Commodification of Otherness
A qualitative postcolonial analysis of representation in contemporary French cinema

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ABSTRACT
This thesis investigates how colonial legacies shape representational practices in contemporary French cinema and interrogates how hierarchical differences are produced and challenged in the cinematic media. Combining the fields of postcolonial theory and culture studies enables a theoretical framework that connects contemporary cultural debates about the politics of representation with the legacies of colonial stereotypes and racialized imageries. Through the application of qualitative content analysis and critical discourse analysis the thesis strives to make a theoretical contribution to the existing body of litterateur that is empirically driven. Additionally an intersectional dimension will be included as the thesis addresses the question of representations in relation to race, gender, class and sexuality and further how power operates through culture as a production of knowledge. The major findings of the thesis consist of how the empirical material reveals how contemporary cinematic expressions reuse colonial racial stereotypes and appropriate blackness as instrumental in commodification of “otherness”. Accordingly the thesis challenges dominant notions of the impact of race in a French context.

KEYWORDS: Colonial discourse, representation, cinema, intersectional, appropriation, commodification, otherness.
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1. INTRODUCTION

This section will offer a historical background to the subject and connecting it to the contemporary context. I will thereafter define the scope of the dissertation and discuss delimitations. Concluding the section will a review of the outline be presented.

1.1. BACKGROUND

In October 2017 a new commercial was released with images that were distressingly similar to campaigns that were launched during the European colonial era. I am referring to the shortened version of a Dove soap commercial that was released on Facebook. In the commercial a black woman is taking off her shirt and during the movement is she turned into/replaced by a white woman. The commercial was met with a lot of anger from people finding these images truly offensive and racist; Dove responded by apologizing and dropped the ad (The New York Times, 2017). Why these images awoke many angry voices can arguably be understood in relation to the problematic history of the soap and the meaning soap was ascribed with through commercials during the colonial and imperial era.

McClintock (1995, p.32-36) argues, while the entry of soap into the commercial market occurred during the 19th century, it was made in line with the ideas of the white man’s burden through examples such as in Pear’s Soap ads. McClintock exemplifies this by referring to one advertisement that announced:

The first step towards lightening THE WHITE MAN’S BURDEN is through teaching the virtues of cleanliness. PEAR’S SOAP is a potent factor in brightening the dark corners of the earth as civilization advances, while amongst the cultured of all nations it holds the highest place – it is the ideal toilet soap.

McClintock identifies in this advertisement how the two spheres of the imperial market and private domesticity, which both held an important position for the British middle-class Victorians, converged in the name of commodity, and thus figures how imperialism came to be articulated through the ideals of domesticity. Noteworthy, the imperial domesticity was shaped through men and women occupying different spheres. As the public sphere and the world of enterprise was a male world, was there no acknowledgment of the economic value of women’s domestic labour. Hence, the cult of domesticity was central to the British identity and was shaped around colonialism and the idea of race and gender, simultaneously as
colonialism was shaped by Victorian ideals about domesticity. Further, the imperial discourse used in the Pear’s Soap ads, marks a shift from the scientific racism that was produced in Europe during the Enlightenment, to what McClintock defines as commodity racism, by which the evolutionary racism and imperial power reached people from all classes, beyond the literate elite. In another Pear’s Soap commercial an image is first displayed figuring a black child in a bathtub looking astonished by the water and also a white child standing over the tub and the black child. In the next picture, the white child holds a mirror in front of the black boy, who is no longer in the bath and his body has magically turned white, while his face remained black. This campaign mediates how the soap as a commodity served the imperial civilizing mission by purifying and washing the “savage” and where the white boy function as an agent of history while the black child remains a passive racial hybrid brought to civilization through the soap (ibid, p.214). In other words, the dirty history of the soap shows how it played a crucial part in the commodity spectacle of mass marketing and the new cultural system of representing social value, which was one of the earliest forms of organized racism that affected people from all social classes.

Arguably, the Dove commercial lacks the imperial political agenda of the 19th century campaigns, nonetheless, the re-emergence of similar images illuminates the need for a critical scrutiny of representational practices in contemporary media and its political content. Stuart Hall (1997, p.225ff) argues that representing “difference” has become a compelling theme in culture today, both when it comes to racial and ethnicity but also gender, sexuality and class. He asks the question of where the fascination of “otherness” comes from and likewise the stereotypical images. Thus, Hall acknowledges the question of politics of representation and he stresses the complexity of representation of difference due to the emotions of fear, anxiety and excitement it mobilizes and usually ends up with a binary form of representation that is stereotyping. He means that to understand and deepen our analysis we need theories to develop critical concepts to explain its operations. Hall (ibid, p. 232f) proposes that one method to read images that are representing “difference” is through intertextuality, which means to see that images gain their meaning when read in the context with others, they accumulate meanings when understood in connection with or against another. The meaning of the image thus depends on being understood in relation to other similar ones, and enables detecting how similar representational practices are repeated. In line with intertextuality, we can understand how the visual representation of the black woman turning into a white woman in the Dove commercial raised questions of repeating imperial racialized images. However,
the politics of the ad was plausibly more about including women from different ethnicities to show a positive attitude toward multiculturalism and by this appropriating “difference” in order to sell their product.

Arguably, there is an ambiguity marking visual representation, and as bell hook claims; the field of representation remains a place of struggle and it becomes evident when examining contemporary representation of blackness. In magazines, movies and books, she argues, the majority of the images of black people re-inscribe and reinforce white supremacy and the hegemonic system of thoughts. Through these representations, there is an abiding connection between the upholding and institutionalization of white supremacist patriarchy and oppression of black people via the media. Therefore she necessitates decolonization of the mind that can function as a contestation to ideological and discursive dominant structures and truly challenge the affirmation of racial superiority in culture and make room for a transgressive transformation of images (hooks, 1992, p. 1ff). Further hooks (ibid, p10-14) argues that in a situation of racial integration, where white supremacist systems are still intact, resistance risks being undermined by ignoring the necessity of changing the culture’s attitude towards black people. She identifies, in similarity to Hall, the successful tendency of the commodification of black culture by white people where blackness is used as something exotic and to “spice” up mainstream white culture, and how this usage rather maintain structures of domination than contesting them, by exploitation of “otherness”. Accordingly, I emphasise that there exist not only one singular way of representing difference and also that difference is intersected by race, sex, class and sexuality in order to grasp the difference of sociohistorical positions.

1.2. DEFINING THE SCOPE AND DELIMITATIONS
The purpose of the thesis is to interrogate the question of how hierarchical differences are produced in the western media landscape, in line with legacies of colonial stereotypes and new forms of racialized imageries by looking at systems of representation. Accordingly I will do this by combining the fields of postcolonial theory and cultural studies which enables a theoretical framework that connects contemporary cultural debates and the politics of representation. The broadness of the interdisciplinary approach requires a narrowing of the scope, thus, the thesis will limit to representation in contemporary French cinema. Arguably, film as cultural expression becomes part of a general public debate as the audience consumes it. Therefore, the messages that are communicated through cinema and the discursive space
they constitute requires a critical analysis to clarify positions of who is representing whom and how, and who is watching whom in relation to agency and gaze. The context of contemporary France is a relevant study due to the country’s colonial history and prevailing legacies that mark current political relations. However the thesis will not touch upon questions of multiculturalism, transnationalism or migration in French politics on a deeper level. Neither will it enter the debate on freedom of expression in an artistic context; rather, the thesis will discuss artistic work from a power perspective and the responsibilities imposed on the position of a filmmaker.

In sum, the thesis examines how race is made in connection to representation in French contemporary cinema along with an intersectional analysis. To clarify, the use of race in the thesis is not as an essentialist and biological category. Rather, I will use it in line with Hübinette’s et.al. definition, who argue that race has become a way to define and categorize people from physical and visual traits, which stem from the racialized “scientific” thinking from the colonial era and also that race is a concept that depends on both time and place. Beyond being a historically created category, race is a performative action and is accordingly constructed through language and images. By addressing the question of race in relation to gender and sexuality, I strive to both avoid a dichotomist analysis and also make visible system of norms that regulates relationships and produces multiple hierarchies of power in terms of race, gender and sexuality (2012, p. 15-25). Through a qualitative analysis of the material composed by two French contemporary films, namely *Girlhood* and *The Intouchables*, the thesis seeks to contribute to the research-field through theoretical insights drawn from the empirical material. Furthermore, by combining cultural studies with postcolonial theory, the paper attempts to bring new ideas to the table by adding dimensions of colonial legacies and media in a joint scrutiny. Accordingly, the main question addressed in the thesis is:

*In what way do colonial legacies shape current identity representation of race, class, gender and sexuality in contemporary French cinema? And how are hierarchical differences produced and challenged?*
1.3. OUTLINE

I will, in order to answer the research question in a satisfying way, discuss the issue of race and the connection with on screen representation in relation to the sociohistorical context. With the extensive work of Edward Said in *Orientalism*, he laid grounds for an interdisciplinary approach of examining European and American reflections of the Orient in cultural representations and in scholarship work, serving the purpose of a western political agenda. Said (2003(1978), p. 7-27) renders a clear description of how the Orient was constructed through the eyes and words of the Europeans and Americans, and refers to Gramsci’s usage of hegemony to draw the connections of culture and political. According to Said, Gramsci separates between civil and political society, where culture operates within civil society, where the influences of ideas and of institutions work not through domination but through consent. Hegemony, then, refers to the certain cultural forms that are predominant over others and are more influential, and identify how culture operates within the industrial West. For Said, it is cultural hegemony at work that gives Orientalism, as a produced field of knowledge, its durability and strength. Further he stresses that the idea of Europe and the European identity as superior is never far from the ides of Orientalism, thus, the collective notion of “us” against “them” is a major component in European culture and in the process of becoming a hegemonic culture both in Europe and exterior. In line with this, Said means that while the European and American interest in the Orient was political due to historical accounts, it was the culture that created that interest and simultaneously acted along with the political, economic, and military rationales to make the Orient the varied and complicated place it was stated as in the Orientalist writings. Therefore within the Orientalist discourse, culture is not something passive; instead it holds a representative role in establishing and maintaining the notion of difference in the distribution of geopolitical awareness between the Occident and the Orient. By looking at Orientalism as a dynamic exchange between individual authors and the large political concern of the British, French and Americans, Said finds that it was in their intellectual and imaginative territory that the writing of Orientalism was produced. Thus, Said, as Hall, sees that texts exist in contexts and adopts an intertextual perspective in his analysis of Orientalism and raises the question of how different spheres such as philosophy, psychology, geography and literature governed by political imperialism produced the field and jointly came to represent the Orient. However the orientalists representations are premised on being outside the Orient, thus the exteriority of these representations are less concerned with the truisms of the actual social circumstances and correctness, they lack the fidelity of representation as if it was the Orient representing itself.
Furthermore, Said connects the issue of stereotypic representations of the Orient in the contemporary electronic postmodern world, referring to anti-Arab and anti-Islamic imaginaries in TV, film and media. He stresses the nexus between knowledge and power in creating the Orient and the importance to not treat literature and cultural expressions as apolitical. In other words, Said demonstrated the need for a critical regard on the interconnection between cultural representations of difference serving political motives as he pointed to the repertoire of imagery reaffirming and maintaining a variety of ideas of the “Other”. In the Orientalist paradigm of representation Said also stress the relation between representation of difference and the power of the orientalists, hence the power that lies in producing knowledge.

Hall further helps us understand the question of representing “difference” and “otherness” and highlights the ambivalent character that it can be both positive and negative and serves the purpose of producing meaning. However the racialized discourse is structured around binary polarized oppositions and works as signifiers of difference between humans. Within this system, stereotypes are produced and reduce people to a few traits that exaggerate, essentialize and simplify the person and the same time fixes “difference”. Accordingly, stereotyping perpetuates social and symbolic order and establishes the frontier of the “we” and the “Other”. In relation to power stereotyping tends to happen where there are inequalities of power. The connection between representation, difference, stereotyping and power in a broad sense, lies in the symbolic power of being able to represent someone within a certain regime of representation, thus, stereotypes and discursive representations can be a form of symbolic violence (Hall, 1997, p.243, 258f). Accordingly, the thesis will address these questions of representation in relation to race, gender, class and sexuality and how power operates through culture as a production of knowledge. I will in the following section discuss the methodology used in order to answer the question posed. Followed by an introduction to the selected material and a discussion of problems and limitations. The next chapter seeks to structure the existing research of postcolonial theory and cultural studies and highlight the relevant work for the thesis’ subject and conclude with a remark on how the thesis contribute to earlier research in the field. The paper will then go on to present the analysis and a discussion to then conclude with a conclusion of the work.
2. METHODOLOGY

I will in this section discuss the methodology used in the thesis. I will start with describing the logic of Critical discourse analysis, and its central concepts, followed by a description of content analysis and the application of the methods. I will thereafter continue with a discussion of the selection of material. Lastly, problems and limitations of the chosen methods and material will be discussed.

2.1. CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Meyer and Wodak (2009, p. 3) introduce the Critical discourse analysis (henceforth CDA) paradigm as in general characterized by being problem-oriented, interdisciplinary and shows an interest in de-mystifying ideologies and power through investigation of semiotic material, including written, spoken and visual. In other words, it is focused on power relationships and how language (in a broad sense) shapes reality in that they are ascribed meanings of how humans perceive it. Further they (ibid, p5-9) stress the heterogeneous character due to the manifold definitions of the concepts discourse, power and critical. According to CDA discourses are relatively stable uses of language serving the organization and structuring of social life. Further they see discourse as language use in speech and writing as a form of “social practice” and thus imply that there is a dialectical relationship between a discursive event and a situation, they shape each other. In this, discourse becomes socially constitutive and conditioned. The concept of critical refers to the need of social sciences to go beyond the perspective of solely understanding and explaining towards critiquing and changing society. The centrality of the concept of power within the CDA comes from analyzing the language use of the people in power, who are responsible for existing inequalities. Accordingly, CDA looks at how discourses produces and reproduces social domination, defined as, the power abuse of one group over others, and how dominated groups may discursively resist. The notion of power draws from Foucault’s definition of power as a relation, and is something that is being made in relation to something else. In line with this, by analyzing discursive practices we can see how power is constituted between people and the rules upholding the power in a discourse.

Similarly to the general discourse analysis approach, the CDA is claiming a social constructivist position to the social reality; hence, the perceived reality is dependent on how we interpret actions and behaviors. Accordingly, the discourse analysis adapts a relativistic view of the world, meaning, going beyond the traditional essentialist and objectivistic view,
that reality exists independently from human interpretation and instead looking of how people create, interpret and produce versions of reality and how they are established in everyday life. Central to the CDA is to understand how these versions are established as natural, and see therefore it central to investigate discourse and language practices in order to understand the constructive and performative nature of language use (language understood here as not only a mean of communication but as action) (Adelswärd et. al. 2009, p.14-17). Further, Adelswärd et. al. (ibid, p19ff) stress that with these aims of the CDA, the method is often applied in cases trying to understand social institutions and medias and their specific discourse practices, to detect different dominating and conquering orders that are established and maintained through language. With the focus on human actions as extensions of ideologies and power relations, the CDA is a method that through empirics investigate the relationship between the individual and a discourse in social institutions, thus attempts to bridge between a macro and micro perspective (ibid, p.27f). In line with this notion of CDA and its investigation of discourses, I argue that is a method that will go well together with the theories of postcolonial studies and culture studies.

2.2. QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS

I will, in addition to the CDA methodology, also use qualitative content analysis. Drisko and Maschi (2015, p. 2) refer to definitions of Weber and Krippendorff when they explain content analyses as a research technique to make replicable and valid inference from texts (defined in a broad sense) to the contexts of their use. Further, the qualitative content analysis is an approach for systematic analysis of texts, addressing the manifested content but also, key themes and ideas in a descriptive manner and seeks to conceptualize it (ibid, p.82). Further Drisko and Maschi (ibid, p.87f) argue that to qualitative content analysis, coding is central and emphasizes the descriptive focus as a process for categorizing the content and define its meaning and nuances through interrogation that can help expand the data. In other words, qualitative content analysis aims at investigating the content of texts in a descriptive manner in order to get an expansive understanding of the data, and encompasses identifying categories and themes of the content to get a more structured and nuanced comprehension. Lastly, within the qualitative content analysis, it is important for the researcher to during the research process be self-reflective since the researcher function as an instrument in the selection and understanding of the material, therefore reflexivity and openness are vital for the research process (ibid, p.116).
Accordingly, I will in this thesis use content analysis to present a narrative description of the material through coding in order to enhance its explanatory function and also to detect possible inherent meanings. The CDA will further build on this understanding of the material through the focus on language and discourse practices through human interaction, and relating it to dominating social hierarchies, connecting a micro and macro perspective. I will by applying the CDA as methodology highlight the connection between theory and discourse in a circular process. Meyer and Wodak (2009, p.24) describe that the theory will form the conceptualization and coding, which lead to operationalization of the analysis of discourse, and then a selection of the information to be interpreted and examined through assumptions that connects back to theory. Furthermore, with CDA and content analysis as methods will I turn to the material and inquire in line with my research question to what is being said in the material, and bring to light weather the discourses in the movies might be influenced by colonial discourses. With the previous research done within in the postcolonial field and cultural studies on colonial representations and discourses will I ask weather they still persist in shaping identity representations of race, class, gender and sexuality in the selected material. Furthermore, these questions will also open up for a discussion of how the movies then are contributing in producing or challenging hierarchical differences. As will be discussed in the section of theory, these are questions that are usually discussed and posed in the fields. Accordingly building on already well-established approaches strengthens the validity of the paper (Esaiasson et.al. 2012, p.216).

The coding and the categorization of the material will be in line with previous research and critically look at systems of representation that are taking place in the movies. Accordingly, central to the coding will be the themes and concepts of, colonial discourse, othering and subjectivity when examining what is going on, what people are saying and what is the context of the material. This is in line with what hooks (1996, p.74) argues, stating that representations of an ethnic minority in cinema demands an extra scrutiny due to its connection with ethnographic cinema in the light of the history of colonialist adventurism, showing images of a “dark Other” from the stand point of whiteness. The operationalization will consist of indicators for; (1) colonial discourse that will be in accordance with the definitions of the theory; (2) othering that could be identified by dichotomous discourses, i.e. civilized/uncivilized, cultural/ natural, superior/inferior etc. also indications of objectification and commodification of blackness such as exotification and desire that can be exemplified by images of the “Other” as more dangerous and fun, and also stereotyping in line with Hall’s
definition; (3) subjectivity that identifies the agency of the characters, i.e. the independent function the person has to bring the story forward related to the dichotomy of active/passive and subject formation. The chosen indicators are in line with what Shohat & Stam (2014, p.138) argue; they state that within the racialized discourses during colonial time, the mechanism of naturalization that the colonized peoples were ascribed functioned as a reduction of the cultural to the biological. Association of the colonized with nature and wilderness further shaped notions of how the colonized people were projected as body rather than mind, as raw material instead of mental activity. Furthermore by turning to Hall (1997, p. 243), who identifies that the creation of binary oppositions within racialized discourse was used during the colonial era to racialize the “Other”, can we understand the connection between colonial discourses and othering. Accordingly, by coding behaviours, activities and meanings that directs actions in passages in the movies, on the grounds of postcolonial theory, I strive to achieve a coding that is descriptive but also analytical. Furthermore posing these questions in a systematic way and being transparent in my argumentation and coding of the material will function as my analytical tool and requirements for the deductions made in the thesis.

2.3. SELECTION OF MATERIAL
The empiric material will compose of two French movies in the drama genre, which depict images of class, race and gender in certain aspects and have gotten prestigious recognition in the movie industry. Both these movies are addressing class, race and gender problems in the context of France and I will in my analysis of them discuss the potentiality of them contributing to a discourse of postcolonial imageries. I selected the movies in which the protagonists of the films are from a minority group and living in “la cité”, which is a suburb that is defined by low socioeconomic standard and can be compared to the English “the projects”. Accordingly the films thus comprise representations of characters from, or families from former French colonies living in migrant dominated areas. Further, to choose the films I also looked at movies with national and international success to enhance the relevance of the movies in relation to the impact of visual representations. Additionally, the category of contemporary French cinema is a broad one, thus, to narrow the selection I chose to focus on films from the drama genre with a focus on the diaspora to increase the relevance and connection with postcolonial theory. First, is the movie Girlhood (original title is Bande de filles) from 2014 made by French director Céline Sciamma, distributed by Pyramide Films.
The film is about Marieme, a 16-year-old girl who lives in one of the cité outside of Paris where she is confined to rules made by the school, the neighborhood and the men. This is until she meets a group of girls and is introduced to their liberated world, where they dance, laugh and fight, and Marieme becomes Vic as in Victoire (Victory) (Pyramide Films, 2017). Secondly, is the French film The Intouchables (original title Intouchables) by Eric Toledano and Olivier Nakache distributed by Gaumont. The two protagonists in the movie are Philippe, a rich aristocrat, who after an accident becomes paralyzed and needs a caregiver and hires Driss, who lives in la cité and was recently released from prison. In the fusion of the two men’s universes an unexpected friendship is built (Gaumont, 2017). Both of the movies have been nominated and won prestigious cinema prices both in France and internationally (IMDB 2017 1, IMDB 2017 2), which arguable increase their relevance of investigation since they reach larger audiences. I will in addition to the films, include interviews with the directors made by film critics as analyzing material.

2.4. PROBLEMS AND LIMITATIONS
To start with, it is worth noting how the relativistic position of CDA separates from the traditional essentialist ideas of social science and creates a disagreement in the aspect of theory and methodology. Accordingly, qualitative research primarily seeks to be meaningful in a specific context rather than striving to be universally applicable and generalizing. In addition, within the qualitative approach the researcher faces the problem of bias due to the researcher position as an instrument in both selection and coding of the material (Drisko & Maschi, 2015, p.92). Nevertheless, Drisko and Maschi (ibid, p.117) argue that through self-reflection one can detect personal bias that may affect methodological and analytical decisions and allow for addressing them overtly. Arguably, with the separation from the quantitative research where statistical interpretation and objective reasoning are key elements, the subjective side of qualitative research should be seen as positive and instrumental to deepen the understanding of the material if completed in a satisfying manner. In order to guarantee trustworthiness of the results of a qualitative research, and approaching the thinking of validity and reliability of the quantitative research, accounting for transparency of the study, such as clarifying how the results reflect the material, personal bias and being consistent and systematical in the analytical process, is necessary. While these are directions I will work by to increase the reliability of the thesis, there is always the aspect of subjective interpretation that has to be emphasized that compromises with guarantying good reliability.
Nonetheless, by applying both CDA and content analysis I hope to achieve a broader perspective through triangulation to increase the strength of the analysis in terms of validity.

The selection of the two movies was made in accordance with my research question and methodology, hence the aim at looking at representation on the movie screen in relation to postcolonial theory in the context of France. Both of the movies take place or partly take place in the suburbs of Paris and have protagonists who are West African French, however, only the director of *Girlhood* actively chose to cast black actors while the makers of *The Intouchables* denounces the importance of race for the story. I thought that this is an aspect that could be an interesting analytical point and see how the subject is treated differently from the two positions. Thus, these two different positions in relation to race will be further discussed in the section of the analysis, and were consciously chosen in order to have diversity within the cases. With the qualitative approach and only two films composing the data, the result of the thesis does not claim to result in a generalization of the representation in French contemporary cinema; rather the aim is to exemplify how dominant hierarchies permeate social institutions, such as culture, on different levels. Accordingly, I am aware of that another choice of movies might have lead to other conclusions, and that therefore the results of the thesis cannot be applied to other areas. In line with the open character of the research question I wish to open for a discussion where different interpretations and opinions are possible simultaneously as demonstrating my findings that are connected to the chosen theories.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section of the thesis aims to describe the theoretical framework used. Firstly, an introduction to the relation between postcolonial theory and France will be presented followed by a review of previous research. Thereafter will an argumentation follow of the notion of representation within postcolonial theory and cultural studies, drawing on the work of scholars I will mainly use. Lastly, this section concludes with a theoretical argument about the relationship between culture and political science and how they are related to each other and how the thesis contribute to earlier research in the field.
3.1. POSTCOLONIAL THEORY AND FRANCE

The field of postcolonial theory, in relation to France, have arguably possessed a leading position and been shaped by francophone anticolonial discourses and by French poststructuralist theory, i.e. writings of Foucault and Derrida. Likewise, postcolonial critique have been raised by francophone writers such as Césaire, Senghor and Fanon, who’s work inspired further writers like Said, Spivak and Bhabha who also build on work within French theory, exampled by Fanon’s dissection of the colonial imagery and decentring of Europe in *Wretched of the Earth* and Said’s anti-Orientalist critique (Shohat & Stam, 2012, p.86). In other words, the theories of poststructuralist which talked little about colonialism, have nevertheless inspired many postcolonial thinkers, i.e. concerning how knowledge is produced, who applied the ideas on their systematic research-interest in colonialism. Furthermore, a critical scrutiny is necessary of the term postcolonial and what it means with postcolonial theory. My usage of the term postcolonial and also how I will apply postcolonial theory are in line with Shohat and Stam’s discussion (2014, p.38-41). They argue that the word ‘post’ in postcolonialism invokes a reductive sense of the political meaning and implications and underline a closure of a historical period. For the former colonized countries, independence rarely meant a stop of the hegemonic structures that had prevailed for 500 years, and the term thus risks lacking a political analysis of contemporary power relations. Similarly they critique how the notion of post also fails to accurately reveal the asymmetry relation for (ex-) colonizer and (ex-) colonized, and neutralizes the differences between colonized countries and the colonizer countries. In relation to the word postcolonial, signifying the after, an articulation of neo-colonial illuminates the structural continuities of colonialism, that post fails to, and defines geo-economic hegemony and contemporary domination and resistance. In line with the discussion, postcolonial theory presupposes a theoretical framework that struggles to illuminate certain issues of time and history in relation to linearity. However it is also a theoretical framework that draws from the anti-essentialist poststructuralism, and avoids seeing identity along purist lines. Accordingly, postcolonial theory tries to nuance the complexities by paying attention to the multiple identities generated by geographical displacement that followed the post-independence era and thus incorporates the continuities of colonialism and includes neo-colonial aspects. Consequently, I will in this thesis by using postcolonial theory, that provides a historical perspective to contemporary phenomenon, examine representation of how identities are constituted within and shaped by colonial discourses and contradictions of the postcolonial condition. The usage of postcolonial will be
in accordance with the above discussion and encompass colonial continuities after independence.

Moreover, as argued by Shohat and Stam (2012, p.84, 88f) postcolonial theory has been lacking in contemporary French intellectual discourse and institutions, despite being the postcolonial nation it is with a large number of former colonial subjects living in diaspora in different minorities in France. They stress how different French scholars are seeing how the situation in contemporary France both demonstrates continuities and discontinuities of the colonial past, such as residents of suburbs still experience themselves as “colonized people” due to the social fracture creating unequal right to political existence. Additionally, others argue that contemporary social injustice cannot be reduced to solely be explained by colonial orders of racial domination, though through a postcolonial thinking, the connection between past and present can be recognized. However, Shohat and Stam (ibid, p.95f) discuss how in accordance with French politics, diasporic identities were for long a taboo. In contrast to the situation in the US, political claims in relation to racial identities had no room in political discourses. Lastly, one of the most established critical voices of postcolonial theory in France is Jean-Francois Bayart who is director of research at CNRS. He, inter alia, claims that postcolonial theory fails to recognize the heterogeneity of France and instead essentializes the country. Further he argues that the French postcolonial writers such as Césaire, Senghor, Memmi and Sartre practised postcolonial studies, and therefore France no longer needs it. However, Shohat and Stam, stresses that these writers were founding fathers of postcolonialism, but were not active in the discursive shift embodied by the postcolonial theory (ibid, p.109f).

3.2. PREVIOUS RESEARCH
As mentioned above, there are leading writers within postcolonial thinking, such as Fanon, Césaire, Said, Senghor, Baldwin and Memmi who were arguably influential for later postcolonial theory scholars such as Spivak, Bhabha, McClintock, Mohanty, Shohat. Similarly these authors have inspired and contributed to the field of cultural studies, and scholars such as Hall, Ahmed, and hooks. The two fields often overlap, as shown in the work of hooks (2009 (1996)), Diawara (1993), Ahmed (2010) and Hall (1997). However, I will in the thesis mainly draw on the work of Fanon, McClintock, Spivak, Shohat, Hall and hooks in regards to the concept of representation. The work of Fanon is fundamental within in the area
and developed a postcolonial canon that identified the hierarchical relation between the colonizer and the colonized. With *Wreathed of the Earth*, (1963 (1961)), Fanon articulated thoughts about colonialism defining it as a Manichean system, a division in two, where in the process of colonisation the colonizer and the colonized were produced, identities that did not exist prior to colonialism. All aspect of the colonial system were embedded and affected by this division at the same time as the division was embodied by difference of conditions, stating the colonizers superiority and dehumanising of the colonized in order to legitimize the domination. Fanon argued that the domination of colonisation was inherently violent due to the power dimension that was visible at all times, exhibited by the colonizer states as a threatening response to any resistance. With his critique, Fanon contributed to both a new political and psychological understanding of colonialism and highlighted the issue of political subjectivity in his review of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonised. He also used the notion of the “Other” to describe how existing hierarchical structures construct identities in opposition against one identity considered as a norm in the context of colonial thinking, and by this illuminated the consequence of internalized racism for the colonized.

This feature of the postcolonial canon will I take into account in my reading of the empirical material. However I will go further by using the work of Spivak, McClintock and hooks who apply a more intersectional perspective on postcolonial theory and hence include an analysis of gender, class, race and sexuality. McClintock confronts Fanon’s understanding of the Manichean dialect, and argues that he excludes gender as agency, and by excluding a notion of gender one presumes that subjectivity is neutral in regards to it (McCintock, 1995, p.363). For McClintock, race, class and gender are articulated categories that come into existence through and in relation of each other. Further McClintock stresses the geographical dimension of imperialism and states that it was not something that only took place elsewhere; rather it was a fundamental aspect of Western industrial modernity. She connects it with the concept of race and with the invention and making of whiteness that needs to be recognizes as a problem, and critically looks at the position of whiteness as a perceived invisible norm (ibid, p.5-8). Accordingly, drawing on the extended thinking of colonialism and imperialism and its connection with race and gender of McClintock, who places whiteness and the metropole in centre of focus, I will strive to operationalize this thinking in my analyses of the movies. Thus, I will illustrate in the empirics the dimensions of how not only blackness is represented but also how it relates to whiteness and the power that colours the dialectic relation between
them and include the axis of gender and class, in line with both the ideas of Fanon and McClintock.

3.3. REPRESENTATION
The concept of representation has manifold meanings, thus, it requires a specification of the usage of the term in this thesis. In the social sciences, representation is usually used to discuss the political and democratic representations, which have been explored by writers such as Pitkin & Samuel (2013) and Mansbridge (1999). Nevertheless, I will rather use it in line with Hall’s constructionist definition, which sees representation as an essential part in the process of producing and exchanging meaning between people in a culture and involves language, signs and images that stand for and represent things (Hall, 1997, p.15). Further Hall (ibid. p. 28) stresses that language is not a reflection of the world, though that meaning is produced within language and through different representational systems. Accordingly, meaning is produced by the practice of representation and constructed through signifying practices.

Concerning representation, Spivak has also contributed to valuable critique in the context of postcolonial studies. She raises the question of the inherent limitations of western, patriarchal knowledge regarding representation of non-western subjects, and how it can contribute to mask real social political inequalities. The ethical problem lies in the relationship of privileged intellectuals speaking on the behalf of (representing) oppressed groups, which risk producing homogeneous images of the actual heterogeneity of the colonized body. In Can the subaltern speak? Spivak also asks the question not only about the subaltern’s ability to speak but also if the oppressor can speak, and emphasizes the problematic of how can the oppressor represent the subaltern if they do not have a voice that the oppressor can listen to. She relates the issue to the concept epistemic violence to refer to how; historically, western epistemology was used to legitimize Europeans exercising political and military violence on non-European cultures (Spivak, 1988). Thus, with representation comes the ethical problem of production of epistemology and universal concepts and frameworks that arguably have to be considered carefully when investigating representations of different cultures. I will in the analysis of the empiric material turn to the critic of Spivak and her notion of representation and its close connection to violence through the production of epistemology and Hall’s thorough analysis of the practices of representation.
3.4. CULTURE AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

To further understand the correlation of culture and politics and political science we can look back to what Said argued in *Orientalism*, where he describes the corollary of western writers, thinkers and travellers jointly constructed the field of orientalism, depicting images and representations of the Orient. Said argues that the Orient that appears through the texts in Orientalism, is a system of representation, that with force, was brought onto the Orient within Western learning. Further, Said highlights the political activities of Orientalism, producing an essentialist body of knowledge about the people, civilisations and places, shaping images of oriental despotism and oriental sensuality, in relation to the self-image of the Occident (2003 (1978), p.202-205). In other words, this exemplifies how representations in culture and academia can contribute to serve the purpose of ideological and political agendas. Said refers to the then prevailing colonial discourse that constructed imaginative images of the Orient as the “Other” by distancing it from the image of the West, a discourse that was used to legitimized the colonization. Moreover, Shohat & Stam (2014, p.93, 103) account for how European cinema from its beginning inherited the racist and colonialist discourse that prevailed, and became in itself a product of western epistemology by mediating progress of western civilization though narratives about explorers, scientist and inventors. The colonized space thus became available to the imageries of imperial cinema, beliefs about the origins and evolution of nations and nationhood crystalized in the form of stories. Thus they argue that cinema was an effective tool to mobilize desire to nationalized and imperialized notion of time and history and fostered national identity as it reached many people. In a contemporary situation bell hooks (2009 (1996), p.9) argues that within the field of culture studies many critical investigations of this old colonial and racial imagery are applied to representations in movies and culture, however it is still a frequently occurring problem. She claims that many filmmakers cast people of colour but nonetheless fail to create a decolonizing perspective and instead contribute to stereotypical representations. Further hooks (ibid, p.90f) argues in order to create images from a decolonized perspective both filmmakers and audience must learn new ways to appreciate and recognize them, as the process of how we look at images are political and that images are not neutral in themselves. The movie culture functions as a site to reproduce and perpetuate a white supremacist and patriarchal hegemonic aesthetics, thus a resistance to these images is necessary to achieve more progressive on screen visions and representations (ibid, p.95). Arguably we can understand hook’s argument of the politics of images deeper when understood in connection with Stuart Hall’s understanding of
stereotyping. According to Hall (1997) the mechanism of stereotyping is a reductive one, and it essentializes, neutralizes and fixates differences, hence it leads to objectification.

I strive in this thesis to, by combining the disciplines of cultural studies and postcolonial theory, to develop a theoretical framework to investigate postcolonial system of representation within French contemporary cinema. By focusing on a French context, where both postcolonial theory and cultural studies are less developed I hope that my contribution can help fill this theoretical gap. In line with the qualitative methodology, by using these theories I attempt to expand the information of the data that composes of the two movies. The interdisciplinary character of the thesis comes from the theory application drawing on previous postcolonial theory research and cultural studies, while the extradisciplinary quality lies in the paper’s focus on popular culture, i.e. cinema. The coding of the material will thus compose of critical questions posed on how the characters from black minorities in France are presented. By connecting the images to the theories of hooks, Hall, Fanon, Spivak and Shohat investigate if a potential persistence of colonial discourses is present in the portrayals of the characters. In other words, with the key features identified concerning representation, difference and othering, power and knowledge in the postcolonial canon of the above discussed authors, the thesis strives to make a theoretical contribution to this body of literature which is empirically driven.

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

*This section will present the empirical investigation of the study. Initially will a presentation of the findings from the movie Girlhood be offered and then followed by the analysis of the second film The Intouchables. Thereafter, will a discussion and highlighting of the main findings of the study close the section.*

In accordance with the theory and methodology, the thesis’ analysis consists of a critical reading of the filmic narrative of the movies and through a descriptive and analytical understanding and coding identify discourses of race, class, and gender and examine what they are saying and to whom. Accordingly, central to the coding will be the indicators presented in the methodology section. Further the analysis will take into account weather the embedded messages in the stories are progressive in terms of producing counterhegemonic representations or if they follow conventional structures of domination and colonial discursive legacies in regards to race, class and gender.
4.1. GIRLHOOD

The opening scene of Girlhood takes the viewers into what seems like a parallel universe and the scene exists outside of the rest of the movie’s context. To the sound of up-beat electro music, we see 20 black girls playing American football, there are no spectators, only them, and it is serious, violent and cheerful. The scene disrupts dominant representations of black young women by its playfulness; it provides a visual possibility of reconstruction of images. From the scene with the girls screaming, laughing and cheering, we are however drastically taken into the next scene that takes place in the suburb where they live, the girls are now silent and only talking from teenage guys is heard. Already here, Sciamma hints that it is the men who make the rules in the neighbourhood. Accordingly the scene with the football becomes more of an experimental one, playing with occupation of space in relation to gender, which is a present theme throughout the movie. When Marieme comes home after the practice, the spectator is introduced to her family situation. The mother is working even though it is late at night, Marieme directly takes the role of seeing after her younger sisters and cleaning in the house and the earlier playfulness is now repressed. Racist and sexist thinking about young black female identity is discussed by bell hooks (2009(1996), p.54) who argues that showing uncritical images of how black girls are forced to assume adult roles in the home, nurtures denigration of black girlhood and romanticizes it as natural process of socialization. This violation of black girlhood is affirmed in the movie’s representation of gender distinctions of household chores and is conversely not critically challenged resulting in confining Marieme’s subjectivity. Therefore I argue that the movie should have included a scene where this is being criticized, for example Marieme resisting it at one point, and thus include a critical voice that opposes it as natural. From the family introduction it becomes evident that the father is absent, and later her elder brother Djibril is briefly introduced, who we are not to know more than that he is occupying the Fifa PlayStation in his room, a sphere coded as masculine that Marieme wants access to, and that he is repeatedly violent abusive with her.

Apart from Ismael, a friend of Djibril that Marieme starts a relationship with, all black male characters in the movie are villainized, i.e. the absent father, violent brother, the guys on the streets with their symbolic power and Abdou, who Marieme starts to work for by selling drugs and who also in one scene gets violent with her. Arguably what is mediated through the
film’s narrative of black men and the space they occupy indicate a homogenous image of the black male as untrustworthy, dominant and violent, hence as uncivilised in line with indicators of colonial dichotomous discourses. By not including a more nuanced developed black male character, Sciamma tends to contribute to a stereotypical representation of black men by reducing them to solely embodying a few negative features in line with Hall’s definition of stereotyping. Furthermore, this also exemplifies how the struggle of representation differs from cases of representing an oppressed community from those of a dominant group. Shohat and Stam (2014, p.179-183) discuss the issue and recognizes that the affect of negative representations of oppressed groups become generalized and symbolic within hegemonic discourses and are seen as a presumed negative essence. While negative representations of dominant groups are interpreted as unessentialist variations of life and are not harmful in the same way, thus negative images of an underrepresented group becomes unavoidably overcharged with symbolic value. Accordingly, this is because the images operate on a continuum with other representations, which determine the different consequences of negative representations of oppressed/dominant groups. In other words, a community with social power can resist the images while to a disempowered group they need to be understood in their intertextual context and how they contribute to a structural violence against these communities together with other images. Accordingly, Shohat and Stam further stresses how fiction in cinema brings into play real-life assumptions about space, time and social and cultural relationships, and implicitly make factual claims without claiming to represent real historical events. Thus, if we investigate what subject positions Sciamma ascribes the black men in the movie; we find that they are not only negative but also one-dimensional and are without room for meaningful subject creation, they are reduced to be delinquents, which consequently contributes to a form of othering. Here we can identify the indicators of subjectivity and othering and further how they are connected, as othering limits agency and subjectivity. Similarly hooks argues, representations of black men as lacking and subordinated in existing social hierarchies is part of the colonial culture to maintain dominant structures (2009(1996), p.105). Arguably, by including a black male character that were more developed, or not to have all these negative representations, the movie could have avoided reproducing reductive images of black men and reproducing social hierarchies.

Concurrently in this coming of age story, the portrayal of the black female main character Marieme who later takes the name Vic, as in “Victoire”, as she joins a girl gang, I argue offers explicit critical practices of black female subjectivity. In one scene, Marieme and her
newly found friends take into a hotel room with money that they forced by threat younger girls to give to them. They put make-up on, smoke and drink alcohol and wear shoplifted clothes. The scene does not only indicate that femininity is constructed through the application of make up and dresses it also demonstrates a cinematic narrative that undermine classic struggle of black female subjectivity. In the scene they exist outside of societal authorities, without a masculine gaze, here it is their gaze that defines who they are, and they recognizes each others subjectivity independently from the outside dominant structures. Thus the scene invites us to look differently at the black young women and challenges a voyeuristic colonial gaze as we see them dancing to Rihanna’s song *Diamonds*. Accordingly the scene avoids othering of black women by not relying on objectification and consequently offers space for active subjectivity formation. Further by offering a disrupt way of representing black women and a counter discourse as it does not include any of the indicators, the scene also highlight the question of spectatorship and provides for black female spectators new possibilities for identification. As hooks argues, drawing from Hall, critical practices that provide alternative ways of thinking about black female subjectivity are crucial for black female spectators as identity is constituted not outside but within representation (2009(1996), p.274).

In another scene, Sciamma continues to play with agency of subjectivity and disrupts classic interpretation of the gaze and offers a counter discourse. Here, Vic let her desire for Ismael control her decisions as she walks to his home in the middle of the night and demands him to take his clothes off. There is a long moment, when she remains dressed and it is his body that gets objectified from her perspective, before she joins him and initiates to have sex. Sciamma constructs here an oppositional gaze from that of how Mulvey identifies the cinematic relations of the gaze and subjectivity. Mulvey (2013(1975)) argues (without including the factor of race) that there is a sexual imbalance in the world that assumes that active is male and passive is female. It is the deterrant male gaze that projects its fantasises and desires on female characters, whose’ purposes are to be watched and desired. For Mulvey the cinematic gaze is male, both in terms of the director holding the camera, the male main character, but also the spectator’s gaze is coded as male. Thus, the oppositional gaze that Sciamma creates is not only oppositional in terms of gender, she being a female director, it also experiments with having a black female character struggling for subjectivity in terms of sexuality and desire and deconstructs the image of men as active and women as sexualised passive victims. Together the scenes of the hotel room and the sex scene, Sciamma offers new images of black
female subjectivity in terms of agency and gaze and forces the spectators to renounce the traditional objectifying male gaze.

Furthermore, in an interview the director claims that her purpose was not to tell a story of a black girl, arguing that she cannot since she is white, thus realizes that her whiteness is a hinder for her. Further she states that she wanted to tell a coming of age story of a girl, friendship and sorority, and wanted a black girl to embody this and accordingly for black to be accepted as universal. Further Sciamma acknowledges in the interview that she, as an established white director, had the privileges of making this movie with an all black cast. She recognizes that it is not the same movie as if a black female director would have done it in terms of interpreting on screen black experiences, also why it was her and not a black director who had the opportunity to make it (IndieWire, 2015). However she does not explore further on the theme of the politics of commodification of blackness and appropriation of black culture and taking the critique of her position of whiteness further in her working process.

Arguably, Sciamma succeeds in portraying this character as universal in this coming of age story in terms of exploring self-identity and the un-judgemental depiction of drinking, smoking and stealing, that are common in this type of stories, which are done without consequences. Conversely, by telling the story in the context of a low socio-economic suburb of Paris, showing homogenous representations of black men, absent parents, failing in school and also how the girls participate in arranged girl fights and take every chance they can to have verbal fights with other black girls on the streets, we come further away from a universal coming of age story and closer to Sciamma’s imaginaries of what it is like being a black girl in the suburb. The main character is multi-dimensional and is not reduced to a few characteristics; nonetheless the depictions of the suburb with fighting, drugs and failing school are reproducing established stereotypes, and can be recognized as an indicator of othering. Albeit these may be occurring events in suburbs, the choice to include all of them in the movie, I argue, leads to an objectification of the suburb and its inhabitants by reinforcing them all and not offer counter images. These representations of poor black culture are working towards othering through these objectifications that fails to differentiate between preconception and reality, and could have been avoided by not including them all.

Overall, when looking at the film’s context with an all black cast and four young women as principal characters together with the fact that it is made by a white female director, the question of sensibility of representation and the perspective of positions becomes extra
relevant. The problem lies in positionality of as an outsider looking in, assuming to have a neutral gaze. hooks (2009(1996), p.287) maintains that the relationship between representation of marginalized black culture and white consumer appetite for blackness risks producing commodification and appropriation of black culture if an interrogation of whiteness is excluded. She relates it to the colonial times when white cultural imperialism of movies showing the adventure journeys to the countries and cultures of the “dark Other”, which allowed the white audience to consume black culture and applaud it if they liked how it was represented. Accordingly, the film, seen in the context of contemporary France and the country’s colonial history with a postcolonial thinking, tends to reengage the problematic of a colonial fantasy and desire for the exotic “Other”, without including a thorough interrogation of the position of whiteness and structural racism. With the noted issue of minority identity politics in France, which makes it harder to articulate the problem of representations of minorities and also the lack of black female directors, the film however contribute to the debate and highlights the lack of black female directors and diverse representations of the suburbs. It offered challenging images of black female subjectivity at the same time as it reproduced already harmful stereotypes of the suburbs and in general raises the issue if commodification of marginalized culture. Accordingly, the representations of black men and women in the film are ascribed more symbolic value because of their marginalized position, but also due to the few cinematic representations that exists of these communities in French contemporary cinema.

Furthermore, the positive reception from the white spectators from the cultural world indicates the relationship of a desire of consuming other cultures, which is problematic in terms of the unequal power that lies in representational subjectivity, i.e. who is being represented and who is representing. The movie offered the white spectators an insight of a marginalised culture they would not otherwise be in contact with and this without having to reflect over the power relation, as the movie does not go into the question of structural racism. Accordingly, considering black spectatorship, the movie offered one of France’s first full black cast movie and counterhegemonic representation of black female subjectivity, concurrently as it failed to in its narrative offer images of minorities in the suburb that disrupts dominant discourses and question hierarchical racial structures in France.
4.2. *THE INTOUCHABLES*

The opening scene of the movie is intriguing as we see two men in a car trying to drive away from the police, here the relationship between the two characters is yet unknown, they are still equal. However, in the following scene it is revealed to the spectator the imbalance of the relationship between the very rich and white Philippe and poor black Driss. From the scene it becomes clear that Philippe who is quadriplegic needs a new caretaker and Driss, who we later finds out just has gotten out from prison, shows up to the interview. Although not with the motivation to get the job but to be eligible to receive welfare, which you have to attend three interviews to obtain. The brute manner of Driss is met with disgust from the white female workers of Philippe, while he seems to be amused by Driss’ lack of professional compartment and sexist jokes about the personal assistant. With this scene, the directors set the tone that will continuously be present throughout the movie, the two men bonding over talking about women in an objectifying way and what seems like an innocent battle over who’s music taste is the best, but rather indicates clear positionality of dominant class structures. Which is demonstrated by Philippe introducing the big composers of classical music and goes to the opera with Driss, who responds by ridiculing it and counters with soul music from the 70’s. Accordingly, this indicates that a black man from the poor suburbs is unable to find enjoyment in what is valued as fine culture such as classical music, opera, poetry and art. Even though Driss resists acknowledging classical music and opera as the best, in the context of class and race oppression, the resistance need to go further than to solely disagree to actually challenge and oppose the hierarchies of power orders. Arguably, in the movie they do not disrupt dominant way of thinking about culture and class and what is higher valued and how these representations are linked to power. Consequently, the representation of subjectivity and social identity in the portrayal of the two characters is reduced to a binary discourse that polarizes them to white/black, rich/poor, cultural/uncultural and intellectual/ unintellectual and suggests a process of othering.

Turning back to what Hall (1997, p. 243) identified, as discussed in the methodology, the creation of binary oppositions within racialized discourse was used during the colonial era to racialize the “Other”. Stating the opposition between bodily characteristics and cultural expressions were used as signifiers of difference between different races and highlights how the visual body was used in the production of racialized knowledge. The visible difference of the body functioned as an evidence for naturalization of difference and became a discursive site through which racialized knowledge was produced. Furthermore, Shohat & Stam (2014,
p.138) also highlight that within the racialized discourses during colonial time, the colonized people were reduced to be associated with nature and biological characteristics rather than cultural and shaped the notion of how the colonized people were projected as body rather than mind, as raw material instead of mental activity. In the light of this discussion the movie arguably finds its most harmful representations and form of othering. In one scene with Philippe and his friend, the friend first states his worries about Philippe and his choice of hiring a guy from the projects, hinting that Driss is dangerous, violent and incapable of being emphatic due to where he is coming from and his criminal history. Philippe’s response is remarkably not to denote this about Driss, instead he claims that he does not want empathy and then goes on by evaluating the body of Driss, stating that he hired him because he is big and strong and end by adding that he is not as dumb as you think. Arguably, here Philippe both objectifies and dehumanizes Driss by talking of him as a commodity, which brings us back to colonial discourses where the black male body was reduced to being only a body rather than a mind.

In another scene Driss’ body is again the centre of focus, it is Philipp’s birthday party and after having had to put up with a live classical music performance, Driss decides to heat up the party by playing soul music and starts a dance performance for the people, who after some time of watching his dance moves join him. Furthermore this scene also highlights how Driss brings something different into Philipp’s world, something new and fun. However, I argue that the entertainment Philippe finds in Driss should be interpreted as what hooks (1992, p.21ff) defines as an example of how racial difference is used in contemporary media to assert pleasure, and consequently used as commodification of otherness. She identifies how commodity culture and ethnicity is used as a seasoning that brings life into mainstream white culture, and reveals fantasies and desires for contact with the “Other” and accordingly the exploitation that only maintains the status quo. This since it does not contribute to subverting racist domination and instead function as an instrumental space where the dominant race can affirm their power in the relation. Subsequently, much of the relationship of Philippe and Driss, as I argued, consist of the amusement Philippe finds in the fact that Driss does not know aristocratic etiquette, which demonstrates how otherness in the movie is used to serve the purpose of entertainment in white culture and exemplifies the indicator of how exotification produces othering. I argue that instead, within the representation of their friendship, the directors should have concurrently recognized the race and class difference to enable an equal relation between the characters. However they do share intimate
conversations. Though, in these scenes it is Philippe’s life that the spectator gets to know, the tragedy of the death of his wife and his accident, while no questions are asked about the personal life of Driss. As the movie mostly takes place in the home of Philippe, the viewer gets a close understanding of him and even the life of his teenage daughter. Concurrently, the few scenes that take place in the home of Driss in the suburb depict stereotypical images, showing him and his friends smoking weed during the day and how his young cousin is getting in trouble and hanging out with bad people. The one time Philippe is actually introduced with the family and life of Driss, is when his cousin comes to Driss to hide out from the bad people. Without inquiring what has happened Philippe interprets it as Driss can no longer work for him and is needed at home. This is the end of the working relationship of Philippe and Driss and what at first also looks like the end of their friendship.

Driss seems to be the one of them who actually had a personal development as he applies for other jobs, while Philippe enters a depressed state of mind. The two are reunited when one of the other workers of Philippe calls Driss to come back and see Philippe and help him out. This dependency on Driss is an interesting feature of the movie and disrupts historical colonial narratives of the master/ slave relationship where the slave’s existence only excited in relation to his master. However the imbalance of the interest in the life of Driss and his family compared to the life of Philippe that the movie represents, indicates a valorisation that agrees with dominant class and racial structures, where the life of marginalised poor black people are devalued in relation to wealthy white subjects. Therefore, when examining the relationship between Driss and Philippe we need to look further than seeing their friendship as an eradication of racial domination.

However, in an interview with the directors where they are questioned about the character of Driss being a racial stereotype, they disclaim it and renounce that the movie is about race and that there is no hierarchy in the relationship between the two principal characters. They state that they wanted to tell the story as close as they could to the real one that the film is based upon. Further they stress that the critique, which came from an American journalist, is because there is in the USA an on-going debate about race, and the critic therefore sees an issue of race where there is none (Huffingtonpost, 2012). Thus, they indicate here, in line with the critics of postcolonial theory in France, that the issue of race and identity politics is neither present nor relevant in a French context. However Shohat & Stam (2014, p. 178f) argue, when looking on ethnic/racial colonial representations in relation to the question of
realism and truth in an uncritical way, stereotypical and distorted images can be defended as “real” and mask the political side of representation. Accordingly, by denouncing the theme of race in the story and claim that it is based on real characters, the directors place the story outside of the historical context of French colonialism. By doing so they adopt a narrative that fails to critically challenge white conceptions of the dark “Other”, and results in appropriation and commodification of otherness. As hooks (1992, p.26ff) argues, marginalized groups have for long been rendered invisible, but through the commodification of otherness, are used to offer reconciliation to dominant structures without challenging them or radically question these representations. The desire of contact with the “Other” is based on a denial of racism and the encounters are marked as more exciting, intense and threatening, and the “Other” is coded as more capable of being alive, which is demonstrated in the movie. Further hooks acknowledges that contact between races that is not based on denial or fantasies needs a mutual recognition of racism and its impact. Although in contemporary culture it is this racialized dynamic that is often masked in representations of the contact between white and non-white, which the movie exemplifies.

Overall, I argue that The intouchables is a movie that, albeit what the directors claim, with its representations inevitably brings up questions about hierarchical race and class structures. With its stereotypic representation of a poor black man and a wealthy white man, the movie contributes to maintain the social symbolic order. Arguably due to the power inequality between them, their peaceful coexistence and friendship is rather embedded with a violent hierarchy. However in the movie these aspects are not critically illuminated and their friendship serves instead the purpose to tell a story where people from different class and race background can reconcile, and masks how blackness is appropriated to convey this message. The othering in the movie is not only composed of the stereotype of black men as reduced to their bodies, but also with his difference. Driss brings more life into Philippe’s every day life, thus he is ascribed the danger and pleasure that are more capable of living that hooks argues are traits, which otherness as a commodity is coded with within dominant white culture.

4.3. DISCUSSION
In line with the analysis of the movies, I strived in the thesis to theorize the analysis of colonialist racism that are manifested and challenged in the representations in the two contemporary French movies. Accordingly, the power of cinema is recognized as a generator
of production of meaning and discourses. By looking at representational practices, including stereotyping, in the empirical material and examining prolonged features of colonial legacies such as appropriation, racialized discourse and production of otherness, the analysis incorporates the dimensions of subjectivity and gaze. Thus, it brings us back to the earlier discussed question posed by Spivak; if the subalterns can speak and weather then the non-subaltern can represent the subaltern, and raises the issue of the subjectivity and the asymmetrical relationalities of domination that marks representation. As the analysis shows, it becomes clear that the movies constitute a space for shaping identities along the different relationalities, such as gender, class, sexuality and race. One of the problematic identified is the issue of the directors of the two movies being white, thus the representations of minorities are made by majority group and does not critically deal with the unequal power relation embedded in this positionality.

At the same time as I believe that it is possible to create meaningful imageries of communities other than your one, as well as that, for example a black director can reproduce racist representations; I still argue that when minority groups are represented by a majority group, imbedded power imbalances needs to be recognized. Otherwise, as exemplified in the empirical material, the dominant representations risk producing imageries of the minority that are associated with certain problems and are then delineated to how they are perceived by others but also how they will perceive themselves, in line with the process of internalised racism that both Fanon and Said theorized about. Noteworthy, the issue does not only concern negative representations of otherness, also positive ones when reduced to being an exotic commodity, which is equally limiting as representation. Thus the question in centre of interrogation should rather be whether if there is within these representations space for diverse and meaningful subject creation as identification is constituted within representations. Turning to the results found in the material, The Intouchables exemplified how, in accordance with stereotyping practices from colonial discourses, images of blackness were reduced to its bodily function and simultaneously appropriated to “spice” up white upper-class culture. Hence, indicating how othering and objectification divest possibility for agency and subjectivity. The subjectivity of the two characters was mainly composed of a binary oppositional discourse. The representations in Girlhood are on the one hand counterhegemonic by showing black female subjectivity as multidimensional and played with the idea of blackness being able to be universal, and on the other hand tended to appropriate poor black culture as a commodity for the film’s narrative. The problem with appropriation
lies in the positionality between whiteness and blackness, and in the case, the power of white directors to select certain conceptions of blackness that will be commoditised and commercialized into representing black culture.

In connection with the theory, the postcolonial thinkers highlighted in their work the dialectic relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. Fanon identified it as a Manichean relationship; Said stressed the historical interconnection of the production of western culture and the culture of the east. Spivak goes further and acknowledges the existence Manichean discourse of the colonizer, but argues that it is also codified within the patriarchal discourse and highlights the need to include a matrix of intersecting power structures. She critically looks at the relation of the oppressor and the subaltern and demonstrates the inability of the western to speak and represent the “Other” without enforcing their own desire and western consciousness upon the subaltern. Thus, she identifies the inherent problem of subject formation in representation, which dismisses the acknowledgement that ideologies are often delineated through what remains unsaid. Accordingly, the production of identity within the colonial discourse has assumed the position of western subjectivity, and through different practices of representation affirmed their superior positionality over the “Other”. This western epistemological production, Spivak argues can be defined as epistemic violence.

By looking at the regimes of representations in the empirical material and not only include the aspect of blackness but rather the positionality of whiteness and blackness the analysis showed how the racialized colonial discourse still persist in the shaping of identity through representations of race, class, sexuality and gender, by reusing colonial stereotypical images and narratives. Further the analysis of the material also demonstrated the lack of a critical self-reflection over ones position in representational practices of the directors, in line with what Spivak demands, resulting in representations that appropriates blackness as a commodification of otherness. By not addressing the issue of whiteness and racial structures in the movies, the directors thus fail to challenge prevailing notions of hierarchical differences. Instead they reaffirm the conception of white western subjectivity as a dominant discourse that is neutral and able to without self-reflection interpret and understand other cultures and represent them, disregarding the violent character of epistemological production. The commodification of difference thus risks erasing knowledge by decontextualizing blackness as whiteness takes the voice of the “Other”.

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Noteworthy, the findings of the analysis are in line with the coding that is based on postcolonial theory, thus other ways of interpreting the empirical material are plausible. By using other theories as analytical bases, different features and dimensions could be found. For example, it is probable that an analysis that builds on contemporary French politics, where the question of identity politics is not highlighted, would look at the material in a different fashion and consequently come up with different results. Nonetheless, I would argue that the principal implications and relevance of the findings are the identification of the need for further critical thinking in terms of whiteness and blackness and postcolonial theory in the French context. In other words, the results of the thesis is limited to be understood in accordance with postcolonial theory, thus it strives to make a theoretical contribution to this body of literature that is based on empirical material.

5. CONCLUSION

This dissertation was set out with the ambition to answer the question of in what way do colonial legacies shape current identity representation of race, class, gender and sexuality in contemporary French cinema? And how are hierarchical differences produced and challenged? To answer the question in a satisfying way I chose to use postcolonial theory and culture studies to construct meaningful analysis from the empirical material. Combining the two theoretical frameworks permitted the analysis to highlight connections between contemporary on screen representations with historical imageries from the colonial era and thus illuminate both continuities and discontinuities from the past to the present. As discussed in the introduction, McClintock’s analysis of racialized advertisements from the imperial days, which she defines as commodity racism, were crucial in the formation of the imperial identity. Further she identifies that the commodity racism marked a shift from the scientific racism produced by the thinkers of Enlightenment, by which the racialized discourse of imperial power could reach people from all social classes. In the work of McClintock, she highlights the political power of representations, as imageries can be used to produce ideological notions and the power of media to reach the mass. Thus she claims that within the process of racialized commodity, one did not only sell a product, concurrently one were selling conceptions about race and power. By stating the historical relationship between representation, race and commodification, McClintock thus enabled further understanding of contemporary racialized imageries in culture and media. As the example with the soap commercials showed, historically racialized imageries serving the colonial agenda can be
connected to contemporary representations, and when understood in their intertextual context, can render visible discursive practices.

From the analysis of *The Intouchables*, it can be argued that colonial legacies still shape identity formation of race as traces of colonial discourse was used in the movie, i.e. reducing the black character to his body. In relation to commodification, the movie also commoditized blackness to convey a message of the possibilities of reconciliation between differences, without disrupting dominating structures of race and class. By playing on the different behaviour of Driss as filled with more vitality and as an exotic spice and to white culture, without including an analysis of the embedded power, one can arguably define these representations as commodification of otherness. Similarly the analysis of *Girlhood* also designated how black culture can be appropriated and commoditised, in line with the desire of white culture for the unknown, for the “Other”. Noteworthy, the film did concurrently offer counterhegemonic images of black female subjectivity. Accordingly, as McClintock recognized, practices of representation of difference are often imbued with ideological motivations from the presenter.

Consequently, when a dominant group are representing marginalized people, critical self-introspection of the power imbalance between them is necessary, which was as argued not done sufficiently in the empirical material. Furthermore, the thesis distinguishes itself from previous research as it offers a postcolonial analysis of representational practices related to race, class, gender, and sexuality, thus including an intersectional analysis, in a French context. These theoretical inquiries are more established within an American setting. Apart from the need of more postcolonial theory applied in the context of France, there is arguably also need for critical race studies that can bring to light prevailing inequalities along racial lines, not only in analysis of cinema. The question of representational practices analysed from an intersectional perspective in a French context, can arguably find other relative areas of study than cinema and culture, for example the question of migration in the light of globalisation.
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