow up in a western society with a multicultural background. In the following chapters, key scenes from each production will be broken down to evaluate the characteristics that represent the younger generation with a multicultural background through the discourse of “the West and the Rest” and double storytelling.

### 5.7 The Airport Scene

The first scene of *Norsk-ish* takes place at the airport. Fading from a black screen, the camera is pointed at a woman's legs, walking with a luggage in her right hand and a purse with a plastic bag in her left hand. Furthermore, the first sound is of an airplane flying, this clearly means she is at the airport, traveling with a suitcase and has shopped at the tax free. In order to set the mood, the woman kicks the suitcase on the side to give a certain comedic alert, that perhaps the wheel on the suitcase is broken, or there is something funny that is about to happen.



The camera continues with a tracking shot upwards to get the woman's upper body in the frame for a medium close shot. As the sun shines on a low rise straight into the camera and sun rays are peaking through the windows, it likely means that the scene is set in the morning, therefore,

the woman in the middle of the frame might be tired considering she has just arrived from a flight. At this point all we see is the back of the woman's head. She has long and loosely curled black hair, wearing a green coat, blue denim jeans and beige high heels. She is walking towards what seems to be passport control where there are two lines, the one on the left has three people standing there and the right line has one person, as well as the left line is for EU/EØS passports, and the right line is for all passports. Therefore, she chooses to stand in the left line. The people in front of her seem to go through quickly, and as it is about to be her turn, she gives the male controller her passport. In the moment after greeting each other and he states her name, "Fariba Asadi", the camera switches, making the first cut after a long tracking shot, revealing her face. Dark brown eyes, dark eyebrows with rosy cheeks and dark pink lipstick, Fariba smiles at the controller. He asks her "Where are you coming from?", her smile drops, staying in a neutral smile where the mouth is attempting to smile, but her smiles are not anymore.

As he repeats his questions, because she did not answer right away, she starts raising her eyebrows, initiating that she is about to feel offended, steering her eyes towards her passport, saying "I have a Norwegian passport". This is the moment where the viewer gets to witness Fariba's personality.

The controller tries to correct himself, "That wasn't what I meant, where are you coming from?", where he emphasized the word "coming". Fariba lowers her eyebrows again, her eyes switching between focusing on the man and the passport, trying to make clear that she thinks he is asking her an inappropriate question. Furthermore, she makes a big sigh and says, "I am born in Iran, if that was what you were wondering about", the controller changes his facial expression as well as he leans backwards on his chair, signaling that he realizes she misunderstood his question. However, before he gets the chance to correct himself again, Fariba continues to say "I have had a Norwegian passport for about 30 years, it should be okay that I answer Norwegian? Or do I need blue eyes and blonde hair? Or is it perhaps my name that is weird?". The controller also sighs, leans back towards her, and looks her straight into her eyes and says, "What I am asking is what flight are you coming from today?". While breaking out her serious face, she looks down with a small laugh, "with Norwegian from New York", then staying completely silent looking up at him and then down at the counter. He looks at her passport and then at her, saying "Welcome home", in which she says thanks to and walks away.

Moreover, to further analyze the semiological characteristics of this scene, the works of Ferdinand de Saussure can be applied here to understand signs as the "basic unit of languages" (Rose 2016, 113). According to Saussure, there are two parts of a sign, signified (a concept or

object) and signifier (a sound or an image). In order to understand that this first scene is set at the airport, the signified is the act of walking with a suitcase and standing in a line, while the signifier is the airplane sounds and handing her passport to a man behind a desk wearing a blue uniform.



As this scene is a reenactment of a past event Bahareh Badavi has experienced herself, I will be analyzing the people in the scene using Gillian Dyer's (1982) checklist for what signs of humans symbolize to establish what makes this kind of an event such a stereotypical one, but in what ways, by humorizing this scene, makes it a good opening scene to the entire series (Dyer 1982; Rose 2016, 115).

As this is the first scene to a series about having to balance life between two different cultures, and being too foreign to be Norwegian, and vice versa, we see a woman with dark brown eyes and almost black colored hair. The people right in front of her, a woman with blonde hair in jeans and jacket, a man with brown hair in jeans and a shirt in the EU/EØS line, and another woman with black hair in matching pink hoodie and leggings in the "all passports" line. Considering this is a scene set at the airport, it would be expected to see various people. The two people sitting behind the desk as passport controllers are a woman with blonde hair and a man with light brown hair and hazel eyes. At first glance what we see is an attempt to place different kinds of people in one setting to not separate Fariba apart from the rest. However, they have placed the light hair colored people on the left side where the Europeans are supposed to go, and a woman of color on the right side, which would be a suggestion to explicitly demonstrate the separation between the two lines. All the travelers are holding hand luggage of some sort and are getting their passports checked. The passport controller checking Fariba's passport is wearing a blue uniform with a black tie.

The idea that this first opening scene demonstrates seems to suggest a more open-minded and modern perspective, and that they are being underestimated when it comes to equality between ethnic Norwegians and Norwegians with multicultural backgrounds. However, the scene may also propose that there is an underlying reason why people with multicultural backgrounds still have this type of reactionary instinct, therefore, immediately goes into self-defense when feeling offended in a public space.

## 5.8 The Norwegian Constitution Day and the bunad

Next key scene is set on 17th of May, Norwegian constitution day. First, we get a few shots from the city with a full crowd of people dressed in traditional folk costumes, nice dresses and suits wearing ribbons with red, white, and blue and waving the Norwegian flag. Fariba walks through the crowd, and Amrit is singing in a choir in front of the crowd. Fariba is wearing a short sleeved, long, and white dress with red flowers, including a red, white and blue ribbon on her chest. Amrit, on the other hand, is wearing a Norwegian traditional folk costume that has a cream-colored jacket and black pants with long knee socks.



While the choir, which Amrit is a part of, is singing, Fariba makes her way through the crowd to get a better view and find her friend. As she is switching her look between the choir and the rest of the crowd in front of her, she pulls up her phone to take a few photos of Amrit and the choir.



Following John Gibbs' (2002) elements of *mise-en-scène*, the photograph must be broken down into fragments to put forth the “contents of the frame” (Gibbs 2002, 5). Out of the two photos Fariba captured on her phone in the scene, which gets displayed in the frame, this analysis selects the second photo as both are quite similar.

The source of the lighting in the image is the sun shining from the right corner of the frame, thus there is natural lighting. The sunlight is hitting the choir directly on the left side of their faces. However, it is placed somewhat from behind, therefore on the left side of the choir, the sunlight does not reach men in national costumes. A majority of the choir is wearing sunglasses, thus indicating there is strong lighting outdoors. Furthermore, in the background there are

pillars with a round roof on the top, which resembles a music pavilion. The choir are standing on the stage in front of the pavilion to remain visible to the audience. Although we already have seen parts of the audience before Fariba captured the photo, one could interpret that the choir are singing to other people as they are facing the same direction and not each other.

Firstly, we see the entire choir consisting of only men. Secondly, looking at the group, there are only a few multicultural people, and the rest are mostly ethnic Norwegians. Thirdly, it seems like the group is split in two although they are not physically separated. The men on the left are all wearing a Norwegian national costume, while the men on the right are wearing suits. However, the two men in the middle, Amrit, and another guy, are placed on opposite sides. Amrit, who is wearing a traditional costume is standing on the right side, and the other guy is wearing a suit, standing on the left side. There are many ways to interpret their placement. One may argue that there was a certain intention on why the way they were dressed determined where on the stage they would stand.

Although there is this implicit way of thinking that multicultural people wear a traditional folk costume to feel closer to Norwegian society, this scene seems to suggest that it is a personal choice that does not determine anything. Everyone is allowed to celebrate the Norwegian constitution day regardless of culture and ethnicity, and it is every individual's right to choose at what level they want to celebrate the country they live in.

### 5.9 WE brought our children to Norway!

The parents of a multicultural child is a significant theme in both productions. They are the first generation who immigrated to another country, and thus, making their children the second generation trying to find their place in urbanized and local culture defined by ethnicity (de Leeuw 2006, 104). In *Norsk-ish*, episode 4 is dedicated to the parents of the main characters. Kaveh's goal is to demonstrate the split Helin, Fariba and Amrit face in Oslo, but also, their parents' challenges and the sacrifices they have made to make a better life for their family. There is a culture among the parents to brag about their children. However, not directly to them, but to others to make them seem like they are doing great in life. According to Badavi, it is a weakness to express how proud parents are of their children with words. By not saying anything is a way of strengthening and motivate them to do even better and work harder. In making their own children look good, some parents also tend to talk badly about other children. However, Fariba's father, Mehdi, gives a reality check to other parents that they in fact lives in Norway,

where certain things that may be frowned upon in their home country is not as a big deal in Norway.

### 5.9.1 Iranian dads being hypocrites

Focusing on Mehdi in episode 4, the introduction shows him visiting a regular meeting spot where he goes to meet other Iranian men and fathers. The set is displayed in a way that tells the viewer that this is a place where they can go to feel comfortable and speak their first language.



He makes his way to the cafe while the camera follows in a handheld tracking shot. Before walking through the door, he stops to greet the man by the entrance who was having a smoking break, which again, demonstrates that this is a place he is familiar with. There is natural lighting as the sun is shining on the building suggesting it is daytime. Meeting during daytime may also indicate that while grandchildren and kids are at school and work, they meet up to make time pass until family gets back home. However, this may also be interpreted as what has previously been discussed within immigrant-foreign characters that they are often portrayed with less stable jobs and lower education (Igartua et al. 2014, 598). On the other hand, there is no other indication that this is the case other than they always meet during the daytime.



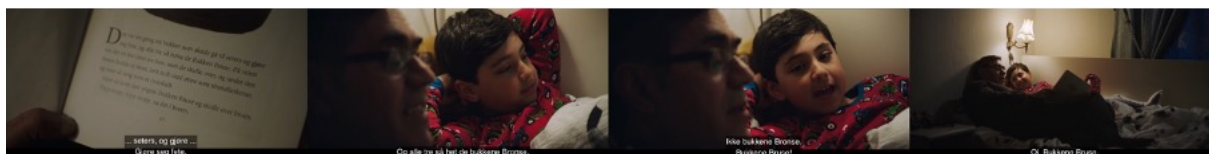
Everyone has already arrived as Mehdi seats himself at the end of the table. As he arrives, the faces of the others by the table are smiling, thus indicating he is, for instance, expected to arrive and that he is welcome to sit with them. They are all looking at each other with kind eyes and smiles, which is another characteristic suggesting they are friends, at least knowing each other. In a first-generation friend group, it is common that each member shares the same culture and ethnicity. Furthermore, they view cultural identity as a shared culture (de Leeuw 2006, 109). In other words, the parents of second-generation children often believe that cultural identity is fixed instead of something you become. Therefore, it is realistic to see an adult friend group of one specific culture.



As he sits down, a person wearing a white shirt and black pants gives him a cup of tea, which indicates that it was a waiter. According to Kaveh, drinking black tea is a big part of Turkish, Iranian, and Indian culture, thus she wanted to place tea wherever they saw it would fit. Therefore, placing something that reminds them of their own home country as much as possible on set contributes to empathy, which is a central pillar of identification with characters and gives a greater enjoyment of the message (Igartua 2010, 350). The shot cuts to another perspective, and the camera is pointed towards the man to the left. He hands Mehdi a brochure and tells him to go start Norwegian lessons and think about his future. However, he shuts the suggestion down by saying it is too late for something like that. As mentioned earlier, although the first-generation are the ones who moved their lives to another country, there are still limits to how much they are willing to let a western culture influence their lives (de Leeuw 2006, 109). It seems as if, in their view, ethnicity is something to overcome rather than to be recognized, thus making it difficult to accept sometimes.

In this context, the suggestion of Mehdi to improve his Norwegian may be to raise a point considering he is in fact living in Norway and would be convenient, but also, he has a grandson who is half Norwegian and only knows the Norwegian language. Analyzing what his friend means by thinking about the future would suggest the younger generation and how to keep a close relationship with them. The conservative ethnicity of the first-generation may be interpreted as a consequence of getting in the way of the second-generation's character development as an individual (de Leeuw 2006, 109). As the entire episode progresses, the theme of the parents also consists of their language struggles.

### 5.9.2 The First and Third Generation Language barrier



In this scene, Fariba's son, Gabriel, is staying over at his grandparents', and before going to bed Mehdi read Gabriel a bedtime story. Bahareh mentions that it is common in certain cultures that the children stay, or grow up, with their grandparents while their parents are out working to earn money. As Fariba is a single mother and spends a lot of time getting a permanent job, Gabriel, therefore, spends a lot of time with her parents.

The source of light is one nightlight on the wall above their heads, which creates shadows in the bedroom. In the first shot, the camera is pointed on the book in an extreme

closeup shot while the grandfather reads. Further, the camera quickly cuts to another extreme closeup of them both looking in the direction of the book. Although reading something may sound easier than having to form sentences yourself, their native written language does not necessarily use regular letters, thus challenges may arise like in this scene. Language is what separates us from the others and represents who we are (Hall 1995, 186), therefore, what is being demonstrated here is a minor frustration of a language barrier between grandfather and grandchild. For instance, Mehdi mispronounced a word and Gabriel had to correct him, “not bukkene bronse, bukkene bruse!”. Comedy is often utilized when a kind of stereotype is portrayed (Hall 2021, 306). However, the tone of a comedic event in a scene is dependent on the confidence from the character and the viewer. Even though Mehdi managed to make Gabriel laugh and smile by joking about the pronunciation error, one day that might not happen and perhaps lead to confusion.

### 5.9.3 Mehdi makes an end to the hypocrisy

By the end of the episode, Mehdi returns to the café where he does not say anything as he enters the room. While the rest of the group is already there chatting as usual, Mehdi silently grabs a cup of tea in the background. It was clear that Mehdi did not intend to be noticed right away considering after he entered the room, he walked straight to the tea facing his face away from them. However, in the second shot, where the camera cuts to a close-up of his face, he turns around quickly looking at them, but does not say a word and lets the simple action of pouring tea to be the factor to seem casual and unbothered.



As the group notices him and jokes about him showing up again, “not being able to stay away”, they welcome him to the table, and he sits down while catching him up on their current conversation subject. The natural light from the sunlight outside lightens up the room insides, which may indicate the light mood around the table. On the other hand, the energy in the group rapidly changes as Mehdi learns that they are talking about Hassan’s daughter and that she is getting a divorce for the second time.

As mentioned earlier, Kaveh and Badavi wanted to showcase as much as possible of the different sides of the first generation. The ones who grew up in their home country and migrated to another country at an adult age. Thus, although living in another country with an

almost entirely different kind of culture, their own culture mostly dominates their perspective and viewpoint on certain situations. In other words, the first-generation's ethnic markers are cultural (de Leeuw 2006, 108), which means, in their view, there are codes connected to gender and family roles. Therefore, the screenwriters wanted to portray the parents' opinions through their traditional lens, which among several things is being divorced.

As the man is explaining to Mehdi how Hassan is ashamed and does not dare to leave the house because everybody knows. The camera cuts to the other men around the table with eyes looking at the one who is speaking while nodding suggesting they are all agreeing with him. In the same shot, as the camera redirects the focus to Mehdi, he has a concerned facial expression and proposes to ask Hassan to join them at the café, but that gets quickly declined with a sarcastically toned joke, "that would have been something!", indicating that he is too "low class" to join them because everyone knows about his daughter. This contradicts the notion of first-generation immigrants being portrayed as someone of lower class. However, this also supports the idea that the characters are not altered by stereotypes (Igartua and Marcos-Ramos 2015, 74). In this scene, the viewer experiences a first-generation immigrant implicitly calling another individual with the same background someone of lower class. On one hand, the question of racism could arise. On the other hand, this scene functions as a demonstration of how all individuals are the same, regardless of ethnicity and cultural background. Lower class is not bound to a person's ethnicity, but rather, it is simply what people do in a public sphere.

A significant line appears a quick moment after, "He does not dare to look anyone in the eyes now", says the same man making the jokes while another man next to him looks at Mehdi, clearly nodding and agreeing at what is being said. This is the moment where Mehdi talks back to everyone in the group, breaking traditional barriers and explicitly points out the double standards the entire group are portraying. This is something that Badavi talks about when it comes to the first-generation. Although it seems as if they are still set in their own ways and beliefs (de Leeuw 2006, 108), they gave up a lot by moving to another country and their culture is something that still reminds them of their home country. However, they made the choice to move, and therefore, they have accepted that their children have grown in an entirely different environment than themselves, thus their children's experience will be different from their own (de Leeuw 2006, 109).



Mehdi asks a crucial question to the group, “Why not? We are the least dangerous group of people to meet”. The camera switches the shot between Mehdi and who Mehdi is talking about in a medium close-up shot to capture the facial expressions of everyone at the table. This is the turning point where Mehdi talks back and directs the trash talk from Hassan to the ones sitting at the table, starting with Ali in the green t-shirt.

According to Mehdi, Ali’s son sat in prison for two years, which is clearly true based on his facial expression and body language. The second his son gets mentioned the sides of his mouth points downwards and he bends his head forward to catch it with his hand. As Mehdi points out the fact he is sitting in the group, looking us all in the eyes, Ali immediately looks down at the table still with his hand on his face suggesting he is now feeling ashamed. Furthermore, Mehdi moves on looking at the rest of the group and the mood is clearly intense around the table. Gholam’s daughter has two children with different fathers, however, “No one is discussing that”, Mehdi states while repeating the fact that these men are all sitting at this table looking each other in the eyes. Finally, the man who started the conversation has a daughter who has canceled four engagements. Although he attempts to defend himself by saying what Mehdi is doing is not okay by making them feel badly about themselves, Mehdi still talks back arguing that what is not okay is the fact that they sit around all day bad mouthing other people for things they are dealing with themselves, “However, when it is the other way around, we get offended”.

What Mehdi is doing in this scene is making a statement that their children did not choose to live in Norway, they did. “Vi bor i Norge nå! (We live in Norway now!)”, he shouts in Norwegian, breaking through from speaking Persian to enhance the statement he is performing and make the other men understand the seriousness of the argument. This makes a significant impact on the men around the table who would most likely continue to talk negatively about others if Mehdi did not stop them and see the bigger picture. They are living in Norway and there is a reason why they left Iran.

This is the message Kaveh wanted to portray in this scene, that the parents live in cultural challenges a lot more than the second-generation because they are limited to stereotypes (de Leeuw 2006, 109). In other words, they have more cultural changes to accept than their children. Standing up to the other men is also a way of Mehdi portraying how he has nothing to be ashamed of, such as addressing his grandson as Gabriel in the Norwegian way and not the Persian way, Jibril.

### 5.10 The difference is that he is a boy, and you are a girl

Although the parents are not as significant of a topic in the *17* series universe as in *Norsk-ish*, there were also important aspects demonstrated of the parents in certain episodes as well. Kaveh wanted to portray a brother and sister representation in the fourth season through Aisha and her older brother Yusuf. This idea appeared while the screenwriters were interviewing young women to get a better idea of their everyday life. Most of them had brothers, and for that reason, mentioned the different treatment they get from their parents because “they are girls”, which is apparently an argument that gets used quite often.

Thus, a question regarding the nature of social categorizations gets raised as this explicit oppression of a young woman with a multicultural background is being portrayed (Crenshaw 1989, 166). Around the topic of gender inequality between brother and sister, through an intersectional view, we can see where the power comes and collides. As mentioned through Hall’s discourse of “the West and the Rest”, it is all connected to power (Hall 1995, 186). Respect in the home is a common cultural trait. However, between any two parties, there is always a certain power hierarchy that is determining, such as whether adults are older, therefore, wiser than the ones younger than them. The parents are expected to be respected by their children, but not necessarily vice versa.

Aisha and her mother have a big fight in episode 12 of season four about Aisha’s recent behavior which has left the mother worried and questioning Aisha’s respect for her family. It starts from episode 11, Aisha’s colleague, Chanel, invited Aisha and her friends to a house party that she was hosting. After Aisha got into a fight with her friends and they left, Aisha stayed at the party till the end, which resulted in Aisha staying the night. Although she sent her mother a text message saying she would not be coming home that night, she did not think of the concerning short and vague message she half-drunkenly sent, “I will be sleeping over at my colleague’s house”. Her mother does not know who this is. All she knows is that her daughter is staying over at someone’s house who she does not know, thus she calls Aisha to check up on her. However, Aisha falls asleep and does not pick up, which is where episode 11 ends.

In episode 12, the scene starts where the previous scene ended only in the morning. The camera tracks Aisha’s moves in a handheld tracking motion, cutting to different angles on each move she makes, from her waking up to finding her phone seeing nine missed calls from her mother. In an extreme closeup shot, the viewer witnesses Aisha’s worried facial expression as she realizes the way she stayed out without properly communicating with her mother. Therefore,

she quickly gets dressed, gathers her stuff, and silently leaves her colleague, who was still sleeping, to go back home.

Aisha enters her home and silently closes the door behind, seemingly to prevent anyone noticing her. However, as she is directing her eyes from looking down to up, her facial expression neutralizes with a slightly open mouth and her eyes are looking at something in front of her. Her mother rushes towards her from the other direction and the camera focuses on the mother, leaving Aisha in the foreground in a blurred focus to portray that they are now standing in front of each other face-to-face. From a mother's perspective, regardless of any ethnicity or culture, they worry about their children at any age. Every act we are seeing in their spoken and body language are making us integrate what is unfamiliar to us into our own familiar context to understand and fuse someone else's viewpoint with our own (Ricoeur 1970, 48). The way she is rushing towards Aisha the moment she enters the door with a worried facial expression and how she is asking where Aisha has been clearly demonstrates her worry.



Her facial expression goes from worried to slightly angry as she states the fact that Aisha did not pick up the numerous phone calls that were left for her. Aisha makes the move of arguing that she did leave a message and that she is 19 years old, thus attempting to direct the focus on the fact that she is an adult and responsible, therefore, can make her own decisions. However, her mother did not find that as a good enough argument and get more upset. Even though Aisha attempts to deny the arguments against her that are being made, her mother keeps on by saying how disrespectful she is behaving towards her family, and she is putting herself before them. What the scriptwriters seem to portray here is family values and that this is not how their family treats each other. In addition, Kaveh wanted to demonstrate the different treatment between a boy and a girl, especially between a brother and sister.

As the argument becomes more serious, a music score appears in the background. It slowly intensifies signaling something big is about to happen. Aisha argues loudly, "This is so unfair". The sound should be equally as important with the image in a film clip (Monaco 1981, 99). Using a score contributes setting the mood in the scene, thus appears the moment the mother defends Yusuf instead of Aisha. As it gives a sad and dramatic tone, the sound

represents Aisha's frustration and the mother's disappointment, but also, the fact that she is hurt at the same time.



The differentiation in treatment between a male and female has been known for decades, however, one would expect something more of an open mind in the 21st century. In this scene, the viewer gets an insight into how there is still not complete equality between the two genders when it comes to a mother with her children. Aisha explicitly asks about the difference and the mother clearly argues that her brother is a boy, and she is a girl.

This is the type of scene that makes the viewer think about how we come to understand people, which is a central question in *Orientalism* (Said 1978, 2). It opens a realm of how history has left us in an infinity of traces, all kinds of marks through heredity, collective experience, individual experience, family experience and the relationship between an individual and another.

What the screenwriters are doing here is giving the viewer a task of interpretation and to give history some shape and sense, because people from the West have a preconceived notion of what, for instance, kind of people from the Middle East are like, how they act, even though we have never been there, or met anyone from there. Considering the entire argument is mainly spoken in Turkish, this may suggest that these kinds of conflicts are common in their culture. However, Aisha says certain lines in Norwegian instead, such as “I need that job” when her mother denies her working. The stereotype of people in the East started working at a young age to support their family gets challenged here as the mother denies her working and to focus on school and family instead. Thus, the viewer gets reminded that Aisha is a girl who has a job at 19 years old just like any other regular young adult.

The significant use of close-ups is to establish the intensity of what is happening in this scene (Nichols 1981, 55). In other words, as Aisha has nothing more to say that could go to her defense, the viewer can see that her head and eyes slowly look downwards demonstrating that she is giving up. It does not mean that she agrees, but she has realized that there is nothing more she can do. Therefore, accepting the demands of her mother of a house arrest, no work, no social life, and the most significant loss, no phone. In this series, the phone is a symbol of a social life.

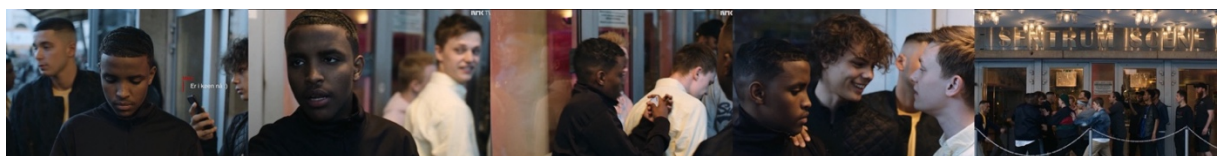
In semiological terms, the phone is the signified. In other words, it is a physical object that expresses the younger generation's need to have a social life and a connection to the rest of the world. The relationship between the signified and signifier has to do with the different languages and their association with the same signified (Rose 2016, 113). Therefore, the signifier is the social life that the phone enables. The sound of when you get a message, a Snapchat, or someone calls you, the words you read on the screen, and the icons of different social media applications that you can only use on your phone.

Thus far, these previous chapters demonstrate the challenges multicultural homes face and the relationship between family members, especially between the first- and second-generation. In the next chapter, I will unearth an explicit demonstration of a “the West and the Rest” scene from *17*, but the scene also challenges the discourse in an interesting way.

### 5.11 A fight between West and East

Abdi and his friends are making their way into the city center to a dance show, which his love interest, Frida, will be performing. In this scene, they are standing in line outside of the concert hall, and prior of their arrival, Abdi's friends did not know that the specific reason for Abdi wanting to go to the show was because of Frida.

As he receives a Snapchat from Frida asking if they are there, he replies that they are standing in line. Abdi stands in front of the rest of the group in the line, therefore, from behind, his friends notices that he is talking with her, which makes them realize why they are coming to the show and begins to talk loudly as they tease him about it. In this moment, the camera switches angle to Abdi looking back at his friends, which also reveals who was standing in front of Abdi, and in the background, the viewer gets a blurred view of the guy in the yellow shirt staring back at Abdi.



The filmmaker wants to see everything that is happening, thus making them the observer (Barnouw 1983, 231). As the scene progresses, Møller wanted to give small hints of what might happen next. This look at Abdi may indicate that the loud talking caught the guy's attention, perhaps disturbed him from talking with the rest of the group he was standing in line with.



Considering the camera positioned Abdi to the left of the frame to make space for getting the reaction from the guy in front of him, this suggests that he will take part in the interaction soon.

Abdi's friends continue to tease him until it gets out of hand and Abdi trips on the guy with the yellow shirt. The guy clearly gets annoyed as he rudely asks them to cut it out using a curse word, "Kan dere gi faen eller?". This type of language is not necessarily uncommon to use among younger people. However, by the impression of this guy's facial expression, and how he immediately turns back to his friends after Abdi apologizing, this may indicate his preconceived thoughts about Abdi and his friends after the first time he looked back at them earlier. Furthermore, this gets confirmed as he resumes to talk to his friends how irritating it is when people cannot behave, and they will never get in.

This act of speech shows us we do not perceive the world by seeing first objects and then clothing them with meaning, rather every act of seeing is putting the world together in a certain way based on our own personal history and cultural tradition (Ricoeur 1970, 29). Emra quickly understands that these guys standing in front of them, who are all ethnic Norwegians, have something against them. Although those words may seem small and short, through a hermeneutic lens, language is not a tool we use at will, but that words, symbols and concepts are the very medium within which our thoughts take shape (Ricoeur 1970, 50). Thus, based on his previous experiences, it becomes clear that the group in front of them implicitly wants to start a fight against them.

Moreover, perhaps there is an underlying reason why this group of Norwegians are standing in front of them in line and not behind, because the same incident of Abdi tripping on the guy with the yellow shirt could have easily have the other way around where they were standing behind Abdi's friends and Abdi would trip backwards on them. All understanding is context dependent, thus, in this scene, we see a portrayal of what Stuart Hall describes as "the West and the Rest". As Emra talks back to the guys in front, they turn back to them. Something as small as one group standing in the front can be interpreted in various ways, and in this context, this arrangement suggests the oppression of multicultural people in Norway, therefore, positioned behind the ethnic Norwegian group in the line.

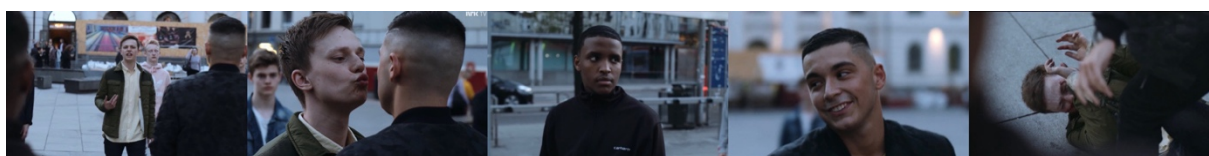
As the two groups are standing facing each other, the camera makes sure to capture each representing person of the groups on each side of the frame, Abdi in front of the guy in the yellow shirt who badmouthed them. This image of these two functions as a system of representation (Hall 1995, 187). In other words, the viewer is witnessing a composite portrayal of what different cultures and peoples are like, e.g., non-western, and western groups are usually against each other and mostly never equal. This is all connected to power, where the

western people think they have the right to talk badly about the non-western people. Thus, thinking they are above them, which maintains and constructs western hegemony (Hall 1995, 204). Therefore, symbolizing this through standing in front of them in the line. They are positioned in a way it is easier for them to turn their heads away from Abdi and their friends. The guy in the yellow shirt continues to say how there is a low chance that they will get into the dance show while they are creating such disturbance, “en gjeng som dere” (a gang like you).

#### 5.11.1 The Notion of the West and the Rest gets challenged

The line from the previous chapter further confirms the guy in the yellow shirt’s preconceived thoughts about Abdi and his friends of multicultural background. Although there is no explicit indication of knowing that these Norwegian guys know anything about them, it is a clear indication of how he classifies each group into categories, like “western” and “non-western” (Hall 1995, 186). Through an orientalist lens, we also witness how these power relations are being represented in this scene by ending it with a fight between “the West and the Rest”.

However, this notion gets challenged as the guards, who oversee the line, notices the fight and rushes towards them to break it off. They immediately prohibit Abdi and his friends from entering the dance show and force them to leave. Both parties were equally participating in this fight, the Norwegian group started verbally harassing them and Abdi’s friends made a physical move by walking closer towards them. Take note that Abdi and his friends were ordered to leave first. On the one hand, this may suggest a powerful ideological way of the series creators to deal with the “otherness” of the East (Said 1978, 6). On the other hand, the moment Abdi and his friends leave the premises and demand justice by asking about the other group who were in fight equally as much as themselves. The guards make the other group leave the area as well, thus indicating that ethnic Norwegians, or “the West”, does not always get special treatment for behaving the way they did by explicitly dehumanizing Abdi and his friends. This scene illustrates how the notion of “the West and the Rest” is still a struggle for people with multicultural backgrounds, but that it is slowly improving.



Even though it seemed to be over, the fight is continued as the Norwegian group were not happy with what had happened. After Abdi and his friends were forced to leave, the other group

went back to the line in a casual way as if this suspension did not apply to them as well. In a way, they made it seem as if that is how things are supposed to be, that is how the world works where they are always the innocent ones, and the others are the troublemakers. However, as the Norwegian guys were sent away as well, they made it seem like that was unfair.

In their body language, they made it clear in how they think of their group as ranked higher than the others, that they are good, and the others are bad (Hall 1995, 187). For that reason, they wanted to regain their power in aggressively approaching Abdi and his friends by first purposely bumping into Emra when ‘passing through’ them. In doing so, the guy in the yellow shirt is attempting to make a statement, which can be his orientalist way of dealing with the ‘otherness’ of the East. He continues by teasing Emra, walking up on his face, and making facial expressions to anger him while everyone else is standing in the blurred background watching them to start a fight again most likely. Emra took a step back saying he does not have time for this to avoid any more conflict and turns away. However, the guy in the yellow shirt was not finished teasing Emra, therefore saying, “Regna med det” (“Thought so”). Abdi and Emra look at each other as Abdi could sense that the last comment would trigger Emra. Although Abdi carefully shook his head to send Emra a message to not do anything, Emra glanced back with a grin before he turned back to the guy in the yellow shirt and punched him.

A fight broke out once again. Abdi clearly did not want to fight as he was already having trouble with his mother in need of gaining her trust back. For that reason, he avoids fighting anyone and simply looks at everyone else fighting. This may suggest Abdi’s wish for this not to be an issue between the west and east, and perhaps, he makes it seem like he does not want to be a representation of what people from the west think of them. Nevertheless, the fight is happening, and Abdi stays on the side until the guy in the yellow shirt yells at Emra to stop and that he is giving up. Emra signals the guys to leave quickly before anyone of authority to arrive.

What the director and screenwriters are doing with this scene is expressing how there is a clear split between the west and the east of Oslo and that this is still a problem today. Furthermore, by portraying how the west is not being favored in any way to keep their spot in the line, they make the distinction that the power relations between the two groups are slowly becoming equal.

### 5.12 Younger generation using Snapchat for communication in the *17* series universe

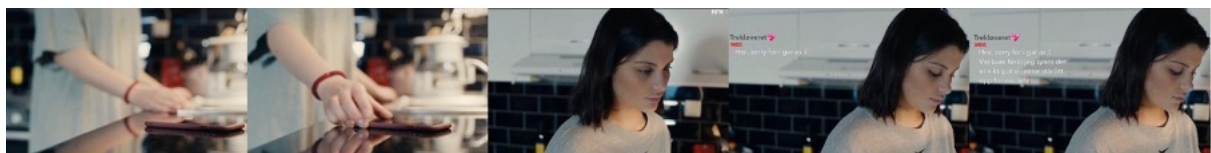
As previously mentioned in chapter 5.1.2, Snapchat was a significant finding in the research process before production of the *17* series universe, which was lightly touched upon with Abdi and Frida.

What the key production personnel of the series spent most time with was to do research on the demographic they were creating this series about and for. Møller's goal was to tell the stories of normal young people, but who happen to have a multicultural background. He argues that multicultural youth are living just as normal lives as any other teenager in Norway with the same kinds of issues. Thus, resulting in following boys in the age between 16 and 19 to get a better sense of understanding of their everyday lives. A significant finding was how much they have implemented Snapchat into their lives. It is used for several unimaginable things. The platform started out as any other conversational platform. However, what the screenwriters found interesting is how much they depend on the platform in terms of maintaining relationships, creating new ones, and to control their relationships.

In the first season, *17*, Abdi spent a lot of time talking with his love interest, Frida, in the series through Snapchat, which is a common thing among younger people in today's mediated society. Although dating applications have become a way of meeting people, most likely the conversation will continue by giving each other their Snapchat username and interacting one there. Furthermore, there is much more of people's personal life that is happening on Snapchat. The following scenes demonstrate other things younger people do on Snapchat in season 4, *19*.

#### 5.12.1 Holding onto friendships through Snapchat

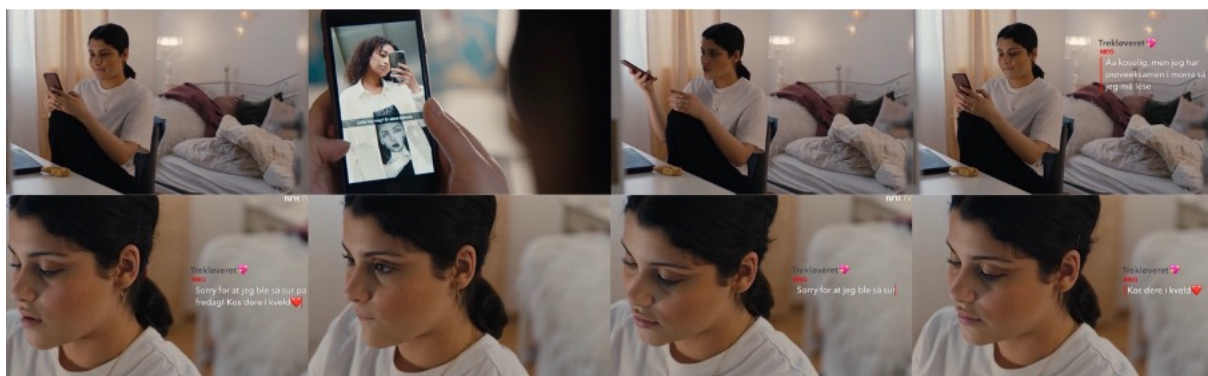
Aisha was at a birthday party with her girlfriends where everything was good, and they had a fun time together shooting TikTok videos and sharing Snapchat stories of the birthday cake while singing the birthday song. However, by the end during a conversation about sexuality and the different treatment between a boy and a girl, the debate got heated where Aisha had a different view on the topic in contrast to the rest of the group, which resulted in her having a tantrum, and in simple terms, yelled at her friends and stormed out of the party. The following day, Aisha was not feeling good about the way she acted and had intentions of apologizing.



The scene starts with a close-up shot where the camera focuses on the phone in the foreground laying on the counter. Aisha stands in the middle ground where we do not see her face in the moment, but her hands are resting on the counter with the phone on her right side. In the unfocused background, it seems to look like steel pots and an oven with a fan above it behind

her, as well as a part of the wall has black shining tiles, therefore, indicating she is standing in the kitchen. The source of lighting in this scene is the outside shining through the window from the camera's standpoint, thus there is natural lighting, and we can see Aisha's shadow on her left side. She is wearing a light gray oversized t-shirt with messy hair. This may indicate the scene is set in the morning. Aisha grabs her phone quickly and the camera moves to her face in a tracking motion, still in a close-up shot. A foundational part of mise-en-scène is influenced by the action performed in the frame and the significance it entails (Gibbs 2002, 12).

We see her worrying facial expression with her eyes looking slightly down and the way she is clenching her lips together as she is thinking about what to write to her friends. The moment she focuses her eyes down towards the phone, from being in the center, she gets placed on the right side of the frame, making space for her Snapchat message. On the top is the name of the group chat she is writing to, "Trekloveret", which consists of Aisha, Jamila and Freba, below in red text indicates that it is Aisha writing from her own account, "meg". The Snapchat text appears simultaneously as she is writing, and she starts by directly apologizing and slightly explains why she got upset. However, something makes her delete the entire message, and she ends up not apologizing in this scene.



In this next scene, Jamila sent a Snapchat-photo to the group chat asking if Aisha and Freba wanted to hang out. However, Aisha has not apologized about the other night yet, thus making her unsure how welcome she is to join. Shooting Aisha from a medium shot, we can see her surroundings clearly. In the background, there is a bed with a duvet and pillows, and Aisha placed in the foreground, sitting in front of a desk where we can spot the keyboard part of a laptop. As she looks at her phone, the phone makes a sound indicating a Snapchat notification. The camera cuts from Aisha to an extreme close-up to her phone so that the viewer can see the Snapchat-photo from Jamila. The camera cuts back to the medium shot of Aisha as she takes a photo of her computer and writes a text to go with it.

Following Paul Ricoeur's work in the hermeneutic field, there is a connection between text and the experience, that text can both reflect and influence the experience. This connection is important in terms of understanding how the transition of what people experience in life can be understood (Ricoeur 1970, 28). The intention of Aisha taking a picture of her laptop instead of herself, like Jamila, was to give a glimpse of what she is doing in the moment, which is schoolwork. Therefore, emphasizing with a text on the photo that she has an exam coming up and that she needs to study, which supports Hausken's idea of photos as a type of realism (Hausken 2013, 17) because Aisha is showing exactly what is in front of her with the camera on her phone. As she was in conversation with her friends, there was an opportunity to apologize to them, and she started to write a message saying exactly that. However, as she paused and thought more about it, she erased the message and wished them a nice evening.

#### 5.12.2 Using Snapchat to Apologize

Thus far, this analysis has demonstrated how the younger generation uses Snapchat in their daily lives through two examples from *19*. As already established, Snapchat is their primary choice of communication. The platform is used to share experiences, such as birthday parties and other social gatherings, but it is also utilized for deeper human connection as well.

Following the example in the previous chapter, it suggests that Snapchat can be a platform of showing vulnerability. Aisha felt apologetic and turned to the group chat she has with her friends on Snapchat to contact them. Normally in the pre-social media era, or before these platforms became such an essential part of our everyday lives, one would suggest to either call, or perhaps go see them in-person to apologize. However, what the action of texting has is that none of the other options have been the opportunity to think things through before sending anything to the other person.

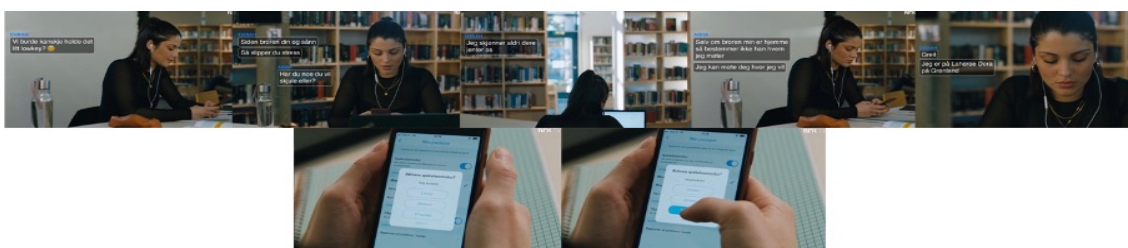
Hausken discusses how different kinds of media can facilitate the way we look at things differently. Furthermore, she expresses the openness to understand something through, or with the help of something. It is not necessarily an easy comparison between objects, but rather the different objects enable us to take notice of perspectives we otherwise would not see (Hausken 2017, 63). The younger generation sees Snapchat as a safe space for self-expression and to be themselves, and thus, allows them to express their thoughts and emotions on their own terms. What we see in this series is how Aisha communicates with her friends, but also, what she wishes to say. The viewer gets to witness the process throughout the series of what she first starts out to write, and how she ends up erasing the message, or rewrites it into a simpler version

of what she meant to write. Moreover, the camera enables a sense of understanding in terms of seeing other sides of the character, and that there are various stages of Aisha that we otherwise would not have observed.

Focusing on the understanding of the digital image and how the portrayal of the image can be challenged and changed through something else (Hausken 2013, 33), we see Aisha wanting to apologize to her friends from analyzing her body language and facial expression. Her hands are right next to her phone on the counter and her eyes looking slightly down into empty space with dark circles around her eyes, which may indicate she did not sleep well due to last night's event. However, the image of her wanting to apologize changed after she started to write the apology on Snapchat. Although the viewer perceives her as apologetic, that changes in the way she represents herself through Snapchat. Thus, the series enables us to see Aisha's true intentions compared to Snapchat, which offers an opportunity to build a wall up. In other words, Snapchat may be used as a tool for expressing human emotions, such as apologetic and being vulnerable with someone, but with the screen functioning as a wall, it gives Aisha a moment to second guess herself and that may contribute to restricting the message she originally wanted to share.

### 5.12.3 Micromanaging brother via Snapchat

Aisha's older brother, Yusuf, used to live abroad, but moved back home for good. The freedom of getting to go wherever she wanted got taken away, and with the Snapmap function, which enables the possibility to view each other's positions made things more difficult. As an older brother, he wants to know that his little sister is safe, and for instance, not hanging out with people he disapproves of. Following an event where Aisha was supposed to meet Emra, her love interest in the series who Yusuf does not necessarily like, after work, Yusuf suddenly showed up before she got to walk towards Emra. It turned out Yusuf was in the area and tracked Aisha through Snapchat. Aisha and Emra's meetup was therefore interrupted and to keep this unknown from her brother, she decided to go home with him. The next day Emra texts Aisha about it.



Shooting Aisha from a medium shot, the camera is focused on her in the middle ground. In the foreground, although slightly unfocused, we see what appears to be a pencil case and an open book. Further in the unfocused background, there are many bookshelves, and in the third shot, cutting to another camera angle showing us more of the surroundings, is what exists in front of Aisha. We see more bookshelves, thus indicating she is in a public library. She is at the library studying and receives a text from Emra wondering if they now must hide from Yusuf.

In the second shot, Aisha is expressing an empty expression. She is looking down at her phone with her mouth slightly open and expresses that by answering his question with a question. The shift of perspective between cuts from her front, back, then side, illustrates how quick a conversation can change. From Emra saying that he does not understand a girl's thought process to Aisha boldly shooting back saying she can meet whoever and wherever she wants. As they come to an agreement, Aisha comes with a temporary solution to her problem. We are socialized into cultural frameworks of understanding (Hausken 2013, 71), therefore, considering Snap-location is optional and that is how Yusuf keeps track of her, Aisha decides to turn on ghost-mode to restrict her brother and believes that is the best solution.

However, that did not last for long as they got to spend some quality time with each other at the gym by working out together and they started to argue about Aisha's whereabouts. The arguments started quickly as Yusuf brought up that he heard from some friends where Aisha had been spotted recently and that he thought that was not okay. Aisha soon stood up to her offense arguing the difference in treatment when it comes to a boy and a girl. The whole scene was shot in close-up shots, cutting between the two when each is talking, to clearly see their arguing facial expressions. As there is a serious tone to the scene, the background is displayed quite dark and the only focus in the frame is on the two actors.



Furthermore, Yusuf gets to the mention of the ghost-mode on Snapchat and that Aisha should just give up and turn it back on so that he can see where she is. Aisha was fed up and disappointed, thus the camera tracks her movement as she pulls up her phone and starts tapping. The clip cuts to her showing her brother the screen saying that she has blocked him on Snapchat. As a photograph often is used as documentation (Benjamin 1991, 45), as well as Aisha pointing her phone screen to Yusuf and the camera positions itself to show the screen to the viewer, this functions as evidence material to confirm Aisha's actions. In contrast to the



bright light on the phone screen, the background is completely dark to have the full focus on her phone, but still leaving half of her face to see the dominant facial expression she is portraying.

#### 5.12.4 Cutting people out through Snapchat

In the *17* series universe, Snapchat is used to ask if people want to hang out, as documentation of what they are currently doing, and as the other two examples in the last chapter suggested, a way of statement in terms of shutting out micromanaging siblings. We do not perceive the world by first seeing the object and then clothing them with meaning afterwards, but rather every act of seeing is putting the world together in a certain way based on our own personal history and cultural tradition (Ricoeur 1970, 46). Thus, images need interpretation because it is not given what it is supposed to mean. When analyzing the first scene in chapter 5.12.3, Aisha feels a force against her. Emra suggested keeping their relationship more hidden because of her brother, in which her facial expressions may be interpreted as she was not happy about the situation.

In terms of the texts written in this scene, Ricoeur considers speech to be the key and suggests that text is not restricted to expressing an implicit speech but presents directly what the discourse means (Ricoeur 1970, 32). The way the text messages are written between Aisha and Emra is similar to the way they realistically would speak in person. In the first text from Emra, he uses a crying emoji in the end of his text to indicate that it does not bring him any joy to suggest that they should hide, and further, putting the blame on Yusuf. On the one hand, the messages could be interpreted in a way that he is doing her a favor and releasing stress from her shoulders. On the other hand, this is his way of saying that he does not want any trouble. However, something that Emra perhaps did not expect was Aisha being upfront asking if there is something he would like to hide.

In many ways, social media has enabled a sense of confidence and safety, because it may be easier to confront someone through a screen, but people tend to camouflage themselves behind the screen as well. Therefore, as Emra puts more pressure against Aisha saying he never understands girls, she goes straight into self-defense arguing that she can do anything she wants. Thus, her escape being the ghost-mode on Snapchat, which results in her brother not being able to track her geographical moves anymore.

What we see in this series is a confident Aisha who is standing her own ground with the help of Snapchat. As mentioned earlier, photos are viewed as a type of realism (Hausken 2013, 17).

In other words, it is an interpretation of an event's reality. In the examples above, we can see a conversation between Aisha and Yusuf. However, the way it was portrayed indicated that this was an intense fight about something serious in terms of the close-up shots and the dark shading in the frame. They were arguing about the fact that Aisha has no freedom to do what she wants, thus resulting in her restricting her brother from getting to see her location on Snapchat.

As Yusuf kept denying her of seeing people he does not approve of, she felt that she had no other choice than to block him on Snapchat. The camera makes it possible to bring back an illustration of the original, thus making it evidence material (Benjamin 1991, 45). The viewer sees what exists in front of the camera, therefore, we see the phone screen, which Aisha is showing Yusuf, demonstrating her blocking him and a part of her face showing a serious facial expression. A film clip should want the viewer to think about how everything is wired together and what shapes the experience (Benjamin 1991, 54). The series is produced in a way for us to understand the younger generation and how their everyday lives are wired. For that reason, the aesthetics in this series is connected to our perception of the world and how it changes in terms of media technology.

What has been illustrated in this series is the relationship between an individual and the world of our mediated society through Aisha as a representation of the younger generation. Human reality is of basic historical characteristics, such as perception, experience, and knowledge. However, the way we view the world constantly changes through different media.

By going back to Hausken's central question about how something means something and in what ways that can create meaning, the series is portrayed to give the viewer a better understanding of the current life of the Gen Z generation. Feelings are easier to express through a screen, and Snapchat is used to keep up with the world. By displaying the chats from the application in the frame, we get to witness the thought process that goes into writing a text and how a photo gets taken to show what they are currently doing as a type of documentation. By following the movements of the camera and the clips cutting from one perspective to another, the viewer gets different perspectives of the character development which shapes the experience of watching the series.

### 5.13 Home is where I feel the most like myself

As Snapchat is a safe haven and place of self-expression for the younger generation. The home is meant to be a safe haven and place of residence for families. Someone's home represents many things. No matter where you live, the home is the place where the viewer gets to see the

most from the characters and the visible that lay beneath the implicit. The production personnel's choice in their portrayal of the main characters and their families in *Norsk-ish* is based on significantly different palettes using different types of wood, both in textures and colors of textiles, metals, and style in general. Elements of the mise-en-scène, such as props or household objects, are used to collect meaning and develop associations throughout the narrative (Gibbs 2002, 9). In other words, props are used to display the characters on a personal level with the viewer, and in this series, to separate each culture and representation of their homeland. This may also suggest an ideological understanding to reflect on interests of power and to legitimate social inequalities between the West and the Rest topics that gets raised in this series (Rose 2016, 107).



In Helin and her family's Turkish home, colors in the tone of orange and red, as well as terracotta and earthy colors, are used the most. Therefore, the interior and decorations reflect clearly on that. For instance, the first image with red curtains and several plants behind Eda. In terms of metals, such as the lamp next to the father in the second image, dark grey, or silver, and black colored metals is chosen, as well as copper. The textile in the living room consists of rugs with different patterns, linens, and velvet, which is demonstrated with the pillows and blanket on the couch and the rug on the wall in the back.

Furthermore, the type of wood is deep brown with simple lines. Their home represents a sophisticated and clean, but also, warm, and classic type of environment. The choice of different color tones of red and orange may be utilized as a representation of Turkish tradition. Red is a powerful color, because it is the color of their flag, as well as simple things as Turkish black tea and preferred color in clothing. It is a color that reminds them of where they are from. The warm and earthy tones in the home may also be a representation of their personalities. When Eda told her parents that she was pregnant, she kept explaining how everything was going to be alright because she learnt from "the best" and that her child was going to be loved by the greatest grandparents. Although a major life changing event was happening, the parents did not do anything else than being supportive with Eda's decision with keeping the baby. The warmth and earthy tones in the home represents the way the parents showed acceptance and comfort to Eda. Also, the relationship between Helin and Eda in which may suggest some conflicts, but always ends up happy for one another.

Although Helin experiences misunderstandings and confusions in terms of her parents' point of view on certain things, they are a family who lives together. Thus, the long couch in the living room and large dining table signifying a down-to-earth family who loves each other and stays together regardless of what situation that occur, even when it does not go with what Helin views "right and wrong".



In Fariba's parents' Iranian home, it is overall light colored with white and beige. However, they have added some details with mahogany, purple, and deep red colors to give some variation that accents the light walls and wood types. Although the colors seem simple, the textures of textile in satin and polyester used on, for instance, the chairs and couch with some sequins suggests a type of "tacky-classy" style which is how the series creators describe it.

With some art on the walls, such as paintings and Persian carpets, portrays a glimpse of their culture. The big painting of a woman in the third photo may function as an appreciation of their religion, or it might be a portrayal of what they perceive as beauty in their culture. Having art of Persian culture may contribute to creating meaning in their home, as in Iranian culture, the sense of privacy and safety of the individuals and families in the home is important, which may also represent their personality.

Mehdi portrays a clear behavior that he does not want to seek attention throughout the series, thus explicitly expresses his concerns about Fariba's work in the media as it attracted a lot of "eyeballs" to herself, as well as her family. In other words, Fariba attempted to be a microcelebrity where she first posted a photo on Instagram, which gained some temporary fame, thus continued to increase online status (Fairchild 2007; Marwick 2015, 138). These actions made both her parents deeply uncomfortable. Therefore, having tokens of their culture creates safety, and the use of double curtains creates privacy at their home so that they feel comfortable while whatever that is happening in the outside world continues.

Another example where the importance of privacy is demonstrated in the series is in the first episode. It is during the night as the celebrations of May 17th comes to an end and Fariba makes her way home to her parents, and as she walks into the living room, she realizes based on her knowing her parents well that they have been inside the entire day with their curtains shut. Although it was Norway's constitution day, it was also still Ramadan, which Fariba did not give any empathy for. Here we see the split between two cultures in one home

where Ramadan, which is a month of fasting not many in Norway does, is prioritized over the Norwegian celebration. Thus, with the help of the décor at Mehdi and his wife's home, it is clearly established that this is a home of Iranian culture which appreciates privacy and safety.



In Surinder's Indian home, the viewers will get a glimpse of a colorful environment. The choice of wood type is a dark brown to compliment the fabrics and textures of yellow and other colorful patterns. We see a lot of silks and cotton around the living room on the table, chairs, and curtains, as well as blinged details with mirror and glass pieces and objects with a golden tone. Thus, the production personnel aimed for an energetic and playful home for Surinder to represent Indian culture.

Most scenes take place at the kitchen where she usually would be cooking. It is a significant part of their culture that the women know how to cook. A traditional food culture in India is curry and their use of different spices, therefore, this culture is reflected through the bright color palette that is used in the home with the yellow curtains, the wall decoration with golden plates and red fabrics, and the multicolored glass-stained décor in the first image on the top-left corner. In the third image, she has a photograph on the wall in her kitchen of different spices. This would suggest an appreciation of the food culture in her home country, as well as pride.

Furthermore, the sense of playfulness is displayed in the living room. Amrit invited Tina over to Surinder's home for a family dinner for the first time. This is when we get to see the living room and it is filled with Amrit's sister's children on the couch. There is an energetic and playful vibe in the room as Amrit sits on the couch with the children and plays with them. The couch is big enough for them to play and right next to the dining table where Tina is seated while watching the others play.

In similarity with other cultures, family is important in India. Although Surinder lives by herself, she still has made space for her family when they visit. Moreover, it is common to have more than one child, thus meaning there should be room for many people in a home. As yellow is a color connected to joyful feelings, it plays well as we see a wide smile on Tina's face as she is watching Amrit with the children playing and laughing together, which

emphasizes the longing for a family in both Amrit and Tina. Thus, Surinder's Indian home represents food culture, importance of family and joyful energy.



Amrit and Tina's apartment was, according to the production personnel, originally Tina's apartment in prior to them moving in together before the story of the series starts. This is an example of a traditional Norwegian home with hints of Indian influence. In the home, there are wood types of oak and beech and the colors that are most dominating is blue and green. The furniture is simplistic in terms of color where the table and chairs are of wood colors, light couch, white lamps, and black- and wood-colored shelves.

It is minimalistic in terms of not having a lot of objects on the kitchen counter, in the shelves and on the coffee and dining table, which portrays the traditional Norwegian style. With the hints of blue colored décor and green colored walls, the home gives a simple and youthful, but also, retro tone. It has the minimalistic Norwegian interior with an Indian influence of colors and energy. On the one hand, there is cultural and personal meaning the interior and how their home is decorated. On the other hand, their home is also a reflection of what they experience as an interracial couple.

Furthermore, the multicultural tone in the home represents their relationship where throughout the series, the viewer gets an insight into the experience of when two people from completely different cultures lives together. Moreover, they get to challenge various stereotypes in their home. For instance, Amrit is the one who is mostly at home. Although he has a job as a bar owner, that gives him spare time during the day. However, Tina has a regular corporate office job of her own, thus means she usually is not at home during the day and comes home in the afternoon. Therefore, Amrit has mostly the responsibility of cooking at home, which is, for instance, in Indian culture the opposite where the woman cooks at home and the man comes home from work in the afternoon.

Another example where this is portrayed, as well as challenges of cultural differences, is in the fifth image above where Amrit and Tina are having dinner with her parents. First, the mother makes comments of the Indian food being delicious, while they were eating Thai food. Secondly, when Tina points out that Amrit made the entire dinner, her father made the comment of Amrit being more "integrated" than him. In other words, the father innocently meant that in 'his 'culture it is in fact more common that the wife cooks and husband works, thus even in

their own home they face challenges when it comes to being multicultural. Therefore, through the lens of intersectionality, they are often disadvantaged by various sources of oppression, like race and gender identity (Crenshaw 1989, 141). Moreover, their home of Norwegian and Indian culture represents appreciating and acknowledging all complexities and to combine different perspectives.

The purpose of this analysis chapter has been to address some aspects of how these NRK productions are created to tackle the oppression people with a multicultural background in Norway experiences on a regular everyday basis, but also, in what way their pre-production strategy has contributed to an authentic way of telling a story of a minority in a western-dominated country. I began by building on the document analysis looking into the documents provided by each production and connecting them to the interviews with the key exclusive informants, which allowed me to understand their goals and aims for each of the series. Furthermore, I explored closer into the plot and development of the characters that would be the significant factors to represent the multicultural community in Norway as accurate as possible to create a sense of understanding and relatability. I attempted to contextualize the characters in terms of discussing how they have broken stereotypical barriers and equalized the notion of a typical character with a foreign ethnicity in a western society.

Proceeding to the close visual analysis of key scenes from each series, I connected most of the events to Stuart Hall's discourse of "the West and the Rest" and Edward Said's Orientalism. I ended the chapter by choosing a type of setting to analyze its representation of a multicultural family living in Oslo. Thus, analyzing the homes of different culture and ethnicities to unearth an understanding and to reflect on social equalities between the west and the east topics raised in the series. The observations made through this chapter are relevant to my research questions because they suggest what parts of the production personnel's strategy contributed to the series' success, how the portrayal of the plot and characters tell a genuine story for a multicultural audience to relate to, and for an ethnic Norwegian audience to gain a better understanding of topics they perhaps have never had a particular relation to.

Now that the strategies and content have been broken down into fragments for textual analysis, the following chapter will discuss these fragments to establish what in particular NRK's *Norsk-ish* and the *17* series universe worked to reach a younger and wider audience with a multicultural ethnic background.

## 6 Discussion

In the chapters above, *Norsk-ish* and the *17* series universe have been closely analyzed to gain an understanding of how each production has used the plot, characters and setting to portray a story of young people with a multicultural background from Norway. Through interviews with exclusive informants and access to production documents from both series, I was able to explore their strategies in approaching a youth targeted audience with a multicultural background and got an insight into NRK's ambitions of media diversity.

In this discussion chapter, I will discuss the main findings from the analysis to answer the research questions raised in this thesis.

### 6.1 The *17* series universe is a media-created series

Before the creation of the *17* series universe, Kaveh claims that there was a large amount of negative news media coverage of the youth with a multicultural background from the east side of Oslo. The series is not created to prove that the headlines were false, but rather there are other stories to tell that does not include being sent back to their home country or dealing drugs to earn money. Considering it was the negative media coverage that inspired the series creators to produce the *17* series universe, Kaveh named the series a media-created series. One would suggest this resembles what the field of news production calls "the running story" (Schlesinger 1975, 344). The news articles about the youth of Oslo East will always be a continuing story, thus, the series is simply another story about them through the realm of fiction.

When talking with the director and screenwriter of the production, there was clear goals of what they wanted to portray to contribute in the context of the younger generation with a multicultural background getting a bad reputation. Through the frameworks of double storytelling (Redvall 2013; Sundet 2020, 73), they aimed at changing the perspective that the news created and put this specific target group in a general problem instead of a stereotypical problem. One of the messages from the series is that everyone faces problems and challenges in life, however, that should not be pinned on one specific demographic. Something that Møller mentioned was how he wished the series could function as an homage to the east side of Oslo. In other words, the aim was also to make a shift in how people have started to view that side of the city due to the negative light that has been shed for the past years. Thus, the intention through this media-created series was to portray everything as authentic as possible. By providing the younger audience a portrayal of current and relevant everyday challenges and dilemmas, the series may function as a tool in learning how to cope with similar problems (Sundet 2020, 74).



There are several stories from the news about the younger generation with a multicultural background, therefore, various opinions about the demographic created by the news media. As mentioned in chapter 5.1 of the analysis, Møller visualized the production to become a multi-functional plot-dominated series. What he wanted to achieve through this concept was to portray the plot in a way that would make the viewer assume that something stereotypical is about to happen, but what happens is something else than expected. Furthermore, I believe that is what was observed through the close visual analysis of the fighting scene in chapter 5.11. There was a clear portrayal of “the West and the Rest” where the west thought of themselves as the superior group and that they get to have their way (Hall 1995, 202). As Abdi and his friends gets kicked out of the waiting line outside of the venue, the western group acts as if the same punishment did not apply to them and kept standing in the line. It was interesting to witness how they shortly after got kicked out of the waiting line too and their facial expressions of shock and disappointment.

The main ambition of this production was to create something of cultural value. Representation in the realm of diversity is highly prioritized and most definitely expected from NRK. Thinking of Newcomb and Hirsch’s (2000) study on television as a cultural forum, we must remember that topics, such as multicultural representation, are part of current debates today. It is crucial for NRK to portray this specific group of people differently compared to 40 years ago. Television has a significant responsibility to the process of public thinking (Newcomb and Hirsch 2000, 563). For that reason, public service institutions, like NRK, must remember that fact that they are the ones who responds to real events, have the power to change in social structure, and are able to shift attitudes towards certain things. Thus, it is significant how NRK contribute to provide news to the Norwegian society of current events, as well as they use those stories to create a new perspective, in which the *17* series universe was able to achieve. The audience prefers to make meaning of contents that touches personal experience (Newcomb and Hirsch 2000, 571); therefore, it is crucial for NRK to use television as a cultural forum that is separated from the citizens’ influence.

## 6.2 *Norsk-ish* is theme-based

During the interviews, Kaveh and Badavi pointed out the unusual beginning of how the idea for creating *Norsk-ish* came about. What started out as a conversation between two people turned out to have a common theme reoccurring, which was the challenge of juggling between two widely different cultures. Several ideas are often inspired by a certain experience or a person, but the stories portrayed in the series were written based on a chosen theme, and

through the perspective of the theme, motivated the screenwriters to create something that makes a difference among the younger generation with multicultural background. With an emphasis on Newcomb and Hirsch's (2000) perspective on the producer, which in modern production culture would be the series creator or screenwriter, a significant goal that every producer wishes for is to include personal ideas in their work (Newcomb and Hirsch 2000, 568). Kaveh and Badavi have created this series as a means of personal expression.

The plot is fictional, yet the represented theme reflects real stories that happen to people in the real world. Therefore, the authentic style in *Norsk-ish* clearly reflects stories that are written by someone who understands the situation the characters in the series are going through. The screenwriters discovered the opportunity to tell a story that they themselves understood on a personal level, but also, to reach out to the younger multicultural generation who are experiencing the same in their everyday lives. Cultural representation is essential in production studies, in fact, a key argument made by Caldwell (2008) is that media production itself is a form of culture because producers can share and shape values, norms and identity (Caldwell 2008, 2). Thus, the way second-generation immigrants are portrayed in this series has a crucial impact on society. *Norsk-ish* may be the cultural difference that is needed among the wide selection of television dramas currently available.

To portray the theme of being a young adult with a multicultural background from Norway, Rangnes wished to aim for a fictional comedy-drama series with characteristics of a documentary, also known as the fly-on-the-wall technique, because his priority was to tell these stories as realistic as possible. The use of steadicam and handheld camera motions contributes to a more realistic to the theme without using voice-over narration (Tseronis, Forceville, and Grannetia 2015, 1386). The ambition was to represent a specific group of people in Norwegian society and express their experiences from a first-person perspective. There is no direct view into what the characters are thinking, however, the series leaves room for interpretation for the viewer to reflect upon, which Nichols would characterize as observational mode in documentaries (Nichols 2010, 172).

Denying the viewer a clear path of meaning gives the production creative freedom to think innovatively, which contributes to the double storytelling that NRK has become known for (Sundet 2020, 73). As a public broadcaster, it is important to produce content that informs and enlightens the population. However, to reach as wide as possible, a mixed-genre schedule is of great importance as well (Syvertsen et al. 2014, 81). *Norsk-ish*'s portrayal of serious topics through comedy and drama suggests an educational way of providing entertaining television. Furthermore, the theme of choice in this production compliments the younger generation's

interest in shedding light on current debates on mainstream and social media. As they are slowly abandoning traditional ways of media consumption (Wee 2017, 133), there is a critical issue of finding ways to either keep the younger audience or evolve towards the newer digital era with them.

As mentioned in chapter 6.2.1, the content the younger generation consume on an everyday basis is significantly shorter and more specific compared to a decade ago, resulting in reducing the title sequence to only a few seconds long, or implementing the “skip intro” button (Re 2016, 161). Thus, there is only a limited amount of time to convince younger people to continue watching a series. A strategically important characteristic that is used is the multi-functional effect from the title of the series and how it has been used in the introduction of the series. The title is the main theme of the series in one simple word. When asking what the series is about in one sentence, it is simple about being Norwegian “ish”. The suffix, “ish”, is mostly used in two ways, either placed behind a noun to turn it into an adjective, or behind any word to indicate uncertainty of something (Nilssen 2015, 3). In this context, the “ish” has an uncertain connotation to it based on the feeling of not being Norwegian enough as discussed in chapter 5.4. The functionality the series title portrays works well with the younger generation in the sense that the theme of the production is clear. In addition, the way the title sequence is created through the typewriting style appeals to the trend of a retro aesthetic the youth are currently interested in.

Through the production model of *going small*, *Norsk-ish* aimed at a specific and niche-oriented target group through the inspiration of a theme (Sundet 2021, 52). There are stories of feeling lonely and not understood in a western-dominated society. Although the production is more relatable to the people who grew up in Norway with multicultural background, people outside the target demographic are invited to gain an understanding of how it has been to grow in the same country, but with a different experience. The notion of feeling Norwegian “ish” has led to significant debates, such as whether the multicultural Norwegians should wear the bunad, and perhaps, the multicultural people have lived with discrimination for such a long time that their defense mechanism jumps into conclusions too quickly, like in the airport scene. Representing these kinds of situations on public broadcasting provides reflection of different cultures that will broaden our minds, which is an important goal in NRK’s mission in the realm of diversity.

### 6.3 Using Snapchat for life choices

Through interviews with the key informants for this thesis, a significant discovery was the use of Snapchat in the younger generation's everyday life. As mentioned in the analysis, the production personnel conducted thorough research to be able to represent the younger generation with a multicultural background as authentic as possible. Instead of fearing that social media and other popular streaming websites would destroy the television industry (Lotz 2018, 149), their focus was to understand the youth in today's media landscape and how to attempt to see things from their perspective.

Gen-Z spends the most time with technology for their age, thus important to understand their relationship with all the technology they are exposed to (Kamble, Desai, and Mehendale 2021, 2). Since the beginning of the telephone, it has been possible to call and message others through the phone's own applications. However, since the rise of the World Wide Web 2.0 and all the social media platforms that came with it, the original way of staying in touch with people has been replaced. The production personnel's research confirmed that Snapchat is a main tool of communication in Norway, regardless of age, but also, especially for the younger generation. Instead of saving a person's telephone number, you exchange Snapchat usernames, or "Snapcode" (Kamble, Desai, and Mehendale 2021, 4). This way, younger people will not have to worry about giving up personal information, as the user generated content disappears after seconds sending a snap, which offers a unique characteristic of privacy. Therefore, the notion of ephemerality and privacy is what attracts the younger generation to the platform.

In the *17* series universe, we witness young people take photos of themselves and of their surroundings as a means of documentation (Hausken 2013, 17) to show what they are doing in real-time, but also, to communicate with others through representing themselves on Snapchat. Sometimes it is difficult to understand the way the younger generation expresses themselves. The emergence of social media has raised conflicts between parents and their young adults (Kamble, Desai, and Mehendale 2021, 6).

The relationship between NRK and the younger audiences they want to reach out to shares common characteristics with the relationship between Aisha and her mother through the fight between them discussed in the analysis. Although there is the element of a gender equality issue, a main issue for the mother was the way Aisha sent only a short message with little to no information on her whereabouts. In Aisha's mind, she had sent a text message saying she was sleeping over at a friend's house and that should have been enough. However, those kinds of short text messages would have worked on Snapchat and with her friends, but when texting

family about planning activities, or sharing information, Snapchat cannot offer that same function (Kamble, Desai, and Mehendale 2021, 7). Thus, resulted in her mother being disappointed that Aisha did not properly communicate with her and took her phone away, which enabled a function of Aisha's freedom being taken away from her. In other words, NRK needs to improve how they communicate with their younger audiences.

Snapchat has become an important part of the younger generation. It is where everyone spends most of their time and a platform where everyday life moments are shared for a limited time. The informants were quite firm on how essential it was to be updated with what was happening online to reach a younger audience, because it allowed them to use the realm of social media to portray the life of a young person. Referencing Sundet (2021), Kaveh stressed the importance of 'made-for-mobile' television content and how essential that is to reach the youth (Sundet 2021, 153).

There is a certain type of language that Snapchat enables. It is limited in how much you can write in a Snapchat, thus the younger generation is used to writing short text messages, hence the limited amount of understanding from Aisha's mother. For instance, the use of emojis does not necessarily have the same meaning to the younger generation compared to adults in the same way signified and signifier do not have to be directly connected (Rose 2016, 113). A significant contribution to the development of the script, and the text messages that were displayed in the frame from their phones, were the close collaboration between the director/screenwriters and the actors who portrayed the characters.

Considering the actors are young and use these social media platforms themselves in their everyday life, the exclusive informants claim that the communication with the young actors was crucial. Kaveh points out that during production, she constantly asked if their lines were something that they would say normally, and in this context, if the language used in each Snapchat seemed authentic to the actors, which unearthed how they prefer short and simple texts. Thus, indicates that the production personnel's desire to acquire detailed information about their target group awarded them knowledge to provide a series as relevant and realistic as possible (Sundet 2021, 152).

This finding may indicate that instead of creating a drama series *about* the younger generation, the series is rather created *for* the younger generation, which could contribute to NRK regaining the youth's trust back in the sense as these efforts suggest that they truly care about keeping their young audience. As multicultural representation is an important topic in today's media landscape, which will be touched upon in the next chapter, NRK needs to

continuously keep track of current debates the younger generation engages in to stay relevant in their productions of youth dramas.

#### 6.4 The portrayal of first-generation immigrants

The parents in both productions, although not a significantly large amount, had an important role in how the main characters were going to be portrayed in the stories. While closely observing the series, expecting the entire focus to be on the young adults, the parents were a part of the plot more than anticipated. For that reason, I felt the need to point that out during the interviews and turned out to be an important aspect to the key informants. As discussed in chapter 5.9, they are the first generation to immigrate to another country and the first having to change their lives drastically to fit into a different culture. Although their children face another kind of challenge having to grow up with cultural differences from childhood (de Leeuw 2006, 104), the parents are the ones who sacrificed the most to give their children better opportunities.

Both screenwriters of *Norsk-ish* have experienced what is being portrayed in the series, they understand the cultural changes the parents had to go through at an adult age, which can be argued to be more difficult than for the second generation. Even though the production is created primarily for the younger generation with a multicultural background, as well as the episode featuring the parents from chapter 5.9.1 functions as educational for the youth, older age groups tend to watch youth dramas, allowing them to reminisce to their own youth (Petersen and Sundet 2019; Sundet 2021, 148). In other words, this kind of storytelling about the youth, but also, how their parents are a part of their development and where the children's perspectives originate from, is insightful for many age groups. Such a function in a television series is crucially important for NRK as a public service broadcaster, considering their ultimate goal is to reach as wide as possible with their own productions.

There are several portrayals in both productions that raises significant themes in the context of parent-children's relationships. For instance, how Mehdi from *Norsk-ish* would not compliment Fariba directly, but rather to other fathers while calling them hypocrites for bad mouthing other children when their own have done equally as bad things. Moreover, how Aisha's mother in *19* clearly treats Aisha and Yusuf differently because of their genders. Regardless of which part of the world you are from, there are cultural differences, even between same countries. Referencing Hall (1995), language is what represents who we are, and it is what that separates us from others (Hall 1995, 186). We have our own language, and our own culture. However, it does not mean that we must keep that to ourselves. The key informants

from both productions wished to portray the notion of feeling different at the same time as we are all the same in one way or another.

Television is denser and more complex rather than restrictive (Newcomb and Hirsch 2000, 571). The inclusion of the parents has contributed to much deeper reflection of the targeted audience group because of the variety of cultures represented in both productions. In a youth production, the series creators have created two television dramas that function as a medium for both the first and second generation to feel heard. While attracting audience groups outside the key demographic, the public service broadcaster was able to gather the population, which can be of great influence in promoting language, enlightenment, and culture to Norwegian society, leaving a societal “footprint” (Sundet 2021, 123).

## 6.5 Keeping up with the younger generation

Trends come and go in the current digital landscape, especially among younger people. It is difficult for series creators to predict what is still cool in a year’s time, or if what they are making will be cool around time of release. Something that NRK has managed to do is listen directly to the younger generation instead of speaking for them. Although it does not make sense to the adults, NRK and the key informants have made it clear that the content is made for *them*, and that they aim to bring young people closer (Andersen and Sundet 2019, 5).

### 6.5.1 How do young people get hooked?

It is both an advantage and disadvantage in a television series to consist of several episodes and seasons, either the viewer watches the whole series, or they lose interest after the first episode. A series depends on a 50% chance of keeping their viewers per episode, thus in keeping their attention, something must get them ‘hooked’.

As the television genre evolves, there are several ways of approaching the crucial start of a series and one thing that seems to always remain is the title sequence. According to John Ellis (2011), the title sequence, also known as the intro, is the audiovisual version of a hardback binding on a book to a television series with the significant quality that makes the viewer want to invest their time on (Ellis 2011; Davison 2013, 7). Furthermore, there are two types of title sequences, and it varies from series to series when it starts, whether it is at the beginning, after a recap, or after a scene.

First, the traditional version at around 60 to 90 second that portrays high production value, and second, the modern version of a simple title card with the series’ title logo and audio cue (Davison 2013, 7). The title sequence is used to present the series in an effective way to

both inform and portray what it is about. Moreover, Jonathan Gray (2012) suggests that it also introduces the tone and genre of the show (Gray 2012; Re 2016, 152). In today's television, the shorter version of the title sequence is more common as it is more challenging to keep the viewer's attention as the competition of viewership is increasing. Therefore, the goal is to be as short and precise as possible in creating the introduction of a series.

Also, technology gives creative editors another challenge as the function of "skip intro" has been implemented to most streaming websites (Re 2016, 161). Due to this function the longer title sequences are less to be seen in more recently produced shows as this brings a certain satisfaction to the user experience and the viewers who pay for a streaming service.

Although NRK is a public service broadcaster and some may not expect as much as their services are free, they keep themselves up to date in recent technological advancements on an international level, thus also have implemented the skip-button shortly after the known popularity the function received. However, the public broadcaster also keeps up with the structure of the attention-grabbing title sequences in their own productions. For instance, one of their success series, *Side om Side*, which consists of nine seasons starting from 2013 to 2022.

In the first season, the title sequence is an almost 20-second-long introduction of three different families, which includes a jingle, formal portrayal of the family members and ends with a title card. In other words, the season from 2013 uses the traditional version of a title sequence to prepare the audience to create a connection to the series (Haskin 1996; Re 2016, 152). The ninth and latest season's title sequence, on the other hand, uses the more modern version of a title sequence with only a single title card and their signature jingle that have remained the same every season. This shows signs of how NRK are keeping up with the ever-evolving genre of television series in their own productions. Furthermore, they manage to stay relevant and modern when it comes to the attention span of the younger generation who are the demographic certain functions in online streaming sites are created for.

## 6.6 The home is a safe haven

The furniture of a home is not necessarily determined by what society has made acceptable, but rather, the furniture of a home should represent the people who live there. *Norsk-ish* made the looks of the characters' homes a high priority. It was a clear characteristic from "the contents of the frame", also called *mise-en-scène* (Gibbs 2002, 5), and the way everything was organized created an interesting discussion with the series creators during the interviews. There was a close collaboration between the director, screenwriters, and actors to represent the different



cultures displayed in this production as authentic as possible. Among the working documents received by the production manager, the production personnel had put together mood boards of how they envisioned the homes to look like. As mentioned in chapter 5.13, the props on set were utilized to enhance the characters on a more personal level.

Furthermore, the close attention to detail provides a clear separation between each home, as well as the ethnicity and culture each comes from. The props and décor are crucial for the actor to perform, but it is also important for the camera and the audience's view (Gibbs 2002, 5). For that reason, the series creators have intentionally chosen, for instance, the type of wood on the floors and furniture, and the type of textiles and colors, with a strategic thought to invite the viewers into the realm of *Norsk-ish*. Kaveh pointed out that they spent longer time than anticipated in finding apartments that would be displayed in the series. The wish to find the exact home with the inspiration from the mood boards was of high priority. However, the time spent on organizing their sets and décor contributed to a realistic way of telling a story about multicultural families in Norway.

According to earlier production culture traditions, cinematographers and screenwriters would not prejudge the look of a production set, but rather, it mostly was the director's work and vision (Caldwell 2008, 19). In this production, and more modern productions, the screenwriters/series creators and director had a close collaboration in what would go into the different homes. Moreover, the fact that the screenwriters are from a multicultural background themselves, as well as the same cultures portrayed in the series, except the Indian representation from Amrit, played an important role. Considering the director is an ethnic Norwegian, it is significantly important that he gave his trust to the series creators regarding the production set.

Through the portrayal of each home, the viewers get to learn a lot from the characters. A common trait in every family is the appreciation and respect they have for each other, something that is clearly demonstrated throughout the analysis. Each home had a large common room, whether it was a living room with a big couch, or a dining room with a long table, suggesting the importance of having a place in the home to gather the entire family. The color tones chosen are viewed as a representation of family values and pride of their home country. Among the décor and props in each home, the viewers get to witness tokens of their respective cultures. Through pictures and objects on the walls and shelves, the series was able to portray various characteristics that provide room for interpretation and to reflect deeper meaning of what it is like to be a person with a multicultural background in today's Norwegian society.

In the analysis of four different homes, there is a Turkish, Iranian, and Indian home, as well as a mixed Norwegian and Indian home. Tina and Amrit's mixed home representing each

of their cultures portrays their relationship and we get to witness two culturally different people living together. Throughout the series, there were instances where they experienced some challenges, which were connected to race and gender. One can argue that there could be a case of the West and the Rest perspective. However, looking at it from a “television as a cultural forum” viewpoint, no one is hardly right or wrong, but rather, one is right and other is left (Newcomb and Hirsch 2000, 569). In other words, there will always be someone who attempts to make meaning of things from television. The way we get to witness Tina and Amrit in their home is as a couple who appreciate each other, even when mistakes are made, and that the combination of two cultures in one home is a way of embracing and acknowledging the notion of being multicultural.

The notion of certain fixed gender roles was a significant balancing problem in earlier television production cultures. If a woman would not fit into the typical housewife role, they would not make it in the industry (Spigel 1992, 84). The wife of the main male character was supposed to be an attractive, middle-aged woman who fit right in the living room. Fortunately, gender roles have made progress throughout the years, but in some cultures, there is still the perception that women are supposed to do the chores at the home. As analyzed in chapter 5.10, Aisha struggled with gender inequalities from her mother simply because she is a girl, therefore, was the one cleaning the bathroom and vacuuming her brother’s room instead of himself. From an “at home” perspective, this portrayal does not directly affect Aisha, but rather, demonstrates and contextualizes an everyday life at home (Spigel 1992, 98).

On the other hand, we get to witness two different sides in *Norsk-ish* where there is in a way the same perspective, but the typical housewife role gets split between both genders. At Fariba’s parents’ home, there are some instances where we witness Mehdi sit on the couch while his wife is vacuuming and makes him move because he is in her way. Another side we get to see at their home is when Gabriel is visiting. One could assume that the wife would look after their grandchild as the hardworking housewife who runs the home she has been portrayed as (Spigel 1992, 84), but Mehdi is mostly the one looking after Gabriel, watching television with him on the couch, and who reads stories with him before bedtime. Therefore, *Norsk-ish* proves that, regardless of culture, the woman does not take care of the home alone.

Although living in a culturally different environment compared to their home country, *Norsk-ish*’s portrayal of the main characters’ home demonstrates a pride in where they come from, and how living in Norway does not shadow their ethnicity, but rather challenges them in the context of experiencing cultural differences. However, the challenges that arise tend to contribute to a strengthened relationship to their home country instead.

### 6.7 How is NRK strengthening the relationship between the west and east?

Although there is this distinction between people from the west and east side of Oslo, Hall points out how we need to remember that the generalizations of using “west” and “western” represent complex ideas with no single meaning (Hall 1995, 185). It is easy to think of the discourse “the West and the Rest” as something geographical. However, the fact that the entire continent of Europe is not considered the west, but the USA, which is not in Europe, is considered the west. Norway is in Europe, but one part of a city is western, but the other is not. As it is a well-known phenomenon that there are significant social, economic, and political differences between the west and east in Europe (Buljo 2019), this distinction is more dependent on what perspective the matter is viewed from rather than geographical.

NRK has always been aware of the explicit divide between the west and east part of Oslo, and they actively shed light on various topics that relate to the prejudice and stereotypes that people face on an everyday basis. In an article on what people visualize when thinking of ghetto, the *17* series universe gets an honorable mention of the way the series has portrayed the Norwegian ghetto in pop culture (Sandvik and Chavez 2021). What people tend to forget is everyone is simply trying to find their own identity, but somehow have been led to think that, for instance, rap and hip hop are a part of a language connected to ghetto. A large group of people from one nationality often find their strong sense of identity by simply separating themselves from other cultures (Hall 1995, 188). Therefore, what NRK, as part of their public service mandate, is aiming at is to include diversity and portray everything that is happening in society to demonstrate that opposing forces often merge unnoticeably into each other.

Bendik Stalheim Møller’s main ambition for the *17* series universe was to build a bridge between young people who have grown up to believe that they cannot blend with the other from a different culture. Similar to the claim Judith Butler makes about gender identity, we are placed in society by discourses, and we are performing accordingly (Butler 1990, 7). We are not born with a gender the same way that we are not born with prejudice towards a certain group of people, but we are taught and grown up with it through what we are surrounded by. For that reason, NRK wants to be an acting institution to enlighten the Norwegian population to language and culture (Enli et al. 2013, 216). However, as a public service broadcaster, there is the responsibility to inform the entire population. Thus, there is a significant challenge of informing people of all ages, stages in life and cultural backgrounds, which are several groups to take into consideration.

One of the reasons that can be discussed on how NRK is strengthening relationships in today's society is their honesty and their ability to listen to all voices. In a cliché kind of way, they listen to both sides of a story, something that is clearly demonstrated during the creation processes of their productions. For instance, in the documents received by the production leader of the *17* series universe, there are documentations of interviews with groups of high school students, as stated in the analysis, but also, different kinds of groups, girls and boys, and not only one, but several high schools. In addition, they spoke with police officers as well to get their perspective. Through interviewing these people, it has enabled a particular perspective on the topics that the series creators want to portray in the series (Sundet 2020, 71). Furthermore, the in-depth research conducted by the production personnel has allowed them to tell a story of people that feel oppressed in a western dominated society. A television series, such as the *17* series universe and *Norsk-ish*, reflects NRK's overall goal of popular enlightenment. There is an ambition to represent minorities in Norway, and in doing so, contribute to gaining trust in the public service broadcaster that everyone is included.

To feel like you belong somewhere entails several factors because the world is constantly changing in behavior, habits, and lifestyle. The younger generation is continuously evolving, which keeps the public broadcaster on their toes as they need to keep up with trends to not lose them as viewers, including growing up with them. Furthermore, the constant fear of losing them for good increases when NRK has competitors, such as Netflix, Disney+, Snapchat and other digital platforms (Mangelrød 2022). What has made these such competitive services is the wide collection of content they have to offer that satisfies almost every user. Thus, that is a factor that NRK strives to reach as that is the main goal of their mandate, to serve the interest of the entire population.

#### 6.8 How are the characters doing the multicultural community in Norway justice?

As the representation of diversity is a particular struggle, the strategy of double storytelling has been used in NRK's productions to both entertain the younger generation, while educating them to reflect deeper meaning beneath the surface of what they are watching (Redvall 2013; Sundet 2020, 70).

In the past, screenwriters of fictional television series have often based their characters on the news where immigrants have been portrayed in a particular way emphasizing a problematic and criminal perspective (Galán 2006; Igartua and Marcos-Ramos 2015, 65). Therefore, the notion of giving people with a multicultural background unimportant, or

stereotypical, roles with a narrative structure that distorts the view of minorities have contributed to a negative history of cultural representation in television. What gives the characters of *Norsk-ish*, and the *17* series universe a more authentic and positive sense of understanding is how they are developed by second-generation women with multicultural backgrounds.

The series creators and screenwriters of *Norsk-ish*, Bahareh Badavi and Melike Leblebicioglu Kaveh, have both experienced what it is like to be born and raised in Norway while being treated differently, hence the series title of being Norwegian “ish” (Kildebo 2021). To create something that aims at telling a real story that is happening in the real world, the authenticity must originate from somewhere. What Badavi and Kaveh have achieved through conversations together is something they have in common even though coming from different cultures (Kildebo 2021), and they used that in *Norsk-ish* to show the similarities within the Norwegian population. Through the lens of Hall, culture is the way we make sense of things and consists of a map of meaning. Moreover, he argued the presentation of broadcast television to be mostly biased (Hall 1981, 273). The representation through Helin, Fariba and Amrit suggest the double storytelling of being Norwegian-ish, which can have its entertaining moments, but also, of being a human being in general, which makes the viewer think about the deeper meaning of this television series.

For the *17* series universe, the scriptwriters consisted of Kaveh from *Norsk-ish*, including Marte Sunde Härter and Ane Arstad Isungset. Someone who is also important to mention in this production is also the series creator and producer Nora Ibrahim. Following the two first seasons, *17* and *18*, Amir Shasheen wrote a critical opinion article, also called an op-ed piece, about how disappointed he was of the series and NRK for wrongly representing the communities from the east side of Oslo (Shaheen 2019). He raised concerns about where the production personnel received their information to develop the characters while claiming that as a person from the areas in the series, he is dissatisfied with the portrayal. However, what is not being considered in his chronicle is the bigger picture of the east side of Oslo.

The series is created primarily for boys around the age of 15-19 and it has managed to reach both girls and boys between 12 and 18 years old (Härter, Isungset and Leblebicioglu 2019). The production personnel’s strategy of forming close relationships with their demographic has contributed to significant increase in interest among the younger generation, especially those with a multicultural background without preexisting relations to NRK. Multicultural representation is an essential part of the diversity NRK is striving for. Therefore,

it is important to take this age group seriously and help them create something that has now become a substantial part of their identity (Härter, Isungset and Lelebicioglu 2019).

Furthermore, a significant finding in *19* was the change to a female main character, Aisha, and the portrayal of her relationship with her brother, Yusuf. As mentioned in chapter 5.10 of the analysis, the screenwriters discovered that many of the young women they interviewed at the different high schools had brothers and that they were treated significantly differently. It is the culture they have grown up with that has led to the inequality, and “because you are a girl” is a regularly used argument. The fight between Aisha and her mother demonstrates something that many do not dare to speak up on. Through the lens of Hall, the screenwriters managed to represent how everything is connected to power, whether it is between an adult and teenager or boy and girl (Hall 1995, 186). Thus, the explicit portrayal of the oppression young women with a multicultural background face on an everyday basis show something that many experience in the real world. In addition, the characters contribute to shedding light on the nature of social categorization as we get to witness how Aisha needs to come up with a well thought excuse to sleepover at her best friend’s house, while Yusuf gets to bring home any girl he wants.

Regardless of what it is, someone is bound to be dissatisfied with something in a creative piece. It is a part of figuring out the youth and a learning curve to take into consideration for next projects. Therefore, if the target audience the series is created for is satisfied with the result, which is most likely 13-29-year-olds and the age NRK P3 aims at (Andersen and Sundet 2019, 4), NRK has fulfilled their goal in reaching the younger generation with a multicultural background through aiming at a more niche-oriented audience group. The thorough research and interviewing round the production personnel conducts seem to be the most significant way of creating characters as authentic as possible, and it supports their production moral in wanting to produce youth fictional drama to “bring young people closer together” (Andersen and Sundet 2019, 5).

## 7 The final words of this thesis

There are several stereotypes created through decades and history, therefore, public service broadcasters have an important role in addressing these kinds of topics and challenges. Although demonstrations, such as Black Lives Matters and Stop Asian Hate, have made headlines and increased visibility in the media (Tong et al 2022, 1), normalizing multicultural

representation in fictional production is significant as well. Also, to use multicultural representation in ‘normal’ storytelling. In other words, an Indian actor can also play a role, which would, in the past, be given to an ethnic Norwegian actor, and not be given a role of an Indian character because he is Indian.

The aim of this research has been to explore NRK’s strategies and production culture in how to reach out to the younger generation with a multicultural background. This thesis has outlined the role of the Norwegian public broadcaster in the delivery of multicultural youth productions and considered how it provides entertaining and educational storytelling of real stories through fictional characters. Although both productions target specifically the younger audience with a multicultural background in Norway, *Norsk-ish* and the *17* series universe managed to reach a wider audience outside the key demographic, something that is ultimately crucial in the context of their public service mission (Sundet 2021, 148). Through detailed research, the exclusive informants managed to create characters and storylines that the target audience can relate to and portray relevant everyday challenges that happen in the real world. By including personal ideas into each production, the series creators and screenwriters used television as their cultural forum and created the difference that contributed to a difference (Newcomb and Hirsch 2000, 568). Their strategies in actively working directly with the target group they are creating the series for suggests a clear ambition to promote multicultural storytelling at NRK, which contributes to the youth regaining trust in the public broadcaster.

The future is looking promising. However, there are grounds yet to be covered in this research field. As mentioned in the introduction, there is a significant lack of research in this area within the realm of production, television, film, and media studies. It is essential to continue exploring multicultural representation in television, and in the online digital space, as the younger generation with a multicultural background is still facing what has been heavily discussed throughout this thesis, the discourse of “the West and the Rest”, suggesting it is all connected to power (Hall 1995, 187). For that reason, production studies and analyzing future films and television series featuring the multicultural younger generation must be examined to not repeat history of oppression from only a few decades ago, especially in the public service broadcasting industry. This field of study is essential because although some people might think that we have come far in our Norwegian society, we have barely scratched the surface. By stating that, I am not suggesting that nothing has been done, but rather, there is still a long journey ahead.

A short time after stepping into the role of Broadcast Director at NRK, Vibeke Fürst Haugen quickly addressed the biggest challenge of keeping and attracting the younger

generation to NRK (Mangelrød 2022). Considering we find the younger generation actively joining political demonstrations on social media, it is important to engage in similar debates to keep their interest with the public broadcaster. As they are significantly more vocal, strengthened by the participatory culture in today's digital media landscape, the current youth are clearly more opinionated.

Representation is key to the youth. This research is for the ones who get asked where they are from in their hometown on a regular basis. For people who look different from the crowd, who grew up with defense mechanisms because they can immediately sense that something offensive is about to happen and have gotten used to that being their "normal". It is crucial for a public service broadcaster to prioritize these kinds of topics because there are young people with a multicultural background out living their lives where strangers are doing disrespectful things without thinking it might be wrong. Throughout the two years of working on this master's thesis, NRK has produced more television dramas featuring the younger generation with a multicultural background, such as *Flus*, and *Norsk-ish* is about to release a season two the coming year. Television should portray how things are in the real world, but also, how things should be. The bottom line is that everyone has the same type of problems regardless of ethnicity.





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## 9 Appendices

### 9.1 Interview guide

#### Who?

- Professionals of the production, also employed at NRK.
- 2-3 people per production.
- Series creator, producer, screenwriter.
- Every interview separately by person.

#### Setting:

- Either in-person, video/phone call, or by email.
  - Hopefully in-person.
- Only me with one other, or max. 2 people.
- I will ask if it is okay to record the conversation (only sound).
- I will have the questions prepared in front of me.

#### General questions and topics for both productions:

- Pre-production:
  - What was the inspiration that brought forth the idea of the series?
  - Who did you contact first in further work through the idea?
  - Did you encounter any individuals who were against the idea?
- Thought process:
  - Did you consider the other existing content by NRK that also targets young individuals with multicultural background? How and why does this series stand out?
  - What was your vision when it comes to casting?
  - What did you consider as important elements of the script?
  - Talk a bit about the homes of the characters, and the way it is displayed.
- Important messages they wanted to display in the series.
- Their goals for the series.
- Any challenges?

#### *Norsk-ish:*

- Could you please talk about the creation of each three main characters.

- The inspiration behind the name of the series.
- Specific chosen scenes - please talk about the thought process.

The *17* series universe:

- Could you please talk about the creation of the main character from each season.
- The inspiration behind the countdown structure of the series.
- Specific chosen scenes - please talk about the thought process.



## Vil du delta i forskningsprosjektet

### ***”Original NRK TV Drama Series Reaching the Younger Audience with a Multicultural Racial Background”?***

Dette er et spørsmål til deg om å delta i et forskningsprosjekt hvor formålet er å gjennomføre et produksjons studie om hvordan NRK, som allmennkringkaster, produserer sitt innhold til å nå ut til yngre og bredere, og mer spesifikt yngre med flerkulturell bakgrunn. Produksjonene som blir fokusert på er drama seriene, *Norsk-ish* og *17* serie universet. I dette skrivet gir vi deg informasjon om målene for prosjektet og hva deltakelse vil innebære for deg.

#### **Formål**

Dette er et produksjons studie om NRK’s drama serier, *Norsk-Ish* og *17* serie universet, hvor jeg skal analysere strategi og planlegging som gikk inn i disse produksjonene. Denne masteroppgaven vil videre se på hvordan NRK, som allmennkringkaster, produserer serier med mål for å nå ut til et yngre og bredere publikum, mer spesifikt yngre med flerkulturell bakgrunn.

#### **Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?**

Cindy Xia er ansvarlig for prosjektet.

Student i Masterprogrammet, Medievitenskap, fra Universitet i Oslo

#### **Hvorfor får du spørsmål om å delta?**

Jeg vil intervjuer viktige produksjon personell, som serieskaper, regissør, og manusforfattere, som var med i hele prosessen og har verdifull informasjon om produksjonene.

Kontaktinformasjon er mottatt fra NRK sin analyse avdeling.

#### **Hva innebærer det for deg å delta?**

Dette masterprosjektet innebærer individuelle intervjuer med produksjon ansvarlige og opplysningene registreres med notater og lydopptak. Spørsmålene for intervjuene vil handle om pre-produksjon, tankeprosess, budskap, mål og utfordringer under produksjonen.

I tillegg skal jeg analysere tilgjengelige dokumenter som NRK’s analyse avdeling har å tilby.

**Det er frivillig å delta**<sup>[1]</sup> Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Hvis du velger å delta, kan du når som helst trekke samtykket tilbake uten å oppgi noen grunn. Alle dine personopplysninger vil da bli slettet. Det vil ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for deg hvis du ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke deg.

Det vil ikke påvirke ditt forhold til arbeidsplassen, eller navn i medie/film industrien

#### **Ditt personvern – hvordan vi oppbevarer og bruker dine opplysninger**

Vi vil bare bruke opplysningene om deg til formålene vi har fortalt om i dette skrivet. Vi behandler opplysningene konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

De eneste som har tilgang til opplysningene er prosjektansvarlig, Cindy Xia, og master veileder, Arnt Maasø.

Leverandører av UiO tjenester, Microsoft Teams og OneDrive (med grønne og gule data) er databehandlerne som har tilgang til personopplysningene.

Navnet ditt vil bli nevnt i prosjektet ettersom produksjons ansvarlig er offentlig informasjon.

### **Hva skjer med opplysningene dine når vi avslutter forskningsprosjektet?**

Opplysningene anonymiseres når prosjektet avsluttes/oppgaven er godkjent, noe som etter planen er Juni 2023. Personopplysninger vil deretter ikke bli brukt videre til andre forskningsprosjekter.

### **Dine rettigheter**

Så lenge du kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har du rett til:

- innsyn i hvilke personopplysninger som er registrert om deg, og å få utlevert en kopi av opplysningene,
- å få rettet personopplysninger om deg,
- å få slettet personopplysninger om deg, og
- å sende klage til Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger.

### **Hva gir oss rett til å behandle personopplysninger om deg?**

Vi behandler opplysninger om deg basert på ditt samtykke.

På oppdrag fra Universitet i Oslo har NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

### **Hvor kan jeg finne ut mer?**

Hvis du har spørsmål til studien, eller ønsker å benytte deg av dine rettigheter, ta kontakt med:

- Institutt i Medier og Kommunikasjon ved Cindy Xia ([yucx@uio.no](mailto:yucx@uio.no)) og Arnt Maasø ([arntm@uio.no](mailto:arntm@uio.no)).
- Vårt personvernombud: Personvernombud ved UiO - [personvernombud@uio.no](mailto:personvernombud@uio.no)

Hvis du har spørsmål knyttet til NSD sin vurdering av prosjektet, kan du ta kontakt med:

- NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS på e-post ([personverntjenester@nsd.no](mailto:personverntjenester@nsd.no)) eller på telefon: 55 58 21 17.

Med vennlig hilsen

Cindy Xia  
(Prosjektansvarlig/Student)

Arnt Maasø  
(Forsker/veileder)

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## **Samtykkeerklæring**

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet “*Original NRK TV Drama Series Reaching the Younger Audience with a Multicultural Racial Background*”, og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål. Jeg samtykker til:

- å delta i intervju
- at Cindy Xia kan gi opplysninger om meg til prosjektet

Jeg samtykker til at mine opplysninger behandles frem til prosjektet er avsluttet

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(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)



### 9.3 Moodboards of *Norsk-ish's* homes



Helin's family home



Amrit and Tina's home



Amrit's mother, Surinder's home.

