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**Filmic Representations of Contemporary American Masculinity in Crisis:  
The Joker Figure  
(PhD Dissertation Booklet)**

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## Summary of the Dissertation

This dissertation examines the representation of post-9/11 American masculinity in crisis through an in-depth analysis of three significant cinematic depictions of the Joker character: Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* (2008), David Ayer's *Suicide Squad* (2016), and Todd Phillips's *Joker* (2019). Anchored in the theoretical framework of masculinity studies and masculinity in crisis discourse, this study explores how these films portray fractured and subverted masculine identities in response to broader socio-cultural and political shifts. R.W. Connell's conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity serves as the analytical framework. I focus on three critical elements: patriarchy, class hierarchies, and emotional toughness, all of which serve as markers of hegemonic masculinity in crisis. These elements interrogate the tensions within traditional models of manhood and identify how these crises are articulated through the Joker's cinematic representations.

This dissertation contextualizes American masculinity, tracing its evolution from the 20<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It examines cultural shifts influenced by events like 9/11 and the Great Recession. By integrating Stuart Hall's theory of representation, the analysis explores how cinematic depictions of the Joker reinforce or subvert specific models of masculinity. This study contributes to the understanding of various masculinities in post-9/11 American cinema, reflecting broader socio-cultural anxieties and reshaping dominant gender norms. It analyzes each manifestation of masculinity, determining whether these films react to, represent, or challenge rigid expectations of manhood in the United States.

I define Nolan's Joker as the embodiment of an anarchic masculinity that profoundly rejects hegemonic norms in favor of anarchy and anti-capitalist insurrection. Secondly, I regard Ayer's Joker as a prime example of dissociative masculinity, which is characterized by emotional disintegration, misogyny, and violent patriarchal traits. I ultimately defined Phillips's Joker as embodying a carnivalesque masculinity, in which Arthur Fleck's unsightly physique, fractured relationships, and social marginalization combine to facilitate his transformation into a mock-king archetype. Through this role as a carnivalesque jester, he temporarily subverts conventional ideals of manhood, challenging hegemonic structures before ultimately reaffirming his position's (in)stability. Viewed holistically, this dissertation examines how cinematic representations of the Joker surrounding power dynamics, body politics, and intimacy illustrate the post-9/11 American masculinity in crisis, socio-cultural anxieties, and the shifting challenges to hegemonic ideals in contemporary society.

## **Methodology**

This PhD dissertation examines how the Joker embodies and responds to the American masculinity in crisis through Stuart Hall's representation theory. Using Hall's representation theory, which asserts that popular culture mirrors actual culture. Hall (1997) claims that the importance of culture comes from a system of representation that connects cultural meanings with visual representations. I focus on the portrayal, discussion, and complexity of masculinity issues within the Joker films. Hall identifies three methodologies: the reflective approach, which echoes social reality; the intentional approach, which highlights artists' intentions; and the constructionist approach, which regards representation as influenced by audience perceptions and creators' objectives. This study employs a constructionist approach to investigate how narratives entwined with cultural norms and intertextual discourses produce meaning. It illustrates how these films challenge and shape hegemonic masculinity by closely examining various Joker narratives, each representing unique concepts while still embodying the archetype of the Joker. Hall's constructionist perspective connects the Joker's role as a cultural product influenced by the film industry with the social context in which the character exists. Thus, the Joker reflects post-9/11 social turmoil and operates at the nexus of cultural narratives, influenced by and influencing contemporary anxieties, through genre conventions and transmedia strategies that respond to market needs. Consequently, the Joker serves as a cultural barometer, mediating the tensions between real-world crises and the generic and economic codes that define their cinematic representation. By applying content analysis to the selected films, I will gain a deeper understanding of my research context within these works, exploring overarching narratives and answering my research questions. Content analysis is a research method that allows scholars to draw replicable and valid conclusions from texts or other significant materials regarding their contextual applications. (Krippendorff, 2004). This method can be applied across various materials to understand and interpret the narratives they convey. In analyzing the representation of masculinity in crisis in the Joker film, I see that focusing on the narratives is more critical than the cinematography, as I aim for the narrative to give meaning to the reflected world. This approach emphasizes the building and deconstruction of masculinities in cinema rather than cinematography, notwithstanding the latter's contribution to narrative enhancement. I am not addressing the impact of lighting, composition, camera angles, or other cinematographic techniques that enhance each film's cinematic mood and tone.

## **Structure of the Dissertation**

I sectioned this dissertation into six chapters. The first chapter provides the theoretical background for my dissertation. It surveys the theoretical frameworks employed in masculinity studies to examine crisis tendencies and how historical events and cultural shifts have influenced notions of masculinity. This underscores the necessity of scrutinizing male behavior and its historical backdrop before the emergence of masculinity studies, along with the perspectives it offers for comprehending masculine constructs. This chapter explores masculine ideals, norms, and conventions through R.W. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity (2005). It draws on further studies by Demetriou (2001), Goffman (1963), Hammer (2023), Kimmel (2006), and Messerschmidt (2005, 2018) to discuss the plurality of masculinities, their fundamental elements, and the hierarchy that shapes them. My examination of the Joker character will specifically focus on three essential aspects: patriarchy, class hierarchies, and the ideas of physical and emotional toughness. These aspects will be discussed in detail throughout the chapter. This chapter further debates moments of masculinity in crisis, framing it as a discourse and exploring the challenges and changes affecting hegemonic masculinity. It also emphasizes different practices that challenge conventional norms and encourage shifts away from them.

The second chapter examines the evolution of American masculinity from the 1960s onward, emphasizing the current crisis facing masculinity in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century. It traces developments from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, focusing on the impacts of war, the economy, politics, and cultural attitudes towards masculinity. Additionally, this chapter portrays social change as an ongoing process, asserting that the "masculinity in crisis" in the U.S. is influenced by both external historical events, like wars and conflicts, and ingrained social beliefs. A key event that underpins my analysis is the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. This traumatic instance in American history will form the basis of my discussion, exploring the psychological, economic, and political effects of the attacks and their role in shaping a new understanding of masculinity in the United States.

The third chapter analyzes the evolution of American cinema about hegemonic masculinity, highlighting the shift from conventional hegemonic masculinity to portrayals of male characters as insecure, defiant, and psychologically complex. This chapter, furthermore, traces the change in the cinematic idealized notions of American manhood and examines how heroic masculinities have shaped American society over the past two centuries. This chapter discusses various forms of masculinities in film genres, including crime fiction, noir, neo-noir, western, and neo-western, as well as thriller. This chapter expands on concepts

previously discussed in my published work, “Anamorphic Masculinity: Post 9/11 Cinematic Masculinities” (2024). It explores the trend of villainizing protagonists in American cinema, highlighting villainized masculinity as a representation of masculine transgression. This discussion emphasizes the growing discourse on evil amidst a crisis in masculinity.

The fourth chapter explores Christopher Nolan’s *The Dark Knight* (2008), delving into its intricate themes of justice, anarchy, and disorder, particularly through the lens of hegemonic masculinity. I investigate how Nolan’s depiction suggests that his masculinity faces rejection and stigma due to his reluctance to follow erratic governing principles. I refer to his masculinity as anarchic masculinity, emphasizing the Joker’s masculinity in crisis as portrayed by Nolan. This idea challenges established societal norms, authority figures, and economic conditions impacting individuals like him. His masculinity acts as a means to interrogate, critique, and subvert traditional social norms and expectations of manhood. In my analysis, I identify a direct link between the portrayal of masculinity in the Joker character and the concept of American masculinity. My argument hinges on the idea that the Joker is a byproduct of American culture, designed to reflect and confront significant societal issues in the United States. I approach the film from three perspectives. First, I examine the Joker as an anti-hegemonic and anti-authority figure, shedding light on his anarchic masculinity, a term I coined to capture his defiant masculine behavior. Second, I analyze his iconic yet vaguely defined interests, highlighting how the Joker symbolizes anti-capitalist ideology by targeting Gotham’s elite society. Lastly, I discuss his philosophy of chaos, which seeks to create a city without authority, allowing his principles to dominate through violent acts that reject established power dynamics. This analysis interrogates the Joker’s motives and how he critiques prevailing norms, viewing them as burdens rather than affirmations.

The fifth chapter analyzes the dynamics of David Ayer’s Joker in *Suicide Squad* (2016) and his relationship with Harley Quinn, and explores its implications for his masculinity. Preliminary discussion of this chapter has already been published in the examination of Ayer’s Joker as modern *homme fatal* in my article entitled “The Reconfiguration of *Homme Fatal* in the Third Millennium Joker Adaptions” (2022). Within this dissertation, however, the examination starts with the Joker’s aggressive conduct towards Harley, illustrating it as a reflection of his entrenched patriarchal views, emphasizing his mistreatment and promotion of others’ disdain. The second section presents a perspective that reduces Harley’s humanity, viewing it as indicative of his misogynistic tendencies. Harley is perceived as an object or possession under the control of the Joker, yet she continues to be fascinated by him. The third section analyzes Harley’s character by exploring the concept of

*amour fou*, or mad love, to assess the impact of her obsession with the Joker on the narrative. This point seeks to clarify whether their relationship is inherently abusive or stems from a deep fear of intimacy linked to his dissociative masculinity.

The sixth chapter examines carnivalesque masculinity through Todd Phillips' *Joker* (2019), drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the carnival. It clarifies how the Joker embodies societal upheaval, challenging established norms. During crises, marginalized masculinity surfaces, eroding power dynamics and empowering those on the fringes while momentarily diminishing mainstream authority. A partial discussion of the Joker's struggle with marginalization was previously addressed in my 2023 article, "The Representation of Racism and Social Invisibility in Todd Phillips' *Joker* (2019)." This chapter defines carnivalesque masculinity as a defiance of authority, emphasizing Arthur Fleck's physicality and the grotesque imagery that accompanies it. It complicates his overt masculinity in personal connections, particularly with his mother and neighbor. It reveals how his care for his mother and imaginary bond with his neighbor present reality *à l'envers*. Ultimately, this frames him as a mock hero, highlighting the evolving nature of gender identities in carnivalesque contexts and raising critical questions about masculinity. As a carnivalesque character, the Joker exhibits a profound understanding of moral distinctions, and he intentionally defies conventional rules due to his inherently chaotic nature. Moreover, labeling the Joker as a monster and a clown accentuates clowns' intrinsic repulsiveness and imaginative nature. In analyzing Arthur in *Joker* (2019), one observes his deliberate challenge to and mockery of conventional ideas surrounding masculinity. I choose the typology of carnivalesque masculinity, a notion that stems from Bakhtin's theory of the carnival. Bakhtin delineates the carnival as a domain where social hierarchies are temporarily suspended and established norms are reversed. This thesis explores how the Joker deliberately undermines conventional masculinity by rejecting societal norms and crafting his own warped identity. Arthur Fleck's embodiment of flamboyant masculinity is evident in numerous facets. At first glance, his flamboyant and hyperbolic persona after transforming into the Joker represents a defiance of the conventional and subdued masculinity often expected in societal norms. He embraces a dramatic expression of masculinity that challenges established norms. He chooses to partake in laughter and dance in the face of adversity, thereby upending the typical gravity and restraint linked to conventional masculinity. Despite being fictitious, the Joker holds considerable cultural significance in the United States since he represents the changing masculinity in crisis in various periods in which he appears.



This work aims to contribute significantly to discourses on gender, culture, and cinema, especially in exploring how iconic characters like the Joker embody social anxieties and function as a cinematic agent of cultural critique. The central aim of this dissertation is to argue that the Joker functions as a cinematic barometer for the crises afflicting American masculinity in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century. Through the lens of hegemonic masculinity and its three core criteria—patriarchy, class hierarchies, and physical and emotional toughness—this study analyzes how each version of the Joker embodies a distinct reaction to these crises. Nolan’s anarchic Joker rejects hegemonic norms by embracing chaos and anti-capitalist rebellion, Ayer’s dissociative Joker exhibits hyper-aggressive patriarchal traits and emotional fragmentation, and Phillips’s carnivalesque Joker challenges and subverts conventional ideals of manhood through grotesque and marginalized embodiments of masculinity.

The Joker’s complex embodiment of masculinity in crisis challenges simplistic categorizations of heroism and villainy, offering a nuanced commentary on the instability of hegemonic ideals. By analyzing how these films interrogate and reimagine masculine identities, this dissertation contributes to ongoing discussions about the role of media in shaping cultural narratives about gender. Ultimately, it seeks to demonstrate that the Joker’s cinematic representations are not just reflections of a society in turmoil but active participants in reshaping the cultural imagination of manhood in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century.

### **Summary of the Main Arguments and Findings**

This dissertation explored the varied embodiments of American masculinity in crisis after 9/11, concentrating on three notable cinematic portrayals of the Joker: Christopher Nolan’s *The Dark Knight* (2008), David Ayer’s *Suicide Squad* (2016), and Todd Phillips’s *Joker* (2019). These representations highlight forms of masculinity that challenge the dominant model and subvert established hierarchies among white Western men. This was effectively represented and analyzed through the lens of villains, antiheroes, or antagonists who represent marginalized and unresolved social figures that require deeper representation and study. They reflect the reality of many troubled men who may resort to crime or violence as a defense mechanism. In this framework, the Joker exemplifies the apex of the crisis surrounding American masculinity through his acts of terrorism, thirst for power, and various disturbances.

My examination began with studying masculinity studies as a framework guiding my research methodology. I concluded that masculinity studies recognize the range of masculine expression and the adaptability of manhood expectations. Nonetheless, the discourse

surrounding masculinity in crisis is a global phenomenon, not limited to the U.S. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity offers an insightful framework for examining how historical and cultural contexts shape masculinities. This allows for a culture-centered analysis that exposes moments of rupture and identifies crises in masculinity.

I focused primarily on three key criteria—patriarchy, class hierarchies, and physical and emotional toughness—as indicators of hegemonic masculinity in crisis. This narrow focus, however, limits my study despite the numerous elements that could be explored in relation to how individuals either cannot enact American hegemonic manhood or demonstrate their rejection of it. Throughout my research, I observed how various elements interrogate the tensions within traditional models of masculinity and articulate these crises through cinematic representations of the Joker. Additionally, my dissertation contextualizes American masculinity by tracing its evolution from the 20<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup>-century, shaped by cultural shifts, including those triggered by 9/11, various political conflicts, and the repercussions of the Great Recession. Overall, I argue that American manhood is profoundly influenced by the nation's political climate and collective trauma, evident in how various presidencies have shaped the construction of masculine leadership, particularly how male protectors are expected to serve as ultimate saviors during times of crisis. Furthermore, by emphasizing how deeply ingrained patriarchy is in discussions of masculinity, this work problematizes the concept of hegemonic manhood, fostering a debate about the distinctions between positive and negative forms of hegemonic masculinity portrayed in films.

This dissertation examined the crucial role of class relations and hegemony in social and cultural domination. It has been identified as a catalyst for rejection stemming from the unequal power dynamics it fosters between employers and employees. This, in turn, fosters class divisions that celebrate the wealthy while marginalizing the working class. By viewing the Joker as an emblem of the working class throughout the various films, I highlighted several aspects that elicited anger towards masculine expectations and the relentless pursuit of economic dominance, which largely neglects the impoverished. I discussed how these portrayals of the Joker serve as a critique of capitalism and neoliberal policies that continue to shrink the middle class, thereby diminishing the chances for the majority of people to be recognized as hegemonic.

Furthermore, the Joker's physique signifies disabilities and deliberately disengages from traditional masculinity, making the embodiment of masculinity a crucial component of visual culture and film portrayals. I selected this aspect because it clearly demonstrates how American culture is intrinsically visual, shaped by Hollywood's productions and standards.

However, this relationship is reciprocal; cinema responds to social changes while Hollywood films endeavor to address and reflect the prevailing challenges. This interaction is evident in several films discussed in this dissertation to argue how gender performance confronts social norms.

I argued that the Joker embodies various roles associated with his criminal identity, challenging prevailing norms of masculinity while simultaneously representing those in crisis. His rebellious behavior redefines manhood and unveils different expressions of masculinity in turmoil. I interpret his performances as rejections of traditional norms, presenting a kind of anarchic masculinity portrayed in Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* (2008), alongside another form characterized by toxic, emotionally unstable traits, which I term dissociative masculinity depicted in the persona of David Ayer's Joker in *Suicide Squad* (2016). Furthermore, I introduced the concept of carnivalesque masculinity to discuss the intriguing persona of Arthur Fleck in Todd Phillips' *Joker* (2019), who defies established norms and breaks Gotham's rules as a criminal hailed as a hero. This discourse sheds light on significant cultural transformations and events occurring in the U.S. that need addressing and potential reactions.

First, I argued that Nolan's Joker embodies an anarchic masculinity linked to the national trauma and fear following 9/11. As a domestic terrorist, he seeks to reveal governmental corruption and the absence of intrinsic virtue. He represents a cinematic reaction to a crisis in masculinity, deconstructing hegemonic masculinity and opposing Batman's heroic masculinity. Nolan's Joker rejects dominant masculinity through physical frailty and impulsive, erratic behavior. The film highlights patriarchy through the love triangle of Rachel, Dent, and Bruce, with Rachel acting as a legitimizer of their hegemonic masculinity. Additionally, Nolan's Joker serves as an anti-capitalist figure, illustrating chaos as a vital expression of individuality. He exemplifies anarchic American masculinity, characterized by emotional instability and aggression, revealing the limitations of traditional conventions and the potential for rebellion.

Second, I explored how Ayer's Joker exemplifies dissociative masculinity, particularly through his romantic involvement with Harley and his violent behavior towards her. Although Ayer's Joker exhibits limited traits associated with masculinity in crisis, I focus on his character as a representation of toxic, aggressive masculinity. I contend that his portrayal throughout the crisis focuses on examining social issues concerning toxic masculinity. I interpreted how Harley validates the Joker's toxic masculinity by complying with his acts and being silent to his objectification, thereby maintaining his dominance

throughout the film. Her femininity, in some respect, does not negate his control over her. I observe that this abuse and patriarchy endure until she rejects it to challenge his power, a topic pertinent to the ongoing discourse of the #MeToo movement focused on revealing abusers and fostering open dialogue.

In examining Phillips's *Joker*, I showed how Arthur is portrayed as carnivalesque through his eccentric, rebellious behavior and grotesque corporeality. His masculinity in crisis is depicted not only through his physicality and performance but also through external factors that challenge his identity as a white heterosexual man. These influences collectively illustrate the complexity of his experience. His longing for a father and his mother's neglect and lies contribute to his societal ostracism, resulting in his marginalization and dehumanization. The forced class hierarchies he faces as a clown, coupled with a lack of romantic intimacy, compel him to adopt nonconformity in reaction to his crisis. Rather than striving for self-improvement, he revolts against the very systems that enforce these norms. To assert dominance over hegemonic structures, Arthur exhibits aggressive, violent masculinity; however, he is ultimately apprehended by police and committed to a mental health facility.

Each *Joker* symbolized a unique societal concern embedded in 21<sup>st</sup>-century American culture. The examined films provided characters that, on one hand, depicted mankind in crisis through the *Joker*, a figure lacking a distinctive narrative. He serves as an exemplary figure for examining broader societal concerns, including critiques of patriarchy, the undue glorification of masculinity, and the amplification of the challenges individuals face within the hierarchical economic class system. This contributed to a comprehensive understanding of the challenges confronting American hegemonic masculinity in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century.

I perceive masculinity in crisis through the *Joker* character as both harmful and transformative. My theoretical approach reveals the shortcomings of hegemonic masculinity, suggesting that a crisis can be beneficial, similar to the dismantling of patriarchy and a broader interpretation of what constitutes hegemonic toughness. Conversely, this crisis allows for greater openness to emotional considerations, which is a valuable aspect to embrace or soften. Nevertheless, based on my analysis of the films, I conclude that this crisis remains unresolved. The *Joker*'s sole purpose is to represent the crisis without offering clarity or hints towards possible resolutions. However, this can inspire real-life discussions aimed at finding solutions, and I genuinely believe there is always hope for regeneration.

This doctoral dissertation discussed hegemony and the variety of masculinities, focusing on how this variety is often perceived as being in crisis and deviating from

established norms. While masculinities encompass diverse expressions, the hegemonic system, viewed as rigid, typically excludes many of these forms. Although hegemony is a dynamic concept, recognizing its changes can be difficult, as these shifts are often tied to inflexible and unrealistic ideals. This context compels both myself and other scholars to investigate the evolving structural facets of hegemonic masculinity, pinpointing flaws in its dynamics and examining how its rigidity might be less impactful on those who resist conformity. It raises the question of whether we truly need a hegemonic model or if we should instead embrace a fluid and inclusive model better to explore the diversity of masculinities in contemporary society.

### **Publications in the Research Field of the Dissertation**

1. Saidi, Amira. R. 2022. "Review of Evil Matters: A Philosophical Inquiry by Zachary J. Goldberg." *Studia UBB Philosophia* 67 (3): 161–165.
2. Saidi, Amira. R. 2022. "The Reconfiguration of Homme Fatal in the Third Millennium Joker Adaptions." *Studia UBB Dramatica* 67 (2): 141–158.
3. Saidi, Amira. R. 2022. "Review of Routledge Companion to Masculinity in American Literature and Culture." *Americana E-journal* 18 (1).
4. Saidi, Amira. R. 2023. "The Representation of Racism and Social Invisibility in Todd Phillips' Joker (2019)." *ALTRALANG* 5 (1): 310–321.
5. Saidi, Amira R. 2024. "Streetcars: A Comparative Study between Elia Kazan's A Streetcar Named Desire (1951) and Its Various Adaptations by Egyptian Cinema." *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 17 (4): 583–606.
6. Saidi, Amira R. 2024. "Anamorphic Masculinity: Post 9/11 Cinematic masculinities." In *Space, Identity and Discourse in Anglophone Studies: Crossing Boundaries*, edited by Dósa, Attila, Ágnes Maguczné Godó, Anett Schäffer, and Robin Lee Nagano, 337–353. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

### **Attended Conferences**

1. The Fifteenth Annual International Graphic Novel and Comics Conference: Comics and Technologies, University of East Anglia, Norwich, July 10-12, 2024, organized by the Centre of Study of Journalism and Community, Bournemouth University (Presenter). Technology and Masculinity: Exploring Hegemonic Masculinity Dynamics in Film through Batman and the Joker.

2. ESSE Doctoral Symposium 2023: Milano (Italy), 24-25 August 2023 (Presenter). Filmic Representation of Contemporary American Masculinity in Crisis: The Joker Figure
3. 20<sup>th</sup> HCA Spring Academy on American Culture, Economics, Geography, History, Literature, Politics, and Religion; Heidelberg Center of American Studies, Germany; March 20-24, 2023 (Presenter). Anamorphic Masculinity: Post 9-11 Cinematic Masculinities.
4. 16<sup>th</sup> Biennial International Conference of the Hungarian Society for the Study of English (HUSSE); Department of English Language and Literature, University of Miskolc, Hungary; January 26-28, 2023 (Presenter). Anamorphic Masculinity: American Masculinity from Margin to Center.
5. The 7<sup>th</sup> International Conference on the Arts in Society, San Jorge University, Zaragoza, Spain; July 4-6, 2022 (Presenter). The Reconfiguration of Homme Fatal in The Third Millennium Joker Adaptions.
6. The 4<sup>th</sup> International Conference on the Future of Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Washington, Rome Center, Rome, Italy; May 20-22, 2022 (Presenter). The Representation of Evil Figures through the Various Embodiments of the Joker Character in Three Films of the 2000s
7. Algerian Science Day (Doctoral Symposium), hosted by the Algerian Students' Association, Óbuda University, Budapest, Hungary; May 6, 2022 (Presenter). The Representation of Evil in the Joker Movies.
8. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Barcelona Conference on Arts, Media and Culture (BAMC2021), Barcelona, Spain; December 8-10, 2021 (Presenter). Illusioned Comedy of Life in Todd Phillips' Joker.

### **Teaching Practice**

During the spring semester of my third year in the doctoral program (March-May, 2024), I taught six sessions across two courses: three sessions for an MA-level course and three for a BA-level course, both overseen by my supervisors.

**MA Course Title:** Race/Ethnicity, Class and Gender

**Instructor:** Dr. Irén Annus

**Course Description:** This course critically examines contemporary theories on the intersection of class, race/ethnicity, and gender relations. We will discuss the major theoretical works on the interplay of ethnicity, race, class, gender, and sexual orientation, with particular attention to how dominant ideologies of femininity come to be problematized and explained within the particular frameworks. At the same time, we will also explore if and how far the various models marginalize or naturalize alternative approaches. This course will challenge students to critically reflect on issues of economic inequality, racial/ethnic oppression, and their effects on gender distinctions in US and UK society.

**BA Course Title:** Current Approaches to North American Culture

**Instructor:** Dr. Zsófia Anna Tóth

**Course Description:** The aim of the course is to examine how the American and the Canadian identities are (re)conceptualized formed, interpreted, and (re)presented in literary and cultural works (short stories, poems, paintings, dramas, films, music videos etc.) from World War II to our day with a special focus on the most recent decades. During the course, we will discuss how these North American cultures are comprised of various and multiple voices while having a look at the different approaches to the interpretation of what it means to be American/Canadian. We will examine how immigration, globalization, multiculturalism, mass culture, imperialism, capitalism, etc. form the concepts of “Americanness”/ “Canadianness” nowadays. The works to be read/watched/contemplated/listened to (re)present the diversity and the complexity of these cultures: African American, Asian American, Native American and/or Inuit, Latino/Latina - Chicano/Chicana identities, etc. while race, gender, sexuality, class, religion etc. issues are to be targeted likewise also including intersectionality in the interpretations. Simultaneously, the course provides theoretical and practical considerations for the integration of literary works, films, and other media content such as internet sites, YouTube videos, or popular music into language teaching. Much emphasis will be placed on developing an awareness of the linguistic and stylistic features of the works in order to encourage students’ active involvement in the production of meaning.

### **Memberships in Academic Associations**

Hungarian Association for American Studies (HAAS)

European Association for American Studies (EAAS)

Hungarian Society for the Study of English (HUSSE)

European Society for the Study of English (ESSE)