

Jim Weijs

American Studies Semester 2

Supervisor: Frank Mehring

Course professor: Laszlo Muntean



AMERICAN SOFT POWER AND HBO'S *THE SOPRANOS*

A Bachelor's Thesis by Jim Weijs

ENGELSE TAAL EN CULTUUR

Teacher who will receive this document: Dr. F. Mehring

Title of document: American Soft Power and HBO's *The Sopranos*

Name of course: Bachelor's Thesis American Studies

Date of submission: 15-6-2017

The work submitted here is the sole responsibility of the undersigned, who has neither committed plagiarism nor colluded in its production.

Signed

Name of student: Jim Weijs

Student number: s4363051

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	4
Introduction.....	5
Chapter 1: Soft Power and Americanization	9
Soft Power.....	9
Americanization	15
Chapter 2: How Soft Power and <i>The Sopranos</i> can Help Spread American Culture	19
Television as culture and a form of soft power.....	19
The Mediation of the Mafia in Film and TV.....	21
<i>The Sopranos</i> : Made in America.....	22
Chapter 3: Americanization Through <i>The Sopranos</i> and the Role of Soft Power	27
<i>The Sopranos</i> as a form of Americanization.....	27
<i>The Sopranos</i> as Soft Power	30
Conclusion	34
Bibliography	39

ABSTRACT

The following research project critically investigates the two concepts soft power and Americanization and how these two relate to each other. This will be evaluated by looking at theories on soft power, Americanization and television culture, focusing on HBO's *The Sopranos*, one of the best-known American television series, which still has a large fan base, looking at the amount of scholarly articles about the series and fan-fiction on the series, even ten years after its last episode. The relevance of this thesis is to show that there is more to the power of the United States than its political or military power. Soft power, in the sense of Joseph Nye, is one of the main terms in this thesis and explains how important culture is to spread power. This thesis will consist majorly of literature research as well as a semiotic approach, where I will analyze elements from *The Sopranos*. Much of the theory will come from media studies and studies about Americanization and American culture abroad. The findings from the semiotic analysis will be interpreted alongside the frameworks set by theorists on Americanization and soft power, which enables me to connect the themes presented in the series to theory.

Keywords: *The Sopranos*, Americanization, soft power, Joseph Nye, America, Marshall Plan, American culture, television culture, cultural imperialism.

INTRODUCTION

“It’s just that it’s so much more interesting”. “Than what?”. “Than life”. “Are you kidding? This is your life!”. This is a conversation between Tony Soprano, protagonist of the HBO series *The Sopranos* and his wife Carmela, from the eleventh episode of the fifth season, called *The Test Dream*. In this episode, there is a very long dream sequence from over thirty minutes, where Tony goes through a lot of unrealistic experiences. In one of the scenes, he is in the kitchen with his wife he is about to separate at that moment. They are headed for a meeting and Tony has to get dressed. While having a conversation, the television is on, screening several old films (remember that this is a dream, the films change continually). When Carmela asks him to go, he tells her to wait a second and the conversation above takes place. This conversation marks the importance and ubiquity of television and film in our daily lives, especially that of the protagonist of the series. To him, film and television is his life. He seems to spend almost every free minute of his day in front of the television, mainly watching old films. What the writers of *The Sopranos* want to say with this is that television has become a major part of our lives, something that is part of our daily activities and something we have gotten to enjoy so much that we cannot really step away from it when we sometimes should.

Because more than ever, television is all around us. Even though a lot of people are watching less (linear) TV, there seems to be more of it. This paradox can be explained by the fact that the world of television has changed dramatically. Where there was nothing but a big box that some people could afford to have in their living rooms in the years after World War II to the small screens like smartphones and tablets that are now functioning as television screens more and more, watching television has changed drastically. Where films and cinema always were the most popular medium, television has become equally attractive, especially with streaming devices like Netflix and Amazon Go. *Breaking Bad*, *Game of Thrones*, *Mad Men*, and *The Wire* have all become household names that many people have seen and that academics like David Lavery and Albert Auster have done research on.

Television is more than just a screen. According to many scholars, like Jason Mittell and John Fiske, television is a device that allows for the spread of culture. Mittell even specifies his theory to America, stating that “television not only defines America’s cultural norms concerning democracy and class differences, but also asserts what it means to be female, Latino, or gay, all

of which are part of a broader sense of cultural politics. Following this approach, many television scholars examine how television represents particular social groups and establishes cultural norms and expectations for a particular category of identity” (305). The idea that Mittell drops here is one shared by many other scholars, also in different areas of expertise. One of these is the acclaimed Joseph Nye from Harvard University who has done a lot of research into politics and power. According to Nye, power in the traditional sense can be described as “the ability to affect others to get the outcome you want” (94).

Unlike many other scholars, Nye did not only see power as something that was purely political, militaristic or economic. He saw the influences other domains had on the international power of a nation. The other form of power, Nye calls ‘soft power’. This stands for the other way of getting what one wants and stands for co-option rather than coercion (Nye, 95). Nye argues that culture is one of the three main aspects of soft power (Nye, 96). With culture, Nye mostly means cultural works like art, music, film and TV. This idea will function as the starting point from this thesis in which I will delve into the power of culture and how a country can spread its norms and values through a piece of culture and can thereby try to change their international public diplomacy. The focus in this thesis lies on how the United States apply soft power in order to spread their cultural works and thus their culture, norms and values all over the world. I will do this by analyzing the American mafia-series *The Sopranos* (1999-2007) which aired on the American premium cable and satellite television network HBO (Home Box Office), became a huge success afterwards and has now been aired on the international HBO channels in more than seventy countries (Lavery et al. 14). The research question that is at the center of this thesis sounds as follows: how is the process of Americanization taking place through soft power by airing TV shows like *The Sopranos*, one of the most popular American TV shows so far?

The reason for choosing *The Sopranos* as the central case study in this thesis is based on several factors. First and foremost, the series is through and through American, drenched in American popular culture and even actual political and worldly events. It is also set in America and almost every single episode is completely set there, except for two or three. Second, the series has a lot of episodes and was aired for more than seven years, giving the viewer a lot of material to study. The length of the series gives a lot of room for character development but the environment and the nation it is set in changes with it. Another reason is that *The Sopranos* was aired in many countries all over the world, giving a lot of people outside America the

opportunity to watch it. This has led to many online forums where people all over the world can discuss what they thought of certain episodes, where they could together analyze dream sequences or other things that happened in the show.

This thesis will mainly consist of literature reviews and analyses of stills and elements from *The Sopranos*. A broad range of scholars who have written about media studies, the mediation of the mafia and processes of spreading culture to other countries and Americanization will be considered for this thesis, with Nye's work on soft power as the central element. Although there has been many research done into the series so far, this thesis provides a new perspective. Many scholars have written about *The Sopranos* from a psychological view, from a gender-perspective view, or about the representation of Italian-Americans. But where many scholars focus only on America, this thesis will focus on the whole world and how the process of Americanization takes place through TV-series like *The Sopranos*.

The first chapter of this thesis will delve deep into the theories of soft power, coined by Joseph Nye and describe some clear examples of soft power. Then, it will move onto an effect of soft power: Americanization. There will also be a focus on the spread of American culture in the Netherlands in this chapter, as an example of a country where America has gained a certain influence through the use of soft power. The subquestion that will be answered in this chapter is how soft power and Americanization work and how important the role of culture like movies and TV is in these concepts.

The second chapter will present *The Sopranos* as the case study for this thesis and will build upon some literature around the series and around media studies. Literature on television studies like *Television and American Culture* by Jason Mittell, or John Fiske's and Martha Bayles' theories on television and scholarly works on *The Sopranos*, mainly by David Lavery but also by for example Albert Auster will be discussed. The mediation of mafia and gangsters in film and television will also be discussed, using literature by John McCarty. The subquestion in this chapter is: how does HBO's *The Sopranos* present the image of America and American culture and how does television work in the process of Americanization?

The third and last chapter of this thesis will combine the first and second chapter in that it investigates how HBO's *The Sopranos* can be seen as an example of soft power, mentioning the function of television in spreading culture and investigating into how the process of Americanization is taking place through airing TV shows like *The Sopranos*. The subquestion

will be: how is *The Sopranos* an example of soft power and in what way can Americanization take place through airing a TV show like this?

CHAPTER 1: SOFT POWER AND AMERICANIZATION

SOFT POWER

In his works, Joseph S. Nye argues that soft power is a key element in the distribution of power. Nye describes soft power as “the ability to shape the preferences of others” (Nye, *Diplomacy* 95) and “getting others to get the outcomes that you want, [which] co-opts people rather than coerces them” (Nye, *World Politics* 5). Gregory Weeks, chairman of the political science department at the University of North-Carolina sees soft power as “increasing mutual trust and space for dialogue, especially with other states that may be otherwise resistant to policy goals” (526). According to Nye “the soft power of a country rests primarily on three resources: its culture, its political values and its foreign policies. Culture is the set of practices that create meaning for a society, and it has many manifestations” (*Diplomacy* 96). This thesis will focus on the first resource Nye mentions when it comes to soft power: culture. Like Nye says, culture creates meaning for a society. It goes further than politics, is way more entrenched in society and people do not feel that culture is a form of politics, since many people have developed a slight resistance against politics as they feel it does not change anything for them. Those groups of people, feeling let down by the politics of a country, are often better ‘reachable’ through entertainment and culture which may come in various ways.

Soft power has known a long history. According to many scholars, including Nye and Michel Gueldry, several countries were already busy trying to shape the preferences of others and thus using soft power right after the Second World War. But some practices that can be considered ‘soft power’ are documented well before 1945. Nye coined the term at the end of the Cold War, when the United States realized they had to gain influence on all the small countries that fell out of the former Soviet-Union and later fell out Yugoslavia. The realization came to the US that they had to gain influence over these countries in order for them not to fall to communism or tyrant leaders again. The United States then started to work out programs to distribute American information, entertainment and culture to (mainly) European countries.

A good example of soft power is the Marshall Plan, which was a monetary aid plan the US installed right after the second world war, directed against “hunger, poverty, despair and chaos” (Berle 2). The US provided financial support for European countries that decided to opt in. The Marshall plan can be considered as soft power because it is a different form of power than the old-fashioned military power. This was monetary aid, but at the same time, a very clear

and distinct American policy. Countries that decided to receive aid did not only choose to receive American money, they also chose to side with the United States against its biggest enemy at the time: the Soviet Union. So instead of just giving money away to those who needed it, the US made a policy that was intended to help European countries, but was also aimed at showing the US which side each country was on. With the Marshall Plan, the US gained a lot of importance and a foot on the ground in Europe, reviving European markets and public life. This also set the tone for the importance of American culture and entertainment in Europe later, since they created a market for American products and thus American cultural works.

The Marshall Plan was a soft power instrument itself, but it also spawned films that were definitely a form of soft power as well. To promote the plan's aims, the US government decided to make and distribute more than 300 films during the Marshall Plan years (1948-1952). Most of these films were aired and distributed in Europe, with some exceptions that were only aired in the United States. These films were made and distributed to spread the message of what the US government was doing in Europe in order to gain more sympathy from the European people for the capitalist American system and more antipathy towards communist Russia. Examples of these are a film that focuses on the benefits of mechanized farming, films showing the Marshall Plan in progress in the Netherlands and Germany, and a film focusing on a mountainous part of Italy and the opportunities that region has when it comes to using water for generating electricity.

Like the Marshall Plan itself, these films are clearly a form of soft power, meant to shape the opinion of the Europeans in favor of America. Mass media that were being used more and more by people all around the world brought opportunities to spread American ideas. Frank Mehring, head of the American Studies program at the Radboud University in the Netherlands writes "cultural diplomacy emerged as an important element to press on with efforts of re-educating and democratizing former enemies as well as secure geo-strategic interests of the US in Europe. Cultural diplomacy in the sense of the former Minister in the US Foreign Service, Hans N. Tuch, refers to a 'government's process of communicating with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding for its nation's ideas and ideals, for its institutions and culture, as well as for its national goals and current policies'" (Mehring 2).

The Marshall Plan films are a very good example of American soft power. An example of a very distinct program aimed at spreading American ideas to countries thousands of kilometers away from their country. What's more, this is a very clear break with the way power was brought

a couple of years earlier, when there was a war involving more than 100 countries. A break from fighting with guns, bombs and tanks in order to beat an enemy by using film and images to gain support from the countries those tanks drove through some years earlier. Of course, this break only applied to Europe, since the US fought against the USSR in both Korea and Vietnam some years later.

During and after the Marshall Plan years, tensions between the US and the SU kept growing. A cold war started, with the two countries conspiring against and threatening each other. The Korean War and the Vietnam War were excesses in this so far violence-less conflict. To ensure that the Soviet Union would not spread their communist ideas to other countries, America had a policy that was aimed very strictly at limiting the spread of Soviet ideas. Soft power was an important tool in this, especially in Europe. Turkey, one of the bigger countries in Europe, had always been supportive of the United States. And for America, Turkey was an important country during the Cold War, because of their size and their position between Europe, Africa and the Middle-East. The US felt they had to make sure to gain the Turks' favor and prevent the Soviets from gaining more influence there. During the Cold War years, the Turkish people decided that they would rather be allies with the United States than with the Soviet Union and acted upon that. Turkish politicians actively sought more connection with America and were willing to open themselves up to American culture. Of course, America gladly accepted this willingness. According to Turkish studies professor Burcu Sari Karademir, the mechanism "that controlled and facilitated the dissemination of American movies in Turkey was the United States Information Service, a branch of the United States Information Agency, established to construct the American image in foreign countries under the threat of communism" (637). The service spread many films in Turkey after they were thoroughly checked if they brought a positive message about America or not.

Because of this spread of American films, Hollywood became enormously popular in Turkey, and for years the only films the Turks liked were American or Turkish remakes of American films (Karademir 637-638). To illustrate how successful the American policy of soft power during the Cold War years was in Turkey, Karademir argues "as standard accounts of US foreign policy frequently state, Hollywood movies were among the most significant and efficient 'weapons of mass attraction', which disseminated the idea that the American way of life was superior to the alternative presented by the Soviets. The American way was as well received in

most parts of the world as it was in Turkey” (641). Again, the US used film as a tool for soft power, spreading American culture and their capitalist ideas, opposing themselves against the Soviet communism.

According to Nye, it is important to shape public opinion. He states “shaping public opinion becomes even more important where authoritarian governments have been replaced” (*Diplomacy* 99). This might have been one of the key strategies behind Marshall’s European Recovery Program. Nye means that it is important to spread a positive message about a country in order to be able to get in touch with that country. When the image the people in a country have about your country is negative, it will be difficult to get good ties with that country, even when the leader of that country is friendly and willing to communicate. Thus, soft power is a term that implies that you spread a positive image about your country, but that does not always have to be the case. A movie that is skeptical about the way a country –like America- is organized does not have to get a negative feeling about America in a different country. It might even enhance positive feelings one has about America, since he or she gets the acknowledgment that not everything is perfect and that people are allowed to critique their country. Joseph Nye gives an example of this: Stanley Kubrick’s film *Dr. Strangelove* was highly critical of the American nuclear weapons policy. Nye says “one Soviet journalist commented after a restricted showing of *On the Beach* and *Dr. Strangelove* ‘They absolutely shocked us... We began to understand that the same thing would happen to us as to them in a nuclear war’” (Nye, *World Politics* 49). This illustrates the point made here. Gregory Weeks also addresses the fact that soft power can often be used as something that will help smoothen a rough relationship between two countries and sees options for the country exerting soft power because it might gain more than other forms of power. Weeks also acknowledges that hard power might help to get what one wants and desires, but sees that that can also backfire and lead to the opposite effect (526). In other words, it is important to choose a strategy –hard or soft- that fits the region and the situation the message is going to be spread in. Post World-War Europe did not ask for hard power. The region had just experienced years of conflict and the continent did not fare well after it. Policymakers had to be careful in exerting a certain type of diplomacy.

Expanding upon Joseph Nye’s theory, Craig Hayden writes about soft power and public diplomacy. He distinguishes a three-part comparative framework in soft power, the three aspects being scope, mechanism and outcomes. According to Hayden, “the first aspect of the framework,

scope, directs attention to how the ‘subjects’ of power are recognized as viable in terms of strategic objectives. *Mechanism*, the second aspect of the framework, reflects how different power practices and resources are envisioned as effective. Finally, *outcomes* reveal how public diplomacy is justified and articulated as contributing to feasible strategic objectives” (334). This thesis will discuss these three features in relation to the case study later in this bachelor’s thesis.

Since the United States of America have been active in exerting soft power all over the world for a long time, they have become the leaders of this practice in many people’s eyes. Indian scholar Daya Thussu, who has written a lot about soft power, acknowledges “the United States, where the concept [of soft power] emerged at the end of the Cold War, also happens to be the world’s mightiest military and economic power (hard power) as well as soft power (intellectual, cultural and information power)” (George, par. 2). Thussu also mentions that Hollywood or the content that resembles that of Hollywood is still leading the global media world, that English is still very dominant in the international communication and he says the US is and has been the world’s leader in exporting entertainment as well as infotainment which are more easily transported than ever thanks to the globalization of the world (George, par. 31). Former French foreign minister Hubert Védrine argued that the Americans are powerful because they can “inspire the dreams and desires of others, thanks to the mastery of global images through film and television and because, for these same reasons, large numbers of students from other countries come to the United States to finish their studies” (Védrine 3). Sometimes, students around the world even get inspired to come and study in America because of American TV series or films they see. Jennie Bev sketches the following example: “inspired by TV series about medical doctors, some children in Taiwan aspire to study medicine at an American university” (par. 7). Another example comes from a Dutch newspaper, the *Algemeen Dagblad*, which wrote, shortly after the groundbreaking series *Breaking Bad* had its final episode, about a new stream of chemistry students. *Breaking Bad* is about a chemistry teacher who gets cancer and wants to support his family financially, so he starts cooking meth to earn more money. As a result of the popularity of the show, more Dutch people in those years started studying chemistry. At the University of Twente, there was an increase of 97 percent, at the University of Delft in Leiden there was an increase of 95 percent more students (AD, p.2).

As mentioned earlier, this thesis will particularly delve into culture as a form of power. Joseph Nye clearly indicates that culture is one of the three key elements of soft power and that

cultural products like television, film and art can be forms of power. In his book *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, Nye states that soft power really does consist of many cultural themes and cultural works like Hollywood films, with 7.3 billion people worldwide who went to see American movies in 2002, but that other things like American sports play a big role too. The NBA, NFL and MLB are broadcasted worldwide in hundreds of millions of households (47).

These developments are also effects of the technological developments the information and entertainment society has recently undergone. Television networks air films and shows from all over the world, we can watch many films and series from all over the world on our own laptops, smartphones or tablets by just one click with streaming devices like Netflix and Amazon Go. What's more, almost everything can be found on the internet nowadays. This has led to a growing number of people watching films and series from countries they have never visited and corresponds with the theory of Roger Silverstone, who argues that the media have a profound significance in how the world is understood by its citizens and how places these citizens have never been to are represented. This often happens with the use of stereotypes and Silverstone argues these stereotypes are often taken over by the general audience unquestioningly (26). Silverstone's theory acknowledges the media and television have a significant role in the spread of culture, power and identity. This is something which many scholars agree upon. Jason Mittell agrees with Silverstone by stating "nearly all meanings shown on American television might be considered as representing the national character, contributing to a shared sense of America and what makes the country distinct. This mode of national representation also gains significance as American television circulates around the globe, forming the most widely seen set of images of the United States throughout the world" (271). Mittell, in his book *American Culture and Television*, gives an example of how Silverstone's theory works: people watch television (the media) which brings a particular image into their homes about a country or culture. Many of the viewers will not have had the opportunity to visit the place that is depicted. Thus, the media shapes the way they perceive this country or culture. Mittell refers to American television with his quote and thereby exemplifies Nye's concept of soft power. Through culture, in this case television, America's national character is represented to other countries and cultures.

AMERICANIZATION

This brings us to a concept that has over time gained many interfaces with soft power: Americanization. Because of its dominance in exerting soft power, there is a special term for spreading American culture to other countries. The form of Americanization I will discuss in this thesis is a form of cultural Americanization. Dutch scholar Jaap Kooijman sees two seemingly contradictory ways of Americanization. On the one hand, he sees that “Americanization has been equated with American cultural imperialism. In this way, European consumers are seen as passive victims of a globally mediated American mass culture that threatens local and national cultures. On the other hand, Americanization has been equated with an act of liberation” (*Fabricating 11*). With liberation, Kooijman means that American culture has brought a lot of art forms and activities in which people can express themselves. Examples of these are hip-hop, jazz and rock ‘n roll music, which were all streams in music that originated in the United States and later spread to Europe and other regions of the world. Mainly younger people at first liked the American culture, whereas the older people did not see the same opportunities the youngsters did see. According to Rob Kroes, renowned Dutch scholar and former head of the American Studies program at the University of Amsterdam, this development was not special and not new. Kroes states “it was always a matter of younger generations rebelling against the entrenched cultural order and turning values upside down, embracing American forms of culture not for what they lacked but for what they offered in terms of vitality and energy” (36-37). The acceptance and ‘implementation’ of American culture in Europe was one of the main reasons why Americanization is one of the concepts that is often used when talking about European culture or the culture of a specific European country. Cultural forms that had been specifically American blew over from the US and were eagerly used by European youths who wanted to rebel against authorities by using new kinds of cultural forms the older people did not understand.

According to Kooijman, there are two other distinctions in Americanization. Those are the distinctions of active and passive Americanization, where active stands for consuming American culture in your own setting and applying it to a local or national context. Passive Americanization refers to consuming American culture and becoming more and more American over time since one cannot place the culture one consumes on television or in the cinema to a smaller context (Kooijman *Fabricating 12*). In another article, Kooijman writes about Americanization and what it does with the feeling of Europeans and Dutch people in particular

towards America. Because of the massive consumption of American cultural works in Europe, we know a lot about the country. We seem connected to the United States, almost like someone who was born there, went away but still reminisces about the country by watching American films and movies. This, Kooijman, says, leads to a feeling of “being both outsider and insider to American culture” (*Americans* 17).

When it comes to the Americanization of Europe and the Netherlands, Rob Kroes shares a big part of Kooijman’s opinion regarding the amount of presence American culture has in our European society. He says that we Europeans have become American in a way, because we understand the American messages a ‘normal’ American can decipher because of his ‘Americanness’.

“America is a presence in our lives, a part of our imagination, to a greater extent ever than before. In that sense, our lives unmistakably have undergone an Americanization. We have acquired a set of cultural codes that allow us to understand American cultural products, to appreciate them, and to consume them as if we were Americans. We have no more trouble deciphering American messages –be they commercials, television programs or Hollywood movies- than does the average American. That is not naturally so. We have had to get the hang of it” (Kroes 172).

This makes Kroes’ stance on Americanization very clear. Kroes thinks America has become a very big part of our culture, and thinks that Europe is very americanized. For him, “America’s culture has become an unavoidable presence” (173).

But Kroes sees a different work in progress as well. In his essay he describes a different form of Americanization that consists of a different process. Where many American cultural works are brought into Dutch culture and perceived as American, there are also many elements that have been “Dutchified” (Kroes 177). Kroes calls the adaption of cultures to new areas ‘creolization’, after the process languages can undergo when they are exported to new areas. With creolization, he thus means that the basis of the culture stays the same, but that every region it is brought to gives a certain new interpretation to it. Examples will be given later in this thesis.

Many non-Dutch writers who have written about Americanization as well. An example is the French-American writer Michel Gueldry who, as a Frenchman has been living both in France

and the United States for a long time, describes how Americanization has taken place in France. Gueldry sees Americanization as something many countries are experiencing, but finds that there are big differences between the forms and ways each individual country is ‘Americanized’. He argues France has undergone a different form of Americanization than Cuba, China or Russia, looking at what forms of American cultural works are popular there, what kinds of American products people consume and what kinds of American sports are popular in those countries (Gueldry and Goss, 38). Later in his article, Gueldry tries to emphasize the cultural dominance America has on a country like France, listing elements of American culture France is nowadays subject to. He describes how America, after the Second World War gained importance in European countries, with youngsters starting to speak English, drinking Coca-Cola, and listening to rock ‘n roll music. Later, America gained even more importance in France, according to Gueldry because of three factors: the narrowing of the gap between the United States and the rest of the world, the change of France towards a more international and technologically advanced country and the standardization of generational values and practices and the forming of a more globalized world (Gueldry and Goss, 44-45).

Winfried Fluck, a German scholar and head of the JFK Institute of North-American Studies in Berlin writes his essay *California Blue* on Americanization. However, like Kroes, Kooijman and Gueldry, Fluck argues that there is no such thing as Americanization through cultural imperialism alone. Like other scholars, Fluck sees more complex models than Americanization only, like reappropriation, negotiation and creolization (222). All of these terms indicate that Americanization and cultural imperialism itself is too simple, but that it is probably more the over-arching term of all these models. He also aptly points that Americanization is not something that is forced upon us, arguing it is something we choose, and that we therefore “Americanize ourselves” (Fluck, 223). Three driving factors behind Americanization of modern culture are, according to Winfried Fluck “film and television, but above all popular music” (226). This thesis will focus on the role of television in this, and will later discuss how *The Sopranos* is a good example of Fluck’s theory.

The Netherlands is nowadays a very Americanized country as well, with many of its inhabitants watching American TV-shows, drinking American soft-drinks and playing American sports or following them, like Kroes and Kooijman agree upon. Dutch scholars, but also many Dutch people are very often talking about America and the way the country so far from our own

has got a particular influence on our daily lives. When someone takes a look at the Dutch TV-guide, they can conclude Dutch TV-channels air a lot of American television shows. When opening a Dutch newspaper, one will see news about Donald Trump every single day. If someone will walk through an essentially Dutch supermarket like *Albert Heijn*, they will notice that many American brands are sold there: Coca-Cola, Ben&Jerry's, Kellogg's, Hellman's and many others that have spread all over the world.

This process, of Americanization of other countries and slightly changing elements of culture there, while keeping the original culture, is called mediation by Rob Kroes. With mediation, he hints amongst others at the messages we receive from America through our own media. Examples of these messages are, according to Kroes, the way Dutch deejays on the radio present themselves. Some deejays model their way of moderating after American models, but do it in a Dutch way, which explains the term mediation, because there is a mix of two cultures (Kroes, 176). Another example is the Dutch way of rock 'n roll. The lyrics were their own, but the music itself drew on musical genres like blues and rock 'n roll, that originated in America (176). This is also the 'Dutchifying' of American themes mentioned earlier in this chapter. Even though Kroes is a supporter of the mediation theory, where there is a mix of American and Dutch culture where Dutch people give their own meaning to American culture, he goes pretty far when it comes to the importance of America in the Netherlands. Kroes says "we are always the last link in [the] chains of mediation, the final recipient of messages from America. In that position we are never purely and only passive, gradually losing our Dutchness while becoming ever more American" (176). These are pretty strong words. But Jaap Kooijman, in his book *Fabricating the Absolut Fake*, has a comparable attitude towards the influence of America on the Netherlands. He does not call this mediation, but 'karaoke Americanism' with which he means that "American pop culture is being appropriated to provide commentary on Dutch national identity" (Kooijman, *Fabricating*, 124). In this chapter, Kooijman lists various examples of karaoke Americanism, like the way Pim Fortuyn was presented as "the Dutch Kennedy" (125) or Dutch magazine Linda's edition on the 'Dutch Dream' (131). These terms, mediation and karaoke Americanism, mark a feeling that is broader than scholars in the Netherlands, hence the broad amount of European research on Americanization.

CHAPTER 2: HOW SOFT POWER AND *THE SOPRANOS* CAN HELP SPREAD AMERICAN CULTURE

In this chapter, theories on Americanization, soft power and the link to television will be introduced and explained. The works of Martha Bayles, Jason Mittell, John Fiske and John McCarty will be the central works in this chapter. The first part of this chapter, introducing theories and methodologies of soft power, TV and American culture will help understand the second part of the chapter better. The second part of the chapter will introduce *The Sopranos* to the reader and explain why the show was chosen to be the major case study of this thesis. The ‘Americanness’ of the show will be explained with literature about the series but also from examples from numerous episodes. This chapter will also help the reader understand the third chapter, which goes into why *The Sopranos* can help Americanize other countries.

TELEVISION AS CULTURE AND A FORM OF SOFT POWER

In her book *Through a Screen Darkly*, Martha Bayles clearly sees television as a form of soft power, writing about how every country has television shows that are adapted to the ‘moral’ of that country. She did research into American and foreign reality- and talk shows and sees that there are clear distinctions between countries. Distinctions between shows in different countries reflect public opinion diversities between countries on topics like marriage and the legalizing of drugs. This is also the case with American television shows, they are adapted to what Americans like and not to what people in Thailand like, because that is a different market.

In another chapter, Bayles thoroughly discussed American soft power through the use of American radio and television broadcasts around the world. The main institution she uses to make her point is the VOA (Voice of America), an official United States funded news source and the official external broadcasting channel of the United States. The VOA had a very clear goal, set by American government officials, of “represent[ing] America, not any single segment of American society, through a balanced and comprehensive projection of significant American thought and institutions” (Bayles 166). However, according to Bayles these goals are not achieved. “The coverage of American society, culture, and institutions is spotty and superficial” (166), she writes. Even though the VOA does not achieve its goals of presenting America to viewers outside of the United States who might not know the country so well, the objective of the channel is very clear. Voice of America is, in the eyes of American public officials, a tool to

spread the ideas and norms and values of their country, and thus television is.

Without using the word soft power very often in her book, one might argue Bayles is a supporter of Joseph Nye's theory. She sees America as the country that has the biggest cultural influence on the world (Bayles 233). She does, however, also pose improvements for the cultural diplomacy exerted by the United States, because she thinks there is a distortion of the understanding of America by the global public (235). According to Bayles, it would thus be a good idea to have more public discussion about both American and non-American culture in order to get a better understanding of American culture and thus about America, because Bayles is afraid that picture might be distorted (235). This distortion, Bayles sees back in visitors that come to the United States and are surprised by the people and the country, mainly because they do not get a clear image of what the country is like (248).

The point that Bayles made earlier about television having a big cultural influence on the world is supported by other scholars, like Jason Mittell. Mittell, a professor of American studies and film and media culture at Middlebury College has written a book on American culture in relation to TV. Because American television is aired in many countries across the world, it is a significantly important tool for spreading American images (271), Mittell says in his book. But, according to Mittell, there is more to television than just the spread of images. To him, television functions as a part of an ideology. Many American series share a certain American ideology and thus an American view on certain topics. That is also why content and images in series change over time. In the 1950s, African-Americans were represented in a different way than they are now, because the American ideology has changed: one has to be more careful not to discriminate anyone (Mittell, 272).

Another scholar who believes television is a major tool to distribute a culture is John Fiske, writer of the influential *Television Culture*. Fiske argues in his works on television culture that "television functions as a social ritual, overriding individual distinctions, in which our culture engages in order to communicate with its collective self" (29). This claim portrays his argument that television is not just something that we watch on a particular night, but that it is a product of where it is made. Television can only be a social ritual and be used to communicate with the collective self of a culture when it is part of a certain culture. That is also why Fiske sees television as "a cultural agent, particularly as a provoker and circulator of meanings" (63). Mittell goes further than the 'cultural-agent' theory of Fiske and states that "many critics regard

international distribution of American media as a form of cultural imperialism, forcing American values and ideologies upon viewers around the world” (442). Looking at scholarly resources, there is much consensus about the role of television in spreading culture. Some scholars are more harsh in the idea that America forces its ideas upon viewers around the world, which is not completely true, since most countries airing American shows choose to do that. Granted, some countries do not have the resources to finance their own television or film projects and thus have to rely on the programs and series that are made abroad.

Like Bayles’ theory, the ideas posed by Fiske and Mittell clearly join Joseph Nye’s soft power theory, since both scholars very distinctly argue that television is a form to spread culture and thus influence. Mittell says it is about American values and ideologies that are spread around the world. Fiske sees it as a provoker and circulator of meanings, and, in the case of American TV, American meanings. The idea behind the soft power theory by Nye is to coopt people rather than to coerce them, and that is also what Mittell and Fiske want with their theories of television and the spread of culture and ideas. These theories of television as a tool to spread culture to different parts of the world than your own is a good starting point for the next chapter, which will delve deeper into the role that *The Sopranos* can play in bringing America’s culture to The Netherlands.

THE MEDIATION OF THE MAFIA IN FILM AND TV

Both television and film have, from the beginning of the mediums onward, had a special attention for gangster themes. Within the gangster theme, the (often Italian-American) mafia has had special attention, hence the popularity of films like *The Godfather*, *Donnie Brasco*, *Goodfellas* and *The Sopranos*. In his book *Bullets over Hollywood*, John McCarty describes how, since the beginning of film and television, gangsters and mafia both have been important genres. He for example describes how gangster movies changed the medium over the years and how they brought artistic improvements. Describing many examples in detail, McCarty remediates the mafia and gangsters in American film and television. He uses examples of people that have really existed as well, the most famous example in real life and film life probably being Al Capone. Capone, still one of the best known American gangsters, made a name for himself as a mob boss during the 1920s and 1930s in America. McCarty describes how a real life mobster like Capone is adapted to the screen, mediating the American gangster to films like *Little Caesar*

and *The Untouchables* (111,117,120,125, 130). The amount of films focusing on only one Italian-American mafia leader shows how popular the genre has been and still is.

As said, gangster movies have always been popular. In the 1930s, film and cinema were developing very fast. A lot of gangster movies were made, but some parts of the American public disapproved of the content of those films, dismissing it as works that applauded crime and violence. McCarty writes “the studios then began searching for a loophole. And they found one. ‘A wave of kidnappings had focused national attention on the Federal Bureau of Investigation’, noted screen censorship maven Murray Schumach. ‘They (the studios) now made the FBI agents the heroes but gave the same fat parts to the gangsters’” (157). This example shows how the mafia world was mediated in films, even adding ‘recent’ events to the films, allowing more people to like it when placed in a different perspective. The same goes for HBO’s fantastic gangster-series *The Sopranos*, which has one episode that is all from the perspective of the FBI, whereas most episodes are from the perspective of the protagonist, a middle-aged mob boss going through a midlife crisis. This is a different perspective than the former mob bosses known from film and TV, who never really show their emotional or sentimental side. This also mediates a changing mindset in the Western world about psychological health and talking about feelings. McCarty sees a distinct change in content, scope and focus of gangster movies throughout the years. He agrees with David Chase, creator and writer of *The Sopranos*, who says older films like *The Godfather* and *Goodfellas* were period pieces, set in a different time than they were made in, whereas *The Sopranos* was not a period piece, depicting mobsters today.

The thing with gangsters and especially the mafia seems to be that it is still very popular on television and in films. This does not relate to the actual popularity of gangsters and mafia in our society, as McCarty writes “The Golden Age of the mob is gone, it’s never coming back- and the mob has only itself to blame. But it lives on-in the movies, on television, and through the looking glass” (246). The mediation of the mafia and gangsters is that what is being kept alive by directors and screenwriters, not the actual mob itself.

THE SOPRANOS: MADE IN AMERICA

“He’s in this old-fashioned American sweet shop with those round stools and the counter and the football pictures and Cub Scouts” (Greenberg, par. 12). With this quote, David Chase, creator and writer of HBO’s *The Sopranos* sums up the setting of the last scene of the long-

lasting American mafia series. That last scene, which concluded a series that lasted over seven years, with 86 episodes in six seasons that brought the TV network HBO national recognition, was and still is controversial. The setting is an American diner where the family gathers to have a family dinner. Tony Soprano, protagonist of the series, is the leader of two families. On the one side he has his own family, with his wife Carmela and his two children Meadow and Anthony Jr. On the other side, there is his gangster family, which he starts leading after the previous two leaders stop doing that (one dies and one gets Alzheimer's). The source music in the last scene of the series comes from a jukebox that is playing the American song 'Don't Stop Believing' by Journey, which Tony puts on in the beginning of the scene. At the final moment, the scene abruptly cuts to black, echoing Journey's words 'Don't Stop', followed by a moment of silence and blackness which is followed by the rolling of the credits. Many people still speculate whether or not Tony gets shot at that moment.

The description of the setting of this scene by David Chase as quoted above is an apt description of the atmosphere *The Sopranos* has over its six seasons. The life of Tony Soprano almost seems to be like an old-fashioned American sweetshop, as David Chase puts it. In the episode *Nobody Knows Anything*, Tony has a discussion with his daughter Meadow about whether or not one should talk about sex at the breakfast table. After Meadow recalls it's the 1990s, Tony says "Yeah, but that's where you're wrong. You see, out there it's the 1990s, but in this house, it's 1954" (*Nobody Knows Anything*). Tony's behavior adds to the fact that he thinks it is 1954 in his house. One of his main hobbies is watching old films, especially American ones, and we see him do that occasionally. In the second episode of season three, when Tony's mother Livia dies, Tony watches the 1931 film *The Public Enemy* several times. This is emphasized clearly in the show. At the end of the film, Tony gets emotional, probably because he sees a loving mother in the film where he never really had one in real life, but realizes he will nevertheless miss his own mother (*Proshai, Livushka*). In the episode *Pie-O-My* Tony watches the 1959 western *Rio Bravo*, starring John Wayne, Dean Martin and Ricky Nelson. Throughout the series, these references to American movies –old and new- come back. Especially gangster movies are referenced often, with the most references and quotes used from *The Godfather*. Silvio Dante, one of Tony Sopranos' crew members is famous for his impersonations of characters from *The Godfather*.

According to Dana Polan "the gangsters in *The Sopranos* are endlessly comparing

themselves to *The Godfather* or to Pacino in *Scarface*” (8). Like Polan says, there are other gangster movies, like *Scarface* that come back often as well, with other examples being *Goodfellas*, *Casino* and *The Untouchables*. Other, non-gangster films are referenced to as well. Throughout the third season, Ralph Cifaretto, one of the mobsters in Tony’s crew, is referring to *The Gladiator* movie that came out in the same year that season was made. Ralph loves the movie and is constantly quoting it in the series, even acting out some scenes, which leads to him hitting another mobster when he reenacts a scene in which the protagonist swings a chain through the air. In the episode *College*, Tony is on a trip with Meadow in Maine to look for colleges she might want to apply for. In the meantime, Carmela has Father Intintola over, the local priest. Intintola brought some movies and the two are discussing how good *Casablanca* was. In another episode, Tony Soprano is talking to his counselor about being home alone. The counselor says “you were home alone, like Macaulay Culkin. But like him, you wouldn’t be alone” (*Bust Out*), referring to *Home Alone*. In this American TV-series, other American TV-series are referred to as well. In the episode *Down Neck*, Anthony Jr. is talking to a psychiatrist about the American cartoon *South Park*. This means that not only old American films exist in the world of the Sopranos, but that there are many recent American examples of films and television as well. A quote by scholar Albert Auster is a nice one to sum this paragraph up with. Auster states “hardly an episode goes by in which references and even whole scenes are not devoted to popular culture” (11).

These examples all show that the world of *The Sopranos* is not different from the real America. Many movies and series seem to have their ‘own world’, where the things people experience in real life do not play a role. There are, or seem to be no other cultural works that people can sometimes refer to or look back upon. Some films and series do exist in the world, or America, as we know it, and *The Sopranos* is one of them, hence all the examples of films mentioned above. In this way, the mafia and the world of thugs and gangsters is mediated within *The Sopranos*. According to Terri Carney, professor of Spanish literature, culture and film at Butler University, “various studies confirm that the world of *The Sopranos* is one we all share, whether we call it postmodern, post-countercultural, bourgeois, me generation or suburbia” (Lavery et al. 164). Albert Auster states the world of *The Sopranos* is indeed very much alike our own and different from many other cultural works: “theirs is a world of suburban split levels, shopping malls, soccer moms and dads, SATs, and videogames” (11). But there’s more to the

series, “Tony and his gang inhabit a recognizable world of Starbucks, suburbia, and SUVs. They discuss issues of the day, the same ones we discuss when we turn off the TV after the episode” (Lavery et al. 157), argues Terri Carney in *The Essential Sopranos Reader*. There are plenty examples of this. In one episode, Tony is having breakfast with his family. They talk about the legalization of prostitution, which Meadow favors. Tony and Carmella are more conservative and do not agree with their daughter. She responds to that with “I mean, it’s a joke. Look what they’re putting the President through. Carmella: He deserved what he got. AJ: He got Monica Kaczynski and the broad with the long nose” (*Nobody Knows Anything*). What AJ hints at, is obviously the Monica Lewinsky scandal that evolved around US President Bill Clinton and White House intern Monica Lewinsky, with whom the President allegedly had sex. This is an example of how the series takes recent events or topics and how they are being presented in the series. Another example of this is the court case of former American Football star OJ Simpson in which he was accused of murder. In the episode *To Save Us All From Satan’s Power* there are some flashbacks to 1995. Tony and his crew are sitting at a table, watching the criminal trial on television and talking about it. The last example mentioned here are the effects of 9/11 that have an effect on the series. Tony gets suspicious of two young males that visit the strip club *Bada Bing* a lot and reports this to the FBI agent who first worked on the Soprano’s crime family but has moved onto counterterrorism during the last season of the show. All the examples of popular culture and events that actually happened in the world are American, which indicates the series and the world of *The Sopranos* is through and through American.

The Sopranos is thus an example of essential Americanism. It breathes America and America is always one of the main themes in the series. Every single episode of *The Sopranos* starts with the intro, where we see James Gandolfini, the actor who plays Tony Soprano, sit in his car, driving from New York City to his suburban New Jersey home. In *Reading the Sopranos*, David Lavery discusses the images of the intro, stating they “exist outside an HBO series; they are real objects, after all, on a real highway, where they exist as signifiers not only for the fictional history of Tony Soprano but also as recognizable signposts for the audience. From the giant statue of the laborer to the well-maintained lawns of suburbia, these are American images, from the industrial to the upper class, a running catalog of familiar symbols which initiates the viewer’s identification with Tony. (...) as Tony emerges from the Lincoln tunnel he enters the most common of American denominators: the lousy business of the long drive home-

the shared ordeal of millions fleeing the rat race after another long day” (Lavery 29-30). These arguments made by Lavery also come back to the argument that was made earlier: that the world of *The Sopranos* is one that also exists outside of the series, that the world as we know it is the same as the one inhabited by the show’s characters.

The following paragraph will devote some more attention to *The Godfather* saga that has been discussed briefly earlier. The reason there is special attention for *The Godfather* saga is that it is almost unavoidable to talk about Francis Ford Coppola’s movies when writing about *The Sopranos*. The world of the series is one in which *The Godfather* seems to be some kind of bible, or a work that everybody has seen and knows by heart. Misquoting it seems sacrilege. When Christopher says “Louis Brasi sleeps with the fishes”, an agitated Sal Bonpensiero corrects him. “Luca Brasi, Luca!” (*The Sopranos*). Albert Auster writes that the films are “more than just popular culture (...) it is their Norse sagas, legend of the Niebelungen, and Camelot rolled into one gloriously mythic package” (11). There are so many examples from the series that show the existence and importance of *The Godfather* for its characters that it is impossible to name them all. There were some examples so far, mainly that characters reference and often quote the series, like Silvio Dante who does a lot of good reenactments of the series and Tony Soprano who loves quotes and impersonations from the series. These examples are ubiquitous and present in almost every episode. Then there are bigger examples, like in the first scene of the episode *Commendatori*, when Tony’s crew gathers to watch *The Godfather* and to discuss the best scenes of the movies. In the episode *A Hit is a Hit*, Tony gives a present to his neighbor Bruce Cusamano, who then invites him to play golf with his friends. Tony initially hesitates, but decides to go play golf with them. He soon regrets this as Cusamano and his friends are constantly asking him questions about the mafia, like if he ever met John Gotti, or if he knew about Al Capone’s winter home in Biscayne Bay, pestering him for stories about the life of a mafia boss. One of the guys questions whether *The Godfather* is a good representation of life in the mafia. Tony decides to get back at them by referencing to a scene of *The Godfather*, in which Vito Corleone holds a bag of guns for Peter Clemenza asking him to ‘hold on to it for a while’. He fills a bag with sand and puts a strap on it, bringing it to Cusamano and asking him to ‘hold on to it for a while’. So by using a scene from *The Godfather* that Cusamano definitely knows, Tony tricks him and shuts him up about all the mafia stuff.

CHAPTER 3: AMERICANIZATION THROUGH *THE SOPRANOS* AND THE ROLE OF SOFT POWER

The following chapter applies the theories on Americanization and soft power described earlier in this thesis and applies them to *The Sopranos*. The chapter will go into why the case study specifically is a good example to spread Americanization and soft power, but will also focus on how television as a whole serves this function.

THE SOPRANOS AS A FORM OF AMERICANIZATION

Americanization is a concept that has been widely studied, with many scholars arguing that there should be more to the concept than just the spread of American culture throughout the world. Winfried Fluck states “discussions of Americanization remain incomplete and unconvincing as long as they do not take the phenomenon of selective appropriation, the fact of different contexts of use, and the varying, often unpredictable effects cultural objects can have into consideration”(222). Different contexts are used in case of *The Sopranos* in the Netherlands, where there are several restaurants and bars that spread around on the Dutch islands in the Caribbean. One of the Dutch examples is an Eindhoven based restaurant called The Sopranos. These examples can be found in other European countries like German and of course, Italy, as well, where there are several *Sopranos*-themed bars and restaurants, like in The Netherlands. On the internet, there are many forums discussing all kinds of *Sopranos*-related subjects, including many fan fiction websites, where fans write their own stories based on the show.

These are totally different contexts than a TV-series. However, placing the theme of *The Sopranos* in such a different context is a form of what Fluck means when talking about Americanization. He wants it to be complete and convincing and only sees that happening when there is selective appropriation, different contexts of use and unpredictable effects cultural objects can have into consideration. In the examples of restaurants and bars calling themselves *The Sopranos*, the fan-fiction and forums, there is a clear selective appropriation. One can give a restaurant or bar any name one likes, but then decides they are taking the theme of a TV show and proudly portray that in their places. A piano bar called *The Sopranos* on Aruba for example, has the exact same logo as the show, including the R in the shape of a gun. These restaurants and bars also set the show in a different context, because, even though there is a lot of emphasis on eating, drinking, and food in the show, theming a restaurant or bar after it is putting it in a

different context. Of course, this is also an unpredictable effect David Chase, writer and creator of the show, would not have expected when he started working out his initial ideas for a TV show.

As stated earlier, *The Sopranos* is filled with all kinds of different works of popular culture. Film, TV, literature, and art repeatedly come back in the show, with characters talking about it or characters simply enjoying watching a film or reading a particular book. But in the dialogues, there are a lot of elements of and references to works of popular culture as well. Think here about the almost continual references in every episode to mafia films like *The Godfather*, *Casino* or *Goodfellas*. In his article *California Blue*, Winfried Fluck talks about popular culture and the significance of it. At one point, Fluck writes “the significance of the phenomenon of popular culture for cultural history lies in its response to the problems of cultural access and accessibility. Traditionally, access to cultural life in Western societies depended on social standings, economic means, and a high degree of cultural literacy” (225). One could argue that ‘popular’ was not the right word for the term popular culture, since it was not the culture of the masses but that of the elites. The spread of popular culture became easier when images could be spread more easily. To understand images, one did not have to speak a certain language, but could just look at what was depicted. The spread of music, television, and film thus made it easier for popular culture to be appreciated by the masses, as Fluck states “film and television, but above all popular music, have been the driving forces in the Americanization of popular culture” (226).

The Sopranos, so richly filled with references to numerous works of popular culture, including music, combines two things in the theory of Fluck. On the one side, the show itself is television, which is accessible for almost everyone and everyone can understand what is depicted. On the other side, the show itself is filled with popular culture, ranging from mafia films (*Godfather*, *Casino*), to all kinds of other films (*Casablanca*, *The Devil’s Advocate*, *Chinatown*) to literature (Robert Frost, Poe, Herman Melville’s *Billy Budd*), to music (*Jefferson Airplane*, *Nirvana*), television (*A-Team*, *South Park*) and art (*Picasso*, *Dali*, *Warhol*). Because of this richness of popular culture, *The Sopranos* is a tool that brings (American) popular culture to everyone who watches it, consciously or unconsciously. There are many people who do not know all the references to these works of popular culture, but one does not have to know them all in order to understand them and pick them up. Because the vast majority of the cultural works

The Sopranos references to is American and the series has spread all over the world, one can fairly say that the show has spread American culture around. That is not necessarily Americanization, but it is a clear spread of culture from that country and thus a spread of popular culture to the masses both of the series itself and from other cultural works, both in the United States and outside. One could argue that watchers of the show do not necessarily need to have a ‘cultural literacy’, but that the show sort of creates that within its viewers.

As was said, the fact that *The Sopranos* does spread American culture around the world does not necessarily make it a form of Americanization. There is more to the concept than the simple exchange of cultural works from one end to the other. Many scholars have different views on Americanization, but a feature of the concept that Winfried Fluck and Swedish anthropologist Ulf Hannerz share about the concept is that it is a toolbox view. With this view, they mean that American culture functions as a resource for people in other countries. Everyone can take out what they want from the toolbox and everyone sees it in a slightly different way, but the basis is the same for everyone: the toolbox is there and is filled with American culture and ideas we pick from (Fluck 222). It is fair to say that *The Sopranos* itself is a toolbox. The series is an example of what could be in the toolbox, but functions as the toolbox full of cultural works itself, be it film, TV or literature. There are many American ideas being presented in the series as well. The most clear one being the American dream and whether or not it exists, with Tony desperately believing in it, which he clearly emphasizes throughout the series. He brings both his children to a church his great-grandfather helped build, telling them about how their forefathers came to America with nothing and built up everything themselves. Tony sometimes also sees his own life as the fulfillment of the American dream, building up a good life, with a big house and two beautiful children. In the last episode of the fourth season, while looking for a beach-house, Tony says to Carmela that “when we were piss poor this was the biggest caviar wish we could come up with” (*Whitecaps*).

In this view, presented by Fluck and Hannerz, everyone can watch *The Sopranos* in his own way and pick ‘objects’ from the toolbox. This is what Winfried Fluck means with ‘self-Americanization’. According to Rob Kroes, Americanization has allowed non-Americans to decipher and understand American messages as easy as the average American, because “we have acquired a set of cultural codes that allow us to understand American cultural products, to appreciate the, and to consume them as if we were Americans” (Kroes 172). This also applies to

The Sopranos and the toolbox theory. Because of our knowledge of America, non-Americans understand their products better than when Americans watch foreign television shows.

At the time of writing this thesis, it is the spring of 2017. Some might argue that, in order to make a valid point about soft power and Americanization, this thesis should have taken a more recent series as a case study. The pilot episode of *The Sopranos* was aired in 1999 and the final episode was in 2007, which means the series has been ended for more than ten years. One of the reasons this does not matter for this thesis is that the series is the toolbox that was just explained. This toolbox –the show in this case- does not necessarily link to a particular timeframe. It is a cornucopia of American literature, film and TV, discussing writers like Edgar Allan Poe and Herman Melville who both lived in the 19th century, but also more contemporary writers like Mary Higgins Clark and Stephen King. The same goes for TV and film, which are both obviously more recent media, but in these categories, old and new come back as well. Examples of older films are *Rio Bravo*, *High Noon* and *Citizen Kane*, those of more recent films *The Lord of the Rings* and *Gladiator*. Examples of old and more recent TV-series are *The Honeymooners*, *Sandford and Son*, *Curb Your Enthusiasm* and *Friends*. Because of this wide diversity in topics and timeframes, *The Sopranos* is almost like an encyclopedia full of popular culture content and there is no point in changing those all the time. The two main theories investigated in this thesis are both investigated in the light of a television show and thus is it not especially necessary to take a case study that is very recent. It might however be interesting to do research into a more recent series from the same perspective to see if there are differences and comparisons.

THE SOPRANOS AS SOFT POWER

The introduction and the first chapter of this thesis delved into Joseph Nye's ideas of soft power and how countries try to exert influence on another through the use of co-option and attraction. As stated earlier, television and film are major tools in this. There are several clear examples of American soft power, like American satellite TV that has been adapted to the countries it is being aired in but is still bringing American messages. Examples of this are the Voice of America (VOA) discussed earlier, but also the American channel Alhurra, which is an Arabic-language channel which brings news that is more positive to the US than news from other channels, trying to get the support of the inhabitants of the Arab world for America. *The Sopranos* is not as clear of an example of American soft power as these two TV/radio channels,

but is still a good example of soft power. HBO's show, together with David Lynch's *Twin Peaks* were the two shows that made quality TV popular and "*The Sopranos* took TV to a new level" (Lavery et al. 15). This new level meant much more viewers than many scripted TV-series had before, with the premiere of the fourth season in 2002 attracting more than 13 million viewers and the show's finale in June 2007 attracting 11.9 million viewers in America. Because television became a more prominent medium it became a better way to reach viewers, since an increasing number of people own TV sets now.

The higher number of viewers for television shows meant that more people were placing themselves in the world of Tony and Carmela Soprano, their ideas and view on life every week. Before and during the years HBO was airing *The Sopranos*, the television channel was rather small and did not have a significant viewership in America. Outside of the US, they were on the air in forty countries in 1999. Their mafia show altered this completely, and soon after the show ended in 2007, HBO had expanded its service to seventy countries (Lavery et al. 14).

This increase of airtime in countries all over the world, from Asia to South-America to Central Europe has a significant link to soft power. David Chase's show, together with *The Wire* and *Game of Thrones* is probably the best the channel has to offer, which means HBO has aired it all around the world. The relation to soft power is there. In his book *Social Power in International Politics*, Peter van Ham observes that

"the emotional power of America's media industry is considered an especially valuable ally in this new approach. (...) Mainstream American TV programs and movies are expected to reinvigorate America's reputation by projecting images of individual freedom and endless opportunity. As we concluded earlier, communities in the Middle East, Asia and elsewhere take much of their ideas of what the US is all about from American TV series and movies. The social power imbued in these images and narratives may well be greater than any description of the US and its values offered through governmental channels" (61).

This brings us back to a quote that has been mentioned before, by Jason Mittell, who wrote about television in relation to the spread of culture: "many critics regard international distribution of American media as a form of cultural imperialism, forcing American values and ideologies upon viewers around the world" (442). Later in his book, Van Ham argues that "one could hardly expect that watching *The Sopranos* or *Weeds* will instill values and norms that sit well with America's strategic vision for the Middle-East and beyond" (61). With this quote, Van

Ham indicates that he thinks soft power is a tool that always should be along the lines of a certain strategic vision. In the case of the VOA and Alhurra, there will probably be a strategic vision, in the case of Alhurra even specifically for the Middle-East. However, the examples Van Ham sketches, *The Sopranos* and *Weeds*, both American TV-series, are initially not made to be exported to so many countries around the world. In the case of *The Sopranos*, the show was created and developed because David Chase had the idea of creating a series about a mob-boss who visits a psychiatrist. The reason the show was created and made was thus not a certain policy or strategy developed by the American government. That does not mean, however, that the show cannot be a good example of soft power, as argued above. Soft power does not always have to be a program or policy set up by an institution or government with strategical purposes. That is also what this thesis has said. It has not said TV shows should not be set up with strategical purposes, on the contrary, it also agrees that that is a good form of soft power. What Van Ham seems to say is that the ‘strategical’ soft power is the only way soft power can exist, but that is not the case.

To support the last point made here, it is good to go back to Craig Hayden’s theory on soft power that was explained in the first chapter. Hayden distinguishes three features of soft power: scope, mechanism, and practice. Hayden argues “scope refers to the *subjects* of soft power: which actors are seeking power, who is the intended audience for soft power action” (339-340). When Hayden’s theory is applied to the case study of *The Sopranos*, it becomes clear that the show functions as soft power. The subject of power Hayden talks about when discussing scope is *The Sopranos*. The spread of the show over many countries in the world, in combination with the amount of viewers means that the scope of the viewers was big and that the subject of power, the show in this case, is recognized as viable in terms of strategic objectives. The show was intended for the American public at first, but while creating the show, David Chase knew that it would be spread around the world when it would be successful. The second concept, mechanism, is about the medium that is used to spread the message. According to Hayden, “mechanism involves the expected capacity of media forms to elicit effects. In this sense, public diplomacy derives inevitably from an institutional construction of meaning around media and communication technology: what kind of impact media can have, what sort of social significance the platforms exhibit, and what sorts of scale of reach is possible” (344). In the case of *The Sopranos*, that medium is television, which is a medium that has many viewers all around the

world and forms a steady part of many people's lives. The medium, or resource, is, because of its reach and steady role in people's lives, an effective tool to spread messages and ideas. The third concept Hayden distinguishes is outcome, which is the simplest of the three concepts and is about the success of soft power. In the case of *The Sopranos*, there is no straightforward and clear outcome. The case study functions as soft power, but it is not self-contained, there are many other examples that all function as soft power and all contribute to the American dominance when it comes to exerting soft power around the world. This makes it difficult to give a clear answer to the last concept. The only thing that should by now be clear is that *The Sopranos* functions as soft power and thus is one of the elements that make America the world leader when it comes to soft power. That could be the answer to Hayden's last concept. Because the case study in this thesis can be applied to all the concepts Hayden sets for soft power, it is fair to say that *The Sopranos* functions as soft power.

What a show like *The Sopranos* has shown, is that a TV show can function as soft power even though that might not be the intention at first. The show is so full of references to America and its culture, practices, ideas, and events happening there that it is almost a showcase of the country. A showcase of events happened in the years before, during and after 9/11, like *Mad Men* is a showcase of America of the 1960s. Culturally it is a showcase of almost everything America has to offer. The best way to gain support for a country, is to introduce the viewer to it, to show them what a country is like and to teach them about its people, its culture, and its kitchen. That is what happens in *The Sopranos* and is why it is a good example of soft power.

CONCLUSION

In the introduction to this thesis, a research question was posed that sounds as follows: how is the process of Americanization taking place through soft power by airing TV shows like *The Sopranos*, one of the most popular American TV series so far? Through academic books like *American Television Culture*, *The Essential Sopranos Reader*, *Reading The Sopranos* and other books, scholarly articles and episodes from the series, this thesis answered this question as meticulously as possible. Academics have shown that soft power is an instrument that is gaining increasingly more attention and influence, especially in a globalized world where there is more interaction between people from all over the world. The influence that is meant here is influence in the sense that a country (or institution) can spread ideas and images and thus gain the favor of certain people or groups. America's dominance in this area, with Hollywood, American TV productions like *Breaking Bad* and *House of Cards* and their TV channels smartly aimed towards spreading American ideas like Alhurra and Voice of America have made them the most powerful country in the world in terms of soft power (Portland, Monocle, Elcano's surveys). This American power has an obvious reason: ever since 1945 America has been exerting soft power all over the world, starting with the Marshall Plan.

The reason for American global power is tied to Americanization. What is clear from this thesis is that the concept is not set in stone and that there are several theories on what Americanization exactly is. What is clear, however, is that Americanization is part of soft power. Many academics and studies agree upon the fact that the United States is the leader of the world when it comes to the use of soft power. This top position in the world can amongst others be explained by the American dominance in the entertainment industry. Hollywood, the home of the American film industry is one of the biggest producers of films in the world, coming second after Bollywood, the Indian film industry. The big difference between the two is the spread of their products. Hollywood's films are spread around all over the world, getting the box office hits on almost every continent many times a year. Bollywood's products are mostly for the domestic market, and its products are not prone to export because of the language barrier and lack of cultural export on a global scale. The American film market, however, is made for the whole world and not just the American market, whereas Bollywood clearly focuses on the Indian market and occasionally has a big success film that spreads around the world, like *Baahubali* and *3 Idiots*.

This thesis has shown that soft power is a key element of the foreign policy of the United States nowadays, that comes in many forms. The country is actively seeking to spread out its norms and values to other parts of the world where it feels necessary to do so. In many cases, the reason why one would actively spread soft power would be political. But soft power, even though it might be a political tool, often comes as a form of culture, because it is mostly distributed via film, TV or even music. A good example of this is the Marshall Plan films discussed in the first chapter of this thesis. These are examples of soft power because they are aimed at changing people's minds towards being in favor of the United States and their policies. With the Marshall Plan example, this is done through a cultural form, namely film.

Because of all the American films, TV-series and other cultural works –soft power tools or not-, Americanization became a more widespread concept. Taking the Netherlands as an example, one can argue that it is an ‘Americanized’ country. One of the reasons for the Dutch openness to other cultures and languages is the fact that the Dutch have always been a traveling people, exploring other cultures and languages. The small size of the Netherlands forces its people to do this, as they do not have much space in their own country. However, simply stating that the Netherlands is an Americanized country might be problematic. As many scholars have pointed out, it is not possible to say that something is purely Americanized, since there are more processes going on. As one of the leading scholars on the topic of Americanization, Rob Kroes turned to the idea of Creolization, the process languages like English, Portuguese and Dutch have undergone in colonized parts of the world, and applied this to Americanization. He takes the Netherlands as an example where American concepts are taken and creolized in a Dutch context. The best example of this might be the 2016 Dutch television series *La Famiglia*, which is about a mafia family that owns an Italian restaurant and a collection agency, which are both fronts for mafia activities. Like *The Sopranos*, *La Famiglia* contains a lot of dark humor, a focus on Italian heritage and Italian food and on familial ties. *La Famiglia* can definitely be seen as a Dutch series inspired by *The Sopranos*. The Netherlands has a lot of ‘pure’ examples of Americanization as well, looking at the amount of American films and TV-shows that are being aired on Dutch TV. Even the TV channels that air in the Netherlands contain a lot of American channels like Comedy Central, TLC, Discovery Channel, and Fox, only mentioning a few of the total offer. These developments are not self-contained. They are going on in many countries, all across the world. There is definitely a correspondence between this development on the one hand

and the growing importance and focus on the spread of American soft power on the other.

The Sopranos as a form of Americanization has several reasons that contribute to the theories from the scholars mentioned earlier in this thesis. At first, it must be said that the show is a clear example of what Nye would consider a form of soft power. That would be cultural soft power, aimed at attracting people towards ideas and principles of a certain country or institution. It also connects to the theories set by Craig Hayden, who describes what three features soft power tools must have: scope, mechanism and outcomes. That these three concepts apply for *The Sopranos* was explained in the last chapter.

Looking at the theories of Americanization, there is the toolbox theory that was explained extensively, where the show functions as a toolbox of American culture, news and political events. The creolization theory offers insights in how *The Sopranos* had a different reaction in specific countries. Because of the importance of food in the show, restaurants themed like the show have popped up in the world. Other examples of places that are themed after the show are bars and cafés, in Europe, but also in America. These establishments, like bars, restaurants, and cafés that came into being because of the show, make it fair to say that the show has been taken out of its context and put in a new one. This is a very distinct choice, since one can theme their place after everything they like. To choose *The Sopranos* as the central theme of their establishment indicates that the show is more than just a television show to some people. These people take the show out of its context as a television show, and place it in a different one. At the same time, these kinds of places have significance in the series, since the members of Tony's crew often meet at bars or restaurants, like the *Nuovo Vesuvio* or *Bada Bing*.

Looking at the theories of soft power and Americanization, it is fair to say that *The Sopranos* fits into the categories set by the scholars on these concepts. The airing of TV shows like *The Sopranos* around the world facilitates Americanization. Soft power is the overarching principle here, which stimulates the spread of American products like TV shows and thus stimulates Americanization. Every country might have a different reaction to the cultural works that function as soft power, but the process of Americanization is definitely stimulated by these works.

The link between soft power and Americanization should by now be clear. Television is one of the media often used to spread soft power, either by scripted TV or by informational TV channels that only air in certain areas to bring messages in favor to America. This thesis has

shown that HBO's *The Sopranos* is a good example of a TV-show that can function as soft power. It has done so by applying the theories on soft power and Americanization by Nye, Kroes, Kooijman, Bayles and Fluck to what is seen on screen. An example of what is discussed above is the theory of Americanization as a toolbox and how *The Sopranos* fits into that category. Quite some attention has been dedicated to the fact that David Chase's show is one big set of popular culture, in that every single episode contains many references to other films, television series, pieces of literature, and art. This is much like the films by Quentin Tarantino, who always enriches his works with pieces of popular culture, some well-known, but some very unfamiliar to the common viewer.

This thesis has focused on soft power and the link with Americanization and has, along the lines of HBO's *The Sopranos*, explained how these two concepts work and shown why David Chase's show fits into that category. The research this thesis consists of is mainly literature research: reading and reviewing academic books and scholarly articles. The other part of research was a semantic research that consisted of watching, analyzing and taking examples from a number of key episodes from *The Sopranos*. What this bachelor's thesis did not allow the writer to do, was research on reception that could give more insights to the people's reaction to concepts like soft power and Americanization. The amount of time and resources did not allow the writer to go any further than the things discussed above. Ideas for further empirical research would be quite interesting, because one could actually do a lot of research into the topic of soft power and Americanization. *The Sopranos* could then function as a very interesting case study and one could analyze whether the show has a big influence on people's image of America or not. A group of American studies students from the first and the third year could be used to do this research, and for a control group one could choose a first and third year group of a completely different study, like math. One could split these into two groups and teach them about soft power and Americanization, while the other group would be taught nothing about these subjects. Then, every student would get to watch a selected episode from *The Sopranos* and fill in a form about soft power and Americanization and what effect the show has to that effect. The results might be very interesting and a valuable contribution to the discussion inside and outside of this bachelor's thesis.

What this thesis also shows, is that cultural works like television and film but also literature and art are essential in our societies nowadays. Looking at political parties at the far

right that seem to be gaining popularity all around the world, the Trumps, Le Pens and Wilders, one can say that they are not in favor of subsidizing the arts. Dutch politician Geert Wilders has even called theatre, television and art ‘leftist hobbies’, indicating that he does not want much government money to be put in those activities. Something many of these politicians forget is exactly what a major part of this thesis is about: the influence cultural works can have on people, or, in other words, soft power. Without these cultural works, the world would be a much different place. Not only do they bring joy in people’s lives, they are a very influential political tool as well, spreading culture, norms and values and ideas around. If that is not something worth clinging on to, then what is?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- “A Hit is a Hit”. *The Sopranos*. Writ. Joe Bosso, Frank Renzulli. Dir. Matthew Penn. Warner Brothers. 1999. DVD.
- Auster, Albert. “The Sopranos, the Gangster Redux”. *This Thing of Ours: Investigating the Sopranos*. Ed. David Lavery. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002. Web. 11 May. 2017.
- Bayles, Martha. *Through a Screen Darkly: Popular Culture, Public Diplomacy, and America’s Image Abroad*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014. Web. 15 May. 2017.
- Berle, A.A. “The Marshall Plan in the European Struggle”. *Social Research* 82.1 (2015): 199-218. Web. 2 Apr. 2017.
- Bev, Jennie S. “The Power of American ‘Soft Power’”. *Forbes* 23 May 2012. Web. 29 May. 2017.
- “Bust Out”. *The Sopranos*. Writ. Frank Renzulli, Robin Green and Mitchell Burgess. Dir. John Patterson. Warner Brothers, 2000. DVD.
- “Chemie in Trek Door *Breaking Bad* en Extra Studiebeurs”. *Algemeen Dagblad* 29 Apr. 2014, early edition. Web. 29 May. 2017.
- “Commendatori”. Writ. David Chase. Dir. Tim van Patten. Warner Brothers, 2000. DVD.
- “Down Neck”. *The Sopranos*. Writ. Robin Green and Mitchell Burgess. Dir. Lorraine Senna Ferrara. Warner Brothers, 1999. DVD.
- “Elcano Global Presence Report 2015”. Real Instituto Elcano. 2015. P. 20. Web. 23 May. 2017.
- Fluck, Winfried. *California Blue: Americanization as Self-Americanization*. New York: Berghan Books, 2005, 221-237. Web. 15 May. 2017.
- George, Cherian. “Soft Power: Looking Beyond American Hegemony”. *Media Asia* 43.2 (2016): interview. Web. 30 Mar. 2017.

- Gueldry, Michel and Michael Gott. "The Americanization of France". *Yale French Studies* 116/117 (2009): 37-51. Web. 9 Apr. 2017.
- Greenberg, James. "This Magic Moment". *Directors Guild of America* spring 2015. Web. 18 Apr. 2017.
- Ham, Peter van. *Social Power in International Politics*. New York and London: Routledge, 2010. Web. 23 May. 2017.
- Hayden, Craig. "Scope, Mechanism and Outcome: Arguing Soft Power in the Context of Public Diplomacy". *Journal of International Relations and Development* 20.2 (2017): 331-357. Web. 14 Jun. 2017.
- Karademir, Burcu Sari. "Turkey as a 'Willing Receiver' of American Soft Power: Hollywood Movies in Turkey During the Cold War". *Turkish Studies* 13.4 (2012): 633-645. Web. 30 May. 2017.
- Kooijman, Jaap. "Americans We Never Were: Teaching American Popular Culture in the Netherlands". *The Journal of American Culture* 34.1 (2011): 16-25. Web. 6 Apr. 2017.
- Kooijman, Jaap. *Fabricating the Absolute Fake: America in Contemporary Pop Culture*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008. Web. 5 Apr. 2017.
- Kroes, Rob. *If You've Seen One, You've Seen the Mall*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996. Web. 5 Apr. 2017.
- Lavery, David, Douglas L Howard and Paul Levinson. *The Essential Sopranos Reader*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011. Web. 29 Mar. 2017.
- Lavery, David. *Reading the Sopranos: Hit TV from HBO*. New York&London: IB Tauris, 2006. Web. 11 May. 2017.
- McCarty, John. *Bullets over Hollywood: The American Gangster Picture from the Silents to The Sopranos*. New York: Perseus Book Group, 2004. Web. 6 Jun. 2017.

- Mehring, Frank. "The Promises of 'Young Europe': Cultural Diplomacy, Cosmopolitanism, and Youth Culture in the Films of the Marshall Plan". *European Journal of American Studies* 7.2 (2012): 1-28. Web. 15 May. 2017.
- Mittel, Jason. *Television and American Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. Web. 4 Apr. 2017.
- "Nobody Knows Anything". *The Sopranos*. Writ. David Chase, Frank Renzulli. Dir. Henry Bronchtein. Warner Brothers, 1999. DVD.
- Nye, Joseph S. "Public Diplomacy and Soft Power". *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616 (2008): 94-109. Web. 30 Mar. 2017.
- Nye, Joseph S. *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: Perseus Books Group, 2004. Print.
- Polan, Dana. *Pulp Fiction*. London: British Film Institute Publishing, 2000. Print.
- "Proshai, Livushka". *The Sopranos*. Writ. David Chase. Dir. Tim van Patten. Warner Brothers, 2001. DVD.
- Silverstone, Roger. *Media and Morality: On the Rise of the Mediapolis*. London: Polity Press, 2007. Web. 4 Apr. 2017.
- "Soft Power Survey 2016/17". Monocle. 2016. Web. 23 May. 2017.
- "The Soft Power 30- Ranking". Portland. July 2016. Web. 23 May. 2017.
- "The Sopranos". *The Sopranos*. Writ. David Chase. Dir. David Chase. Warner Brothers, 1999. DVD.
- "The Test Dream". *The Sopranos*. Writ. David Chase, Matthew Weiner. Dir. Allen Coulter. Warner Brothers, 2004. DVD.
- "To Save Us All From Satan's Power". *The Sopranos*. Writ. Robin Green, Mitchell Burgess. Dir. Jack Bender. Warner Brothers, 2001. DVD.

Védrine, Hubert with Dominique Moisi. *France in an Age of Globalization*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2001. Web. 12 Apr. 2017.

Weeks, Gregory. "Soft Power, Leverage, and the Obama Doctrine in Cuba". *The Latin Americanist* 60.4 (2016): 525-540. Web. 29 May. 2017.

"Whitecaps". *The Sopranos*. Writ. David Chase, Robin Green, Mitchell Burgess. Dir. John Patterson. Warner Brothers, 2002. DVD.