

Radboud University



**To what extent does the proposal on a Directive on Corporate Sustainability
by the European Commission reflect a change in the European Union's
behaviour towards corporate imperialism?**

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Abstract

Underlying the thesis is the question whether the EU can change from its colonial narrative and behaviour. In order to answer this, the thesis investigates the research question “To what extent does the proposal on a Directive on Corporate Sustainability by the European Commission reflect a change in the European Union’s behaviour towards corporate imperialism?”. The postcolonial theory and institutional change theory are used to establish the theoretical framework for the qualitative content analysis. While postcolonial theory argues that there are colonial practices that continue until today in neo-colonial form such as corporate imperialism, the institutional change theory argues that change in policies and institutions is possible if there is an environmental challenge or a change in power relations. Several documents from the European Union bodies and institutions as well as from the presidents of the European Commission have been analysed and show that the concepts of (no) western universalism, (no) white saviour complex, crisis, and change in power relations are all present in the chosen time frame from 2014 to 2022. Due to the limitations of the postcolonial theory and the chosen method, the hypotheses are not able to provide an answer to the research question. In order to be able to assess change in behaviour and its impact, further research should include an amended version of the postcolonial theory that is combined with the institutional change theory and an additional method such as interviews or a case study should be added to the research design.

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List of abbreviations

BIPOC – Black, Indigenous, People of Color

Commission – European Commission

EEAS - European External Action Service

EP – European Parliament

EU – European Union

UN – United Nations

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1. Introduction

1.1 Context

Current debates on stolen artefacts and their restitution shed a light on the colonial past of several European Union member states and whether their behaviour towards former colonies can change. While restitution is slow in some member states and non-existing in others, there are more areas in which the EU and its member states are influenced by their colonial past (Williams, 2022; Ellena, 2022). One example of that is the continued economic exploitation by EU based multinational corporations that damage the environment and violate human rights in host countries such as the case of Ferrero and child labour in the cocoa and hazelnut sector (Anti-Slavery International & ECCJ, 2020). The European Union has been criticized for supporting and causing human rights violation and environmental damage through for example the European Investment Bank that finances fossil fuels (Ambrose, 2019). Furthermore, the EU is accused of enabling neo-colonial practices such as corporate imperialism that exploit host countries and establish dominant western ideas (Dimitrovova & Kramsch, 2017). To counter that behaviour by multinational corporations the European Commission adopted a proposal for a Directive on Corporate sustainability due diligence on the 23rd of February 2022. The Directive is meant to make companies comply with international human rights and environmental protection standards throughout their supply chains within and outside Europe. The Directive wants to “foster sustainable and responsible corporate behaviour” as well as to “ensure that businesses address adverse impacts of their actions” (European Commission, B, n.d.). Firstly, the EU uses clear and strong language in this proposal about the role of multinational corporations. Secondly, if the Directive is adopted by the Council and the EP, it is binding for the EU member states and legal actions can be taken if the multinational corporations fail to comply with it. What is surprising with this proposal for a Directive is that it would be contradicting previous policies that are accused of promoting neo-colonial practices such as corporate imperialism. This inconsistency within the EU’s policies between aiming for corporate sustainability as well as facilitating corporate imperialism causes a contradiction. On the one hand the EU enables harming human rights and the environment and on the other hand it wants to condemn this. In order to make sense of this contradiction the postcolonial theory and the institutional change theory are used to investigate whether the EU can change from its colonial behaviour.

1.2 Corporate imperialism

Corporate imperialism refers to an exploitative behaviour by multinational corporations in host countries (Storgaard, Tienari, Piekkari, Michailova, 2020). The multinational corporations are often based in the global North while the host countries are often based in the global South (Bell, 2016; Palombo, 2011). Postcolonial scholars argue that multinational corporations can still engage in

economic exploitation today while nation states are less able to do so due to the end of colonialism (Seipato, 2020). Therefore, nation states are accused by postcolonial theory to support exploitative behaviour by multinational corporations in order to continue their influence on host countries (Kandikuppa, 2021). These exploitative relations between multinational corporations and host countries are said to resemble old colonial power relations and the behaviour of corporate imperialism is referred to as neo-colonial.

1.3 Theory

One way to approach this contradiction is to look at institutional change theory that argues that change in institutions and their policies is possible, even if this is contradictory to previous goals and policies (Streeck & Thelen, 2005). According to institutional change theory, an environmental challenge hereafter referred as crisis or a change in power relations can cause change in institutions and policies (Streeck et al., 2005). If these two factors are at play institutions like the EU and their policies can change. The theory of institutional change by Streeck and Thelen is “very influential in the literature and has been applied across a wide range of institutional and policy changes” (Cerna, 2013, p. 11). Using this theory is helpful when approaching possible changes that have occurred in the institutional history of the EU. The institution was founded in the 1950s and has since expanded its scope and increased its members. This evolution is one way in which the EU managed to change. Including institutional change theory into this thesis shows the possibilities for change. Since the world does not stand still, over the years different challenges arose to which the EU needed to respond. At the same time these crises have had an impact on citizens of the member states, some as profound as the financial crisis of 2008 which caused a lot of frustration and tension inside civil society. The Fridays for future protests in response of the climate crises show a mobilization by civil society and constitutes a change in power relations because politicians from national and supranational level cannot longer ignore these voices.

Another way of approaching this contradiction is to look from the postcolonial theory. Postcolonial theory claims that “colonialism is not over but remains embedded in the historical, political, sociological, and economic discourses” (Morris, 2022, p.7). The theory of postcolonialism has been chosen in order to explain the EU’s behaviour about corporate imperialism because it allows for a critical examination of the current EU behaviour taking into account the colonial past of its member states. Furthermore, marginalized voices are taken into account that are left out in the dominant discourse. There is not just one author cited but many since the theory of postcolonialism is as diverse as the people who suffered under colonialism and oppression. This broadened scope adds another dimension to the analysis when looking at issue at hand. Since the EU is made up by its member states and for a lot of aspects depending on them, it is worth investigating in their history. Several EU member

states pursued colonialism and slavery and have a long history with the colonized countries. Using postcolonial theory is a way to portray this entanglement and relationship between EU member states and consequently also the EU with the former colonised countries. Academia about the EU is still very white and Eurocentric and the dominant discourse does not pay a lot of attention to marginalized voices. I decided to work on this topic because by including postcolonial theory I was able to include non-dominant points of view and engage with the content in a critical way.

1.4 Research Question

Dittel (2022) argues that: “The European Union (EU) champions itself as a protector and promoter of human rights” (p. 1). This can be observed in the way how the EU claims that its commitment to human rights is a vital part of their relations with others (European Union, B n.d.). However, postcolonial theory claims that the EU itself and its members have facilitated neo-colonial practices since “Imperial states’ selective free-market practices allowed their multinationals to capitalize on market opportunities in target countries” (Petras, 2002, p. 149). The proposal for the Directive on corporate sustainability stands for goals such as the protection of human rights and the environment. The institutional change theory argues that there can be change in policies and institutions can evolve over time through the emergence of crises and shifts in power relations. This is contradictory to the claim made by postcolonial theory which argues that the EU continues to have colonial power. The question is whether the EU can change this colonial narrative. Therefore, the research question arises:

“To what extent does the proposal on a Directive on Corporate Sustainability by the European Commission reflect a change in the European Union’s behaviour towards corporate imperialism?”

1.5 Relevance

Societal relevance

The EU’s support of corporate imperialism by European multinational corporations and its proposal for a Directive on corporate sustainability seems to be contradictory. Firstly, there is contradiction between the European Union’s claim to be exceptionally supportive of human rights and the environmental and the accusation of harming human rights and the environment through corporate imperialism. The former can be observed with the statement that “The European Union is based on a strong commitment to promoting and protecting human rights, democracy and the rule of law worldwide. Human rights are at the heart of EU relations with other countries and regions.” (European Union, B, n.d.). Furthermore, in terms of climate protection the EU aims to become “the first climate-neutral continent”(European Commission, A, n.d.). Taking these bold standpoints into account the EU needs to resolve this contradiction by committing to its moral obligations. Secondly, the interconnectedness of the world adds another reason why the EU should avoid this contradiction

between corporate imperialism and its founding morals such as the protection of human rights and the environment. Climate change will not stop at the EU's borders and poor living conditions caused by capitalism and climate change in the global South will cause migration. Even though only a small fraction of these migrants and refugees will enter the territory of the EU, the EU will be affected by this indirectly through increased need for humanitarian help. Thirdly, the EU needs to resolve this contradiction because it is bound by international and European law to protect human rights and to protect the environment. The EU is bound by the United Nation's Universal Declaration for Human Rights and the European Charter for Fundamental Rights as well as by the 2015 Paris Agreement. Lastly, the contradiction needs to be resolved for the majority of Europe's population that are "citizens of former colonial powers" and because "it is not possible to decipher the EU's current reality without taking into account the 'historical impact of empire on today's world'" (Bhambra, 2009, p. 72). This thesis will investigate the EU's behaviour towards corporate imperialism over time and its findings can help the EU to realize that its behaviour is inconsistent. With this knowledge the EU can reflect on its current role in the international sphere and on corporate imperialism and start solving its contradictory behaviour.

Scientific relevance

Firstly, the thesis will show if a change in EU behaviour may happen despite the colonial burden of the past of several EU member states. Due to the colonial past of several member states, the new Directive for a proposal on corporate sustainability is revealing the contradiction between past behaviour by member states and current behaviour. The thesis will look at this contradictory change of behaviour and will try to find an answer to it.

Secondly, since academia about the EU is still predominantly white and Eurocentric, the theory of postcolonialism adds another point of view to the existing research on EU behaviour and tries to take marginalized voices and ideas into account while avoiding to take over the dominant discourse. Including postcolonial theory in the thesis allows to investigate in the colonial past of the EU member.

1.6 Method

This research question will be answered through a qualitative content analysis using the deductive approach. Diverse documents from the EU will be analysed during the analysis. These documents are debates in the EU Parliament, documents from the EU Commission and Council of the EU and press releases from the Commission. Furthermore, they are the state of the union speeches by Juncker and von der Leyen and their political guidelines as well as from the European External Action Service (EEAS). A qualitative content analysis will be the best method to investigate the research question because it allows to examine the documents fully in regard to hidden meanings and intentions. Since the EU is a

supranational institution and has a lot of diplomatic experience documents might look neutral at first glance. However, with the qualitative content analysis it will be possible to delve deeper and read between the lines. Several theoretical concepts such as (no) western universalism, (no) white saviour complex, crisis and change in power relations will be used to analyse the documents and answer the research question.

1.7 Outlook

After this introduction to the thesis, a theoretical framework will follow in chapter two. The theories of postcolonialism and institutional change will be used to set up a framework to use during the thesis. These theories have contradictory views on the possibility for change in the EU's behaviour toward corporate imperialism. The chapter will elaborate on the theoretical expectations. The third chapter will elaborate on the research design, the method of qualitative content analysis and the empirical evidence chosen. During the fourth chapter the analysis will be conducted and chapter five will conclude and answer the research question. Furthermore, there is room for discussion and reflection on the theories as well as the research project itself.

2. Theory

In this chapter, I will draw on different theoretical concepts that will help investigate the European Union's behaviour towards corporate imperialism. The theory of postcolonialism as well as institutional change theory will allow me to set up a theoretical frame to investigate the research question: "To what extent does the proposal on a Directive on Corporate Sustainability by the European Commission reflect a change in the European Union's behaviour towards corporate imperialism?".

2.1 European Institutions and Bodies

The European Union was founded in 1951 as the European Coal and Steel Community by six member states. These six member states were Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg. Today, more states have joined the EU which add up to 27 member states.

The EU has several institutions and bodies that fulfil different tasks. The most important ones and with most relevance to this thesis are the European Commission and their president, the Council of the EU, the European Parliament, and the European External Action Service.

The European Commission is the main executive body of the EU. It can initiate laws that get voted by the EP and Council of the EU and the Commission controls the budget of the EU. From 2014 to 2019 the Commission's president was Jean-Claude Juncker. In 2019 Ursula von der Leyen took over the presidency.

The Council of the European Union is made up of the national ministers from the member states and represent the governments of the EU member states. The Council of the EU can adopt laws and decide together with the EP about laws.

The European Parliament is established to represent the EU citizens. The first direct elections to the European parliament were held more than two decades after its first meeting, in 1979 (European Union, A, n.d.). The EP can decide together with the Council of the EU about laws and is also responsible for approving the EU budget.

The European External Action Service (EEAS) is a EU body that helps the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission to implement the EU's foreign and security policy (European Union, C, n.d.).

2.2 Postcolonialism

The majority of EU citizens today live in member states that have colonized big parts of the world in the past. The European colonization started with the conquer of Latin America in the 15th century by the Spanish and the Portuguese (Storgaard, et al., 2020). Other member states of the European Union

such as France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy and Germany also colonized large parts of the world. These EU members extracted and exploited the colonies for their resources and labour and installed a worldwide cruel system of slavery, displacing millions of people mainly from the African continent to conduct forced labour on plantations in the Caribbean, South America, Asia and elsewhere (Seipato, 2020, Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). The colonies were not just exploited for their resources and labour but the colonizers also established the thought that “white people were superior and black people were inferior” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018, p. 42). Together, these strategies led to the creation and fostering of unequal power relations since the colonizer managed to weaken the colonized territories by destroying indigenous industries, cultures, identities and political systems. The European colonizers gained power, wealth and prosperity by “dehumanisation, enslavement, colonialism, imperialism, oppression, exploitation, and domination of two-thirds of the world’s population” (Allen, 2016 in Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018, p. 41). Only after the end of the second World War did most colonies achieve independence from the colonizers after centuries of exploitation and violence (Storgaard, et al., 2020).

Neo-colonialism

The theory of postcolonialism argues that the practices and ideology of colonialism are still operating today and shape the contemporary world. A vital part of postcolonial theory is to resist the dominant Western discourse and listen to, value and implement marginalized positions (Morris, 2022). There are many influential scholars that have worked on the topic of postcolonialism. Some of the most famous ones are Franz Fanon, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Robert Young. Fanon was one of the first postcolonial scholars and argued that the culture of the colonized was lost during colonialism but that they could rebuild it (Bandyopadhyay, 2019). Other scholars have argued that since the former colonies continue to be under influence by the former colonizer, postcolonialism is not achieved yet (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018; Ramnath 2019; Moosavi 2020). Therefore, many scholars speak of neo-colonialism which refers to the idea that practices from colonialism are still alive, however, they might play out differently and in new ways than during colonial rule (Shohat, 1992; Boussebaa, 2015).

Imperialism

An important aspect of the colonization process of the European States was imperialism which allowed the colonizers to control the colonized territories (Troyer, 2011). Imperialism can be defined as "the domination and exploitation of weaker states by stronger ones." (Chalmers, 2004 as cited in Troyer, 2011, p. 1). Imperialism led to the introduction of capitalist systems in the colonies and the struggle of economic influence over the world (Udofia, 1984). This economic dominance was often established by companies such as the British East India Company or the Dutch East India company that worked closely together with the nation state (Bell, 2016). It has been argued that “it was in large part the existence

of a commercial empire which facilitated the creation of a political empire” (Bell, 2016, p.77). Therefore, often the domination over economic processes in the foreign territories came first, through which military and political power was made possible. The trading companies are said to have been “extensions of colonial states” (Palombo, 2022, p. 3). According to postcolonial theory, this link between trading companies and the colonial state has continued into present day with the relation between the multinational corporations and the EU member states as well as the EU.

As scholars argue “imperialism has not disappeared” (Kandikuppa, 2021, p. 152) and still aims at “the conquest of markets, the penetration of competitors and the protection of home markets” (Petras 2002, p. 141). As Kandikuppa (2021) has argued, rather than conquering foreign territories many nation states today have sought to excerpt power and influence through neo-colonial practices of imperialism such as the domination of the economy. The “connection of imperialism with economics clearly associates imperialism with multinational corporations” (Udofia, 1984, p. 354). This domination of the economy is achieved by enabling multinational corporations that are based in the former colonizing countries to act in the host countries. Most multinational corporations are based in the global North, in countries that have been former colonizers (Bell, 2016; Palombo, 2011). The nation states from the global North are “an essential adversary, in the front line of the defence of the privileges and power of the multinational corporations” (Petras, 2002, p. 136). Through enabling multinational corporations to operate in host countries, former colonizing countries still exert power over former colonies.

Postcolonial theory not only describes the legacy of colonialism but also focuses on specific ways in which imperialism including patterns of exploitation, suppression and domination continue until today. Two of these specific ways are the concepts of western universalism and the white saviour complex which can be indicators for corporate imperialism.

2.2.1 Western universalism

Western universalism is the claim by countries from the global North to have values and norms that are applicable and superior to all other parts of the world. The European Union is referred to as Normative Power Europe trying to spread its values and norms so that the idea of western universalism applies to the EU (Staeger, 2015). Some of the norms that are part of western universalism are “peace, liberty, democracy, rule of law and human rights” (Manners, 2002, p. 242 as cited in Staeger, 2015, p. 984). These norms are also vital to the EU as has been argued by Dittel (2022). According to postcolonialism the EU has the power to spread its norms to other countries by dictating trade agreements, and policies to countries with less bargaining power due to economic dependency on Bretton Woods institutions and therefore pursues western universalism (Staeger, 2015).

Critiques have called this western universalism hypocritical since the EU's member states have been disregarding and violating the same norms during colonialism (Golder, 2021). The EU portrays itself as an entity deeply committed to human rights, however the colonial history of its member states are ignored according to the postcolonial theory. Some scholars argue that "EU foreign policy based on Eurocentric norms struggles to free itself of paternalistic discourse" (Staeger, 2015, p. 981). Therefore, according to postcolonial theory the EU cannot leave behind its colonial history when assuming their own norms to be superior to other non-European norms. It can be argued that the way in which the EU's norms are universalized constitutes a neo-colonial behaviour (Staeger, 2015). The EU uses its own norms and experiences assuming that these are universal and apply to others as well. Postcolonialism argues that this way of thinking can be compared to the colonial thinking in which the European ideas would bring development and progress to the colonies (Staeger, 2015).

2.2.2 White saviour complex

The White saviour complex refers to the idea that people from the global North feel obliged to rescue people from the global South. The term first came up in 2012 by the postcolonial scholar Teju Cole referring to the idea that the supposedly inferior people from the global South cannot help themselves, and therefore any agency is denied according to the white saviour logic. Apparently, what is needed are the white people from the global North, helping and rescuing BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) from the global South from their misery which makes the former feel emotionally satisfied and fulfilled (Aronson, 2017). According to the white saviour complex, people in the global South are depending on the rescue by white people from the global North and therefore, constitute the "white man's and woman's burden" (Bandyopadhyay, 2019, p. 340).

The idea of the global South being a place "in need of heroism" (Aronson, 2017, p. 36) makes white people believe that they are needed in order to rescue BIPOC, however "what gets left out of this conversation are the roles settler colonialism and white supremacy have had in creating these conditions in the first place" (Aronson, 2017, p. 37). Postcolonial theory argues that seeing the people from the global South in need and without any agency shows the deep racial divide that has been established during colonialism and continues until today. These racialised inequalities make that "whiteness is associated with progress, power and domination" (Bandyopadhyay, 2019, p. 333). However, postcolonialism says that in the dominant discourse the origins of this belief are not addressed.

Western universalism and white saviour complex can lead to corporate imperialism.

2.2.3 Corporate imperialism

The distinction between transnational corporation and multinational corporation decreased during globalization and the terms are now used interchangeably (Seipato, 2020). In this research I will use the term multinational corporation that refers to companies that operate around the world but have their headquarter in a specific nation state (Seipato, 2020). The overwhelming majority of the multinational corporations are based in the global North, in countries such as Germany, France, Britain, the Netherlands and the U.S. (Boussebaa, 2015). Most of these countries are former colonizers where the first multinational corporations like the British East India Company emerged during the sixteenth century with the begin of “colonial and imperial expeditions to countries outside Europe” (Seipato, 2020, p. 168). Just as multinational corporations were important to the state in the past, many postcolonial scholars claim that they are still important today since they allow for profit making and gathering wealth after “states from the global North could no longer play a direct role in the extraction of resources and the exploitation of people through slavery and colonisation” (Seipato, 2020, p.168). However, states can still indirectly continue this exploitation by paving the way for multinational corporations to engage in corporate imperialism. This is done through applying western universalism and the white saviour complex.

The state’s behaviour allows multinational corporations to extract and exploit the host countries’ resources (Storgaard, et al., 2020). That is done “through organizational practices of extraction, exclusion and expulsion” (Banerjee, 2011 as cited in Storgaard et al., 2020, p. 1472). They “reproduce distinctions between cores and peripheries established in colonial times, and perpetuate colonial-style power relations in contemporary society” (Storgaard, et al., 2020, p. 1472). According to the postcolonial theory, corporations are able to engage in corporate imperialism because the nation states where they are based in facilitate it. They do so by engaging in western universalism and the white saviour complex. These two concepts are therefore indicators for corporate imperialism.

When the states from the global North apply western universalism, the ground has been laid for corporate imperialism by assuming western values such as capitalism and the liberal market economy to be universal. This allows multinational corporations to step inside the host countries conducting their business and further implement liberal market values. Multinational corporations are enabled by the state to exert “imperial power ... through false claims to “universalism”” (Boussebaa, 2015, p. 1221). When states from the global North apply the white saviour complex, the ground has been laid for corporate imperialism by assuming the people from the global South to be victims that need help from the countries from the global North. One way to grant this help is to let multinational corporations engage in the host country to create jobs and invest. However, with the activity by

multinational corporations in the host countries, the white saviour complex is reinforced since inequality and unequal power relations are perpetuated.

2.3 Institutional Change Theory

As outlined above, the postcolonial theory claims that patterns of colonialism are repeated and at play today. There are however other theories such as the institutional change theory that argue that change is possible under certain circumstances. Change can take place when there are “new environmental challenges” as well as “changes in power relations” (Streeck et al., 2005, p. 26).

Streeck et al. (2005) argue that often times theories about institutional change only acknowledge big changes and do not grant the same attention to smaller changes. That leads to “excessively high demands on ‘real’ change to be recognized as such” (Streeck et al. 2005, p. 9) since most changes do occur on a small scale first leading to adaptive and reproductive changes. However, the majority of institutional change theory, regards small changes as neglectable and aiding to the stability of the institution rather than as threatening it. Streeck et al. (2005) argue that these small changes should not be underestimated since they can add up and cause “major historical discontinuities” (p. 8) that imply profound change. The same logic can be applied when answering the accusation of neo-colonial EU behaviour by postcolonial theory. Since neo-colonial implies new or different behaviours than during colonial rule, it can be argued from an institutional change theory point of view that there are changes in the way the EU behaves towards the global South and former colonies. Even if these changes seem small, the institutional change theory would argue that these changes should not be underestimated since they can add up and ultimately cause far-reaching change.

The theory of institutional change by Streeck et al. (2005) claims that there are five types of gradual transformative change. These types are called displacement, layering, drift, conversion, and exhaustion. Conversion focuses on the redirection of institutions to “new goals, functions, or purposes” (Streeck et al., 2005, p. 26) as opposed to the other types that focus more on the amendment or decay of institutions. This redirection may be caused by “new environmental challenges” or through “changes in power relations” (Streeck et al., 2005, p. 26). The authors note that “time matters” (Pierson, 2004 as cited in Streeck et al., 2005, p. 27) in the redirection of institutions since the founders and the circumstances of founding the institution have changed or have been outlived. New challenges might have emerged and the power relations might have changed as well since the founding days of the institution. Time allows for the institution to be “redirected to very different and even diametrically opposed goals and ends” (Streeck et al., 2005, p. 28). The EU has been established as the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in the 1950s for economic reasons in the first place but over time has evolved into an institution with other interests as well. In the beginning the economic challenges were most prominent but as time evolved, the institution faced also new

challenges such as climate change so that it had to adapt and had to broaden its decision-making power to other topics. Additionally, new member states have joined the founding member states and there has been a shift in power relations inside the EU since there are more actors and new units involved in decision making today than when the institution was first established.

The theory would expect change to occur when there has been a new environmental challenge, hereafter called crisis such as the financial crisis of 2008, the rise of terrorist attacks throughout the 2000s with attacks in Madrid, Paris and Berlin, the 2015 and 2016 refugee crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. Additionally, there was the climate crisis which caused droughts and floods such as the one in summer 2021. According to the theory, if a crisis happens and the policymakers or institutions “respond by deploying existing institutional resources to new ends” (Streeck et al., 2005, p. 26) the institution can change itself or its policies

The theory would also expect change if there has been a change in power relations when “actors who were not involved in the original design of an institution and whose participation in it may not have been reckoned with, take it over and turn it to new ends” (Streeck et al., 2005, p. 26). One example would be the power relations between the civil society and the EU that changed as compared to when the EU was first established, since voters and the EP have gained more rights.

The institutional change theory has established two categories of change. They are “gradual transformation which stands for institutional discontinuity caused by incremental, ‘creeping’ change” and “breakdown and replacement” that is caused by “abrupt change” (Streeck et al., 2005, p. 9). Over the years, the EU has become more concerned with sustainability as various policies show. The 2015 Paris Agreement and the European Green Deal from 2019 are just some examples of the increased interest and concern about sustainability. According to the institutional change theory the proposal for a Directive on sustainability could not have been caused by abrupt change since the EU’s history of sustainability matches more with the incremental change. In light of the EU’s history of sustainability policies, conversion as a type of change is best applicable to explain how the proposal for a Directive on corporate sustainability came about. Small changes over the years that have been adding up, allowed for the proposal to be established in the first place.

2.4 Theoretical implications

Hypotheses:

- 1 A) If EU policies reproduce western universalism, they will enable corporate imperialism.
B) If EU policies reproduce the white saviour complex, they will enable corporate imperialism.
- 2 A) If EU policies contain no western universalism, they will restrain corporate imperialism.
B) If EU policies contain no white saviour complex, they will restrain corporate imperialism.

- 3 If the EU experiences crisis, it will restrain corporate imperialism.
- 4 If a change in power relations takes place in the EU strengthening the voters and EP as well as the consumers and the youth, the EU will restrain corporate imperialism.

3. Method

In this chapter the method of qualitative analysis more specifically, qualitative content analysis will be discussed and the choice for the documents will be explained. After the data selection I will lay out the data analysing process with the three phases of preparation phase, organizing phase and reporting phase. The concepts for the analysis will be operationalized in the organizing phase. Lastly, I will explain how to guarantee the quality of this thesis.

3.1 Qualitative research design

As opposed to the quantitative analysis, the qualitative analysis has understanding as the purpose of the research rather than explaining (Jackson, Drummond, Camara, 2007). Qualitative research will allow the deep investigation of a topic, however, due to the design will not allow for generalization as compared to quantitative research (Jackson et al., 2007). I have opted for this method because it allows to understand the phenomenon of corporate imperialism taking into account the context of the EU and the member states.

3.2 Qualitative Content Analysis

One specific way of conducting qualitative research is by using a qualitative content analysis. The qualitative content analysis “is concerned with meanings, intentions, consequences and context” (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992, as cited in Elo & Kyngäs, 2008, p. 109). It does so by analysing sources such as oral histories, texts and images (Elo et al., 2008) This method has been criticised from the quantitative side of being “simplistic” due to the lack of statistical evidence (Morgan, 1993, as cited in Elo et al., 2007, p. 108). Despite some criticism, the qualitative content analysis has many benefits. Firstly, the qualitative content analysis is carefully taking into consideration the content, paying attention to the context and detail (Elo et al., 2008). Secondly, it allows the researcher some room to apply a research design that fits the specific research and does not restrain with strict rules about the research design (Elo et al., 2007). Thirdly, a wide variety of data can be analysed in the qualitative content analysis (Nair, 2017). I will take into account the context and analyse different types of data together with applying a tailor made research design. These measures allow for a deep and throughout analysis that is sensitive to specific features and will enable me to conduct meaningful and high quality research.

There are two approaches one can follow with a qualitative content analysis. There is the inductive approach in which concepts emerge from the documents, if there are no sufficient theories and there is the deductive approach in which the concepts are taken from the existing body of theory and are tested (Elo et al., 2008). In this analysis I will make use of the deductive approach to the qualitative content analysis with the main research objective to “extent or test an existing theory or conceptual

framework" (Nair, 2017, p. 4). This implies that I will move from the general theory of postcolonialism and institutional change theory laid out in chapter two to the specific.

3.2.1 Data selection

The documents that will be analysed are debates from the European Parliament and documents by the European Commission as well as official press releases from these two bodies. Furthermore, there are documents from the European External Action Service (EEAS), the Council of the EU and the presidents of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker and Ursula von der Leyen, including the political guidelines and State of the Union speeches both presidents have held in front of the EP. All documents are related to the topic of corporate imperialism because they talk about, reflect upon or line out new approaches to the way the EU deals with either foreign countries, the environment, human rights or multinational corporations.

All documents have been acquired from the European Union websites in English. Furthermore, the speeches by the presidents Juncker and von der Leyen were held mostly in English. Sometimes in the originals they referred to German or French but I have decided to select the English version to enable a comparison cross the texts.

The documents have been retrieved from several European Union websites. Some documents were specifically searched for when I knew about their existence prior to the research such as the European Green Deal. Other documents were found by using the search option and looking for "corporate imperialism" and "corporate sustainability" on the websites of the European Parliament, Council of the EU, and Commission. The documents that came up during the search were investigated and skimmed through in order to judge whether they relate to the research question. When this was the case, I downloaded them and continued to look for more documents. I continued this process until I had sufficient documents for each year that were extensive in scope and content. Overall, I analysed 10 documents which added up to 248 pages.

The chosen time frame is from 2014 to the introduction of the proposal for a Directive on corporate sustainability in 2022. This timeframe includes two different presidents of the EU Commission. From November 2014 until November 2019 Jean-Claude Juncker was the president of the European Commission and in December 2019 Ursula von der Leyen took over as the president of the EU Commission until the present. It will be interesting to see whether there was a change in the EU's position on corporate imperialism due to crises or change in power relations between these two or within their presidencies. The chosen time allows to compare each year with the one before and the one after as well as a comparison between the Juncker presidency from 2014 to 2018 and the von der Leyen presidency from 2019 to 2022. The comparison between the presidencies do have different

amount of years covered, however, the chosen timeframe of 9 years is the most feasible set up from the begin of the Juncker presidency until the introduction of the proposal for corporate sustainability due to the limited scope of the thesis.

For some documents the decision was made to analyse only parts of it. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, I wanted to keep the number of documents by Juncker in the year of his election equal to the number of documents by von der Leyen in the year of her election. That is why in 2014 I have only analysed the “Political Guidelines for the next European Commission” and the “Opening Statement in the European Parliament Plenary Session” by Jean-Claude Juncker. Since there were only two documents for von der Leyen which included the political guidelines and the speech in front of the EP I wanted to choose the same type and number of documents for Juncker although there were more documents available for Juncker. This would allow for better comparison between the two presidents.

Secondly, some documents were only analysed partly because some sections of the documents were too technocratic. This is the case for the years 2015, 2020 and 2022. In 2015 the document “EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy” includes a detailed explanation of the exact steps that are to be taken between 2015 and 2019. This does not add a lot of new information to the previous parts. Additionally, there were a lot of photos in the technocratic section which are not part of the analysis in general. This is due to the fact that the other documents did not include photos and in order to compare the documents with each other only the text has been analysed. Therefore, the document was analysed only until the end of page 15 of a total of 49 pages. In 2020 the proposal for a Regulation of the EP and of the Council for “Establishing the framework for achieving climate neutrality and amending Regulation (EU) 2018/1999 (European Climate Law)” was analysed. This document was analysed until page 14 out of 45 pages because what follows are the articles that have been adopted. The content of each article however, has already been elaborated on in the previous section. Other technocratic information such as the legislative financial statement that do not add new content have also been excluded from the analysis. In 2022 the proposal for a Directive of the EP and of the Council “on Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence and amending Directive (EU) 2019/1937” was analysed. This document was analysed until the end of page 45 of 69 pages. What follows are the articles that have been adopted. The content of each article however, has already been elaborated on in the previous section. This section does not add new content. Therefore, the content from page 46 and onwards has been excluded from the analysis.

Despite the flexibility in research design, there are three phases in deductive and inductive qualitative content analysis which are called preparation, organizing and reporting (Elo et al., 2008). These three phases by Elo et al. (2008) will be used in my research in order to allow for a structured analysis.

3.2.2 Preparation phase

During this preparation phase I selected the documents for my analysis as described above and the unit of analysis was established by taking concepts from chapter two. I decided to analyse the manifest content that “denotes the information that is explicitly described in the text” since this includes not only “looking for the presence” but also for the “absence of a particular term in the document” (Nair, 2017, p. 11). I have used the following questions to “make sense of the data” (Elo et al., 2008, p. 109): “who is telling?”, “where is this happening?”, “when did it happen?”, “what is happening?”, and “why?” (Dey, 1993 as cited in Elo et al., 2008, p. 109).

3.2.3 Organizing phase

While the preparation phase is the same for the inductive and the deductive approach, the second phase of organizing is different for them. I chose the deductive approach because I want to test the theories of postcolonialism and institutional change theory with these documents. Therefore, I developed a structured categorization matrix with which to code the data. I used the concepts laid out in chapter two, western universalism, white saviour complex, crisis, change in power relations. Corporate imperialism has not been added because it is not possible to observe it directly since it is executed by multinational corporations of which no documents are included. However, through the presence of the other concepts we can see whether corporate imperialism is facilitated by the EU. With these concepts in mind, the documents were coded by looking for the main concept of each paragraph. Western universalism was marked with red colour and the white saviour complex has been marked with pink colour in the documents. Crisis was marked with green colour and change in power relations was marked with blue colour in the documents. For each concept the subcategory was added in a comment in order to further specify. The subcategories were chosen because they make up the concept and are the most important ones to do so. Undoubtedly, there are other subcategories for each concept but based on the theories in chapter two and the aim of this thesis, I selected these.

Western universalism was chosen because it can facilitate corporate imperialism according to the postcolonial theory as laid out in chapter two and is needed in order to answer hypothesis 1A. Part of the western universalism is regarding the western values as superior to other values. Therefore, the subcategory of “Role model” has been added because the western values are considered exemplary and worth of pursuing. Western universalism also entails the active promotion of these values because they are regarded as universally applicable in all countries despite regional or cultural differences. That is why, “Promoting Western values” has been added as a subcategory. Western universalism also entails that the West sees itself as already having achieved the implementation of all these Western values that are regarded as superior and universal and therefore, the subcategory of “(World) leaders & Champions” has been added to the concept. In order to answer hypothesis 2A each subcategory

has an opposing concept. They are “Learning from others”, “Accepting non-western values” and “Lagging behind” (see table 3.1).

Table 3.1 - the structured matrix for western universalism

	Role model Learning from others	Promoting Western Values Accepting non-western values	(World) Leaders & Champions Lagging behind	Total	%
Western univers. No Western univers.					

The white saviour complex was chosen because it can facilitate corporate imperialism according to the postcolonial theory as laid out in chapter two and is needed in order to answer hypothesis 1B. Part of the white saviour complex is regarding the countries from the global South as being in misery due to for example economic problems or hunger. Therefore, the subcategory “Continent / country from (global South) in misery” has been added. Part of the white saviour complex is to think of the people living in the global South as being unable to help themselves. Therefore, “Victim” has been added to the concept. In the white saviour complex it is not only about the victims but also about the one who can rescue them from their misery, that is country from the global North. Therefore, the subcategory of “Hero” has been added to the concept. In order to answer hypothesis 2B) each subcategory has an opposing concept. They are “Feeling guilty”, “Change agents” and “Acknowledging past” (see table 3.2).

Table 3.2 - the structured matrix for white saviour complex

	Continent/Country (from global South) in misery Feeling guilty	Victim Change agents	Hero Acknowledging past	Total	%
White saviour c. No white saviour c.					

Crisis was chosen because it can facilitate change according to the institutional change theory as laid out in chapter two and is needed in order to answer hypothesis 3. The concept crisis is broad and can be referred to by many different words such as challenge, threat or problem, but all share the sudden deterioration of a certain situation and possibly a change in circumstances when comparing the situation before and after the crisis. Related to EU and the concept of corporate imperialism there are three important types of crises. These are the political, the economic and financial, and the environmental crises. The political crisis is important because the EU is a union of several member states deciding about policies. Since corporate imperialism is also facilitated by political agreements a political crisis can change the ability of corporate imperialism to take place. Therefore, the subcategory of “Political Crisis” has been added. Additionally, the EU is also a monetary union and a trade zone. Corporate imperialism is about corporations engaging capitalist activities in host countries and being dependent on tax laws in the country of headquarter. If the economic situation deteriorates this could have implications for the entire capitalist system in which multinational corporations operate and could cause far reaching change in the EU’s market position. This could change the EU’s possibility to enable corporate imperialism. This is why “Economic & Financial Crisis” has been included. Finally, climate change is a crisis affecting the entire world including the EU. Multinational corporations based in the EU and operating in host countries will be affected by increasing scarcity of resources available for production as well as stricter environmental laws. These changes caused by climate change could destabilise the EU’s economy and wealth and limit possibilities for the EU to facilitate corporate imperialism. The category of “Environmental Crisis” has been added to the concept (see table 3.3).

Table 3.3 - the structured matrix for crisis

	Political Crisis	Economic & Financial Crisis	Environmental Crisis
Crisis			

Change in power relations was chosen because it can facilitate change according to the institutional change theory as laid out in chapter two and is needed in order to answer hypothesis 4. In order to measure this concept, I will look at the “capacity of some actors to affect practices and ideas of others” (Ribot and Peluso, 2003, as cited in Neimark, Osterhoudt, Alter, Gradinar, 2019, p. 5). This capacity is given, if the actor has been named in one of the documents by the EU to be the reason or inspiration for a certain action. There are many actors that try to influence the EU. However, in line with the institutional change theory I want to focus on the ones that were not initially part of the institution when it was first established and those who were not considered in the first place. Since the EU started out as a economic community, the industry has been part of it from the beginning while voters, the youth and consumers have not. Therefore, representatives from the industry have been excluded in this analysis.

Since the EP gets elected directly nowadays and the vote outcome influences the decision for a president candidate of the Commission, voters have more influence on EU politics. Additionally, the European Parliament gained more power since its first meeting. Today, it can approve the budget and comment on proposals from the Council of the EU. Therefore, the category of “Voters & European Parliament” has been added. Furthermore, there are increased efforts from the young generation to protect the environment with several environmental movements such as Extinction Rebellion and Fridays for Future. Especially children and young people have been participating in these movements and protesting for a better protection of the environment. Some of them are too young to vote and lack powerful tools such as financial means to influence the EU policies otherwise. If the EU refers to the youth and their demands despite this less privileged position, than there was a change in power relations. That is the reason why “Youth” has been added to the concept. Consumers are also actively calling for more sustainability as can be seen with the steep increase in consuming organic products in the last decennia (Shahbandeh, 2023). Making conscious decision is increasingly important to consumers. Consumers are another group next to voters and the EP as well as the youth whose participation was not reckoned with when the institution was first established. Therefore, the subcategory of “Consumers” has been added (see table 3.4).

Table 3.4 - the structured matrix for change in power relations

	Voters & European Parliament	Youth	Consumers
Change in power relations			

The subcategories of all four concepts are taking into account for each new paragraph and a comment in the document has been added to indicate which of the three subcategories is present. The objective was to only mark the main subcategory for each paragraph since sometimes several subcategories were mentioned. However, mostly there was one clear subcategory per paragraph at play which was the most important and which allowed to mark only the main subcategory. Only exceptionally, I have marked several subcategories per paragraph when they were equally important to the understanding of the document. Marking all subcategories in the entire text would not make sense with this qualitative analysis since it would increase the number of times each concept is counted and falsely create the impression that the concept is very important in the structured matrix. When focusing on the individual paragraphs the risk of interpreting a category as very important is limited. By defining the subcategory for each paragraph rather than during the whole text the concepts are taken into account in the way that they contribute to the content of the document as opposed to simply count the number of times a concept has been mentioned. This is in line with qualitative analysis as opposed to quantitative analysis.

3.2.4 Reporting phase

In order for the reader to understand how the analysis was conducted, I will describe the analysis and results extensively in chapter four by using quotes that illustrate the findings. The structured matrix will be added with all years from 2014 to 2022 and the number of words each document has as well as the number of paragraphs. Additionally, the concepts – crisis, change in power relations, (no) western universalism, (no) white saviour complex- and all of their three subcategories are added to the matrix. Moreover, the total number of coded concepts from one year and the percentage of that will be part of the matrix. Since documents are already coded in a qualitative way, the findings can be illustrated in this way without contradicting the qualitative analysis. Adding the percentage of how many times a concept was mentioned each year is useful for the comparison between the years due to the different lengths of the documents. However, the percentage will sometimes be relatively low in comparison to the entire word count of the document so it is important for the accessibility and

understanding of this thesis to also add the number of times a concept was mentioned in each year. Also one should take into account that the concept of crisis is relatively big and large in scope including more situations than the more narrow defined concept of white saviour complex. Furthermore, the documents that are used and marked will be added to the appendices.

3.3 Quality assurance

When conducting a qualitative content analysis it is important to remember, that every researcher interprets the data in their own subjective way (Elo et al., 2008). With a deductive approach there are also the risks of approaching the data with a bias due to prior theoretical knowledge as well as to lose sight of context specific aspects of the phenomenon because of focusing too much on the theory (Hsieh et al., 2005). Furthermore, there is another limitation, that is my own positionality. Being trained at European universities makes me bias and despite trying to avoid the Eurocentric bias as much as possible, it sticks with me and influences my writing. However, due to my own non-European background I am aware of these biases which helps to minimize their impact.

To counter these limitations, I applied criteria which can measure “the quality of scientific inquiry” (Nair, 2017, p. 19f). These criteria are: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability and test the trustworthiness (Nair, 2017; Jackson et al., 2007). Additionally, I added reflexivity in order to reflect on my own positionality inside this research.

With credibility, the focus lies on making sure the research is set up in a way that the “data and analysis address the research question” (Nair, 2017, p. 20). I did so by collecting documents from the EU and analysing them with concepts that relate to the research question and corporate imperialism. Dependability can be achieved with sharing the materials used for preparing the analysis such as coding schemes with the readers (Nair, 2017). This has been done in section 3.2.3 Organizing phase. The transferability is important when looking at the “degree to which the results of a particular study can be transferred to other similar settings” (Nair, 2017, p. 20). It can be achieved by giving detailed examples and collecting much data (Nair, 2017). This will be achieved by including extensive quotes during the analysis which illustrate the findings. The confirmability is another criteria to ensure the quality of the research and refers to the relation between the collected data and the research results (Nair, 2017). This can be achieved by sharing the collected data with the readers (Nair, 2017). The coded data will be added in the appendix. Lastly, I added reflexivity to ensure the quality of the research. Engaging in reflexivity includes to critically reflect on my own position in the research and examine closely how my own bias played into this thesis which will be done in the conclusion.

4. Analysis

In the following chapter I will conduct the analysis. The structured matrix of the percentage scores for the four concepts in all years from 2014 to 2022 is included at the beginning of the analysis. Firstly, each year from 2014 to 2022 will be discussed, including all four concepts of western universalism, white saviour complex, crisis and change in power relations. Here, the order of the most to the least observed concept will be elaborated on. The structured matrixes for each individual year with the concepts and their subcategories are provided in the beginning of each subsequent year. Secondly, the changes that occurred between the years 2014 to 2022 will be analysed for each concept. Thirdly, the time periods of 2014 to 2018 and 2019 to 2022 respectively, the Juncker and the von der Leyen presidency will be compared with each other in order to see whether there are significant changes between the two periods.

4.1 Overall results

Table 4.1 shows the concepts of (no) western universalism, (no) white saviour complex, crisis and change in power relations including their subcategories and opposites as well as their scores over the years from 2014 to 2022 in percentage.

I coded the documents and then counted the number of times each concept was coded. Then I calculated the percentage of the concept from the total words in each document(s) of each year. These percentage scores are reported in table 4.1. For each year there has been one document that was analysed except for 2019 when there were two documents analysed. The percentage scores are there in order to make it easier to compare the concepts over the years since the length of each document differed. If I would have just reported the number of times a concept was mentioned per year it would have been difficult to see whether a concept decreased or increased regardless of the amount of words of the document.

Table 4.1 – concepts per year 2014-2022 in percentage

year	Western universalism	No Western universalism	White saviour complex	No white saviour complex	Crisis	Change power relations
2014	0.15	0.03	0.09	0.01	0.40	0.19
2015	0.62	0.02	0.17	0.14	0.19	0.05
2016	0.29	0.02	0.27	0.13	0.37	0.04
2017	0.13	0.07	0.02	0	0.37	0.05
2018	0.20	0.008	0.02	0.02	0.27	0.10
2019	0.26	0.05	0.11	0.02	0.49	0.25
2020	0.09	0.01	0.03	0.03	0.26	0.03
2021	0.21	0.06	0.29	0.09	0.90	0.30
2022	0.02	0.009	0.05	0	0.55	0.009

4.2 2014-2018 Juncker’s presidency of the European Commission

2014

In the following are the structured matrixes with their subcategories for the concepts of (no) western universalism, (no) white saviour complex, crisis, change in power relations for 2014. The document for that year has 10489 words and 147 paragraphs.

Table 4.2 – structured matrix 2014

	Role model	Promoting Western Values	(World) Leaders & Champions	Total	%
	Learning from others	Accepting non-western values	Lagging behind		
Western univers.	8	5	3	16	0.15
No Western univers.	0	0	3	3	0.03

	Continent/Country (from global South) in misery	Victim	Hero	Total	%
	Feeling guilty		Change agent	Acknowledging past	
White saviour c.	3	0	6	9	0.09
No white saviour c.	0	1	0	1	0.01

	Political Crisis	Economic Crisis	Environmental Crisis	Total	%
Crisis	17	25	0	42	0.40

	Voters & European Parliament	Youth	Consumers	Total	%
Change in power relations	12	6	2	20	0.19

The documents from 2014 in which Juncker speaks to the European Parliament and lays down his political guidelines focus from all concepts the most on crises which can be observed in the matrix where the concept of crisis scores 0.40 percentage. Juncker (2014) keeps mentioning the financial crisis of 2008 in the EU and says: “The crisis has only been paused.” (p. 8). The focus is on the consequences of the financial crisis that are still relevant in 2014 such as high (youth) unemployment. This becomes evident when looking at the subcategory of economic crisis which is the most mentioned one in the documents with 25 times.

Furthermore, attention is paid to the new institutional dynamic in which there is more interest in the European Parliament election and its outcome. Juncker stresses that for the first time the EP elections have influenced the proposal for a president of the EU Commission. These changes imply a shift in

power relations since the European voter and the EP are taken more seriously in having a say in the election of the president of the Commission. This is confirmed by looking at the matrix in which the subcategory of voters and EP has the highest score out of the three subcategories with 12 observations. The concept of change in power relations as a whole has a score of 0.19 percentage which makes it the second most observed concept after crisis.

The documents scores 0.15 percentage on the concept of western universalism. The concept is the third most observed concept. When this category is observed it is clear and obvious as with this statement: "I want a Europe at the heart of the action, a Europe which moves forward, a Europe which exists, protects, wins and serves as a model for others" (Juncker, 2014, p. 23). Europe should be a union that does well and stands for certain values so that others will admire and try to copy it. This is in line with the observation that the subcategory of role model is the highest out of the three with 8 observations. The concept no western universalism is observed with 0.03 percentage. The subcategory of lagging behind is 3 times observed and the only one observed out of the subcategories.

Lastly, the concept of white saviour complex scores 0.09 percentage and is thus the least observed in comparison with the other concepts. When the white saviour complex is observed, it is sharp. The following statement illustrates that: "I would have liked to speak to you about Africa, a continent so often unhappy and forgotten. ... Let us not forget Africa and let us end the appalling scandal, the absolute tragedy in which a man dies of hunger every six seconds and 25 000 children die of hunger every single day. As long as 25 000 children are dying of hunger every day, Europe will still have work to do. Europe has a responsibility to change this situation." (Juncker, 2014, p. 22). This statement shows that Juncker thinks Europe has a responsibility to rescue people living in all countries of Africa from hunger. This is in line with the subcategory of hero that scores highest with 6 observations among the three. The concept no white saviour complex scores 0.01 percentage. The subcategory of change agent is the only one observed out of the three with 1 time. This can be observed with this quote: "With countries in our Eastern neighbourhood such as Moldova or Ukraine, we need to step up close cooperation, association and partnership to further strengthen our economic and political ties." (Juncker, 2014, p. 12). Interestingly, this is not said about the neighbours in the south.

2015

In the following are the structured matrixes with their subcategories for the concepts of (no) western universalism, (no) white saviour complex, crisis, change in power relations for 2015. The document for that year has 4223 words and 33 paragraphs.

Table 4.3 – structured matrix 2015

	Role model Learning from others	Promoting Western Values accepting non-western values	(World) Leaders & Champions Lagging behind	Total	%
Western univers.	6	18	2	26	0.62
No Western univers.	0	1	0	1	0.02

	Continent/Country (from global South) in misery Feeling guilty	Victim Change agent	Hero Acknowledging past	Total	%
White saviour c.	0	0	7	7	0.17
No white saviour c.	0	6	0	6	0.14

	Political Crisis	Economic Crisis	Environmental Crisis	Total	%
Crisis	8	0	0	8	0.19

	Voters & European Parliament	Youth	Consumers	Total	%
Change in power relations	2	0	0	2	0.05

In 2015, the EU action plan on human rights and democracy by the Council of the EU was presented. The western universalism concept scores 0.62 percentage and is the most observed concept. It can be observed with statements about the EU like: “promote ... democracy around the world” (Council of the European Union, General Secretariat of the Council, 2015, p. 9) which shows that the EU wants to spread its own ideas and values over the world. This statement is in line with most observed subcategory of promoting western which was observed 18 times. The concept no western universalism was observed with 0.02 percentage. The subcategory of accepting non-western values was observed 1 time and the only one out of the three.

The concept of crisis is observed with a score of 0.19 percentage. The document looks at crisis at the beginning of the document stating that: “we are faced with dramatic political and humanitarian crises” (Council of the European Union, General Secretariat of the Council, 2015, p. 6). The only subcategory that is observed out of the three is the political crisis with 8 observations.

The white saviour complex scores 0.17 percentage. Statements like: “The EU seeks to prevent violations of human rights throughout the world and, where violations occur, to ensure that victims have access to justice and redress and that those responsible are held to account.” (Council of the European Union, General Secretariat of the Council, 2015, p. 11) show that the EU thinks that they are the white saviour of people who are victims of human rights violations because only through them the people get justice. This is in line with the fact that the subcategory of hero is the only one observed among the three with a total of 7 observations. The concept no white saviour complex reaches 0.14 percentage. Statements like: “the EU will put special emphasis on ownership by, and co-operation with, local institutions and mechanisms” (Council of the European Union, General Secretariat of the Council, 2015, p. 13) show that the EU sees other actors as active agents that can bring about change. The subcategory change agent is observed 6 times and the only one out of the three.

The least mentioned concept is change in power relations with a score of 0.05 percentage. The only subcategory that is observed is that of voters and EP with 2 observations. This matches with the statement that the EP is regarded as having “a particular authority and expertise in the field of human

rights” (Council of the European Union, General Secretariat of the Council, 2015, p. 13). Special attention is placed on the EP.

2016

In the following are the structured matrixes with their subcategories for the concepts of (no) western universalism, (no) white saviour complex, crisis, change in power relations for 2016. The document for that year has 15524 words and 123 paragraphs (quotes do not count as individual paragraphs).

Table 4.4 – structures matrix 2016

	Role model Learning from others	Promoting Western Values Accepting non-western values	(World) Leaders & Champions Lagging behind	Total	%
Western univers.	7	34	4	45	0.29
No Western univers.	2	1	0	3	0.02

	Continent/Country (from global South) in misery Feeling guilty	Victim Change agent	Hero Acknowledging past	Total	%
White saviour c.	2	1	39	42	0.27
No white saviour c.	0	20	0	20	0.13

	Political Crisis	Economic Crisis	Environmental Crisis	Total	%
Crisis	41	2	14	57	0.37

	Voters & European Parliament	Youth	Consumers	Total	%
Change in power relations	1	3	2	6	0.04

In 2016 the EU's diplomatic service EEAS presented the global strategy for the EU's foreign and security policy. Out of the four categories, the EU referred to crises the most with 0.37 percent. Crises of all kinds were observed, including terrorism, illegal migration, climate change, energy insecurity and economic fluctuations. The subcategory of political crisis is observed the most out of the three subcategories with 41 observations. This situation is summarised nicely in the begin of the document with the following words: "We live in times of existential crisis" (European External Action Service, 2017, p. 7). The EU takes the contemporary problems serious and is aware of the many challenges awaiting the EU today and in the future, the main focus lies on political crisis as opposed to economic or environmental crisis.

The second most mentioned concept is western universalism with 0.29 percentage. The EU states that: "We have an interest in promoting our values in the world" (European External Action Service, 2017, p. 13). This quote shows that EU wants to promote its values which can be observed with the fact that the subcategory of promoting western values is most common out of the three different ones with 34 observations. The document makes it clear that the EU is not just generally talking about promoting their values but has specific ones in mind as can be observed with this statement: "We have an interest in fair and open markets, in shaping global economic and environmental rules" (European External Action Service, 2017, p. 15). The concept no western universalism is observed with 0.02 percentage. The subcategory of learning from others is observed 2 times. It can be illustrated with this quote: "We will not strive to export our model, but rather seek reciprocal inspiration from different regional experiences." (European External Action Service, 2017, p. 32). This is an interesting quote since it seems

to contradict the previously made statements coded as western universalism about wanting to promote their own values.

The white saviour complex is the third most mentioned concept and close to western universalism with a score of 0.27 percentage. The opening statement: "We need a stronger Europe. This is what our citizens deserve, this is what the wider world expects." (European External Action Service, 2017, p. 7) is showing that the EU needs to be strong in order to help others because they are counting on the EU and cannot do it themselves. This way of thinking is nicely illustrated by the statement that: "We must enhance our efforts to stimulate growth and jobs in Africa. The Economic Partnership Agreements can spur African integration and mobility, and encourage Africa's full and equitable participation in global value chains." (European External Action Service, 2017, p. 36). This is in line with the subcategory of hero which is named most often with 39 observations as compared to the others. The concept no white saviour complex is observed with a score of 0.13 percentage. The subcategory of change agent is the only one observed out of the three with a score of 20 observations.

The concept of change in power relations is the least mentioned concept in the document accounting to 0.04 percentage. When it is mentioned the focus lies mainly on the young people and they are mentioned in order to achieve another goal. This can be observed with this statement: "We will deepen work on education, communication, culture, youth and sport to counter violent extremism." (European External Action Service, 2017, p. 21). This is in line with the observation of youth as the main subcategory of the concept which is observed 3 times.

2017

In the following are the structured matrixes with their subcategories for the concepts of (no) western universalism, (no) white saviour complex, crisis, change in power relations for 2017. The document for that year has 8715 words and 84 paragraphs.

Table 4.5 – structured matrix 2017

	Role model Learning from others	Promoting Western Values Accepting non-western values	(World) Leaders & Champions Lagging behind	Total	%
Western univers.	0	4	7	11	0.13
No Western univers.	0	0	6	6	0.07

	Continent/Country (from global South) in misery Feeling guilty	Victim Change agent	Hero Acknowledging past	Total	%
White saviour c.	0	0	1	1	0.02
No white saviour c.	0	0	0	0	0

	Political Crisis	Economic Crisis	Environmental Crisis	Total	%
Crisis	7	20	5	32	0.37

	Voters & European Parliament	Youth	Consumers	Total	%
Change in power relations	1	0	3	4	0.05

The European Commission did present “A renewed EU Industrial Policy Strategy - Investing in a smart, innovative and sustainable Industry” in 2017 to the other EU bodies such as the EP and the Council of the EU. The concept of crisis scores 0.37 percentage and is the most observed one. Several crisis are taken into account such as: “changing value chains, sustainability challenges, shifts in global demand as well as remaining structural weaknesses in our business environment.” (European Commission, Secretariat General, 2017, p. 3). These are mainly related to economic crisis and this can also be observed with the subcategory of economic crisis being most often observed compared to the others with 20 observations.

Western universalism is the second most observed concept with 0.13 percentage. In line with the concept is the statement that: “The EU pursues sustainable development in a cross-cutting way and is the driving force behind the Paris Agreement for climate action and the Sustainable Development Agenda for 2030.” (European Commission, Secretariat General, 2017, p. 9). This shows that the EU is seen as exceptional and a leader of other countries. This is in line with the most observed subcategory of (World) Leaders and Champions with 7 observations. The concept of no western universalism scores 0.07 percentage. The statement: “investment in innovation and other intangible assets remains lower than by many competitors” (European Commission, Secretariat General, 2017, p. 11) shows that the EU is lagging behind in investments in comparison with other countries. This is in line with the subcategory of lagging behind that is the only one out of the three that can be observed with 6 times.

Changes in power relations is the third most mentioned concept with 0.05 percentage. The EU claims that: “Innovation itself and value creation are changing in profound ways, driven by a new generation of consumers who expect value-co-creation, connectivity and real-time performance measurements.” (European Commission, Secretariat General, 2017, p. 2). That means that consumers are more interested in the products they consume and the impacts these products have on the environment but also on people making them. This is in line with the subcategory of consumers which is most often observed with 3 observations.

The white saviour complex is the least observed concept in this document with 0.02 percentage. The one time it is observed it is very clear as can be illustrated with this statement: “To help accelerate the market uptake of innovation worldwide, the EU will, together with the Nordic Countries, co-host a major global summit in 2018” (European Commission, Secretariat General, 2017, p. 10). The way the EU portrays itself is that of a white saviour, saving the planet and the people from climate change. The explicit mentioning of countries from the global North creates a divide between the saviours from the global North and suggests that the victims are from the global South. This is in line with the white saviour subcategory that is the only one of the three observed with 1 observation. The concept no white saviour complex is not observed and scores 0 percentage.

2018

In the following are the structured matrixes with their subcategories for the concepts of (no) western universalism, (no) white saviour complex, crisis, change in power relations for 2018. The document for that year has 12360 words and 127 paragraphs.

Table 4.6 – structures matrix 2018

	Role model	Promoting Western Values	(World) Leaders & Champions	Total	%
	Learning from others	Accepting non-western values	Lagging behind		
Western univers.	3	3	19	25	0.20
No Western univers.	0	0	1	1	0.008

	Continent/Country (from global South) in misery Feeling guilty	Victim Change agent	Hero Acknowledging past	Total	%
White saviour	1	0	1	2	0.02
No c. white saviour c.	0	3	0	3	0.02

	Political Crisis	Economic Crisis	Environmental Crisis	Total	%
Crisis	5	4	24	33	0.27

	Voters & European Parliament	Youth	Consumers	Total	%
Change in power relations	1	1	10	12	0.10

In 2018 the European Commission presented “A European strategic long-term vision for a prosperous, modern, competitive and climate neutral economy, a Clean Planet for all” to other EU bodies such as the EP and the Council of the EU. The most observed category was crisis with 0.27 percentage. In the document there is most focus on environmental crisis as can be observed with the subcategory of environmental crisis that is observed most often out of the three with 24 observations. When addressing the environmental crisis the EU focuses on the impacts climate change has on the EU as can be observed with this statement: “This would also have severe consequences on the productivity of Europe's economy, infrastructure, ability to produce food, public health, biodiversity and political stability.” (European Commission, Directorate-General for Climate Action, 2018, p. 2).

Western universalism is the second most mentioned concept with a score of 0.20 percentage. The concept can be observed with this statement: “The EU has already started the modernisation and

transformation towards a climate neutral economy and will continue to lead global efforts to this end.” (European Commission, Directorate-General for Climate Action, 2018, p. 22). This shows that the EU regards its own actions as good and universally applicable to other regions and furthermore, shows that the EU refers to itself literally as a leader when it comes to climate protection. This is in line with the subcategory of (World) Leaders and Champions that is observed most often out of the three with 19 observations. The concept of non-western universalism is observed with a score of 0.008 percentage. The only subcategory that is observed is lagging behind with 1 time.

Change in power relations is observed the third most concept in this document with 0.10 percentage. That the consumer is of importance in this document becomes clear with this statement: “Consumers have a powerful role to play in driving the transformation forward” (European Commission, Directorate-General for Climate Action, 2018, p. 22). It implies that the consumers will have influence on the development of climate change. This matches the observations from the subcategories since consumer is most often observed with 10 observations.

The white saviour complex is the least observed concept in the document with 0.02 percentage. The EU thinks of itself as a white saviour which can be observed in this statement: “share knowledge and experience in developing long-term strategies and implementing efficient policies so that collectively the objectives of the Paris Agreement are accomplished” (European Commission, Directorate-General for Climate Action, 2018, p. 25). This implies that thanks to the EU sharing its knowledge the goals could be reached while other countries or regions do not have knowledge and are dependent for it on the EU. The subcategory of Country (from global South) in misery and white saviour are both observed 1 times while victim is not observed. The concept of no white saviour complex is observed with a score of 0.02 percentage. The only subcategory that is observed out of the three is change agent with 3 times. It can be observed with this: “the EU needs to work with global partners” (European Commission, Directorate-General for Climate Action, 2018, p. 11).

4.3 2019-2022 von der Leyen’s presidency of the European Commission

2019

In the following are the structured matrixes with their subcategories for the concepts of (no) western universalism, (no) white saviour complex, crisis, change in power relations for 2019. The document for that year has 13195 words and 413 paragraphs.

Table 4.7 – structured matrix 2019

	Role model Learning from others	Promoting Western Values Accepting non-western values	(World) Leaders & Champions Lagging behind	Total	%
Western univers.	11	6	17	34	0.26
No Western univers.	0	0	6	6	0.05

	Continent/Country (from global South) in misery Feeling guilty	Victim Change agent	Hero Acknowledging past	Total	%
White saviour c.	1	1	13	15	0.11
No white saviour c.	0	2	0	2	0.02

	Political Crisis	Economic Crisis	Environmental Crisis	Total	%
Crisis	43	13	9	65	0.49

	Voters & European Parliament	Youth	Consumers	Total	%
Change in power relations	25	8	0	33	0.25

In 2019 Ursula von der Leyen delivered a speech in front of the EP and set out political guidelines. Von der Leyen refers to a lot of different crises, which is summarised with this statement: “Today’s world feels ever more unsettled.” (von der Leyen, A, 2019, p. 4). The concept of crisis is observed most often and scores 0.49 percentage. The subcategory of political crisis is most often observed with a 43 observations. This subcategory can be observed with the following statement: “managing crises after emergency, fighting to keep our unity and solidarity intact.” (von der Leyen, B, 2019, p. 5).

Western universalism is observed the second most with 0.26 percentage. Statements like: “We are the world’s trading superpower.” (von der Leyen, A, 2019, p. 4) are in line with the subcategory of (World) Leaders and Champions which is counted 17 times. Furthermore, von der Leyen stresses several times that Europe “takes the global lead on the major challenges of our times” (von der Leyen, A, 2019, p. 3). This illustrates that the EU is not just passively a leader as with the example of world trade but does also engage in its role as a leader actively. The concept no western universalism was observed with 0.05 percentage. The subcategory of lagging behind is the only one observed with 6 times. The statement about investment illustrates this lack: “Honourable Members, we have to scale-up” (von der Leyen, B, 2019, p. 10).

A similar score like western universalism is noted for the concept of change in power relations. It scores one point lower with a percentage of 0.25. Von der Leyen states that: “the European Parliament should have a leading role” (von der Leyen, B, 2019, p. 14). This focus on the EP explains why the subcategory of voters and EP is the most observed out of the three with 25 observations.

The white saviour complex can be observed in the guidelines and in the speech von der Leyen gave in front of the EP. The concept scores 0.11 percentage and is the least observed concept. Sentences as: “We need to put the clear focus of our development cooperation on improving the perspectives of young women and men in their countries of origin.” (von der Leyen, A, 2019, p. 16) imply that the countries of origin are not able to do so and are dependent on the help of the EU. This is in line with the subcategory of hero that is observed most with 13 observations. The concept no white saviour

complex is observed with 0.02 percentage. The subcategory of change agent is the only one observed with 2 times.

2020

In the following are the structured matrixes with their subcategories for the concepts of (no) western universalism, (no) white saviour complex, crisis, change in power relations for 2020. The document for that year has 6840 and 52 paragraphs.

Table 4.8 – structured matrix 2020

	Role model Learning from others	Promoting Western Values Accepting non-western values	(World) Leaders & Champions Lagging behind	Total	%
Western univers.	0	2	4	6	0.09
No Western univers.	0	0	1	1	0.01

	Continent/Country (from global South) in misery Feeling guilty	Victim Change agent	Hero Acknowledging past	Total	%
White saviour c.	0	0	2	2	0.03
No white saviour c.	0	2	0	2	0.03

	Political Crisis	Economic Crisis	Environmental Crisis	Total	%
Crisis	0	0	18	18	0.26

	Voters & European Parliament	Youth	Consumers	Total	%
Change in power relations	0	0	2	2	0.03

In 2020 the Covid-19 pandemic reached the EU and caused many deaths and lockdowns in all EU member states. Despite the crisis there were several times when the EU focused on multinational corporations and sustainable business. One example of this is the proposal for climate neutrality by the Commission. In this document they refer to climate change as: “urgent challenge” and “global challenge” (European Commission, 2020, p.1,3). Which shows that the EU takes into account other crises than the Covid-19 pandemic. The concept of crisis is also the most observed one with 0.26 percentage. The subcategory of environmental crisis is the only one observed out of the three with 18 observations.

Also present in the document are ideas in line with the concept of western universalism. The concept is the second most observed one with 0.09 percentage. The statement about the EU like: “it is a leader in the global transition towards a net-zero-greenhouse gas emissions economy” (European Commission, 2020, p. 3) illustrates how the EU thinks of itself as a leader in the fight against climate change. The subcategory of (world) leader and champion scores highest out of the three with 4 observations. The concept no western universalism is observed with 0.01 percentage. The subcategory of lagging behind is the only one observed with 1 observation.

The concept of change in power relations in this document is observed with 0.03 percentage. The subcategory of consumer is named 2 times while the others are not. This statement elaborates the importance of consumers: “enhance certainty and confidence on the EU’s commitment for businesses, workers, investors and consumers” (European Commission, 2020, p. 2). They are named next to other powerful stakeholders such as businesses and investors.

The white saviour concept is observed with the same 0.03 percentage score as the change in power relations concept. In line with the concept is that the EU thinks of itself as saving the world from climate change which becomes evident with this statement: “Given that worldwide progress towards the objectives of the Paris Agreement is insufficient, EU leadership is needed now more than ever.” (European Commission, 2020, p. 3). This shows the white saviour logic since the EU steps in and takes action to save the planet and people while others do not. The world and the climate depend on the EU for their rescue and the EU is willingly taking up the role as a saviour. This is in line with the observation of the subcategory of hero with 2 observations while the other two subcategories have not been observed. The concept of no white saviour complex is observed with a score of 0.03 percentage. The subcategory of change agent is the only one observed out of the three with 2 times. This can be illustrated with the following: “the EU cannot solve climate change without others also acting” (European Commission, 2020, p. 3).

2021

In the following are the structured matrixes with their subcategories for the concepts of (no) western universalism, (no) white saviour complex, crisis, change in power relations for 2021. The document for that year has 6666 and 290 paragraphs.

Table 4.9 – structured matrix 2021

	Role model Learning from others	Promoting Western Values Accepting non-western values	(World) Leaders & Champions Lagging behind	Total	%
Western univers.	6	0	8	14	0.21
No Western univers.	0	0	4	4	0.06

	Continent/Country (from global South) in misery	Victim	Hero	Total	%
	Feeling guilty	Change agent	Acknowledging past		
White saviour c.	1	4	14	19	0.29
No white saviour c.	2	4	0	6	0.09

	Political Crisis	Economic Crisis	Environmental Crisis	Total	%
Crisis	42	10	5	57	0.90

	Voters & European Parliament	Youth	Consumers	Total	%
Change in power relations	0	20	0	20	0.30

In the State of the Union speech by Ursula von der Leyen in 2021 the concept crisis is the most observed one with a score of 0.90 percentage. Von der Leyen refers to several crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic, climate change, decline in press freedom and cyber-attacks as well as the conflict with Belarus. To summarize the scope of the crises nicely, von der Leyen said: “The speed of events and the enormity of the challenges are sometimes difficult to grasp.” (von der Leyen, 2021, p. 2). The subcategory of political crisis is most often observed with 42 observations.

The concept of change in power relations can also be observed in the document. The concept scores 0.30 percentage. The focus lies on the European youth which becomes clear with this statement: “This is why we will propose to make 2022 the Year of European Youth.” (von der Leyen, 2021, p. 8). Since the youth had to take responsibility during the Covid-19 pandemic and had to miss out on many things,

von der Leyen wants to give back to this generation by allowing the youth to have more influence and a say in EU politics. Von der Leyen also invites a young person to speak in front of the EP. The young speaker is introduced with the following words: "So let's be inspired by Bebe and by all the young people who change our perception of the possible." (von der Leyen, 2021, p. 20). This is why the subcategory of youth is the only one that is observed with 20 observations out of the three.

With a score of 0.29 percentage which is close to the previous concept, the white saviour complex concept can be observed in the document. Especially, when it comes to the Covid-19 pandemic, von der Leyen stresses the EU's role as a white saviour. The following statement illustrates that: "We were the only ones to share half of our vaccine production with the rest of the world. ... we delivered more than another 700 million doses to the rest of the world, to more than 130 countries." (von der Leyen, 2021, p. 3). This shows that the EU portrays itself to have saved people outside the EU from Covid-19 by providing vaccines and being a better actor than others. Additionally, the EU also applies the white saviour complex to the political situation in Afghanistan as this statement shows: "I think in particular of women judges who are now in hiding from the men they jailed. ... We must support them and we will coordinate all efforts with Member States to bring them to safety." (von der Leyen, 2021, p. 11). This is in line with the most observed subcategory of hero with 14 observations. The concept no white saviour complex is observed with a score of 0.09 percentage. The subcategory that is observed most is change agent with 4 times. However, the subcategory of feeling guilty is observed 2 times in this document and that is the only time in all the years from 2014 to 2022. This is in connection to the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan. The statement: "There are deeply troubling questions that allies will have to tackle within NATO." (von der Leyen, 2021, p. 11) illustrates that the EU feels guilty about having left the country in chaos and violence.

The concept western universalism was the least observed one in the document with 0.21 percentage. The clearest statement to observe this concept is the following: "We did it the right way, because we did it the European way. And it worked!" (von der Leyen, 2021, p. 3). The way the EU chose is considered to be a role model for others since it achieved the goal. Furthermore, von der Leyen refers to the EU in the following way: "We are world leaders." (von der Leyen, 2021, p. 7). This last quote is in line with the most observed subcategory of (world) leaders and champions. It was observed 8 times. The concept no western universalism scores with 0.06 percentage. The subcategory of lagging behind is observed 4 times and the only one out of the three.

2022

In the following are the structured matrixes with their subcategories for the concepts of (no) western universalism, (no) white saviour complex, crisis, change in power relations for 2022. The document for that year has 23052 words and 221 paragraphs.

Table 4.10- structured matrix 2022

	Role model Learning from others	Promoting Western Values Accepting non-western values	(World) Leaders & Champions Lagging behind	Total	%
Western univers.	0	4	0	4	0.02
No Western unives.	0	0	2	2	0.009

	Continent/Country (from global South) in misery Feeling guilty	Victim Change agents	Hero Acknowledging past	Total	%
White saviour c.	0	1	10	11	0.05
No white saviour c.	0	0	0	0	0

	Political Crisis	Economic Crisis	Environmental Crisis	Total	%
Crisis	67	21	38	126	0.55

	Voters & European Parliament	Youth	Consumers	Total	%
Change in power relations	0	0	2	2	0.009

In 2022 the Commission and the EP initiated the proposal for a Directive on Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence. Central to this proposal were the following problems: “adverse human rights and environmental impacts” (European Commission, Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, 2022, p. 1). The concept of crisis was the most observed one with a score of 0.55 percentage. The subcategories of political crisis was most often observed out of the three with a score of 67 observations.

The concept of white saviour complex is the second most observed one with a score of 0.05 percentage. The following statement is exemplary for the concept: “The connection of the EU economy to millions of workers around the world through global value chains comes with a responsibility to address adverse impacts on the rights of these workers.” (European Commission, Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, 2022, p. 1). It illustrates that the EU regards itself as a responsible actor that brings progress and justice to people because other actors do not care to step up against injustices. This is in line with the most observed subcategory of hero with 10 observations. The concept of no white saviour complex is not observed in this document and scores 0 percentage.

The concept of western universalism was observed third most with a score of 0.02 percentage. The following makes clear what the EU regards as most important: “promoting European core values are among the priorities of the Union” (European Commission, Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, 2022, p. 27). This open acknowledgement of the importance to promote their own values is in line with the subcategory of promoting western values that was observed 4 times and was the only one observed out of the three. The concept of no western universalism score 0.009 percentage. The subcategory of lagging behind is the observed 2 times and the only one out of the three.

The concept of change in power relations was observed the least with a score of 0.009 percentage. The subcategory of consumer was the only one observed out of the three with 2 observations. The consumer seems to be of more importance now which becomes clear with the following statement: “consumers and investors that are becoming increasingly aware of sustainability” (European

Commission, Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, 2022, p. 2). This shows that the EU knows about what consumers want and how they behave even though they were not in mind when the EU was first established as an economic Union while the investors were.

4.4 Comparison concepts 2014-2022

Figure 4.1 shows the percentage scores of all concepts between 2014 and 2022. These include the concepts of (no) western universalism, (no) white saviour complex, crisis, change in power relations. Combining all concepts in one figure helps to compare them to one another. It illustrates that the concept of crisis has the highest percentage scores overall with a peak in 2021 and that the concept of western universalism saw a peak in 2015. The other concepts have lower percentage scores and show less change in comparison with the former two concepts.

In order to see the exact scores and changes per concept, figure 4.2 to 4.5 show the percentage scores of the individual concepts with a linear trendline. Figure 4.2 shows the percentage scores of the concepts western universalism and no western universalism. Figure 4.3 shows the percentage scores of the concepts white saviour complex and no white saviour complex. Figure 4.4 shows the percentage scores of the concept crisis. Figure 4.5 shows the percentage scores of the concept change in power relations. The linear trendline helps to illustrate the overall behaviour of a concept during the years 2014 to 2022.

Figure 4.1 – percentage scores of all concepts 2014-2022

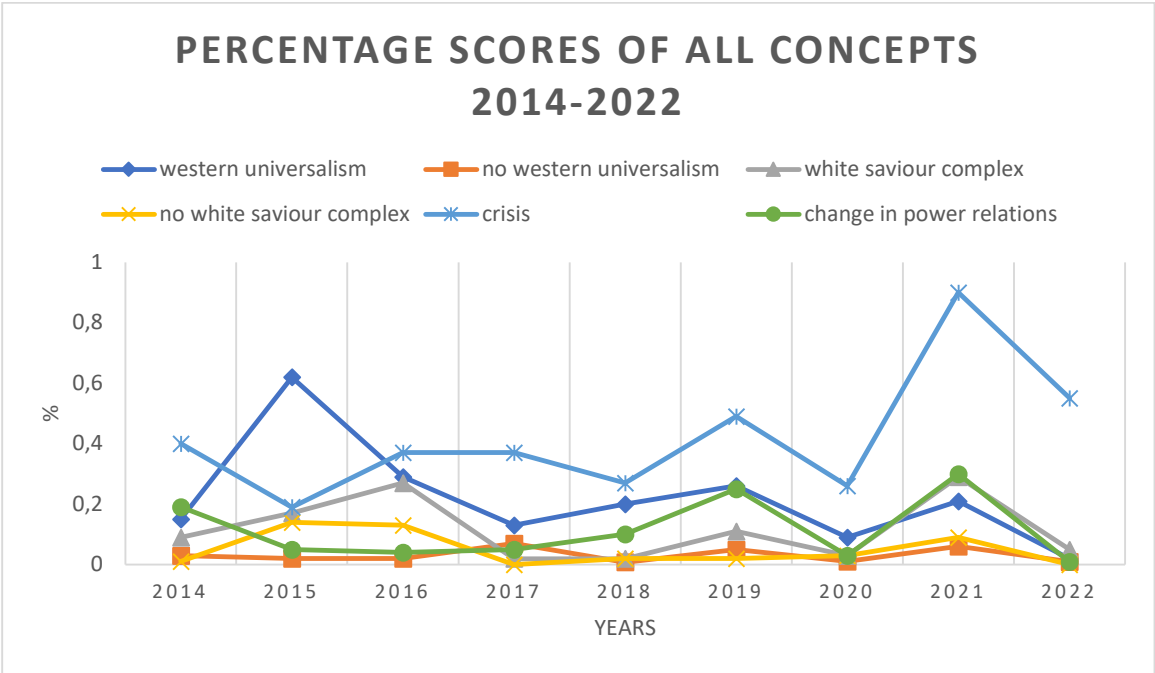


Figure 4.2 – percentage scores of western universalism & no western universalism 2014-2022

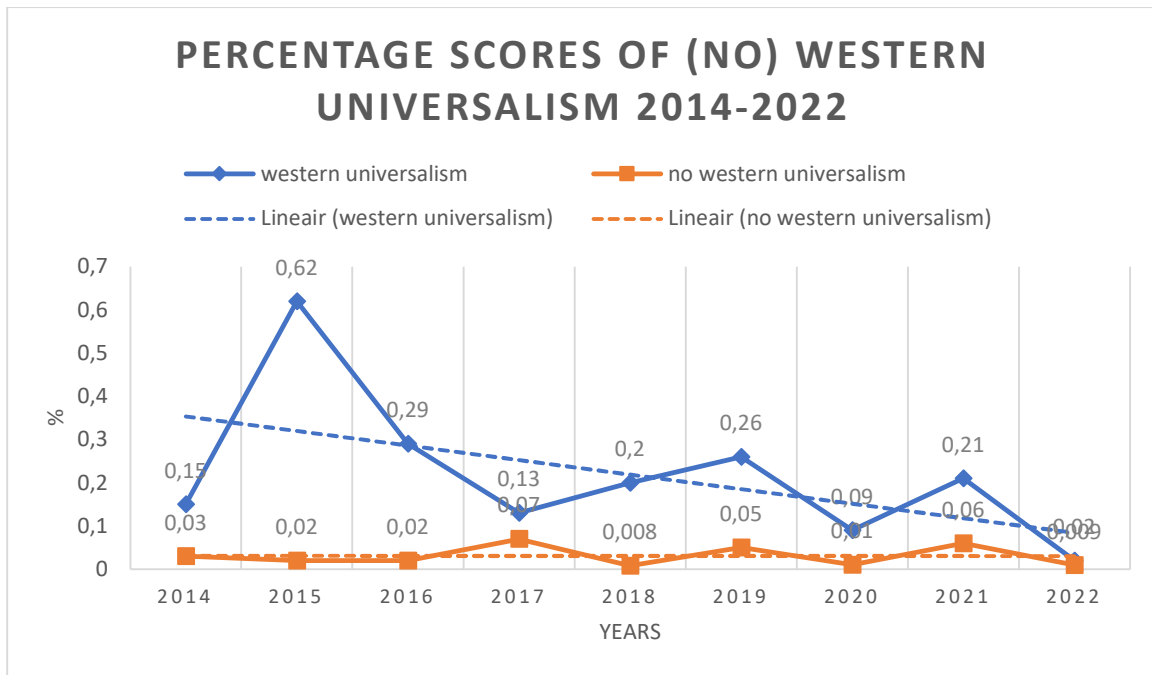


Figure 4.3 - percentage scores of white saviour complex & no white saviour complex 2014-2022

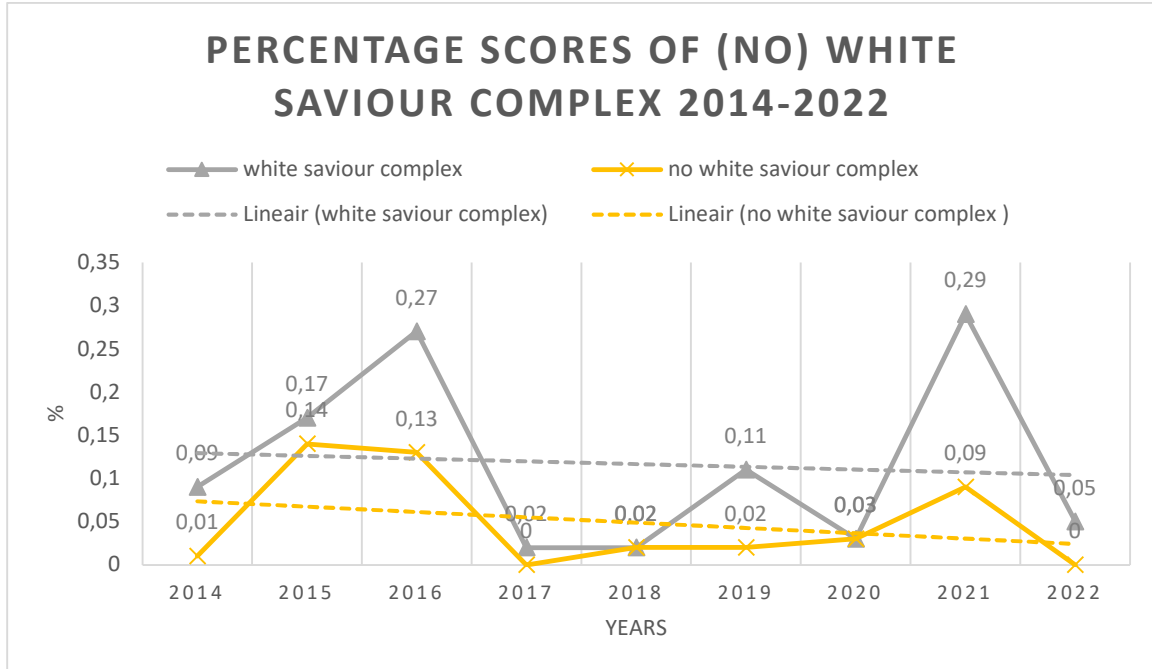


Figure 4.4 - percentage scores of crisis 20214-2022

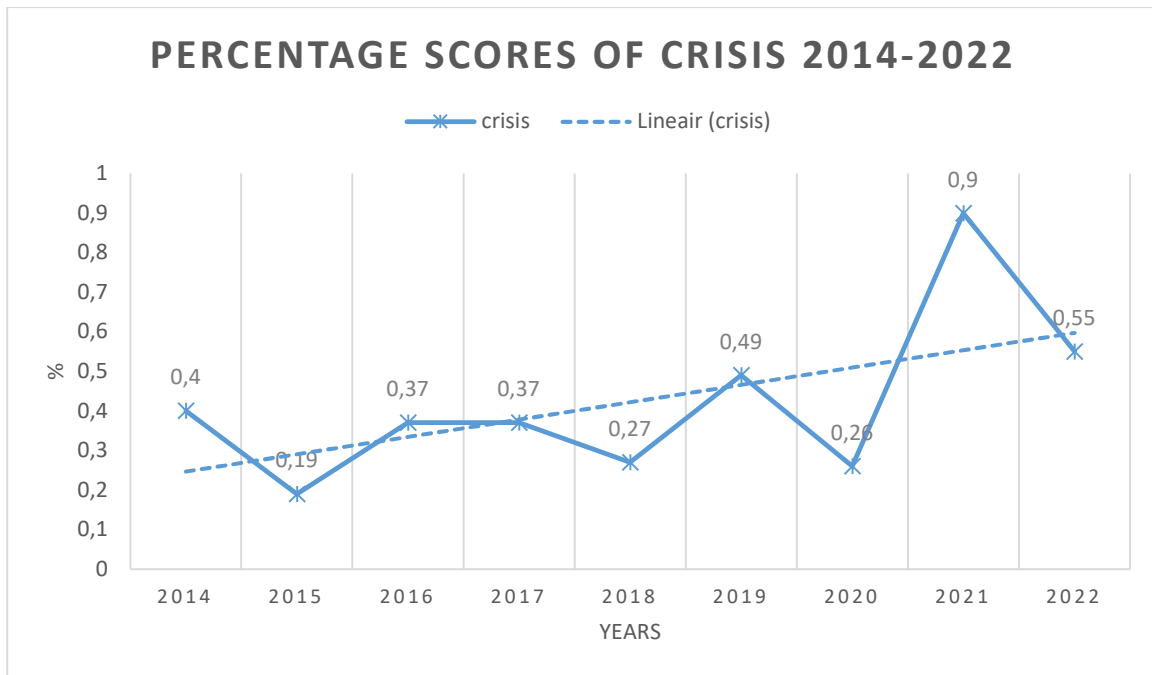
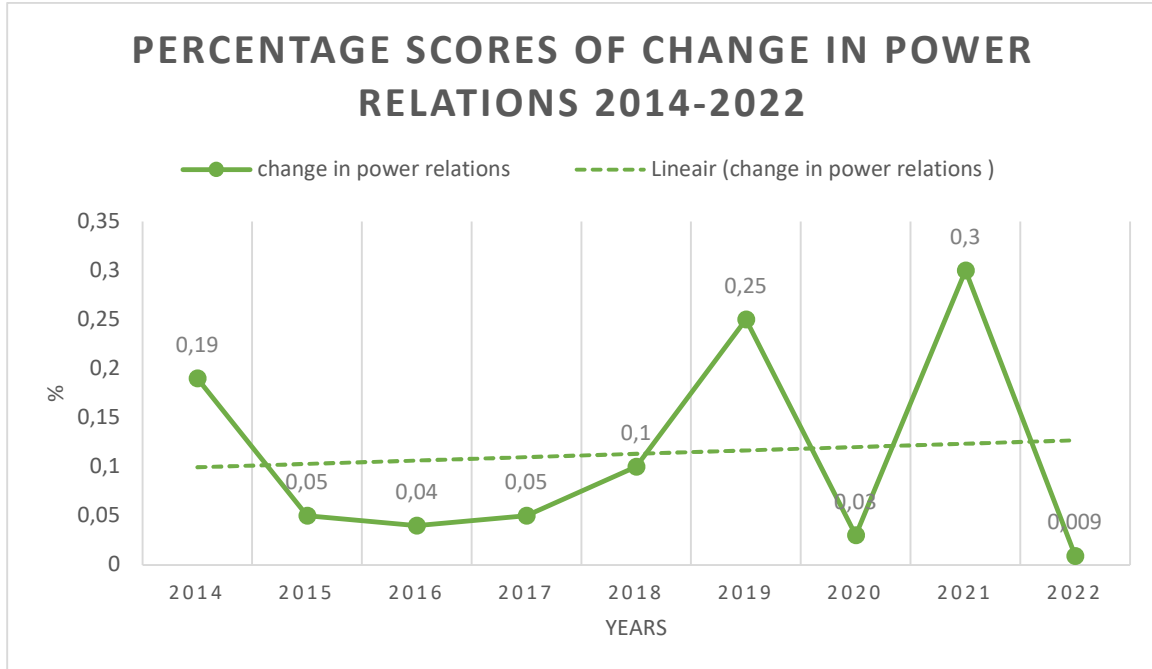


Figure 4.5 – percentage scores of change in power relations 2014-2022



4.5 Comparisons concepts between Juncker’s and von der Leyen’s presidency

Figure 4.6 shows the percentage scores of all concepts during the Juncker presidency from 2014 to 2018. Figure 4.7 shows the percentage scores of all concepts during the von der Leyen presidency from

2019 to 2022. Adding all concepts in one figure helps to make a comparison between the concepts over the years.

Figures 4.6 and 4.7 illustrate that the concepts did not follow a certain pattern during the former presidency while they did so during the latter one. Figure 4.7 illustrates that in von der Leyen’s presidency, most concepts started out with relatively high percentage scores while they decreased in the next year. In 2021 they reached a peak and in the following year they declined rapidly.

Figure 4.6 – percentage scores of all concepts 2014-2018

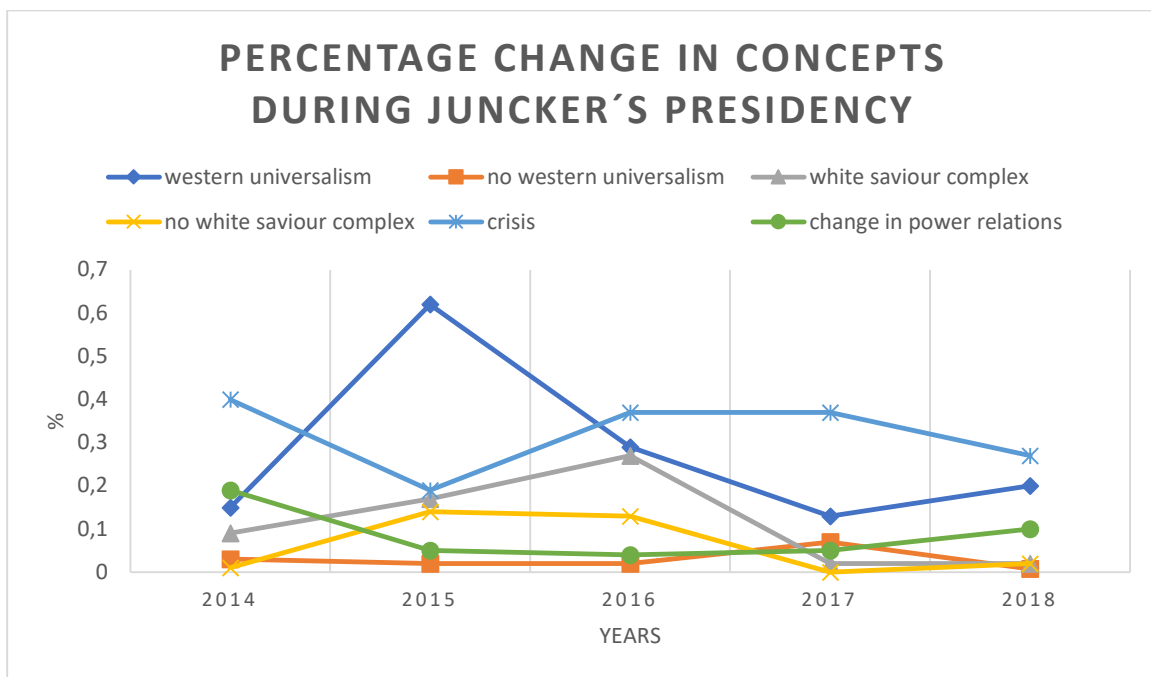
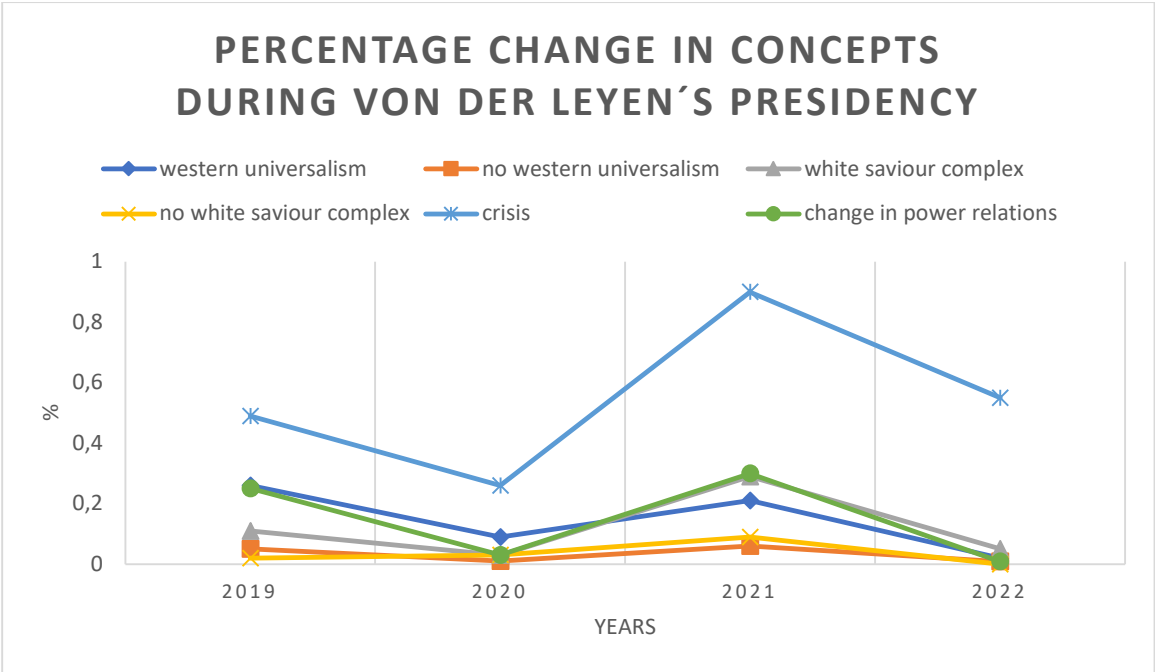


Figure 4.7 – percentage scores of all concepts 2019-2022



5. Conclusion

5.1 Outcome

The current debates in many EU member states about restitution of stolen artefacts from the colonial past is only one way in which the important topic of the colonial past of several EU member states is raised. Another way of addressing this issue is done in this thesis with the research question: “To what extent does the proposal on a Directive on Corporate Sustainability by the European Commission reflect a change in the European Union’s behaviour towards corporate imperialism?”. Similar to the discussion about restitution, the underlying topic of this thesis is whether the EU can change from its colonial behaviour. The thesis was set out to focus on one specific form of neo-colonial behaviour, namely corporate imperialism.

The topic is relevant for the EU for many reasons. Firstly, there is a contradiction between the European Union’s claim to support human rights and the environment and the EU’s behaviour of harming human rights and the environment through corporate imperialism. Secondly, the interconnectedness of the world causes this contradiction to affect others outside the EU as well. Thirdly, the EU is bound by international and European law to protect human rights and to protect the environment. Lastly, the majority of Europe’s population live in member states that have been colonizers in the past.

The topic is also relevant for academia. The theory of postcolonialism adds another point of view to the predominantly existing Eurocentric and white research on EU behaviour. Using postcolonialism allows to investigate in the colonial past of the EU member states and to avoid using the dominant narrative as well as giving a platform to marginalized voices and ideas.

It is not possible to answer the research question because the theories of postcolonialism and institutional change theory do not allow to measure change in behaviour towards corporate imperialism. Looking at the hypotheses we can only observe the following.

Hypothesis 1A states: “If EU policies reproduce western universalism, they will enable corporate imperialism.” The analysis shows that western universalism is present from 2014 to 2022. Therefore, hypothesis 1A is confirmed. Hypothesis 1B states: “If EU policies reproduce the white saviour complex, they will enable corporate imperialism.”. The white saviour complex is present from 2014 to 2022. Therefore, hypothesis 1B is confirmed.

The hypothesis 2A states: “If EU policies contain no western universalism, they will restrain corporate imperialism.”. No western universalism is present from 2014 to 2022. Therefore, the hypothesis 2A is confirmed. Hypothesis 2B states: “If EU policies contain no white saviour complex, they will restrain corporate imperialism.”. No white saviour complex is present most of the years except for 2017 and 2022. Therefore, the hypothesis 2B is not confirmed.

The third hypothesis states: "If the EU experiences crisis, it will restrain corporate imperialism.". Crisis is present from 2014 to 2022. Therefore, the hypothesis 3 is confirmed.

The fourth hypothesis states: "If a change in power relations takes place in the EU strengthening the voters and EP as well as the consumers and the youth, the EU will restrain corporate imperialism.". Change in power relations is present from 2014 to 2022. Therefore, the hypothesis is confirmed.

Summing up, the two concepts of western universalism and white saviour complex that enable corporate imperialism decreased over the years. The two concepts of no western universalism and no white saviour complex that entail acknowledging the own colonial past and accepting non-western values are slightly decreased. The concept of crisis increased steeply and the concept of change in power relations increased as well. However, the hypotheses do not allow to answer the research question because change in behaviour towards corporate imperialism was not measured.

5.2 Discussion

The hypotheses do not answer the research question due to the weakness of postcolonial theory that cannot say something about change. The theory raises an important issue but does not allow to investigate in the changes in behaviour that could possibly occur. However, measuring change would be needed if postcolonial theory wants to do more than raising awareness and instead contribute to monitoring progress. Monitoring progress in behaviour would allow postcolonial theory to actually show when and how marginalized voices are excluded and where they would need to be included.

In order to be able to say something about change, postcolonial theory could benefit from being combined with the institutional change theory by Streeck et al. (2005). Firstly, the theory allows to see why policies or institutions change, due to crisis or change in power relations. This is more than postcolonial theory on its own is able to investigate. Knowing why change occurs, allows to work towards the circumstances that enabled it.

Secondly, the institutional change theory allows for small changes to be recognized. These small changes can add up and cause change. That is especially important for postcolonial theory since big changes are not expected. Being able to recognise small changes would help postcolonial theory to monitor behaviour and allow for concrete lobbying for the inclusion of marginalized voices in areas that are open for change but also in areas where there has not been any change.

The institutional change theory would also benefit from the pairing with postcolonial theory, since the former does not address the roots of power relations but only its changes. With postcolonial theory the causes for unequal power relations between former colonizers and colonized are addressed while the institutional change theory can say something about changes within these relations.

5.3 Biases

Taking into account the chosen method of qualitative content analysis and the deductive approach there is potential for bias. Firstly, since the concepts are taken from the theory first and the analysis is done afterwards, there is a bias for looking to find content that matches the previously established concepts. In order to fore come this, I have taken all content into account, however there is no guarantee to avoid this bias.

Secondly, there are certain instances where concepts overlap. I have decided to code one sentence with all the overlapping concepts when applicable. This is a personal choice of the researcher and is therefore highly interpretative.

Thirdly, there have been paragraphs in which one concept has been mentioned several times, however I have chosen to only mark a concept once per paragraph. Again, this is interpretative but this choice is based on the previously established method section.

However, overall these biases would not necessarily lead to different conclusions since the relation of the concepts to one another and their development would be similar.

Lastly, official documents and qualitative content analysis can show the official discourse and its changes but cannot measure the impact of these changes. This is problematic for this thesis since the research question cannot be answered. In order to assess the impact of the changes another method could have been added to the qualitative content analysis such a case study or interviews. These methods would allow to investigate the impact of changes for the affected actors in depth. Additionally, these methods could guarantee the inclusion of marginalized voices which is crucial for postcolonial theory.

These biases illustrate that the deductive approach of the qualitative content analysis is highly interpretative and while it has many advantages as taking into account the context of the data, it also prevents me from drawing generalizable conclusion and measuring the impact of change.

5.4 Recommendations for further research

Further research would need to first measure change towards corporate imperialism and then investigate on its impact. One way to investigate in the impact could be to look whether the change of EU behaviour towards corporate imperialism is sustainable. This could include to look at other policy areas and if the change will be further implemented in the future. In order to do so postcolonial theory could be combined with institutional change theory by Streeck et al. (2005) to measure change and be able to monitor behaviour as well as to recommend when marginalized voices are needed. Furthermore, an additional method such as a case study or interviews would be needed on top of the qualitative content analysis in order to show the impact of the change.

Additionally, it should be investigated in the observation from the analysis that the subcategories of acknowledging the past, feeling guilty and accepting non-western values were not present in the documents or only observed marginally. The question arises whether change in EU behaviour can be convincing without mentioning the colonial past of its member states. This would include to look at ways in which the EU deals with its colonial past and whether the EU behaviour only functions as a redirection of attention towards multinational corporations, away from the EU and its member states. Finally, further research could investigate if there has been change in power relations not just within the EU but also between the EU and countries from the global South.

5.5 Limitations

There are some limitations in this thesis. Firstly, the concepts that were used during the analysis are different in scope. The concept of crisis is broader than the other concepts which has caused more content to be coded as crisis and resulted in higher scores of crisis in comparison with the other more narrow defined concepts. This broad definition is partly caused by the theory that did not specify exactly what constitutes crisis and partly by my own decision to use broad subcategories that would be in line with the theory. Despite the fact that the concept of crisis is the most observed one, the overall development of this concept is still useful for the analysis.

Secondly, different documents from different bodies of EU with different purposes have been analysed. This might limit the possibility for comparing the documents with each other. However, using different documents of different bodies of the EU also allows for a diverse perspective that takes into account the several layers of the institutions and decision-making process.

Thirdly, the institutional change theory does not take the different power positions of institutions or states into account. Therefore, it might only be partly applicable to policies impacting countries from the global North and South with diverging power. Fourthly, the institutional change theory does only allow to take into account two concepts for explaining change. However, there could be more things that cause the EU's behaviour towards corporate imperialism to change.

Lastly, despite a change in corporate imperialism, there might be other neo-colonial practices that are done or enabled by the EU. One example could be land grabbing where past colonial exploitation is continued through the acquisition of vast amount of land in the global South through multinational corporations that are based in the global North. The scope of the thesis did not allow to investigate in those.

Concluding, the proposal by the EU Commission for a Directive on corporate sustainability was set out to "foster sustainable and responsible corporate behaviour" as well as to "ensure that businesses address adverse impacts of their actions" (European Commission, B, n.d.). During this thesis the

research question could not be answered whether the proposal for a Directive is a change in EU behaviour towards corporate imperialism. This is mainly because of the postcolonial theory that was used and does not allow to measure change but also because of the decision to only use content analysis and no additional method such as interviews or a case study in order to investigate in the impact of change. Despite its limitations, the postcolonial theory and this thesis have allowed to raise an important issue, that of the colonial past of several EU member states and the existence of neo-colonial practices today.

6. References

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7. Appendix: Full list of empirics used for analysis

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