Introduction

> And what is critical consciousness at bottom if not an unstoppable predilection for alternatives? (Edward W. Said)[1]

This thesis explores the alternative worlds created in a particular historical epoch of the life of a nation by three different people: Syed Ahmad Khan, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar. This thesis travels with them from India which was a subject colony of the British empire to the very centre of the empire, that is, England and beyond (the United States of America). The thesis assumes that such alternative worlds are not created in vacuum. There has to be many worlds to begin with. These different kinds of worlds provide the scope for intervention. The many worlds, I suggest are the socio-cultural-religious-political worlds of Syed Ahmad Khan, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar. Their worlds were intricately linked to the larger world of India of nineteenth and twentieth century. Further there were other worlds with which these figures interacted: the firmly established centre of the colonial world – England; and the newly emerging centre of the imperial world – the United States of America. The movements of the subjects of this thesis in these multiple worlds form the central narrative not only of this thesis but also of the history of Indian nation at large over a period of century and a half (1817-1956 CE). Yet, this thesis is not so much about the physical movement of the subjects as it is about the 'subjectivities' they fashioned in the course of their movement from India to the metropolitan centres across the world and back to India. In this sense, this thesis is an exploration of the world of ideas – their crisscrossing, contestations, interventions and the emergence of ever-shifting new forms.

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[1] Edward W. Said. "Traveling Theories." *The World, the Text and the Critic*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1983. 226-247. Print.

Edward Said, in his influential essay "Traveling Theory," argues for broadening the scope of travel from its links to human movement to account for the movement of a variety of things. Such a wider scope entails the vibrancy of cultural and intellectual life:

> Like people and schools of criticisms, ideas and theories travel—from person to person, from situation to situation, from one period to another. Cultural and intellectual life are usually nourished and often sustained by this circulation of ideas, and whether it takes the form of acknowledged or unconscious influence, creative borrowing, or wholesale appropriation, the movement of ideas and theories from one place to another is both a fact of life and a usefully enabling condition of intellectual activity. (1983: 226)

Clearly, Said makes a connection between movements of ideas and that of the cultural and intellectual life of a society. Moreover, the travel of ideas is not a simple affair of moving from one place and settling into another place. The movement, unimpeded as it is, "necessarily involves processes of representation and institutionalization different from those at the point of origin" (1983: 226). Ideas, when they travel from one location to another gets transformed in the milieu of the new location even while they transform the new location itself. This is not a simple case of clear-cut hierarchy where the new theory/idea occupies a hegemonic position over the new location or the other way round; rather Said points to a more complex nature of institutionalization which involves complex negotiation and a continuous investment in terms of cultural and intellectual capital. Following Said, this thesis seeks to account for the travel of ideas from colonized India to colonial metropole and their eventual return to India and the contestations which took place in the entire process.

India, in most of the colonial as well as nationalist accounts, was characterized by timelessness and unchanging social order. In the "Introduction" to the book *Society and Circulation: Mobile People and Itinerant Cultures in South Asia 1750-1950*, the editors—Claude Markovits, Jacques Pouchespadass and Sanjay Subrahmanyam—point to this

prevalent idea calling it "the anthropological conceit" (Markovits *et al* 1). India was represented as a conglomeration of villages which were timeless and eternal. (1). Markovits *et al* show how even Gandhi was complicit in creating such an understanding of India as an unchanging entity by his uncomplicated position on the villages. Markovits *et* al writes that it was Gandhi who:

> gave a magical new lease of life to the notion of the 'village republic' that had come into existence in the middle years of the nineteenth century through the pens of Henry Maine and Karl Marx. (1-2)

Markovits *et al* point to the delicious irony that Gandhi, who was one of the most mobile of all nationalist leaders, spoke "of fixity as some sort of Indian idyll" (2). Moving away from this sort of 'fixity' of the Indian society, Markovits *et al* locates the source of its vitality in its constant mobility which is evident in the markers of Indian civilization:

> If Indian civilisation must be defined in terms of its greatest epics, as classical Indologists have so often insisted, we must surely make something of the fact that both the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* centre in large measure on the relationship between fixity and circulation, between the life of the wanderer and that of the sedentary prince. (2)

The notion of circulation in Markovits *et al* echoes Said's notion of traveling theory:

> Apart from men and goods, many other items circulate in a society (and between a given society and other societies): information, knowledge, ideas, techniques, skills, cultural productions (texts, songs), religious practices, even gods…. *In circulating things, men and notions often transform themselves*. Circulation is therefore a value-loaded term which implies an incremental aspect and not the simple reproduction across space of already formed structures and notions. (Markovits *et al* 2-3; emphasis added)

Said and Markovits *et al* emphasize the importance of complicated and contested nature of travel of ideas from one place to another and mark its representational nature. Said points to the complicated nature of this travel of ideas by marking four stages in such a travel. In the first stage, some theory/idea emerge from a point of origin; in the second

stage, it travels across time and space and reaches another time and space; in the third stage, it encounters conditions of acceptance and/or resistance in the new location: and in the fourth stage, it emerges as a transformed theory/idea which responds to the new location in space and time. It can be added that after passing through Said's four stages, the new theory/idea may move to a new location and in the process it will again undergo the four stages. So, there is constant circulation of theory/idea entailed in this process.

The circulation of theory as described by Said has been commented upon and further elaborated by James Clifford. Clifford's intervention in this argument of travel of theory/idea is important because he links, etymologically; the word 'theory' with 'travel', that is to say, the travel of theory is inevitable:

> The Greek term *theorein*: a practice of travel and observation, a man sent by the polis to another city to witness a religious ceremony. "Theory" is a product of displacement, comparison, a certain distance. To theorize, one leaves home. (Clifford 177)

One cannot generate new ideas/theories without undertaking any kind of travel. There has to be a movement across some distance and only then one can have a new idea. But, travel in Clifford operates at a different level. As against a simple understanding of travel as physical traversing of space, Clifford understands travel as "a figure for different modes of dwelling and displacement, for trajectories and identities, for storytelling and theorizing in a postcolonial world of global contacts" (177). Further, travel is a "range of practices for situating the self in a space or spaces grown too large, a form both of exploration and discipline" (177). Here, Clifford does two things: first, he locates the idea of travel in the contemporary postcolonial world of academia, and second, he furthers Said's argument that travel (of theory) entails the process of "situating the self" in a (new) space. There are more layers to Clifford's definition apart from these two.

Clifford, by defining travel as "a figure" shifts travel from a mere physical traversing of space to a much more rich category of a trope. This allows for a more

nuanced as well as wider scope for the use of ‘travel’. It connotes not only a physical movement but also ‘story telling’ or ‘theorizing’, that is, narrativising. Travel can be used as a trope to structure a narrative of any kind. Further, the ‘exploration’ aspect of travel is not only confined to physical spaces but it can be also used to explore the ‘self’ of a person who is the subject/object of the narrative. Clifford explains such situating of the ‘self’ by showing the limitations of the much-used definition of ‘explorer’ as given by Paul Fussell in his text *Abroad: British Literary Travelling between the Wars*. Fussell distinguishes the figure of an explorer from that of a traveller and a tourist. An explorer is someone who seeks the undiscovered. A traveller travels to places discovered by the explorers and a tourist goes to those places which have been publicized by tourism entrepreneurs (in Clifford 177). Clifford finds a problem in the ideas of ‘undiscovered’ places. He points that a question might be asked how unknown the hill of Mt Everest was for Edmund Hillary. The most unfamiliar places are made known somehow to the explorer before s/he sets out on a journey. There is nothing as a totally ‘undiscovered’ or ‘unfamiliar’ space waiting to be discovered by an explorer. In the postcolonial phase of theorising, it is not possible to make an uncontested claim such as ‘Columbus discovered America’. Clifford argues that Fussell’s explorer has a fixed point of departure which is also the point of arrival. The point is home–the explorer starts from home and comes back to home to tell the stories of exploration: “In Fussell’s topography, home and abroad are still clearly divided, self and other spatially distinct” (Clifford 178).

As against Fussell’s certainty of home and abroad, self and other, Clifford poses the question of ‘location’ as being discussed in academia from early 1980s. Clifford shows that in the light of changed demography of the institutions of higher education in terms of teachers and students, the question of ‘location’ has lost its certainty. The very idea of home and abroad is being questioned as my home can be somebody else’s abroad

and what is abroad for me is a home for somebody else. The postcolonial scholarship has fundamentally shifted the site of theory from its 'natural' home in England and Europe to other parts of the world. The emergence of different kinds of theory after 1960s from non-Western world is a major reason for this de-centring of theory and by extension the idea of travel. Travel, which was once meant as something done by the Europeans, came to be re-configured with non-European people in the light of these new developments in the theoretical fields. The accepted common sense was that the Europeans explored the world and in the process mapped it. The postcolonial theorists challenged it by producing evidence of travel undertaken by Asian and African travellers to other parts of the world throughout the known history of the world. Clifford's argument has been used to theorize the act of travel undertaken by the Asian and African travellers as well as the theorization of the 'self' and the 'other' by postcolonial scholars such as Mary Louise Pratt, Padmini Mongia and Tabish Khair among others.

The postcolonial critics and scholars have brought to light the intimate connection between European travel and the colonization of the world. European travel after the sixteenth century inevitably resulted in the colonization of Asia, Africa, North America, South America, Pacific Islands and Australia. This process of travel, exploration and eventual colonization was mediated by the production and encoding of 'knowledge'. Scholars such as Said and Pratt have shown how European travel was not just a simple exercise of physical traversing; rather they argue it was a practice that put in place an extensive discursive logic of encoding knowledge about the places explored by the European countries. While outlining the objective of her own book *Imperial Eyes*, Pratt is indeed speaking of the objectives which have guided postcolonial scholars from early 1980s:

> How has travel and exploration *writing produced* "the rest of the world" for European readerships at particular points in Europe's expansionist trajectory? How has it produced Europe's

> differentiated conceptions of itself in relation to something it became possible to call "the rest of the world"? How do such signifying practices encode and legitimate the aspirations of economic expansion and empire? How do they betray them? (5; emphasis in the original)

In her book, Pratt points to the two momentous events in 1735: first, the publication of *The System of Nature* by Carl Linaeus which outlined a systematic mechanism to classify all known and unknown plant forms on the earth; and second, the launching of a first joint European expedition to determine the exact shape and size of earth. Pratt interprets both these events as Europe's "planetary consciousness" (15). This consciousness, according to Pratt, is the point of departure for European exploration and eventual colonization of the world by producing the most authoritative knowledge about the entire world. In an essay, Wolfgang Binder points to the fact that:

> Since the 18th century, probably with Linaeus, virtually all exploration vessels to the New World had a botanist on board to collect and systematize, a phenomenon which culminated in Alexander von Humboldt's and his French lover Aime Bonspland's phenomenal results. (38)

It is easy to see that both Pratt and Binder follow Said's thesis on Orientalism. It is equally easy to discern how Europe produced knowledge about the Middle East and in the process created a binary of self/other. Middle East became an important 'other' against which the European 'self' was defined. Pratt also looks at Europe's 'planetary consciousness' as an exercise on the part of European elites to understand themselves as well as others.

The above discussion clearly indicates how the theorization of travel was intricately linked to fashioning of the European 'self' vis-à-vis the non-European 'other'. It was to challenge this sort of hegemonic production of centre and periphery that postcolonial scholars sought to provide a counter-reading of the European exploration. By this counter-reading, the exercise also sought to refashion a different kind of 'self' and a different kind of centre. Pratt writes that:

> While the imperial metropolis tends to understand itself as determining the periphery (in the emanating glow of the civilizing mission or the cash flow of development, for example), it habitually blinds itself to the ways in which the periphery determines the metropolis—beginning, perhaps, with the latter's obsessive need to present and re-present its peripheries and its others continually to itself. Travel writing, among other institutions, is heavily organized in the service of that imperative. So, one might add, is much of European literary history. (6)

Postcolonial scholarship problematized the transparent nature of travel writing and drew attention to its opacity; that is, travel writing does not convey the meaning in any simple manner and one has to look at how the meaning produced by travel writing is underlined by the power-relation between the writer and his/her subject. It required increased self-consciousness on the part of the writer as well as the reader of the travel writing (Khair 9). It is not only that the postcolonial scholars question the earlier narratives and theories; they are equally critical of those scholars who while working within the framework of postcolonialism exhibit an uncritical acceptance of the European discourse. Tabish Khair critiques Steve Clark for this very reason. Clark writes that, "to a certain extent, however, travel writing is invariably one-way traffic, because the Europeans mapped the world rather than the world mapping them" (Clark 3). Khair points that Clark's reflection is the result of the widespread perception of "travel as European(ized) travel" (Khair 11-12). It is to respond to such charges about the absence of non-European travel that Tabish Khair *et al* edited the anthology of Asian and African travel writing over a period of 1500 years. This anthology of travel writing, entitled *Other Routes: 1500 Years of African and Asian Travel Writing*, contains travel accounts of pilgrimages, socio-political studies, autobiographies-diaries-memoirs, and travel accounts.

Clifford points to these developments in the field when he says that theory has been de-centered from its natural home:

> Theory is no longer naturally "at home" in the West—a powerful place of Knowledge, History, or Science, a place to collect, sift, translate, and generalize. Or, more cautiously, this privileged place

> is now increasingly contested, cut across, by other locations, claims, trajectories of knowledge articulating racial, gender, and cultural differences. But how is theory appropriated and resisted, located and displaced? How do theories travel among the unequal spaces of postcolonial confusion and contestation? What are their predicaments? How does theory travel and how do theorists travel? Complex, unresolved questions. (179)

Clifford also critiques Said's formulation of the four stages of travelling theory. Although it is an important formulation as an entry point to the question of travel and theory, it has to be modified to account for postcolonial travel and theory. According to Clifford, Said's formulation has a certain fixity or rigidity and reads like "an all-too-familiar story of immigration and acculturation" (184). Clifford argues that such a linear path will not account for more nuanced movements such as "feedback loops, the ambivalent appropriations and resistances that characterize the travels of theories, and theorists, between places in the "First" and "Third" worlds" (1989: 184). Clearly, Clifford is talking about postcolonial theorists such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Ranajit Guha, Partha Chatterjee, Dipesh Chakravorty, Cornel West, Aijaz Ahmad, Trin T. Minh-ha, Homi Bhabha and Edward Said among others who constantly moved between "First" and "Third" worlds.

Clifford's definition of travel as a "figure" gives ample scope to account for the life and work of these postcolonial theorists. It brings to light how they have sought to challenge the hegemonic European notion of travel and theory. It is only by using travel as a trope that we would be able to account for how ideas have travelled in diverse forms from one location to another and what happened in the process of the travel.

Drawing on the light of above discussion, this thesis uses travel as a trope to read the social, political, cultural, religious and economic writings of Syed Ahmad Khan, Mohandas Gandhi and Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar to see the impact the metropole had on the subjectivity of these figures. These three were the major figures in the landscape of

Indian social and political life from the middle of the nineteenth century to a little over the middle of the twentieth century. All three figures have considerable following among the people of India and they left a powerful impact on the life of their followers. As three figures—Syed Ahmad Khan, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar—represented different sections of society, to argue that any of them represented the entire country without any challenge will be an exercise in constructing a homogenized idea of either the nation or of its people. This thesis argues for a more plural understanding of the idea of the nation, that is, India and the people who inhabit it.

Syed Ahmad, Gandhi and Ambedkar—all three travelled to the European or American metropole for more or less similar purposes. Syed Ahmed travelled to England in 1869. His son was awarded a scholarship to study in England and Syed Ahmad, aged 52 at the time, decided to accompany him. He gave many motives for his travel but the most plausible reason was that he desired to visit the educational institutions of England. During his seventeen month stay, he visited many public schools, colleges and universities. Gandhi travelled to England in 1888 at the age of 19 with the express motive of earning a degree in law. He stayed for around three years and earned the degree. Ambedkar travelled to the United States of America in 1913 at the age of 22 to pursue higher education. He stayed there till 1916 and earned a PhD (which was awarded in 1927). From the United States, Ambedkar moved to England as a degree from England was more coveted in India than the one earned in the United States. Unfortunate circumstances cut short his stay in London and he had to come back to India in 1917. However, he went back to England in 1921 to finish his study in the London School of Economics and Political Science and he wrote a thesis in 1923 for the award of Doctor of Science (DSc).

This thesis argues that the three figures in their interaction with the metropole picked up certain key ideas in circulation in the metropole at the time and used those key ideas later in India. These ideas underlined their work in important ways. More than that, the ideas they picked up allowed them to fashion their 'subjectivity'. This 'subjectivity' was later on mapped on to their idea of India and so their own 'subjectivity' came to be a 'national subject'. Without their travel to the metropole, it would not have been possible for these figures to imagine or fashion a 'national self' which bore such a strong imprint on their own life and work. The key ideas which they picked up were different in each case. I argue that for Syed Ahmad, it was the idea of liberal education that he saw in England. This gave him a template for using education to produce a 'national self' among Muslims in India who could go on to become collaborators with the British. In the case of Gandhi, vegetarianism was a key idea which he used to fashion a new 'national self' for himself. Vegetarianism was one of the important ideas which were considered radical in the nineteenth century England. Gandhi picked up this idea in London. This idea of vegetarianism underwent multiple changes in his career. Nevertheless, it remained a constant presence in his most of his future works. In the case of Ambedkar, it was the idea of liberal democracy including adult suffrage and affirmative action for the disadvantaged sections of the society which were the defining frames of his work and writings. I wish to underline the fact that the selection of key ideas in the three figures is purely a subjective choice. It is my reading of importance of these ideas in these figures.

This thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter, "A Definitional Quandary: Travel, Travelogue, Travel Writing, Writing Travel," discusses different terms related to the idea of travel. 'Travel', 'travelogue', 'travel writing' have been defined by different scholars in different ways over a period of time. There seems to be no consensus on the definitions. As the discussion in this introduction has attempted to establish, travel

is a term which is defined both in literal sense of traversing space and time and in metaphorical terms to mean different things in different contexts. The chapter looks at the history of the terms ‘travel’ and ‘travel writing’ both etymologically and theoretically to see how they came to be linked with British colonialism in a particular historical point of time. The word ‘travelogue’ occupies an uneasy space between factual record of actual travel and that of a fantastic record of an imaginary travel. Through an analysis of two texts, one categorized as travel writing and the other as travelogue, the chapter attempts to show how a rigid categorization does not survive a critical scrutiny. There is no clear-cut boundary between ‘travel writing’ and ‘travelogue’ and they blur seamlessly into each other. The chapter poses another term ‘writing travel’ as a category which is more nuanced than either ‘travel writing’ and ‘travelogue’. ‘Writing travel’, the chapter argues, offers more scope to read those texts which do not fall under the conventional rubric of travel writing or travel account. In diverse texts, travel acts as a trope even though the text is not classified under ‘travel writing’ or ‘travelogue’. The chapter attempts to establish that ‘writing travel’ allows this thesis to use travel as a trope to examine the works of Syed Ahmad, Gandhi and Ambedkar to see how they fashioned a ‘national self’.

The second chapter, “Nation, Nationalism and the Rise of the National Subject in India,” traces the history of the terms ‘nation’ and ‘nationalism’ in the context of India. The chapter gives different definitions of these terms and examines the limitations of each of the definitions when it is examined in the context of India. We know that these terms originated in Europe in the wake of European Enlightenment and it was exported to the rest of the world from the eighteenth century onwards in the form of colonialism. It is obvious that for their links with colonialism, these terms were not to have easy life in European colonies such as India. The chapter uses the theoretical frameworks developed by Ashis Nandy, G. Aloysius, Partha Chatterjee, Sudipta Kaviraj and Subaltern Studies

Collective to understand how the European categories of nation and nationalism were received, contested and appropriated in Indian context by different sections of people. The chapter examines different kinds of 'national subjects' formed by different sections of people and the scope as well as limitations of each of the formulations. The chapter also explores the hegemony of a dominant 'national subjectivity' which was sought to be achieved by the national elites and how that project was disrupted by the subaltern groups. The chapter argues that no accepted frame of 'national subject' formation can account for Ambedkar and the manner in which he was fashioned into a 'national subject' that was in radical opposition to the hegemony of the elite nationalism.

The third chapter, "Syed Ahmad Khan and the Shifting Notion of Self," explores the works of Syed Ahmad Khan to see when, how and why education, especially liberal education, came to be the central theme of his life and work. Syed Ahmad's name is synonymous with the Mohammadan Anglo-Oriental College (MAO College) or Aligarh Muslim University in India, which is a premiere institution of higher education in the country with a student strength of around 35000 (2013-14). It was in 1920 (some twenty years after the death of Syed Ahmad) that the MAO College got the status of a university. There is one common element in the name of the college and that of the university it developed into. Both names have the word 'Muslim' in them. The word 'Anglo-Oriental'' was removed from the original name of the college. This removal of 'Anglo-Oriental' in 1920 should be read in the light of historicity of the time as well as the role of the institution during that particular historical time in India. This naming, I argue, gives a clue to the kind of 'national subject' Syed Ahmad sought to fashion in his institution and what happened to that project of 'national subject' after Syed Ahmad's death. The chapter traces the career and work of Syed Ahmad to understand how and why his relationship with the British developed despite all-round hostility in the British circles towards

Muslims. This relationship is the key to understand what kind of 'self' Syed Ahmad aspired for. The chapter examines how the site of the 'self' in Syed Ahmad was never stable and why this instability needs to be located in the shifting political and social landscape of the second half of the nineteenth century. It is only through the analysis of the social history that one can account for Syed Ahmad's notion of nation, nationalism, community and 'national self'.

The fourth chapter, "Vegetarianism and the National Self: Gandhi's Food as the Site of Anti-colonial Struggle," looks at the ideology of vegetarianism that shaped and was shaped by Gandhi. The use of the word 'ideology' is a conscious act as vegetarianism was/is not only a food habit rather it is an ideology in itself which encompasses diverse political, social, cultural, religious and economic movements throughout the history. The chapter traces the development of vegetarianism in Gandhi and the manner in which it allowed him to have a sense of a national 'self' at different points of his life. I argue that the three years Gandhi spent in England as a student could be read as an exercise in national self-fashioning which was rooted in the ideology of vegetarianism. The chapter traces Gandhi's association with the London Vegetarian Society to see what kind of political alliances he developed as a student. Through a close reading of various articles Gandhi wrote for the journal of the London Vegetarian Society, I trace the assertion of a national identity on part of Gandhi. In my view this national identity defines itself strictly against the British nation. So, seemingly innocuous articles on vegetarian food in India allowed Gandhi to launch his anti-colonial struggle against the British empire right from his days as a student in England. The chapter will also examine how vegetarianism was modified by Gandhi during his struggle against the British regime first in South Africa and later on in India.

The fifth chapter, "Ambedkar and the Political Self," looks at Ambedkar's travel to the United States of America and England to examine how these travels allowed him to use 'caste' as a tool for securing the rights of untouchables in India. 'Caste' was always a category that came handy for constructing and maintaining social hierarchy. For the higher castes of the society, it was a category which ensured their position of power and privilege. For lower castes and untouchables, 'caste' was always a category to be dreaded. It branded them forever as outcastes and kept them in a position of servitude. The most damning aspect of caste was its linkage with one's birth, that is, caste was decided by birth and not by any expertise in any particular field. So, once an untouchable, always an untouchable. There was no escape from this scaffolding for any number of generations. In such a scenario, Ambedkar used 'caste' as a tool for advocating equality for the untouchables in all aspects of life. Equality and Liberty were important concepts for Ambedkar right from his student's days at the Columbia University and he used the category of 'caste' to press home the point how this denied equality and liberty to a huge sections of the society. Ambedkar was not the first person to theorize on 'caste system' but he certainly was the first person to use it for a two-pronged battle: on the one hand, he used 'caste' to mobilize the entire section of the untouchable population under a political dispensation; and on the other hand, he fought for the annihilation of caste for he believed that 'caste system' cannot be reformed. The only option is to annihilate it. The chapter argues that Ambedkar used 'caste' to demand a greater space for the untouchables in the electoral democracy in India. These attempts of Ambedkar were intricately linked to his larger ambition of securing equality of life and living for the untouchables in India.

The "Conclusion," summarises the arguments presented in the thesis and delineates how the formation of national subject is intricately linked to the key tropes used by the three figures under study. Along with this, it also marks the points of

departure and points of convergence in the construction of the national subject undertaken by the three figures. The conclusion also thinks around the limitations of this thesis and indicates possible areas for future research.