

# Representation of race in Quentin Tarantino's films

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**Ela Igrac**

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Završni rad

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Zadar, 2019.



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## Table of contents:

1. Introduction .....	5
2. What is difference? .....	7
2.1 Stereotyping vs. typing.....	9
2.2. Representation vs. presentation .....	10
3. The development of racism.....	10
3.1. Representation of race through history in American popular culture.....	11
3.2. Stereotypes in American popular culture .....	15
4. The birth of black actors .....	16
4.1. Blaxploitation cinema .....	17
5. Representation of race in Quentin Tarantino's films .....	18
5.1. <i>Reservoir Dogs</i> .....	19
5.2. <i>Pulp Fiction</i> .....	21
5.3. <i>Jackie Brown</i> .....	24
5.4. <i>Django Unchained</i> .....	26
6. The analysis of representation of race in Quentin Tarantino's films .....	30
7. Conclusion .....	33
Works cited .....	35
8. Representation of race in Quentin Tarantino's films: Summary and key words.....	37
9. Rezentacija rase u Quentin Tarantinijovim filmovima: Sažetak i ključne riječi.....	37

## 1. Introduction

People always had the tendency to represent their way of living, their culture and society. The first records of it are the cave paintings. As the world was developing, so were the representations of human lives, altering their appearance according to the current time period. With the time, people began to see the differences among them, either racial, religious or ethnic and started to display them as well. From such differences, certain stereotypes and prejudices appeared which labelled some individuals and groups in a negative sense. Such stereotypes have become massively displayed in American popular culture which resulted in the creation of oppressed groups in society which were consequently harassed, generalized and insulted. One can talk about gender, racial, ethnic, religious and many other stereotypical representations popularized by American popular culture in order to attract a larger audience. That kind of representation was particularly present in the past especially with the black people. In the beginning, they were shown as being happy that they have master to serve who will teach them how to behave and work because of the belief about their inborn laziness. Later, their depiction did change once they gained the right to perform the plays on the stage. Around 1970s, Blaxploitation genre appeared which was a way into the American popular culture for many black directors and actors.

One would think that stereotypical representations cannot be found – or at least not in such a great amount - in a contemporary popular culture of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but such thought is false. According to Hollywood Diversity Report 2018, only “1.4 out of 10 lead actors in the film are people of color” (14), and only “1.3 out of 10 film directors are people of color” (29). Regarding the gender stereotypes, there are less than 1 out of 10 female film directors and in 2016 female leads were on top, with the 31.2% out of 100% (Hollywood Diversity Report 2018).

Films that tackle with stereotypical representations often carry ambiguous meanings and therefore viewer has to look at both denotation, or the shown image, and at connotation, or the message that image carries. Audience often look only at denotation while seeing Quentin Tarantino's films and therefore have wrong conclusions, such as that he is a racist. Quentin Tarantino, as Samuel L. Jackson stated, cannot be a racist and is not. He produces such films with the goal of showing that there are still prejudices, stereotypes and misconducts towards the African American population in American society, as can be unfortunately seen by many unjust cases regarding the relation between police and blacks. His goal is to encourage people

to start talking about these issues on louder and stronger scale and therefore all of his films are savagely violent and exaggerated when it comes to blood and cruelty.

In many of his movies, Tarantino presents black person who in the end outsmarts white person, which was not a common belief regarding social situations in the past. In *Jackie Brown*, Tarantino showed his audience that there are capable black women in the world who are neglected in American popular culture because of the stereotype that black females are only capable of being perfect housewives. The film with the same message is *Escape Room* from 2019 which displays Zoey Davis (Taylor Russell), a black student girl trapped with other five people in the escape room. She, along with Ben Miller (Logan Miller) successes in escaping from the escape room. But, Zoey did not escape only by founding the way out. She made an intelligent trap for the people in charge, outsmarted them and ran away proving that you can be both black and a woman to outwit white people. There are many films with the message of black superiority, as for instance *Blade* (2004) in which Wesley Snipes plays the role of the hero as does Halle Berry in the film *Catwoman* from 2004. The film that depicts the hardship of slavery, along with the Tarantino's *Django Unchained*, is *12 Years a Slave*, produced by Brad Pitt in 2013. It is a story of an African American man born in the New York who was kidnapped in 1841, sold into the slavery and worked for twelve years on the plantation before he became free. *Dear White People* is another instance of displaying the notion that racism in the American society did not die, but is still very much alive. Before it became a TV show that was released in 2017, it was a film directed by Justin Simien released in 2014. Its main theme is showing the life of black college students and their everyday struggle on account of their skin color. Message which this film carries is the same as Tarantino's films: the racial stereotypes are present in contemporary American society which affect many people, no matter of age. Along with Tarantino, Spike Lee is a director who refers to race, racism and racial issues throughout his films. His most famous films related to this theme are *Do The Right Thing* (1989), *Malcom X* (1991) and his documentary film *4 Little Girls* (1997) in which four African American girls were killed in the bombing attack in 1963.

What makes Tarantino a fascinating director is the message that he conveys throughout delicate themes. He seeks to penetrate to the audience so as they realize that such racist matters are still present among the society. His films are full of insulting words, violence against blacks as well as the display of their oppression. One would perhaps think that is better not to tackle with such topics but Tarantino does it with each and every film proving his

greatness as director. Every insulting word and every stereotype in his films conveys a certain message about American society and the world that we live in. Quentin Tarantino is one of the few directors who ventured out producing films which have something to say about the society and make people finally start talking about it.

This paper is analyzing Quentin Tarantino's films according to racial stereotypes that he displays. It is divided into two sections: first one deals with the evolution of forming differences among people and their representation throughout the history regarding racism. The second part is analysis of four of his films: *Reservoir Dogs*, *Pulp Fiction*, *Jackie Brown* and *Django Unchained*. In the end, overview to this analysis is given including the perspective from other authors as well. The main aim of this paper will be to investigate the representation of race in Quentin Tarantino's films and to try to determine the reasons behind such representation. This is firstly made by covering the theory of racism and then with the analysis of his films. There are also many instances and comparisons with American popular culture.

## 2. What is difference?

Differences among people and cultures have been present since the establishment of the human civilization. Such differences usually occur through stereotyping which determines how they are going to be represented in popular culture. One can talk about ethnic, racial, gender, sexuality, class and disability differences which have developed throughout the past and were, and some of them still are, represented in specific ways in popular culture. Stuart Hall in his book *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* deals with the question whether 'have the repertoires of representation around "difference" and "otherness" changed or do earlier traces remain intact in contemporary society?' (225).

To provide an answer to this question, Hall describes four theoretical accounts from different academic fields. The first account that Hall discusses is one from linguistics. He emphasizes that "difference matters because it is essential to meaning; without it, meaning could not exist" (234). Saussure, a famous linguist gave an example of white/black distinction, saying that "we know what black means, not because there is some essence of "blackness", but because we can contrast it with its opposite – white" (Hall 234). But Hall argues that this approach does not function very well since such binary oppositions are almost never neutral – there will usually be one pole that is more dominant over the other. Second



account with which Hall deals is also concerned with theories of language, but uses a different approach. The main point in this account is “that we need “difference” because we can only construct meaning through a dialogue with the “Other” (235). This means that even though meaning is created through dialogue, it can be modified by interaction between persons who employ conversation. Hall states the negative side of this theory - meaning can never be fixed or entirely controlled by just one group. Anthropological point of view served as the third account stating that “culture depends on giving things meaning by assigning them to different positions within a classificatory system” (236). Hall uses Strauss’ example from the field of semantics to further explain this theory. Strauss argued that one can divide food into several categories, such as “raw” and “cooked”; “fruits” or “vegetables”; “starters” and “desert”, emphasising that difference is of great importance while grouping things. But Hall gives an insight into negative side of this theory – “when things turn up in the wrong category” (236). For instance, mulattoes are people of mixed-race, so they are neither “black” nor “white”, and that can have different indications if classified in “the wrong category”. The last account that Hall mentions is psychoanalytical. The main “argument here is that the “Other” is fundamental to the constitution of the self, to us as subjects, and to sexual identity” (237). Hall uses Freudian theory of the Oedipus complex, saying that in the young age, one cannot fix his/her sexual relations, but only after one can realize that mother differs from the boys and father from the girls, that is that mother employs feminine role, and father masculine role. This means that unconscious relationship with “Other” is important in creating subjectivity. However, Hall argues that there is no stable identity then since one is in constant relation with the “Other” and even though it fills quite fulfilling, one will always be in need for something more which appears outside of him/her (Hall 237).

It is visible from this four theoretical accounts that “difference” is present in many academic approaches. The notion of “difference” is equivocal as it can have positive and negative meanings important when discussing representation of race since it creates meaning and is very often intimidating to the “Other”. Second approach is significant in representing race because it states that “difference” varies from various groups that may interpret “difference” in a dissimilar way and therefore create significant and perhaps unjust differences. But the anthropological view is of greater importance since it indicates that “difference” plays an important role in grouping things. It projects the fact that differences among races were created on this basis – whites were “grouped” as cultural people, whereas blacks as savages connected with the Nature. The result was that white and black people were

treated accordingly to the group they were located. Such theories provide the inevitable conclusion that differences among races exist because of which divergent races – “the Others” - are treated in a particular way which can be threatening to them. This theoretical accounts provide the basis of creation of differences on any levels of cultural analysis – linguistic, social and especially cultural which is significant in the representation of race.

### 2.1. Stereotyping vs. typing

Because of such differences, stereotyping occurred which, according to Hall, “reduces people to a few, simple, essential characteristics, which are represented as fixed by Nature” (257). Richard Dyer, an English academic argues that stereotyping can be seen through “the ordering processes”. Analysis of stereotypes in this way indicates that stereotypes are a particular form of the complex data that people receive from the world and therefore they are seen as a form of “ordering” such data among the other wider processes with which people identify themselves in a particular society (Dyer 4). The more laic definition of stereotyping was given by Dr. Katherine Puddifoot, a professor at Durham University. She states that stereotypes are either “accurate or inaccurate associations between individuals and attributes ... made due to the perceived social group membership of the individuals” (139). For instance, association between black people and criminality is regarded as stereotype because it associates black people with criminality more greatly than the members of other social group. Such stereotypical practice is of great importance when discussing representation of racial difference where Richard Dyer dealt with this topic in a quite detailed way. Dyer emphasises the difference between typing and stereotyping stating that we use typing as a tool for referring to certain things and then classify them into categories where they best fit in relation to our culture. So, typing is used to give meaning to things. Stereotypes, on the other hand, are used to make certain characteristics of person or thing “vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognized” (Dyer 28). This means that stereotyping reduces everything there is about person’s characteristics and fixes the necessary parts of what makes that person distinctive. Dyer also argues that one feature of stereotyping is “splitting”, that is it separates what is thought to be “normal and acceptable” from what is thought to be just the opposite. This means that social types are used to refer to those who live according to the rules established in a society from the people whose rules are created to exclude them from one. Because of that, stereotypes are more severe when compared to social types. Therefore, stereotyping is used to

differentiate “Us” from “the Other”. Julia Kristeva, influential 20<sup>th</sup> century feminist, called such expelled groups – “the Others” – “abjected”, which means “thrown out”. Dyer also sees stereotyping as a tool of great power since it categorizes people conforming to a norm and forms the notion of “the Other” which refers to people that do not belong in a norm (Dyer).

## 2.2. Representation vs. presentation

According to Burney, representation is “the means by which society re-presents itself” (61). It means that representation is a way in which we define our culture and society, but also our identity. Different scientific fields present our culture in various ways, as through art, music, literature, politics... with the aim of strengthening our identity and the feeling of the self. Representation can also be seen as a tool of producing ideology (Burney 61) which can lead to certain stereotypical representations. For instance, Eastern world is represented as submissive and savaged and therefore they are “the Other” while Europeans are represented as civilized nation and therefore referred to as “us”. Such representation led to a development of the concept of Orientalism. Both presentation and representation show certain ideas held by a person accompanied by image and/or text. The difference is that presentation can be seen as an original idea, while representation is the one that “takes” that idea, accompany it with image or text so as to improve that idea. For example, slavery can be seen as presentation and film with such theme, as *Django Unchained* or *12 Years a Slave*, is representation of the slavery. Throughout his film opus, Tarantino took the idea of the unjust life of black people and represented it in his own way. He accompanied that idea with the combination of old and modern, decadency and indecency followed by brutality and bloodiness so as to represent their life and everyday struggle. It can be concluded that representation sometimes can be a very useful tool for representing certain matters which have to be discussed, but more frequently American popular culture uses representation as a tool for generalizing and displaying negative matters, as stereotypes and prejudices.

## 3. The development of racism

All such differences led to a construction of specific stereotypes about race in the past. When talking about representation of race in American popular culture, western part of the world plays a major role in it, giving it its beginning in the sixteenth century. At that time,

Europe started to trade goods with West Africa which resulted in a slavery that continued for three centuries. Number of prejudices considering black people appeared which can be described in terms of binary oppositions. They were represented “through sharply opposed, polarized, binary extremes – good/bad, civilized/primitive, ugly/excessively attractive” (Hall 229), that is, the connotation of white people was “civilization”, whereas of black people “savagery”. So, whites were strongly associated with “Culture” and blacks with “Nature”, meaning that black people are savages, barbarians, unintelligent, irrational... and white people are just the opposite. This is the reason why whites evolved their “Culture”, so as to conquer “Nature”. But for blacks, these two terms were mutually interchangeable. Green analysed this notion using anthropological and ethnological view saying that the position of black people, and this being them inferior to the whites, was in a way fixed which led to a particular socio-cultural differences that are determined by hereditary features. This means that differences between races were made through individual human body that makes those differences visible for everyone (31). Much of racial beliefs were built and spread basing on this thesis since it gives scientific evidence for producing the concept of the “other”.

During the times of slavery, representations of racial “difference” mainly gathered around two topics. First one was inferior status of black people and their “inborn laziness” that makes them suitable for nothing else but for servitude, but at the same time they resisted to the ways in which they had to do their jobs because of their “stubbornness”. Second issue was black’s “inborn primitivism” which prevented them not only from being members of cultural society and but also from the thought that they could never be cultural themselves because of their genetics. The fear of miscegenation was present due to all this reasons forming binary opposition between purity and, as Hall defined it “pollution” that results from “intermarriage, racial hybridity and interbreeding” (243). This just made whites’ claims about slavery even stronger since the abolition of it would cause such “issues”.

### 3.1. Representation of race through history in American popular culture

One of the covers of the *Sunday Times* magazine depicts black Canadian sprinter, Ben Johnson winning the race of the men’s 100 metres final at Olympic Games in 1988 and leaving behind other black athletes. The name of the image is “Heroes and Villains”. There are several possibilities of “reading” this image. One would perhaps be that black people were considered to be losers or victims during the history, but now they are winning the race in the

Olympics which makes them Heroes. Or, since this specific magazine was about drug-taking in sports and Ben Johnson was expelled from the competition because of such issue, the image may be read as him being both the Hero and the Villain. It can be concluded from this example that meanings are ambiguous, so Barthes uses two terms to differentiate image from its meaning – denotation, or the shown image, and connotation, or meaning or “message” which particular image carries. Denoted and connoted meanings are part of linguistic message of the image known for its twofold nature (Barthes 156). Denotation and connotation are of great significance when analysing representation of race since, as it can be seen from the example, meaning is not fixed and it can have several different interpretations.

Nineteenth century was the time of exploration and colonization of Africa which resulted with many popular representations of black people. Travellers and explorers recorded their findings in various forms, such as drawings, maps, diaries... and from that advertising developed, specifically one about Africans. McClintock states that through the racializing of advertisements,

the Victorian middle-class home became a space for the display of imperial spectacle and the reinvention of race, while the colonies – in particular Africa – became a theatre for exhibiting the Victorian cult of domesticity and the reinvention of gender (34).

At that time, homes were filled with various types of advertising which often brought people closer with the real world. Henry Stanley is of a significant importance when discussing about this topic since he thought that expansion of commodities would make civilization unavoidable in Africa. Because of that culture and many parts of Africa were presented on matchboxes, pencil boxes, board games... McClintock argues that no previous forms of “organised racism had ever before been able to reach so large and so differentiated a mass of populace” (209). Example of such advertisement is Pears’ Soap which is presented as being able to wash black skin, that is it has the power of cleaning the “unwashed poor” – black people – but also keeping the imperial body completely clean.

Representation of life in times of slavery was depicted in many ways, as for example idealized and sentimentalized, as is Uncle Tom – obedient Christian black slave. Another form of representation is quite ambiguous since it includes black people who were accepted, but not favoured. These are so called “happy natives”, such as banjo-players or minstrels, and “tricksters” who were favoured for their ability to avoid hard work. In general, representation of black people was reduced to their core – black man was nothing else but a slave; Uncle

Tom did not have other qualities except for his Christianity. Due to all this stereotypes, many signifiers of black people's physical difference were developed, such as thick lips, fuzzy hair... One of the most famous examples of blacks' signifiers is the Golliwog, doll with which children play (Hall 1997). Such representations of black people are important since they can be seen even nowadays, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There are many films that represent the notion that blacks are still submissive to whites and that their only purpose is to serve and guide white people. One such instance can be seen in the film *The Devil Wears Prada* where Lily (Tracie Thoms) is a friend of Andrea Sachs (Anne Hathaway) who helps Andrea to find her way back into reality. Without Lily, Andrea would still be lost in a material world. *The Help* is a film from 2011 which depicts the theme of black domestics. Aibileen Clark (Viola Davis) and Minny Jackson (Octavia Spencer) are servants to Eugenia Phelan (Emma Stone) who help her to achieve the glory by telling her how was the life in the times of slavery since Eugenia was writing the book about this topic. The message that this film conveys is that it is impossible for blacks to prosper since the lives of two maids were still static, but the life of Eugenia changed as her book was a huge success.

Anti-slavery movement is of great significance since it marked a beginning of a new period in which prejudices and stereotypes about black people changed from the way they were represented in the history during the slavery. This was quite visible in the times after the Civil war, when such opinions about blacks gradually disappeared because of new social exploitations. Donald Bogle, an American film historian, identified in his book *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies and Bucks: An Interpretative History of Blacks in Films* five main stereotypical film characters that, according to him, made the turning point. First one are Toms who are the Good Negroes, always "chased, harassed, hounded, flogged, enslaved and insulted" (Bogle 6) and very submissive to their white masters against whom they never rebel because of their heartiness. Second film roles are Coons who are masters at telling humorous stories, "unreliable, crazy, lazy, subhuman creatures, good for nothing more than eating watermelons ... or butchering the English language" (Bogle 7-8). Bogle mentions The Tragic Mulatto as a woman of both races who is, because of her "white part", accepted in society and even attractive to white men, but has a tragic end because of her "black part". Then there are Mammies, "prototypical house-servants, usually big, fat, bossy and cantankerous" (Bogle 9) whose husbands are "good-for-nothing" (9). In the end, Bogle describes the Bad Bucks who are "over-sexed and savage, violent and frenzied as they lust for white flesh" (10). These

characters did not appear only in the past, but are present as well in many contemporary images describing black adolescents.

According to Boskin, the most enduring comic image in American popular culture is Sambo, who is even described by some critics, as Walter Lippmann, as being the “perfect stereotype” (4). Sambo’s character has been changed throughout the years, but he remained in his core what he originally had been – a perfect comic performer. He can be seen as an American version of a Jester and a Fool whom people loved to watch because of their wits and tricks, but if compared to them, Sambo was underrated. On the stage, he was mantled with plantation clothes, rarely chosen because of his competences, mostly performed themes related to irrelevant events and matched with foolishness, while Jester with sagacity. He was represented as a very lazy person and therefore subordinate to his slavery master for guidance which also served as a justification of slavery at the time. His representation spread across the country and was imbedded in many forms of popular culture, such as songs, literature, games for children... Everybody adopted the image of Sambo – a black grinning man – that Boskin even concluded that transmission of such stereotype from parents to a child becomes a “biological fact” (12). Jim Crow is another stereotypical representation of African Americans in American popular culture that developed in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was performed by Thomas D. Rice in blackface and represented the views that whites had at the time about African Americans. Jim Crow is dressed in rags, worn hat and riven shoes. He soon became stereotype for blacks in a way that they are lazy, not human, unintelligent and therefore not worthy of integration. From this depiction of African Americans Jim Crow laws evolved that applied racial segregation in America (Engle 17). Goings in his book *Mammy and uncle Mose: Black collectibles and American stereotyping* describes Aunt Jemima, stereotypical representation evolved from the Mammy. The difference is that Aunt Jemima is a perfect housewife, but limited only to cooking. Such stereotype represents the view that black wives are only capable of being house-servants with the main task of cooking. This stereotype developed so much that Aunt Jemima collectibles were produced, such as spatulas, teapots, mixing bowls, grocery list holders, salt and pepper shakers (Goings 28)... Another female stereotype is Jezebel, beautiful and thin Mulatto girl. From this representation, debate can be made since stereotypes such as Mammies or Aunt Jemima were shown as being unattractive since only white females could have such proud features at the time. So Jezebel can be seen as a justification for the raping of a black woman by a while white male since such representations – black woman wearing short dresses and being pretty – point to the fact that

such women must have “askin’ for it” (Goings 67). Presently, blacks are sometimes shown as mixture of all these stereotypical representations in American popular culture.

### 3.2. Stereotypes in American popular culture

Nowadays, there are plenty of different stereotypes in the films represented by American popular culture. Not only that they concern African Americans, but other nations as well. Perhaps the most well-known example is Arabic representation evident from the Disney’s cartoon *Aladdin* from 1992. In the books *Aladdin*, there are not many female representations, yet Disney incorporated some in the cartoon, but as overtly sexualized with the aim of gaining more attractive story. Regarding representation of Arab males, there are two opposite images of them. Zabel describes the first representation as “hedonistic, crouched, unlucky, victimized, sneering, sexual, poor, and deceitful/cunning” (172) which can be contrasted with the representation of the other group of Arabs, as being very intelligent, affluent and ingenious. Furthermore, Arabs were portrayed as terrorists before attacks on September 11 in the 1994 film *True Lies* directed by James Cameron which associates Arabs with terrorism. Films like *How to Be a Latin Lover* from 2017 and especially *Chasing Papi* from 2003 depict Latinos as very attractive and exotic. In *Chasing Papi* three beautiful Latin women are chasing a Latin guy; Thomas, who was cheating on them. All four of them are represented as very fiery with the goal that must be accomplished since Latinos do not give up easily. Because of such stereotypes, Latinos will very often be represented as maids or gardeners, as four maids in TV show *Devious Maids* or as gardener John in *Desperate Housewives*, than doctors or police officers. Stereotypical representation of Asian Americans also appears in American popular culture, mostly with the notion that they cannot speak English properly, as The Cool Asians in the film *Mean Girls*. In the film *The Hangover*, Asian actor Ken Jeong represents vulgar gangster, who despite of his “danger character” – that he needs to have since he is a gangster – acts in a very feminine way and speaks English with difficulty. Asian women are represented as “Dragon Ladies” – stereotype that displays Asian females as domineering and strong woman who will conquer any male, usually that being a white male. Example of it is Dr. Cristina Yang from the TV show *Grey’s Anatomy* who is a determined doctor capable of distancing her private from career feelings. Alex Munday, one of the *Charlie’s Angels* represents “the Dragon Lady” as skilled and oversexualized Asian woman who is special because she broke the stereotype of Asian’s inability to speak English language



as she speaks several languages with ease. With all these examples, American popular culture proved once again that stereotyping will never die and that people are submissive to it since all films above gained huge popularity.

#### 4. The birth of black actors

American cinema was developed in the first half of the twentieth century projecting the films lasting about ten or fifteen minutes, until the film *The Birth of a Nation* appeared which lasts for three hours. This film was directed in 1915 by D.W. Griffith who is a founding father of the cinema. Not only that *The Birth of a Nation* marked the turning point in American cinema, but it is important for the representation of race since it includes types of film characters that Bogle introduced. This film also projects “the birth of American nation” by showing the Ku Klux Klan as “defenders of white womanhood” (Bogle 12) and as defenders of white racism by destroying homes of black people, assaulting and attacking them. Racism went even further at the time with so called “segregated cinema” invented by Oscar Mischeaux which projected black movies intended for black audience only. In the middle of the twentieth century, black actors appeared only in subordinate and minor roles in the films. In the 1940s, black musicals developed, such as *Cabin in the Sky* and *Stormy Weather*, as well as black entertainments like Lena Home and Pearl Bailey (Hall 252).

In the past, interest for watching black actors on stage was very rare. In theatres, there were only white actors who performed the role of black characters by painting their skin black and wearing various types of wigs. The most famous of such character at that time was Shakespeare’s *Othello*. Around 1770s, minor black characters started to appear in plays such as *The Candidates*, *The Fall of British Tyranny* and *The Yorker’s Stratagem*. After that, black people were presented in plays as being servants for the comic purpose, as in *Triumphs of Love*, but soon such representation became stereotypical, as in Dunlap’s *A Trip to Niagara*. In 1892 the presentation of black people changed with Thomas’ *Colonel Carter of Cartersville* where black servant is very clever and has dignity – two characteristics that black characters did not have until that time. Not only that blacks were imitated by whites in plays, but in other forms of entertainment as well, as in songs and burlettas. One of such instances are songs by G.W. Dixon “Coal Black Rose” and “Long Tailed Blue” in 1820s performed by white people in black face. Soon after, it was obligatory to insert “Negro songs” in theatres which resulted in producing various types of minstrel shows called Ethiopian minstrelsy. It refers to white

masquerade, meaning that it was performed and sung only by white people for white audience. This was the case even with the plays that concerned black audience. For example, when *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was first performed in 1852, blacks did not have the right to be the part of the audience. They gained that right only a year later and in 1879 the only black actor occurred in any of the showings of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Even though blacks got their right to participate in any type of entertainment only after the Civil War, there are some references that black people occurred on the American stage before the war. First one is in Edwin Forest's *Tailor in Distress* in 1823 who stated that the reason for employing black person is that he could not find anyone who would perform it in the play. But this matter is very questionable since some critics argue that Forest was the one who performed it by painting his face black. Another instance of black person on the stage, according to R. L. Hilliard, is in the mentioned play *Colonel Carter of Cartersville*, but this reference is also questioned by some critics (Austin 237-238).

#### 4.1. Blaxploitation cinema

After the Civil War, blacks gained a lot of rights and the so called "Black Power" was very important at the time so film industry started to focus on African American society and life. Such matter led to the development of a new sub-genre of exploitation cinema, that being the blaxploitation genre. Junius Griffin, leader of Los Angeles National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), was dissatisfied of how African Americans were depicted in films and with the desire of changing such representation, he coined the term "blaxploitation" in 1970s. Blaxploitation films are known for their indecent, aggressive and taboo topics with a lot of disagreements among the characters. Such films feature black actors in the main roles and focus on African Americans who overpower tyrannical and authority figures that usually appeared to be white and are referred to as "The Man". Protagonists of blaxploitation films, that being black actors, are generally represented through some kind of stereotypical classification – as pimps and prostitutes, or as bounty hunters, but all of them carry a message of a new black power in the American society. One of the first blaxploitation films was the *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song*, directed and produced by Melvin Van Peebles in 1971. It gained a huge popularity among black audience since it was the first film which projected the equality between the races – in it, the police could not catch the black man. Another film of a great importance regarding this matter is Gordon Parks' *Shaft* from the

1971. This film did not only show urban life of African Americans which could not be seen previously in the film industry, but it also proved that black directors are capable of producing the film of the same quality as white directors. As popularity of blaxploitation cinema grew with the time, it created its own film stars, as Tamara Dobson, Pam Grier, Rudy Ray Moore... Around 1980s, blaxploitation cinema had huge problems and it almost came to its end since NAACP criticized it for the stereotypical representation of black people which meant that it reinforced prejudices about African Americans. But in the early 1990s, blaxploitation cinema came back to life with directors such as Spike Lee and Jon Singleton. Lee's film *Do the Right Thing* and Singleton's *Boyz in the Hood* project urban life of African American, but in a more realistic way which gained the audience in a trice. But according to many critics, person because of whom blaxploitation cinema was revived is Quentin Tarantino. Almost all of his films feature blaxploitation's characteristics, especially ones as *Jackie Brown* or *Pulp Fiction* (Haughton).

##### 5. Representation of race in Quentin Tarantino's films

Quentin Tarantino is an American film director, screenwriter, producer and actor born in Tennessee in 1963. Majority of his works are regarded as classics because of their complexity and realistic display of society. His films are characterized by violence and savagery followed by a lot of bloody scenes. Dark comedy is generally present in his works and his characters are often in-between moral and immoral. The storylines are generally nonlinear, the dialogues are expanded and he makes very many references to popular culture combining them with themes and especially with the music from 1960s to 1980s. He became known to public as a director when he released his first film *Reservoir Dogs* in 1992. This film received great popularity, so Tarantino released his second film two years later *Pulp Fiction* which is characterized as a blaxploitation film as well as *Jackie Brown* in 1997. Mixture of many cultures and film types is visible in his film *Kill Bill* which was released in two parts: *Volume 1* in 2003, in the following year *Volume 2* and in 2011 he released *Kill Bill: The Whole Bloody Affair*. In 2007, *Death Proof* was released and two years later *Inglourious Basterds*. *Django Unchained* is his western film from 2012 and his last film was *The Hateful Eight* in 2015. He is planning to release his newest film *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* in 2019. Tarantino has frequent collaboration with many well-known actors, such as Samuel L. Jackson, James Parks, Michael Madsen, Tim Roth... His greatness as a director can be seen through all the

awards he gained during his career, as two Academy Awards, two Golden Globe Awards, two BAFTA Awards... He was even considered to be one of the 100 most influential people in the world according to the Time in 2005 (Famous People).

Even though Tarantino is often faced with accusations about racism on account of regular repetition of n-word in his films and because of black humour he employs, many people recognize him as a high-quality director because of such matters. Such accusations are only made by people on blogs and social networks whereas film critics and other experts who examined his films, as Adilifu Nama, David Roche or Betlem Soler-Pardo, realize that he is not a racist, but a director who represents the race as it is. Tarantino states in many interviews that it is the time for discussing such matters, whether they are about racism or about the Civil war – as is the case in *The Hateful Eight* – and not to neglect them. For instance, people started talking more and more about Confederacy in America after the film *The Hateful Eight* was released which sets the scene a few years after the American civil war. He wants to achieve the same thing regarding racism, so he projects realistic image of racism in many of his movies, for which he is criticized by some people, and praised by the others.

There was an incident with five Los Angeles police officers in 1991. They were chasing black motorist and after they have caught him, they were beating him and somebody videotaped them. The videotape was soon on almost every news and people were horrified that that kind of racial prejudices were still very present. After that incident, many segments of American popular culture began to depict unfairness towards the black people. It was then the so called “gangster period” with corresponding music and games such as Grand Theft Auto. Film industry did not neglect it also, so films about such prejudices with blacks as main characters who conquer white character started to be revived after the blaxploitation cinema almost perished. An outstanding figure of such representation in that period, but also nowadays, is Quentin Tarantino with his great collection of films.

### 5.1. *Reservoir Dogs*

*Reservoir Dogs* is a first Tarantino’s film influenced by blaxploitation cinema. It is a type of heist film with nonlinear storyline and expended dialogues. The plot takes place around six main characters who plan to perform diamond heist. To secure their identity, they use false colour-specific names: Mr. White (Harvey Keitel), Mr. Blonde (Michael Madsen), Mr. Blue (Eddie Bunker), Mr. Brown (Quentin Tarantino), Mr. Orange (Tim Roth) and Mr.

Pink (Steve Buscemi). Their boss is Joe Cabot and his son, underboss, “Nice Guy” Eddie. Diamond heist did not go as it was planned – Mr. White, Mr. Pink and wounded Mr. Orange were hiding in one of the Cabot’s warehouses, Mr. Brown died, Mr. Blue was missing and Mr. Blond killed several innocent civilians and kidnapped the police officer Marvin Nash. Because of all those sudden events, they start to argue mutually and accuse Mr. Orange of being a traitor. In the end, almost all of them are dead and Mr. Orange confesses that he actually is an undercover officer.

As in a majority of Tarantino’s films, *Reservoir Dogs* contains a lot of racial talks and usage of n-word. Such instance occurs at the beginning of the film. The film starts in a restaurant where the heist crew is gathered around a table. They are discussing Madonna’s song “Like a Virgin” when Joe Cabot finds black address book in his jacket and says “I haven’t worn it in a coon’s age” (00:01:23-00:01:25). Cambridge Dictionary defines the term coon as a “very offensive word for a black person.” Since all members of heist crew are white, it was not offensive for Cabot to say that and nobody at the table reacted on that statement. This proves that such statements have intertwined into the everyday lives and that they are normal to be heard. Furthermore, Cabot was the one who gathered the heist crew that completely consists of white members and with that statement he proved that he has some prejudices about blacks. Another instance of representation of race throughout the dialogue in the film is the scene when Mr. White and Mr. Blonde argue who ruined the diamond heist and Mr. Pink tries to calm them down by saying “Am I the only professional? Fucking guys are acting like a bunch of fucking niggers, you want to be niggers, huh? They’re just like you two – always saying they’re gonna kill each other” (00:35:33-00:35:40). In this scene, Mr. Pink can be seen as a character who is trying to release the tensions between the two thieves and stay professional, but also as a character with racial prejudices. With this statement, he insinuates that black people are savages, violent, reckless, unprofessional and definitely not what a white person should be. His statement can be contrasted with the only black character in the film, Holdaway. He is represented as a very professional, strategic and intelligent character who succeeds in taking down Cabot’s organization. So, what Mr. Pink said about blacks could not be applied to the Holdaway since he is a complete contrast of Mr. Pink’s description of “niggers”. Several more representations of race occur throughout the film, such as the one when members of the diamond heist crew have been given colour-specific names. Mr. Pink was dissatisfied with the colour that he got so he protested by saying that he wants to be Mr. Black. Cabot, who was giving names, said “no way, tried it once, it doesn’t work. You

get four guys all fighting over who's gonna be Mr. Black" (01:21:41-01:21:56). In this situation, the presence of blackness is not permitted. It implies that if it was, a violent situation would arise. Blackness is excluded from the whole heist crew in general, not only in this situation, which is visible from afore mentioned dialogues and since the crew consists only of white members. The only black character in the film is Holdaway. He is the most marginal character, but also the most important one when talking about representation of race. His marginalization is shown with details such as that he always sits alone in crowded places, whereas members of the heist group are shown within some kind of a group. Holdaway is a smart and professional police officer with the aim of taking down Cabot's organization. He is everything that white people thought that black person cannot be. So, one might ask why is not Holdaway an undercover officer, but Mr. Orange, that is Freddy. This matter can be simply answered – due to the racism. Freddy, being a white male, possesses the perfect qualities for infiltration, while Holdaway, on the account of him being black, does not. Even though it may seem that Freddy is the main character of the film who drives the whole plot, this role belongs to Holdaway, the genius who crashed the Cabot's organization and in that way one black person succeeded in outwitting seven white persons.

Several characters from the film are indeed racist, such as Cabot, Nice Guy Eddie, and Mr. Blonde, but the whole film is not. It carries a message that black people are unfairly underrated and their strength, especially intellectual one, is visible from the film. Diamond heist crew can be seen as a perfect example of business organisation in which racism is incorporated, but with the "plot-twist" of losing to the only black person in the film. It can be concluded that this film projects the reality in America in 1990s: white people call blacks "niggers" or "jungle bunnies" with ease. Tarantino incorporated such names with the aim of showing that there are still some people with racial prejudices in America and have no difficulties articulating them.

## 5.2. *Pulp Fiction*

*Pulp Fiction* is Tarantino's second film because of which he received esteemed awards, but also got criticized for several parts of the film which are believed to be racists by some people. The debate was especially conducted about the usage of n-word. At the time, one had to be very careful to whom the n-word will be said, by whom and under which circumstances. Tarantino was not cautious about such matter in *Pulp Fiction* since he wanted

to project the real picture of the racism, not hidden or improved picture of it. To make it happen, he gathered famous cast of actors, such as John Travolta, Samuel L. Jackson, Uma Thurman, Tim Roth and Bruce Willis. Film's dialogues and monologues are expanded and storyline is not linear. It follows three main related stories and consists of seven narrative sequences. The protagonist of the first story is Vincent Vega (John Travolta) who works with Hitmen Jules Winnfield (Samuel L. Jackson) for their crime boss Marsellus Wallace. Butch Coolidge (Bruce Willis) is the protagonist of the second story. He deceived Marsellus and therefore their relations are not great. Movie ends with the story in which Jules is the main character in the restaurant during the robbery performed by "Honey Bunny" and "Pumpkin". Tarantino was praised by many critics for successfully combining such sequences into a harmonious story with many plot-twists. Some sequences, such as the first and the last one, are even shown with different perspectives of the characters.

Cooperation of Jules and Vincent as business partners presents pairing white person with black, which is a typical notion in American films. In such pair, black person is generally the one who is the subject to white person. But in Jules and Vincent pair, this matter is reversed. It is obvious from the Jules' speeches from the bible before killing his victims that Jules plays the role of "morally" superior person than Vincent is. The usage of n-word in film is highlighted and in some cases, it has the meaning of addressing and/or controlling somebody, rather than insulting them, whether that person is black or white. For instance, Marsellus greeted Vincent with the words "Vincent Vega's in the House? My nigga! Get your ass over here." (00:25:53-00:25:58) when Vincent came into the empty strip club to give Marsellus briefcase. Marsellus said the word "nigga" without the intention of insulting Vincent, but as a way of welcoming him. He also used the n-word a few minutes ago when he asked Butch "are you my nigga?" (00:23:04-00:23:05) with the intention of controlling him for business purposes. Those are instances of how Tarantino used such word without the meaning of an insult that would refer to the degradation of black people. Such usages of the n-word can be compared with the Jimmie's usage of n-word which is offensive. When Jules and Vincent came to Jimmie's house in order to hide the car in which Vincent accidentally killed Marvin, Jimmie says to them

But you know what's on my mind right now? It ain't the coffee in my kitchen, it's the dead nigger in my garage ... When you came pulling him here, did you notice a sign out in front of my house that said 'Dead Nigger Store'? ... You know why you didn't see that sign?

... Cause it ain't there, cause storing dead niggers ain't my fucking business, that's why!"(01:58:57-01:59:30).

Not only that this dialogue is offensive, but the whole situation about abandoning and hiding Marvin's body is as well. It symbolizes how racism is present in America and how its society is trying to dismiss black persons. There are many examples of it, as was the case when Oscar Grant was shot dead by police officer in California in 2009, Gregory Hill Jr. in Florida in 2014, Jamarion Robinson in Georgia in 2016 and unfortunately many others. When Jimmie was telling Vincent and Jules how his house is not the place where they can bring dead black people, Jules did not make any reaction to it. Neither did Vincent when his drug dealer Lance said to him: "Am I a nigger? Are we in Inglewood? No, you're in my home. Now white people who know the difference between good shit and bad shit, this is the house they come to" (00:27:55-00:28:04). With this, Tarantino once again showed that racism is incorporated into everyday speech and that people do not react against it, but as if it is normal to compare something unacceptable, unpleasant and inadequate with the black person.

In the film, there are many signifiers of black presence, especially Marsellus' house. It is crowded with African statues and masks which signify that this is the place where black person lives. Tarantino decided to show the audience his house in order for us to realize that his home represents his cultural identification. Perhaps the most vivid representation of race in *Pulp Fiction* happened when Marcellus and Butch were captured in the basement of the pawnshop. Marcellus was taken first as to be raped and in the meantime Butch escaped but decided to help Marcellus escape as well. In this case, Butch employs the role of a typical white male hero who despite of his imperfections is moral and even though Butch and Marcellus are business enemies, he saves Marcellus from further raping. His rape can be seen as a torture that black people went through in the past because whites thought that they are superior to them. Butch got away with the rape, as well as white people got away with being slaves and underestimated their whole lives. After the rape, Marcellus lost his pride and dignity which Tarantino substituted with the notion that black character usually dies first in the film. The fact that Butch returned in order to save Marcellus is another example of a white and black pair mentioned afore. It indicates that some people do have feelings of empathy towards the person of any race.

Although *Pulp Fiction* has some "racists" parts, if analysed in a more detailed way, it can be seen that it is an expression of the injustice that happened to black people. Tarantino showed it with many dialogues – even though some of them are offensive – and through



specific doings of specific characters. One of the reasons why *Pulp Fiction* is not a racist film is that Jules was alive in the end of the film. Generally, black characters have a tendency to die during the film, often in a dishonourable way, but in this film Jules is presented as a strong character.

### 5.3. *Jackie Brown*

*Jackie Brown* is Tarantino's third and only film that was an adaptation of a previous work. He adapted it from the Elmore Leonard's novel *Rum Punch* from the 1992. The film pays homage to blaxploitation films and has some instances of expressed racism, but it is much different from Tarantino's last two films. In this film, race is represented throughout a middle aged black woman Jackie Brown (Pam Grier), a stewardess who cannot succeed in the economical world so she is forced to do illegal jobs for Ordell Robbie (Samuel L. Jackson). Jackie is soon discovered by two police officers; Ray Nicolette (Michael Keaton) and Mark Dargus (Michael Bowen), who offer her a deal to work for them so as to expose Ordell. Max, Ordell's bondsman, picks Jackie from the prison and starts to fall in love with her, so he says yes to Jackie's proposal to deceive Ordell and take 500 000 dollars from him. Ordell tries to smuggle 550 000 dollars and to make sure that the plan will realize, he relies on his friend Melanie and on his former cellmate Louis Gara (Robert De Niro). In the end, Jackie succeeds in deceiving everyone and escapes with the money to Madrid.

This film represents Jackie Brown as a middle aged black woman trapped in economical difficulty trying to live a financially normal life by doing illegal business for Ordell. Much of the audience sympathizes with her and some of them find themselves in her. Because of that, this film can be seen as a progressive - rather than regressive because of a frequent repetition of n-word - which displays a realistic picture of the world around 1990s when majority of black women were regularly falsely accused of drug offense. Since she is a black female in American society, she confronts many racial comments. An example of such a comment comes from detective Dargus who was trying to persuade her to work for them and therefore he said

you'll probably only end up serving a year and some change but if I was a forty-four year-old black woman desperately clinging on to this one shitty little job I was fortunate enough to get, I don't think that I'd think I had a year to throw away (00:32:16-00:32:29).

This statement proves that Jackie's race is indeed something that affects her and her decisions. In that way, she is "the Other" in this film. Also, the film reflects the notion that woman's place is next to a man's. First, she was dealing drugs for her husband in Delta and now she has a choice either to be on the Ordell's side or the officer's side. Because of Jackie's race, Ordell warns Max to be compassionate about Jackie since she is a "forty-four-year-old, gainfully employed black woman, falsely accused" (00:39:06-00:39:10), but Max responds with "is white guilt supposed to make me forget I'm running a business?" (00:39:23-00:39:25). What Max means with this statement is that blacks often try to get out of something on the grounds of being black and whites should "allow" that because they should feel compassion for them and not have racial prejudices. Once Max met Jackie he started to fall in love with her and helps her to double-cross the police and Ordell. His change of mind about Jackie might be due to the hard life that she is having. But this also symbolizes that Jackie, even though such characters are represented as a helpless black middle aged woman in American popular culture, is capable of gaining trust of white men and of deceiving her boss. These doings make her a smart, intelligent and a very strategic woman who is represented completely different on account of her skin colour.

Even though Ordell himself is a black person, he shows hatred towards the blacks. Such instance occurs when Ordell was talking about dead Beaumont (Chris Brown), the man who worked for him but got caught by the police, to Louis: "Hey, you think I'm gonna let a little cheese-eatin' nigga like this fuck this up? You best think again. Before I let that happen I'll shoot this nigga in the head and ten niggas that look just like him." (00:27:03-00:27:13). With this, Ordell is saying that he will do anything in order to preserve his business, even if that means killing somebody. He is also degrading the value of a black person although he is black. His contemplations about blacks are very abjected and the film shows that he is trying to live without the presence of any black person. Because of that, he has white female companion Melanie who tries to deceive him and together with Louis steal his money. When Louis said to Ordell what Melanie asked him to do, he says:

Well, you can't trust Melanie ... but you can always trust Melanie to be Melanie ... She's my fine little surfer girl. You know, she ain't pretty as she used to be and she bitch a whole lot more that she used to. But she white (01:17:13-01:17:31).

From the before mentioned conversation with Louse about Beaumont, audience finds out that Ordell will do anything for his business, but now he is keeping Melanie next to his side, even though she presents a threat to his business. He does that because Melanie is white and Ordell

loves to be in the company of white people, although they may possess a threat to what Ordell values the most. It is obvious that she is Ordell's possession and acts like a perfect wife, but it is not her sexuality what attract Ordell the most, but her whiteness. Ordell's behaviour is irrational since Melanie is not as loyal to him as are his black associates - Beaumont, Sheronda and Simone – but he keeps her and kills Beaumont. Tarantino here has also employed black and white pair in which black person has the power over the white one.

The opening song from the *Jackie Brown* is very useful if one examines the representation of race in the film. It is called Across 110<sup>th</sup> Street with verses such as:

I was the third brother of five doing whatever I had to do to survive ... Trying to break out of the ghetto was a day to day fight ... I knew there was a better way of life that I was just trying to find ... (00:00:39-00:01:04).

Song is about the hard life of black people who try to improve it by escaping from the “ghetto life”. This song generalizes too much about the lives of blacks, but it tells the audience what the film is about. It gives background information about Jackie - she is a black person stuck in the undesirable part of the black life and tries to get out of there as to improve her life. Audience could right at the beginning of the film assume, because of the song and because Jackie is a black female, that she would try to fight for her life in the film, but what they perhaps did not assume is that she would win in the fight and so represent a few women in American cinema who succeeded in overcoming intimidating male character.

In a way, Jackie and Ordell share many similarities. Both of them are doing illegal business to make money and both of them are cunning. The difference between them is that Jackie is a more sympathetic character who will not kill as Ordell would. But the film's emphasis is on Jackie, on middle aged black woman who is trying to survive in an unfair world. It shows that being a black woman in America will put one through economic difficulties and therefore many of them will start doing some illegal business. Jackie symbolizes a strong black woman who found a way to live a normal and a safe life. Many women connects with her and this is why this film is a progressive one. It shows that no matter of one's race or gender, one is capable of overcoming all prejudices there are in the society.

#### 5.4. *Django Unchained*

*Django Unchained* is a 2012 film that demonstrated Tarantino's ability to produce Western films. Its setting is in the Old West and Antebellum South and is a tribute to

Spaghetti Westerns that emerged in the 1960s. *Django Unchained* presents an extraordinary depiction of antebellum slavery combined with notions of black supremacy and its remarkable individualism. Containing Gothic elements, this film displays and compares the torture and injustice done to black people during the slavery in America. It depicts a perfect love story – Django (Jamie Foxx) comes back for his beloved wife Broomhilda (Kerry Washington) on the Candyland plantation owned by Calvin J. Candie (Leonardo DiCaprio) with the help of Dr. King Schultz (Christoph Waltz). Schultz is a bounty hunter who decides to help Django find and save his wife after he has helped him kill the Brittle brothers. Calvin has the most loyal slave Stephen (Samuel L. Jackson) who has adapted to whites in order for slavery to pass quicker and painlessly. After the massive shooting and many deaths, film ends with shabby scene of Django and Broomhilda leaving the Calvin's house which is on fire because Django planted a dynamite in it. *Django Unchained* is a racial revenge narrative, as is the movie *Reservoir Dogs*, but with a more problematic theme of the great injustice that happened to black people.

Throughout the film, there are significant signifiers of the Western, such as men on the horses with the slaves walking in chains right next to them, but the whole film is teaming up with Gothic elements. This notion is visible right from the beginning of the film when several slaves are walking in chains in the middle of the night guarded by two white slave traders who are riding horses. The injustice and oppression of black people is obvious from this scene, but their torture is completed once Schultz comes and shoots at the slave traders. When Schultz leaves, slaves walk as if they are zombies towards the slave trader who is alive so as to kill him. When they shoot him, part of his head is shown flying up in the air giving the audience a more specific Gothic picture. Although Schultz was their saviour, he made a racist comment when he was trying to help them escape: “Oh, and on the off chance that there's any astronomy aficionados amongst you, the North Star is THAT ONE” (00:11:44-00:11:50). With this statement, he excluded the possibility that even one of them has some knowledge about stars on account of their race colour. In every Gothic narrative, there has to be at least one villain and in this film the role belongs to Calvin. There is also one antagonist of the film, Calvin's sister Lara who is a widow and several instances in the film imply that there may be incestuous relationship between Calvin and Lara. Calvin is a symbol of terrible and violent slave owner as he practices slave fights. The scene in which Django and Schultz meet Calvin for the first time represents the combination of enjoyment and torture. The slaves are fighting in front of the fireplace in a neatly furnished room and Calvin is comfortably sitting on the

sofa watching them fight and every now and then saying disparaging things like “keep fighting niggers”. During these fights, when one slave succeeded in beating the other one, Calvin would give him a hammer to “finish him”. The analysis of literature did not point to such instances of slave fights so it is possible that Tarantino included them as a racial metaphor for blacks’ difficulty during the times of slavery. The notion that Calvin and other white persons were enjoying the slave fight can be seen as whites enjoying having blacks for slaves even though blacks are suffering both physically and psychically. Another instance of the hardships of slavery represented through the Gothic features is when the slave D’Artagnan tried to escape but was caught and therefore Calvin let the dogs bite him to death. Before he did that, he humiliated him with the words “What about my five hundred dollars? You go n’ reimburse me? You even know what reimburse means?” (01:21:50-01:21:59) accompanied by laughter of present white men. Onwards, there are many instances of Gothic elements in the film, such as the skull of the slave Ben or Broomhilda passing out after seeing Django. Tarantino produced this film in the Gothic style to deliver a strong message of the impact of slavery on black people. It shows how blacks had poor, pointless and underrated life full of physical punishments just because of some ideology that America put forward. Such doings were dreadful to blacks so Tarantino represented them in a Gothic style in order for the audience to realize the real picture of enslavement.

There is a saying that “a black man who will do anything to stay in good standing with the white man including betray his own people”. This saying can refer to Stephen, Calvin’s most loyal slave and because of that he can be seen as another villain of the film. He is in charge of the house since he pays the bills and orders penalties for runaway slaves. His fantastic mind is visible in his resourcefulness and adaptiveness to every situation. When he gives orders he is very self-assured and authoritative; when he has to amuse their guests, he is liable to Calvin as he laughs at his every joke; when serious matters have to be discussed, he is a loyal slave to Calvin who tries to warn him about Django’s attentions. Stephen is a complex figure who can be seen in two opposite ways. First, as a traitor to its race and secondly as a resourceful and intelligent man who has found a way to avoid the hardships of slavery. Not just that, but Stephen is so ingenious that he does not even have somebody to control him. His humour, but also the betrayal of his race is visible in his first scene when Django came to Calvin’s house, Stephen says: “Now I ask you, who this nigger, on that nag?” (01:28:44-01:28:46). Some critics argue that Stephen is the best character that Tarantino has ever made on account of him being a “free” black slave. With him, Tarantino resisted the

classical notion of underestimated black character in American films since he showed him as a brilliant, and more important, in a way free black slave.

Django, on the other hand, is a completely different character from Stephen in a sense that he did not betray his race. In order to save his wife, Django became somebody who he is not and maintained that role even though it may dehumanize a black person's life. The best example of this notion is the D'Artagnan scene. When Calvin asks D'Artagnan who is going to reimburse him, Schultz says that he is going to, but then Django declares that Schultz will not do such a thing explaining that Schultz "is just tired of you toyin' with him, is all. Matter of facts, so am I. But we ain't payin' a penny for that pickaninny, ain't got no use for 'em, ain't that right, Doc?" (01:22:27-01:22:40). Django was on Schultz's side instead on D'Artagnan and can be seen as a traitor of his race, as well as few seconds later when Calvin asks Django if he does not mind if Calvin deals with him as he wants since Schultz will not pay for it, Django answers "he's your nigger" (01:23:29-01:23:31). Under such false pretence, Django is trying to achieve his goal of saving his wife even if he has to go through severe moments like those. But because of that, he can be described as an exceptional black person. Even Calvin confirms this by saying:

say one nigger that just pops up in the thousand. The exceptional nigger ... but I do believe that, given time exceptional niggers like Bright Boy here become if not frequent, more frequent. Bright Boy, you are that one in ten thousand (01:13:12-01:13:56).

This relates with the Du Bois' "The Talented Tenth" theory that states that one in ten black men can become leaders of their race and improve their status by education. This theory refers to the outstanding black men, as Django is described by Calvin. He is the only black character in the film that is not static, but very much active in his desire to save Broomhilda.

*Django Unchained* presents times of slavery as they really were and not as they were depicted in the 1930s and 1940s films which display slaves as being very happy that they are given the opportunity to help white people. It contains a lot of interesting black characters that Tarantino presented in a quite different way than they are presented in American popular culture. First, there is Stephen who is cunning and brilliant free black slave who had to betray his own race in order to live a calm and peaceful life. On the other hand, there is a brave Django, an exceptional black figure who will conform to anything so as to save his wife. Once again, Tarantino showed that American popular culture represents black characters with completely distorted picture, as being unable to do anything without the help of white

character. In *Django Unchained*, but in other Tarantino's films as well, black figure succeeded in winning and deceiving white person, a notion impossible to find in the history of American cinema.

## 6. The analysis of representation of race in Quentin Tarantino's films

This paper has presented the analysis of four films directed by Quentin Tarantino. In every analysed film, Tarantino projects the representation of black people through specific characters in his films as they were rarely presented in American popular culture. He shows black people as being very capable, intelligent and intuitive persons with the ability of outsmarting the people that rarely who could in American cinema – the whites. They are shown as being dominant throughout the film, but in the end of it, they turn out to be very submissive to blacks, as is the case in the *Reservoir Dogs* or *Django Unchained*. In *Reservoir Dogs* Holdaway outwitted white thieves and with that demonstrated that blacks are intelligent. This film carries a strong message of prejudices that whites still have about blacks. This was proved with the fact that Holdaway had to employ Freddy (Mr. Orange) to infiltrate in Cabot's organisation because black people are unable to commit a robbery. To express his belief that racism is imbedded into everyday life, Tarantino makes the racist scenes in which none of the characters, either white or black, react to it, but rather behave as this is a standard thing to be said or done that disrespects the blacks. But he also makes exceptions to this statement by combining white and black pair or with the scene in *Pulp Fiction* when Butch returns to save Marcellus. Tarantino does not only show strong black men, but also a powerful black woman, as in the film *Jackie Brown*. Even though she is portrayed as a typical black woman trying to succeed in economic world – since a black woman is incapable of having economically acceptable life and therefore has to rely on her husband – she succeeds in deceiving two white men and her boss. Tarantino also shows instances of reverse racism. Such concept was evolved in the America after the blacks have gained their rights because of which whites thought that they are disadvantaged and that this is a discrimination against them. Some critics argue that this belief is completely absurd so Tarantino displays it often in a mocking way. On few occasions, Tarantino presents whites who praised the blacks, as Calvin in *Django Unchained* praised Django, but in a way which tells the audience that even though they are saying commendable things to blacks, they are saying them in a way which means that whites are better than blacks and that blacks will always be submissive to them.

But in the end, the sides have turned and whites lose out to blacks, as did Calvin to Django. Some of his characters are very irrational, such as Ordell from the *Jackie Brown* who hates being around black people although he is black. It may seem that Stephen from *Django Unchained* also detests his own race, but Tarantino made that character so perfectly that this cannot be true. Stephen is a figure that was never presented in the American popular culture – he is a free slave who lives his life as comfortable as he can. Because of his brilliant mind, he outwitted Calvin and came to the position where he does not have to answer to anyone. The brutality of white people, as Calvin's slave fights in *Django Unchained* or Marcellus' rape in *Pulp Fiction*, can be seen as a racial metaphor for the control that whites hold over the blacks during the times of slavery. White people always avoided unpleasant things which would affect person both physically and psychically. Even though Tarantino shows his characters in a completely opposite way as they are usually presented in American popular culture, he still sometimes displays the conventional types of characters. The instances of this notion are Butch from the *Pulp Fiction* who has to be perfect since he is a white male – and therefore he returns to save Marcellus – or as is the shabby ending of *Django Unchained*.

In order to show the cruelty and hardships of blacks during the slavery, Tarantino frequently includes features of certain periods which are considered to be dark and brutal, as he did in *Django Unchained* with Gothic elements. He can sometimes overdo such representations, so it can be psychically very hard for one to watch it, but with it he wants to demonstrate how it was for the blacks in the times of slavery. He also imbeds in his films very many signifiers of the West and of the black culture, as well as obviousness who plays the role of “the Other” in the film. But Tarantino's “the Other” is a strong figure capable of outwitting the rest of the characters. Signifiers employed by Tarantino can be misinterpreted so it is important while watching and analysing his films that one does not only think about their denotation, but also about their connotation. All of Tarantino's films contain a specific representation of race. Tarantino proved that he is an extraordinary director with brilliant display of his beliefs concerning the race in America's past, but also in present. Because of him, more and more people started to talk about such injustice – which is Tarantino's goal - and saw that racist's stereotypes are unfortunately still very present among the people.

Soler Pardo is a professor at the University of Valencia who made a research on Tarantino's films in 2010, which was published in the book *On the Translation of Swearing Into Spanish: Quentin Tarantino from Reservoir Dogs to Inglourious Basterds*. She states some of her observations that can be discussed regarding Tarantino's representation, as for



example exclusion of women in *Reservoir Dogs* which makes Tarantino seem as a sexist male chauvinist. One of her emphasises is on the scene from *Pulp Fiction* when Marcellus was raped because of which some critics accuse Tarantino of being a homophobe or a racist, as Giroux did. Soler Pardo sees that scene as an expression of “cynicism through his characters, and not homophobia or racism” (14). She states that Tarantino himself said that he saw such scene when he was little and was traumatised by it so he wanted to represent it in his film. The author questions how is it possible that *Jackie Brown*, film with not so many brutal and bloody scenes, has 339 insults in 151 minutes, whereas *Reservoir Dogs* has 330. The given answer that she provides us with is that in *Jackie Brown*, Tarantino uses verbal abuse violence in order to demonstrate his point, and not physical as in majority of his films. Soler Pardo concludes that some people believe that the usage and especially Tarantino’s exaggeration with the n-word and other insulting words should not be included in the representation of race, but the author argues that such words are “integral part of Tarantino’s artistic project” (xiv) with which he displays the realistic treatment of the blacks.

David Roche, professor of film studies at the University of Toulouse-Jean Jaures, combined cultural studies and neoformalist approach to analyse Tarantino’s films. In the first part of his book *Quentin Tarantino: Poetics and Politics of Cinematic Metafiction*, Roche deals with historical truthfulness of the *Inglourious Basterds*, *The Hateful Eight* and *Django Unchained*. He gives proof for and against the truthfulness supported by statements of other critics, but he analysis the Mandingo fighting from *Django Unchained* in a more detailed way in order to find out whether such fights were happening or not since they are not cited in literature. He provides the readers with two opposite views. The first one is from the book *Screens of Blood: A Critical Approach to Film and Television Violence* from the writer Gregory Desilet who believes that with this scene, Tarantino proved that he does not want to display the real violence that happened to the slaves (33). The other one was stated by Adilifu Nama in his book *Race on QT: Blackness and the Film of Quentin Tarantino*, that Mandingo fights “perfectly articulates the fusion of dread and delight, abjection and desire that underscores the appetite for violence and erotic sadism that was black enslavement” (110). Throughout his whole book, Nama does not criticize Tarantino but he praises him for his imaginative display of the harsh reality of black people. He sees his films as a symbol of “racial anxieties circulating throughout American society” (12) and approves that finally the director has come who will speak about issues regarding race, gender and ethnicity. Adilifu made an interesting analysis from the film *Reservoir Dogs* when Holdaway and Freddy had

secret meeting about taking down Cabot's organization. Holdaway came dressed in the t-shirt with the image of Che Guevara's face and wore a cap with five-pointed red star. For Adilifu, with this look Holdaway signifies "an urban guerrilla planning the overthrow of a corrupt and racist capitalist regime" (18) as he plans to destroy Cabot's organization.

All three of these authors share the same opinion about Tarantino as a director and the message that he is trying to convey. Each of them with their own words agree that in order to produce the film with strong message of the unjust behaviour toward the blacks, Tarantino had to exaggerate with vocabulary as well as with physical torture so that the audience would realize the way in which whites treated blacks. With sudden events, Tarantino succeeded in making the audience astonished as with so many bloody scenes that were so harsh that some viewers could not even watch them. Each and every Tarantino's film is an exaggeration of some matter, but with reason. In his sense, exaggeration means pain, brutality, injustice and neglect, all of which blacks have suffered in the history.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper intended to represent Quentin Tarantino's display of race with analysis of his indirect messages achieved with such representations. It can be concluded from the analysis of his films that he succeeded in his goal to encourage people to start talking more about such issues since. He presented this message in his films, a message which is still present among people, especially in American society. Since Tarantino presents such delicate themes, he has faced many criticism and accusations that he is a racist. But in his many interviews he stated that he did not have an attention of offending anyone, but what he wanted to do is project real picture of blacks' struggle during the times of slavery. He succeeded in it with many dialogues, many usages of the n-word and more important with the selection of great actors. Because of such accusations, Samuel L. Jackson stated in one of his interviews that it is impossible for Tarantino to be racist because then he would not give "racist" characters to him. But such accusations do not bother Tarantino since he is confident in what he is doing and what he is displaying to a large group of people. He presents lives of black people in a way which approximately reflects how it was for them to be slaves, but also how it is for them even nowadays when we live in a so called modern world which is filled with racial comments and misconceptions. He presents their lives by combining old and new features in his films which contain a lot of violence, blood and torture – sometimes exaggerated – with

the aim of not forgetting what happened to black people in the past and of not allowing for such thing to happen ever again in the future. He dismissed all stereotypical representations of blacks, such as Mammies, Bad Bucks, Jim Crow... and represented blacks in a way in which they were never displayed in the past.

This paper analysed four of Tarantino's films and showed how he incorporated many instances of expressed racism. First of all, he exaggerates in all of his films with the n-word. On many occasions, when such word or racist statements were made, many characters did not many any reaction to in. This proves that people still have prejudices towards black people and that stating such matters is a normal thing in today's world. There are many possible reasons for the exaggerated usage of the word "nigger". One would be that Tarantino is trying to show the audience that it is still used in contemporary society, and the other one was given by Samuel L. Jackson. He stated in one of his interviews regarding *Django Unchained*, that he does not understand the confusion around Tarantino's usage of such a word since blacks were called "niggers" in the past as well as sometimes today. Tarantino also exaggerates with whites' brutality towards the blacks, as for example the rape scene from *Pulp Fiction* or Mandingo fight from the *Django Unchained*. With these scenes, Tarantino is trying to represent the pain and suffer that blacks felt, especially in the times of slavery. But the theme that Tarantino almost always displays is the ability and intellect of black persons. In all of four films analysed above, a black person won the white person over using their brilliant mind which was so underrated in the history and it sometimes still is. He has found the best possible platform for representing such messages – the American popular culture.

Quentin Tarantino is a well-known figure of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the film industry. If critics are dealing with the representation of race in films, they are dealing with Tarantino. If they are analysing possible racism expressed in films, they are analysing Tarantino. If awards as Golden Globes, Emmy or BAFTA awards are given, they are given to Tarantino. These notions indicate that Tarantino is praised as well as criticized for the same film and for the same message. But if his films and characters are analysed in a more detailed way, one will realize that Tarantino does not have an intention of assaulting anyone, but has the agenda of awakening the society's consciousness about important taboo topics that are happening in the world which people are slowly starting to ignore.

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## 8. Representation of race in Quentin Tarantino's films: Summary and key words

Representations of race have been modified throughout the history as slavery was abolished and as many movements considering blacks' rights occurred. In the beginning, they were represented as submissive slaves who were thankful to have white masters to guide them. Later, their representation changed which produced many stereotypes. Blacks were mainly represented as unintelligent people whose only purpose was to guide white people or as persons engaged in some kind of criminal acts. The producer who changed such representation is Quentin Tarantino. He represents them as being intuitive and independent individuals capable of defeating white person. With such presentation, Tarantino is trying to send a message that blacks were unfairly underrated in the past and unfortunately still are sometimes. His goal is to change such belief in modern society. For some members of the society, Tarantino achieves it, but majority states that he represents racist matters. In this paper, the analysis of *Reservoir Dogs*, *Pulp Fiction*, *Jackie Brown* and *Django Unchained* was given proving that they have strong message that Tarantino is trying to deliver to the society. Analysis of other writers and critics are also given, as well as the examples and theories of how blacks were represented in the past and the reasons behind it.

Key words: representation of race, Quentin Tarantino, black actors, stereotypical representations, "the Other".

## 9. Representacija rase u Quentin Tarantinijovim filmovima: Sažetak i ključne riječi

Reprezentacija rase se mjenjala kroz povijest kako je ropstvo ukinuto i kako su se pojavili mnogi pokreti za prava crnaca. U početku, oni su bili reprezentirani kao podložni robovi koji su bili zahvalni na bijelom vlasniku koji ih je vodio kroz život. Kasnije, njihova reprezentacija se promijenila stvorivši mnoge stereotipe. Crnci su većinom bili prikazani kao neinteligentni ljudi sa jedinom svrhom vođenja bijelca ili kao osobe koje se bave kriminalom. Producent koji je promijenio takvu reprezentaciju je Quentin Tarantino. On ih reprezentira kao intuitivne i samostalne individualce koji su sposobni pokoriti bijelca. S takvom reprezentacijom, Tarantino pokušava poslati poruku kako su crnci bili nepravедno podcijenjeni u prošlosti i nažalost su ponekad i danas. Njegov cilj je promijeniti takvo vjerovanje u modernom društvu. Za neke članove društva Tarantino je uspio, ali većina njih smatra kako on prikazuje rastističke ideje. U ovom radu su analizirani filmovi *Reservoir*

*Dogs, Pulp Fiction, Jackie Brown i Django Unchained.* U svakoj od analiza je vidljivo kako svaki analizirani film ima snažnu poruku koju Tarantino želi poslati društvu. Analize ostalih pisaca i kritičara se također nalaze u ovom radu, kao i primjeri i teorije o prezentaciji crnaca u prošlosti i razlozi koji se kriju iza takve prezentacije.

Ključne riječi: reprezentacija rase, Quentin Tarantino, crni glumci, stereotipična reprezentacija, „*Drugi*“.