Critical Perspectives on Hollywood Science Fiction:

A Neoliberal Crisis?

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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INTRODUCTION

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of communism across the Soviet Union were widely regarded as decisive events that contributed to the accelerated proliferation of US neoliberalism as an unopposed global socio-economic ideal. A popular neoliberal narrative (Fukuyama 1992, Wilson 2002, Varoufakis 2018) promotes the idea that there was an ongoing, decades-long struggle between US-led democratic capitalism and Soviet authoritarian socialism that ended with the fall of the Wall. Nevertheless, despite such presumptuous claims of an ideological triumph, several events since the turn of the century—most notably the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the global recession of 2008—served to increase criticism around the popular myth that US neoliberalism is a superior socio-economic model. Concerning Iraq in particular, Petras comments on how the war "depleted the [US] economy, deprived American corporations of oil wealth, and reduced the living standards of US citizens" (2014, 54); Doran goes further, writing that the Iraq invasion "fundamentally changed the course of US history", resulting in many subsequent years of "soul-searching" (2012, 3). In their discussion of the 2008 financial crisis, Birch and Mykhnenko claim that the recession once and for all "exposed fault lines in the neoliberal economic order that has been dominant for three decades" (2014, 1), further supposing that the crash has laid bare the "conceit at the heart of neoliberal thought" (3). The combination of these two epoch-defining incidents and the effect that the resulting governmental and institutional policies have had on the wider general public have been seized upon by opportunistic right-wing political parties across the world, culminating somewhat in the election of Donald Trump as US president in 2016. Drawing upon the cultural and geopolitical subtexts surrounding these events, this book assumes the standpoint that the term "neoliberal" is as much an ontological phenomenon as it is an economic one. It suggests a historic link between modern neoliberalism and European colonialism and twentieth century American imperialism (see Hardt and Negri 2000, Chowdhry and Nair 2004, Mignolo 2011, Kapur and Wagner 2013). At this early stage, neoliberalism can be briefly described as an ingrained set of behaviours, beliefs and modes of thought concerned with the proliferation of the intellectual, cultural, political and economic superiority of Anglo-Saxon, Christian identity and

values. This will be elaborated upon in detail in the first chapter of this book, "Exploring Neoliberalism".

Hollywood, the home of US mass-produced cinema, has often been the subject of critical interrogation regarding its dissemination of neoliberal perspectives (see Roberts 2006, Rieder 2008, Riegler 2016). As a result of its far-reaching appeal, it has, in a Foucauldian sense, become a key strategic tool of discourse "inclusion and exclusion" (Sheridan 2012, 122) for neoliberal and corporate elites who hold an interest in continually propagating narratives critical to maintaining the economic status quo. To give an anecdotal example: immediately following 9/11, prominent director, screenwriter and producer Robert Altman commented that Hollywood's tendency to disseminate imagery of mass destruction "created the atmosphere for the attack", reasoning that "nobody would have thought to commit an atrocity like that unless they'd seen it in a movie" (see *The Guardian* 2001). Following on from this, in November 2001, senior adviser to President Bush, Karl Rove, seemingly responded by arranging a summit with forty top-level Hollywood studio bosses, directors and producers. The agenda of this gathering was to agree on methods by which the industry might assist with the administration's "communication strategy" of "shoring up support for the US action in Afghanistan" (see King 2001).

As a genre with the storytelling potential to indulge the limits of the human imagination and a narrative medium that is often unbound by the limits of the present circumstance, science fiction can be distinguished from other categories of film because of its ability to manipulate those factors to implicitly allegorise a broad range of socio-economic issues. In this way, Matthews (2007), Cornea (2007), Rieder (2011) and Geraghty (2009) have argued that science fiction often stabilises and propagates US neoliberalism and Eurocentric notions of superiority, whereas Booker (2006), Kerslake (2007) and Pollard (2011) have discussed the genre as one that is unique in its ability to provide an outlet for critiques on contemporary society. With regard to the evolution of science fiction itself, the concepts that shaped the genre were present for centuries before the expression came into use, Rieder identifies de Bergerac's *Other Worlds: The Comical History of the States and Empires of the Moon and Sun* (1656) as an early example of a text that "mocks, criticises, parodies and de-naturalises the cultural norms of the author's French contemporaries" (2008, 1). The term "science fiction" was first introduced by Hugo Gernsback in the 1920s to promote a particular form of literature he published in the pulp magazine *Amazing Stories* (see Geraghty 2009, 1). Initial works focused mainly on tales of alien invasion and interplanetary travel; however, as science fiction grew in popularity, so did the potential of the narratives. Indeed, the genre became so popular that

the criteria with which we might traditionally classify science fiction in the first half of the twentieth century would later come to be incorporated seamlessly into the horror, fantasy and adventure genres, with a "sci-fi element" providing merely a backdrop. To define what constitutes a science fiction narrative from the perspective of this book, it is useful to observe Roberts' broad definition of key elements that must be evident within a story for it to be designated "science fiction"; those components can be summarised as follows:

- Aliens or alien encounters.
- A monster of some form.
- Robots (either biological or mechanical) or genetic engineering of some kind.
- Computers, advanced technology or virtual reality.
- Time travel, alternate histories.
- Futuristic utopias and dystopias (2006, 12).

Upon consideration of Doran, Petras, and Birch and Mykhnenko on the "decline" of neoliberalism and the assumption that cracks of doubt have appeared in the untouchability of US ideals (Weaver-Hightower 2006, Rings 2016), this book will investigate how far this model is interrogated in the genre of contemporary (Hollywood) science fiction cinema. It is a matter that deserves further attention upon reflection of the role that a heavily ingrained allegiance to neoliberal and (neo)colonial discourse in mainstream politics and media has played in the rise of populist right-wing politics, growing worldwide income inequality and, in particular, cultivating racist attitudes towards the Other. Therefore, this book offers a qualitative post-colonial analysis of four popular Hollywood science fiction productions: James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009), Neill Blomkamp's *District 9* (2009) and *Elysium* (2013), and Len Wiseman's *Total Recall* (2012)—as well as the Wachowskis and Tom Tykwer's independent epic *Cloud Atlas* (2012)—with the aim of investigating how cinema has reacted to this supposed loss of confidence in the wake of 9/11 and the recession of 2008. This study is the first to propose an in-depth investigation of neoliberal representation in science fiction with a focus on five commercially successful films. It will add to existing analyses of *Avatar*, *District 9*, *Elysium*, *Cloud Atlas* and *Total Recall* available in journals, books and essays and go further than those works in terms of its commitment to an analysis in the framework of contemporary US neoliberal and (neo)colonial representations.

While a number of scholars have analysed the chosen features in a post-colonial (Veracini 2011, Burgchardt and Ott 2011, Ng 2015), socio-

political (Peck 2014, Fernández-Menicucci 2014) and/or ideological (Žižek 2010, Holiday 2014) framework, there is a shortage of comparative and literary criticism within a neoliberal milieu, meaning that this book will facilitate an examination of Hollywood's contemporary discursive messages in the face of an increasingly globalised and interconnected world. This analysis is underpinned by a Foucault-based understanding of discourse (1969, 1980) as a phenomenon that structures the way that we interpret truth through language. I find that the fluid nature of discourse best accounts for the often ambiguous nature of human agency and cultural representation. A useful justification can be highlighted in Mills' work, which articulates discourse as a force that "transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines it and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (2003, 54). Foucault himself describes discourse as "the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualisable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements…we should think of a discourse as existing because of a complex set of practices which try to keep them in circulation and other practices which try to fence them off from others and keep those other statements out of circulation" (see Mills 2003, 53f.). In his analysis of discourse, Simons writes that "societies possess narratives or texts of some kind or another that become the object of variation, transformation or commentary. In our own culture, these 'primary' works are religious, legal, literary and, to some extent, scientific texts" (1994, 27). I would also add cinema and media to this list of "primary works" in consideration of twenty-first century technological advancements and the scope of influence that these two mediums have come to acquire over contemporary popular culture. This means that discourse is crucial in constructing identities, maintaining self-concepts and in understanding notions of Self and Otherness today.

As central to neoliberal mentalities, colonial discourse in particular has been the subject of comprehensive discussion with regard to the manner in which certain aspects of fictional storytelling and the dynamic of the relationship between the "coloniser and the colonised" (Memmi 1965) uphold long-held ideas of European and neoliberal superiority (Mignolo 2011, Quijano 2000, Chowdhry and Nair 2004). By combining critical discourse and literary analyses of post-colonial (Said 1978, Hardt and Negri 2000) and cinematic (Roberts 2006, Rieder 2008, Geraghty 2009) works, this investigation will attempt to answer three central research questions:

1) How has Hollywood science fiction reacted to the above-discussed events and how have they altered cultural representations of US neoliberalism?

2) Is a loss of confidence in neoliberal ideologies and power structures evident in the selected features?
3) Which basic neoliberal and (neo)colonial binaries continue to be disseminated in each film?

This book consists of two central sections: the first part comprises two theoretical chapters and the second, a five-part film analysis. Chapter one, "Exploring Neoliberalism" introduces the book's research background, exploring its key concept, "neoliberalism", within a discursive and ideological framework. Chapter two, "Neoliberalism in Contemporary Hollywood Science Fiction" examines continuities and discontinuities in neoliberal representation by reviewing secondary sources on Hollywood science fiction literature and analysing a corpus of prominent popular science fiction movies. It investigates colonial and neoliberal tropes in Hollywood, examining a history of science fiction literature within a post-colonial milieu. For the film analysis section, each of these features has been selected not just because they are well known in mainstream media for their criticism of power-hungry US-led capitalism and corporate exploitation, but more so because of their massive commercial success and accessibility in terms of global spectatorship. I believe that this creates the broadest possible potential for particular viewpoints, principles and values to be disseminated. In this context, as well as scrutinising directors and scriptwriters—who naturally consider the taste, interests and cultural values of their audience in the development of plots and characters—it is equally crucial to consider the role of studios and US policymakers when analysing popular Hollywood films. In this regard, *District 9* and *Elysium* director Neill Blomkamp has very explicitly expressed his frustration with mainstream Hollywood filmmaking because of interference from top-level studio bosses concerning storyline direction.[1] Moreover, military documents obtained under the US Freedom of Information Act (1966) in 2017 reveal substantial intervention by the United States Department of Defense on Hollywood productions, comprising the ability to influence scripts or even directly prevent films critical of the US military from being made in the first place (Secker and Alford 2017). The revelations include evidence of direct influence upon some of Hollywood's most popular film franchises like *Transformers* (2004–2017) and *Iron Man* (2008, 2010, 2013).

This study regards income to be the strongest indicator for popularity as it can be used as the most evident measure for potential impact on

[1] Wilkins writes: "[Blomkamp] has announced that he'll keep making films on the relative cheap because it's the only way to make science fiction movies with creative freedom" (2010).

worldwide audiences. All of the selected films were successful in their own right in this respect, and therefore each warrants an in-depth investigation in this neoliberal framework. *Total Recall* grossed close to $200 million and was particularly popular with East Asian audiences (see *Internet Movie Database* 2019), *Total Recall*'s take was only slightly less than *District 9*, which earned $210 million (Nel 2012, 548) in ticket receipts. Blomkamp's follow-up, *Elysium*, was not as well received critically as *District 9* but was certainly more profitable financially; raking in some $286 million at the box office, it was among 2013's thirty top-grossing films (see *Box Office Mojo* 2019a). The Wachowskis and Tykwer's *Cloud Atlas* became the highest-grossing independent feature of all time with receipts of $130 million (*Box Office Mojo* 2019b) upon its release. Cameron's *Avatar* held the number one position as highest-grossing feature ever made (box office sales of $2.8 billion worldwide) for almost 10 years until it was overtaken by the Russo brothers' 2019 superhero film *Avengers: Endgame* (Yedroudj 2019). Linking these substantial financial figures to the widely accepted scholarly standpoint that films both reflect and shape the epistemological hopes, fears, apprehensions and anxieties of the population audience (Bernstein and Studlar 1997, Belton 2005, Riegler 2016, Rings 2016), the five features chosen for analysis here can all be claimed to have made a significant cinematic impact in terms of popularity.

The analysis section of this book begins with *Avatar* (3.1), which was selected because of the praise it received from a number of prominent mainstream critics for its anti-corporate and anti-neoliberal message—and the interest it received from scholars (Veracini 2011, Burgchardt and Ott 2011, Mirrlees 2013) who, while discussing its capitalist and colonial perspectives, did not approach subtexts vis-à-vis self-doubt in the superiority of the model. Chapter 3.2 scrutinises Canadian-South African director Neill Blomkamp's big-screen debut *District 9*. In addition to popularity being a key reason for selection as discussed above, this film has also been chosen for its focus on the risks of surrendering government control to an unaccountable private-sector organisation. Through this, *District 9* draws comparisons with real-life post-invasion Iraq flashpoints: for example, the mercenary army's trigger-happy approach to killing alien "prawns" appears to tacitly allegorise the 2004 Blackwater incident in which unarmed Iraqi civilians were shot and killed by employees of the private military contractor. Moreover, whether the mistreatment of the hapless aliens in the bio-lab can be said to be visually evocative of the abuse that prisoners received at the hands of US soldiers at Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad in 2003, also deserves further scrutiny. In light of this, the chapter

will investigate to what extent *District 9* genuinely criticises modern-day US neocolonialism and foreign policy.

Elysium, Blomkamp's next feature, is the subject of enquiry in 3.3. Released in 2013, it is the most conspicuous example of the five selected films in terms of a story that reflects the anxious public mood of post-financial crisis United States vis-à-vis rising wealth inequality. This chapter gives special attention to the spatial construction of the Elysian base in contrast to an economically shattered Los Angeles to ascertain how far *Elysium* assuages or exacerbates concerns regarding a failing neoliberal system. This will be followed by an analysis of Len Wiseman's *Total Recall* remake in 3.4. Like *Elysium*, income inequality is central to the plot, as are themes of resource distribution and socio-economic marginality. To accentuate this, *Total Recall* appears to explicitly reconstruct colonial binaries with its depiction of the economic dominance that the "United Federation of Britain" (UFB) has over the poorer, underdeveloped "Colony"—also drawing upon the same apprehensions regarding rising wealth inequality that are seen in *Elysium*. In this chapter, this spatial disparity will be investigated along with the role of protagonist Douglas Quaid (Colin Farrell) in fighting against the (neo)colonialism of the UFB.

The Wachowskis and Tykwer's epic *Cloud Atlas* (3.5) has been selected because of its strong liberal position and anti-conservative agenda (see Martin 2013). Officially an independent film, *Cloud Atlas* surely allows for relative creative freedom on the part of the directors and, in this way, it should highlight the pressures that Hollywood studios place on filmmakers to adhere to established neoliberal patterns and cultural hierarchies for the sake of entertainment. At the same time, however, it may indicate the potential and limits of big-budget independent films in breaking with traditional neoliberal representations on screen. Once again this book is distinctive in its examination of the extent to which declining confidence in neoliberal representation is evident in popular Hollywood science fiction, and these five popular features should provide adequate evidence of the extent to which this is so.

CHAPTER 1

EXPLORING NEOLIBERALISM

This chapter outlines conceptual discussions on neoliberalism, debating different notions of the concept concerning its limits and scope. It seeks to firstly investigate the genesis of neoliberalism in the colonial era, before moving on to its evolution in the form of what Appadurai defines as the "new global cultural economy" (1990, 6). This section similarly aims to critique various definitions of neoliberalism and formulate a concise description of the term to provide a framework for the book's in-depth film analysis in the proceeding chapters.

The *Cambridge* and *Oxford Dictionaries* (2019) both define neoliberalism quite simply in economic terms, with the former describing it as "the policy of supporting a large amount of freedom for markets with little government control or spending, and low taxes", and the latter similarly defining it as a "modified form of liberalism tending to favour free-market capitalism". Moreover, in wider business, political and popular discourse, neoliberalism finds itself affiliated with terms like "globalisation" (Gill 1995, Olssen 2004) and "global business" (Schmidheiny and Timberlake 1998, Dunning 2006) and is frequently analysed inexorably within such frameworks. However, Smith's (2019) detailed description of neoliberalism as an "ideology" in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* brings it more in line with the focus of this book in that it draws attention to the presence of the underlying matrix of systems, beliefs and discourses that underpin neoliberalism's ostensive economic doctrine. The question of what these beliefs are, and what kind of systems have been formulated to accommodate them, requires a detailed investigation in this chapter.

Blaut (1993), Ashcroft et al. (1998) and Hardt and Negri (2000) examine the complex phenomenon of neoliberalism within a post-colonial framework. However, before a brief historical contextualisation and an in-depth critique of arguments in relevant literature, Krishna's summary concisely introduces the essence of the concept for the reader: "Although the specific terms postcolonialism and globalisation have become popular only in the past two decades or so, they emerge from a far longer intellectual history on the growth and decline of various regions and nations in the world

economy and the intertwined histories of capitalism and colonialism" (2008, 13). Quijano's debate on colonialism and Eurocentrism in the Americas also articulates the central underpinning of neoliberalism: "[It] is the culmination of a process that began with the constitution of America and colonial/modern Eurocentered capitalism as a new global power [that] has proven to be more durable and stable than the colonialism in whose matrix it was established" (2000, 533). At this early stage, Chowdhry and Nair's discussion of the contemporary universal "business civilization" as a phenomenon "anchored in a particular history and discourse [that] ultimately is used to justify and legitimate forms of class domination on a global scale" (2004, 7) is also worth mentioning in the way it encapsulates an understanding of the economic rationale for neoliberalism today. Taking each of these excerpts into consideration, what is clear is that they all immediately draw attention to an inexorable link between the mechanisms that comprised the historical control and exploitation of indigenous peoples by European powers, and the later development of capitalism as a global system. Such stances firmly reject the accepted popular opinion that the two processes are distinct. Rather, they closely follow the assertion of Bennet and Antony in associating colonialism with "the first radical transformation in the domain of economy that allowed the West to reproduce its resources indefinitely" (2011, 288) throughout the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

In wider political and public discourse today, the word colonialism itself exists as a dated term that is considered incompatible with modern practices of international relations and global diplomacy. From a scholarly perspective, however, the view is quite different; McLeod reminds us that if we take into account the contemporary unequal globalised condition of the world, it is very problematic, at least temporally, to conclude that the practice of colonialism belongs to yesteryear (2007, 7). Most official definitions of colonialism focus on the phenomenon in its physical form, supporting the view that it is a past phenomenon: the *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* describes the practice of colonialism as something that usually involved "the transfer of a population to a new territory, where the arrivals lived as permanent settlers while maintaining political allegiance to their country of origin" (2017). The *Oxford Dictionary* defines it as "the policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically" (2019). Castree, Kitchin and Rodgers' classification of colonialism as "the control over one territory and its peoples by another, and the ideologies of superiority and racism often associated with such domination" (2016), best emphasises the phenomenon from a neoliberal perspective in that it draws attention to the assimilationist

mentality that was crucial to colonialism and remains principal to neoliberalism today. A prime example of this tendency can be observed in Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay's infamous *Minute on Education* speech given to the British Parliament in 1835, in which the then Council of India member outlined his desire to cultivate "a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect" (see Curtin 1971, 178f.).

As a practical historical process, colonialism has been comprehensively (and controversially, some post-colonial scholars may say) chronicled by the likes of Ferguson (2003), Crowley (2015) and Gilmour (2018) and, therefore, does not require an extensive recitation in this book. Instead, in the context of this chapter's discussion of neoliberalism, it is more important to understand that the proliferation of the British, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Dutch Empires not only opened up new territories for the exploitation of labour and resources—allowing colonialism to expand territorially and advance capitalism—but it also provided European nations with the means to propagate ideas, values and beliefs derived within Europe in much the same manner that Lord Macaulay envisioned. At the heart of this undertaking was the notion of European society as a historical and geographical "centre" of human evolution, something that is articulated by Blaut: "[Europe] eternally advances, progresses, modernises. The rest of the world advances more sluggishly, or stagnates: it is a 'traditional society'. Therefore, the world has a permanent geographical centre and a permanent periphery: an Inside and an Outside. Inside leads, Outside lags. Inside innovates, Outside imitates" (1993, 1). Such a myth derives largely as an outcome of Enlightenment teachings, which fostered the belief that Europe—in this case, a historical, not geographical, construct—was the intellectual and cultural apex of human civilisation. Societies and peoples in other parts of the world, despite their complex histories, technological developments, and cultural achievements, were considered uncivilised, primitive, and unworthy (Hall 1986, Tiffin 1987). Going back once again to the *Minute* speech, Lord Macaulay sums up this mentality, proclaiming that he had "conversed both here and at home with men distinguished by their proficiency in the Eastern tongues, [and that he had] never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia".

The culmination of technological developments in the field of the printing press in the eighteenth century enabled the production of texts on a relatively mass scale. This allowed the propagation of cultural-economic discourses concerning the Enlightenment, religion, capital and race within

both the European host societies and their colonial possessions (Mignolo 2012). Anderson's thesis of the "imagined community" (1983) is central to comprehending the success of this. It cannot be underestimated how valuable it was for those pursuing the colonial project that individuals hundreds and thousands of miles apart were able to consume identical literary content; this—more than any other aspect of colonialism—helped shape notions of self, nation and peoplehood critical to advancing affinities of ethnicity and culture (See Appadurai 1990). Said describes how the field of literature, in particular, would become a consciously constructed discipline that "structured attitudes of reference" (1994, 53) towards colonised peoples. Furthermore, true to Anderson's theory, literature grew into a medium where only "the best that is thought and known" (45) could be admitted:

> Goethe's idea of *Weltliteratur*—a concept that waffled between the notion of "great books" and a vague synthesis of *all* the world's literature—was very important to professional scholars of comparative literature in the early twentieth century. Its practical meaning and operating ideology were that, so far as literature and culture were concerned, Europe led the way and was the main subject of interest…certainly, American practitioners and academic departments found this European pattern a congenial one to emulate…Academic work in comparative literature carried with it the notion that Europe and the United States together were the centre of the world, not simply by virtue of their political positions, but also because their literatures were the ones most worth studying. (45f.)[2]

This "ownership" of what constitutes great literature is referred to by Torres-Saillant as the "intellectual industry of the West" (2006, 3), something that contributes to ensuring control over the production of

[2] Krishna discusses something similar with regard to English literature: "The canonical primacy of English writing from England was unquestioned within departments of English literature the world over, and yet its links to the very process of colonialism were rarely explored. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin used the term postcolonial to describe all writing in English that originated outside England itself, that is, from the 'colonies'. Irish and American writing in English (think James Joyce and Herman Melville), that of Canadians, Australians, or South Africans, and the Anglophone writings of South Asians, East and West Africans, the Caribbean, or Singaporeans, were all regarded within departments of English literature as ineffably mimetic, variants on an original theme doomed to inferiority and provincial status at best" (2008, 58f).

knowledge and maintaining power over the agency of other cultures.[3] From a British perspective, Charles Wentworth Dilke's *Greater Britain* (1868), John Robert Seeley's *The Expansion of England* (1883) and classic literary works like Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness* (1899) and Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (1901) can be cited as examples that contributed to this. The *Requerimiento* of 1513[4] is another that relates to the Spanish Empire.

A central message to the vast majority of literature in this period is that of the racial, intellectual and cultural superiority of the European characters, evident in the civilised, rational and patriarchal nature of many of the story's main protagonists. Kipling's Kim and Conrad's Kurtz undoubtedly follow this. (see Said 1978, 226). In a binary sense, the positive characteristics of these individuals tend to directly contrast with the nature of the native Other. As McLeod writes: "If the colonisers were deemed civilised, the colonised were declared barbaric; if the colonisers were thought of as rational, reasonable, cultured, learned, then the colonised were dismissed as illogical, awkward, naïve, ignorant" (2007, 2). Hall (1986, 215) identifies four central recurring characteristics to Otherness in literature which assist in outlining the fundamental parameters of representation:

1) Idealisation.
2) The projection of fantasies of desire and degradation.
3) The failure to recognise and respect difference.
4) The tendency to impose European categories and norms, to see difference through the modes of perception and representation of the West.[5]

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[3] In addition, Blaut believes that the implementation of legal structures within colonies was also critical to this process, writing that "land law and property rights developed by lawyers and administrators in colonial corporations and colonial offices established the legal basis for expropriating land from colonised people" (1993, 25). The founding of educational institutions also contributed to the development of cultural domination, safeguarding colonial interests and ensuring that, even after the colonisers had physically vacated their colony, influence remained. This was famously observed by Fanon in his discussion of the "nationalist bourgeoisie" (1963, 53), a group he claims exploited newly independent states' natural resources and dominated the population in the same manner as the departed colonists.

[4] See Surhone et al. (2011)

[5] Bhabha summarises the representation of the Other as "the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism that is a paradoxical mode of representation, it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition" (1994, 66).

French writer Albert Memmi described this binary relationship as "interdependent and inseparable" in his book *The Coloniser and the Colonised* (1965). He wrote that the condition of the colonial dynamic transforms modes of identity and behaviour, with the process "manufacturing colonialists, just as it manufactures the colonised" (122). None more so are these traits illustrated than in Daniel Defoe's classic shipwreck tale *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), which has been discussed as a "masterpiece" of colonial writing by Joyce (1964) and Said (1991).[6] It is also considered a literary classic in its own right, influencing popular culture and spawning any number of imitators and "Robinsonade" spin-offs such as Cabanne's *Miss Robinson Crusoe* (1917) and Haskin's *Robinson Crusoe on Mars* (1964). The dynamic of the relationship between the protagonist and Friday in the book endorses the traditional Self/Other binary in its most fundamental form. Firstly, in the way that Crusoe commits quite readily to the role of a patriarchal teacher: "I taught [Friday] to say Master, and let him know this was to be my name" (Defoe 2001, 218), and secondly in Friday's willing acceptance of his subordinate position as Crusoe's servant in desperate need of civilising. However, while *Robinson Crusoe* and other works such as William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1610)[7] and Jules Verne's *The Mysterious Island* (1874) can be cited as examples that construct and maintain this paradigm, Fanon (1963) and Bhabha (1994) remind us of its contradictory nature. It is within this desire to "civilise" that a deeper psychoanalytical analysis reveals how the ostensive rational, chaste and intellectual demeanour of the coloniser frequently falls away to reveal feelings of profound insecurity, self-doubt, erotic desire and violence, which clearly does not correlate to the supposed civilised character of the European in discourse. It is this that confirms Memmi's thesis on the interdependence of the relationship; as Rings points out, in *Robinson Crusoe*, the protagonist's ongoing fear of being eaten by the Caribs living on the neighbouring island "highlights the subversive character of [Crusoe]'s radical individualism vis-à-vis European colonial discourse" (2011, 124). Crusoe is apparently a calculated, rational figure, but the Caribs inspire an unjustified, irrational terror in him. He suspects violent and murderous tendencies in the Other but, in fact, they emanate from within the illogical psyche of Crusoe himself. Hulme highlights the "unethical" (1986, 195) nature of Crusoe's concerns, especially in consideration of Rings' observation that Friday has not given him "any reason to fear disloyalty,

[6] Rings' analysis highlights the role of Crusoe as a "successful capitalist of his times" (2011, 131) in that he is a wealthy landowner and businessman who embodies the individualism of eighteenth century English capitalism.
[7] See Fernández-Retamar (1974).

never mind an assault" and that, on page 235 of the novel, his faithful servant clarifies the customs of Carib cannibalism to his master (124).[8] The works of Memmi, as well as those of Frantz Fanon (1963, 1967), Aime Césaire (1972) and Gayatri Spivak (1993, 1999) exposed how colonialism ruthlessly exploited not only the natural resources of their colonies for monetary gain but also the psychological process involved in coercing the colonised into a position of willing inferiority in the face of their oppressors. *Robinson Crusoe* is just one of many examples of colonial-era stories that demonstrate this in its paradigmatic form (Said 1991). It remains the principal undertaking of post-colonial studies as a discipline to continuously seek to uncover similar instances in contemporary literature and film; with the "post" in post-colonialism representing the continued relevance of the subject's impact in the neoliberal epoch.

After the Second World War, the crumbling of European empires across the globe escalated and decolonisation began. It is during this period that contemporary neoliberalism begins to take shape. Instead of ushering in a new epoch of autonomy for newly independent states, Hardt and Negri correctly remark that the "geographical and racial lines of oppression and exploitation that were established during the era of colonialism have in many respects not declined but increased exponentially" (2000, 43), whereas Huggan sees the emergence of a "late capitalist Empire" (2008, 242) in the aftermath of decolonisation. The most prominent question of course is: How did this happen despite the loss of physical colonial possessions? The answer is highly complex and requires extensive discussion.

The post-colonial form of hegemony that emerged after the Second World War flourishes and endures through a deterritorialised, decentred system of authority which, according to Hardt and Negri, as the outcome of highly organised power networks, can "progressively incorporate the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers" (xii). McClintock contends that these networks of power have been redistributed through a "revamped economic imperialism that has ensured the United States and [former European colonial powers] have become richer, while, with a tiny scattering of exceptions, others have become poorer" (1995, 393). While the propagation of this cultural hegemony had naturally been ongoing since the initiation of the first colonial settlements, increased proliferation of this epistemological aspect can be discerned throughout the process of decolonisation. Rieder articulates a practical explanation for this process when he describes the new world order as predominantly "involving the

[8] Friday explains: "They never eat any men but such as come to fight with them, and are taken in battle."

recession of direct government control in favour of a more stable and enveloping world system of trade and finance" (2008, 148). Jameson saw the genesis of this as primarily technological in nature (1991, xx). Later, through the decline of communism, he further observes that economic and social factors were also able to come together and give rise to an overarching (predominantly US) neoliberal ideology (xxi), which allowed unprecedented new forms of international business, financial, technological and military structures to develop.[9] For Appadurai, the result was the "new global cultural economy" that "has to be seen as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order, which cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing centre-periphery models. Nor is it susceptible to simple models of push and pull, or of surpluses and deficits, or of consumers and producers. The complexity of the current global economy has to do with certain fundamental disjunctures between economy, culture and politics" (1990, 6). Foucault's concept of power (1980) is central to comprehending Appadurai's statement and the spread of neoliberalism being discussed here. The decentring process and the insusceptibility of the global cultural economy to "traditional models" can be explained through the disassociation of the "principle of sovereignty" from "its embodiment in anything actually sovereign" (see Rouse 2003, 104). This means that power loses its fixity and becomes diffuse across a wide network of social relations wherein its authority can be constantly reasserted. In Fisher's opinion, capitalism—the motor that drives the neoliberal machine—is a system which "is no longer governed by any transcendent Law; on the contrary, it dismantles all such codes, only to re-install them on an *ad hoc* basis. The limits of capitalism are not fixed by fiat, but defined (and redefined) pragmatically and improvisationally" (2009, 10).[10]

In a post-colonial context, the first Ghanaian President and former revolutionary Kwame Nkrumah defined the resulting outcome of this

[9] Bennet and Anthony on the other hand, pinpoint two key aspects crucial to neoliberalism's advancement: the first was the development of capitalism (aided tremendously by colonialism as has been discussed) throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; the second was epistemology: "A term that was extended to encompass both science/knowledge and arts/meaning" (2011, 6).

[10] German philosopher Max Weber famously noted also that "rationality" had a profound influence on the evolution of neoliberalism (1922, 1930). Wilson highlights how this mode of belief was "one in which capitalism, science and the nation state's legal institutions shared" (2002, 97), thereby allowing an overarching ideology to slowly materialise. Weber's proposition was later adapted and advanced by Ritzer who, in his theory of "McDonaldisation", notices a widespread tendency for companies and organisations to adopt rational and bureaucratic characteristics associated with US business models (1997, 2013).

deterritorialising process as a form of imperceptible authority permeating "economic subordination, cultural imperialism and psychological anxiety" (1965, 1).[11] Blaut suggests the term "diffusionism" for the same phenomenon, articulating it as something that "embraces the whole world and the whole of history, and forms a tight theory" (1993, 42), whereas Shohat and Stam choose to label it "Eurocentrism" (1994). Keohane and Nye (1989) highlight how, in the post-colonial era, actual attitudes to power accumulation did not change. Only it benefitted those with authority to establish cross-border institutions and mechanisms rather than rely on governmental structures. Mignolo's work on decolonality considers the term post-colonialism problematic when read in the context of the American continent's role in the neoliberal milieu (2007, 88). The author claims that, contrary to nations in Asia and Africa, "the Americas" were originally conceived within the European notion of the Occident: the antithesis of the Orient (2012, 59). As such, it must be understood as part of an "extension of Europe" or, in other words, its "daughter" who, throughout the twentieth century, "grew up" to replace Europe as the leader of the world order. This means that post-colonial literature, which draws many of its analyses from seminal texts by Said (1978), Bhabha (1994) and Spivak (1999) on the Orient, becomes ambiguous when applied to the question of the American continent's role in neoliberal agency. As such, Quijano regards it a critical task of Latin and South American nations to "delink" themselves from the idea that the history of human civilisation originated in Europe" (2007, 168). Despite their fundamental differences, the views of Quijano and Mignolo do remain largely complementary with those of mainstream post-colonialists from a neoliberal perspective in that both disciplines consider contemporary Western European nations and, more so, the United States as propagating historical discourses of intellectual, cultural, economic and social superiority.

These perspectives highlight the extent to which initial readings on the scope of neoliberalism appear to illustrate a robustly self-assured ideal, unchallenged in its dominance in the global realm. This study, however, detects reasonable evidence to suggest that cracks are beginning to appear in the widespread belief that neoliberalism, as outlined above, is a superior model. Fisher writes that until 1990, there were political alternatives to

[11] An analogy could be drawn here with Freudian psychoanalysis and his theory for the development of guilt. From the perspective of the colonised in the "traditional mode", the coloniser takes the shape of the primaeval father, an external authority meting out physical punishment. In the postcolonial era, under this decentred system, power can be suggested to manifest itself more in the manner of the superego—an internalised authority that is invariably on hand to regulate the actions of the colonised individual (Freud 2012, 103ff.).

capitalism, but now, in the aftermath of the Soviet Union's demise, a "deeper, far more pervasive, sense of cultural and political sterility" (2009, 7) saturates our social reality. Mignolo (2011) asserts that the present construct of neoliberalism has entered a period of inexorable decline due to the growing influence of Eastern nations on the world economy and politics—something Kalb (2013) also agrees with. This would suggest an "external force" exerting pressure on the ideology and, at first, might seem to have some credibility in terms of an argument. However, this does not take into account the very fact that the increasing Asian presence in the world economy is due to the adoption and adaptation of neoliberal modes of capitalism and production.

Taking this into account, this study would put forward that the dilemma facing neoliberal elites today is, in fact, a crisis of confidence, with major events like the 9/11 attacks and the 2008 economic crash inserting morsels of doubt into the idea that neoliberalism is a superior socio-economic model. Discussing this subject, Porritt states that, after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, "a triumphalist axis of capitalist nations has so profoundly mismanaged and abused its triumph that something much, much worse than the Cold War now looms in our midst" (2005, ixx). Mishra writes that 9/11 and 2008 have similarly "stunned political and media elites in the west into bewilderment and some truly desperate clichés. The extraordinary hegemonic power of their ideas had helped them escape radical examination when the world could still be presented as going America's way. But their preferred image of the west—the idealised one in which they sought to remake the rest of the world—has been consistently challenged by many critics, left or right, in the west as well as the east" (2014). The United Kingdom Brexit vote and, in particular, the election of Donald Trump to the US presidency in 2016 have both been presented as consequences of this predicament (Clarke et al. 2017). Trump's rhetoric on "draining the swamp" and his "America First" policy have been discussed by Awan (2016), Bhambra (2017) and Green (2017) as clear rebukes to neoliberalism. His wins in the Rust Belt states of Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania likewise. In contrast, Caliskan and Preston highlight how the worldview conveyed by Trump fundamentally incorporates values of colonial discourse, reasserting long-held hegemonic principles of the "dominator" (2017, 199). Bhambra suggests that the use of the term "class" in the Trumpian context has been employed euphemistically as a ruse for racialised identity politics: "The presentation of class as an objective category that happens to refer to white workers puts all others outside the operation of history and social processes. It makes exceptional what is, in fact, central to the configuration of socio-economic hierarchies.

Class is not the operation of a race-neutral economic system, but part of an economic system which is deeply racialised" (2017, 14). Rather than seeing the election of Trump as symbolic of a working class being left behind, Bhambra believes that it was a call for the revival of race privilege.

Regardless, as issues of wealth inequality, economic stagnation and environmental degradation have become more apparent, neoliberalism seemingly does face a period of unprecedented crisis, with growing calls for system change now invariably a part of mainstream media discourse. The effectiveness of neoliberal economics for instance has been questioned in numerous areas of academia also, with leading economists Thomas Piketty (2013) and Yanis Varoufakis (2015) both providing convincing empirical arguments that demonstrate how the current approach cannot continue in its present form without disastrous environmental and social consequences for vast numbers of the global population. In response to similar claims, moves towards sustainable management through the promotion of fair trade goods and bilateral regulatory agreements reflect genuine attempts to address systematic flaws and reform from within (see Wood et al. 2006 and Ghista 2004). On the other hand, US historian Donald Kagan (2008)[12] and British journalist Douglas Murray (2006) point out that neoliberalism continues to receive popular support among many economists, politicians and, of course, the general electorate. Wilson argues quite reasonably that "even though the vast majority of the citizenry are rarely, if ever, what we would call capitalist in the strict sense, they appear to be clearly supportive of the form of [neoliberal] capitalism that has taken in their respective nation-states" (2002, 10). In the context of Wilson's assertion, Murray writes that neoliberalism endures because it is "a philosophy for dealing with the world, a way of looking at the world. It can provide the philosophical and practical solutions for many mature Western political parties, for it provides the moral and practical answers to many aspects of politics" (xxxii).

It is not difficult to see that the scope of opinion on the state of neoliberalism today is quite disparate: while some are predicting its inevitable decline, others like Sorman (2008) and Zingales (2012) see US-led neoliberalism as the most effective global socio-political model. However, Sorman and others often ignore the totality of the commitment to

[12] Donald Kagan's son Robert predicts that a curtailment of neoliberal economic policies and a conscious resolution from the United States to withdraw from the front line of global affairs under the Trump administration arouses the very real possibility of a third World War: "As the declining will and capacity of the United States and its allies to maintain the present world order meets the increasing desire and capacity of the revisionist powers to change it, we will reach the moment at which the existing order collapses and the world descends into a phase of brutal anarchy" (2017).

capitalistic, particularly neoliberal, modes of production and thought among elites and governments in the so-called "post-ideological" (Žižek 2009) era. For example, Brown comments on how former US President Barack Obama's 2013 State of the Union speech[13] "repackaged neoliberalism as economic recovery", arguing that the contents of the address only serve to highlight how economic growth has become "the end and legitimation of government" in the contemporary epoch (2015, 26).

Despite this, according to Žižek, the demise of socialism means that, without a prominent ideological Other, neoliberalism has had to rely on ulterior methods to justify its existence. In opposition to Stalinist models of communism that required propaganda, neoliberalism relies on a prevailing attitude of cynicism, in which the individual disavows and maintains a critical distance to the ideology for it to endure (1989, 25).[14] Spivak makes a similar observation, writing how the neoliberal crisis has been managed via a "reterritorialisation" from the "centre" to the "margin" (1993, 68f.). Once again, unlike communism, criticisms and satires—even outright protests—contrary to undermining capitalism, reinforce it, and serve merely to mitigate our denial of the centrality of capitalist exchange in our lives at the level of the Real. As Fisher clarifies: "We believe that money is only a meaningless token of no intrinsic worth, yet we *act* as if it has a holy value. Moreover, this behaviour precisely depends upon the prior disavowal—we are able to fetishise money in our actions only because we have already taken an ironic distance towards money in our heads" (2009, 18). One result of this has been the seemingly widespread challenging of traditional capitalist models across politics, education, public service and, of course, media and film. Carpenter's *They Live* (1988) and Moore's *Roger and Me* (1989) are two good examples of cinema that genuinely challenge these models whereas Stone's *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps* (2010) and Lawrence's *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay – Part 1* (2014) may be classified more in the mould of anti-capitalist films that highlight Žižek's cynicism stance. The reason for this is that, in an epoch of all-pervasive capitalism with the lack of a credible alternative system, the viewer, or subject, is aware of their indirect responsibility in maintaining the social, environmental and economically exploitative agenda of neoliberal domination.

The guilt resulting from upholding what is perceived as being necessary to ensure the continuation of neoliberalism (economic subordination,

[13] Link to the full speech is available at https://www.forbes.com/sites/beltway/2013/02/12/full-text-president-obamas-2013-state-of-the-union-address/#547d2e7b354a (Forbes 2013).
[14] See Trinder (2019a, 3).

cultural appropriation and human exploitation, for instance) and the disturbing knowledge that the individual may be somewhat responsible in the detrimental process that results from it is filled by a resulting social reality exemplified in cinematic anti-capitalist tropes. Cremin discusses the evolution of exchange value to what can now be called "social-value", something that serves a "political and commercial function" (2011, 75) in which the act of consumption works to allow the subject to indulge the fantasy of removing themselves from the ideological order. Hence, notions of charity, ethics and social concern have come to be included in consumption and, although it remains a largely under-researched topic in a cinematic context, Hollywood appears recently to have followed commercial products in promoting discourses of ethical and social concern for the sake of its stakeholders. Selected contemporary examples like Nolan's *The Dark Knight* (2008), Stanton's *WALL-E* (2008) and Matt Reeves' *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* (2014) display clear anti-capitalist, pro-environmental and ethical themes, which initially seem to critique neoliberalism. However, each film can ultimately be said to support key aspects of the system through justifications of cultural and racial hierarchies, economic imperialism and Western principles of freedom, liberty and individualism. Key to these principles also is that these concepts were borne within the colonial ideal, an aspect this book suggests investigating further in the next chapter.